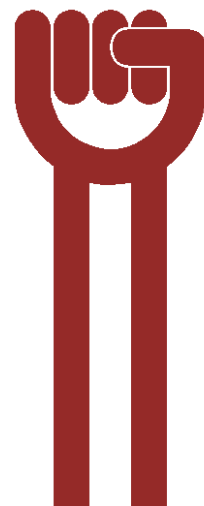




POA Annual Conference 2026

Annual Report 2025

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ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary



MARK FAIRHURST
National Chair

FOREWORD

This Annual Report of the POA covers the activities, achievements, challenges, and financial position of the union during the 2025 calendar year. 2025 was a demanding year for members across the UK, marked by continued staffing pressures, increasing operational complexity, and ongoing concerns around safety, pay, and conditions. Despite these challenges, the POA remained steadfast in defending members' interests and advancing the collective voice of prison officers and related grades in HMPPS in England and Wales, along with our members in the secure hospitals, immigration and private sector.

During 2025, the POA membership remained stable, with modest growth in 2025 in all areas of the UK. Since 2017, we have seen an enormous increase in membership, with 7,000 additional full members. This is due to new recruitment initiatives and increased engagement with new and existing members.

Branch officials continued to play a vital role supporting members throughout the year, particularly in relation to disciplinary matters, health and safety concerns, and workplace disputes. Increased attendance at branch meetings and improved digital communication channels strengthened member engagement throughout the year.

Pay remained a central concern for members in 2025. The POA actively campaigns for fair and meaningful pay awards that reflect the risks, responsibilities, and professionalism of our members. POA negotiations in the private sector and immigration, where we have direct negotiations, and with Pay Review Bodies where submissions are made, focussed on:

- pay progression and pay awards;
- recognition of specialist roles;
- retention and recruitment pressures;

- fair application of terms and conditions.

While progress was made in some areas, the union continued to press the case for long-term reform of pay and conditions.

Chronic understaffing and overcrowding continued to affect safety, morale, and operational effectiveness. The POA consistently raised concerns about:

- unsafe staffing levels;
- excessive hours working;
- fatigue and burnout;
- impact on regime delivery and rehabilitation.

The POA submitted formal representations at local, national and ministerial levels, calling for sustainable staffing solutions rather than short-term fixes. Health and safety remain a priority throughout 2025. The POA continued to challenge unsafe practices and environments, particularly in relation to:

- rising levels of violence and assaults;
- use of detached duty and inexperienced staff;
- availability of PPE and safety equipment;
- mental health support and trauma management.

Our POA safety representatives worked tirelessly to ensure risk assessments were completed and reviewed, and that incidents were properly investigated and followed up.

During 2025, the POA provided representation and advice to members in a wide range of cases, including:

- disciplinary investigations;
- assault-related proceedings;
- attendance management and ill health cases;
- equality and grievance matters.

This work remains one of the most valuable services provided by the union, offering members reassurance and protection during often stressful circumstances.

The POA also continued to work closely with its legal partners to ensure members had access to high-quality legal advice and representation where required.

The POA invested in training for branch officials and members in general through the women's workshop, sexual harassment training and branch official training, whilst also providing training through GFTU and TUC courses. This investment ensures that the union remains effective, knowledgeable, and capable of supporting members at all levels.

During 2025, the POA continued to work with other unions where it was in our interests to do so, and the union reaffirmed its commitment to equality, fairness, and dignity at work. The POA continued to oppose discrimination in all its forms, and supported members facing unfair treatment or disadvantage in the workplace. The POA campaigned heavily on getting body armour for our members, as well as

PAVA and Tasers, to ensure our members can be as safe as possible in some very hostile environments.

The POA's finances remained stable throughout 2025. This was achieved by having clear financial strategies that derived more income from membership subscriptions, with expenditure focused on representation, legal costs, training and administration. The POA maintained appropriate reserves to ensure long-term sustainability.

The POA NEC wishes to thank all branch officials, safety representatives, and members for their dedication, resilience, and continued support throughout 2025.

HR

HR Sub Whitley Annual Report 1/1/25 – 31/12/25

Introduction

The work of the HR Sub Whitley this year has been challenging and varied, and has covered recruitment and retention, sick excusal, a fit-for-purpose grievance policy and changes in the claiming of expenses. The implementation of the Rademaker Report and a joint commitment to dealing with bullying, harassment and discrimination has involved much work and achieved significant progress.

The POA have also been heavily involved on your behalf in supporting fair career progression and support for newly appointed managers to ensure that they support the staff they manage. The outstanding issues regarding medical inefficiency have been clarified and the POA, together with other trade unions, are ensuring that the Employer mitigates the failure of the administration of members' pensions, which previously had not been fit for purpose and, since the transfer to Capita, has been an unmitigated failure, regularly featuring in the press and the Money Show presented by Martin Lewis. There will be much work to do next year. The POA have had success in extending visa requirements for prison officers, albeit on a temporary basis.

Angela Montgomery
Assistant General Secretary

POA HR Sub-Whitley Meeting Monday 10 February 2025

Attendees:

HMPPS:

Francis Stuart (FS) (Chair)	Head of HMPPS Employee Relations
Andy Hewitt (AH)	Senior Employee Relations Lead
Dan Bateman (DB)	Deputy Director, HMPPS HR Business Partners
Karen Mulliner (KM)	Head of HR, HMPPS HR Workforce Strategy Team
Damian Evans (DE)	Prisons Resourcing
Michaela Taylor (MT)	Tactical Resourcing Lead
Eleanor Jemison (EJ)	HMPPS Intelligent Partnership – People
Kate Heeks (KH)	MOJ Resourcing
Gill Hannay (HG)	People Policy
Joseph Nsarhaza (JS)	Employee Relations

POA:

Dave Todd	National Vice-Chair, POA
Terry McCarthy	POA NEC
Geoff Willetts	POA NEC
Angela Montgomery	Full-Time Officer

Apologies:

Rachael Waters	Interim Divisional Director, HR Policy and Transparency
Ruth Mulder	Divisional Head of HR - Workforce Strategy & Stability
Joseph Holloway	Head of HR Services (Operations and Improvement)
Caroline Rostron	HMPPS Staff Wellbeing Lead
Kency Soko	Employee Relations

1. Welcome and Apologies – Francis Stuart (FS)

1.1 Apologies were noted as above

2. Minutes of last meeting and Actions Log – Francis Stuart (FS) and Andy Hewitt (AH)

2.1 FS apologised to union colleagues for the delay in providing the minutes from the November 2024 meeting. He explained that they would be sent as soon as possible after today's meeting.

2.2 AH confirmed that the action regarding a revised staff grievance policy remained open, as the policy had not yet been further shared with trades union colleagues for consultation, due to the need to take into account any recommendations from the Rademaker Commission. POA colleagues confirmed that they had not received it and expressed concerns over the length of time taken.

2.3 FS provided an update on the Rademaker Commission review, which commenced in March 2024. The review was to assess the effectiveness and suitability of current HMPPS mechanisms to address discrimination and bullying and, as part of this, to assess staff confidence in raising grievances and their trust in their concerns around discrimination, bullying, and harassment being appropriately addressed. As a result, policy colleagues working on the grievance policy had been asked to pause further consultation until the review's outcome was available. FS expressed hope that discussions with all recognised unions would take place soon, including a review of the grievance policy.

2.4 AH addressed the second action point, which related to the POA's request to attend OSG training. He confirmed that dates for upcoming training sessions had been shared with the POA prior to the meeting, along with relevant contact details for future attendance. Additionally, AH confirmed that he had provided the POA with a requested document on over-recruitment. The POA had received the figures, and DE attended the meeting to provide further clarification if required.

Standing Agenda items

3. Recruitment & Retention Update – Damian Evans (DE) and Karen Mulliner (KM)

3.1 DE provided an update on recruitment figures as of the end of December 2024. For Band 2-3 prison officers, the staff in post figures stood at 98.7% of the National Target Staffing Figure (TSF), including surplus staff. December was a quiet month for recruitment, as fewer people typically start new jobs during this period, resulting in a joiner rate of 78%. A total of 280 staff members left in December, with 205 leaving HMPPS and 75 transferring internally. Due to the shortfall between joiners and leavers, vacancies increased to 687. However, the number of surplus staff in post rose to 382, recovering from a previous drop below 300, partly due to staff movements following the closure of HMP Dartmoor.

3.2 DE stated that the team continues to model an expected turnover of 330 leavers per month. Just under 2,500 individuals were contracted to start within the financial year, with 2,400 of those already in post. Spaces remain available on training courses scheduled for February, March, and April 2025, which should further increase the intake. The team is currently working on projections for 2025/26 and will share these figures with trades union colleagues once they have completed the final governance process. Consideration is being given to the anticipated vacancy figures at the end of 2024/25 and the attrition rates expected for the following year.

3.3 DE concluded with an update on Operational Support Grade (OSG) recruitment. The staff in post figure against target staffing, including surplus staff, stood at 93.1%. In December 2024, there were 57 new

joiners and 79 leavers, of whom 60 left HMPPS entirely and 19 transferred internally. Vacancies stood at 43, with a surplus of 31 staff. The OSG staffing figures have begun to be affected by the latest OSG-to-prison officer fast-track campaign, which concluded in November 2024. Nearly 300 individuals were allocated through this scheme and are now undergoing pre-employment checks and medical assessments, with the intention of filling prison officer vacancies.

POA Item

4. Prison Officer Recruitment

4.1 POA colleagues requested to discuss item seven on the agenda at this point, as it related to the recruitment update provided by DE. Trades Union representatives expressed concerns that individuals were no longer being interviewed for prison officer roles. They highlighted cases where candidates were recruited and trained despite potentially being physically unable to perform the role, seeking clarification on how this was possible.

4.2 DE explained that the recruitment process includes an Occupational Health (OH) assessment for any candidate with potential health concerns. As part of the medical fitness assessment, applicants meet an OH nurse and undergo a series of checks, including an eye and hearing test, Body Mass Index (BMI) measurement, and blood pressure recording. Additionally, candidates complete an online health screening questionnaire, and their responses determine whether further assessment is required. This could include a triage by Optima, a telephone or face-to-face consultation, or the submission of additional medical evidence. DE emphasised that the decision on an individual's suitability based on health grounds rests solely with Optima, as they are medically qualified.

4.3 POA representatives suggested that Optima's medical experts should ensure their assessments align with the physical requirements of a prison officer's role. They also raised concerns about the removal of interviews by governing governors, suggesting that if such a change were to be implemented, it should occur earlier in the recruitment process. DE confirmed that this matter was under review, with the team examining the prison officer success profiles to ensure assessments align with organisational changes, such as Enable. DE invited union engagement as this work progresses and welcomed any feedback.

ACTION: ER to liaise with DE to arrange a meeting with POA to ahead of the next quarterly HR sub-Whitley to share feedback on the ongoing review of the local recruitment process once internal governance procedures have been completed.

Standing Agenda items

5. Recruitment & Retention **Update concluded – Karen Mulliner (KM)

5.1 KM provided an update on retention, noting that the confirmed data for December 2024 was still awaiting upload to the performance hub. She shared the latest available figures, stating that as of the end of November 2024, the resignation rate stood at 8.4%, the lowest recorded since October 2021.

5.2 The team had been analysing exit interview data and identified career progression, health and wellbeing, ways of working, and leadership among the top five reasons for staff leaving. Efforts were underway to refine the exit interview process by incorporating additional questions to gain greater clarity. Given the volume of pretext data available, further analysis was required before reframing the exit interview questions to improve insight.

5.3 The retention oversight work continued, with a shift towards a more thematic approach on the prison side. The latest thematic review would focus on the experiences of staff in their early years of service, as

50% of leavers had less than two years' service within the organisation.

5.4 POA colleagues sought further clarification regarding career progression as a factor in staff departures. They questioned whether staff felt there were limited promotion opportunities or whether the issue was related to diversity within the prison service. KM explained that analysis of pretext data highlighted several concerns, including a lack of touchpoint meetings with line managers to discuss career aspirations and development, perceptions of bias in the recruitment process, and a lack of visible development opportunities. She stated that while some insights had been gathered, further work was needed to encourage vacancy managers to implement fair, robust, and transparent selection processes, as well as to develop targeted interventions to address these issues.

5.5 POA acknowledged the focus on staff with less than two years' service but emphasised the importance of retaining experienced staff, who play a crucial role in mentoring and developing new recruits. They urged the team not to overlook this group. KM agreed and confirmed that while the thematic review aimed to reduce early-career attrition, experienced staff would be a key focus, given their role in coaching and supporting new employees. She anticipated that the review would not be completed until summer 2026, as the process would involve conducting interviews across 25% of establishments over a three-month period, followed by a detailed analysis before presenting findings to the relevant forums.

6. HR Policy Focus – Gill Hannay (HG)

6.1 GH provided an update on HR policy developments, highlighting the team's focus on Synergy, a new HR and Finance system. Design decisions were expected to be finalised by mid-2025, with system processes being adopted wherever possible to facilitate easier upgrades. The project aimed to align people policy processes across the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and the Home Office where appropriate. The team had participated in workshops on time off, absence management, and performance management, with further sessions scheduled for the first quarter of 2025. Additionally, HMPPS Trade Unions had received a Synergy information pack and had been offered a meeting in February 2025.

6.2 The team was monitoring the Employment Rights Bill, which was published on 10 October 2024, and was liaising with the Government People Group and the Department for Business and Trade to assess its potential impact. The HMPPS Professional Standards and Rademaker Review recommendations were still awaited. Once published, these would inform future policies relating to grievance procedures, discipline, conduct, and performance management.

6.3 GH confirmed that Neonatal Care Leave and Pay would come into effect on 6 April 2025, as announced by the Department for Business and Trade. Work was underway to draft the policy and impact assessment, including Annex A and the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). A consultation on Loans and Secondments Policies was scheduled to begin in the week commencing 17 February 2025.

Additionally, policy alignment for probation periods was expected to be completed by mid-March 2025.

6.4 GH provided an update on the Expenses Policy Review, which was linked to the Expenses Programme initiated in September 2023 by the HR Director of People Services. The review aimed to address various issues, including SSCL expenses audit queues, tax non-compliance, and recommendations from the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA). Changes to PI 17/2015 Travel Expenses Policy would be introduced, including:

- Simplifying overnight subsistence claims, allowing employees to retain the full £25 allowance without declaring incidental travel.

- Introducing a Personal Incidental Expenditure (PIE) allowance of up to £5 per night for absences of five nights or more, aligning with MoJ policy.
- Increasing the lodging allowance across the UK to £42.25 (previously £31 and £32.45).
- Reducing the self-approval limit in HMPPS from £500 to £150, in line with the Global Finance Function's "no self-approval" principle.

6.5 POA representatives expressed a strong interest in meeting with GH to discuss the expenses policy and loan agreements in greater detail. They highlighted concerns arising from the migration of policies between MOJ and HMPPS, particularly in relation to Learning & Development (L&D) staff. GH acknowledged these concerns and agreed to engage further on these matters.

ACTION: ER to liaise with GH and POA and to organise a dedicated meeting to discuss the Expenses Policy Review.

POA Item

7. MS Teams being used as primary offer for disciplinary meetings, appeals & grievances

7.1 The POA raised concerns regarding the use of MS Teams as the primary platform for disciplinary meetings, appeals, and grievances, rather than holding these meetings face-to-face. They cited an example where an individual with mental health and psychological issues was required to attend a virtual meeting. As the meeting was not conducted in person, there was no opportunity to provide appropriate support, and no offer of care team assistance was made, resulting in the individual leaving the call. Additional concerns included issues with internet connectivity, the unauthorised recording of meetings (which is against policy), and the inaccuracy of MS Teams transcripts. POA further expressed frustration that MS Teams was being used as the default option, particularly in cases where individuals were fighting to keep their jobs. They felt that a virtual meeting did not demonstrate the necessary level of respect. Additionally, they raised concerns that governors were justifying the use of MS Teams based on guidance issued during the COVID-19 period, rather than considering the current context.

7.2 GH responded by addressing the issue of recording disciplinary hearings on MS Teams. She stated that she had not observed an increase in virtual meetings being used by default and had not received feedback indicating such a trend. She requested that union colleagues provide specific examples of where this had occurred, as this would allow her to escalate the concern and collaborate with HR Business Partners (HRBPs) to clarify the situation from a policy perspective.

7.3 POA colleagues acknowledged GH's response but requested that clear guidance be issued, reinforcing that face-to-face meetings should be the default approach. They warned that failure to reinforce this practice could lead to an increase in grievances from their members. GH agreed that this could be considered but emphasised the need to first gather further information on the frequency and locations of these concerns. She requested that union colleagues share any specific examples or recurring themes, so the HRBP team could assess the situation before determining the best course of action.

ACTION: POA to provide further information and examples to ER regarding concerns over meetings being conducted via MS Teams.

8. Wellbeing priorities – Eleanor Jemison (EJ)

8.1 EJ provided an update on the current HMPPS wellbeing priorities, highlighting that suicide prevention was a key focus for the team. An intranet article had been published on 6 February 2025 promoting the Zero Suicide Alliance training. Staff Support and Wellbeing Leads (SSWL) were being encouraged to work with local establishments to facilitate staff access to the training before wider promotion.

8.2 TU colleagues sought clarification on whether the training was aimed at staff or prisoner suicide prevention. They reiterated concerns previously raised about the number of staff suicides and expressed frustration that no additional measures appeared to have been implemented. They noted that if there were an increase in prisoner suicides, there would likely be a more significant response. They requested an explanation of the employer's actions regarding staff suicides. EJ clarified that the training was a peer support package developed externally by the NHS and endorsed for use within the organisation. While it was part of the required learning package in the Probation Service, it had not been made mandatory in prisons or HQ due to concerns about how and when staff could access the material. The training had the potential to be distressing, so ensuring adequate support was in place was a priority before making it required learning.

8.3 EJ continued her update by outlining work on the Workplace Post Incident Trauma Support Guide (WPITSG). The team was considering how best to roll out and implement this guidance. While implementation in prisons was expected to be relatively straightforward due to existing frameworks, a tailored approach would be required for the Probation Service. Additionally, the team had identified links between WPITSG and the Volunteer Peer Support Evaluation (VPSE), which focused on the role of care team volunteers, mental health allies, TRIM practitioners, and SPOCs who coordinate wellbeing support. Strategic leads from HMPPS and MOJ were working collaboratively to develop an implementation plan, with rollout expected in March 2025.

8.4 POA colleagues expressed appreciation for the efforts to reduce staff suicides but voiced concerns over the reliance on peer support. They believed that many colleagues and members would also be uncomfortable with this approach. EJ clarified that suicide prevention was a separate initiative under the Zero Suicide Alliance training, while the review of peer support was a distinct exercise unrelated to suicide prevention.

8.5 EJ concluded the update by discussing the ongoing Active Wellbeing initiative, which was being run by the Civil Service Sports Club. While it was primarily a promotional activity, participation did not require club membership. Additionally, the Charity for Civil Servants was organising a Mega Mile Challenge in May 2025. Although these initiatives had attracted significant participation across the wider Civil Service, engagement from HMPPS staff, particularly prison staff, remained low. This was thought to be due to the difficulties in using fitness tracking technology within prisons, as wearable devices and mobile phones were not permitted. Wellbeing leads were engaging with the Civil Service Sports Club and the Charity for Civil Servants to explore alternative ways to encourage HMPPS staff participation.

POA Items

9. Medical Inefficiency Payments

9.1 The POA raised concerns regarding the taxation of Medical Inefficiency Payments, particularly in cases where an employee had a disability. They highlighted that staff required clearer guidance at the point of payment to determine their eligibility for non-taxation, as the current process lacked clarity.

9.2 POA further explained that this issue was similar to another agenda item—Section 406 of the Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions Act)—which states that payments made in connection with the termination of employment due to disability should be exempt from taxation. However, HMRC had been applying a blanket approach, only exempting the first £30,000 of any compensatory payment from tax, rather than considering whether the payment should be fully exempt due to its connection with disability.

9.3 FS enquired whether this issue was linked to other legislation or if other trade unions were raising similar concerns. POA representatives clarified that while they had raised the issue in relation to Medical Inefficiency Payments, it was likely to be a Civil Service-wide concern. They had also sought legal advice

on the matter and noted that several successful test cases had been brought forward. They emphasised that while the issue primarily lay with HMRC, they had chosen to raise it in this forum due to its relevance to HR policy.

9.4 DB clarified that the Medical Inefficiency Payments scheme was not specific to the Prison Service but was a Civil Service-wide scheme. He further explained that receiving a payment under the scheme did not necessarily mean that an individual was classified as disabled. The scheme provided payments as a result of dismissal, but the reason for dismissal was not always linked to a disability. DB acknowledged that he was not an expert on the policy and suggested that POA colleagues submit their concerns in writing so that further advice could be sought from HR specialists familiar with the scheme.

Meeting Ended

The Next Meeting is set for Wednesday 5 May 2025

POA HR Sub-Whitley Meeting_Wednesday 7 May 2025

Attendees:

HMPPS:

Francis Stuart (FS) (Chair)	Head of HMPPS Employee Relations
Andy Hewitt (AH)	Senior Employee Relations Lead
Dan Bateman (DB)	Deputy Director, HMPPS HR Business Partners
Karen Mulliner (KM)	Head of HR, HMPPS HR Workforce Strategy Team
Damian Evans (DE)	Prisons Resourcing
Michaela Taylor (MT)	Tactical Resourcing Lead
Eleanor Jemison (EJ)	HMPPS Intelligent Partnership – People
Kate Heeks (KH)	MOJ Resourcing
Gill Hannay (HG)	People Policy
Kency Soko	Employee Relations

POA:

Dave Todd	National Vice-Chair, POA
Terry McCarthy	POA NEC
Geoff Willetts	POA NEC
Angela Montgomery	Full-Time Officer

Apologies:

Rachael Waters	Interim Divisional Director, HR Policy and Transparency
Ruth Mulder	Divisional Head of HR - Workforce Strategy & Stability
Joseph Holloway	Head of HR Services (Operations and Improvement)
Caroline Rostron	HMPPS Staff Wellbeing Lead
Sarah Rigby	POA NEC

1. Apologies and Introductions

Apologies were received as set out above.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Action log

2.1 The Minutes of the last meeting that took place were agreed as a true record.

2.2 The Chair spoke on the action log and updated the meeting accordingly, with the below points raised.

2.3 Action 1: The Chair advised the consultation had started a few years back however was paused due to the Rademaker review, which has now been made public as of yesterday. TU colleagues expressed a breakdown between shared services and taking away an employee's number when they retire or are dismissed so they will not have the facility to log a grievance. The Chair advised there currently are no means for ex-employees to log a grievance. Karen advised that the employee number remains but shows as ex-employee.

Action: Rish will further examine as to whether the systems on SSCL allow for an ex-employee to have a live grievance against an ex-employee record.

Action 4: The advance on technology and how it is impacting on policy – Ristead advised the additional guidance was issued in July 2021 post-Covid due to the increasing use of Microsoft Teams. This guidance does not mandate the use of Teams but suggests how it can be used where available. Regarding recording and transcription Teams can be used to record disciplinary hearings, regardless of using technology, tape recording or written note the principles of fairness dictate that the individual should be provided with an accurate and comprehensive record of the meeting. However, for face-to-face hearings for gross misconduct, disciplinary hearing considering an allegation of gross misconduct should be carried out face-to-face rather than virtually. This is not intended as a predetermination of the outcome but reflects the seriousness of the allegation and that the potential outcome could be dismissal. The principle also applies to any subsequent appeal hearings resulting from the initial hearing. Our suggestion is that we issue comms to remind senior leads of this expectation, we can share this comms with TU colleagues beforehand. POA colleagues requested to see documents before they are shared to ensure all points raised are covered within the documents.

MS Teams guidance: <https://justiceuk.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/HMPPSIntranetPrototype-Test/EaVQmPR5NYBJknEV6Mv0uBIBVU0mNICXJWPwvGA0ffFY0w?e=xrJgdD>

Standing Agenda items

3. Recruitment and Retention Update – Damian Evans (DE) and Karen Mulliner (KM)

3.1 We have the resignation rate figures up to the end of March. With April figures to come in the following days as April has just ended a few days ago. In previous months we were reporting a month in arrears. This then meant we were seeing a significant high volume of late notified leavers which was affecting the figures we were receiving. We monitored this over a 6-month period and have seen these numbers reduce significantly. Where we were seeing around 50 late notifications each month we are now currently in single figures across prisons and probations last month. This decrease steered us to revert to the previous reporting process of reporting by previous month rather than a month in arrears.

The position as of the end of March was the resignation amongst our Band 3-5 prison officers was 8.2% which is a reduction from 8.32% in the previous month. Resignation did increase on a month-by-month basis from February-March in terms of their volume, we did see a decrease in leavers by other reasons. Overall, in the 12 months we have seen a reduction in leavers.

We continue to monitor the sites that have high attrition, all the sites in our top bracket have had the full retention oversight process with the exception of Long Lartin, they are going to be included in the proposal going to POMCR this month for consideration on where we will go to next.

Current deep dive retention activity: We are doing thematic deep dive into the experience of those in their early years of service based on data that when we commissioned 50% of our leavers had less than 2 years and of those leavers 34% had less than 1 year.

Wastage and turnover rate: The target for MOJ to achieve by end of March 2025 was a wastage rate of 10%. For Bands 3-5 at the end of March it came in at 9.35% allowing us to meet that target.

POA advised they have stated they do not like the use of term 'wastage' and have requested for this to be changed. They asked how many within wastage were deaths or suicide. KM advised that deaths in service and transfers are combined into the same category from the data received. There is no way of segregating that data to get specific figures on that. The POA stated when there is a cluster of deaths, as an employer you should deep dive to see whether a potential cause can be identified for example as to what took place in Isle of Sheppey.

Exit Interviews: We are currently doing work on this in order to gather questions that will allow us to understand the drivers of attrition in more detail. The top 3 drivers for Bands 3-5 officers in the last 12-months remain as career progression, ways of working and leadership. Our team got allocated our copilot licences, this means we can now make use of copilot to help us interrogate that data in more detail.

Leavers by length of service: The highest proportion of leavers are within their first year at 29.7% followed by those between 1-2years at 18.3%. The next group with a high attrition rate is those with more than 5 years but less than 10 years at 12.3%.

DE advised that Kate Heeks will be attending future meetings alongside him to cover the recruitment update. DE spoke to slides during the meeting covering end of February data:

DE advised he will share slides with ER and slides will be circulated once received.

4. HR Policy Focus - Ristead McDonald (RS)

4.1 We are working on a forward look, which has our current priorities. This can be shared with colleagues by the end of the month. Our key priorities continue to be Synergy, HMPPS professional standards work also known as Rademaker, workforce transformation and legislative change.

Synergy: This will replace SOP. It is a cross departmental project aimed at improving the delivery of HR, finance and commercial services. It aims to offer better value for money by streamlining time consuming processes. We are going through this process as part of a cluster with DWP, Home Office and Defra. Wherever possible we are expected to align with other departments in our cluster.

Specific policy updates: Grievance, bullying, harassment, discrimination, victimisation, sexual harassment and assault guidance, conduct and discipline, all these active policy developments were all put on hold pending the outcome of Rademaker. We are liaising with all leads for that review to contribute to the organisational response and all feedback on relevant policies and guidance will be reconsidered in due course, and TU's will be provided with an opportunity to contribute any additional views or feedback on policy areas.

Parental bereavement leave: Currently there is no parental bereavement leave policy. We have developed a draft policy on parental bereavement leave which will be located on the existing intranet pages.

Career break: We have drafted a new career break policy which brings together the MOJ, PSI and PI policies into a single policy document. These will be located on the intranet pages. The only significant change will be to remove the age limitations on who can apply for a career break to eliminate any discriminations that employees of retirement age may face in requesting a career break.

Neonatal care leave and pay: This came into effect 6 April 2025 and is located on the new intranet pages. It is a new entitlement meaning there are no existing policies to consider. This allows parents to take up to

12 weeks paid leave in addition to other entitlements so they can spend more time with their baby.

Expenses: We will hold a dedicated meeting on this. The expenses programme has now closed with some limited changes having gone live on 1 April. We are now going to commence a full policy review Led by Paula whom TU colleagues will meet at the dedicated meeting.

5. Wellbeing priorities – Eleanor Jemison

5.1 Area plans will be launched over the coming weeks. We are involved in a piece of work that supports the Enable Programme. They have developed a core capability package called 'Wellbeing Matters.' It has been offered and delivered in the enable programme earlier doctor site. There is now an opportunity for prisons across the organisation to opt in to having that package delivered as part of their core capability packages in their establishment. We are asking our staff support and wellbeing leads to promote it. The package offers an opportunity to understand and reflect on the importance of wellbeing and working in a psychologically safe environment. It offers a safe space to reflect on the people who are participating on their own wellbeing and to know what is available for support. There is a lot of information in the package about the services we can access as employees of HMPPS and how we access them.

The government audit team are in the initial stages of planning and scoping an audit report on trauma support for prison officers. We are expecting this to be led by prison safety group, but the official accountable owner has not been identified as yet.

6. Pay and Reward Update – Francis Stuart

6.1 The position for pay 2025/2026 is that the prison service pay recommendations are now with government to consider, alongside with responses from all the other pay review bodies across the public sector. We are anticipating by June for a response. We aim for a timely process, with the intention to ensure people are paid ahead of the summer recess. In terms of this year's rounds as soon as we are in a position to provide embargoed information we will provide that in the usual manner. To ensure that you are provided with adequate information to answer any questions that may come in from colleagues, providing you with comms and frequently asked questions.

POA Items:

7. Update on compassionate transfer process. Is last years complete? Any stats relating to it? Are you repeating the same process this year? – if so, when?

7.1 POA advised there was a meeting held last week, where this item was discussed in more detail. KM advised there has been consultation taking place with various stakeholders, with HR consultations currently going on and they are looking to draft the new compassionate transfer process based on the engagement that occurred. They have done survey's with people that have used the service, and this will be factored in. KM will provide a further update on a process that will be consulted with POA colleagues in due course.

8. Band 3 prison officers increasing their hours from 37 to 39 or 41.

Several prisons have contacted us because prison officers are being refused when they ask to increase their hours. I have it in writing from the resourcing team that they can increase their hours. Can we please have absolute clarity on this issue as prison management teams are clearly not being advised in the same way as us.

8.1 POA advised there seems to be conflicting information, when a new prison officer starts they are on 37hours for their training, after this they can extend their hours to 39 or 41. However, we are now being

made aware of some prisons refusing to allow officers to extend their hours to 39 or 41.

Action: Dan Bateman will carry this forward to get clarity and feedback to POA.

9. sick leave excusal

9.1 POA advised if it is clear assault, the sick leave excusal should be given for that period of sickness not when an individual returns to work.

Guidance on ACHP from my Hub: <https://hmpps.myhub.sscl.com/hr-and-pay/Pay-pensions-and-expenses-Staff-pay-pensions-and-expenses/allowances-and-payments/additional-committed-hours-prison-and-hq-staff>

<https://hmpps.myhub.sscl.com/hr-and-pay/being-away-from-work-staff-being-away-from-work/sickness-and-attendance/sick-leave-excusals>

Action: Dan Bateman will gather further information on line management approach to sick leave excusal and share findings with colleagues.

