



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Prison Review Team: Briefing

25 November 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Lord Morrow (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Lord Browne
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Sir Reg Empey
Mr Paul Givan
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Conall McDevitt
Mr David McNarry
Mr John O'Dowd

Witnesses:

Mr Paul Leighton) Prison Review Team
Ms Mandy Morrison)
Dame Anne Owers)

The Chairperson (Lord Morrow):

With the Committee today are Dame Anne Owers, the chairperson of the Prison Review Team, Paul Leighton, a team member and Mandy Morrison, who provides secretariat support to the team. You are all very welcome. I notice that you decided not to send a paper to the Committee, but that is your decision. You have 20 minutes to outline your position, and perhaps you will take some questions after that.

Dame Anne Owers (Prison Review Team):

I apologise that we did not provide the Committee with a paper. That was partly due to a misunderstanding and partly because, as we said in our note, we are still in the process of gathering evidence. We welcome the opportunity to share where we have got to so far, but it will be very much by way of a progress report. We have done a great deal of work over the autumn, but we are still not able to give the Committee our position on where we think the solutions lie.

As the Committee will know, the team started work properly in September, and, since then, we have taken a lot of time to read the representations that were made to us, to meet a lot of people and to visit the prisons. Some of the team are very familiar with prisons while others are very familiar with Northern Ireland, and there has been some useful cross-learning on both sides.

We visited all the prisons, the prisoner assessment unit, the juvenile justice centre and some of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that work with prisons, such as Include Youth, the Inspire Project for women prisoners and the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO). We visited prisons in other jurisdictions, including those in the Republic, and members of the team have been over to visit a number of prisons in England, and those visits were very useful. We also received written evidence from 49 different individuals, agencies and Departments in response to our call for evidence.

We have held a lot of meetings, including with staff, prisoners and ex-prisoners, Prison Service headquarters, the prison board, the Prison Officers' Association (POA), and the Minister of Justice and officials, including those who are working on the other reviews that were generated after the Hillsborough Agreement. We have also met representatives of the political parties, key voluntary sector organisations, healthcare providers and some of the academics who are working with prisons and on the issue of reoffending.

We commissioned surveys of prison staff and prisoners at Maghaberry prison, and we will be doing the same for the other two prisons in Northern Ireland. We also read all the voluminous reports on prisons that have been prepared by many people in Northern Ireland.

One of the reasons that we do not have a report to put before the Committee or to bring to the Minister is that our original terms of reference required us to first produce a report on Maghaberry prison and then go on to do a final report on the prison system as a whole. However, as we worked, we felt that that did not seem like a sensible way forward, because, although Maghaberry prison is the biggest and most complex prison in Northern Ireland, the issues and problems that it faces are, in many ways, reflective and symptomatic of issues in the prison system generally.

So, we agreed with the Minister that we will produce an interim report early in the new year that will set out the components of the problems, as we see them, for and in the Prison Service and the components of a solution. We want to be solution focused, because we see no point in rehearsing things that have been said already unless they are relevant to how we think that things might change. So, initially, we want to produce a very general report that sets out, as I said, the main components of the problems that we have seen and where we think that the solutions to them might lie. The report will not be detailed, and it will not have a raft of recommendations; it will be a road map setting out the direction of travel and how, as a whole, change can be achieved.

We are aware and will be cognisant of the other reviews that are going on in the Northern Ireland Prison Service, including the strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme (SEEP), which I know the Committee has heard about. We are in the final stages of evidence gathering. Tomorrow, we will have a seminar with academics, and we have yet to carry out final visits to Magilligan and Maghaberry. If the Committee wishes, when our interim report is ready, I would like to come before you again to discuss its overall conclusions and the issues that I have just described.

A few additional points might be helpful. At this stage, we are not looking in detail at the management of individual prisons. It is not our job to inspect or micromanage prisons, which is what you would expect the director general and the governors to do. There are already enough detailed recommendations, from a wealth of bodies, hanging over the service, and part of job is to find out why that is so.

As we go along, I am afraid that we will not be able to answer the questions about detail that

you quite rightly want to ask, such as about how the various populations might be dealt with. It is not that we want to duck difficult questions, but we have yet to refine our thinking, and we want to present a complete package, rather than a series of quick fixes. When we have put the package together, of course the Committee will be among the first to know about it.

