



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Prison Reform: Delivery Update

25 October 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Seán Lynch
Mr Patsy McGlone
Mr Jim Wells

Witnesses:

Mr Mark Adam	Northern Ireland Prison Service
Mr Ronnie Armour	Northern Ireland Prison Service
Ms Sue McAllister	Northern Ireland Prison Service
Mr Max Murray	Northern Ireland Prison Service

The Chairperson: I welcome Sue McAllister to the meeting. I think that this is your first official appearance, Sue?

Ms Sue McAllister (Northern Ireland Prison Service): It is.

The Chairperson: You are very welcome.

Ms S McAllister: Thank you.

The Chairperson: Sue is director general of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS). We also have Mark Adam, the strategic change manager. I know the other two. *[Laughter.]* We have Ronnie Armour, director of human resources and organisational development, and Max Murray, director of offender services, from the Prison Service. You are all very welcome. The session is being reported by Hansard. I will hand over to you, Sue.

Ms S McAllister: Thank you, Chairman, for your welcome to my first formal meeting with the Committee. I am grateful for this opportunity to brief you on the progress that we have made to date on the reform of the Prison Service. As you know, we have provided the Committee with a detailed briefing paper in advance. With your permission, I will, in my opening remarks, briefly expand on a few of the issues covered in the paper.

If I may, I will begin with the estate strategy. Committee members will be aware that we published our outline estate strategy for public consultation in June. The strategy is an important part of the overall reform programme in prisons and throughout the justice system. I am conscious that how we develop the strategy, and, in particular, the question of the future of HMP Magilligan, has big implications, not only for prisoners and their families, but for staff and the local communities where the prisons are located. That is why it is important that we take our time to fully consider the complex issues that surround the strategy. That is why we chose to extend the consultation process in order to engage more directly with stakeholders through workshops and public meetings and to listen closely to the views, concerns and suggestions put forward by stakeholders.

Obviously, I am keenly aware of the concerns of staff, prisoners and local communities about the future of Magilligan prison. We know that the Minister intends to be in a position to make a decision and offer clarity on the issue by the end of this calendar year.

Turning to staffing and structural changes, the Committee will be aware that following detailed negotiations with the Prison Officers' Association (POA), a wide-ranging agreement was reached in March this year and subsequently endorsed by the POA's membership in May. The agreement was a vital component in setting the foundations for the structural and cultural reforms envisaged in the Owers report. Underpinning the structural reform programme is a voluntary early retirement scheme. At the end of April and in May, 159 staff left the service. This week, a further 60 applications were approved for staff to leave the service on 30 November.

The scale of the change that we have implemented over the past year is significant. The reform programme is complex and challenging, both for managers and staff. I am conscious that some of those changes have been painful. However, each step that we have taken is a clear demonstration that we are determined to reform NIPS and improve our efficiency and service delivery.

I know that the Committee will be particularly interested in our ongoing custody officer recruitment. To date, 60 recruits have entered the training college and are nearing the completion of their course. I will attend the first passing out ceremony tomorrow. I have met them on several occasions and have been extremely impressed by the calibre of the candidates we have recruited. A further five batches of 20 recruits each are due to begin their training shortly, with the first batch starting at the college on Monday.

We are encouraged by the number of female applicants, which has risen by 9% on our last major recruitment competition. However, we are disappointed that the number of Catholic applicants remained static. In view of this, the director of human resources has established a working group, on which we have invited the Equality Commission to be represented, to look at how we can further enhance our community-engagement strategy.

The target operating model (TOM) aims to achieve a more consistent and flexible deployment of staff to best meet the needs of a service that is focused on rehabilitation. For the first time, we will clearly link our resourcing to our priorities and risks. Following management agreement with the POA, the new TOM was implemented along with new shift patterns on 15 October. I am conscious that some of our colleagues are unhappy with the new arrangements. However, NIPS must live within a very carefully balanced budget in a challenging economic environment. We must ensure that we have the right number of staff working in the right places and at the right times. We must be able to discharge all of our leave commitments and training requirements, and provide for sick-absence cover. Put simply, we cannot afford not to change the way in which we do business. The new TOM and shift patterns are crucial elements of the reform process as they fundamentally change our delivery model.

At the end of August, I announced plans to commence the period of assessment and testing of new search technology. Although the prison reform team (PRT) recognised that full-body searching was justified as proportionate and necessary, it recommended looking at other less intrusive methods. Two pilot schemes have now commenced; one at Magilligan prison and one at HMP Hydebank Wood. The pilot schemes will test whether advances in technology can lessen the need for full-body searches in favour of effective and less intrusive methods consistent with PRT recommendation 8. Those pilot schemes will run for three months before evaluation.