Meeting Ended

POA HR Sub-Whitley Meeting Monday 11 August 2025

Attendees:

HMPPS:

Dan Bateman (DB)	Deputy Director, HMPPS HR Business Partners
Derek Stanton (DS)	Employee Relations Senior Lead
Daisy Forster (DF)	Workforce Movement & People Policy Lead
Alex Krupa (AK)	HR Prison Learning Delivery
Karen Mulliner (KM)	HMPPS HR Workforce Strategy Team
Damian Evans (DE)	Prisons Resourcing
Jasmin De Souza (JDS)	Resourcing, Selection and Onboarding
Eleanor Jemison (EJ)	HMPPS Intelligent Partnership – People
Shakira Artrey (SA)	Pay and Reward
Kate Heeks (KH)	MOJ Resourcing
Gill Hannay (HG)	People Policy
Lauretta Devlin (LD)	HR Services
Joseph Nsarhaza (JN)	Employee Relations Admin Manager

POA:

Dave Todd	National Vice-Chair, POA
Terry McCarthy	POA NEC
Sarah Rigby	POA NEC
Angela Montgomery	Full-Time Officer

Apologies:

Francis Stuart (FS) (Chair)	Head of HMPPS Employee Relations
Rachael Waters	Interim Divisional Director, HR Policy and Transparency
Ruth Mulder	Divisional Head of HR - Workforce Strategy & Stability
Sam Beard (SB)	Head of Prison Learning Delivery
Joseph Holloway	Head of HR Services (Operations and Improvement)
Caroline Rostron	HMPPS Staff Wellbeing Lead
Geoff Willetts	POA NEC

2. Apologies and Introductions

Apologies were received as set out above.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Action log

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and agreed upon as an accurate record.

2.2 DS provided an update on the action log and addressed the following points:

2.3 DS required Trade Union colleagues to confirm they had received the SLB update shared with them 16 May 2025. TU colleagues confirmed that although they had received the SLB update they were unable to access the link as the link is only accessible for internal staff.

Action: ER to provide the SLB update wording sent to POA on 16 May 2025, as the original link isn't accessible externally.

Standing Agenda items

3. Recruitment and Retention Update – Damian Evans (DE) and Karen Mulliner (KM)

3.1 KM reported on retention, confirming that the resignation rate stood at 7.75% at the end of June 2025. The team had received the July data, which indicated that resignations in July 2025 fell below 100 for the first time since February 2021. It was noted that this figure could rise due to late notifications of leavers; however, overall, there had been a reduction in the number of resignations received.

3.2 KM stated that 66 prisons currently had a resignation rate below the national average. Alongside the decrease in resignation rates, there had also been a reduction in the number of leavers for other reasons, with 70 such leavers in May 2025 and a decrease to 56 in June 2025. Nevertheless, a number of prisons continued to experience high resignation rates, and the team was actively working with those establishments.

3.3 KM provided further updates on other categories of leavers. The voluntary leaving and death in service rate was noted as 8.99%, while the rate for all other reasons, including non-voluntary departures and dismissals, stood at 11.6%. The primary reason for leaving remained unchanged; as of the end of June 2025, leadership continued to be the predominant factor, followed by ways of working, health and wellbeing, career progression, and retirement.

3.4 KM explained that retention was showing signs of improvement, acknowledging that the situation remained fluid but expressing optimism given the 98 resignations recorded for July 2025. KM also provided an update on prison officer level transfers, informing the group that applications had closed on 7 August 2025. There had been 127 applications for the adult male campaign, 29 for the adult women's campaign, three for the YCS estate, and 44 for PIT and EFA. The team was in the process of conducting eligibility checks to ensure that all applicants had completed two years in a prison officer role prior to the sifting of applications.

3.5 POA colleagues enquired about the measures being taken regarding exit interviews and the pursuit of improved outcomes. KM responded that the team had recently revised the exit interview questions to facilitate completion by staff. Additionally, the team had conducted several training sessions in July 2025 to retrain HR staff, aiming to enhance their engagement in the process. This formed part of a broader

commitment to engage with+ leavers prior to their departure to encourage participation in exit interviews.

3.6 DE delivered an update on resourcing data, stating that at the end of June 2025, there were 904 vacancies for Band 3 to Band 5 prison officers, with 223 service staff in post across those bands. It was explained that the majority of these were due to organisational changes, including the temporary closure of HMP Dartmoor and previous staff movements at HMP Cookham Wood. As of the end of July 2025, agreed start dates for 2025/26 stood at 1,157, representing approximately 30% of this year's target.

3.7 DE further reported that in June 2025, there were 327 joiners and 294 leavers. Of these leavers, 186 had left the organisation, while 108 represented internal movements. The current staffing position was therefore at 94% nationally. Regarding Operational Support Grades (OSG), there were 525 vacancies as of the end of June 2025 and 20 surplus staff. There were 115 joiners and 103 leavers in this category, of whom 46 left the organisation and 57 moved internally, with 37 transferring to prison officer roles. National staffing for OSGs was at 91.7% of target as of the end of June 2025.

3.8 DE informed the group that scenario modelling was underway to assess the impact of recent immigration changes relating to right to work on the recruitment pipeline and existing employees. The team had been actively engaged in these efforts, with several briefings circulated to colleagues regarding ongoing work.

3.9 DE added that the team was working to ensure that SSCL communicated with all candidates in the recruitment pipeline to establish their right to work status and the implications for individuals. At present, there had not been a significant number of candidates withdrawing from the process. The team was continuing efforts to clarify right to work status and ensure that candidates remained eligible for employment.

3.10 DE concluded by stating that all prison officer job adverts had been updated to clearly indicate that sponsorship was not available. All candidate information materials had been revised accordingly, and the team was preparing to introduce additional application form questions to make explicit the inability to sponsor individuals who had not previously been sponsored through the skilled worker route.

POA Item

4. Visa requirements and Immigration Status

4.1 POA colleagues enquired regarding the process by which an employer determines whether an individual possesses the legal right to work. In response, JDS explained that this was a complex matter, noting that an individual's right to work status depends on personal circumstances and available options. JDS reported that, at present, the organisation had an understanding of the number of individuals with limited right to work status, including projections extending to 2030, as many visas were set to expire in 2026 and subsequent years.

4.2 JDS clarified the procedure for confirming an individual's right to work, stating that SSCL undertakes the employer checks on behalf of the organisation. These checks are sent to the Home Office, which then verifies whether an individual has the required right to work status, indicating either a positive or negative outcome. This verification forms part of the recruitment process and is included in pre-employment checks. JDS further confirmed that regular checks are conducted for individuals with a negative right to work status to ensure that, should their right to work be nearing expiration, an 'in time' application is made to the Home Office, thereby extending their legal entitlement to continue working.

4.3 POA colleagues reported receiving various enquiries from branches and expressed the view that it was the employer's responsibility to provide accurate information. JDS responded by noting that several

communications had been issued across the organisation. Where individuals had directly contacted the team seeking sponsorship, the team had engaged with those individuals, accordingly, emphasising that it was not possible to assume that all staff required sponsorship.

Standing Agenda items continued

5. HR Policy Focus - Daisy Forster (DF)

5.1 DF provided an update on the ongoing work within People Policy, outlining that the team had continued to deliver the policy organisation agenda across key areas, including performance and behaviour, absence, moving and leaving, and travel and expenses. She reported that the team had also maintained engagement with Synergy, ensuring that Ministry of Justice (MOJ) was prepared for the implementation of Synergy, referred to as Synergy readiness.

5.2 DF went on to report progress regarding policy harmonisation. She stated that People Policy was responsible for a total of 43 policies, of which 21 had been aligned and 17 remained in the process of being updated. DF noted that the team had worked closely with POA and other Trade Union colleagues and expressed gratitude for their support. She added that the team would shortly commence a full review of Rademaker-related policies, with plans to engage Trade Union colleagues in due course. The policies under review would include BHDB, sexual harassment, and grievance conduct and discipline.

5.3 She further advised that work was progressing on the Rademaker-related policies, with the intention to have updated versions of BHDB, sexual harassment, and assault policies ready to share with Trade Union colleagues by the end of August 2025. DF explained that a number of outstanding decisions were awaited in relation to the grievance policy, but the team anticipated producing a revised draft policy toolkit and letters for renewed engagement with Trade Union colleagues. She also indicated that the conduct and discipline policy was running approximately one month behind schedule, with a revised policy and toolkit expected to be shared by the end of October 2025.

5.4 DF reported that the loans and secondments policies had passed governance and were expected to go live within the next month. She noted that work was ongoing on the annual leave and special leave policies, which had been significantly impacted by Synergy. Draft policies for these areas were expected to be ready for consultation with Trade Unions by the end of October 2025.

5.5 In conclusion, DF confirmed the team's commitment to accelerating the expenses review, recognising its growing priority. She outlined that options to expedite the review were being considered, including a phased approach that would prioritise business travel, followed by a focus on excess fares and relocation policies, with engagement planned to commence in November 2025.

POA Item

6. Secondment policy in respect of ability to apply for successive secondment

6.1 The POA raised a query on behalf of one of their members who had previously been on secondment and wished to apply for another secondment. However, the member had been informed that there were restrictions in place due to their prior participation in a secondment. The POA enquired whether a policy existed addressing this issue.

6.2 In response, DF sought clarification on whether the secondment in question involved an external organisation or was an internal transfer to another prison. The POA confirmed that they held relevant email correspondence and would revert to DF with further information in due course.

Action: POA to confirm staff are restricted from a second secondment due to previous participation, and that annual leave allocations are accurate.

7. Annual Leave Calculations

7.1 DF reported that she had liaised with the Pay and Reward team regarding annual leave entitlement for employees on the FNS scheme. She expressed concern that, upon promotion, some staff were receiving less annual leave than they had previously been entitled to. DF requested that POA colleagues clarify the method used to calculate annual leave, noting that although POA had previously provided this information in hours, she was unable to determine the entitlement based on those figures. DF further relayed that the Pay and Reward team had confirmed there should be no change in terms and conditions for employees progressing through the FNS grades but acknowledged that changes might occur when moving into FNS.

7.2 The POA informed the meeting that the initial information had originated from the Resource Management team at HMPPS Leyhill, where a review had been conducted to ensure correct annual leave allocation. The review had indicated that a significant number of staff promoted within FNS had been advised that their annual leave entitlement should be reduced from 320 hours to 316 hours. The POA disputed this reduction and stated that they had not been informed of any such change.

7.3 The POA also raised concerns about the existing mistrust among staff regarding transitions into FNS, especially given assurances that their terms and conditions would not be altered.

Action: The POA agreed to provide the email from the Resource Management team, which outlined the detailed explanation for the annual leave calculations.

8. Expenses Programme Update

8.1 The POA had raised concerns regarding the current level of training and awareness among line managers and staff in relation to claiming expenses. It had been noted that making a claim, as well as understanding entitlement, was proving to be challenging, as reflected by the volume of overpayments recorded. The POA had enquired whether there were any plans to circulate clear guidance or provide training to assist staff in comprehending which expenses could be claimed.

8.2 DF had acknowledged the points raised by the POA and explained that the TNS team was actively considering such issues.

Action: DF had agreed to liaise with the TNS team to determine what steps were being taken to make the expenses claiming process more accessible for all staff. DF undertook to provide an update to colleagues at the November 2025 meeting.

Standing Agenda items

9. Pay and Reward Update - Shakira Artrey (SA)

9.1 SA provided an update on pay and reward matters. She reported that the implementation of the 2025/26 pay award had been completed in the July 2025 payroll, with pay notices published on the intranet. No issues had been raised with the team, suggesting a successful implementation. SA further noted that the team was reviewing the opt-in process for closed grades into the FNS and that arrangements were being finalised with colleagues in SSCL. She confirmed that, once the window for the opt-in exercise had been agreed, formal communications would be issued via the HMPPS intranet.

9.2 SA informed the meeting that 400 staff across the prison service remained on closed grades pay

arrangements. She highlighted that the majority of these staff would see financial benefit from opting into FNS. For those who would not benefit financially, she explained that they had already received a one-off, non-consolidated payment in their July 2025 salary, calculated at 4% of their closed grade salary.

9.3 SA went on to state that there were currently 203 closed grades in bands 2-5 operational roles. Of these, 183 staff members had been identified as able to benefit from the current year's annual opt-in exercise. The remaining 20 staff were all located at HMP Lowdham Grange in band 5 custodial manager roles. SA explained that early analysis indicated these staff would not benefit at present, as their existing 40-hour salary exceeded the pay they would receive through the FNS opt-in, which would be based on a 39-hour week.

9.4 In conclusion, SA confirmed that the team had received a data request from POA colleagues. She advised that the data would need to be requested from the analysts and confirmed that, once a date had been established for the receipt of this data, Trade Unions would be informed accordingly.

POA Item

10. Flaw in the profiling tool

10.1 The POA reported that they had recently held a meeting concerning unsocial hours and the proportion of unsocial hours that OSGs were required to work. They expressed concern that the profiling tool used by the Workforce Development team was flawed, as it did not recognise bank holidays as unsocial hours. As a result, the tool was not accurately calculating the percentage of staff working during unsocial hours.

10.2 The POA further noted that this issue had been raised at HMP Berwyn, particularly regarding band 3 staff, whose actual percentage of unsocial hours worked was significantly higher than what the profiling tool indicated. A member of the Workforce Development team had acknowledged this flaw and had created a Microsoft Excel document to address the discrepancy. However, this solution had not yet been integrated into the official profiling tool.

Action: DB agreed to consult with the Workforce Development team to investigate whether the profiling tool failed to identify bank holidays as unsocial hours and to determine whether this issue was isolated to one establishment or prevalent across multiple sites.

11. Pam Assist

11.1 The POA raised a concern regarding the PAM Assist counselling provision, suggesting that the service should be extended to offer long-term sessions for staff. They noted that, at present, only six sessions were available, which they considered insufficient. Furthermore, the POA highlighted that these sessions were currently being conducted via Microsoft Teams, which presented challenges for addressing complex cases, as such sessions were not well suited to a virtual platform.

11.2 LD explained that the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) was a professional and independent service providing support, guidance, and counselling for a wide range of issues. The service was confidential, available to employees 24/7, and free of charge. LD added that there was a need to exercise caution to ensure that the service did not supplant provision by the private sector, particularly if the number of sessions were to be increased beyond six.

11.3 LD further stated that it was possible for the six sessions to be delivered face-to-face. She reported that the EAP specification had recently been rewritten and was currently at the bid stage. Over recent months, the team had worked with their lead psychological partners to develop the specification, requesting a geographically dispersed supplier to facilitate the provision of face-to-face counselling across different

locations.

12. Wellbeing priorities Written Update - Debra Slater (DS)

HMPPS Core Wellbeing Services Team – Stakeholder Update (June–August 2025)

The Core Wellbeing Services team is pleased to share a consolidated update covering key activity across June, July and August. This streamlined communication reflects a period of focused development across several wellbeing workstreams.

Strategic Activity

Wellbeing Monthly Action Group (Mag7)

Meetings were paused in July and August to allow ongoing projects to progress. The group will reconvene in September to review the implementation of the HMPPS Stress Risk Assessment.

- **Stress Risk Assessment**

Health & Safety and Business Change colleagues are finalising alignment of the HMPPS Stress Risk Policy with the MOJ Stress Code of Practice. Implementation is expected from October, supported by centralised communications via HMPPS Comms.

- **Peer Support Programme Refresh**

Key workstreams and leads have been identified, with several already underway. The team will continue to engage Trade Unions and stakeholders at relevant stages.

- **Middle Managers Wellbeing Conference (November 19th)**

Communications will be cascaded via Area Staff Support and Wellbeing Leads (SSWLs). Due to limited capacity, tickets have been proportionately allocated across HMPPS. SSWLs are encouraged to identify suitable middle managers to ensure targeted invitations and maximise impact.

Research, Policy & Training

- **Wellbeing Survey Insights**

Key findings have been published and shared with Area SSWLs, who are working with local strategic networks to identify appropriate interventions.

Two pilot recommendations from MoJ Workplace Wellbeing are open for expressions of interest:

1. Trialling Participatory Action Research to reduce the impact of work demands.
2. Funding financial education and 1:1 advice for one year to assess impact on financial wellbeing.

- **Worker Protection Act**

The Strategic Wellbeing Group received a presentation from Professional Standards and Behaviours colleagues to explore collaborative opportunities and embed pastoral support in response to Recommendation 4 of the Rademaker review.

- **Zero Suicide Alliance Training**

SSWLs are collecting data on peer support volunteers' completion of the training. While required for probation staff, it remains optional for prison and HQ colleagues due to the sensitive nature of the content. Staff are reminded to prioritise their wellbeing and access support services as needed.

- **World Suicide Prevention Day (10th September)**

A communications package is in development with HMPPS Comms. All staff are encouraged to complete the 40-minute Zero Suicide Alliance training. The [PDF Staff Support Directory](#) (May 2025) remains available for those seeking wellbeing support.

Action: The POA requested the contact details for the Area Staff Welfare Leads under each AED. This would enable the POA to make direct contact when issues arose at establishment level, and to also have a list of HRVPs.

Meeting Ended

POA HR Sub-Whitley Meeting_Wednesday 5 November 2025

Attendees:

HMPPS:

Francis Stuart (FS) (Chair)	Head of HMPPS Employee Relations
Heather McDonald-Copeland (HMC)	Senior Employee Relations Lead
Karen Mulliner (KM)	Head of HR, HMPPS HR Workforce Strategy Team
Michaela Taylor (MT)	Tactical Resourcing Lead
Eleanor Jemison (EJ)	HMPPS Intelligent Partnership – People
Kate Heeks (KH)	MOJ Resourcing
Ruth Mulder (RM)	Divisional Head of HR - Workforce Strategy & Stability
Belinda Lyttle (BL)	HR Business Partner
Hazel Elliott (HE)	HR Change Lead
Paula Parsons (PP)	Policy Manager
Shakira Artrey (SA)	Head of Reward (Prison Pay, Pensions and Job Evaluation)
Anwer Humaira (AH)	Lead for Assessments
Kency Soko (KS)	Employee Relations

POA:

Dave Todd	National Vice-Chair, POA
Terry McCarthy	POA NEC
Geoff Willetts	POA NEC
Sarah Rigby	POA NEC
Mark Fairhurst	National Chair
Angela Montgomery	Full-Time Officer

Apologies:

Rachael Waters
Joseph Holloway
Caroline Rostron
Derek Stanton

Interim Divisional Director, HR Policy and Transparency
Head of HR Services (Operations and Improvement)
HMPPS Staff Wellbeing Lead
Senior Employee Relations Lead

3. Apologies and Introductions

Apologies were received as set out above.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Action log

2.1 The minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed and confirmed as an accurate and true record of the proceedings.

2.2 Following this, the Chair addressed the action log, providing updates to the meeting on the status and progress of each action. The key points raised during this update are outlined below.

2.3 **Action 1:** Staff retaining employee number - live grievance consultation currently happening. Paula will take this to people policy team to be aware of request when taking forward consultation on revised policy of Rademaker. The chair advised that POA have given examples of when people have left the service but have issues that still ought to be heard. POA colleagues advised it could take 6-12 months to formulate and agree a new policy what can be done in the interim. POA gave an example of incident taking place whilst working for the organisation and end up resigning over it, if you haven't worked for the organisation for 2 years you can't submit an employment tribunal claim. POA stated they need to be able to provide members with a link where can they access a grievance form and submit it to shared services with their previous employee number.

Action: Paula will aim to have interim position provided to POA before next HR.

2.4 **Action 2:** senior leaders bulletin- Sarah to check if Dave got link he wanted - if not received check with Ruth

2.5 **Action 3:** secondment- the action relates to incident in Hull relevant email has been forwarded to Daisy. POA to forward to Francis who will then take this forward with correct team.

2.6 **Action 4:** annual leave- POA have shared this with Daisy & ER lead. Michaela advised this sits with her team. This action relates to incident at Leyhill where resource management team went into their prison & did audit which resulted in findings stating some staff over their annual leave allocation. POA advised the policy may not be applied correctly so requested HR to intervene to investigate this.

2.7 **Action 6:** profiling tool failing to identify bank holidays as unsocial hours - Michaela advised the query was regarding profiling tool being used at specific site not picking up unsociable hours. It was in fact due to incorrect outdated form being used at the site which has been rectified and reissued. POA advised this was part of a dispute where Berwyn identified the profiling tool was flawed and resolved it locally by doing a reprofile. The site wanted this addressed nationally. The chair further added there is a review of nights being launched as prison service pay review body has picked up on grades particularly OSG's working to many unsocial hours. The POA will be consulted on the progress of this. Michaela confirmed the profiling tool link has been reissued to all sites to ensure they're using the most up to date version. Michaela to share response with POA colleagues.

Standing Agenda Items

3. Recruitment and Retention Update – Kate Heeks (KH) and Belinda Lyttle (BL)

3.1 Prison Officer Level Transfer: Allocation meetings were conducted with HR regional representatives, and outcome notifications have been sent to all applicants. A total of 206 applications were received across the four campaigns:

- 40 applicants were either deemed ineligible, withdrew, or left the process.
- 7 individuals submitted dual applications and were allocated through one of the campaigns for which they applied.
- 13 candidates passed for the women's estate; however, due to required gender officer ratios, allocations could not be made at this time.
- 12 candidates passed assessment, but their preferred establishments had limited vacancies; those who did not indicate alternative preferences will be placed on hold.
- 26 applicants did not progress past the initial screening.
- 108 allocations have been finalised, with the majority receiving either their first or second choice of placement.

3.2 The POA inquired whether individuals awaiting the correct gender officer ratios would remain on the waiting list for the next 12 months. RM responded that if male positions become available within this period, those candidates would be moved into the roles. The POA further asked whether the waiting period might extend beyond 12 months. RM indicated that there are ongoing discussions about potentially extending the wait to 18 months, with further details to be communicated to colleagues. The POA also requested information regarding the ratio being applied within the women's estate. BL confirmed that the gender ratio for the women's estate is 70:30.

3.3 There has been a further decrease in attrition rates for Band 3-5 officers this month, which now stands at 7.01%. Although there have been positive developments, it is notable that 59 establishments continue to report double-digit resignation rates, currently at 20%.

3.4 The team has initiated a deep dive analysis for Onley and an improvement review for Bedford. At its peak in November 2022, Bedford's attrition rate was 26.39%, but as of last month, it has decreased to 5.50%. A visit to Bedford is planned to identify successful strategies and evaluate their potential application elsewhere. Additionally, a deep dive is underway at Long Lartin. Guys Marsh has also demonstrated significant progress, reducing their attrition from over 25% last year to the current rate of 18.34%. However, concerns persist regarding Deabold, where, despite following established processes and conducting further reviews, no improvement in resignation rates has been observed. Meetings have taken place to determine what additional support can be provided by the Retention and Delivery Committee.

3.5 As of September 2025, the resignation rate stands at 7.01%, turnover rate at 10.97%, and wastage rate at 8.26%. These figures are encouraging and indicate a positive trend.

3.6 Analysis of reasons for departure among Band 3-5 officers identified leadership, peer pressure, working methods, health and well-being, and retirement as the leading factors. When compared with all staff, these remain the top five reasons, albeit in a different order. Further investigation into departures categorised as 'other' revealed that they were ultimately linked to a primary driver.

Recruitment

3.7 KH reported that she recently met with the POA and provided them with the latest recruitment statistics, which remain unchanged from those previously shared. In September 2025, there were 295 departures, comprising 225 actual exits and 70 internal movements, alongside 186 new joiners. The POA noted that overall, leavers exceeded joiners, resulting in fewer staff available for operational frontline roles.

RM commented that while the rate of attrition is showing signs of improvement, a review of all findings indicates that, although progress is evident on an individual basis, there remains significant room for improvement across the service.

4. HR Policy Focus – Paula Parsons (PP)

4.1 The policy transformation initiative continues to progress, with 23 people policies completed, 15 currently in development, and an additional 5 scheduled to commence. The loans and secondment policies are now operational and have generated notable interest and activity. Recent recruitment within the team has enabled further momentum in advancing our policy reform objectives. Additionally, fast streamers who have joined the team are actively contributing to ongoing policy development efforts.

4.2 The team is introducing a new project management methodology across the division and plan to share this approach more broadly with other people and capability groups. This change aims to enhance the accuracy of forward planning and scoping, thereby improving the ability to coordinate engagement effectively.

Rademaker

4.3 Currently, several matters are under consultation with Trade Union (TU) colleagues, including ongoing grievances, BHDV issues, sexual harassment cases, and probation periods. Meetings have been scheduled with the TUs, and RW has responded by requesting additional information regarding some of the feedback received.

Joining, moving and leaving

4.4 Development work continues on the approach to annual and special leave. Policy formulation is primarily guided by feedback from relevant leads, with the objective of making policies straightforward and accessible for staff in their daily use. The team recognise the importance of aligning their policies with Synergy, and ongoing efforts are focused on balancing these alignment requirements with broader business needs related to policy development.

Expenses

4.5 The team is currently in the initial phase, focusing on discovery work with significant time dedicated to analysis and research. This includes evaluating cost of living data, conducting cross-government comparisons, and reviewing the Synergy group's strategies to identify common design decisions within this space. The working groups have commenced, with the team now engaging with their third group, having held three stakeholder sessions across the business to identify areas where current policy may not be effective.

4.6 Additionally, the team is benchmarking the internal policies, as separate policies presently exist for MoJ and HMPPS, with the objective of eventually harmonising these into a single policy that serves all areas of the business. The primary goal of the working group is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the requirements of each business area to develop a unified policy aligned with both Synergy leads and business needs. At present, access to expenses remains limited; system changes will be necessary to allow broader access, as expenses can currently only be managed from work-issued laptops or computers.

5. Wellbeing priorities – Eleanor Jemison (EJ)

5.1 The alignment of the HMPPS Stress Policy with the MOJ Stress Code of Practice became effective on 1 October. Collaborative working groups have been established at the area level, involving staff support and wellbeing leads, health and safety representatives (the policy owners), HR, change delivery, and other relevant local stakeholders to oversee implementation. From a health and safety perspective, this transition involves deregulating the previous PSI and adopting the new Stress Code of Practice. It is essential to

promote a comprehensive understanding of when and how to apply the Stress Code of Practice throughout the organisation. Staff support and wellbeing leads will play a key role in ensuring the effective utilisation of the Stress Policy.

5.2 The staff support resource library has recently been launched. The staff support directory remains available as a printable PDF or via QR code with a detailed list of all support services. The new resource library consolidates this information into an online tool accessible to HMPPS employees. Additionally, a feedback form is provided at the bottom of each website page to facilitate user comments.

5.3 The upcoming wellbeing conference is scheduled for 19 November 2025 and is designed for strategic influencers in areas impacting stakeholder wellbeing. This in-person event has attracted 163 registrants from across HMPPS. Attendees will include representatives from various organisations and approved premises, reflecting the organisation's commitment to enhancing and supporting wellbeing initiatives.

6. Pay and Reward Update – Shakira Artrey (SA)

6.1 The HMPPS 2026/2027 written evidence was published last Thursday, following a briefing conducted by Michelle Jarman-Howe to present the pay proposals. With the submission of the written proposals complete, preparations are now underway to provide oral evidence. The session with HMPPS and ministerial representatives is scheduled for 28 November.

Recommendation 14

6.2 Efforts are ongoing in response to the recommendation. A meeting with POA colleagues took place during the summer 2025, focusing initially on issues related to unsocial hours. Subsequently, a review of night working practices in prisons was initiated. The terms of reference for this review have been shared with the POA, and further engagement with POA colleagues is planned as the review progresses

Opt-in exercise following the 2025 pay award

6.3 This has now finished with 239 closed grade staff identified as financially benefiting from the opt-in exercise, of this 171 were operational grades and 74 of those now opted in. The team are now planning to do an analysis on the data in order to understand those that have chosen not to opt-in but could financially benefit.

POA Items:

7. OPERATIONAL ROLES

7.1 Trade Unions raised a query regarding the retention of 2-hour increments in relation to promotion and requested a comprehensive list identifying which operational roles permit this allowance. RM explained that there are two components involved: ACH and ACHP. For newly appointed Band-3 staff members, working hours increase to 41, however, upon promotion, these revert to 39 hours. RM confirmed that she would provide supporting documentation on this matter

Action: RM to circulate the criteria outlining which operational roles permit staff to increase their working hours, for review by POA colleagues.

8. MUTUAL AID OUTSIDE WORKING SHIFTS AND PAYMENT

8.1 The POA reported an incident involving a missing toolkit, where staff responded at short notice. Despite this being a Mutual Aid situation, staff were unable to claim either the Tornado Rate or Callout Rate, which differs from the protocol followed for other staff in comparable situations. Although participation is recognised as voluntary, concerns have been raised regarding the fairness of this arrangement. A POA

representative will collect additional information
. on this matter and subsequently share it with SA.

Action: The POA representative will provide further details to SA, who will then conduct a more detailed investigation into the issue.

9. Management of Sick Warnings – HMP Frankland –

9.1 The POA reported that an attendance management committee advises custodial managers on issuing warnings regarding sick leave excusal. This practice has led to situations where private medical information is disclosed to individuals who do not require access to such data, raising concerns about potential data breaches. Although communication has been provided to line managers encouraging the use of their own discretion, some managers feel pressured to comply with directives due to career considerations. FS will coordinate with Ruth to determine effective methods for communicating the importance of discretion and ensuring its proper implementation.

9.2 The POA raised a query regarding HRPM members whose workload has increased following recent changes to the overall HR structure. It was noted that challenges in communicating messages within prisons may stem from a reduced physical HR presence on site. Ruth confirmed that the HR review has been concluded and affirmed a commitment to ensuring minimum HR resource allocation in each business unit.

Action: Provide an update on the HR review. Arrange for an HRBP/HRPM representative to attend and discuss these matters further at the next HR meeting.

Additional Items:

10. Promotional Assessments Update - Humaira Anwer (HA)

10.1 The 2026 assessment calendar is now available, detailing all scheduled assessments. Regarding CMAC, the team is currently conducting its largest campaign, which will conclude at the end of week six. The sift resulted in an 83% pass rate. Results are scheduled to be published in the second week of December 2026.

10.2 The team has initiated the review of promotional assessment processes, beginning with the custodial manager assessment centre level. The occupational psychology team is evaluating both the process and frequency to identify opportunities for enhancement. Areas under consideration include development portfolios, online sift, readiness evaluation forms, and the online assessment centre.

Values Based Assessment (VBA)

10.3 VBA is presently implemented for prison officer and operational support grade levels. It will be incorporated into next year's recruitment cycle, replacing the current task-based assessment at the sift stage, and will align with the HMPPS values framework. VBA is anticipated to launch in February or March next year, with active involvement from existing prison officers, OSG personnel, and other stakeholders in the design process.

Meeting Ended.

SECURITY

Security Sub Whitley Annual Report 1/1/25 – 31/12/25

Introduction

The meeting attendees were the POA Security Whitley Team along with the Heads of the Operational Response and Resilience Unit, the Heads of the National Intelligence Unit, the Head of the Joint Extremist Intelligence Unit, the Head of MARSOC, Head of Drug Reduction, Security Investment Program Lead, Enhanced Gate Security Program Lead, and Head of former Risk Capability Unit.

Andy Rogers, Deputy Director Safety Group, continued his tenure as chair of the Security Whitley.

Meetings took place on 11th February, 24th June and 10th November.