We are also very aware of the effect on prison staff and managers, as well as on prisoners, of the many negative reports that have and may still come out, which seem to be symptomatic of a whole system issue. As I said, although we want to identify the components of problems, our task is to seek solutions. At Present, the service seems to be demoralised at all levels, and that is not a good place to be. If solutions are agreed and are going to work, there will have to be support all the way up the line, from staff on the landings, through the prison organisation up to the director general and on to the Assembly and its Ministers. It will not be a one-off hit, and it will require time and patience to get it right.

Of course, the present economic climate is not an ideal one in which to be making systemic change, and I do not need to tell anyone around this table about the fact that public finances are under strain in all the areas that the Committee and the Assembly are looking at. Nevertheless, any change that has a prospect of long-term success usually requires some short-term investment, so we will look realistically at what needs to be invested now for the future, not just in prisons but in the approach to offending generally, because prisons alone cannot solve offending.

It might be helpful if I bullet-point the headline issues around which we envisage structuring the report, and I will then pass over to Paul for his comments on some of them. There is a problem with leadership throughout the system. There is inconsistency and changes of direction. Decisions are sometimes made at the wrong level, and initiatives are not followed through. As yet, there is no central vision or clear objectives, and we will look at how managers at all levels need to be trained and supported in order to move forward and be given them space to manage with clarity from the top of the organisation and political support for the vision and objectives of the prison system. Consequently, we will look at headquarters as much as at individual prisons. There is an issue about communication, which Paul will talk about.

Mr Paul Leighton (Prison Review Team):

We tried to look behind some of the symptoms that were apparent during our visits in order to determine their causes. When I talk about communication in the prison system, I mean at all levels and in all sorts of different directions: between headquarters and prison governors; governors and staff; staff and prisoners; staff and staff associations; and prisons and the public, visitors and families. There were problems at all levels. We feel that communication is poor throughout the service. It tends to take the form of instructions and a lot of initiatives are launched that are not followed through. Governors or managers move on and the initiative is left hanging with no instruction or communication as to what should happen to it. Communication seems to be one of the causes of the symptoms that we have seen.

Dame Anne Owers:

That is right. As I was saying about the vision of the service as a whole, it is our view, and that of most people we took evidence from, that the core business of the Prison Service should be reducing reoffending. It should be sending people out less likely to offend than when they came in. At the moment, that is not articulated and clarified in the system. Offender management has been introduced, but not as an integral part of the way in which the prisons that we have looked at worked. It is almost an add-on. To follow on from Paul's point: we have seen silos in prisons and throughout the service. Surfacing all that will be very important for us.

We know, and staff accept, that staffing issues exist and that changes are needed. We know the pressures that prison staff have worked under in the past and are still working under. We are very aware of that, and our meetings with staff and staff associations have been useful. We have been looking at all the issues around staffing. Investment in training and development is needed to support change. There are staff who joined a very different service with very different objectives and ways of working, and if that is to change, there will need to be investment in those staff. There are also staff who have been in the service for many years but will want to leave it. As the Committee knows, there has been no recruitment of main-grade prison officers since the early 1990s. It is our view, and that of nearly everyone who gave evidence to us, that those people need to be able to leave with dignity. There also needs to be better ways of managing industrial relations problems.

I want to make a few final points in more detail. Regimes are poor in at least two of the three prisons that we looked at. It is partly about a focus on security, even for low-risk prisoners, and partly about the deployment of staff. However, it is also about bringing in sufficient purposeful activity that can improve prisoners' life chances. That requires not just work in the prisons but leadership from the centre, including making links with employers and encouraging inward investment and good management.

A problem is that the prison system is suffering because of what is happening or not happening elsewhere in the criminal justice system. We believe that it is necessary to reduce the number of remand prisoners in the system, which make prisons very difficult to deal with, and to reduce the use of prison for fine defaults. Those issues are not central to what we have been asked to do, but we cannot look at prisons without considering the effect of those issues on the prison system.