The supply of drugs in prisons continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing the Prison Service. I have made it one of my priorities to minimise the availability of drugs in establishments in Northern Ireland. We currently have a range of measures to prevent drugs entering prisons and to minimise the availability of drugs in prisons. We continue to improve the effectiveness of stopping the flow of drugs into prisons. A range of measures is currently in place to address that problem, including anti-bullying measures, drug and alcohol treatments and counselling services. We can also use closed visits

where appropriate. This week, I asked that work be expedited to amend prison rules to allow governors to authorise closed visits. At present, such approval has to come from headquarters. That is unnecessarily bureaucratic.

NIPS also continues to work with partners such as Alcohol and Drug Education, Prevention and Training (ADEPT), whose counselling services place great emphasis on reducing dependency on drugs. We also continue to work in close partnership with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which has lead responsibility for the delivery of healthcare in prisons, to ensure that robust measures are in place for the management of in-possession medication and to deal with a wide range of prisoners with mental-health and drug-addiction issues. Less in-possession medicine and more supervision of prisoners who are receiving medication have been introduced. The types of medication that are in use in prisons have been changed.

Of course, a great deal of work on the wider reform programme is being taken forward by the Department of Justice to look at alternatives to prosecution, reducing the number of people who are held on remand, and introducing a fine-enforcement strategy; all of which will help to divert people away from custody and allow NIPS to make efficiencies and channel our valuable resources in the most effective way. The Minister has said that the justice system cannot continue to send people to prison for a few days at a time for not paying their fines. I welcome his statement. We must do better at dealing with that problem. Fine default has placed undue pressure on prison resources that could be better used to work with prisoners to reduce their risk of re-offending. I therefore welcome the Minister's initiatives to reduce both the number and the frequency of fine-default committals.

The prison review team made a specific recommendation about additional pilots of the supervised activity order arrangements. The operation of the first pilot scheme in Newry has shown that those orders are a viable alternative to custody. Since the pilot launched, 78 orders have been made in Newry and 36 people who might otherwise have gone to prison are now doing work in the community. I plan to visit one of the pilot projects on 20 November to see for myself how they are working. The initial success of the first pilot has led to the Minister extending its operation for a further six months. A second pilot has launched in the Lisburn area.

I hope that my comments have given you an idea of the issues that the service is currently facing as we try to bring about wholesale and lasting reform. We will, of course, continue to keep you informed of future developments in a timely manner. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. I am sure that you will now want to question us on those or, indeed, any other issues.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. That was very helpful. I will pick up on a number of points, then I will bring members in. I think that there has been some friction or difficulty with the implementation of the target operating model in some establishments. How is that progressing?

Ms S McAllister: In a few minutes, I will ask Ronnie to comment on that in more detail. Yes: we did have some teething issues, particularly at Hydebank Wood. I have been to all three establishments there since the target operating model was introduced. There is an improving picture in all three establishments. We have some statistics to evidence that. The management teams and staff are clear now that the target operating model is what is required of them. It has been brought in and it is embedding. We are very confident that it will allow us to do more as we move to have fewer staff in place. Ronnie, do you want to comment on the impact?

Mr Ronnie Armour (Northern Ireland Prison Service): Yes. I will give the Committee a few statistics. If we look at HMP Maghaberry and Hydebank Wood, we will see that in the week leading up to the introduction of the new TOM, at Maghaberry prison, we had two lockdowns and 46 restricted regimes. In the week after implementation of the TOM, we had no lockdowns and the 46 restricted regimes were reduced to 18. That is evidence of a positive move in the right direction. The figures at Hydebank Wood were 19 lockdowns and 72 restricted regimes as opposed, post-TOM, to five lockdowns and 38 restricted regimes. That demonstrates that we are moving in the right direction. However, there is still some way to go.

The Chairperson: Has there been any local variances of what is happening at Maghaberry prison, Hydebank Wood, and Magilligan prison, or is there one standard regime? People were able to negotiate local deals on that in different areas.

Ms S McAllister: We have what we call a "core day", which is a standardised day for prisoners. Obviously, the regime at Magilligan prison looks very different to the one at Maghaberry prison because it is a much more open regime with fewer staff. It is appropriate that the female regime, again, looks different. As regards having a core day, and, in the evenings what time prisoners have for association, for example, we have been clear that we need to get the TOM in as it is, so that we have standardisation across all three prisons. Later, it might be appropriate to look at whether we can localise things. However, at present, it is standard across the three prisons.

The Chairperson: OK. This week, 60 applications to the voluntary early retirement (VER) scheme were approved. Have staff been informed yet as to whether they are one of those 60?

Ms S McAllister: Yes: they have. Ronnie will say a bit more about that.

Mr Armour: The number is actually 59, Mr Chairman, as opposed to 60. Yes: staff were informed earlier today.

The Chairperson: So, they went in and, if they had a paper clip, they got it, and if they did not —

Mr Armour: We tried to avoid paper clips on this occasion. Yes: they should all have received their letters at this point.