Security & Custody Whitley 11th February 2025 by MS Teams

Attendees

Andy Rogers- Deputy Director for Operational Security and Risk Management Group.

Sarah Ashcroft - Operational Security Group.

Phil Whittaker - HOOCM.

Jay Thomas- National Intelligence Unit.

Tara Kasogbia – PA to Director.

Andy Hewitt – HMPPS ER.

James Rampton ORRU.

Chantel King – RaCU.

Emma Thompson – CCPU.

India Greenland – JEXU.

Dave Todd – POA VC.

Sarah Rigby – POA NEC.

Terry McCarthy- POA NEC.

Andy Baxter – POA FTO.

The meeting opened with an overview of current pressures and priorities. The December session had been cancelled due to internal budget work. Leaders explained that funding is tight and not all planned activity can be delivered. Discussions have taken place with senior operational and policy colleagues, and some proposals may move forward only if additional funding is secured. If work has to stop, unions will be consulted. Submissions linked to the Spending Review have been positively received and remain a central focus. On drones, the emphasis is shifting toward physical security improvements, with further updates to follow. Operationally and politically, workloads remain high, including ongoing issues linked to high-profile cases.

The group then moved to motions from the annual conference.

The first motion concerned staff vetting. A dedicated meeting on lifelong vetting is planned following a recent report. Workshops have been held to explore lived experience and recruitment pathways.

Management invited specific feedback on what is considered not fit for purpose. Union representatives raised concerns about personal suitability and recruitment decisions, arguing that vetting alone is not enough. They suggested that candidates should be interviewed by experienced governors to assess character and suitability before formal vetting. Management agreed that selection and vetting are distinct

processes. Around 60,000 vetting applications are processed each year, with a significant number rejected. There was agreement to continue engagement and review individual cases where concerns arise, while recognising that no system is flawless.

The second motion addressed vehicles for dog handlers. Analysis showed that most handlers travel short distances to single establishments, making dedicated vehicles cost prohibitive. National specialist dog handlers are already issued vehicles. Union representatives highlighted inconsistencies in travel time, subsistence, and historical arrangements across regions. Legal advice has been sought, but there is no simple national solution. Management acknowledged that different terms and conditions can feel divisive but said they reflect operational need. Further meetings are planned to discuss individual circumstances.

The third motion proposed including X-ray training in initial training for Operational Support Grades. Management confirmed support in principle and said papers had been submitted to the training committee. Although not all proposals were accepted, there is a shared view that this is core training. Both sides agreed to rework the proposal and pursue resources to support implementation.

Another motion challenged the categorisation system, particularly in relation to the open estate. Management pointed to ongoing consultation and invited formal written feedback. Union representatives expressed concern about increasing numbers of returns from open prisons and predicted pressures will worsen. Capacity and categorisation were acknowledged as linked challenges across custody and probation.

The TRAKA review was discussed next. A senior manager has been tasked with presenting options by the end of the month, with implementation targeted for April. Concerns were raised about data protection and the use of tracking data in timekeeping investigations. Management agreed that clearer guidance is needed on when the system should and should not be used.

On maternity leave and dog handlers, management confirmed that the care and maintenance allowance will continue at the same rate during maternity leave, re-teaming, or retraining. This is intended to prevent financial disadvantage. Union representatives felt earlier drafts did not go far enough and asked for clearer wording distinguishing pregnancy from sickness absence. Management agreed to follow up and circulate the revised document.

The Sudbury dispute focused on the use of PAVA and batons. Local representatives are seeking 24-hour PAVA and daytime baton carriage. Management reviewed four years of data showing no staff assaults, relatively low prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, and only one PAVA discharge. Many recorded assaults were sexual and identified after the event. Management proposed a stepped, evidence-based approach and invited a formal request to trigger review. Union representatives argued that safety is not just about recorded assaults but about staff confidence and levels of non-compliance. Concerns were raised about staffing numbers, high volumes of returns, and whether returned prisoners are always sent to appropriately secure establishments. Management requested written submissions including data on non-compliance.

Exclusion policy was also reviewed. The current approach aligns with police barring periods, typically preventing return within ten years. Individuals can appeal both the exclusion and any associated award. Management offered to share exclusion data, though appeal data may be limited. Representatives asked whether independent oversight could be built into decisions.

Unit updates followed. In the Risk and Categorisation Unit, expansion of the open estate pipeline is under pressure, but leaders do not intend to reduce thresholds. A proposal to extend certain timeframes from three to five years is out for consultation. There was a request to distinguish clearly between policy design and failures in execution. Vetting renewals may be replaced with a more continuous system by late 2025, with safeguards to be shaped through engagement.

Drones remain a priority. A counter-drone strategy based on the four “P” model—prevent, protect, pursue, and prepare—is being rolled out, with named leads for each strand. Further meetings with these leads were agreed.

In specialist units, a Taser trial has progressed positively, particularly for distance control and reducing blunt trauma risk. Approval has been granted for an operational trial in the adult male estate, with 20 staff to be trained. Governance, medical oversight, and health and safety arrangements are being finalised. Evidence suggests visible red-dot deployment often leads to compliance without discharge. Body-worn video capability will be integrated. Introduction is expected in the spring.

Updates were also provided on capital investment in specialist centres, including improvements to roofs, heating, showers, training facilities, and staff areas. Guidance on attendance at sentencing hearings has been refreshed. While judges can direct attendance, use of force must remain reasonable and proportionate. Governors will receive clearer guidance to support defensible decisions.

Counter-terrorism work has intensified following recent incidents and public disorder. A consolidated framework is out for consultation, bringing existing policies into one place. New training will roll out in March and April. Although not mandatory, there is an ambition to strengthen uptake.

The meeting closed with no additional business raised.

Security & Custody Whitley 24th June 2025 by MS Teams

Attendees.

Andy Rogers – Director of Security

Sarah Ashcroft – Head of ORRU

Sarah Stevenson – ORRU

Dawn Orchard – HMPPS ER

Tara Kasogbia – HMPPS

Sarah Rigby POA NEC.

Dave Todd – POA VC.

Andy Baxter – POA FTO.

The meeting opened with agreement to make conference motions standing agenda items for the year. It was confirmed that a recent meeting on drones had been cancelled and would need to be rearranged. Following recent serious attacks in the high security estate, a task force has been established reporting into the central office. Union representatives stressed the ongoing levels of violence and argued for stricter regimes and a more proactive approach to security, including learning from supermax models in the United States. It was noted that external review work is considering these issues and that further discussions will follow.

On incident management, there has been a recent spike in telephone-reportable incidents and gold command activations, although this is now levelling off. There has been less use of Tornado compared to last year. While the original target was 2,100 trained staff, 1,700 has become the working model. A research evaluation into use of force patterns has been completed, highlighting increased force linked to non-compliance. Data analysis has also identified certain establishments, including young offender institutions and parts of London, where force levels are proportionately higher. Concerns were raised about potential legal and reputational risks, particularly around disproportionality affecting young Black men.

There is ongoing legal challenge around PAVA use, including proportionality arguments, which will continue to be defended.

The rollout of body scanners in the women's estate was discussed. Ministerial agreement has been secured to expand scanning to non-pregnant women. Work is underway to update policy, including safeguards to ensure prisoners are not pregnant prior to scanning and to consider whether pregnancy could create displacement risks. Women's estate governors are reported to be supportive. Cohort scanning guidance will be strengthened within the Policy Framework to improve legal defensibility, with union consultation beginning shortly. Some sites will require infrastructure changes and additional funding to accommodate scanners.

Conference motions were allocated to relevant policy leads, particularly those relating to drones, dog retirement, and fitness tracker trials. These will now become fixed agenda items.

Updates from operational units included improvements in resilience through a triage system that aligns specialist response teams with establishment need, improving staff wellbeing. A separate training function is being developed to sit outside of on-call response, with a target date of September. A replacement digital case management system is being tested and will roll out later this year. A new digital forensic laboratory has opened to examine mobile phones and drones, with the aim of speeding up intelligence returns once fully staffed.

Reviews of self-cooking and kettle use in separation centres and the long-term high security estate are underway. Concerns focus on inconsistent controls, lack of central guidance, and risks posed by equipment such as kettles and flasks. While some see cooking as purposeful activity, others want it removed. The likely direction is tighter controls rather than full removal in most sites, though separation centres may not reintroduce self-cook. Work is ongoing to develop a safer kettle design with reduced capacity and tamper resistance. There is also wider work needed on what prisoners are allowed to possess and purchase.

Drones remain a major priority. Physical hardening measures are being trialled, including stainless-steel wire systems to prevent access to windows, new window designs, and netting that cannot be burned through. Evidence from Ireland suggests physical barriers can be effective. A funding bid has been submitted for research and development to address evolving drone threats, including fibre optic and cellular-controlled devices. There is support for prioritising physical security solutions over purely technological ones. A secure briefing was proposed to provide further detail.

Protective body armour is being rolled out initially at three high security sites. Staff are being measured, with the aim of issuing kit to whole units within a short timeframe. The selected armour provides ballistic, knife, and spike protection and meets required standards, though it is lighter than specialist team equipment. Some staff have expressed reluctance to wear it. Health impacts will be evaluated over the next 12 months, and there will be regular reviews of rollout progress.

The Taser 7 trial is due to go live shortly, with 20 staff trained. Final permissions and operational readiness checks are underway, including policy, governance, and medical aftercare arrangements. The expectation is that visible deployment will secure compliance rather than discharge, reflecting police experience. Evaluation will take place over the coming months. Demonstrations have been offered to union representatives. The overall aim is to reduce hand-to-hand combat and improve staff safety.

Local Response Team training is being redesigned with updated policy, command structures, and standard operating procedures, with a target introduction next spring. Initial rollout will focus on dispersal prisons, with potential expansion considered later. Around 20 trained staff per site are anticipated to ensure sufficient numbers on duty. Funding is in place, but recruitment appetite will determine viability. No additional pay allowance is currently attached.

Finally, the updated dogs policy framework, including provisions linked to maternity leave, has passed

governance and is expected to go live shortly. A summary of changes and the final document will be shared with union representatives. The meeting then closed.

POA / HMPPS Security Whitley 10th November 2025 By MS Teams

Attendees

Sarah Ashcroft - Operational Security Group.
Phil Whittaker - HOOCCM.
Derek Stanton – HMPPS ER.
Dave Todd – POA VC.
Sarah Rigby – POA NEC.
Dave Ferry- POA NEC.
Sarah Stevenson – ORRU
Geoff Willetts – POA NEC
Phil Whitaker – Drone Project
Glenn Knight – Interim HO ORRU
Kalpana Kapoor – ORRU Legal
Andy Baxter – POA FTO.

The meeting opened with acknowledgement that it had been cancelled twice since June. It was confirmed that the current chair is stepping aside temporarily to focus on the rollout of protective body armour, Tasers and the reintroduction of Local Response Teams (LRTs). An interim head of the operational response unit has been appointed, with a wider update to staff planned via an all-colleague call. Concerns were raised about stability at one establishment, with reassurance given that additional support, including staff and dog resources, can be deployed if requested.

An update was requested on release in error cases, with confirmation that senior oversight has been in place to support information gathering and ministerial briefings.

Discussion moved to Annex A matters and conference motions submitted in June. A written response was requested, given earlier meeting cancellations, and agreement was given to provide this and arrange a dedicated follow-up meeting. On the national Taser trial, it was confirmed that the first spontaneous red-dot challenge has taken place during a ballistic removal. Staff involved in the trial have been trained to the same standard as police for spontaneous use. There is a proposal to expand spontaneous authority under the same medical and training safeguards, particularly where there is personal risk or the need to avoid hand-to-hand force.

Concerns were raised about the use of CCTV for reviewing ACCT checks and other staff activity. It was clarified that a local notice had been withdrawn following legal advice. Current policy allows CCTV to be used for quality assurance, but any use must be proportionate and justified. There was strong union concern that CCTV should not become a management surveillance tool. Management emphasised that no policy change has occurred and committed to consultation if that changes.

The previously issued Annex A on permanent training positions was withdrawn due to confusion. It had originally proposed creating a dedicated training arm separate from response duties, after staff reported unsustainable workloads. Following wider government announcements covering Taser, LRT and protective body armour expansion, the approach is being reviewed. Recruitment has been paused while job descriptions and grading are reconsidered. A key issue raised was whether roles should be band 4 or band 5, reflecting the increased training and skill requirements. A reprofile exercise will now take place with union input, and a revised Annex A will follow.

In relation to LRT rollout, the programme is expanding across 13 long-term high security sites. Training

begins in December, initially for one site. Plans include training up to 500 staff in Taser use and issuing protective body armour across the estate. Sixteen additional trainers are being recruited to mentor and coach staff, though this campaign has been paused pending clarity on grading. Around 70 expressions of interest have been received. It was acknowledged that introducing LRTs and Tasers is significant and must be delivered properly, with correct resourcing and evaluation.

Questions were raised about delays in issuing body armour at one establishment. It was explained that only a small number of made-to-measure sets have arrived so far, with generic spares on site. Full rollout may wait until all bespoke sets are delivered, which could take several weeks.

A policy update confirmed that the revised External Escorts Framework will take effect in January, supported by short guidance videos. Security training at Newbold Revel has received positive feedback, and OSG training content is under review to ensure it reflects current duties. X-ray body scanning policy has been updated to include cohort scanning and is being redrafted for the female estate. Routine and responsive vetting cases have increased by 30% year on year, creating pressure, though mitigation work is ongoing. Engagement on vetting reform is planned, with a policy update expected next year.

There was discussion about body-worn video policy and earlier objections to mandating its use across all staff groups. It was acknowledged that concerns remain among some professional groups, and further clarification may be required.

A summary of spending review bids was provided. Funding has been requested for dedicated search teams, counter-drone taskforce work, general purpose dog expansion and major physical hardening measures, including windows, grills and netting. Significant investment has also been bid for counter-drone technology, with a preference for revenue funding to allow flexible leasing of evolving capabilities.

Operational updates confirmed further Taser training infrastructure investment and support offered to establishments experiencing stability pressures. Recent weeks have been busy, including multiple deployments and several gold command openings, reflecting sustained operational demand.

The meeting closed after confirming that further detailed notes and meetings would follow where required.

OPERATIONS

Operations Sub Whitley Annual Report 1/1/25 – 31/12/25

It has been a busy 12 months operationally, with a number of consultations due to the independent Sentencing Review and legislative changes as a consequence of that. There has also been work following a high-profile release in error, which forced the Government to look deeper into the release processes and brought the acknowledgement that these processes could be improved considerably with investment.

Safety statistics on violence and self-harm continue to cause concern. They remain far too high, and this must be addressed. Every time there is an assault, there is a wider impact, and it is important not to lose sight of that.

Recruitment is once again a pressing issue and, although there is a temporary reprieve for staff recruited from overseas, there needs to be a longer-term solution that sees staff being recruited and retained at the prisons that desperately need them. Compelled detached duty is not the answer.

Population pressures remain. The changes to sentencing will hopefully buy some time to allow new accommodation to be brought on line.

Next Operations Whitley meeting is scheduled for May 20th 2026.

Sarah Rigby
Assistant General Secretary

HMPPS Operations Whitley Sub-Committee (Joint Bodies)

Thursday 27 March 2025

HMPPS

Alison Clarke (AC, Chair)
Heather McDonald-Copeland (HMC)
Israr Shah (IS)
Rachel Radice (RR)
Chris Marr (CM)
Brendan Christie (BC)
Victoria Oatway (VO)
Kency Soko (KS)

Director of Prison Operations
Senior Employee Relations Lead

Director of Facilities (Prisons)
Deputy Director for Substance Misuse
Lead HR Business Partner
Deputy Director, Custodial Capacity
Employee Relations Team (Minutes)

NTUS

Nigel Wharrier
Niall McCormick
Kevin Newton
Sheila Pevely
Jagtar Singh-Dhindsa
Susan Webb
Trevor Jacquet

NTUS Joint Secretary
FDA
PCS HMPPS National Branch Chair
PCS
PCS
PCS
Prospect

POA

Dave Todd
Jackie Marshall
Terry McCarthy
Angela Montgomery

POA NEC Vice Chair (TU Joint-Vice Chair, Operations Sub-Whitley)
NEC Officer
NEC Officer
Full-Time Officer

Apologies

Niall McCormick
Jenny Rees
Zoe Markham
Dan Bateman
Lynne Last
Nick Poyntz
Geoff Willetts
Richard Vince
Ginnette Gantschuk
Simon Marshall
Michael Wheatley
Mike Macdonald
Francis Stuart

Prison Group Drug Strategy & D&I Lead
Head of Prison Safety Team
OMiC Lead, Safety Group Head of Family Services
Deputy Director HR Operations
FDA
Deputy Director, Courts and Custody Group
NEC Officer
Executive Director, Directorate of Security
NTUS Chair (TU Joint-Vice Chair, Operations Sub-Whitley)
Divisional Director Health and Wellbeing
Head of Substance Misuse Group Operations
Prospect
Head of HMPPS Employee Relations

1. Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies were received as above.

2. Opening Remarks – AC and TUs (Joint Bodies) Vice Chairs

2.1 AC reported that a Headquarters Senior Leaders' event had taken place the previous day, during which Amy Rees outlined her priorities as Interim Permanent Secretary. These include a review of sentencing and the spending review. It was also noted that Capacity Gold and CJSSC had been activated.

TUs (Joint Bodies) Vice Chairs

2.2 The TUs (Joint Bodies) Vice Chairs, represented by NTUS, highlighted that capacity concerns are shared by trade union members and are not limited to Offender Management Units (OMUs), as capacity issues affect all staff and have a widespread impact. NTUS offered congratulations to Phil and Amy on their interim leadership appointments and extended thanks and well-wishes to Kevin Newton upon his retirement, recognising his years of dedicated service.

2.3 The POA also congratulated Michelle Jarman-Howe on her recent promotion. They raised questions regarding the recent announcement of 10,000 proposed civil service job cuts, seeking further information. Additionally, POA representatives reiterated that persistent issues such as violence, self-harm, and overall stability remain ongoing concerns within the service. They also offered their thanks and best wishes to Kevin Newton on his retirement.

2.4 The Chair confirmed that, at present, no official communications had been issued concerning the 10,000 civil service job cuts. However, assurances were given that once further information is received, it will be shared with the trade unions.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

3.1 It was agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting would be circulated again to the Trade Unions.

4. Update on Actions Log

4.1 HMC reviewed the current action log with attendees. The trade union representatives agreed that the second action could now be marked as completed with the third action carried forward, and for Dan

Bateman to provide a future update.

Standing Agenda Items

5. Operational Update – Alison Clarke (AC)

5.1 AC reported that current efforts are focused on capacity mitigation measures. One key initiative is the extension of TPRS from 12 to 24 months, with the aim of maximising occupancy in the open estate. Current occupancy stands at 94.5%, with a target of 97%. However, this is expected to be negatively impacted by the forthcoming extension to Home Detention Curfew (HDC) to 12 months, which takes effect on 3 June 2025. Following this change, it is anticipated that occupancy in the open estate will temporarily fall to around 90%, as approximately 600 prisoners are expected to be released on HDC.

5.2 Despite the initial reduction, the extension is forecasted to provide wider benefits, with a total of around 1,300 individuals potentially being released, including from the closed estate, thus alleviating overall capacity pressures.

5.3 It was confirmed that the Treasury has approved a further six-month extension to the OSP scheme.

5.4 AC provided an update on the Rademaker Review. Meetings are currently being scheduled, and publication is expected in the near future.

6. Population Capacity Management and Reconfiguration – Brendan Christie (BC)

6.1 BC advised that the current population trend remains concerning, with numbers continuing to rise. Initial expectations for a levelling out in March 2025 did not materialise, though it is still hoped this may occur in April 2025. The activation of emergency governance structures, namely HMPPS Gold and CJSSC, has made a significant impact. In particular, actions coordinated through the gold command have helped maximise the benefits of the TPRS policy changes, supporting increased transfers into the open estate.

6.2 Efforts such as increased weekend transfers and utilisation of vacancies at LTHSE prisons have played a role in managing Monday disruptions, which are typically the busiest.

6.3 Construction of new capacity at HMP Rye Hill is progressing well. The site is expected to accommodate 40 additional prisoners per week. However, the current population growth rate exceeds this intake, and while these measures will assist with stabilisation, they are not sufficient to counteract the overall growth trajectory.

6.4 HMPPS reaffirmed that their operational red lines remain unchanged. Fire safety projects will continue, and crowding will not be increased beyond safe limits. Furthermore, sites that cannot be adequately staffed will not be operated, in line with the stance maintained under the previous government.

7. Drugs Reduction Strategy update – Simon Marshall (SM)

7.1 A written update on the Drugs Reduction Strategy has been requested and will be circulated once received.

Interim Items

8. Facilities Management and Compliance Update – Israr Shah (IS)

8.1 IS delivered a presentation, speaking to the accompanying slides. He advised that there are currently 30 vacancies within Property Services. However, this figure does not equate to 30 unoccupied posts, as agency staff are being utilised on a short-term basis while permanent recruitment is ongoing.

8.2 With regard to cells out of use, the primary causes were identified as broken windows or toilets, general

cell damage, vandalism, and fire damage. Of the 10,671 cells reported as out of use, approximately 65% were returned to operational use within seven days. On compliance, IS confirmed that audits and statutory maintenance for all private prisons have now been completed. Work has commenced on public sector prisons, with the audit programme having started on 3rd February and expected to be completed by November 2025.

9. Safer Recruitment – Victoria Oatway (VO)

9.1 VO delivered a presentation, speaking to the slides below which were circulated in advance of the meeting.



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9.2 VO outlined that the safer recruitment project is being implemented to ensure robust safeguarding practices across the service. The aim is to guarantee that staff, contractors, and volunteers are suitably vetted to work with children.

9.3 VO confirmed that the revised safer recruitment policy has been fully developed, with the final version now signed off.

9.4 In relation to HR processes, VO advised that the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) renewal period has been reduced from five years to three years. Consequently, all individuals within the relevant scope will now be required to renew their DBS checks within a three-year timeframe.

9.5 A training package has been approved by the National Training Centre (NTC). This training will be mandatory and delivered via Shared Services. The first working group has been established in collaboration with NSPCC, Barnardo's, the Welsh Government, and the organisation's Head of Safeguarding.

9.6 A governance and assurance framework has been developed to support the transition to business-as-usual. This framework provides a clear process for governors to follow, ensuring compliance with all changes introduced under the updated safer recruitment policy.

10. National Safety Team Update – Jenny Rees (JR)

10.1 Jenny Rees advised that the next set of national safety statistics will be released on the last Thursday of April 2025. These will include data on deaths in custody up to March 2025, and statistics on self-harm and assault up to December 2025.

10.2 The current Safety Programme will conclude at the end of March 2025, with the majority of its work finalised. A new plan is now in development to succeed the existing programme.

10.3 The roll-out of electric shavers will continue until the end of the month. Funding for the next phase is yet to be confirmed. If additional funding is secured, the roll-out will be extended to more establishments. The team has been working with participating prisons to evaluate lessons learned, particularly in relation to self-harm reduction. Site visits have been conducted to support implementation and to ensure the effective use of the shavers.

10.4 The Safety Support Approach (formerly known as the "Tear Support Approach") has been developed to assist frontline staff. This model includes three tiers of support. The first being the foundation level which is general support available to all prisons, delivered either virtually or via training sessions. The second tier is targeted support, focusing on assistance for selected establishments identified by AEDs, including sites with recent deaths in custody or under urgent notification. Sustained Support is the third tier and centres

around long-term engagement for a small number of prisons requiring ongoing intervention.

10.5 The team has completed its 'Focus on Assaults' initiative, covering 22 sites. The work centred on analysing site-specific factors contributing to both self-harm and violence, drawing insights to inform future safety strategies.

Meeting Ended.

Minutes of HMPPS Operations Whitley Sub Committee (Joint Bodies POA and NTUS)

11th November 2025

1. Introductions and opening remarks – Chair and Joint-Vice Chairs

1.1 Ed Cornmell in his first meeting as Chair thanked the trade unions for all the work we do together. NTUS said that the new checklist being used in OMU's were not going to stop releases in error and that it was being implemented to provide a defence for the business. They thought that there was nothing in the checklist that wasn't already being done. On the maintenance of prisons, NTUS said there had been no change, and they were not fit for purpose. Dave Todd as Joint-Vice Chair for the POA said that he did not see how the WDM's were going to deliver. He said that staff were being put under significant pressure to do their jobs and that senior leaders needed to challenge Ministers around this. He also commented that he was unhappy about the FM contract and that deliverables in the manifesto have been ignored.

1.2 PCS said that the Government had gone against pledges in terms of the FM contract. They also commented that prisoners are living in appalling conditions, but our members are working in those same conditions. This was unacceptable and things had gone too far. PCS added the business needs to consider insourcing.

Action – Ed Cornmell said he would look into insourcing.

2. Operational update – Ed Cornmell

- There was still a requirement for GOLD openings for lots of different incidents.
- Assaults against staff are reducing which is good to see.
- There is increasing access to body armour across the estate
- There is lots of policy development and procurement around tasers going on.
- POA commented that in Bullingdon a taser had been used for the 1st time.
- EC commented that we were still assessing use and developing practice.
- Brendan Christie said that there had been 19 lockouts last night he also said that the Midlands was emerging as a pinch point. However, we are not in a crisis position.

3. Drugs and Alcohol update – Simon Marshall

- Discussed events that had taking place in the Northeast

Action - SM said he would ensure that Trade Union colleagues were invited to the next events.

4. National Safety update – Jenny Rees

- Shared a link in the chat for statistics
- There are multiple workstreams to drive safety in place
- There are safety floor walkers in place
- There was a safety learning week in October
- Razors - distributing to rest of estate

- We are inputting into Enable induction
- We are developing guidance on constant supervision

5. Property Services update – Israr Shar

- 24 vacancies at various grades
- Property transformation programme in place
- Cells out of use 307 at the 7th November - predominately for acts of vandalism
- Open task orders have been dropping
- Programme of high voltage audits being carried out

Unions asked what the issues with filling vacancies were? Israr said there were problems recruiting, but we will bring in temporary and agency staff to cover.

Action – IS to produce maintenance breakdown to prison level.

6. Safer Recruitment update – a written update had been submitted

7. No TU items submitted

8. Reward and Recognition data update – Sarah Danzie

- System has changed
- We can provide data 2/3 times per year
- We could look at regional data

Action (i) – DT requested what rewards had been given to staff and to what grades.

PCS also requested data at a local level so that it provided assurance that rewards were paid in an equitable way – NTUS explained that they need this data for pay talks. HR said we are unlikely to get data at a local level as suppression rules came into play at a granular level.

Action (ii) – Ruth Mulder to get official lines on above request.

Action (iii) – Ruth Mulder, Ed Cornmell and Sarah Coccia to see if they can get a national and regional data picture for Unions on payments and grades.

9. Any other Business

The Terms of Reference for this meeting were discussed.

Action: Heather McDonald Copeland agreed to review the Terms of Reference for this meeting and send to Unions for review and comment.

Meeting ended.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Health and Safety Sub Whitley Annual Report 1/1/25 – 31/12/25

Minutes of the Whitley Occupational Health, Safety and Fire Sub Committee held on Tuesday 04th February 2025 Via Microsoft Teams

Attendees Official Side:

Kathryn Ball (KB)	Head of Occupational Health, Safety & Fire (Chair)
Janine Fuller (JF)	HMPPS Secretariat
Ben Whitehouse (BW)	HMPPS Secretariat
Ian Oakes (IO)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (North)
Heather McDonald-Copeland (HMcDC)	HMPPS Employee Relations
Hayley Gethen (HG)	National Lead – Health & Safety, HMPPS
Jo Gordon (JG)	OH & EAP Representative
Andy Hewitt (AH)	HMPPS Employee Relations
Jason Sunley (JSu)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (South)
Jason Morley (JMo)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (Strategic Centre)
Andy Davies (AD)	HMPPS Fire Safety Lead
Pete Collingwood (PC)	HSE Prison Lead
Glenn Knight	ORRU, HMPPS
Helen Gray	HMPPS, Estates

Attendees Trade Union Side:

Nigel Wharrier (NW)	NTUS Joint Secretary
Kev Newton (KN)	PCS
Jackie Marshall (JM)	POA NEC
Geoff Willetts (GW)	POA NEC
Phil Hannant (PH)	POA NEC
Mick Pimblett (MPi)	POA
Kevin Brandstatter (KBr)	GMB
Susan Webb (SW)	PCS HMPPS National Joint Vice-Chair
John White (JW)	PCS

Apologies:

Ginnette Gantschuk (GG)	NTUS Chair
Julie Kenney (JK)	Senior Health & Safety Advisor, HMPPS
Niall McCormick (NMCC)	HMPPS
Sheila Pevely (SP)	PCS Midlands

1. Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Kathryn Ball opened the meeting and thanked the membership for their attendance. Apologies were noted as above. Some variations to the agenda were agreed to allow members to attend other meetings. However, for the purpose of these minutes, they will follow the published agenda.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Action Log

The minutes of the previous meeting were already agreed ahead of the meeting therefore a factual

accuracy check was not needed. All had agreed they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting held in October 2024.

A review of the actions was taken, and the following actions were agreed to remain open: 167, 192, 193, 195, 198, and 199.

GW and NW raised concerns about the risk management of prisoners in workshop areas. They suggested that there appears to be a reliance on how many people can fit in a workshop room for purposeful activity, rather than how can staff adequately manage the risk of the people who are turning up for workshop time.

KB said there should be a Safe system of work for the workshops in prisons that will be based on the outcome of the risk assessment. The risk assessments should consider several different elements, including how the risk the individual prisoner poses, the risk of the activity itself, the nature of the workshop etc. these things will contribute to how we identify how many prisoners are going to be in that workshop.

Lack of noise assessments being completed at HMP Bure was also raised by NTUS. JSu confirmed that he would investigate this.

ACTION 204: It was agreed to address the concerns raised about the number of prisoners in workshops and the apparent lack of suitable and sufficient risk assessments in relation to workshops. JMor to look at existing best practice. Action assigned to JMor, NW and HG.

ACTION 205: JSu to investigate blocks at Bure around arranging a date for noise assessment to take place.

Concerns were raised by JM and MPi regarding availability of dummies for SPEAR training. GK confirmed that he sent out a request for this information, but had limited returns so could not provide an accurate picture on this. As a result of the low number of returns he had ensured that all establishments were provided with another copy of the guidance related to the procurement of the relevant PPE and training equipment, so local establishments could address any potential short falls.

MPi said that if there weren't enough dummies available then the POA view was that, that part of the training shouldn't be going ahead. MPi asked for a copy of the guidance that had been sent to establishments.

ACTION 206: Glenn Knight to provide the SPEAR training guidance for committee members.

Frustration was raised regarding Jenny Rees' absence from this meeting and members being invited to her safety meeting, along with other NEC members leading to a situation where 8 NEC members are at one meeting. MPi wanted it noted that he feels Jenny Rees should be attending this meeting.

KB said that extending the invite to POA NEC HS reps, gave them two opportunities to address their concerns, once directly with Jenny Rees at her safety update and also, here in the HSF Whitley Meeting.

It was noted that Nathan De Thabrew had been replaced by Justin Bayliss. It was agreed that Justin Bayliss would be invited to attend the meeting, on an as and when required only basis.