We will also be looking at issues in the prison estate, such as juvenile justice, women, the buildings and the estate. We have not yet reached any firm conclusions about those issues, but we will need to look at them. We have looked at healthcare, and, particularly, mental health provision. We are doing some work on that as well as the arrangements for staffing and governance of healthcare staff. We are looking at the issue of drugs in and outside prison and the key role of the voluntary sector in supporting work in and outside prisons. I am afraid that that is a list of issues rather than a set of firm conclusions, but we can see a path from where we are now to where we need to be. That is the outline that we want to produce early in the new year. We will then put it before the Committee and discuss it further.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much. There seems to be a theme running through what you said, and you referred to it a number of times: you were at pains to point out that there just is no leadership. The word that you could have used to sum it all up, but you diplomatically did not, is that the whole thing is "shambolic".

Dame Anne Owers:

I would not use that word and I would not say that there is no leadership. There is no clear line of

leadership and accountability throughout the service. There is no clarity about who is responsible for what, about why things are being done and about what needs to be done. There is an issue of leadership, but there is also an issue of being led because, if there is leadership, there must be requirements on people to be led. It is a whole piece.

Mr Leighton:

Based on what we have been able to glean so far, the point about leadership is very valid. However, it is more about there being no clear vision for what the prison system seeks to achieve. Such a vision needs to be understood at each and every part of the prison system, as do people's roles, in order to try to bring that together. Perhaps the vision is articulated in a headquarters office and one of the governors may know about it, but the staff on a landing do not see exactly how they fit into it because they have never been told. It goes back to the communication issue. That is how we see leadership in the prison system.

The Chairperson:

No organisation or group will ever be any better than its leader or leadership.

Mr Leighton:

The leader plays a key role in any organisation.

The Chairperson:

Yes. Therefore, if the system is wrong at the top, it must be assumed that it is wrong at every strand. Is that right?

Mr Leighton:

It will not achieve what the leader wants it to, because the leader has not articulated that or it has not been communicated through the organisation.

The Chairperson:

You are sticking to diplomacy.

Dame Anne Owers:

Leaders need to have followers. If people have confidence in the leadership, they need to be prepared to be led. We have seen good people at levels right through the system. It is simply that the system is not pulling together. It is a bit like an orchestra in which all of the instruments are playing a different piece. It needs to be brought together.

The Chairperson:

I think that we all accept the point that, if a person is not a good leader, it does not mean that they are a useless person. It is just that that person is useless at leadership. I think that that is what you are saying.

Mr McNarry:

You are very welcome. I think that you said that you did not really want to get involved in cutting across others, but I thought that that was what you were doing. I assume that those others were the Prison Ombudsman and other inspection bodies. I can see your difficulty in that, but when you spoke about what you were doing, I could not see how you can avoid cutting across others. I am sure that you will be able to deal with that.

From my point of view, it would be very interesting if your report could address why candidates for the top job are not rushing forward, because therein lies a problem. One would have thought that that is certainly a job that most people who have aspirations in that career line would go for.

Paul mentioned communication. It would be helpful if you could elaborate on that. To pick up on the Chairman's point: if the communication is poor, the whole thing, including direction and leadership, is poor. Hopefully, your report will show that that is where the thing is going wrong. I would not mind hearing in a minute what you have to say about that.

Finally, are you able to assess how prison numbers can be reduced? I think I detected that you might want to be involved in assessing that.

Dame Anne Owers:

I will just make a small point about leadership before I pass over to Paul to speak about communication. There is an issue about leadership, but I think it is more than an issue of the leader or leaders. If people are to manage a system, they have to be given space and support to manage and they have to know that, if they make the right difficult decisions, those decisions will stick. Based on what we have seen, I do not think that there is one bit of the whole process that you would want to point a finger at and blame at any point. The point is that the system is not running together, it is not a coherent system.

Mr McNarry:

Is that the fault of, or is that down to, a problem with policy, in that the people given the leadership role are unaware of, or are unable to cope with, too many changes in policy, and that is therefore detrimental to them doing an effective job?

Dame Anne Owers:

I would almost turn that on its head and say that there needs to be a clear policy and strategy that needs to run all the way through from the Assembly and the Minister right down to the officer on the landing.

Mr McNarry:

Hang on, just a second. Before we get to see it, is your report going to deal with that aspect of policy and point out the fault lines that you have come across, so that we can look at it and identify what you are telling us?

Dame Anne Owers:

Our report is going to say what we think the policy and the vision should be.

Mr McNarry:

Good.