The Chairperson: We had the Department here earlier to discuss the October monitoring. It had identified a pressure on the Prison Service of around £6 million for the exit scheme. It was indicated that the figure would be around 60.

So, the 59 staff whose applications have now been approved will leave on 30 November. I appreciate all that has been said previously about getting six months' notice meaning that you cannot tell me on 30 January that there will be another batch because that will impact on people's payments. I understand that. However, is there any indication of when we are likely to see the next batch? What needs to happen for the next batch to be able to leave?

Ms S McAllister: Obviously, part of the issue is about getting new staff in and getting them trained and ready to take on those roles. Ronnie will explain that a bit more. He does a very clever balancing act with how many are coming in, how many we need and how many we can let go. I think that we have a provisional idea of when the next batch will be.

Mr Armour: As you indicated, Mr Chairman, I cannot be definitive about when people will be released. However, I wrote to all staff on 3 July. I indicated to them at that stage that staff would be released in phases when it was operationally possible to do so. Tied into that, obviously, is the recruitment campaign and the arrival of the new recruits, who not only need to be trained but need to be in post. That is basically what we are working towards.

The Chairperson: So, you will have 60 new recruits passing out tomorrow?

Ms S McAllister: No: we have 20 recruits passing out tomorrow. Twenty recruits will pass out next Friday and 20 the following Friday.

The Acting Chairperson: OK. So, that has, obviously, allowed those 59 staff to go and the implementation of TOM. When the next five batches of 20 recruits are signed up, I assume that, at that point, there should be potential for another release.

Mr Armour: That is a valid assumption to make. At this stage, we could not be definitive about that. However, as I have said to staff, we are working towards releasing people when it is operationally possible to do so and when we have new staff in and trained. So, all things being equal, it is not an unreasonable assumption.

The Chairperson: How many people are left in category 2?

Mr Armour: The number of people who have applied has fallen back slightly since the 544 figure. We now have 532 people. Some colleagues have died in service. Others have withdrawn their names. As you know, earlier this year, we allowed 159 staff to go in April and May. A further 59 have been

approved today. So, that leaves us with 314 people. The breakdown for that figure is 79 people in the letter-2 category, who know that they will definitely be allowed to go, and 235 people in the letter-3 category, who are still under consideration.

The Chairperson: I do not need to re-emphasise the importance of moving on this. Sue, I know that you are the new director general. I am sure that you have heard what staff thought of the previous one and the expectation he created; the assumption that if staff signed up, they would all be out. Most people knew that it was highly unlikely. Nevertheless, the expectation in people's minds was that they all needed to sign up to it if they wanted to get out: the train was leaving the station and if you were not on it, you were not going. People thought, rightly or wrongly, that they would all have been out by now. Therefore, you have more than 300 people who, mentally, have already left the service, but who are having to continue to do that work. I think that you can appreciate that this is, clearly, difficult for your organisation to manage. So, I want this to be expedited as quickly as possible. I am sure that you share that view.

Ms S McAllister: That is right, although some staff whom I have spoken to, who are going and who want to go, are still very committed to the work that they are doing, which is encouraging. Some have told me that until their last day of service, they will be committed to the Prison Service. However, you are right; we should be open with people about when and whether we can let them go. That is how we are trying to behave at present.

The Chairperson: With regard to the drugs issue — this probably ties in with the current pilots of the use of body scanners, body-orifice security scanner (BOSS) chairs and electronic testing systems — how effective will the body scanners and BOSS chairs be in detecting drugs? I have heard that they are not effective. Perhaps, you can tell me.

Ms S McAllister: BOSS chairs are already in use. They are not part of the pilot. They will pick up metal items. They will not pick up drugs unless those are with something else. So, BOSS chairs will pick up items such as weapons, mobile phones, SIM cards, and so on, but not drugs.

The millimetre-wave body scanners, which are the two pieces of equipment that we are piloting at present, will pick up items concealed on the person. They are non-invasive. They will not pick up items that are concealed internally. However, they will pick up things in your pockets, in other parts of your clothing or concealed on your person. Obviously, it is early days for the pilot. We are running it in Magilligan prison and with the young people in Hydebank Wood, not the women. We currently have results for the first month from Magilligan prison and the first couple of weeks from Hydebank Wood, so it is too early to tell how effective they are. At present, people who go through the millimetre-wave body scanner will also get a full-body search. That gives us a better idea of the comparison between the two searches.

The second pilot will be of the X-ray equipment, which will be invasive and will find things concealed internally, including drugs. We are in the process of writing the application for the authority to use that equipment, which is not in place in any other UK prison. Because ours is the first application of its type, we need to get it right. We will then pilot and comprehensively evaluate that in Magilligan and Hydebank Wood. We need something at least as good as full-body searching. Full-body searching does not detect things concealed internally either, so we need to be clear about our ambition when we test this equipment. We are confident that we will at least find a technological option to use in some prisons at some times.