3. POA and NTUS Items

NTUS items

No agenda items received.

POA Items

The health and safety effects of night work (Paper 1) - MPi raised the risk associated with night work, including the links to illnesses and fatigue etc. MPi noted that there are currently a large number of staff who are on permanent nights, particularly in the OSG Group,. MPi said that it appears the only mitigation for the risk is that people are supposed to be sent on an occupational health assessment once every 12 months. POA don't believe that the occupational health assessment once every 12 months is adequate, and don't believe that the occupational health assessments are taking place every 12 months.

POA would like the risk assessments around night working and questions on the occupational health assessments to be revisited.

JG was able to address that the OH assessments aren't mandatory for staff working nights. If staff do take up the assessment, they are sent a questionnaire and if any issues are flagged from that they are contacted by an OHA nurse who will take that issue forward.

KB queried if this was something that OH and POA could collaborate on promoting? KB suggested an article in the POA magazine that JG could contribute to. JM said that night working would be an article in the POA magazine. JG agreed to pass along some information to JM for use in the article.

Action 207: JG to share information with JM for the POA article on night working

4. Radon Update

Helen Gray informed the meeting that HMPPS continues to meet with the HSE, and there are fortnightly meetings for North and South which are in place to monitor the management of Radon. There are ongoing issues with Radon at HMP Dartmoor, but the situation is being closely monitored. The radon policy is with our legal firm for comment and once we've had that feedback then we're hoping to get the policy through final OPS and get that policy released. No questions or actions arose.

ACTION 208: JF to remove Julie Kenney's name from the radon update. Replace it with Helen Gray and invite Helen Gray to the meetings in future.

5. HSE Priorities & Update – Peter Collingwood

PC noted that this meeting will probably be his last one due to HSE restructuring and it's not currently clear where this work will sit or who will take it on.

For the HSE work year 25/26 PC noted that there will be some asbestos "duty to manage" inspections being undertaken and prisons will likely be included.

PC then talked about the Crown Improvement Notice served last year on NTRG.

HSE have responded to Sarah Ashcroft, confirming that they have discharged the Notice as there are improved systems in place in relation to the interventions. PC confirmed that HSE had made the point to NTRG that this isn't something that stands still and as any new equipment or technology

becomes available NTRG should be considering whether it would make interventions safer for staff.

GW asked if NTRG have met all the requirements for the improvement notice?

PC said that NTRG had improved the systems in place which included everything in terms of planning, organisation measures, control measures and larger issues like the governance surrounding decision-making structures, logging decisions, and the whole framework around interventions. PC acknowledged it's now a case of continuing to move forward.

GW then asked about NTRG related PPE as he said there were still concerns regarding helmets and then further potential issues with overalls, helmets, visors, and shields. GW asked where do the HSE fit within that remit?

PC said that the HSE team spoke with local union reps, there was a visit to Kidlington to see the PPE and spoke with frontline operational staff. Some of the staff at Kidlington were willing to sign a letter saying they 100% back the current PPE to share their confidence in the equipment.

GW said it was his understanding that staff were "marched" into a room and told if they don't sign, they'll be moved back to establishments.

PC said he was unaware of the situation as GW described it. When HSE staff spoke with staff during their Kidlington visit the staff didn't appear to be working under duress. PC noted that Whatever helmet is used, there will be pros and cons for each. PC said that, what was important is that training systems are in place and the safe systems of work, protect the staff as far as is reasonably practicable.

GW queried what would happen during and after the HSE restructure. PC said HSE don't always go back after a period to review every notice. PC said that HSE had stressed in the letter that went back to Sarah Ashcroft that there should be a continual feedback loop with the staff on the ground in relation to the safe systems of work.

Any concerns that come from operational staff following an operation incident, should be fed back so they can be dealt with and the safe system of work reviewed, where necessary. PC noted that there's always that route back into HSE for operational staff to raise new concerns or follow up on existing reports.

GW asked for a copy of the letter to Sarah Ashcroft. PC said that he would speak with Paul Lane about getting GW a copy and would circulate the meeting secretariat.

ACTION 209: Pete Collingwood to pass a copy of the letter to Sarah Ashcroft to Secretariate for circulation.

KB noted PC's contributions over the years. KB said that through PC HMPPS had built a helpful and constructive relationship with the HSE. She thanked PC for his support and helpful suggestions over the years, she wished him good luck with his new role.

PC said he had been amazed and impressed by the dedication and commitment of everyone working in HMPPS. PC said that whenever he's gone on a site visit to a prison it was noticeable to him, someone from outside the organisation, just how committed everyone working in HMPPS is.

PC noted that prison and probation staff are working in difficult circumstances both in terms of resources and the environment itself, but they remained dedicated to their work.

6. Updates from OHSF Teams

OH/EAP Update – Jo Gordon's slides were circulated to the membership ahead of the meeting. The Flu campaign is currently running in 107 prisons. Should staff not be able to attend the onsite clinics, we are also promoting the digital flu vaccine vouchers and there's a QR code that people can use and get a voucher and then go online to book a vaccination with their local pharmacy.

DSE and workstation assessment – there have been several inappropriate DSE referrals with people saying they've lost their chair or part of it isn't working. If you make an OH referral, you've got to have done the Cardinus assessment first. JG concluded her presentation by talking about reflective sessions and provided dates and information about taster sessions for managers. No questions were raised about this section.

Fire Safety Update –AD's report was circulated ahead of the meeting. AD asked for any questions on the report or for any other fire issues that TUS would like to raise.

Jackie Marshall raised that there was a fire at Lincoln Prison caused by misuse of domestic washing machines. JM wondered where the Fire Team were with that and was concerned that the Fire Team didn't seem aware of this until JM spoke with AD.

AD said that this fire wasn't initially reported as a large fire so didn't trigger a notification. The incident involved the residential unit being evacuated while the fire was dealt with. The cause of the fire was an electrical fault within the machine that happened a few days prior to the fire. A member of staff had noted that there was a fault and could hear a knocking noise within the dryer and it wasn't reported via FM. It could be this failure to report that could be behind the incident itself. AD agreed that domestic drying appliances were unlikely to be appropriate for a residential wing, given the amount of usage that they get. The fire team have some comms drafted around domestic appliances and residential areas which will be shared across the prison and probation estate.

GW raised that at HMP Woodhill there was an issue when a fridge caught fire. When the local health and safety lead investigated it, apparently it was a domestic appliance. GW commented that domestic appliances in the workplace should be replaced with industrial appliances.

GW queried what the corporate stance when it comes to using domestic appliances on the wing? GW is concerned it's going to take another fire before appropriate appliances are used.

AD agreed that GW's concerns were valid. AD will write out to everybody via the notification system and then share a copy of the policy position at the next meeting. Staff will be instructed to limit use until relevant equipment can be replaced.

KB wanted to note her congratulations to the National Fire Team and the whole of the prison service due achieving the BS 9997 accreditation for Fire Safety Management Systems, it's an amazing achievement. We're the first government department to have achieved it and we work in challenging circumstances, from a built environment point of view and in terms of the people in our care. Achieving this is not only testament to the hard work and resilience of the fire safety team but also to the staff implementing all the safe systems of work and relevant mitigations locally.

Without a whole system approach and the commitment of all staff we would not have been able to achieve this accreditation. Well done to everyone.

ACTION 210: AD will write out to staff via the HSIN about the position on domestic appliances being used on the wing and then share a copy at the next meeting.

- HS Data – Hayley Gethen's report had been circulated to the membership ahead of the meeting. HG raised that we're working jointly with Amey to produce some gate and vehicle safe handling videos. We're hoping to record these in March, and they should hopefully reduce any accidents, instance and injuries that we have with Gates and make gate and vehicle handling a little bit safer for staff.

No questions or actions were raised at this point.

Papers Submitted in Correspondence:

Safety Update – Jenny Rees (Paper 5)

JM raised on point 3 about the frontline staff, she didn't agree support should be linked to self-inflicted deaths but instead she felt it should be all deaths in custody. JM said that those on the front line build relationships with prisoners and regardless of whether those prisoners die because of self-inflicted injuries or natural causes, it can still be very upsetting. JM asked what is it that HMPPS is doing to support staff when prisoners die of natural causes? JM also questioned what HMPPS is doing about the number of deaths in custody? This time last year there were 24 deaths in custody, 6 confirmed self-inflicted and one for an unknown reason. So far this year, up to now, we've got 53 deaths in custody, 8 confirmed self-inflicted and still 17 with an unknown reason.

KB said that the unknown reasons will be due to coroners' investigations and won't be able to be reported until we receive the outcomes.

JM was clear that there's already been double the cases this year and frontline staff are having to deal with this.

JM raised the issue of managing the risks of violence because staff are still getting assaulted.

Month after month we're managing the risks but staff have still been assaulted.

KB indicated that there's a change with how the safety team is going to be working and there is a move to operationalize the safety response. KB was unsure if the union briefings on this have happened yet. AH said that Jenny Rees had met with POA but unsure if it was a joint meeting with NTUS. Changes in the safety team were discussed and the new direction of travel for the team.

JM asked for a more detailed report into the roll out of the new safer razor project.

ACTION 211: KB to invite Jenny Rees to next meeting to talk through changes in the safety team and to provide an update on the safer razor project.

Estates/FM Update (including RAAC update) – John Burgess (Paper 6)

There were no questions or actions raised from this paper.

Date and time of next meeting

Your paper and agenda items need to be submitted to the Sub Committee Secretariat by midday on the deadline advised by the Secretariat, Monday 14th April 2025 to allow Sub Committee members to fully consider the papers in advance of the meeting.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting ended.

Minutes of the Whitley Occupational Health, Safety and Fire Sub Committee held on Friday 25th April 2025 Via Microsoft Teams

Attendees Official Side:

Kathryn Ball (KB)	Head of Occupational Health, Safety & Fire (Chair)
Janine Fuller (JF)	HMPPS Secretariat
Heather McDonald-Copeland (HMcDC)	HMPPS Employee Relations
Hayley Gethen (HG)	National Lead – Health & Safety, HMPPS
Jo Gordon (JG)	OH & EAP Representative
Andy Davies (AD)	HMPPS Fire Safety Lead
Helen Gray (HGr)	HMPPS, Estates
Dave Quinnell (DQ)	HMPPS, Safety Team

Attendees Trade Union Side:

Nigel Wharrier (NW)	NTUS Joint Secretary
Jackie Marshall (JM)	POA NEC
Geoff Willetts (GW)	POA NEC
Phil Hannant (PH)	POA NEC
Mick Pimblett (MPi)	POA
Susan Webb (SW)	PCS HMPPS National Joint Vice-Chair
Annyah Spencer (AS)	

Apologies:

Jason Morley (JMo)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (Strategic Centre)
Ian Oakes (IO)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (North)
Jason Sunley (JSu)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (South)
Ginnette Gantschuk (GG)	NTUS Chair
Sheila Pevely (SP)	PCS Midlands
Graham Tompkins (GT)	HSE – HM Principal Inspector of Health & Safety

2. Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Kathryn Ball began the meeting by acknowledging the recent assault at HMP Frankland, which took place on 12 April 2025. She described the incident as particularly violent and noted the severity of the injuries sustained by staff. She reiterated the organisation's commitment to officer safety and outlined the immediate actions taken, including the commissioning of an independent review by the Lord Chancellor, an internal HMPPS review of the incident, and a focused review of protective body armour provisions.

Jackie Marshall responded by expressing the union's dismay that it took such a serious incident for the issue of protective body armour to be revisited. She noted that the union had been raising the issue for years and lamented that preventive measures were not acted upon sooner. She also raised concerns about the new uniform specifically, the polo shirts being trialled. She warned that these garments might exacerbate injuries in incidents involving hot liquids or oils, particularly because of their synthetic materials.

Kathryn agreed to take forward the action to raise these uniform concerns with the Uniform Board and confirmed that there would be regular meetings with the POA during the PBA review. Jackie named Alison Clark and Amanda Henderson as points of contact on the Uniform Committee.

Phil Hannant emphasised that proactive safety assessments are critical. He cited recent visits to HMP Frankland and other prisons, noting significant delays in implementing safety changes. He

expressed frustration with the reactive approach taken by management and insisted that health and safety representatives be empowered and supported to conduct proper reviews, including examining the use of materials such as ceramics and kitchen equipment.

Nigel Wharrier, on behalf of the unions, expressed solidarity with affected staff and reaffirmed their commitment to working together for better safety outcomes.

Geoff Willetts noted that preliminary work on protective body armour had already taken place and called for the organisation to act quickly to build on it rather than delay implementation further.

Apologies for absence were noted as above.

Action 212: Kathryn Ball, as Chair of this Committee will write to Alison Clarke and Amanda Henderson of the Uniform Board to raise TU's concerns with the current suggested polo shirt material construction.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Action Log

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed ahead of this meeting therefore a factual accuracy check was not needed.

The group reviewed the action tracker, focusing on closure recommendations and status updates and the following was noted:

- Action 167 (Stress Policy): Closed. Although union concerns will still be considered, future updates will be processed as part of standard policy governance.
- Actions 192 & 205 (Noise Assessment): Closed. All local actions completed with union reps confirming resolution.
- Action 193 (HMP Onley Concerns): Closed. Concerns were deemed to fall within local management remit and it was agreed that a side conversation between Geoff Willetts and Jackie Marshall would take place to confirm there were no remaining worries.
- Actions 195: Closed. This action has been redirected.
- Action 199 & 206 (SPEAR Training & PPE Equipment): Remain open. Union concerns persist about the location and availability of training suits and dummies. Jackie reiterated that the suits were originally area resources and demanded clarity on their whereabouts. Phil added that instructors are unclear about minimum training requirements without proper PPE. A meeting is to be scheduled with operational leads to address both equipment logistics and training content.
- Action 209: Remains open. Janine to further clarify with Pete Collingwood when he informed Geoff Willetts that the Sarah Ashcroft letter had been shared with local and national unions.
- Action 210: Action to remain open until quarterly newsletter is shared with POA colleagues.
- Action 211: It was agreed to close this action on the basis that Kathryn would raise POA's concerns regarding the information provided and importance of attendance from the Safety Team. KB agreed to share how important attendance by the Safety Team at this meeting is to TU colleagues, with Cohen Lewis, DD for the National Service.

Action 213: Kathryn Ball to raise TU concerns with Cohen Lewis regarding the information provided by the Safety Team and the importance of attendance at this meeting from the Safety Team is to TU colleagues.

Jackie Marshall reminded Kathryn of her concerns regarding dirty protest cleaning chemicals which she spoke to her about following the previous meeting. It was noted that Kathryn had agreed to put this on the action tracker, but it was not on there. Jackie reiterated that she had concerns over updated cleaning guidance that appeared to contradict previous health and safety advice specifically, regarding the use of a chemical for cleaning urine that was previously flagged as dangerous. Kathryn requested Jackie provide the name of the chemical so that a formal review could be conducted. Hayley Gethen confirmed that updated guidance had recently been reviewed and was awaiting sign-off.

Action 214: Jackie Marshall to provide Hayley Gethen with the name of the chemical for cleaning urine, so that HG could consider whether there was an issue with the updated cleaning guidance.

3. Safety Update – Safer Razor Project - Dave Quinnell

Dave reported that 30 of the 31 pilot prisons have completed implementation of electric razors, and the final site is concluding its amnesty period. He shared that just under 100,000 razors have been distributed and early feedback suggests a reduction in razor-related incidents. Violence and self-harm data are being monitored, with a formal analysis to be conducted after three months. Dave confirmed that guidance documents are being updated, and plans are in place to expand the initiative to the wider male estate in 2025–26. Phil raised concerns regarding supply shortages at HMP Bullingdon due to high remand population. Dave will investigate and consider contingency options.

Action 215: Dave Quinnell to investigate supply shortages at HMP Bullingdon due to high remand population and consider contingency options.

4. Joint Health & Safety Visits – Kathryn Ball

The committee reaffirmed the importance of the joint H&S visits initiative, originally established in 2015. Kathryn invited the POA to nominate sites for 2025–26. Jackie supported the continuation but requested a review of the effectiveness of last year's action plans before proceeding. Hayley confirmed that follow-up actions were documented and agreed to compile a report on any outstanding actions. It was agreed that 10 sites would be nominated, with two additional reserves in case of cancellations. The checklist used during visits will also be reviewed in light of recent incidents at Frankland and Whitemoor.

Action 216: POA to nominate 10 sites to be visited with an additional 2 as reserves.

Action 217: Hayley Gethen to compile a report of any outstanding actions from last year's joint visits.

Action 218: Hayley Gethen to meet with Jackie Marshall to review the checklist used previously to ensure its effectiveness in light of recent incidents.

5. POA and NTUS Items

NTUS items

No agenda items received.

POA Items

No agenda items received.

6. Radon Update – Helen Gray

Helen Gray provided an update on radon safety. Dartmoor remains a priority site. Due to the collapse of ISG, a new contractor is being procured to reassess required mitigation. The process has been time-consuming, but Helen confirmed that once appointed, the contractor will provide updated recommendations which will inform future decisions at senior levels.

7. HSE Priorities & Update

Janine Fuller informed the committee that Pete Collingwood's position remains unfilled. In the interim, strategic queries should be directed to Graham Tompkins (graham.tompkins@hse.gov.uk). Graham Tompkins had confirmed that despite Pete's role remaining vacant, operational processes remain unaffected.

8. Updates from OHSF Teams

OH/EAP Update – Jo Gordon. Jo noted that of the 8,000 flu vaccine vouchers activated, only around 4,000 were redeemed. Next year's campaign will aim to increase clinic availability. Jo also reported that the Workplace Adjustments Service (MoJWAS) has moved under HR Services and is now managed by Priscilla Wong. The change is expected to streamline operations while maintaining service standards.

Fire Safety Update – Andy Davies. Andy presented on ongoing fire safety initiatives. He reported a 7% increase in fires compared to the previous year. A new competency training programme for fire risk assessors has been developed in response to changes in legislation post-Grenfell. Training will be rolled out to 70 staff this year. Regarding vape-related fires, Andy confirmed positive results from pilot schemes at The Mount and Swaleside. Geoff raised a concern about a recent fatality at HMP Lowden Grange potentially linked to vape misuse. Andy committed to find out more details about this incident.

Action 219: Andy Davies to find out more details about a recent fatality at HMP Lowden Grange potentially linked to vape misuse.

HS Data – Hayley Gethen. Hayley Gethen presented her report which was shared for review before the meeting. Hayley highlighted a noticeable spike in use-of-force incidents at HMP Lowden Grange. This is being investigated jointly with the site's H&S advisor to determine whether the trend reflects teething issues post-transition or systemic concerns.

Separately, a concerning rise in gate-handling injuries across the estate has prompted a video training project in partnership with AMEY. Filming is due to begin at HMP Bristol, and the material will be integrated into early career officer training.

Papers Submitted in Correspondence:

Safety Update – Jenny Rees (Paper 4)

Other than concerns referred to earlier whilst discussing the action tracker and safety update, no further questions were raised.

Estates/FM Update (including RAAC update) – **John Burgess (Paper 5)**

No questions were raised.

Date and time of next meeting

The date and time of the next meeting is 29th July 2025 at 12:30pm. The meeting membership were reminded that all papers, action updates and agenda items need to be submitted to the Sub Committee Secretariat by midday on the deadline advised by the Secretariat, Friday 18th July 2025 to allow Sub Committee members to fully consider the papers in advance of the meeting.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting ended.

Minutes of the Whitley Occupational Health, Safety and Fire Sub Committee held on Tuesday 29th July 2025 Via Microsoft Teams

Attendees Official Side:

Kathryn Ball (KB)	Head of Occupational Health, Safety & Fire (Chair)
Janine Fuller (JF)	HMPPS Secretariat
Derek Stanton (DS)	HMPPS Employee Relations
Jenny Rees (JR)	Head of Safety Group – HMPPS
Karen Johnson (KJ)	HMPPS Head of National Safety Support Team
Ian Oakes (IO)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (North)
Jason Sunley (JS)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (South)
Andy Davies (AD)	National Lead - HMPPS Fire Safety
Paul Simons (PS)	Senior Fire Advisor – HMPPS Fire Safety
Julie Kenney (JK)	Senior H&S Advisor – HMPPS Strategic Centre
Cheryl Langin (CL)	Estates Group
Ruth Clarke (RC)	Business Delivery Manager OISG – Uniform Policy
Kevin Bassett (KBa)	OISG – Uniform Policy

Attendees Trade Union Side:

Nigel Wharrier (NW)	NTUS Joint Secretary
Ginnette Gantschuk (GG)	NTUS Chair
Jackie Marshall (JM)	POA NEC
Geoff Willetts (GW)	POA NEC
Phil Hannant (PH)	POA NEC
Susan Webb (SW)	PCS HMPPS National Joint Vice-Chair
Annyah Spencer (AS)	PCS National H&S Lead
John White (JW)	PCS
Victoria Smith (VS)	Prospect

Apologies:

Hayley Gethen (HG)	National Lead – Health & Safety, HMPPS
Jo Gordon (JG)	OH & EAP Representative
Jason Morley (JMo)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (Strategic Centre)
Colin Ware (CW)	Head of Strategic Asset Management, Standards & Assurance – Estates Group
Graham Tompkins (GT)	HSE – HM Principal Inspector of Health & Safety

Mick Pimblett (MP)
Terry McCarthy (TM)

POA
POA

4. Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Kathryn Ball opened the meeting and thanked the membership for their attendance. Apologies were noted as above. Some variations to the agenda were agreed to allow members to attend other meetings. However, for the purpose of these minutes, they will follow the published agenda.

5. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Action Log

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as accurate ahead of this meeting therefore a factual accuracy check was not needed.

The group reviewed the action tracker, focusing on closure recommendations and status updates and the following was noted:

- It was agreed that actions 199, 209, 210, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216 and 219 were complete and could be closed.
- Action 206 remains open. It was agreed that JF will continue to follow this up with Laura Mitcheson.
- Action 217 remains open. We are waiting on confirmation from HMP Styal that their two outstanding actions from the joint H&S visits held in 2024 are now complete.
- Action 218 remain open. The agreed checklist has not yet been confirmed.

3. Safety Update – Jenny Rees & Karen Johnson

Jenny Rees introduced Karen Johnson and outlined the dual focus on safety and health & safety at this meeting. It was noted that staff safety and violence across the estate were multi-faceted and that there were various leads who had responsibility for the implementation of safety strategies. KB said that, depending on what the data was showing us, and where the most significant risks to staff safety were, would dictate whether other leads were also invited to this meeting to update the TUS on what they were doing to improve staff safety. JR gave her commitment to regular attendance and updates at future meetings. Other forums where safety issues are discussed was also acknowledged. JR & KJ provided an update to the meeting with the key points noted as follows:

Safety in Custody Statistics - Latest statistics (assaults, self-harm, deaths in custody) to be published Thursday 31st July covering up to March 2025.

Action 220: Jenny Rees to send the published statistics link to Janine Fuller.

Electric Razor Rollout - Completion of rollout to all adult male closed public sector prisons this financial year. 31 prisons received electric razors last year; remaining prisons will receive them this year.

Focus on Assaults Project – KJ shared findings from a project targeting 22 adult male prisons with high assault rates. Six Common Drivers of Violence Identified as:

1. Capacity & Overcrowding – high prison population can impact living conditions, regime and staff relationships.

2. Staffing Levels & Experience – increased staff experience linked to a decrease in assault/self-harm rates.
3. Procedural Justice – lower assault rates linked to good communication of a legitimate system of rules.
4. Regime & Meaningful Activity – lack of meaningful activity increases violence.
5. Gang Affiliation & Drugs – difficult to manage, often linked to violence.
6. Debt & Illicit Economy – requires effective whole-prison approach with strong leadership.

Safety Support Approach – KJ described the transition to a broader safety support approach, emphasizing site readiness, senior leadership oversight, foundation targeted and sustained support, and a whole-prison strategy integrating safety, security, and drugs.

Transitioned from “proactive support” to a tiered model:

New Research on Overcrowding - Confirms a 19% increase in likelihood of violence in overcrowded environments.

Action 221: Jenny Rees to send the published research on overcrowding to Janine Fuller.

PH asked if Wormwood Scrubs is being reviewed as a case study for improved safety? JR agreed this would be valuable and will follow up with the London PDG and Group Safety Lead for feedback and data.

Action 222: Jenny Rees to follow up on Wormwood Scrubs safety data and feedback.

AD asked if fire safety data be correlated with violence statistics? JR welcomed the idea and said that some previous work had been done on the correlation between violence and fire setting. JR suggested AD shared current data.

Action 223: Andy Davies to contact Jenny Rees and Karen Johnson to share fire safety data for correlation with violence statistics.

Protective Body Armour (PBA) Review – KB discussed the review following the Frankland incident. HS focus is on systemic controls over PPE. A pilot project, looking at the systemic controls, will be launched in a high-security prison.

KB and JM proposed inviting operational leads from the long-term high security estate to future meetings to ensure oversight of action being taken and it was agreed that JR would contact Ruth Stephens and Alex Worsman and arrange for them to attend future meetings and provide updates.

Action 224: Jenny Rees to contact Ruth Stephens and Alex Worsman to discuss their attendance and updates at future meetings.

4. Joint Health & Safety Visits – Kathryn Ball

KB confirmed that joint visits are a priority and expressed strong interest in getting them started this year. The preferred start time is September, aligning with the autumn schedule. Upon HG's return from annual leave, she will be asked to prioritise the joint checklist. It was agreed that HG will liaise with JM and other POA colleagues to agree on any necessary revisions. It was noted that one outstanding action from Styal is expected to be signed off shortly, enabling the scheduling of joint visits. JM stated that once the checklist is received, it will need to be scheduled into NEC meetings, which occur approximately every other week. KB acknowledged this and emphasised the

importance of prioritisation to avoid unnecessary delays.

Action 225: Hayley Gethen will liaise with Jackie Marshall and other POA colleagues to agree on any necessary revisions to the joint checklist.

5. POA and NTUS Items

NTUS items

- Climate Risk Assessment for MoJ Estate (2020–2039) Paper 1 - Annyah Spencer raised a query regarding the climate risk assessment document for the MoJ estate, covering the period 2020 to 2039. The document includes a list of premises identified as high or very high risk but presents them only as numerical codes. The lack of identifiable site names makes it unclear which premises belong to HMPPS, and which are under other MoJ departments. AS requested access to the full, unredacted version or a key to interpret the codes. KB acknowledged the concern and noted that the document appears alarming due to the prevalence of red-coded entries, but without context, it is difficult to assess its actual implications. AS confirmed the document was shared via PCS, likely through Assistant General Secretary John Maloney, as part of broader green initiatives. The section in question pertains specifically to HMPPS. KB requested that AS follow up to identify the originating team within MoJ, so the appropriate contact can be approached for clarification. AS agreed to take this action and will send an email once the source is confirmed. KB confirmed that once the origin is known, further steps will be taken to interpret the document meaningfully in the context of HMPPS.

Action 226: Annyah Spencer to identify the originating MoJ team responsible for the climate risk assessment and share this information with Kathryn Ball.

Action 227: Kathryn Ball to follow up with the relevant MoJ contact to obtain a key or unredacted version of the document for clearer interpretation.

- Management of Prisoners Under the Influence (UTI) in Workshops – AS raised concerns about inconsistent practices across establishments regarding the management of prisoners under the influence (UTI) in workshops. Some prisons remove affected individuals to their cells for healthcare assessment, while others require them to remain in the workshop, posing safety risks. The lack of a national framework has led to varied local policies, with some establishments demonstrating good practice and others leaving staff and prisoners vulnerable. Nigel Wharrier confirmed that previous work with Brian Warrington focused on workshop risk assessments but did not address UTI management. He emphasised the need for a national framework to guide local policy development. KB suggested incorporating best practice examples into existing risk assessments. PH and GW highlighted the importance of empowering instructors to make safety decisions and using ACT documentation to safeguard prisoners and staff. JS supported the use of ACT procedures and stressed the need for immediate healthcare intervention, noting that UTI symptoms could mask medical emergencies. SW called for coherent guidance to be issued to governors, either as a standalone policy or integrated into risk assessments, to prevent reliance on local dispute procedures. IO proposed a zero-tolerance approach and recommended identifying affected prisons for targeted discussions with governors, potentially leading to formal guidance. NW reiterated that establishments currently lack national guidance, resulting in inconsistent and often unsafe practices. PH and JS agreed that prisoners unfit for work should be removed from workshops immediately and assessed appropriately. KB confirmed support for developing guidance and proposed including UTI management as a control measure in the national generic risk assessment for workshops.

Action 228: Annyah Spencer to send a list of affected prisons to Ian Oakes and Jason Sunley, covering both North and South delivery arms.

Action 229: Nigel Wharrier, Jason Sunley, Hayley Gethen, and Brian Warrington to convene a separate meeting to review current risk assessment work and explore inclusion of UTI-related control measures in a national generic risk assessment for workshops.

- Health Safety & Welfare of Pentonville - Susan Webb raised concerns regarding recent developments at HMP Pentonville, particularly following a UN letter and press coverage highlighting operational failures, including a release in error. She emphasised the impact on OMU members, citing chronic understaffing, environmental issues (e.g., vermin infestations), and the detrimental effect on staff wellbeing. PH shared that he would be visiting Pentonville with General Secretary Steve Gillan. He echoed concerns about poor conditions, including rat infestations and inadequate facilities, and reaffirmed union solidarity. SW requested that the minutes reflect the situation as a growing and emerging crisis, citing the pace and pressure of work without adequate stress risk management. KB agreed the minutes would reflect what had been shared and noted that "demands" are a key stressor for staff in HMPPS. KB referenced ongoing reviews of probation and prison workloads and acknowledged the scale of the issue. GG added that multiple reviews are underway, including workforce delivery models and the OMU review, and confirmed union representation in these discussions. KB confirmed that the concerns raised would be formally noted in the minutes and acknowledged the significance of the issue for both individuals and the organisation. KB referenced similar discussions with other unions and confirmed that risks identified were being escalated to the national JNC chaired by Kim Thornton Edwards.
- Inclusion of Union Health and Safety Contacts on Intranet Page – AS proposed adding the National Health and Safety contact (herself) and the PCS functional mailbox to the intranet health and safety page to improve visibility and access for staff seeking union support. KB noted that including PCS contacts may necessitate listing contacts for all unions (e.g., Napo, Unison, GMB, POA), which could present space limitations and maintenance challenges. JM expressed concern that listing union leads could result in direct contact from members, bypassing established escalation protocols. She requested that her name not be included. JK acknowledged the technical difficulty of updating the intranet page but agreed to raise the request with the relevant team. She suggested a compromise: adding a line that signposts users to the Employee Relations (ER) page, which includes union health and safety contacts. GG supported the idea of a link to the ER page as a practical alternative.

Action 230: Julie Kenney to liaise with the intranet team to explore adding a line to the health and safety page that signposts users to the ER page for union health and safety contacts.