Dame Anne Owers:

If that report is accepted, which is a matter for the Assembly, it needs to run like the lettering in a

stick of rock — all the way through the system.

Mr McNarry:

We need guidance, because we are learners and we are slow learners at times, and I speak personally, before I incriminate anyone else. If you are going to put that in your report, are you going to point out where the flaws are and have been and how they would be put right?

Dame Anne Owers:

We are going to point in particular to how you might make it better. We do not want to add to what can sometimes be a blame culture where everyone points the finger at everybody else. We are looking for solutions.

Mr McNarry:

I want you to put the blame on people. Personally, I want you to put the blame on people so that we can identify where the problems and faults are. It would cut out an awful lot of innuendoes and gossip about personalities. It would help. It flummoxed me that nobody seemed to want this top job because of where and what it was. It was bad for Northern Ireland's image.

Mr Leighton:

It was. An absolute plethora of reports have been written about prisons, as we discovered, which finger-point and identify individuals because they focused on individual issues or areas. We are trying to bring something together that offers a solution and a way through those things, rather than reiterate what has already been written. We are not investigating a particular incident but trying to review the overall prison system.

Mr McNarry:

I wish you well in that.

Mr Leighton:

I know. I will give you a couple of recent examples about communication problems. I was going to Hydebanks this morning. We have been in and out of there quite a lot. It is an interesting place. It is not a big prison; it is quite small. Two of the panel were going in to talk to some juveniles

who are detained in Hydebank, though there is a question over whether juveniles should be there. When we arrived at the front gate, although our visit had been arranged, no one at reception knew that we were coming or who we were going to see. That is a minor point, but I have been in and out of quite a few prisons over the past few months and it seems to happen every time.

Mr McNarry:

Some people think it is easier to get out of these prisons. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Leighton:

It is certainly not easier when your card does not work to get out, as we found out one night in Maghaberry when my card would not work to let me out. We had a little bit of a problem getting me out.

The Chairperson:

Maybe they just wanted you to have the experience.

Mr Leighton:

I got a feel for it.

Dame Anne Owers:

They were going to add him to the roll.

Mr Leighton:

I will make another point about communication to illustrate how it could be better in the regime. I am not saying that the communication fell down in this instance, but it could have been better. We went to the prisoner assessment unit (PAU), which is an element on the car park of the old Crumlin Road jail. The demeanour of the place is pretty grim. It is a halfway house for life-sentence prisoners who are going to be released on licence. We were lucky enough to get there in the afternoon when some of the prisoners were coming back from their work regimes in the community. We spoke to quite a few of the prisoners — most of them had been in jail for murder and had been jailed for life. We had very good conversations with quite a few of those people. One of the things that came across from the vast majority of them was that they had not been

properly communicated with about their probation officers and the regimes that would apply to them when they were released, which meant that they did not understand them. Those are people who have been institutionalised for a long time. We expect them to go out into the community and live a normal life, so I would have expected there to be a decent amount of communication with those people so that they understand what they are getting into and what their regime will be. The issue was not that there was no communication at all; the prisoners had some idea, but they did not fully understand. There is obviously a question about how much time you have to put into communication with people who have been in an institution for such a long period of time. You have to take a lot of time to explain things and get your message across to them. For the vast majority of the people who we spoke to, the communication was not there.

There are elements of communication right the way through the system. Today, we met some representatives from the independent monitoring boards. Again, there were issues of communication between them and the prisons. Communication seems to be a theme in everything that we have looked at.

Mr McNarry:

OK. In those communications, are you convinced — maybe you have not been at the job long enough — that prisoners are getting the message that they are not to come back to prison? That is what my constituents want to hear?

Mr Leighton:

I would love to be able to say to you that that is the communication that prisoners are getting. I am sad to be able to say to you that sometimes the communication is nothing like that.

Mr McNarry:

That is sad.

Dame Anne Owers:

It is about more than just communication; it is about having the kind of environment that does the best that it can to make sure that that will not happen and is focussed on that.

Mr McNarry:

Will prisoner reductions be part of your review? Are you going to come up with some solutions? You said that part of the solution would involve fewer people going to prison?

Dame Anne Owers:

In any prison system, if you invest in only prisons and put your money only into having more people in them, you will never solve the problem. The problems happen outside prisons and begin long before anyone gets near a prison, and, if you are not careful, they will carry on afterwards.