The Chairperson: What is your own target? In my view, you are right to have made it a priority; therefore, you will be judged on that. It is simple for us to ascertain detections over the past three years. What percentage decrease do you envisage so that we know that a corner is being turned, it is working and that there is a drugs reduction in our prisons?

Ms S McAllister: The difficulty is that we do not have a benchmark. We do not have a starting point because, at the moment, our own performance data are not good to use as a starting point. The first thing that we must do is get mandatory drug testing in place alongside voluntary drug testing, searching and intelligence, so that we can understand the position as it is now. We will then be in a better position to say what the level of improvement required will be. We should have an appropriate balance between carrot and stick, so that we use punishment, including closed visits and other sanctions that are available in our progressive regime, but also offer support to prisoners who want to remain drug free.

We have just opened Quoile House at Maghaberry for prisoners who say that they want to remain drug free. Any inmate with a positive drug test will be required to leave Quoile House immediately. The environment there is much better than in any other part of the prison, so it is a good place to be if you have to be in prison. We are just developing that appropriately balanced approach between carrot and stick. I am clear that it is a priority that we have figures to use as a starting point so that we know what our finish point or level of progress need to be.

The Chairperson: Finally from me; there has been a change in order to enable governors to decide when there is to be a closed visit. Did they request that power or did you decide that they should have it? Will you outline what a "closed" visit is?

Ms S McAllister: I will tell you what a closed visit looks like then talk about the levels of authority. Closed visits are those in which there is no physical contact between prisoners and visitors. I have had a look at the closed visits in Maghaberry this week just to make sure that we have got some facilities. They are quite austere but decent. They are not something that you would want to use unless you had to, because they impact negatively on the quality of the links between prisoners and their families. However, they are basically visits from behind a screen.

The impact of closed visits has to be immediate; therefore, I was surprised to learn that governors did not have the authority to impose them. If somebody is found trying to bring in drugs, their visit needs to be a closed one. Again, governors need to be able to remove people from closed visits when it is appropriate and safe to do so.

We have to amend our secondary legislation to change prison rules to make it lawful for the governor to act in that way. At the moment, our prison rules state that the Secretary of State — headquarters — must approve closed visits. That is not appropriate; closed visits are a local decision, and governors should have that sort of authority because I will be holding them to account for reducing the level of drug use in their establishments.

The Chairperson: I certainly support and welcome that.

Mr Wells: My colleagues from the East Londonderry constituency would not forgive me if I did not take the opportunity to ask questions, because you have mentioned Magilligan. As you know, I have no interest in this whatsoever, as I am I am not aware of anyone who makes the extremely long journey from south Down to Magilligan.

Any change in the status of Magilligan would have a hugely deleterious impact on the whole area and way beyond, into Foyle, Mid Ulster, etc. The consensus there is that a newbuild prison on the site is the best of both worlds — it would give a welcome boost to the economy through the building trade and secure 430 permanent jobs. Are you aware of the strength of feeling in the area about any proposal to change the status of Magilligan?

Ms S McAllister: Yes. We held a public meeting in Limavady a couple of weeks ago and we have spoken to members of the public. This week, the Minister met chief executives from councils in the north-west, and it was agreed to set up a group of chief executives to look at issues that may arise from the economic impact of any decision about Magilligan. We are clear: we have not reached the point at which we can make a recommendation to David Ford for his decision. We have said all along that this is not a done deal. We have extended the consultation period because we are looking very closely at the financial, economic, HR and personnel implications. We are now doing some work with councils in the north-west to determine what Magilligan could look like if we decide to recommend that it remains the third prison.

Mr Wells: As you know, DARD has announced that it intends to move its headquarters from Dundonald to Ballykelly. It would be ironic if most of that good work was undone by the decision to move the Magilligan services to, for instance, greater Belfast. There is not much joined-up thinking —

Ms S McAllister: We have not made up our mind. There is an argument for moving to where the greatest configuration of prisoners' home areas is; but, equally, there is a counterargument that not all prisoners come from the greater Belfast area. We are genuinely still working through the arguments for both options. Mark may want to say more on the estate strategy.

Mr Mark Adam (Northern Ireland Prison Service): Nothing other than no one element of it can be decided in isolation. We extended the consultation period in order to get the complete picture of what it would mean for communities, prisoners and staff. I ran a workshop in Magilligan last week, at which I got some well-measured views from staff, not just about their own circumstances but on what Magilligan delivers and how it works. That was very positive and helps us to look at the complete picture, which is why we are taking a little longer to come up with an answer.

Mr Wells: I understand that the vast majority of staff in Magilligan, in fact all of them, come from Foyle, East Londonderry or North Antrim.

Mr Adam: The majority are from those areas.

Mr Wells: Therefore, if you close that facility and there is no newbuild, anyone who wanted to move with the service would face a huge commute.

Mr Adam: They would, yes. It would have a huge impact on staff.