POA Items

- POA Annual Conference Motions (**Paper 2**) – KB acknowledge receipt of the conference motions.
- Critical Incidents and PTSD research summary (**Paper 3**) – PH introduced findings from a commissioned report on PTSD among prison staff, highlighting the significant impact of critical incidents such as assaults, suicides, and traumatic events. He emphasised the need to formally recognise PTSD as a foreseeable workplace hazard under the Health and Safety at Work Act and called for strengthened post-incident support. KB acknowledged the importance of appropriate support for staff exposed to traumatic events. She noted that while treatments for PTSD are available via the Occupational Health (OH) provider, awareness among staff and

managers may be limited. She referenced ongoing discussions and the potential value of reflective sessions throughout staff careers. GW raised concerns about the limitations of current OH provision, specifically the standard six-session model, which is often insufficient for staff with complex needs. He noted a lack of managerial support for extending sessions and highlighted that NHS services are often inaccessible while OH involvement is ongoing. He stressed the urgent need for more comprehensive and sustained support. KB confirmed that Optima health provides 8 sessions of EMDR and 6 sessions of CBT. Any additional sessions would be requested by the clinician and be clinically indicated. If an individual starts a course of therapy and the clinician requests extra sessions to complete the therapy this goes to the MoJ OH team to approve. Line Managers are not required to approve extra sessions for EMDR and CBT. She reiterated the importance of bridging the gap between OH and NHS care. JM confirmed she would be writing an article on the topic for the next Gate Lodge issue and agreed to include key points from this discussion, pending review with Jo Gordon. GW added that many sessions are delivered remotely, which is unsuitable for treatments like EMDR that require in-person delivery. He emphasised the need to improve the quality and accessibility of support. IO queried whether governors were declining practitioner-recommended session extensions. GW confirmed this was occurring, citing staffing pressures and reluctance to authorise further support. PH shared a case where a staff member's return to work was delayed due to lack of timely support. He noted issues with continuity of care, as staff are not guaranteed the same practitioner for follow-up sessions, which can retraumatise individuals. KB proposed an action for JF to summarise key issues raised in the discussion and seek clarification from JG on contractual provisions, session extension protocols, and practitioner continuity. These insights will inform Jackie's upcoming article.

Action 231: Janine Fuller to compile key issues from the discussion and liaise with Jo Gordon for clarification on:

- **Session extension policies and authorisation**
- **Continuity of care with OH practitioners**
- **Delivery format of PTSD treatments (e.g., remote vs. in-person)**
- **Availability and access to reflective sessions**

Action 232: Jackie Marshall to consider incorporating the findings and responses into her article for the next Gate Lodge issue, ensuring staff are informed about available support and how to access it.

- **Prison Uniform Review** – PH introduced concerns raised by a branch regarding synthetic materials used in prison uniforms, particularly the presence of plastics and dyes that may pose health risks. He noted that cotton is the only material without such risks and requested further investigation into uniform composition. JM reiterated previous requests for uniforms to be tested against exposure to hot water, sugar, and oil. She raised concerns about plastics in non-cotton materials potentially adhering to skin during incidents. Ruth Clarke confirmed that the current uniforms are made from a polycotton blend, with polyester and cotton sharing a melting point above 200°C. The current uniform has been tested to 180°C. Testing of new uniforms cannot proceed until the contract is awarded, expected within two weeks. Kevin Bassett clarified that the specifications for the new uniforms remain unchanged from current standards. The polycotton mix is consistent with existing uniforms, and no new materials have been introduced. GW emphasised that the issue is not about maintaining existing standards but improving them. He suggested exploring fire-retardant treatments used in other sectors, such as Formula 4, to enhance protection. JM expressed frustration over inconsistent messaging from suppliers and reiterated concerns about the melting behaviour of synthetic materials. PH shared feedback from staff at Feltham, noting that tighter-fitting polo shirts may allow hot liquids to reach the skin more quickly than looser-fitting cotton shirts, which can be removed more easily in emergencies.

KBa responded that the manufacturer's data confirms the tested melting point and that the specifications have not changed. He committed to sharing this data once the new supplier is announced. GW asked whether the uniform trials had concluded. RC confirmed that trials were completed across six establishments, and the contract award process is underway, with standstill letters expected imminently.

Action 233: Kevin Bassett to share material specification data with the POA once the new supplier is announced.

Action 234: Kevin Bassett to arrange a meeting with Jackie Marshall to provide uniform samples for review.

- Life expectancy of PPE – GW raised concerns regarding the expiry and condition of PPE and Control & Restraint (C&R) equipment across the estate. He noted that the National Tactical Response Group (NTRG) had identified outdated equipment during visits to establishments. The issue stems from bulk purchasing, which has led to simultaneous expiry across multiple sites. GW emphasised the need for a review of all equipment, including helmets, visors, and overalls, and questioned whether this could be addressed through local health and safety channels. KB confirmed that work is already underway. Jason Morley and Hayley Gethen are engaging with manufacturers to clarify the meaning of expiry labels (e.g., “sell by” vs. “use by”) and assess the actual usability of items post-expiry. She shared an example involving high-visibility vests used in community punishment projects, where reflective strip expiry would not impact functionality in non-roadside settings. GW reiterated that the issue extends beyond reflective strips to the full range of PPE, and that outdated equipment is impacting operational readiness and safety. IO confirmed that a Request for Information (RFI) exercise was conducted in January 2023 to assess local equipment status. He suggested revisiting this data to inform next steps. JM reported that local health and safety reps have been instructed to check equipment dates. In one case, a governor deferred responsibility to the National Executive Committee (NEC), raising questions about funding and accountability for replacements.

Action 235: Jason Morley to report back on findings from manufacturers regarding expiry dates and usability of PPE and C&R equipment.

Action 236: Ian Oakes to share the January 2023 RFI report and consider revisiting the data to assess current equipment status.

Action 237: Kathryn Ball to ensure findings from manufacturers are reviewed and used to determine the scale of the issue and appropriate next steps.

Action 238: Jackie Marshall to continue monitoring local feedback and escalate unresolved cases as needed.

- Air Fryers/Domestic Appliances – PH raised concerns following a fire incident involving an air fryer at one establishment. He highlighted that domestic appliances such as air fryers, toasters, and washing machines are not designed for continuous, unsupervised use in prison environments and may breach health and safety legislation (PUWER 1998). He advocated for the withdrawal of all domestic appliances from prisons. JS supported the concern, noting that HMIP inspections often encourage the use of such appliances without fully considering safety implications. He cited previous incidents involving fires caused by domestic appliances and stressed the need for a coordinated response, including engagement with HMIP. GW shared examples of unsafe appliance use, including poor placement, lack of ventilation, and absence

of fire safety measures. He recommended incorporating appliance checks into health and safety visits to gather evidence and support removal. AD confirmed that guidance on domestic appliances has been issued, but not to the extent discussed. He referenced PSI guidance on quantifiable fire risk and supported a joint, high-level discussion to address the issue across the estate. JM reiterated PSI guidance prohibiting cooking facilities in cells and expressed willingness to support a higher-level meeting. She raised concerns about cost implications and the need to prioritise safety over budget. IO emphasised the importance of engaging DD Prisons, noting that governors are often driven by HMIP expectations. DS agreed to take the issue away and explore appropriate governance routes for escalation.

Action 239: Andy Davies to consider a letter to DD Prisons on behalf of the subcommittee, outlining joint concerns regarding the use of domestic appliances and cooking facilities in prisons and reference relevant PSI and HSIN guidance. KB to approve and send on behalf of the Sub Committee.

Action 240: Geoff Willetts to continue gathering evidence through health and safety visits to support the case for removal.

- Inclusion of special trauma and burn packs in first aid kits – GW proposed the inclusion of specialist trauma and burns packs in prison first aid kits, citing incidents involving hot oil, water, and sugar. He emphasised the importance of having emergency equipment available before external medical assistance arrives and suggested reviewing the first aid syllabus to include relevant training. KB acknowledged the proposal and noted that traditional first aid guidance recommends cooling burns with water. She raised concerns about the potential risks of applying materials to burns that may later complicate hospital treatment. GW clarified that burns kits contain hospital-grade gels and wraps designed to cool and protect the skin, especially in environments where water access is limited. He also highlighted the presence of neutralising agents for chemical burns affecting the eyes or mouth. JK confirmed that burns kits are available via the ARCO contract and can be purchased by prisons. Kathryn suggested that their inclusion should be based on local risk assessments, particularly in establishments with known incidents. JS agreed that burns kits should be part of the first aid needs assessment and confirmed willingness to support further review. PH shared that trauma packs have already been introduced in Franklin's CSC and Separation Centre following a serious incident, reinforcing the need for wider implementation.

Action 241: Julie Kenney to review the Emergency First Aid at Work syllabus to determine current coverage of burns and scalds treatment.

Action 242: Lee Stephens to conduct an analysis of burns and scalds incidents across the prison estate using Sphera data.

Action 243: Julie Kenney to promote the availability of burns kits via the ARCO contract to prisons, particularly those with higher incident rates.

Action 244: Geoff Willetts to share details of the trauma and burns pack currently in use for comparison with the ARCO offering.

- Proposal for Spitting Incident Grab Bags and DNA Kits – JM proposed the introduction of dedicated grab bags for spitting incidents, similar to the previously introduced potting bags. These would provide staff with hygienic supplies to clean themselves after being spat at, particularly in the face or hair. Suggested contents include antibacterial face wipes and basic toiletries. JS queried whether soap and water would suffice but acknowledged the practicality

of wipes and other items for immediate use, especially in areas without easy access to water. GW recommended including DNA swab kits in the grab bags to support prosecution efforts. He shared that HMP Nottingham had successfully implemented this approach, with kits funded locally and used to deter spitting incidents. KB supported the idea and suggested the Strategic Centre Health and Safety Team take forward an action to define the contents of a spitting grab bag. She also requested further details from GW on the DNA kits used at Nottingham. GW confirmed the kits were sourced externally via the local constabulary and used effectively to reduce spitting incidents. KB noted the potential relevance of this approach for high-security prisons and agreed to explore the inclusion of DNA kits alongside hygiene items.

Action 245: Strategic Centre Health and Safety Team in conjunction with Jackie Marshall to define recommended contents for a spitting incident grab bag.

Action 246: Geoff Willetts to share details of the DNA kits used at HMP Nottingham for review and potential wider adoption.

Action 247: Jason Morley to consider appropriate governance routes for recommending grab bags and DNA kits across the estate.

- Facility Time – JM raised concerns regarding Health and Safety Representatives experiencing difficulties in securing facility time. There appears to be a misunderstanding among some Governors that this time is included within the eight hours specified in the facilities agreement. JM clarified that facility time for Health and Safety Representatives should be in addition to the eight hours outlined in the Facilities PSI.

Action 248: Derrick Stanton to raise the issue with Francis Stewart, and seek his advice as to whether a reminder should be sent to Governors confirming the position regarding facility time for HS representatives

6. Radon Update – Cheryl Langin

Cheryl Langin, representing Colin Ware from HMPPS Estates, provided an update on the current position regarding radon management across the estate. Two documents were circulated in advance: a PowerPoint presentation offering a high-level overview and Paper 4A containing detailed site information.

Key Points from the Update:

- All sites are being monitored through the national tracker, which records survey results and identifies required mitigation measures.
- Priority is given to sites where radon levels have previously exceeded actionable thresholds.
- Current status:
 - 41 sites identified (23 prisons and 18 probation sites).
 - Of the 23 prisons, 9 have been fully mitigated; 14 remain under regulation with permanent mitigation works in progress.
 - Post-mitigation monitoring is in place for all affected sites.
- Capacity risk:
 - Three prisons (Exeter, Lindholme, and Portland) were previously identified as having a potential risk to capacity.

- Exeter: Mitigation works ongoing; monitors remain in place.
 - Lindholme: Mitigation completed; additional monitoring continues as per RPA advice.
 - Portland: Mitigation works ongoing.
- All sites are currently being managed effectively, and risk levels are considered low.

KB acknowledged the significant progress made in managing radon and commended the work undertaken to improve compliance and oversight. No questions or concerns were raised by attendees.

7. HSE Priorities & Update

Janine Fuller informed the committee that Pete Collingwood's position remains unfilled. In the interim, strategic queries should be directed to Graham Tompkins (graham.tompkins@hse.gov.uk). Graham Tompkins had confirmed that despite Pete's role remaining vacant, operational processes remain unaffected.

8. Updates from OHSF Teams

OH/EAP Update – Jo Gordon was unable to attend the meeting however her paper was distributed to the meeting membership ahead of the meeting. Attendees were advised to raise any questions arising from the paper in correspondence via Janine Fuller.

Fire Safety Update – AD an update on fire safety, referencing Paper 6, which had been circulated in advance. He noted that since the report was submitted, a significant incident had occurred.

- Fire Statistics - Fires have increased by approximately 10% compared to the previous year. Year-to-date figures indicate around 1,500 fires across public and private sector prisons. The original report stated no serious incidents for the quarter; however, a serious incident has since occurred.
- Serious Incident – HMP Stocken (11 July) - A prisoner, intentionally set a fire in his cell at approximately 4:00 a.m. The cell's automatic fire detector had been deliberately obstructed, preventing an alarm from sounding. Staff discovered the fire during an adjacent cell check. The prisoner had blocked ventilation and door gaps using bin bags, which also obstructed water mist suppression. The fire was low temperature and survivable, but the lack of ventilation suggests a likely act of suicide (subject to Coroner's determination). Despite staff efforts, including CPR for 40 minutes and hospital transfer, the prisoner later died. The incident is under investigation, with police currently leading. National learning has been issued via a Service Managers Instruction (SMI) regarding fire alarm panel functionality. This is the first fire-related death since late 2023. Staff response was commended given the challenging circumstances.

KB acknowledged the update and noted that communication channels between the TUS and the National Fire Team remain strong. No further questions were raised by attendees.

HS Data – Hayley Gethen was unable to attend the meeting however her paper was distributed to the meeting membership ahead of the meeting. Attendees were advised to raise any questions arising from the paper in correspondence via Janine Fuller.

Papers Submitted in Correspondence:

Estates/FM Update (including RAAC update) – **John Burgess (Paper 5)** - No questions were

raised.

Date and time of next meeting

The date and time of the next meeting is Tuesday 28th October 2025 at 12:30pm. The meeting membership were reminded that all papers, action updates and agenda items need to be submitted to the Sub Committee Secretariat by midday on the deadline advised by the Secretariat which is **Friday 17th October 2025** to allow Sub Committee members to fully consider the papers in advance of the meeting.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting ended.

Minutes of the Whitley Occupational Health, Safety and Fire Sub Committee held on Tuesday 28th October 2025 Via Microsoft Teams

Attendees Official Side:

Kathryn Ball (KB)	Head of Health, Safety, Fire & Litigation (Chair)
Janine Fuller (JF)	HMPPS Secretariat
Derek Stanton (DS)	HMPPS Employee Relations
Jenny Rees (JR)	Head of Safety Group – HMPPS
Jason Sunley (JS)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (South)
Andy Davies (AD)	National Lead - HMPPS Fire Safety
Ruth Clarke (RC)	Business Delivery Manager OISG – Uniform Policy
Jo Gordon (JG)	OH & EAP Representative
Jason Morley (JMo)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (Strategic Centre)
Colin Ware (CW)	Head of Strategic Asset Management, Standards & Assurance – Estates Group
Shelley Roberts (SR)	Data Manager – Strategic Centre
Jon Collier (JC)	ORRU
Laura Mitcheson (LM)	ORRU

Attendees Trade Union Side:

Nigel Wharrier (NW)	NTUS Joint Secretary
Ginnette Gantschuk (GG)	NTUS Chair
Jackie Marshall (JM)	POA NEC
Geoff Willetts (GW)	POA NEC
Phil Hannant (PH)	POA NEC
Mick Pimblett (MP)	POA
Susan Webb (SW)	PCS HMPPS National Joint Vice-Chair
Angela Cossins (AC)	FDA
Mike MacDonald (MM)	Prospect

Apologies:

Hayley Gethen (HG)	National Lead – Health & Safety, HMPPS
Ian Oakes (IO)	HMPPS HSF&L Lead (North)
Graham Tompkins (GT)	HSE – HM Principal Inspector of Health & Safety
Terry McCarthy (TM)	POA
Annyah Spencer (AS)	PCS National H&S Lead
John White (JW)	PCS
Victoria Smith (VS)	Prospect

6. Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Kathryn Ball opened the meeting and thanked the membership for their attendance. Apologies were noted as above. Some variations to the agenda were agreed to allow members to attend other meetings. However, for the purpose of these minutes, they will follow the published agenda.

7. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Action Log

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as accurate ahead of this meeting therefore a factual accuracy check was not needed.

The group reviewed the action tracker, focusing on closure recommendations and status updates and the following was noted (to be read in conjunction with the action tracker):

- It was agreed that actions 217, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 226, 228, 230, 232, 242 and 243 were complete and could be closed.
- Action 206 remains open. It was agreed that the action will remain open to evidence the timeframe for this open action and any further actions arising from this subject will be added to it rather than creating new actions.
- Action 227 remains open. Further investigation needed. NTUS to lead.
- Action 229 remains open. Risk assessment guidance exists but TUS suggests this area lacks a national policy. Jenny Rees will identify what has been sent out from Drugs & Alcohol Group and will forward to Jason Morley to complete the wider picture.
- Action 233 remains open. Ruth Clarke to provide melting temperature data from the supplier.
- Action 234 POA requested action remains open.
- Action 235 remains open. Awaiting supplier clarification.
- Action 236 no update received as Ian Oakes is on annual leave. Action remains open.
- Action 238 Jackie Marshall to escalate unresolved cases to H&S and ORRU. Action remains open.
- Action 239 action remains ongoing as requires further consideration and evidence gathering by Andy Davies. Kathryn Ball has requested this is completed before the next meeting.
- Action 240. Ongoing. Geoff Willetts to send the evidence he has gathered to Andy Davies.
- Action 241 acknowledged that data has been shared however POA request the action to stay open and for these kits to be included in First Aid packs. Jason Morley to lead a further review. Action remains open.
- Action 246 action to stay open until Geoff Willetts has shared the information with Jason Morley and Jackie Marshall.
- Action 247 ongoing
- Action 248 awaiting sign off from Francis Stuart. Action remains ongoing.

3. Safety Update – Jenny Rees & Alex Worsman

Jenny Rees provided an overview of the upcoming publication of safety and custody statistics noting deaths in custody data up to September and assaults and self-harm data up to June. Jenny will share the data link post-publication.

Scrubs Prison Data Analysis - Scrubs has maintained lower assault levels post-pandemic, unlike other sites where rates have risen. Phil Hannant previously flagged this trend, prompting further analysis. Jenny noted key factors contributing to Scrubs' success as strong leadership (Head of Safety now Group Safety Lead), effective regime management and violence reduction strategies. Jenny and her team continue to engage with Scrubs to identify and document successful practices for wider dissemination. Jenny offered to meet Phil Hannant outside of the meeting to discuss the factors that had contributed to a reduced level of violence.

Razor Distribution and Policy - Electric razors have arrived and are being distributed to closed male adult prisons. This also includes prisons that previously removed wet shave razors. It was noted that wet shave razors may be removed from facilities lists nationally. Jenny and her team will oversee distribution prioritising LTHSE sites and sharing guidance with prisons on their use which takes into account learning from the earlier rollout.

Frontline Support and Targeted Safety Interventions – Safety Support Approach includes foundation, targeted, and sustained support in line with HMPPS wider performance model. Pentonville received targeted support following an urgent notification which included a safety summit held with staff and prisoner feedback with actions to be developed based on the summit outcomes. Jenny and her team continue supporting Pentonville and other targeted sites.

Safety Week and Training Initiatives - Safety Week saw varied engagement across prisons (e.g., safety days/months). There was a particular focus on early days in custody with new resources and presentations. Jenny is currently collecting feedback from sites on Safety Week activities.

Training developments include Risks, Triggers, and Protective Factors module pending PLD capacity and Cell Sharing Risk Assessment (CRSA) training which is currently under development. Jenny is pushing for PLD support to roll out new training modules.

Long-Term High Security Safety Concerns - Alex Worsman reported worsening safety trends over 18–24 months with escalation of violence against staff and prisoners and rising self-harm incidents. Cat B trainers particularly affected due to lower supervision levels. Contributing factors were noted as changing prisoner demographics, increased re-categorisation based on behaviour and longer sentences leading to hopelessness and aggression.

Alex discussed the interventions that have been implemented as follows:

- Safety floor walkers deployed to 7 sites.
- Crime in prison coordinators appointed to improve justice outcomes.
- Additional searching staff funded to address weapon risks.
- Cohorted regime planned for Cat B trainers to improve staff-prisoner ratios.
- Suspension of self-cooking in discrete units following a serious incident.

Alex and his team continue to monitor and adjust interventions, including review of cohorted regime effectiveness, continued support from regional safety team and ongoing analysis of safety trends.

Deaths in Custody and PPO Engagement – Alex discussed the improved engagement with

governors on deaths in custody and the increase in PPO investigations with no recommendations, indicating proactive local action. Alex and his team will maintain current approach and continue to refine based on feedback.

Crime in Prisons – Conviction Rates - Mike MacDonald raised concerns about low conviction rates despite strong evidence. Alex noted it is too early to assess impact but highlighted promising results from pilot sites. Jenny offered to invite Kerry McBride from the Crime in Prisons team to present at the next meeting.

Action 249: Jenny Rees to invite Kerry McBride from the Crime in Prisons team to present at the next meeting.

4. Joint Health & Safety Visits – Kathryn Ball

Kathryn Ball emphasised the importance of the joint H&S inspections and expressed satisfaction that POA colleagues would be providing feedback shortly—expected next week—on the proposed checklist. She noted that while time constraints make it unlikely to complete all visits within the current calendar year, there is a strong desire to begin scheduling and conducting some visits before year-end.

The group agreed on a target to complete all joint inspections by the end of the 2025–2026 financial year (March 2026), recognising the value of the data these visits will generate.

Jackie Marshall suggested involving consultative committee members who cover relevant areas, as this would be more practical than relying exclusively on NEC members. Kathryn supported this approach and proposed beginning diary scheduling by late November, assuming the checklist would be finalised by then.

There was a discussion about who should take responsibility for scheduling the visits. Kathryn offered to task Hayley Gethen with liaising with Jackie to begin setting dates. Jackie agreed to this and confirmed she would speak with Hayley once contacted.

Action 250: Hayley Gethen to begin scheduling dates with Jackie Marshall with all visits to take place before end of March 2026.

5. POA and NTUS Items

NTUS items – no agenda items received.

POA Items

SPEAR Training Guidance – the discussion focused on concerns regarding injuries sustained during SPEAR training, the availability of protective equipment, and the clarity of guidance provided to instructors. The discussion was detailed reflecting the seriousness of the issues raised as follows:

Lack of Detailed Injury Data - Jonathan Collier highlighted that despite repeated requests to the POA over three months, the team has not received sufficient data to review the training curriculum. Specifically, there is a lack of clarity on the nature and extent of injuries, the specific training context (e.g., initial vs. refresher courses, SPEAR vs. use of force) and the activity being undertaken at the time of injury.

Jackie Marshall responded that the injuries are known to be occurring during refresher and SPEAR

training, and that Health & Safety holds the relevant data. Kathryn Ball proposed an action to formally request a dedicated report on injuries, specifying the type of training and nature of incidents. It was noted that a set of data on this had already been provided by HS Data Team, but this new set of data would attempt to cover off all of the information JC had requested. Some qualitative data from POA would also be helpful.

Action 206(i): Lee Stevens to provide a detailed report on injuries sustained during training, specifying type of training (initial/refresher/SPEAR/UoffF), activity being undertaken at the time of the injury, and nature and extent of injury.

Use of Protective Suits - Mick Pimblett raised concerns about personal injury claims linked to the absence of protective suits during scenario-based training. He referenced earlier guidance from Glen Knight suggesting that certain training elements should not be delivered without the suits. Jonathan Collier clarified the suits are intended only for the person acting as the prisoner in scenario-based training. They are not mandated or included in the manual but are available as a control measure should the particular scenario that was being used require it. Mick Pimblett and others questioned the logic of investing in equipment that is not mandated especially when its use could prevent injuries. Jonathan agreed to include clearer guidance in the manual confirming that suits must be used in scenarios involving realistic physical force.

Manual Guidance and Risk Assessments - Laura Mitcheson noted that Section 12 of the manual already advises instructors to risk assess scenarios based on available equipment. She proposed a minor wording change to make this clearer. Jason Sunley raised a critical concern: instructors may not be recording risk assessments in practice. He proposed assessing how frequently risk assessments are being completed/recorded. Mick Pimblett supported incorporating this into joint Health & Safety inspection checklist.

Action 206(ii) – Jonathan Collier and Laura Mitcheson to amend Section 12 to clarify when PPE (e.g., suits, helmets) is mandatory and reinforce risk assessment requirements.

Action 206(iii) – Mick Pimblett to include the reviewing local risk assessments for C&R and SPEAR training as part of the POA feedback on the joint inspections checklist.

Bleed/Trauma Kits – This item was discussed as part of the action tracker update.

Kettle – Heats water to 70°C – Mick Pimblett shared that a member at HMP Wetherby had attempted to raise the issue with Phil Copple after observing kettles that heat water only to 70°C. The suggestion was that such kettles could reduce the severity of injuries caused by hot water incidents in custody settings. Kathryn Ball and others agreed that the issue warranted further investigation, especially given the potential to improve safety for both staff and prisoners.

Nigel Wharrier informed the group that Prison Industries is developing a new kettle designed to prevent hot water from being thrown. The kettle fills through the spout, has a fixed lid, and is currently undergoing final testing. Mick Pimblett raised a valid concern about the possibility of prisoners transferring hot water from the kettle into another container, such as a jug, which could still pose a risk. Kathryn Ball clarified that the new kettle design limits the volume of water and does not heat it to boiling point (100°C), thereby reducing risk.

Kathryn Ball committed to contacting Jason Swettenham, Head of PSPI, to arrange a briefing on this for POA meeting members. It was noted that the fire safety team is also reviewing the kettle design in light of the removal of safer vape pens and the increased use of electrical items by prisoners to set fires. The aim is to ensure the new kettle design supports both safety and operational

needs.

Action 251: Kathryn Ball to contact Jason Swettenham to arrange a briefing for POA meeting members on the new kettle design.

Broken Observation Panels - Jackie Marshall highlighted that damaged panels are not being replaced with sufficient urgency, resulting in unsafe conditions where staff are exposed to substances being thrown through the broken panels.

Kathryn Ball acknowledged the issue and suggested that such repairs should be fast-tracked through FM providers. Colin Ware agreed to investigate the delay and report back.

Jason Sunley explained that the problem extends beyond the panels to the structural integrity of the cell doors themselves, which deteriorate over time due to repeated battering. He advocated for replacing entire doors rather than just the glazing and mentioned the availability of a more robust door design trailed by MoJ Property Services, which includes an unbreakable observation panel.

Phil Hannant raised additional concerns about healthcare-designated accommodation being used for general population, where hatches are easily tampered with, posing serious risks to staff. He cited incidents at Pentonville and Franklin as examples.

Jason and Phil both supported the idea of establishing a suite of unbreakable cells in each establishment to house individuals who repeatedly damage fixtures.

Action 252: Colin Ware to review delays in FM response to broken observation panels including whether or not they are being fast-tracked for repair. CW to and to gather data on frequently damaged panels using FM and vandalism records to identify whether repeated repairs to the same doors are being made and whether doors themselves are being replaced in these scenarios.

Fire Safety in Laundry Rooms – this item was covered under domestic appliance issues on the action tracker.

Personal Body Armor – Jackie Marshall and Mick Pimblett focussed their concerns on the deployment and suitability of Personal Body Armour (PBA) across the high-security prison estate. POA stated that although a significant quantity of PBA has been delivered to prisons, none has yet been issued. Clarification was sought on the timeline and rationale for this delay. Concerns were also raised about the lack of appropriately shaped vests for non-standard body types, particularly women. Assurance was given that bespoke versions, including female-specific designs, are being produced.

It was confirmed that 5,000 kits are reserved for the Long-Term High Security Estate (LTHSE), with an additional 5,000 available for deployment based on risk assessments. Questions were raised about the feasibility of having 5,000 spare bespoke vests and their intended use.

MP raised an issue of effectiveness of Vests at HMP Wakefield and noted that reports from the Health and Safety Manager at HMP Wakefield indicated that the supplied vests may be ineffective for up to 70 staff members. This issue was flagged for urgent follow-up.

It was noted that the deployment policy lies with the ORRU team, and it will be shared with trade union colleagues as part of the implementation process.

Action 253: Jason Sunley to contact the Health and Safety representative at HMP Wakefield to verify concerns about vest effectiveness and gather further details. Jason Sunley to report findings to Jason Morley, who will coordinate broader updates.

Action 254: Jason Morley to liaise with the implementation team and ORRU to clarify the current status of PBA deployment and policy development.

6. Radon Update – Colin Ware

Colin Ware gave an update regarding radon monitoring and mitigation across the prison estate.

Phil Hannant raised concerns about elevated radon levels (over 300 Bq/m³) reported at Ford Prison. There was mention of inconsistent meter usage and staff concerns logged in the accident book.

Jason Sunley confirmed no current issues were flagged in the South Working Group and that permanent mitigations and live monitoring are in place. Colin Ware agreed to follow up on this for clarification.

Mick Pimblett requested guidance on accessing the POA office at HMP Dartmoor. Jason Sunley confirmed a risk assessment is in place and offered to coordinate safe access and removal of POA documentation, advising Mick to contact him directly.

Ginnette Gantschuk queried the implications of construction companies considering radon “out of scope.” Colin clarified that while some pushback had occurred, monitoring is being conducted, and technical standards are being reinforced to ensure compliance. Coordination with project delivery teams is ongoing.

Kathryn Ball proposed removing radon as a standing agenda item, with agreement from attendees. It was acknowledged that while radon remains a concern, current management is effective and responsive. Any future issues should be raised locally or escalated in the usual way.

Action 255: Colin Ware to investigate the reported high radon levels at HMP Ford and provide clarification.

Action 256: Jason Sunley to coordinate safe access and removal of documentation from the POA office at HMP Dartmoor, liaising directly with Mick Pimblett.

Action 257: Radon to be removed as a regular agenda item, with the option to revisit if new national concerns arise.

7. Updates from OHSF Teams

OH/EAP Update – Jo Gordon presented her paper which had been circulated to the membership ahead of the meeting. No questions or actions arose.

Fire Safety Update – Andy Davies presented his paper which had been circulated to the membership ahead of the meeting. AD also mentioned that HMPPS had received a letter before action from solicitors acting for the Howard League. This had only happened very recently, and work was ongoing to determine the HMPPS response. No questions or actions arose.

HS Data – Shelley Roberts presented her paper which had been circulated to the membership ahead of the meeting. Ginette Gantshuk acknowledged reviewing the presentation and noted that it

contains a large amount of information, particularly regarding employee accident rates. Ginette expressed concern over some alarming figures and highlighted the lack of explanation for discrepancies between different groups. As a result, Ginette requested a bespoke meeting to review the data in more detail and at a slower pace.

Action 258: Lee Stevens and Shelley Roberts to meet with NTUS colleagues to review the H&S data.

Papers Submitted in Correspondence:

Estates/FM Update (including RAAC update) – **John Burgess (Paper 5)** - No questions were raised.

Date and time of next meeting.

The date and time of the next meeting is Tuesday 27th January 2026 at 12:30pm. The meeting membership were reminded that all papers, action updates and agenda items need to be submitted to the Sub Committee Secretariat by midday on the deadline advised by the Secretariat which is **Friday 16th January 2026** to allow Sub Committee members to fully consider the papers in advance of the meeting.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting ended.