There is a parallel review on reducing offending, and we will want to keep in touch with that. We will, though, be looking at the whole issue of desistance. One of the things that we will be saying is that, if the prison system is to work properly, you will need to invest in the environment outside prisons. For example, mental health issues can result in people going to prison. There needs to be support for people who are released from prison and preventative work. Representatives from NIACRO told us about some work that the organisation is doing with young people aged between eight and 13 years old, for example. It is a lot better to prevent there being victims in the first place.

Mr Leighton:

The other issues that were mentioned were about fine defaulters and remand prisoners. You are aware that remand periods here are quite lengthy compared with those in England and Wales. Remand prisoners behave very differently in prison to sentenced prisoners, which is something that I have not appreciated before I took on this piece of work. Remand prisoners are very different to sentenced prisoners in the way that they behave with prison officers and influence other people around them, because they are not settled, are very much in limbo and are not involved constructive work. In most cases, they are not in training; in some cases they are, but in most cases, training does not even become available to them. What drug agency wants to start a programme of work with somebody who they do not know will be in there next week? How do you do that? It is very difficult. That is a huge issue.

Then there are fine defaulters who go in on a Wednesday and go out on a Friday, who are

watched by people who are in for life. That affects the mentality of people who are in for life, because they see people coming and going after two days. In some cases, people are going into prison for two or three days.

Dame Anne Owers:

There are also resources that have to be deployed to those people. One of the biggest investments a prison makes in a prisoner is when they first come in. That is when the prison has to assess their risk to themselves and others, to do a healthcare assessment, an education assessment and all that work, because, of course, prisoners are most vulnerable in the early days. In England, one third of suicides in prison occur within the first seven days of a prisoner being there; it is when they are most vulnerable, so that is when you have to put in a lot of effort. If it is a fine defaulter, you are putting in all of that effort for two or three days. When we were in Hydebank, a woman had just been admitted there for failure to pay her TV licence. That does not make any economic sense, or any sense, in running a prison regime.

Mr McDevitt:

Dame Anne, did I hear you right when you said that the core purpose of the system should be to reduce offending, but that that is not what the system does?

Dame Anne Owers:

It is not what is seen as the core purpose throughout the system by every person working in it. It is not what they think their core job is.

Mr McDevitt:

That is the fundamental challenge, is it not?

Dame Anne Owers:

Yes.

Mr McDevitt:

So, it is systemic and cultural?

Dame Anne Owers:

It is cultural, yes, and it certainly needs to be embedded in the system as a whole. There is a tendency — we found it in England, and I would hate you to repeat the mistakes that were made in England — to bring in something called offender management, and everyone in the prison then says that reducing reoffending is a job for those people over there in that building. It is not; it is a job for every single person working in prisons.

Mr McDevitt:

Of course, it is quite easy to rationalise why we have ended up where we have, given what we have come through, but the system is entirely unfit for purpose.

Mr Leighton:

It would be wrong to say that we have not seen examples of excellence in different parts of the prison system. We have seen prison officers and staff members go way beyond and above the call of duty and do tremendous things to try to assist prisoners to desist from offending. However, it would not be right to say that that is everywhere or that it is the main theme of people's thoughts.

Mr McDevitt:

Do you think the system is fit for purpose?

Dame Anne Owers:

That is a phrase I do not like, because it has been overused. I do not think that the system is clear about what its purpose is at the moment.

Mr McDevitt:

Is it capable of meeting the needs of Northern Ireland in 2010?

Dame Anne Owers:

At the moment, no. Part of our job is to say what you need to do to all the bits of the system that would make it a prison service for the twenty-first century. There are lots of people in the service with some really good ideas, and there are lots of people who are very frustrated because there is

no consistency. That goes all the way through the service, in all grades.

Mr McDevitt:

I think we concur, having also visited the prisons and having spoken to many people who are looking for opportunities to do things differently.

Communication has been mentioned. Mr Leighton, I found it amazing that there were still communication policies and industrial relations structures that made effective communication impossible. In my opinion, as a former manager, it is not possible to communicate effectively or positively in that system. Do you agree?

Mr Leighton:

Yes.