Ms S McAllister: We have been clear that we cannot make the decision based simply on the personal circumstances of the staff, but that is not to say that it will not be a major, or relevant, consideration when we come to making a final recommendation. So, it is not just about the staff, it is not just about the prisoners' families and it is not just about the local communities; it is about taking all of those things together to come to the best solution for Northern Ireland.

Mr Adam: We need a sustainable answer and not one that we end up flip-flopping on in 18 months or two years' time.

Mr Wells: Yes, but you have sufficient land holdings there to do whatever you want. That is not the issue. You have got access and a very readily trained workforce. My colleague Gregory Campbell would be keen that I urge you to consider the newbuild option. In fact, I would not get out of this building alive if I did not make that point on his behalf because he is not on the Committee. I know that he feels very strongly about the issue and spoke at the Limavady meeting.

Ms S McAllister: He was at our public meeting.

Mr McCartney: Thank you for your presentation. I will start with the Magilligan debate because one of the errors made in the initial proposal was the Department's stated preference that there would be a second site at Maghaberry. In Committee discussions at that time, members thought that it was not a good idea to have said that because most people said that the outcome of your consultation was predetermined. I expressed my opinion that it is not the best site anyway, regardless of the other arguments. I sort of welcome the Equality Commission being brought in on the recruitment issue. As the debate moves forward, is one of your considerations the fact that where a place of work is situated can sometimes influence how many from a certain community or background apply for jobs?

Ms S McAllister: It could be. It has not been an explicit consideration until now. However, we are working, as you know, closely with the Equality Commission and we are looking at all options to recruit a more representative workforce.

Mr McCartney: I know that, at the time, a lot of work was carried out through advertising, with the stated intention of making the service representative. Have you any sense of what you wanted the percentage to be?

Mr Armour: No; I did not have a sense of exactly what I wanted it to be. I hoped that it would improve significantly. As you know from the statistics that I provided to the Committee earlier this week, we are not in that position. We did not have a magic figure in mind, but we wanted to see improvement on the previous campaign in 2008.

Mr McCartney: It is interesting how the statistics for the recruitment carried out by Grafton shook down from applicants to success. Will we get the same breakdown? I know that there are 1,840 applicants for the new support grade. Will we get same breakdown, by gender and religion, of the successful applicants?

Mr Armour: Absolutely. We will provide the Committee with any statistics that it wants.

Mr McCartney: I turn to wider prison reform. You gave evidence to the oversight group. Do you attend all its meetings or only when you are summoned?

Ms S McAllister: I attend all meetings. I am not a member of the oversight group, obviously, but I attend all its meetings.

Mr McCartney: Your presentation was interesting, but, at the operational end, the strategic, efficiency and effectiveness (SEE) programme is seen as being very much part of the wider review package, and that is fine.

Is the body scanner pilot scheme for three months?

Ms S McAllister: Yes.

Mr McCartney: Security considerations obviously aside, will you then make public the finding?

Ms S McAllister: Yes; we will evaluate it fully and we will share the findings, and that will inform our decision about whether that is the right equipment for us going forward or whether we need to look at something else.

Mr McCartney: Do you have a timeline for the licence application?

Ms S McAllister: We have no idea because we have nothing to benchmark it against. I saw the first draft of the application yesterday. It is a comprehensive document of about 50 pages. There are all sorts of health and safety and public safety considerations. We have never done anything like this before. We will have to send that off and try to push it through as quickly as we can, because we want to get this pilot done as soon as we can.

Mr McCartney: The Chair made most of the points around the issue of drugs. Statistics presented by the Health Minister show that prescription drugs are a big issue. If the Quoile House experiment is successful, is there provision or room to extend it?

Ms S McAllister: There is no reason why not, and I will shortly ask Max to talk about the work that he has been doing with health. We have some very positive things happening on prescription medication. What is happening in Quoile House is not dependent on the bricks and mortar and the physical environment. Having a new wing helps as an incentive to prisoners who want to go there and co-operate. As you said, if it is successful, there is no reason why we could not roll it out onto other wings. It is a no-lose situation: we get prisoners who are motivated; we contribute to their reduced reoffending; and we send them out less likely to get involved in crime to finance a drug habit. So, I see absolutely no reason why we could not extend that. Max will say something about the prescription medication.

Mr Max Murray (Northern Ireland Prison Service): You are right to point to it being a problem. We are working with the South Eastern Trust, which is introducing a new prescribing formula to try to reduce the number of prescriptions for diazepam, for example. It is no surprise that 80% of prisoners coming into Maghaberry are on significant medication, diazepam being the main one, along with pregabalin and tramadol, all of which are very attractive drugs. The revised formula would mean that a tablet would be issued, for example, once a day rather than three times a day. They are also looking at introducing a supervised swallow arrangement, which is operating successfully at Hydebank, Magilligan and parts of Maghaberry. It is logistically difficult to get prisoners in the square houses at Maghaberry down to the dispensary points, but we are looking at introducing other dispensary points on the landings. So, that is all good stuff that will significantly reduce the abuse of prescription medication.