EQUALITIES

Equalities Sub Whitley Annual Report 1/1/25 – 31/12/25

Introduction

The progression of equalities issues with HMPPs has been hampered by the structural changes, with the creation of IRRIS and the Professional Standards Teams as well as the creation of the Behaviour Interventions and Practical Support Team. The recruitment to these teams has taken some time but all the teams are now fully staffed and the Tackling Unacceptable Behaviour Unit and the Professional Standards Unit, in which the Disparities Unit is now located, have merged and are rebadged as Independent Review, Resolution and Investigations Service. The implementation of the Rademaker recommendations has taken centre stage this year, which is only right and proper and which is endorsed by the POA. This has led to a number of cases being dealt with and changes to the grievance and disciplinary processes, which are yet to be finalised.

Throughout 2025, the POA has continued to pursue the Employer for clarification of the implementation of the fitness test in respect of staff who are not new recruits and those who are still required to pass a fitness test in respect of specialist roles. The work is ongoing. The same clarification has been sought for those who request disability sick leave. The implementation of reasonable adjustments has improved and, with regular updates, this should continue. The provision of sanitary products has improved but there is still work to be done in respect of certain establishments, with the same being true in respect of the provision of suitable breast-feeding facilities.

The implications of the recent court rulings in respect of gender identity are also being worked through in terms of guidance about the practical implications.

The issue of black members being less likely to be promoted and more likely to be disciplined has also been raised by the POA, and an action plan has been launched, with progress to be monitored.

Angela Montgomery
Assistant General Secretary

POA Equalities Sub-Whitley Meeting Thursday 30 January 2025

Attendees:

HMPPS:

Francis Stuart (Chair)
Joseph Nsarhaza (JN)
Graham Kilvington (GK)

Lucas Hall (LH)
Alana Ajani (AA)
Harriet Dale (HD)
Kirstie Adams (KA)
Ristead McDonald (RMc)
Emma Ferdinand (EF)
Daisy Forster (DF)

Head of HMPPS Employee Relations
Employee Relations Admin Manager
Head of HR Diversity and Wellbeing Performance
Analysis
PiPP National Lead
Head of Diversity and Inclusion Team
Workforce Statistics and Analysis
MOJ Inclusive Culture Centre of Expertise
HR Policy and Transparency
Inclusive Culture Centre of Expertise
Workforce Movement Policy

James Mills (JM)

MoJ Workplace Adjustments

POA:

Sarah Rigby
Geoff Willetts
Ian Carson
Jackie Marshall
Angela Montgomery

NEC National Officer
NEC National Officer
NEC National Officer
NEC National Officer
Full-Time Officer

Apologies:

Andy Hewitt (AH)
Amy Froggat (AF)

Senior Employee Relations Lead
HMPPS DAWN (Disability, Advocacy and Well-being Network) National Lead

Ellen Whiteford (EW)

HMPPS Pride in Prison and Probation (PiPP)
Staff Network Deputy Lead

Philip Hannant
Derek Rhoden (DR)

NEC National Officer
HMPPS Racial Inclusion & Striving for Equality (RISE) Staff Network National Lead

Kency Soko (KS)

Employee Relations

1. Welcome and Apologies – Francis Stuart (FS)

1.1 FS noted apologies as above and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of last meeting – Francis Stuart (FS)

2.1 FS requested that the Trade Unions (TUs) confirm the accuracy of the minutes from the previous meeting, to which the TUs unanimously agreed, stating that the minutes were a true and accurate reflection of the discussions held.

3. Matters Arising - Actions Log – Joseph Nsarhaza (JN)

3.1 JN reviewed the action log with attendees to discuss the current status of outstanding actions.

The first open action, related to the fitness test, remains ongoing and was left open. The action for FS and AA to have discussions with AF regarding the need for additional guidance on disability leave was noted. Colleagues from that team were in attendance to address any concerns raised by the TUs.

3.2 TUs expressed a strong interest in having a representative from the MOJ Workplace Adjustment Services attend future meetings to provide updates on recent developments in this area. TUs also raised the point that, in future, they should be consulted before any action is marked as complete. FS agreed to ensure that this would be the case going forward.

4. Diversity and Inclusion Data Update – Graham Kilvington (GK)

4.1 GK began his update by confirming that [the staff equality report](#) had now been published. He discussed some key findings from the report and informed attendees that they were welcome to review it in their own time. He also offered (or for a data colleague) to return for further discussions if there were any questions. GK explained that the report includes an HTML document summarising key insights in written form. The data covers staffing posts by different protected characteristics and provides a breakdown by grade. Additionally, it includes information on new joiners, temporary cover allowances, promotions, bonuses awarded to staff, grievances raised, and staff under investigation.

4.2 GK outlined the format of the tables within the report. Most tables list staff demographics in the left column, including gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and religion. There are two versions of the tables. Table A provides a time series showing promotion rates, average staff in post over time, and

promotion rates since the 2021 financial year whilst table B focuses on individual grade details.

Action: KS to arrange a meeting between POA, GK, and HD to review the annual Staff Equality Report figures in more detail.

4.3 GK then provided an update on disability leave data. Since there is no established benchmark for the appropriate level of disability leave within the organisation, figures were compared to HMCTS levels. Given that HMPPS is roughly three times the size of HMCTS, a higher level of disability leave was expected. The latest data covers the period from September to December 2024. GK also clarified that disability leave allows staff to take time off under special leave arrangements for assessment, treatment, and rehabilitation, as well as while workplace adjustments are being implemented. However, disability leave does not cover sickness-related absences.

4.4 GK addressed an action from a previous meeting regarding applications for partial retirement. He explained that while applications are not directly recorded in SOP, there is a variable that tracks whether a staff member is currently on partial retirement. This allows the team to determine the number of staff assigned to that status. However, the system does not record cases where a staff member applied but was denied partial retirement. GK noted that such rejections are rare.

4.5 TUs raised concerns that decisions on partial retirement are often influenced by individual Governors at different establishments. They noted that securing partial retirement was not difficult in some locations, likely due to differences in local decision-making. Given that the process is formal, they did not believe accessing the data should be problematic. TUs also highlighted that staff applying for partial retirement are typically over 55 and seeking to balance their pension with reduced working hours.

Action: GK to analyse partial retirement assignment status by prison in the 2025 report and to update this sub-committee via HD.

4.5 TUs stated that the data presented was not the specific information they had requested. They clarified that they were seeking data on the number of staff currently suspended or under investigation for sexual harassment. GK confirmed that while the team has access to data on staff suspensions, they were unsure whether the reason for each suspension was recorded.

Action: GK to investigate whether data on reasons for staff suspensions is available and to update this sub-committee via HD.

Standing Agenda items

5. Disparities Unit Update – Alana Ajani (AA)

5.1 AA began the update by announcing that recruitment is underway for a specialist and consultation post covering LGBT, Race, Disability, Sexual Harm, and the Equality Act. The application deadline is early February 2025, and the team aims to have successful candidates in post by the end of the 2024 financial year. Additionally, the team is finalising its Network Lead Recruitment process. Each network lead serves a two-year term, with the current tenure concluding in March 2025. Members have been voting for a new Chair, and the outcome is expected to be announced by March 2025.

5.2 AA highlighted the ongoing work with SCS Champions, who represent all protected characteristics and priority areas. Progress has been positive, particularly with the Race Champion (Sarah Coccia), who is actively increasing the number of race allies. The team is now looking to introduce sponsorship opportunities for underrepresented groups by encouraging all Band 12 and above staff to mentor individuals from these groups.

5.3 Looking ahead, AA noted that the National Inclusion Priorities, which have focused on race and ethnicity over the past year, will shift towards disability in the coming year. This will include improving staff accessibility measures, such as ensuring workplace passports are in place. The team will also continue their work on accredited programmes for individuals in their care, expanding beyond race disparities to address gaps related to disability.

5.4 AA introduced an ongoing pilot programme called Questions in Advance, which allows candidates to receive interview questions ahead of time. The pilot is currently being tested in prisons, probation services, and HQ over the next six months. Research suggests that this approach benefits neurodivergent individuals. However, before rolling it out nationally, the team needs to ensure there are no unintended negative consequences for participants or vacancy managers.

5.5 AA concluded by discussing the success of the Lunch and Learn sessions on religion. These sessions have received strong engagement and positive feedback from staff. So far, sessions have been held on Hinduism, Paganism, Islam, and Sikhism, with upcoming sessions planned on Christianity and Buddhism. Staff are encouraged to participate, as these sessions have proven to be both educational and impactful.

Staff Networks update

6. DAWN - Amy Froggat (AF) written update

6.1 DAWN AGM 5 March 2025 with full agenda regarding disability inclusion – invite welcome to POA members should they wish to attend.

- In 2024, Main themes of support provided from DAWN to members:
 - 42% Workplace adjustment support and passport completion
 - 28% Advice (procedures or frameworks such as disability leave, MOJWAS)
 - 21% Support (wellbeing calls, listening to concerns)
 - 8% Advocacy (as advocates or McKenzie friends in official capacity)
 - 1% Other (including BHDV)
- Working in collaboration with central Disability Inclusion lead, Senior sponsors and identifying trends to support disability action plan.
- Forward look for 2025:
 - New NL takes post April 2025; AF has reapplied and if successful, looks forward to continued partnership. If unsuccessful, with thanks for the support to DAWN since her leadership.
 - DAWN Survey 2025 will be launching soon where data from first quarter (April) to better understand how they can improve DAWN
 - DAWN Events and Comms will continue raising awareness of conditions, adjustments and support available

PiPP – Lucas Hall (LH)

6.2 LH informed attendees that a member survey was conducted and concluded at the end of 2024. The purpose of the survey was to gather feedback on how members were feeling. The last survey had taken place two years prior. The results highlighted key areas such as members missing events and a decline in communication. These were anticipated issues, and the team had already begun addressing them. They were pleased to see they were on the right track. In response, they have recommitted to publishing monthly newsletters, which have now been circulated for the past three months to keep members informed.

6.3 The team has also started reintroducing events alongside exploring workshop opportunities. Four events are planned for February 2025 in celebration of LGBT+ History Month, one of which will be with the Executive Committee. Survey feedback indicated that not all members were familiar with the committee network. During this event, committee members will discuss their roles and share

stories about their LGBT+ heroes.

6.4 LH also provided details about the SES Champions event, where Champions will discuss their roles and how they support their communities. Additionally, there will be further events focusing on the UBT community, as well as a session on Section 28 and its lasting impact on LGBT+ individuals in the workplace. LH shared a link to [the PiPP Newsletter](#).

6.5 LH concluded by announcing the recent launch of a support group for trans colleagues, providing a space for them to discuss any challenges they may be facing. Feedback from this group will help inform support strategies in this area. Details have been shared via team communication channels and newsletters, and final approvals are underway to formalise the group. The team is also finalising work on a Banter Workshop, which will soon be presented to the Gateway Board for approval.

Additionally, they are in the final stages of developing a Trans Awareness Package, which they hope to submit to the Gateway Board within the next few months.

POA Items

7. Disability Leave

7.1 POA colleagues emphasised that reasonable adjustments should be explicitly stated as being for disabled staff rather than staff in general. They clarified that disability leave typically covers treatment, rehabilitation, and assessment, making it available to disabled staff who meet these criteria. However, there is confusion regarding the workplace adjustment policy. They noted that disability leave was originally considered a reasonable adjustment when the policy was first developed. Despite various updates, the policy remains unclear, particularly as it separately discusses workplace adjustments.

7.2 They pointed out that a workplace adjustment can be part of the process of helping staff return to work, but disability leave itself was intended as an entitlement for disabled staff, which they could apply for via the governor. The policy outlines time off for treatment, rehabilitation, or assessment, but staff cannot take disability leave if they are unable to work, which they feel is contradictory. They provided an example of a staff member undergoing chemotherapy, which requires a few days of treatment followed by a short rehabilitation period before returning to work without further adjustments. Since this scenario only meets two out of the three outlined criteria, staff find it difficult to obtain disability leave.

7.3 Discussions with governors have revealed that they also find contradictions within the policy, making it challenging to justify granting disability leave. The POA called for further engagement to explore ways to clarify the policy, ensuring it better supports staff and makes decision-making easier for prison governors. They noted that governors receive conflicting advice, highlighting the policy's ambiguity. A clearer policy would also provide a more accurate reflection of the number of disabled staff within the organisation.

7.4 EF responded by acknowledging that, over the years, various policies have been misinterpreted or applied inconsistently. She explained that disability leave is a form of special leave, which can be one of several reasonable adjustments offered to staff. While some view disability leave and workplace adjustments as separate policies, they should be considered collectively. EF pointed out that the Ability Manual addresses disability-related absences, including disability leave, which is designated for assessment, treatment, or rehabilitation. However, it can only be used when the individual would otherwise be fit for work.

7.5 KA added that a distinction must be made between disability leave and disability-related sick absence. If an individual is unwell and unable to work, their absence is classified as disability-related sick leave, which is recorded separately on the SOP system. Special leave covers health or

disability-related absences, while sick leave is recorded when a staff member is unwell due to treatment. KA suggested that some governors may not fully understand these differences, leading to inconsistencies in how disability-related sick absence and associated adjustments are handled.

7.6 RMc requested to be sent the policy document and asked for clarification on the sections that appear unclear, so they could be reviewed in more detail. He acknowledged that the documentation surrounding disability leave is extensive, often referencing multiple other policies across different remits. He agreed that simplifying the policy would benefit end users. Moving forward, operational user-centred approaches will be prioritised, and feedback from unions will be essential in ensuring policies are clear and practical for staff.

Meeting Ended

The Next Meeting is set for Wednesday 30 April 2025

POA Equalities Sub-Whitley Meeting Wednesday 30 April 2025

Attendees:

HMPPS

Francis Stuart (Chair)	Head of HMPPS Employee Relations
Amy Froggat (AF)	HMPPS DAWN (Disability, Advocacy & Well-being Network) National Lead
Lucas Hall (LH)	PiPP National Lead
Joseph Nsarhaza (JN)	Employee Relations Administration Manager
Kency Soko (KS)	Employee Relations

POA

Sarah Rigby	NEC National Officer
Angela Montgomery	Full-Time Officer
Ian Carson	NEC National Officer

Apologies

Philip Hannant (PH)	NEC National Officer
Alana Ajani (AA)	Head of Diversity and Inclusion Team
Tony Mansour (TM)	Deputy Head of the Disparities Unit
Islam Ahmed (IA)	HMPPS Racial Inclusion & Striving for Equality (RISE) Staff Network National Lead
Geoff Willetts (GW)	NEC National Officer
Jackie Marshall (JM)	NEC National Officer
Ian Tune (IT)	Staff Fitness Strategy Delivery Manager
Nigel Williams (NW)	Fitness Test Review Programme Lead

1. Welcome and Apologies – Francis Stuart (FS)

1.1 Apologies were noted as above

2. Minutes of last meeting – Francis Stuart (FS)

2.1 FS requested that the Trade Unions (TUs) confirm the accuracy of the minutes from the previous meeting, to which the TUs agreed, stating that the minutes were a true and accurate reflection of the discussions held.

3. Matters Arising - Actions Log – Joseph N (JN)

3.1 JN reviewed the Action Log and invited attendees to raise any questions.

3.2 POA colleagues raised concerns regarding the fitness test and the availability of related data. It was noted that there is currently no comprehensive data available, as the fitness test is only being administered to new recruits or individuals in certain specialist teams. Trade Union (TU) representatives expressed ongoing concerns, particularly regarding prison officers who have been on two years of paid protection due to a disability. When such individuals are deemed fit to return to the prison officer role, they are being asked to complete the fitness test. TUs highlighted this as a potential case of disability discrimination.

3.3 TUs believe the confusion arises when staff, returning from roles held under the Equalities Act's protection provisions, are treated as if they are new members of staff. TUs emphasised that such individuals cannot be classified as new recruits due to their prior service. Clarification is needed concerning who is required to undertake the fitness test and the relevant length of service criteria. Additionally, TUs reported that some prison governors have expressed confusion about the guidance they are receiving on this matter.

Action: ER to arrange a bespoke meeting with HR Policy to discuss POA concerns regarding the requirement for staff who have been absent from prison officer duties due to medical reasons to complete a fitness test upon return.

Action: ER to arrange a bespoke meeting with Anna Neale and Amy Froggat to provide specific clarity on disability leave and the statistical data.

Action: ER to arrange a further bespoke meeting involving HR Policy and Disparity Unit colleagues to address POA concerns regarding the low uptake of disability special leave in prisons and the issue of such leave not being applied to time off for disability-related medical treatment.

3.2 The Chair advised that Priscilla Wong is now leading MOJWAS and recommended that an introductory meeting between POA colleagues and Ms Wong would be beneficial.

Action: ER to arrange a bespoke introduction meeting between POA colleagues and Priscilla Wong following the POA Conference.

4. Diversity and Inclusion Data Update – Harriet Dale (HD)

4.1 HD provided the below update on data related to partial retirement.



Partially retired staff
by prison - December

4.2 The data was segmented into four categories for each establishment: overall staff in partial retirement, prison officer population, staff over the age of 50, and the ability to further analyse by different age groups if required.

4.3 HD noted that, while significant variations would normally be expected across the population, current figures appeared relatively consistent, with most establishments showing figures in the range of 50 to 100.

4.4 TUs TU representatives queried whether it would be possible to approach prisons with particularly low numbers of partial retirement applications to determine how many applications had been submitted within the year. This would support further inquiry where necessary.

Action: HD to review partial retirement data and compile a list of establishments with below-average applications. This information will be used to identify prisons to approach for further inquiry and will be shared with POA colleagues.

Action: FS to liaise with HR colleagues to obtain additional data on partial retirement and report findings back to TU colleagues.

Suspension

4.5 HD advised that the main challenge with suspension data is that it is only recorded within broader absence data. Currently, suspension status can only be identified by reviewing absence records and determining whether suspension was cited as the reason for absence.

4.6 HD explained an alternative method being developed: using employee numbers of suspended staff within a specific timeframe to cross-reference with data on conduct and discipline investigations. By doing this, it is possible to identify staff suspended over a three-year period and determine if and why they were subject to investigations. However, caution must be taken to avoid mismatched data. To ensure meaningful outcomes, any data request must be highly specific. For example, a recent query focused on suspensions related to sexual harassment, allowing a targeted review over a three to five-year period.

4.7 TUs emphasised the significance of the suspension issue, noting that it is also being discussed at the POA Conference. It was reported that some prison governors are now referring suspended staff to mental health services. TUs expressed the need for improved data and clearer information to ensure that informed decisions are being made in relation to staff welfare and support.

Action: HD to gather information on suspensions for sexual harassment and share that data gathered with colleagues in this forum.

5. Disparities Unit Update – Francis Stuart (FS)

5.1 The Disparities Unit provided a written update, which was read aloud by the Chair during the meeting. Key points from the update were highlighted below.



POA Update 30
April.docx

5.2 It was noted that the Disparities Unit sits within the Professional Standards and Behaviour Group and works in close collaboration with both the Unacceptable Behaviour Unit (TUBU) and the Behaviours Interventions and Practical Support (BIPS) team.

5.3 TU representatives raised concerns regarding the BIPS team, stating that this was the first occasion on which they had been made aware of its existence. They further noted that no consultation had taken place with them prior to the commencement of recruitment for the team.

5.4 AF clarified that the BIPS team has not yet been formally launched and is currently in the recruitment phase.

Action: Sally Hill and Amy Froggat, as representatives of the BIPS team, are to attend the next quarterly meeting to provide an introduction and overview of the team's role and responsibilities.

Staff Networks Update

DAWN – Amy Froggat (AF)

6.1 AF announced that she would be stepping down from her role as the DAWN National Lead, with Hannah Harding assuming the position from 19 May 2025. AF expressed gratitude to all colleagues in the forum for their ongoing support and collaboration with DAWN.

6.2 AF reported that DAWN held its first Annual General Meeting (AGM) in March, attended by 130 individuals in person and a further 40 online. Attendees shared a wide range of lived experiences, including visual impairments, mental health conditions and physical disabilities. Feedback indicated that participants felt included and empowered, comfortable in expressing their authentic selves.

6.3 AF confirmed that the 2025 DAWN survey had been finalised. Notable findings included a significant increase in participation from prison staff, with over 50% of responses originating from prison establishments. Additionally, there has been a rise in managers seeking support to facilitate inclusive conversations on workplace adjustments.

6.4 The Chair formally thanked AF for her collaborative efforts with DAWN, praising her passionate and innovative leadership throughout her tenure as National Lead.

RISE

6.5 A written update from RISE is to be provided separately.

PiPP – Lucas Hall (LH)

6.6 LH advised that he would be moving to a new role within the Disparities Unit, joining the LGBT Inclusion Team. Peter Upton will take over the PiPP role from the following week. LH thanked all colleagues for their support and collaboration during his time with the PiPP team.

6.7 LH shared that four successful events were held during LGBT History Month in February 2025. Plans are underway to replicate these for Pride Month in June 2025, including both regional attendance and virtual events throughout the month.

6.8 LH reported that in-person member socials were held in London, Cardiff, and Liverpool, with further dates to be released soon. Efforts are being made to ensure communications such as posters reach all colleagues, particularly those in prison establishments.

6.9 The Band-2 Workshop has been approved by the Gateway Board for a three-month pilot in London prisons. Following the pilot, a strategy will be developed for a potential national rollout.

6.10 A new forum has been established for trans, non-binary, and gender diverse staff members. This space is intended to offer peer support and a platform for communication among colleagues with similar identities.

6.11 The Chair expressed thanks and appreciation to LH for his significant contributions to the forum and his positive impact while leading PiPP.

6.12 POA colleagues also extended their gratitude to both AF and LH for their contributions and collaborative work within the forum.

Meeting Ended

The Next Meeting is set for Monday 7 July 2025

POA Equalities Sub-Whitley Meeting Monday 7 July 2025

Attendees:

HMPPS

Francis Stuart (Chair)	Head of HMPPS Employee Relations
Derek Stanton (DS)	Senior Employee Relations Lead
Hannah Harding (HH)	HMPPS DAWN (Disability, Advocacy & Well-being Network) National Lead
Harriet Dale (HD)	Workforce Statistics & Analysis
Alana Ajani (AA)	Head of Diversity and Inclusion Team
Islam Ahmed (IA)	HMPPS Racial Inclusion & Striving for Equality (RISE) Staff Network National Lead
Kate Walker (KW)	Head of Strategy, Prioritisation and Business Development • Behaviour Intervention & Practical Support (BIPS)
Emma Dunkerley (ED)	Transforming Culture- Strategy, Planning and Performance (BIPS)
Kency Soko (KS)	Employee Relations

POA

Sarah Rigby	NEC National Officer
Geoff Willetts	NEC National Officer
Angela Montgomery	Full-Time Officer
Ian Carson	NEC National Officer
Jackie Marshall	NEC National Officer

Apologies

Philip Hannant	NEC National Officer
Peter Upton (PU)	PiPP National Lead

1. Welcome and Apologies – Derek Stanton (DS)

1.1 Apologies were noted as above

2. Minutes of last meeting – Derek Stanton (DS)

2.1 POA Colleagues to be provided with longer to agree previous minutes as a true record.

3. Matters Arising - Actions Log – Derek Stanton (DS)

3.1 **Action 1:** POA Colleagues advised their concerns of this action were around staff who have been subject to a reasonable adjustment due to having an alternative role for two years then being advised to do a fitness test if they would like to return to the prison officer roles despite never being originally subject to a fitness test. Derek advised he has reached out to relevant colleagues and will provide an updated response to POA Colleagues.

Disability Leave: TU colleagues queried the wording used around disability leave, they requested clarification around the policy on disability leave to attend as there seems to be contradicting wording used. Derek advised he further investigate on this and feedback to colleagues on this forum.

Standing Agenda items

4. Disparities Unit Update – Alana Ajani (AA)

4.1 AJ advised the team is now at full capacity, with specialists now in place for all the areas Race, LGBT and Disability. They have been in post around 4-6weeks of which they have been working on their priorities on things they will proactively seek to improve. The Equalities Road Map should be

ready in September of which can be shared with colleagues in this forum.

4.2 We have now completed the recruitment for professional standards external advisory board. This will be a group made up of external members from private and public sector etc. This group will be to hold accountability on what will be done regarding to professional standards and diversity and inclusion more broadly.

4.3 Questions in advance pilot: This looks at testing out the process of providing candidates with questions 5-days before the interview and how this impacts on their interviews. This pilot has now concluded, and a decision will be made as to whether this can be expanded.

4.4 The Welsh Language Scheme is now complete and has been submitted to the Welsh commissioner for review and approval before publication.

5. Diversity and Inclusion Data Update – Harriet Dale (HD)

5.1 Harriet spoke to the slides on partial retirement.

Staff Networks Update

DAWN – Hannah Harding (HH)

6.1 Hannah has recently taken over at the end of May as the new national chair for DAWN. She has currently been organising her DAWN Strategy for the coming years and focusing on HMPPS staff priorities for DAWN. The staff network strategy should be available by the middle of next month for DAWN.

RISE - Islam Ahmed (IA)

6.2 Islam has recently taken over as the new chair for RISE. RISE is currently in the process of finalising the business plan to be able to share with colleagues in this forum. RISE is looking at areas where they can increase their exec committee regionally in order to gain support from prisons and local areas. RISE still has low visibility however, permission for their first newsletter has been granted and should be issued this week. They are focusing mainly on developing their SharePoint in order to create visibility nationally for everyone.

PiPP – Peter Upton (PU)

6.3 A written update has been requested to share with colleagues.

Additional Item

7. BIPS Team Introduction and Overview - Kate Walker (KW) / Emma Dunkerley (ED)

7.1 KW is the head of strategy prioritisation and business development within BIPS. ED is the head of delivery and intervention planning within BIPS.

7.2 BIPS was officially launched in February this year. BIPS has the responsibility of working closely with colleagues in TUBU and Disparities Unit. When the frontline (prisons, probation, approved premises, headquarters) needs support BIPS will be the team unless its specialist.

7.3 BIPS works with 10 features of culture which means their work is evidence based. BIPS are very proud of offering a proactive and responsive intervention. They ensure that everything is bespoke, as they are not an off the shelf intervention offer. BIPS ensures every team they work with will have something based on the need they go to BIPS for.

7.4 They spoke to the below slides which provide a more detailed outlook on BIPS strategy.



BIPS overview PC
02.07.2025.pptx

POA Items

8. Trade Union Oversight of BAEM promotion processes

8.1 TU colleagues raised this following the statistical data shared across the civil service including HMPPS showing that promotion prospects are significantly less for black applicants when compared to white applicants. TU colleagues wondered if this is something HMPPS has concerns about.

8.2 Alana advised that there is an action which has been taken by RACE champions to increase the promotion prospects and reduce the disparity. The aim is to improve this over a 12month period. This is one of the reasons for the launch of Elevate which is a 12-week programme specifically for Black, Asian or ethnic minority candidates to take them to the brink of promotion. This was launched two-weeks ago in the London area including masterclasses, panel sessions, placements and exposure to senior leaders. This will end on the 17th of September.

8.3 They are also looking at the mechanics of the interview process such as, questions in advance, making sure our panels are diverse, with systems such as a diverse panel database where ethnic minority people can put themselves forward to sit on a panel.

9. Update on Sexual Harassment Training

9.1 TU colleagues were requesting an update on the rollout of sexual harassment training across HMPPS and whether staff will be provided with the opportunity to take part in that training.

9.2 Alana advised the training video is going through its final stages of clearance. The aim is for leaders to take it up as their responsibility to upscale their staff. Should there be a need for additional engagement AA and her team will be on hand.

10. Analysis of Reasonable Adjustments within the MoJ and Prisons and Probation.

10.1 TU colleagues were requesting the attendance of MOJWAS colleagues to inform on the progress currently taking place or the issues being raised by governors. TU colleagues overall requesting an update on the work currently being undertaken.

11. Sanitary Products

11.1 TU colleagues stated this was discussed at conference. They were requesting the policy details regarding sanitary products for staff. Derek advised he had been in touch with Alison Clarke who is leading on this and DS stated there was a notice put out to governors regarding sanitary products. Derek shared that he has the documents on this and will share with colleagues. DS advised the document states there should always be a sufficient supply for staff requiring sanitary products, this is a must-do for governors.

11.2 Document regarding sanitary products: [2 June 2025 - Sanitary Products](#)

Meeting Ended

POA Equalities Sub-Whitley Meeting Wednesday 1 October 2025

Attendees:

HMPPS

Francis Stuart (Chair)	Head of HMPPS Employee Relations
Derek Stanton (DS)	Senior Employee Relations Lead
Hannah Harding (HH)	HMPPS DAWN (Disability, Advocacy & Well-being Network) National Lead
Islam Ahmed (IA)	HMPPS Racial Inclusion & Striving for Equality (RISE) Staff Network National Lead
Kate Walker (KW)	Head of Strategy, Prioritisation and Business Development • Behaviour Intervention & Practical Support (BIPS)
Priscilla Wong (PW)	Head of Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Programmes and MoJ Workplace Adjustment Service
Tony Mansour (TM)	Deputy Head of the Disparities Unit Team
Peter Upton (PU)	PiPP National Lead
Kency Soko (KS)	Employee Relations

POA

Sarah Rigby	NEC National Officer
Angela Montgomery	Full-Time Officer
Ian Carson	NEC National Officer
Jackie Marshall	NEC National Officer
Mick Pimblett	NEC National Officer

Apologies

Philip Hannant	NEC National Officer
Geoff Willetts	NEC National Officer
Harriet Dale	Workforce Statistics & Analysis

1. Welcome and Apologies – Francis Stuart (FS)

1.1 Apologies were noted as above

2. Minutes of last meeting (7 July 2025) – Francis Stuart (FS)

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising - Actions Log – Derek Stanton (DS)

3.1 **Action 1:** DS advised he is still investigating regarding the review of the policy following the suspension of the annual fitness test. DS has shared current findings with POA colleagues, once feedback and a clear position regarding this has been established DS will hold a bespoke meeting with POA colleagues to discuss further. POA colleagues enquired if this was regarding the fitness test being implemented between movement on Bands. FS advised before the suspension of the fitness test there was a policy that spoke on individuals doing a fitness test when they have been regraded for health reasons or before they return to their prison officer role. POA colleagues queried this especially the expectation that colleagues take the test alongside new recruits. FS added there has been a further review which led to the pause of the fitness test with certain parts being kept and some not. FS highlighted the importance of finding out what is happening within that space and what will the final policy be. POA colleagues advised that the policy does not speak on colleagues having to do the fitness test what is currently happening is now discrimination against people with disabilities as they are only regraded under the Equality Act under disability. POA colleagues stated this policy has not been negotiated on or consulted on. It was a letter shared with POA colleagues, and no consultation took place regarding this. POA colleagues shared frustrations on behalf of their members as the time limit of 2-years has lapsed and they would appreciate a concrete answer in

order to resolve this.

Action: FS to liaise with policy holder to hold a bespoke meeting with POA colleagues to discuss the issues around the fitness testing policy and discuss issues raised above.

3.2 **Action 3:** Hannah advised the correct team to take this forward would be MOJWAS or SSCL and to contact John Gleeson as the head of MOJWAS.