Mr McDevitt:

In that sense, leadership will be critical to change, but it is not leaders who transform organisations, it is teams.

Mr Leighton:

Yes, but the team has to be in tune. I suppose it is about trying to get everyone focused on the same thing and see what their part of it is. I always go back to the story about Ronald Reagan, who visited Cape Canaveral and chatted to the guy brushing the runway that they wheeled the rockets out on. He asked the man what he did there and the man said that he helped put men on the moon. I know it sounds trite, but it is that sort of mentality, from the person at reception to the person working as a personal officer with young people in Cedar House (C5) or wherever. They must all understand that preventing reoffending has to be at the centre of what they are doing.

Mr McDevitt:

Finally, I will unfairly pose a question to you, Mr Leighton, because of your professional experience. The place we are at the moment is a place that perhaps policing could have been in the early 1990s or thereabouts at the time of the fundamental review. One of the things most

notable about that, from my reading of those academics who have looked into the transformation of the process there, is that there were enough leaders within the system with enough drive to understand the need for change and with the determination to bring people through the process of change. Are you sufficiently optimistic, having met and spoken to the people that you have, that there is a critical mass of individuals who will be drivers for change in order to transform the Prison Service?

Mr Leighton:

I am not qualified to say whether there is a critical mass, because I have not met everyone. Within the prison system, there are some very good people who know what they want to do and have a good idea of how to get there. However, I am very disappointed that, over the years, no development work has been done with staff. Staff have not been allowed the opportunity to see how things could be done under different regimes, and they have not been developed for management roles. Succession planning, if I dare use that difficult phrase, does not seem to feature. I came across one example in which people were started on a succession programme, but that just fizzled out. That is nearly worse than not starting a programme at all, because aspirations and hopes have been raised. There are real development needs.

Dame Anne Owers:

It goes back to what I said earlier about investing in the workforce. You are absolutely right to say that a critical mass is needed at all levels, whether that involves management or the staff on the landings. If only one or two people are taken away and dealt with, it will never be done. It is a team operation, and one of the big themes in our report will be the where and how of training. Some work on that is going on at, for example, the University of Ulster. There are glimmers of solutions, which we will want to try to fan into rather larger solutions.

Mr Givan:

I am conscious — perhaps not conscious; I had my flu vaccine yesterday and am suffering for it today — that this is just an update.

Mr McNarry:

He does not look over 60, does he? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Givan:

I am conscious that the interim report is still to come. Therefore, I will not pass too many comments.

In shaping the report, will you be clearly defining the role of the head of the Prison Service and that of his directors, governors and deputies, right down to the role of prison officers? The feedback I am getting is that, at the various different levels, no one is exactly sure who is calling the shots.

Dame Anne Owers:

That is what I meant when I talked at the beginning about leadership going all the way down. It is important to be absolutely clear where responsibility and accountability lie at each level. That goes from the officers on the landing knowing what it is that they have to do and being prepared to do it all the way up the service. You are right that there has been confusion about who makes what decisions where.

Mr Givan:

You also said that the report will touch on the voluntary sector. Will it go into how other Departments connect to the Prison Service, and not just around mental health and education issues? Where prisoners are re-engaging and taking part in work outside the prisons, is there any role for other government agencies to be involved, rather than just the voluntary sector?

Dame Anne Owers:

We will certainly be touching on that. However, we are aware that a separate review of reducing offending is going on. I am afraid that we would not have the time and would not be able to do all the work that would be required to do something very specific about that. You are absolutely right; the prison system and those in it sit within a range of local and central government responsibilities, services and budgets, which people will have used before coming into prison and will need again afterwards. We want to point to the things that need to happen, not just while people are in prison but afterwards.

Mr Leighton:

You are right to focus on the point at which people leave prison and go into society, which is a bit of a grey area at the minute. Some things fall down and others work well. There are some things that voluntary organisations can do for prisoners that statutory organisations could not do. We will certainly refer to that. However, I do not think that we will be able to go into solving that bit of it. That is something that the reoffending review should look at.