Mr McCartney: Finally, you described the closed visit facility as austere. Can closed visits be imposed in the situation where drugs are seized on a wing?

Ms S McAllister: Absolutely. It is an administrative measure that we can use. When we give governors the authority to use it, I will certainly check on my regular visits that they are using it

properly and defensibly, but yes, it can absolutely be used for any situation where we think that people might try to bring drugs into prisons through visits.

Mr Murray: Or, indeed, where they are using drugs.

Ms S McAllister: Yes.

Mr Murray: A drugs test failure is another one that we are talking about.

Mr McCartney: Would you not have a sense of what to do if people are found in their cell, a common area or somewhere like that? You may have your view of that, but certainly, on visits, it is far easier understood, so to speak.

Ms S McAllister: Yes.

Mr Dickson: Welcome and thank you for your very helpful presentation and answers so far. I will ask about two areas. The first 20 new recruits coming into the service after graduation will be mixing with the existing workforce, who will have their own experiences, work patterns and views on things. How will you ensure that the new recruits will retain the ethos that they have been given in their training while interfacing with the existing staff? That is the first area. I want to come back to the issue of wave scanners, but will you answer that question first?

Ms S McAllister: OK. That is a really big issue for us, and we have been completely upfront that there is a risk that we train people at the college and then they go back and staff say, "Forget what you have learned at the college; we will show you how it is really done". I have done prison officer training, and I know that that can happen. So, we have done a number of things. As senior people in the organisation, we have been to see and spent time with the new recruits in the training sessions. We have told them that they will come under some pressure not to do some of the things that we are training them to do. We said that they would come under pressure to do things differently, and we told them that we would support them when they resist such pressure. We will do so by making sure that, from each establishment's governor downwards through the management layers, support is put in place for those new staff. We will make sure that the governors see them all, tell them who is available to support them and where they can go to get that support. As they go through their learning journey, we also need to reiterate what behaviours and standards we expect of them. They are coming to the end of eight weeks of initial training, but that is not the end of their training, which will be considerably longer. So, we will have every opportunity to check that they are not just doing the job but doing it in the right way, with the right attitude and with the right positive engagement with prisoners. We are absolutely clear that we cannot let what you asked about happen. This opportunity to get new staff in, and those staff really are very impressive, is just too good not to use properly.

Mr Dickson: I welcome that that concern is recognised. In doing so, do you also recognise that there is the potential for those new staff to influence the staff in the opposite direction, that the positive things that they do and the changes they bring may rub off, as it were?

Ms S McAllister: Yes; we absolutely do.

Mr Dickson: How will that be recorded and noted?

Ms S McAllister: It is difficult to quantify that because culture is what people do when you are not watching them. However, we will monitor that and be clear with our managers that that is the sort of thing that they need to check for, but you are absolutely right to say that that would be a positive spin-off from the training.

Mr Dickson: Are there any identified health and safety risks with the wave body scanner equipment that you are trialling, given that most of us may be invited through it at airports a couple of times a year but prisoners could be scanned regularly? Will the records show for the rest of that's individual's life, for example, that they used that scanner on x number of occasions, so that future health risks, which, perhaps, are totally unknown today, will have been monitored from that day forward?

(The Deputy Chairperson [Mr McCartney] in the Chair)

Ms S McAllister: No risks at all are associated with the millimetre-wave body scanner because it is completely non-invasive and does not use X-ray waves, so it is completely safe. The X-ray equipment does have a health and safety implication. My understanding is that the benchmark that is used is that you could go through it 100 times in any calendar year. That is what airports use as a safe level. So, part of our application for using that equipment will be that we will have to demonstrate how we will record how many times prisoners go through it. It is also why we are unlikely to use it for women, although we have not made a final decision on that. We have concerns about using it for young people, not because we think that it is not safe, but because we think that they might be afraid that it is unsafe and it might create unnecessary fears. There will be a legal requirement to record how many times people go through it. Apparently, airports do that as well. I did not know that. They are required to record when you go through them, so that you do not do so more than 100 times in any calendar year.

Mr Lynch: I want to return to Mr Dickson's point on the composition of the recruits, which does not seem to have changed much from what was there. When you have the same composition coming in, does that not make your change process much more difficult?

Ms S McAllister: It has changed in that we have done better to recruit women. So, when you go and sit with one of the groups of prison officers, there is a different look to them. In terms of a visible minority, there are more women. We know that that is likely to have a very positive impact on changing the culture in prisons.