Standing Agenda items

4. Disparities Unit Update – Tony Mansour (TM)

4.1 TM reported that the team is now fully staffed, with 20 full-time equivalent employees, including six disparities consultants. The team structure comprises senior disparities consultants, each supported by specialists responsible for specific protected characteristic areas. Priority workstreams have been established and will be integrated into the Disparities Unit Roadmap, which is scheduled for launch in November.

4.2 TM proceeds to detail the team's four designated Workstream Areas:

1. **Preventing Sexual Harm in Women** – Esther Gibney-Hulme leads this workstream. Her principal focus is the implementation of the Worker Protection Act, with ongoing development in the assessment of reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of employees. Ms Gibney-Hulme has collaborated closely with the Ministry of Justice to update sexual harassment guidance and enhance the provisions of support following incidents of sexual harassment within HMPPS. The team has prioritised education and training to improve awareness, knowledge, and understanding across the organisation. Additionally, they have been analysing disciplinary and conduct processes and associated data, in partnership with the Senior Disparities Analysis Lead, to identify areas for improvement.
2. **Race and Ethnicity** – The priority within this workstream is to diversify senior leadership across HMPPS, continuing the national inclusion priority. A pilot scheme, Elevate, was conducted in the London region, providing a series of career development sessions. These sessions included guidance from senior civil servants, such as Sarah Coccia, specifically for ethnic minority staff working in prison and probation roles, to support their progression.
3. **Improving Allyship** – An allyship strategy has been developed and is currently undergoing the clearance process.
4. **Reducing Racial Disparity in Use of Force** – This workstream addresses the use of force for people in prison and children in custody. Data collected indicate the presence of racial disparity; however, it does not necessarily suggest racism within any particular site. The established principle is to thoroughly investigate any disparity, seeking either an explanation or, where none is found, implementing change to address the issue.

4.3 TM reported that the flagship priority within the area of disability is the enhancement of access to workplace adjustments for all staff across HMPPS. This initiative is led by Suzanne Bean, Senior Disparities Consultant for Disability. TM explained that efforts are centred on refining workplace adjustment processes, managing and developing confidential communication channels, empowering line manager discretion, and considering occupational health recommendations. TM noted that substantial work is ongoing in these areas, all of which will be consolidated into a comprehensive disability action plan.

4.4 TM informed attendees that the current promotion of the people survey aims to establish baseline data, specifically relating to questions on reasonable adjustments and staff confidence in their effectiveness when implemented.

LGBT+

4.5 TM reported that the primary focus for the Disparities Unit has centred on the HMPPS response to the recent Scottish minister's Supreme Court ruling. The team has been actively engaged in coordinating the Equality and Human Rights Commission consultation response on behalf of HMPPS. TM emphasised that the team would collaborate with regional teams to ensure that any changes and new national policies arising from the ruling are effectively communicated and fully understood across the organisation.

Action: TM to distribute the Worker Protection Act video resource to POA colleagues to support their understanding.

4.6 POA colleagues requested access to the Youth Custody Service (YCS) estate training materials regarding PAVA, specifically in relation to addressing disparity. TM confirmed that he would investigate the availability of this training material for colleagues and provide feedback in due course.

5. Diversity and Inclusion Data Update – Harriet Dale (HD)

5.1 HD provided the PowerPoint and information for colleagues.

Staff Networks Update

6. DAWN – Hannah Harding (HH)

Membership

6.1 HH reported on the current membership figures since the release of the membership form on 8 August. As of close of play on 24 September, there were a total of 1,873 responses across all three networks. Specifically for DAWN, membership stood at 926 members, with an additional 568 allies, resulting in a combined total of 1,494 members and allies. HH noted that this figure had further increased by 25 applications as of 24 September.

6.2 HH highlighted that the four regions with the highest sign-up rates were London, East Midlands, West Midlands, and Yorkshire. Conversely, the areas identified with the lowest sign-up rates across all three networks were: youth custody estate, long-term high security estate, south-west prisons, and the women's estate. HH stated that a deep dive would be conducted to investigate the underlying reasons for the low sign-up numbers in these areas.

6.3 HH confirmed that there are currently 16 area leads in post, with two additional leads scheduled to join for the Yorkshire and Humber area. There remain 17 vacancies, the majority of which are within prisons. HH explained that the few vacancies in probation are primarily due to area leads leaving for further education or other opportunities.

Network Priority Update

6.4 HH informed the meeting that, in an effort to boost awareness and engagement with the DAWN network, all new promotional materials have been available on the one-stop shop since July. She stated that discussions are ongoing with HMP Leyhill printshop regarding the possibility of professionally printing two posters and a leaflet for wider distribution throughout establishments and offices.

DAWN Focus Group

6.5 HH announced that the first DAWN focus group is scheduled to take place on Monday, 6th. She explained that this session will be open to all DAWN members and allies, providing an opportunity for them to express their views on the future direction of the network.

Addressing disability and discrimination

6.6 HH reported that the predominant theme identified within DAWN relates to workplace adjustments, specifically the use and implementation of workplace adjustments passports. She highlighted the intention to raise awareness among line managers regarding the circumstances under which a passport should be considered and the appropriate threshold for its use. As an example, HH noted that some requests for workplace adjustments passports have been declined due to demands for medical evidence of a disability before a reasonable adjustment is made. She clarified that such physical proof is not a requirement for reasonable adjustments to be implemented.

7. RISE - Islam Ahmed (IA)

7.1 IA reported that the RISE network continues to advance its four key priorities: strengthening the network by increasing membership, fostering allyship, developing a clear and effective communication strategy, and supporting member development. Efforts remain focused on consolidating the network's foundation and expanding its reach.

7.2 IA informed attendees that a dedicated SharePoint site has been developed to serve as a central hub for members. This platform is currently under executive review and pending sign-off. Once approved, members will be able to access updates and resources online. Additionally, new promotional materials have been produced, comprising a leaflet with an attached poster, as well as a new members' pack designed to facilitate engagement and provide essential information.

7.3 IA highlighted the creation of a framework to support policy development within the Disparities Unit, specifically focusing on safe spaces. Plans are in place to host the first national safe space meeting in the coming week, with the aim of gathering insights on national concerns from local regions. IA emphasised that feedback from these sessions will be relayed to civil service unions and expressed the intention for such meetings to become a regular occurrence to address emerging issues promptly.

7.4 IA noted that the membership form has been distributed, although current membership figures are below expectations. IA attributed this to recent changes, including some resignations and the onboarding of new members, and proposed a nationwide campaign to increase uptake and support across all regions. The cultural awareness workshop continues to be delivered; however, its frequency is limited due to a shortage of trained team members.

8. PiPP – Peter Upton (PU)

8.1 PU provided a comprehensive overview of the PiPP network's recent activities and outlined the key strategic priorities that are guiding its direction.

Network communications

8.1 PU reported the development of a one-stop shop SharePoint site, designed to provide members and allies with access to essential information, support, and updates. He also mentioned that consideration is being given to holding a PiPP Annual General Meeting (AGM). Plans are underway to navigate the release of the network policy; if an in-person AGM cannot be arranged, alternative formats will be explored to ensure the meeting takes place.

8.2 PU highlighted that, in September, the network hosted a series of listening and safe space events for Bi-Sexual Awareness Week, each attracting over 50 participants. There was notable cross-

collaboration with HMCTS Pride, resulting in approximately 78 attendees at a joint event. Efforts are ongoing to raise awareness of the staff networks at the point of recruitment. PU outlined the introduction of a PQiP session with the probation service, offering new PQiP recruits a monthly 30-minute forum to discuss challenges and support needs. The network intends to establish similar sessions for prison officers, with a recruitment drive commencing at New Bold and subsequently expanding to all UK training facilities for prison officers.

Empowering PiPP network committee

8.3 PU reported that all area and local lead induction materials have recently been refreshed and are currently progressing through the sign-off process. Input from the executive committee and LGBT+ champions has contributed to improved collaboration in creating safe spaces and awareness packages. Four new area leads have been onboarded across the UK. PU confirmed that his own position has been extended until the end of the financial year (April).

Developing with pride, leadership and learning for inclusive excellence

8.4 PU announced the creation of a Trans Voices Group, established following the Supreme Court ruling. This group provides a safe space for trans and non-binary colleagues to share experiences and challenges. Feedback received so far is informing the network's support and communication strategies.

8.5 PU stated that the network has contributed to the development of a transgender and non-binary awareness package for line managers, produced in close collaboration with the Disparities Unit and BIPS. This package will be submitted to the learning gateway board. An additional package on intersex awareness, including information about intersex and the support required, is scheduled for release on 26 October, coinciding with Intersex Awareness Day.

8.6 PU reported that the Band-2 workshop was resubmitted to the gateway board but did not pass on this occasion. Amendments will be made before it is resubmitted for final sign-off and approval.

8.7 PU shared that the network is working with LGBT+ champion Sally Hill to explore the possibility of launching an LGBT+ podcast. There has been significant interest in this initiative, which is expected to benefit both members and allies through valuable conversations.

Additional Item

9. Behaviour Intervention and Practical Support (BIPS) Update - Kate Walker (KW)

9.1 KW reported that BIPS is currently operating at 99% resourcing capacity. The team consists of a collective of Band-8 delivery leads who have been assigned notional regional allocations, aligning with the AED teams. KW clarified that the term 'notional' refers to relationship building within the team, ensuring that each AED has a designated point of contact within BIPS.

9.2 KW explained that BIPS is designed as a bespoke service rather than a standardised product, toolkit, or awareness package. Support is provided on the basis of referrals; for example, if a governor approaches BIPS regarding a specific group within their establishment, BIPS will conduct a tailored analysis to identify issues and determine how best to support, upskill, and enable the establishment to address matters related to culture, professional standards, and behaviours.

9.3 KW outlined that the team has now begun to divide its work into three distinct areas. Firstly, 'Shape Standard', which focuses on defining the professional standards expected of colleagues across HMPPS, aligning these with the Civil Service Code and HMPPS values, and establishing clear daily expectations for prison service staff; secondly, 'Shape Behaviours', which aims to clarify what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable conduct, distinguishing between clear corruption and

general professional standards, and fostering open dialogue, reflection, and the capacity to challenge inappropriate behaviour so that staff are aware of and feel empowered to use appropriate mechanisms; and thirdly, 'Shape Expectations', which is geared towards delivering practical support through the development of training packages, such as those for managing difficult conversations and procedural justice, to further equip staff in their roles.

9.4 KW reported that BIPS provides practical support in situations where there are perceived concerns regarding the integrity of recruitment boards. To address these perceptions of wrongdoing, BIPS members have acted as independent participants during both the sifting and interview stages of recruitment panels. KW noted that this intervention has been implemented in several areas where there were previously concerns about fairness and transparency, often described as operating under a 'done-deal' scenario. Following BIPS involvement, the recruitment process and its credibility have been viewed more positively by staff.

9.5 KW stated that BIPS is currently examining staff perceptions regarding fairness in complaints and investigations. This review will focus on the application of complaints procedures, investigation processes, and grievance management, as well as the fairness of any awards made as a result. The aim is to ensure that staff feel confident in the transparency and impartiality of these processes.

10. MOJWAS Update – Priscilla Wong (PW)

10.1 PW reported that she has been leading MOJWAS since the end of April. A comprehensive review of the service has been completed, resulting in numerous action points. The existing service offer, established in October of the previous year, remains unchanged. PW confirmed that efforts are being made to progress the Rademaker recommendations, specifically recommendation three. The team is currently reviewing the procedures for workplace adjustments, with a focus on resolving inconsistencies in managerial discretion, ensuring recommendations from occupational health and workplace adjustment specialists are not disregarded, and enhancing confidential channels for the assessment of medical information and the communication of adjustments.

10.2 PW advised that MOJWAS has initiated an audit of cases managed since the inception of the service. This audit is driven by a funding review, aiming to establish an effective evaluation process and ensure appropriate allocation of resources. PW emphasised the necessity of developing a clear protocol for case evaluation, in line with the Rademaker recommendations. She noted that the current case management system is inadequate, as it does not capture sufficient information to facilitate feedback and case review, highlighting the requirement for a more robust and fit-for-purpose system.

10.3 PW confirmed that support has been secured for the development of a youth case management system. A Higher Executive Officer (HEO) will engage with demand managers to scope the system's development and address required functionalities. Additionally, PW reported that the position of Head of MOJWAS has been advertised and the application sifting process is currently underway. She expressed hope that the role will be successfully filled by the end of October.

10.4 The Chair addressed colleagues' concerns regarding the current attendance policy. Staff have noted that the policy lacks clarity and is not sufficiently helpful with respect to disability leave, as individuals are often instructed to use annual or sick leave rather than disability leave. For example, uncertainty arose over the appropriate type of leave for staff undergoing chemotherapy treatment. PW referenced [His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service | Disability leave requests \(HMPPS Connect\)](#) which states:

"Disability leave should not be used to cover periods of sickness absence. It should be used for people who would otherwise be in work but who aren't because they have to attend appointments/treatments relating to their disability."

This has been verified with HR and encompasses treatments such as chemotherapy.

Action: FS is tasked with contacting Megan Taylor, Louise Alexander, and HR Policy to formally highlight concerns about the wording of the current attendance policy. FS should refer specifically to the relevant section of the policy and communicate that the existing language is considered unhelpful, as it may hinder staff from appropriately accessing and utilising disability leave.

POA Items

None were raised for this meeting.

Meeting Ended

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES

National Committee for Mental Health Care Services Annual Report 1/1/25 – 31/12/25

Introduction

Since the last POA Conference in 2025, pay has been finalised and backdated. Scotland has a two-year pay deal, with an indexation formula for the second year. The pay settlement in England/Wales/Northern Ireland is a one-year deal. In February 2026, the Government agreed to implement the PRB recommendations and offer 3.3% to all grades of staff covered by Agenda for Change, together with a package of measures focussing on the Band 5 Nursing Grade. While in negotiations, both Ministers [Karin Smyth and Wes Streeting] and the Prime Minister expressed concerns about those on the lowest grade not being paid the living wage – but there has been no differential increase in pay based on the lower bands.

This is the first year of having a seat on the Staff Council and the issues of importance this year have been pay, safety at work in terms of the rising levels of violence that, in our sector, go hand in hand with inadequate staffing levels on wards, and the review of the Agenda for Change pay bands, which is linked to the new Nursing and Midwifery, and have eventually been signed off by the Minister. This has highlighted the pressure on the current JES, with the Staff Council urging trade unions to put representatives forward to become involved in the process. However this has proved problematic as managers on the ground have not been willing to release employees, and this is particularly true of clinicians who are essential to the process.

The issue of violence in the workplace has been ongoing, particularly in this sector, and the reporting of violence both from patients and colleagues continues to be a problem, as is the existence of up-to-date risk assessments and safe systems of work. This had led many of our members being both physically and psychologically damaged by work and with little support in terms of reasonable adjustments to enable them to continue working for their Employer.

Sexual and racial harassment continue to be issues for the NHS, and much work has been done in individual trusts with varying degrees of success in terms of encouraging staff to report and for action to be taken. It is recognised by the Employer that this will take time and that there needs to be better partnership working with trade unions for levels of violence to change. All of the above has led to increasing workloads for local officials, who are to be commended for the work they all do.

Angela Montgomery
Assistant General Secretary

MINUTES OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES **Wednesday 15th January 2025 at Ashworth Hospital**

Present:

Angela Montgomery	Chair
Phil Fairlie	Assistant General Secretary
Lorraine Lewis	Ashworth
Dave Whalley	Ashworth
Mark Lewin	Ashworth

Stuart Curry	Ashworth
Allan Connor	Carstairs
Garry McKendrick	Carstairs
David Allport	Rampton
Karen Henry	Rampton
Helen Whitaker	Minutes

1. Apologies:

Steve Gillan	General Secretary
Mark Fairhurst	National Chair
Dave Todd	Vice Chair
Mandy Isted	Broadmoor
Tim Ryan	Broadmoor

The Chair thanked Ashworth for their hospitality.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 31st October 2024:

Agreed subject to amendment from Carstairs regarding pay deal.

3. Matters Arising:

Carstairs feedback – amend 24/25 to 23/24.

The Chair confirmed the next meeting will be held at Broadmoor on 10th April. The July and October meetings will be held at Linden House.

AP1. Sort invites to prison area meetings for Ashworth, Broadmoor and Rampton – this has not happened yet.

AP2. Meeting with Carol Andrews has taken place. North Nottinghamshire Trust are reviewing facility arrangements.

4. NHS Staff Side Council:

The Chair reported that the POA are now full members of the Staff Council. There has been a tentative discussion about pay, unions have rejected the offer. There is a preliminary meeting regarding pay in 2 weeks.

AP1. HW to check Staff Council meeting dates and send to Lorraine Lewis.

5. Pay:

PF reported that we have a full seat at STUC now we have secured one in England. Unresolved issues from previous pay year ongoing. Pay for this year has been agreed by all unions but won't be paid in April.

The Chair asked what is the collective view on pay for England 8/10%?

Ashworth's view is the only problem with that is the lower paid staff pay more tax and pension and last time came out £5 less after pay rise.

Discussed bank staff not getting sick pay for workplace injuries so they won't jump in to help staff.

AM will raise the position of bank staff pay negotiations with the staff council.

Ashworth took this to annual conference 2 years ago and will be taking it back again this year as nothing has been done.

6. Annual Conference Motions/AGM:

Ashworth's conference motions have been agreed at a branch meeting, just need wording and submitting.

- Bank Pay
- Bank Staff T&Cs
- Lead pay index linked like North of the border.

Rampton's suggested motions are bank and Membership. Membership would need a rule change motion.

Membership – we need to identify where people work as we will probably need to ballot on this year's pay offer.

Suggested a rule change motion so branch meetings can be held on Teams over multiple sites.

Suggestions for speakers for the AGM – Health Minister, senior official from NMC, someone from the TUC, someone from Broadmoor.

AP2. AM to contact speakers.

7. Pension Challenge:

AM reported that England have all responded, only a couple outstanding for health.

Carstairs asked why they are being treated differently as Scotland are 12 months behind England?

8. Current Position at Each Hospital:

Carstairs:

- **Sickness** - Hospital Wide - December 2024 is 8.10% (a decrease from November 2024 9.22%). December 2024: Short Term 2.27%. Long Term 5.83%. The rolling year average is 7.55%, (compared to December 2023 which was 7.42%). Nursing focus - The absence rate for December 2024 is 11.24% (a decrease from 13.7% in November) December 2024: Short Term 3.29%. Long Term 7.95% (both long and short term absence has decreased from previous month).
- **Recruitment and Retention** – Advert went out before Christmas for 10 nursing assistants (male hopefully), this was over and above our current compliment. 100 applied with interviews within next couple of weeks. Director of Security post that was previously interviewed for, was not filled.
- **Finances** – Continues to be a lot of scrutiny in this area and currently slightly overspent however hopeful to be break even by the end of March. 3% uplift for next year.
- **Operational Issues** – The security refresh project continues over budget and behind schedule however there is a hope it will completed by the end of February/March. New 'Once for Scotland' NHS Scotland Workforce Policies – Phase 2.2 – Due to be launched with staff and

managers in February 2025. Looking at the RWW of minus an hour commencing in April 2025. Will start the engagement sessions around a new shift pattern which will commence this month and likely to take 9/12 months however requires to be in place for April 2026 to incorporate the RWW minus 1.5 hours and working 36 hours per week. Concerns around the use of CCTV so trying to work through that. Issues with the PAA system however hopefully these have been resolved. Challenges continued over the festive period with DTC. (Accumulation of sickness/high clinical activity).

- **Membership Issues** – 5 staff suspended a couple of weeks before Christmas, numerous disciplinary and investigations currently taking place.
- **General Updates** – Full seat given to the POA at STAC on the back of the national seat being obtained. Scoping exercise for a female service should be completed the end of January.

Rampton:

- Organisational change – structure along same lines as Ashworth and Broadmoor. Site managers going from Band 8 to Band 7.
- No overtime – everyone has to go on the Bank instead.
- Since before Christmas 6 wards have lone worked. CQC, NHS England and HSE have been brought in.
- Over Christmas there was a one-off payment £100 for bands 5-7, £120 for HCAs, for staff to come in, other staff already rostered on don't get the payment. Still had 6 wards lone working.
- Sickness 12%.
- 2 grievances against management.
- 3 disciplinaries.
- Recruitment and retention rolling programme. Retire and return logging as new staff.
- 16M in debt.
- Bank – PPE teams, if working on bank not covered on insurance but covered on shift.

Ashworth:

- Membership up.
- Cases – 12 disciplinaries, 1 appeal against dismissal. Dismissal through sickness, 6 cases.
- Sickness across the Trust quite good at present, 9.8%, really low for the Trust.
- PARVA bombs set off in A&E, members affected. LL phoned Dave Todd for advice on the effects of PARVA.
- Meeting once a month with HR and staff side. LL raised forgotten kindness to staff.
- Just & Learning culture – emails sent by Trust at 4am on 23rd December, no thought given to people's feelings.
- 270 sites now under the MerseyCare banner, up from 240.
- Biggest issue at the moment is staff falling asleep on back to back obs.
- No recruiting anymore qualified staff, too many female staff, putting out male only adverts.
- Moved 29 females from high secure to medium secure, some are POA members, not happy!

9. Any Other Business:

None.

10. Date of Next Meeting:

Thursday 10th April 2025 at Broadmoor.

**MINUTES OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES
Wednesday 10th April 2025 at Broadmoor Hospital**

Present:

Steve Gillan	General Secretary
Angela Montgomery	Assistant General Secretary
Dave Todd	Vice Chair
Lorraine Lewis	Ashworth
Dave Whalley	Ashworth
Allan Connor	Carstairs
Garry McKendrick	Carstairs
Tim Ryan	Broadmoor
Sarad Tamang	Broadmoor

1. Apologies:

Mark Fairhurst	National Chair
David Allport	Rampton
Karen Henry	Rampton
Phil Fairlie	Assistant General Secretary
Helen Whitaker	NRO

The Chair thanked Broadmoor for their hospitality.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 15th January 2025:

Agreed.

3. Matters Arising:

None.

4. NHS Staff Side Council:

At Staff Council POA were welcomed as a full member and PDA as an observer member. There was an update on non-pay Afc matters. There is no progress regarding changes of terms and conditions or banding. The new job evaluation profiles for nursing and midwifery have not been signed off as yet. Staff Council were informed that this can't be signed off until the Minister agrees.

Pay 2024/2025 – The intermediate pay points for Band 8 staff were discussed and concerns were raised that additional points for this band had not come from the employer. FAQs are now available in respect of this.

A 3-year H&S plan had been requested by the trade unions which the employer had agreed to. There was ongoing work on violence and aggression at work and that further work would include sexual harassment and research on the suicide rate of health care workers.

EDIG (Equality and Diversity) Alice Sorby from the RCM was thanked for her contribution to this

working group. The issue of gender pay reporting was progressing well and NHS England had agreed that disability and race pay gap reporting would be one of the 6 priorities for the following year.

There was a presentation in relation to nursing and midwifery profiles and these were agreed.

It was reported there have been recent amendments to NHS pension arrangements with salary contributions being increased. This had resulted in some bands pay increases either being the same or less than the increase to pension contributions. The late pay award had made payments problematic.

Reports were submitted by Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland where the negotiations for pay are separate.

There is ongoing work being done about reviewing the current mileage rates for Afc staff.

- 4A. The Chief Operating Officer gave a short presentation welcoming her invitation to the NCMHCS meeting. She gave a commitment to support the POA and was pleased that the branch had been revived. She stated that he was very supportive of trade unions and would do what she could to galvanise trade union membership. In terms of retention, she advised the meeting that a 30% vacancy level had been improved upon, with the vacancy level for nurses being almost 0%. She acknowledged there were a number of younger staff that lacked maturity but the retention levels had increased but she stated she was concerned about experienced staff approaching retirement age. She gave a commitment to work with the POA and other trade unions in relation to induction and ongoing support for staff.

The Service Director also attended, she reaffirmed the organisations support of trade union membership and advised that the Trust would be looking solely to bank staff to fill overtime commitments.

5. Pay:

Pay 24/25 it was agreed that there was a need for a longer-term plan on pay by the Staff Council. The employer had previously committed to payment in April 2025. However, there had been slippage due to both the PRB and government decision making on the outcome being late. The trade unions made it clear that this was unsatisfactory and that they were concerned that decisions weren't being made in line with the financial year. There was a concern that low paid members had had temporary increases in April due to an increase in the living wage and then would get a later pay award. The view of the trade unions is that recruitment and retention would be impacted by this. It was agreed that everything would be done to ensure that Afc staff were paid at the correct time in April 2026.

In Scotland the meeting was advised that a 2 year pay deal was on offer with 4.25% for year 1 and 3.75% for year 2. This was currently being balloted upon by all trade unions.

6. Annual General Meeting:

It was noted that there are some motions to conference from healthcare branches which was welcomed and that a speaker from the regulatory board had been agreed.

7. Pension Challenge:

The meeting was advised that an email would be sent out about this to all branches.

8. Current Position at Each Hospital:

Carstairs:

- Sickness 12%
- Recruited 10 FTE's so they are currently overstaffed.
- Additional security to be rolled out.
- The reduction in working week by 30 minutes is being implemented. A number of engagement sessions regarding this took place over the last 4 weeks.
- Reviving the female service with phase 1 focusing on pre-trial and post court.

Broadmoor:

- A couple of disciplinaries which are being dealt with.
- The Trust have reduced the support for pension advice but this was being challenged.

It was noted that the POA has an arrangement with Chesterton Grant regarding pensions advice.

Ashworth:

- Sickness reduced from 11% to 9%.
- It has been difficult to recruit committee members whose numbers currently stand at 5. This was partly because a number of POA members on the committee had recently been promoted.
- The learning and just culture which revolved around reflective practice was being undermined with HR looking to dismiss staff.
- Currently 6 disciplinaries, 4 appeals with one staff member being dismissed.

Steve thanked all of those present for the work that they do for the POA and their members.

It was understood that Angela Sinclair had sent out contact details for POA merchandise for the committees to access.

9. Any Other Business:

A tribute was given to Andy Hogg for all the work that he had done for the POA.

10. Date of Next Meeting:

Wednesday 16th July at Linden House

**MINUTES OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES
Wednesday 16th July 2025 at Linden House****Present:**

Steve Gillan	Chair
Angela Montgomery	Assistant General Secretary
Dave Todd	Vice Chair
Dave Whalley	Ashworth
Allan Connor	Carstairs
Paul McKeever	Carstairs
David Allport	Rampton
Karen Henry	Rampton
Tim Ryan	Broadmoor
Helen Whitaker	Minutes

- 1. Apologies:**
Lorraine Lewis Ashworth – Annual Leave
Phil Fairlie Assistant General Secretary – Association Business
Mark Fairhurst National Chair – Association Business

- 2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 10th April 2025:**

Agreed as a true record.

- 3. Matters Arising:**

SG – Carstairs raised a question at the last meeting on the pension position for the Secure Hospitals. Phase 1 and 2 look to have been done, most people have had their injury to feelings payment. Should be no more delays in starting the next phase. Need to check the lists for secure hospitals and membership in Scotland and those cases can now progress.

- 4. NHS Staff Side Council – Response to AfC Unions:**

AM reported that at a meeting regarding pay ballots, no union is taking industrial action. Money has been put into non pay items. Most unions are not happy with the offer but have accepted it. Will discuss pay in August about where we are going with pay next year. Waiting for the Minister to sign off nursing and midwifery profiles. Review of numbers for every union to be submitted. Safety is an issue, got safety protocols in especially looking at sexual harassment. NHS England are on to this. Very clear they do not want to pay agency staff.

Ashworth and Rampton don't use agency staff due to security.

Ashworth only get offered overtime if the Trust can't get anyone else.

- 5. Pay:**

Covered under item 4.

- 6. Pension Challenge:**

Discussed under matters arising.

- 7. Current Position at Each Hospital:**

Carstairs:

Sickness: Hospital wide – June is 6.12% with short term 2.27% and long term 3.85%. For nursing the absence rate for June was 7.78%, short term 1.87%, long term 5.89%. Reduction in the past 3 months of around 2.3%.

Recruitment & Vacancies: Currently, on paper, minus 13 wte trained staff and minus 15 wte nursing assistants which is mainly down to the female service which starts next week, currently doing recruitment.

Operational Issues – The security upgrade project is almost complete and site acceptance testing period is due to commence on 21st July (this has recently been delayed).

New 'Once for Scotland' NHS Scotland Workforce Policies – Phase 2.2 – which was due to be launched in February 2025, have been delayed by the SG.

Work is ongoing in partnership around the RWW and a move to 36 hours from April 2026. We require to have the plan in place on paper and agreed by 1st October this year. Pretty difficult from a nursing perspective as we are looking at changing shift times and rotas etc. Management is keen that we have breaks and it is working time compliant as well.

Female Service – We are due to have phase 1 of a female service in place and operating by 21st July.

Pay Update – The pay offer for 2025/2026 of 8% approx. over 2 years. 4.25% for all Agenda for change staff in 2025/26 and 3.75% for 2026/27. It also incorporates an inflation guarantee which confirms that the increase in pay each year of the deal will be at least 1 percentage point above the CPI inflation rate. Allowances and RRP's would increase in line with pay uplifts, was balloted on and accepted by all unions. This was included in the end of June pay and back money will be in the end of July wages.

Membership issues – Numerous disciplinary and investigations currently taking place. 5 staff, who have been suspended since December, their hearings are this week.

Broadmoor:

Membership 41, recruited 12, lost 4, 8 new members.

Put together with CEO an all staff email.

Working with Unite to get on next induction course.

Appears to be a push back on sickness.

Chief Operating Officer has agreed to speak at the POA's AGM next year.

Committee, Kevin acting sec, had a motorbike accident and won't be back until December. Committee a bit light at the moment.

Ongoing issue with availability of ASCOM system, no central alarm system.

Female Services – enhanced medium secure removed. No staff made redundant, absorbed into other wards.

Ashworth:

Sickness remains static 9.5/9.6%, main reason for sickness, stress and anxiety and musculoskeletal.

Membership sitting at 540/550. Planning on buying merchandise and going out actively recruiting.

Recruited one committee member.

Push back on sickness, vacancies improved on qualified nurses.

Actively recruiting male HCA's.

4 disciplinaries ongoing.

Rationalisation of bank pay introduced at beginning of July.

Rampton:

Sickness extremely high, staff morale very low.

On nights had up to 9 wards lone working.

1 suspension, 8 sickness, 3 investigations, 1 appeal, 1 appeal lost, 2 staff on fact finding.

Ballot box is out for the pay award, good response of members coming through.

Had a meeting with the Chief Executive last week about blame culture, said it came from above, Department of Health and Social Care.

8. Any Other Business:

SG asked if the committee are content to invite Leanne MacGee to speak at the AGM next year. This was agreed.

Action: AM to send letter formally inviting Leanne to conference.

DT NEC elections coming up. Make sure your members vote, timetable on POA circular 43/25.

DT High Security meeting in August, will get Carol to send out invites to secure hospitals.

9. Date of Next Meeting:

Thursday 30th October 2025

**THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES
Friday 12th December 2025 via Teams**

Present:

Steve Gillan	Chair
Mark Fairhurst	POA National Chair
Phil Fairlie	Assistant General Secretary
Dave Todd	Vice Chair
Lorraine Lewis	Ashworth
Allan Connor	Carstairs
Garry McKendrick	Carstairs
David Allport	Rampton
Tim Ryan	Broadmoor
Kathryn Fairlie	Minutes

1. Apologies:

Angela Montgomery – AGS – Annual Leave
Dave Whalley- Ashworth - No longer works Fridays
Karen Henry – Rampton – Annual Leave

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting 16 July 2025:

Agreed as a true record.