Mr McCartney:

Thank you very much for your presentation. As you are aware, we welcomed the announcement of the review and are heartened by your approach to it. However, we had reservations when the Minister said that you should concentrate first on Maghaberry. That is not a criticism, but it is almost as though there are three building blocks and, if you can fix one, you can fix the others. We argued that the review should be more comprehensive. As we said at the time, there is no doubt that it will be a challenge for you and challenging for everyone else, but there is a massive opportunity. We welcome the more comprehensive approach, particularly the fact that you have identified themes such as leadership, communication and delivery. If there are structural problems, and we get the feeling that there are, those have to be tackled in a central and structural way rather than saying that, if we can fix Maghaberry, we might be able to fix the other problems. I am trying not to be too prejudicial about it. We welcome the review in that respect.

We have met you, and we will do so again. Most people who have met you to date have been dealing with the Maghaberry aspect. Has that posed particular problems? Did you have to do much review around that?

Dame Anne Owers:

Actually, most people did not deal with the Maghaberry aspect. When we talked to your party, other political parties and a lot of the actors, we did not get material about Maghaberry. The questions that we asked in our consultation were general questions about the prison system and not about Maghaberry, so we are not short of information and views about the whole of the system, which has been very helpful.

Mr McCartney:

The headlines that you provided show that. A lot of the reports that were produced in the past were incident-specific. People were sent in to deal with an incident, and they reported on how to fix something that had happened without looking beyond that. I am not saying that they did not look at the wider picture, but it was certainly not the priority. Therefore, a comprehensive, solution-led approach can provide the platform to take this through to the next level. You have addressed that, so thank you very much.

Sir Reg Empey:

Will your report comment on the labour relations issues and the agreements between the Prison Service and the POA?

Dame Anne Owers:

Yes, it will. We will not comment on those matters in the sense of wanting to manage them, because that is a job for management. We will comment on them in the sense that they are components of the problem and that they can be components of a solution. That cannot be left out of what we look at.

Sir Reg Empey:

You mentioned issues of communication and so on. Do you envisage a Prison Service that is up to the standard that is required to achieve, for instance, an Investors in People accreditation?

Mr Leighton:

Quite significant elements of the Prison Service have achieved Investors in People accreditation already.

Sir Reg Empey:

Do you envisage the Prison Service as a whole achieving that?

Dame Anne Owers:

Yes, that should be an aim for every organisation.

Sir Reg Empey:

The picture that you paint of some aspects of the Prison Service is incompatible with achieving Investors in People accreditation.

Mr Leighton:

I can merely comment that I note that they have achieved Investors in People accreditation.

The Chairperson:

You have said it all, Mr Leighton.

Dame Anne Owers:

As with all of the issues that we have been looking at, it is a two-way street. The people who work in the prison system have to want to be invested in. Quite a number of times, we have come across the problem that everyone in the system blames someone else, and that is why I made my comments about blame. I call it the Garden of Eden defence, where everyone points at everyone else. There are things that will be difficult and which will need to change for everyone in the prison system. Because of that, one of the critical things and one of the reasons why we will want to keep coming back to you collectively, to individual politicians and to the Minister is that, if that is to happen and be driven through, there will need to be clear support and a will to change things.

The Chairperson:

Just for my own sake, did you say that you are not producing an interim report and that you are producing a report only at the end of the day?

Dame Anne Owers:

We are producing an interim report, which we hope to have ready in the new year. It will take a broad-brush approach and set out what we see as the components of the problem and what we see as being the components of the solution. Given the date of the Assembly elections, the timing that we were given originally for completion of the final report will probably not be possible. Purdah will probably come into play in the middle of March or towards the end of March.

Mr McNarry:

That is no good to us. We need it before the elections.

Dame Anne Owers:

You will certainly have the interim report before the elections. I am not sure that we have the resources to have the final report by then. We will put the detail on it in the final report.

The Chairperson:

Will you come to the Committee with the report, whether in part or in final draft, before or after you publish it?

Dame Anne Owers:

We will certainly want to run through its main themes with you. Obviously, the report has to go to the Minister first.

Mr Leighton:

Once the report has been to the Minister, it is not in our hands.

Dame Anne Owers:

My view is that I do not want there to be any surprises about the direction in which we are going. The answer to the question of whether we will be able to share the detail is that I am not sure. However, we will certainly want to discuss it with you and take your views on the direction in which we are going.

The Chairperson:

No one else has intimated that they want to speak. Thank you for coming here today, making your presentation and taking our questions. We wish you well.