It will give us another challenge in the other areas that we mentioned that we are more disappointed with. That is why we have raised our game in what we are doing to recruit more Catholics. We are working with the Equality Commission. We are going to work with churches. We welcome any suggestions about what we might do. We are completely open to ideas about how we might reach out to some of the communities that are not receptive. We are going out to universities and are visiting schools. We are determined to promote the Prison Service as a career choice to people who might not consider it to be a career choice at present. It does create an additional challenge for us. Ronnie, do you want to say any more on that?

Mr Armour: I will just echo what the director general said. We seek to do all of those things as we move forward. I think that we are in an increasingly better position in reaching out. When we launched our custody officer recruitment competition, we were in a very different place. We were talking about our aspirations for change. We are now delivering change. I hope that people will see that for what it is: a genuine attempt at reforming and pushing forward the reform agenda in the Prison Service.

You are right: the figure is disappointing. We would have liked it to have been better. It makes the job of cultural change that bit more difficult. We should not lose sight of the fact that, as Sue said, the number of female applicants that we have had is a very positive element of reform.

Mr Lynch: To clarify on the Equality Commission: is it now being brought in or was it involved from the outset?

Mr Armour: We worked to an affirmative action plan for the last recruitment competition, which we ran at very short notice and very quickly. I have now established a working group with the Equality Commission to invite it to come on board and work with us to see how we can do that better in future and to guide us and direct us through that process. So, it is not just about recruitment, I have to say. I want to work with the Equality Commission on a community-engagement strategy that will, I think, support and help us with recruitment in the future. However, it is not solely focused on recruitment.

Mr Lynch: Finally, Chair, what was the process by which Grafton Recruitment received that contract? Was it put out for procurement?

Mr Armour: Absolutely. Are you talking about the recruitment of custody officers?

Mr Lynch: Yes.

Mr Armour: We tendered through the Central Procurement Directorate in the Department of Finance and Personnel for a company to work alongside us and to manage that. Grafton was the successful bidder for that tender. It was all done through procurement rules and in line with regulations.

(The Chairperson [Mr Givan] in the Chair)

Mr McGlone: Thank you for your presentation. To go back to the question of prisoner welfare: how do you feel the arrangement with the health trust for the provision of necessary medications for some prisoners is working out at present? There were some blips or glitches in the past, which were uncalled for. I do not know how that fell down. How do you feel it is working currently?

Ms S McAllister: We know that there are still some difficulties. We have set up a number of meetings. I know that meetings are not the answer, but Max and I now meet the chief executive of the trust regularly. Max also meets the director of adult services. We also have meetings that governors are required to attend with their opposite numbers in the trust. So, that is just by way of saying that we are talking. That means that nothing should be unchallenged and, where there are issues, we tackle them and do so quickly. The picture is improving. There were some difficulties with the health trust recruiting enough staff to work in prisons. When it started, it was losing staff quite quickly. So, we have started to look at why that is: what is it about the prison environment that some nurses and healthcare professionals find difficult? Can we help them to get used to the environment? Can we keep them? If we invest in training, why do we then lose people, and so on?

Some of those issues were about not having enough staff. Some of them were about our procedures and systems not giving healthcare enough priority. We have addressed that now. We are starting to make it clear that we can accommodate the requirements of healthcare provision within the regimes that we run in prisons. Max, do you want to comment in more detail?

Mr Murray: With regard to the problem that your colleague Pat Ramsey raised with us — the availability of prescription medicine — the trust is very alert to some of those issues. We will take every step to ensure that the problem does not reoccur.

We are putting arrangements in place to allow the trust to bring the pharmacy back in-house. We are converting accommodation in order to have an in-house pharmacy on site, which will, hopefully, remove any problems of access.

Mr McGlone: Are those the measures that you were referring to?

Ms S McAllister: Yes.

Mr McGlone: OK. That is good. Did I hear that there has been a change of medical personnel or staff recently?

Ms S McAllister: Yes. There have been some changes to the healthcare staff because, since health moved over to the trust, obviously, staffing is its responsibility. So, it introduced people who were new to the prison environment. It is also looking at having directly employed GPs, so that it has more control over when doctors are in prisons and they come in when we need them to come in and can accommodate that. We will also appoint pharmacy technicians to help us with the issuing of medication. The trust will pay for all of that because the responsibility has moved over to it. So, there have been changes to staffing; improvements, both in numbers and the mix of staff.

Mr McGlone: That is good to hear. Thank you.

Mr Elliott: Thanks for your presentation. I apologise that I was not here for the start of it. I want to pick up on two points that Mr Dickson raised. The first is the issue of new recruits and the culture that they are coming into. Based on what you said, it could be inferred that current staff are not carrying out the role properly.

Ms S McAllister: That is certainly not what I meant to imply. We know that we have a Prison Service that has been structured around security considerations, which really means physical and procedural

security. So, we have a security-focused service. We need to move to a rehabilitation-focused service. That is not to say that security will not be important, because the first thing that we need to do is to keep prisoners in custody and safe. Then, we can start to do work with them. However, the job of a prison custody officer has changed. What we are asking people to do now is not what we trained them to do many years ago or what we expected them to do for many years. It is not that what they are doing is wrong; it is that what we require them to do now may be challenging for them because it is a very different change of focus. So, the training that our officers get now is based around positive engagement, role modelling, diversity, rehabilitation and engagement. Really, that is very different.

Mr Elliott: I assume that those current officers would get ongoing training?

Ms S McAllister: Yes they will.

Mr Elliott: Would they not have until now?

Ms S McAllister: They have, but alongside many years of being required to work in a very different way. If you look at some of the criticism from the inspectorate, for example, you will see that it talks about a Prison Service, particularly in Maghaberry prison, that is wholly focused on security and has a one-size-fits-all approach to security. Now, we are looking at a risk-based approach to how we manage prisoners so that we can address their offending behaviour more effectively.

Mr Elliott: I am concerned that there is almost the implication, which may not be intentional, that there will be conflict between new recruits and existing officers. That would lead to an unsatisfactory position for everyone.

Ms S McAllister: We are not saying that there is conflict, but we are clear that there may well be some tensions.

Mr Elliott: My second point relates to Mr Dickson's question about scanners. You indicated that although there has, obviously, not been a final decision yet, you may not use them on women and younger people, not because they are not safe, but because there may be a perception or belief that they are not safe. To me, that is not a valid enough reason. They are either safe or they are not. If they are not safe, they should not be used. If they are safe, they should be used.

Ms S McAllister: The concerns are around pregnant women and women who may intend or wish to become pregnant. Indeed, when we have explored the risks of the X-ray equipment in more detail, we may find that it is completely safe and we can use it. However, just as we have chosen to pilot the millimetre-wave body scanners in two out of the three prisons, we are likely to pilot it with adult male prisoners in the first instance. Then, we can work through the safety issues.

Mr Elliott: I hope that you accept that there will be fears that they are not safe.

Ms S McAllister: Yes. I accept that completely.

Mr Elliott: If they are safe, they should be used. If they are not safe, they should not be used.

The Chairperson: One point that I missed earlier was in the correspondence that we received on the prisoner escort and custody services (PECS) system, which was that it would continue in-house or, at least, that there would not be market testing for a period. You will now recruit 130 people. Can you elaborate on that? My understanding is that prison officers were having to come in and fill the gap. Obviously, there is a substantial difference in pay scales. Will that be addressed now as part of this?

Ms S McAllister: Absolutely. Ronnie will want to comment in more detail. What we have said is that the change programme that we are undertaking is very complex and wide-ranging. This is not the best time to embark upon another area of significant change. In addition, we believe that there are some improvements that we could make to the delivery of services through PECS with regard to the number of staff that we need to deliver the service and the flexibility of those staff — a target operating model for PECS, if you like. We think that we need to get to that place before we make any decisions about going to the market. I believe that we can deliver a service through PECS that will be as good, efficient and flexible as anything that any other organisation could deliver. I welcome the opportunity to be able to demonstrate that between now and 2014. This morning, Ronnie and I went to PECS

headquarters. We told the staff that this does not mean that nothing will happen between now and 2014. It means that we now have the opportunity to look at how we deliver that service and to get ourselves shipshape and fit for purpose to deliver an important service and value for the taxpayer while demonstrating that we can do it as well as anybody could ever aspire to do it. Ronnie, do you want to comment?

Mr Armour: It is our intention to tender for a company to work with us on a recruitment campaign for the PECS group. I know that we indicated in our letter that we want around 130 people. We are, obviously, not 130 people short at this stage. We are around 30 staff short. However, a significant number of PECS staff want to transfer across into the custody officer role in 2013. So, we obviously need to put in place a recruitment process to replace those people as well. That is where we are in moving forward with that. We have a shortfall in current staffing levels in addition to the staff who are moving across.

The Chairperson: How many PECS staff are transferring across into the new role of support-grade officer?

Mr Armour: From memory, I think that around 94 staff had indicated a wish to transfer across. As we explained today, very shortly, I will write to those 94 people to see whether they still wish to transfer. There may be some who no longer wish to do that now that market testing is no longer imminent. That is a matter for them to decide.

The Chairperson: I am drawing from memory again. If you want to become a prison officer in the future, the clear career progression is through only the support-grade officer role. Is that why PECS officers may want to transfer — because potential promotion would then exist?

Mr Armour: Yes. In effect, the first rung of the ladder would be the custody officer role. You would progress through the service from there onwards. I think that some of the staff would have wanted to transfer across for that progression reason. Others, I suspect, will have been nervous about the market testing issue and decided to transfer across when the opportunity was there to do so. That is why we will write to ask people whether they still want to transfer. If so, there will be no problem from our perspective. We want to give them that opportunity.

The Chairperson: OK, members. Thank you very much.

Ms S McAllister: Thank you.