3. Matters Arising:

We ask Conference and the NEC to support Mersey Care Branch to campaign and negotiate with the Mersey Care NHS Trust equivalent terms and conditions for those members on Bank Contracts (zero hours), with our members on substantive contracts.

Motion 77/25

We ask Conference and the NEC to support Mersey Care Branch to campaign and negotiate with the Mersey Care NHS Trust to agree secure hospital lead is index-linked.

SG – Noted that the motions were carried at the annual conference, and they will be difficult tasks, but an update/report back will be given at Conference 2026

8. AGM/Annual Conference Motions 2026:

SG reminded all present to give thought to preparing conference motions for Annual Conference 2026

9. Current Position at Each Hospital:

Broadmoor:

Tim Ryan gave a report for the Broadmoor branch:-

There was one ongoing disciplinary case, The initial report is awaited, although Tim believed that it would go forward to a panel.

There was an outstanding Improving Work Life appeal which was scheduled for the following week.

There was a case of a Retired/Returned to work member of staff. They had retired then returned on a part-time contract. The employer has tried to insist that the new part-time contract was time-limited and not a permanent contract. The union disagree and has asked Thompsons to look at the paperwork.

The branch now has 45 members, which is another slight but very welcome increase. The POA have updated its profile on the employer's intranet. They also now have a dedicated notice board. They have been allocated a time slot with the recruits during their induction in the Learning & Development Centre. This will start in January 2026, it will be a generic introduction to the trade unions in the health trust; however, the POA will have a desk there for the whole day to encourage the new staff to join. Tim reported that he had now managed to get a laptop allocated to the POA, although he still did not have a power lead for it.

Tim reported that there will be an election for a new committee member and a treasurer. Thankfully, Kevin, the Branch Secretary, will return to work in the new year, after a long absence due to a motorbike accident.

He noted that he had been surprised that, when speaking to new members of staff, some did not know what a trade union was or what they did. SG noted that it was not a surprise, and it seemed to be prevalent in most workforces. He believed that it was a generational thing and many young workers had little or no knowledge of trade unions.

Dave Todd had to leave the meeting at this point, due to a prior arrangement.

Carstairs:

Allan Connor gave a report for the Carstairs branch:-

Sickness

October 2025 absence rate is 7.69%, a slight decrease from September 2025 and a decrease of 1.71% from October 2024. Nursing sickness is currently 9.04%

- Short-term absence: 1.38%
- Long-term absence: 6.34%

Recruitment & Vacancies

We are currently around 20-25 WTE down equally spread between trained/untrained staff, which is partially attributed to the opening of the female service. We are currently engaged in recruitment to eliminate these vacancies hopefully by January next year.

So far this year we have had 22 leavers YTD, a turnover of 3.03% during this financial year to date.

Operational Issues

New 'Once for Scotland' NHS Scotland Workforce Policies - Phase 3 soft launch was in November and will last for 3 months approx, these include: Adverse Weather • Alcohol and other Substance • Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) • Lone Working • Manual Handling • Menopause and Menstrual Health • Smoking and Vaping • Work-Related Driving • Work-Related Stress • Work-Related Violence and Aggression

Work is ongoing in Partnership around the RWW and a move to 36 hours from April 2026. We are currently carrying out engagement sessions in Partnership and an indicative ballot from a JSS perspective. Due to end 17th of December and we are hopeful it will remain a PPAA and 2 off option, with all staff on the same pattern, which will be the first time in 7-8 years.

Continue to have issues with daytime confinement and the issues surrounding this, around working in areas whilst short etc.

Raised the issue around reduced males around the site and it has been agreed that they will carry out male target recruitment.

Female Service

The new service opened on the 21st of July, it seems to be going to plan however really busy. Business case for a new bespoke building, however this is looking at around 2032 before a spade would hit the ground.

Membership

Numerous disciplinary, investigations currently taking place and 1 member suspended. Couple of members were dismissed at stage 3 hearings and another couple resigned for disciplinary reasons before they were sacked.

AOB

Ministerial Review a couple of weeks ago – which went fine from a partnership perspective. Issues with RCN – which Phil is dealing with, and we sent a letter of Complaint to HRD last week.

Ashworth:

Lorraine Lewis gave a report for the Ashworth branch:-

The sickness levels within Ashworth were extremely high. In fact, they were outliers, with the highest sick levels in the whole of the country. This has prompted the employer to start taking action against staff who were absent from work for long periods; in turn, this has resulted in a heavy, overwhelming workload for the branch. Dave, the branch secretary, now only worked three days a week. The working day sometimes started at 6am and finished at 9pm, in an effort to see members from all the shifts, including the night shift.

The Committee as a whole are really struggling with the workload and asked if the NCMHCS could meet more often, perhaps bi-monthly, instead of quarterly.

The ICB (Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board) were applying lots of pressure, attacking the terms and conditions of the staff in Ashworth, as they view them as unfair and not a 'level playing field' compared to the rest of the staff in the health services. This can be a reduction or removal of lead payment rates, being charged for parking etc.

There was an ongoing dispute with the Porters, the ICB wished to bring in a private company to cover the weekends, and the porters to only work Monday to Friday. (Weekends attracted a higher hourly rate). Whilst Lorraine could perfectly understand the pressures on healthcare trusts, she pointed out that Ashworth and Alder Hay children's hospital were the only two sites which managed their budgets and ended each financial year in the black.

In an effort to save money, the ICB had offered some voluntary redundancy packages. The branch is advising the staff not to take the packages, as they are at reduced rates. If redundancy becomes mandatory, the packages will be enhanced. The ICB wanted to get rid of all agency staff in the next 18 months and reduce banked staff by 10% year upon year. All this will be added pressure for the staff.

Lorraine reported the POA reps were working very long hours with limited facility time. She had spoken to Mr Todd, who has been supportive and given some good advice about managing diary commitments. But ultimately, the committee needed support.

GS thanked Lorraine. He did not think that holding more regular NCMHCS meetings would be productive for Ashworth. He felt that help and support should be worked out and tailored to their needs. He will speak to her outside the meeting to work out how best the committee could be helped and

supported through this difficult time. He asked her to write down her concerns, so that all the issues get consideration, and none are overlooked or forgotten about.

Rampton:

A written report was submitted by the Rampton branch:-

Sickness continues to be very high.

We have recruited new reps due to staff leaving/ retiring new members are shadowing

Health & safety

We have raised concerns re MSC issues in our female wards due to the soft paly chairs staff are sitting on for hour upon hour.

Lone working nights does not seem to be as bad at the minute

Cases

Extremely busy

3 non-patient contact – disciplinary

1 capability

1 disciplinary (alleged sleeping at night)

1 safeguarding (2 male staff outside a bedroom on observations of a female patient)

2 driver investigations (misuse of blue light and siren)

4 complaints made in relation to staff

1 grievance

6 sickness

1 police investigation

2 compliance

10. Any Other Business:

Mark Fairhurst took the opportunity to thank everyone present for the amazing work they do in the special hospitals. He understood what a challenging job they do and assured them that the POA would support them in any way it could. He did not wish anyone to work so hard that they would experience burnout. He asked that they always speak up and get all the help and support they needed. He was mindful of the rise in violence, which, given the nature of their patients, was incredibly dangerous. He thanked Tim for all his efforts at Broadmoor, bringing the branch numbers in the right direction. He wished everyone a very happy Christmas and hoped the Scottish contingent had a great Hogmanay.

Steve Gillan also thanked everyone for their efforts and said what a pleasure it is to work with such dedicated people. He reminded them never to suffer in silence and to always ask for support and help. They should never hesitate to raise any concerns. He wished everyone, and their loved ones, a happy Christmas and new year.

Phil Fairlie reiterated the sentiments expressed. He noted that it was always a pleasure to work with the Carstairs branch, they were always hardworking and the best-organised, pro-active branch in Scotland. He always enjoyed his time with them. He wished everyone a happy Christmas and a great Hogmanay.

11. Date of Next Meeting:

To be arranged.

WORKFORCE DELIVERY MODEL PROJECT

Annual Report 1/1/25 – 31/12/25

Workforce Development Model Annual Report 2025

WDM Update By MS Teams 8th April 2025.

Attendees.

Dave Todd – POA VC. Sarah Rigby – POA NEC. Andy Baxter – POA FTO. John Butler – WDM Project John Callan – WDM Project

The discussion focused on Tranche 5 of the workforce delivery model and the assumptions used to calculate staffing levels. Union representatives were clear from the outset that some of the foundations of the model are deeply problematic, particularly the continued reliance on ratios to determine staff numbers.

The conversation started with people hub resourcing, including bed watch and block leave admin. The model builds in a 30% uplift to cover ad hoc or unpredictable work. Where tasks can be measured, they're given a set time allocation; where they can't, they fall into that 30% allowance, alongside non-effective time.

The union's position was that hub work is constant and reactive — “firefighting” throughout the day — and that a flat 30% simply does not reflect reality. Management said the aim is to be transparent about how the model is constructed and that site visits allow for review. If there is clear evidence the 30% is insufficient, it can be increased, or more time can be attributed to specific tasks. The union argued that some hubs cannot function safely or effectively without an operational-grade presence. Management responded that governors can allocate operational staff under their freedoms, but this was challenged as effectively admitting the model doesn't properly account for need.

Segregation and safer custody were another flashpoint. Management stated that resource has been allocated to safer custody functions, but the union stressed that it's not just safer custody posts that require staffing. Segregation reviews, GOOD reviews, IMB sign-offs, return-to-normal-location planning, and high volumes of remanded adjudications all demand time and staff.

The ACCT process was described as particularly labour-intensive. There was frustration that increasing safety expectations — often driven by health and safety oversight — are not being matched with additional funding.

Management said the project is designed to demonstrate what can and cannot be delivered within current resources, providing evidence for future spending rounds. The union's counterargument was that unless the model explicitly acknowledges that more resource is required, there is little prospect of securing additional funding. The project was described by some as a paper exercise, especially given concerns that previously submitted documentation detailing residential officer duties had not been meaningfully reflected in the modelling and in the unions opinion the situation required a bottom up reprofile to account for all the additional work that has been layered onto wing duties and residential staff.

A major point of contention was the use of ratios to model staffing. In areas such as chapel, staffing numbers are driven primarily by prisoner headcount — for example, two staff for up to sixty prisoners, three above that.

Management said this was based on replicating what prisons currently do and that any model needs a clear driver. The union made it clear that ratios as a method of determining staffing levels are a red line. They argued this approach has failed in the past, ignores local risk, layout, regime complexity, and dynamic factors, and leads to a levelling-down effect similar to the damage done in benchmark 1.

Examples were given of prisons deploying more staff than the ratio would suggest because of risk. There were also concerns about Friday prayer services and alarm bell response capacity.

Management clarified that weekend chapel staffing is separate from Friday activity and that chapel staff are not part of alarm bell response, which is **layered** within patrol staffing. It was agreed that references to risk and layout must be added to the documentation.

Lone working was strongly opposed by the union. Management said some establishments already operate this way under risk assessments and safe systems of work, and that the model reflects existing practice rather than reducing numbers. The union maintained that formalising lone working increases exposure to risk, and just because something is already happening does not make it right.

The open estate was another area of concern. The model does not currently account for rising returns from open to closed conditions or the changing risk profile of the open estate population.

Management said prisons would be remodelled if populations increase and acknowledged that the workforce delivery model does not fully reflect shifting risk patterns. The union pointed out that previous reform approaches were based on resource following risk, and questioned where additional staffing would come from as the open estate risk expands.

Other issues included removal of physical education instructors in certain prisons, open estate prisoners remaining on units rather than attending work, staff wellbeing activities not being recognised, night staffing pressures, and unsocial hours worked by operational support grades. Management agreed to remove references to night-time flexible working and to provide clarity on ongoing work around unsocial hours.

The meeting closed with commitments to revisit specific points, review submitted task lists, and provide updates — but significant disagreement remains, particularly around the continued use of ratios as the backbone of the staffing model. The union agreed to again submit its comprehensive and detailed list of residential tasks.

Monthly WDM Meeting 12th August 2025. BY MS TEAMS

Attendees.

Dave Todd POA VC. Sarah Rigby POA NEC. Phil Hannant – POA NEC. Andy Baxter – POA FTO. Tom Head – WDM lead. Kate Carse – WDM Project. Derek Stanton – HMPPS ER.

This meeting focused heavily on Annex A and growing frustration about safety, credibility, and scope.

At the start, it was noted that time was limited under Annex A arrangements. An updated document format had been shared to allow track changes, and there was an offer to provide the workforce delivery model spreadsheet in Excel. A face-to-face session is scheduled for next week.

The union made it clear that violence and self-harm must be central to the discussion. They intend to attach significant data to their formal return and want clarity on exactly where resource for safety is being profiled within the model. The point was blunt: assaults are up 9%, self-harm is up 9%, and safety pressures are having a major operational impact — yet it is not obvious where that demand is reflected in staffing profiles and the union do not see any % uplift in resourcing as a response to immediate safety issues.

The statistics cited were stark. In the 12 months to March 2025 there were 30,846 assaults across prisons, up 9%. Of those, 20,570 were prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (also up 9%) and 10,568 were assaults on staff (up 7%). There were seven prison homicides in the 12 months ending June 2025, with historical annual figures typically ranging between zero and seven. Self-harm incidents reached a new peak in March 2025. The union's position was that these figures are in the public domain and available internally, so they should already be informing the modelling team, but it's as if the modelling team are oblivious to these facts.

There was also frustration that a previously submitted comprehensive list of residential officer tasks has not been properly addressed. It was acknowledged that current leads were not in post when it was submitted, but they committed to revisiting it. The union reiterated that residential work has not been properly profiled and that safety roles — including a dedicated safety post — appear to have been removed or are unclear within the structure.

The credibility of the workforce delivery model itself became a major flashpoint. The union argued that what began as a tool to support spending review bids now looks like “benchmarking 2” — another cost-driven exercise following on from benchmark 1.

The response was that the model helped defend the baseline during the spending review and avoided cuts experienced elsewhere. The union rejected that view, arguing that funding outcomes were driven more by external pressures and negative publicity than by the modelling work. More fundamentally, they said the model lacks credibility because it has not properly tracked or profiled actual work, instead starting from existing funding assumptions and working backwards.

Unsocial hours and potential movement of work to nights were raised next. The union wanted clarity, particularly around references to moving Band 3 staff to night duties. They asked where those staff would come from and when modelling of that impact would take place. The response was that this sits within a separate engagement process and would not be discussed in this forum. That was challenged as putting the union at a disadvantage, particularly if structural changes are being contemplated without joint modelling.

There was also confusion over wording suggesting that PGD had authority to “move people.” It was clarified that this referred to moving financial or budget resource, not physically redeploying staff. That wording will be corrected.

Key Work appearing in Annex A caused significant concern. The union said it was a surprise to see it included without substantive discussion. A previous letter had referenced it, but there have been no formal meetings about how it would be delivered under a revised model. At the same time, unsocial hours solutions are described as out of scope, despite also not having been discussed. The union described this as inconsistent — Key Work is included in Annex A, but unsocial hours is excluded, with no clear explanation.

There was particular concern about how any revised model would be introduced in the open estate, especially given the changing prisoner profile and rising risk levels. The lack of detailed delivery planning was described as confusing and worrying.

The meeting closed with a recap: the main substantive issues requiring further discussion are Residential, Activities, Safety, and Key Work. However, the tone made clear that underlying all of this is a bigger issue — whether the model genuinely reflects operational reality, particularly around rising violence and self-harm, or whether it remains disconnected from frontline pressures.

Annex A - WDM Meeting Linden House 20th August 2025.

Attendees.

John Butler – WDM Project Derek Stanton – HMPPS ER. Tom Head – WDM Project. Johnathan Callan - WDM Project. Dave Todd – POA NVC. Sarah Rigby – POA NEC. Andy Baxter - POA

This part of the meeting got pretty blunt, and it kept circling back to the same basic argument: you can't run a meaningful consultation if big pieces of the proposal are being pushed "somewhere else," and you can't sell a staffing model as realistic if it doesn't properly deal with violence, self-harm and the safety workload that's swallowing staff time.

The first clash was over unsocial hours. The union line was clear: they're not dropping it and it needs to be discussed as part of this consultation, not parked elsewhere. The response was that there should be a separate meeting to talk through options, including swapping grades around, and that this should sit under a separate Annex A. That immediately landed badly because the union then asked why key work isn't treated the same way. Their point was basically: you can't pick and choose what gets proper consultation and what gets kicked into the long grass.

When asked where any grade swaps would come from, the answer was that they would have to be "extra" — an uplift in officers linked to a reduction in OSGs. The union flagged straight away that this drags you into role crossover and boundaries, meaning you then have to talk properly about job evaluation, job descriptions, and who is expected to do what. The frustration was that the employer has identified the problem and knows the likely fixes, but won't properly engage on it through the consultation process. The employer position was they want to take the union with them, but they still want it handled separately.

The union then pressed for pausing the consultation if nights and grade changes are being developed through other project teams. That was refused. The response was that the model is "live" and will always need to move with change — population pressures, sentencing changes, prison configuration, and so on. The union view was: that might be true, but it's not an excuse for consulting on something that is already being undermined by changes you admit are coming. Nights was the example used: there's talk of a new project team, terms of reference, and even going back to a permanent nights OSG grade. The union's point was simple: if that's being discussed, it affects red hours and staffing assumptions, so the model can't be "accurate" while pretending nights is stable.

A lot of time then went into the employer saying they don't understand how the union's data requests feed into the model — things like churn, capacity, wing classification, complexity, split sites, second gates, terminals and so on. The employer described their modelling approach as mostly supervision-driven rather than time-and-motion.

That was met with a pretty strong response: supervision pressure is being driven up by violence and self-harm, and the model can't ignore the work created by that. The union kept coming back to the idea that this is modelling a prison that doesn't exist — "HMP Utopia" — because it isn't properly capturing the day-to-day workload created by violence, self-harm, constant supervision, bed watches, emergency escorts, paperwork and safety processes. The employer said they can show how they've "captured" some elements, but admitted it doesn't push staffing up or down. That's where the union said the whole thing falls apart: if it doesn't change resource based on the pressure, then it hasn't really captured it in any meaningful way.

The employer said the model isn't cost neutral and pointed to extra investment: around £25–£30m in officer posts, which they said equates to roughly 465 extra FTE. The union's response wasn't "that's nothing," it was "show us how you got there and show us what it covers." They warned that if data isn't shared, consultation is flawed, and if necessary they'd use formal routes to obtain it. The employer asked whether the information is already available through safety stats, but the union pushed back: they want the data in relation to the proposal — where the model has made choices, what assumptions it's using, and what it thinks the impact is.

Safety resourcing then got very detailed. The union raised that safety analyst roles (Band 3) appear to be being removed. The employer explained there are two groups of Band 3 analysts totalling 256, and there's a reduction of 28. They said some posts came out because residential and safety admin wasn't classed as an operational role. They argued this is offset by adding 35 Band 4 posts for analytical support and increasing security analysts by 24. They also talked about extra intelligence posts and allocations for safer custody and security intelligence,

plus some prisons being excluded because they have different arrangements and shared resources that the model doesn't handle well.

The union rejected the framing and said none of this is properly profiled. They pointed out the irony of talking about a one-size-fits-all approach while the employer is explaining, in real time, why it doesn't fit certain prisons. The employer admitted the data isn't strong enough yet and suggested it will improve over time. The union then pressed the key point: are you reducing operational safety resource? The answer was yes. The employer tried to soften that by saying governors can realign resources locally because it's a budget model, not a mandated deployment model. The union's response was basically: safety teams were introduced because the data showed they were needed, violence and self-harm are rising, and you're still talking about taking operational safety away and hoping governors fix it locally.

The most direct exchange was when the union asked what the employer is doing under the proposed model to reduce violence and self-harm. The answer was effectively: they can't. The reason given was that the work started within a nil-cost envelope, so there was no capacity to build a model that actively reduces those risks. The union said that means it's failed — because it doesn't support the organisation's own stated priorities.

This fed into the long list of “real work” that the union says is just missing from the modelling. Emergency escorts were raised as one example (a figure of around 3,500 was referenced). The employer admitted they haven't modelled emergency escorts. CSIP, ACCT work, use of force paperwork, constant supervision and bed watches were all raised as obvious time drains. The employer's general response was that residential staffing is “trough” resourcing — static staffing there through the day to deliver residential work — with only limited flex around things like MDT and key work. The union pushed back hard: what residential work, exactly, if staff time is being eaten by safety-driven activity all day? They also said the model no longer properly profiles flex and non-flex tasks, so it has no mechanism to recognise rising workload.

The employer suggested one way of dealing with it is “troughing” work out and reducing regime if staffing hits amber/red points during the day. The union response was: you can trough as much as you want, but how do you know it's enough, and how do you know it holds over a sustained period rather than a short desktop snapshot?

As the group worked through parts of the residential task list, the gap between “corporate” answers and reality on the landings kept coming up. There were disagreements about when certain work happens (for example listeners being treated as mainly nights pressure, but the union saying group meetings happen in the day). There were debates about where things sit (pastoral care under religious services; activity unit tasks being jobs, attendance, or prisoner pay). A practical example was used about a prisoner challenging their workshop allocation and asking for help aligning it to their sentence plan. That was labelled as a key work activity, but the union's point was operational: who covers you on the landing while you're doing that? Someone suggested Launchpad, and the answer was: not everywhere has it. The union argued this is exactly the kind of day-to-day issue that builds frustration, feeds tension, and ends up driving violence.

Custodial managers then became another reality check. The union said the description doesn't match what the job actually is: too many people to line manage, plus HR tasks, health and safety checklists, investigations waiting, and expectations to deliver functions and cover. They argued affordability isn't their issue — they're being asked to manage far larger spans of control than comparable roles, and still deliver operational outputs. The employer acknowledged the point and talked about strengthening wording on spans of control and potentially setting minimum caps. They also discussed that fixing it properly would mean a major restructure, including changing Band 4/5 balances, and that getting to a 1:10 span of control would require roughly 750 extra custodial managers. The union's response was that anything like that would have to be negotiated and would almost certainly need more investment.

There was also a thread running through about the spending review and what the model is really for. The employer offered a breakdown of how resource is typically split and argued that showing those numbers is useful because it exposes how quickly “flex” disappears and how unpalatable choices become. The union

pushed back, saying it had been explained to them as a way of showing where money had gone and evidencing need, and they said they would ask to see the spending review responses.

By the end, the employer offered a set of follow-ups: a high-level spending review breakdown, a caveated staffing/output table, changes to the custodial manager response, a proper response to the residential task list, and some desktop scenario work for different wings. A future meeting date was mentioned for key work, residential issues and the data request responses. The union reiterated again that unsocial hours stays in scope, and that unless the employer properly answers the violence/self-harm and safety questions with real profiling and transparent data, the model will keep looking like it's built around what's affordable, not what's actually happening.

Meeting Closed.

WDM Face To Face Meeting Leeds 4th September 2025.

Attendees Tom Head – WDM lead Kate Carse – WDM Project. Jonny Callan – WDM team Dave Todd – POA Vice Chair Sarah Rigby – POA NEC Andy Baxter – POA FTO

The POA moved from the “in principle” arguments into a more practical fight about what the model actually means in real prisons, what the numbers really are, and whether any of it is backed by funding.

The discussion kicked off with custodial manager spans of control. The model apparently shows an average of 1 to 15, and the union position was that 1:15 should be the maximum, not an average, and ideally it should be closer to 1:10. The response was that the system lands slightly better than 1:15 on paper, but they don't think they'll be able to “lock in” that maximum because governors have a lot of flexibility in how they deliver locally. The union response was basically: that flexibility is not the point — the organisation still has a duty of care to the CMs and the span is already too wide.

They then asked for clarity on the headline staffing position. The employer repeated the overall uplift: +465 FTE across 95 prisons. The next question was the obvious one: is that new money? The answer was “we think so,” but with a big caveat — it may have to come through “efficiency,” and they are still in the mix for funding.

They talked about using prison expansion funding as a route, and gave an example where if a site opens or closes accommodation, earmarked money can be absorbed. That was challenged on the basis that prisons can lose money when capacity goes offline and then wait for it to come back when new accommodation opens, meaning the system still takes a hit in the meantime.

A slide was used to show which prisons were in scope and the investment picture. There was a complicated example around the long-term high security estate where one part of the model showed a minus, but when certain prisons were added back in it became a net plus overall. The women's estate was singled out as needing significant investment — a figure of 106 staff was mentioned — with one site highlighted as needing more because of physical layout and risk in the housing units.

The mother and baby unit was raised specifically. The employer said they want an officer on days and nights. The day cover is an officer, but evenings/nights are currently covered by an OSG in the model, and it had been modelled as a Band 3. There was discussion about whether they already had separate funding for this. The employer said there was separate money for a parent/neonatal role, and that they are effectively putting it back to officer cover.

On women's prisons, there was a blunt reality check: frontline pressure, especially self-harm, is intense. The employer accepted that ACCT volumes are a major issue and said better funding is needed for supervisory cover to handle the workload. It was confirmed that some sites have custodial managers on nights. The union used practical examples to underline how far the operating environment has shifted — including a relatively inexperienced officer with an unusually high number of use of force incidents.

The conversation then moved into where staffing might be taken from and how the “live model” behaves when capacity changes. It was said there are fewer spaces now in reception prisons overall, and the union immediately challenged which Cat B receptions they think they can safely remove staff from.

The employer gave examples: some sites wouldn’t lose staff because they are due to have staff put back in, while others might lose small numbers but gain capacity later. The bigger point was that long-term closures remove money, but new accommodation brings money back in later, with one site mentioned as due to receive significant investment when long-closed wings reopen.

There was a worry raised about a prison that has had spaces offline with no clear plan to uplift its operational capacity, and examples were given of previous temporary funding or additional “uplifts.” The union asked a key question: if a prison gets extra money and then takes a wing offline, is there an expectation staffing is removed? The response was that it is handled case by case. The employer described an approach where, if spaces come out, they might recommend revising the model to take staff off the baseline but then “give them to” area leadership to support the prison, so the resource is still accounted for somewhere. The union concern underneath that was obvious: it still risks destabilising sites because resource can be moved around the system rather than staying where risk and demand sit.

They also asked whether prisons will be able to compare what others are getting and make bids once the model is live. The employer said that would only happen if a system-wide decision is taken to allocate extra resource for a defined issue, like drones. They made the point that they won’t move money around opportunistically between prisons just because one wants more at the expense of another, but there was a clear acknowledgement that these pressures and debates will come up.

Young adult provision came up too. The employer described a threshold approach: prisons only get additional resource for young adults when they tip over 25% of the population being young adults. The union challenged this with an example of a local agreement where a much lower threshold triggers extra staff. The employer said they based it on data showing the average is very low, and they described a business decision approach once a threshold is crossed.

Another line of argument was around detached duty demand and whether prisons with “extra” staff would become targets for detached duty to cover gaps elsewhere. The union warned this can spiral and destabilise prisons, citing past examples. The employer didn’t disagree, said some sites are understaffed already, and accepted it’s not a good idea to overlay detached duty demand on top of these modelling changes, even if it could come up later as “a proper assessment.”

Specific prisons were discussed in quick succession. There was a conversation about one site getting large new accommodation and what that should translate into in staffing terms, with the employer suggesting it would be a mix of staff types and might include reductions elsewhere (for example in PE instruction) depending on how the numbers land. Another site was described as getting a small officer uplift but a larger OSG uplift, and the union challenged why the officer number was so low given the instability and risk in the Cat C estate, and because a previous uplift wasn’t being recognised in the new model. This then triggered a very important argument: the union said the residential model might work in a stable environment, but not in an unstable prison, and they said they asked right at the start whether the modelling links staffing to stability. The employer’s response was basically that this is where operational reality diverges: some prisons are “stable” and can follow the model, while others may need extra staff operationally. The union warned that area leadership will still fight over where the money goes, and local leaders will say “you’re not having that money, I want it in my area.”

The union then brought the discussion back to the long-term high security estate and the real-world consequences: examples were given of mass events where large numbers were moved for prayer services and it ended in serious disorder, and warnings were shared about the perceived risk of a death in the near term in certain sites.

From there the tone sharpened. The union said the bottom line is there aren’t enough staff in the long-term

high security estate, and that if you did an honest exercise of what's actually needed, +465 would turn into +4,000. The employer accepted the direction of that point — they said there is a document showing a need for 3,000+ — but framed the current model as a “bronze minimum standard” that basically keeps the system running. The union response was that “keeping the lights on” is still resulting in serious injuries, and that the model's unit costs are not enough to deliver safe regimes. They also said this is not what they were told at the start — they believed the work would improve the ability to evidence better staffing through a spending review bid, and they don't see that happening in practice.

A graph was discussed that set out different cost scenarios: the starting point, then what it costs with no disinvestment, then adding additional non-effectives to reduce regime disruption, and then finally what it would cost to improve services properly. The employer openly said they expect the union to say the model under-resources prisons. The union reply was that key priorities are being ignored.

The discussion then moved into time-of-delivery modelling on wings, and this is where the “model vs reality” gap got really visible. The employer presented a 15-minute block style model day, and the union immediately pointed out holes: time to safely unlock and lock up, avoiding mass movements, prisoners who don't attend work or education but still need supervision, and the sheer difference between how prisons worked pre-benchmarking and how they have to work now to stay safe. One specific challenge was around exercise: they said the model allocates 45 minutes to unlock, return and deliver an hour's exercise, and that just isn't realistic.

The group then tried to adjust the model using a large houseblock example with around 199 prisoners across multiple spurs. They talked through basics like travel time from gate to wing, what needs to happen in briefing (ACCTs, high-risk prisoners, basics, adjudications, CSIP, moves, transfers), and how roll checks actually work. The union argued for two roll checks (one ending nights, one before unlock) and said the model was overloading 15-minute blocks with unrealistic expectations. There was also detailed discussion about medication, methadone, sending small groups at a time, self-isolators, cleaners, and what happens when key posts like desk/cleaning officers aren't available. In places, there was agreement that adjusting assumptions got them “somewhere near,” but there was also a hard reality: lots of establishments do things differently, and the model can't just wave those differences away.

They then argued about evenings. The employer said they don't see meaningful regime happening in the evening and suggested the work focus is the core day. The union pushed back that evenings were meant to be association for full-time workers and that evening periods are often when missed work gets “mopped up,” but even if it is built in on paper it often can't be facilitated because there's no resource. The employer said weekends are simpler, but the union response was that the model still can't account for the variables that are driving instability.

Searching and volumetric control came up in the same practical way: when is it supposed to happen, especially with drones driving demand? The employer suggested you might search when exercise is cancelled, but accepted it can't clash with movements. The union said searching isn't happening enough and cell clearances take forever, but over time you can get quicker if you get a grip on volumetric control — which again implies this needs time and staffing that isn't being properly built in.

The employer tried to summarise their own takeaway: even delivering a minimum regime is under pressure, and the only “efficient” way is often to do mass movement — but mass movement creates risk, and too much is going on to safely do it all at once. They said they can feed back formally that the minimum regime is under serious strain and that more space and better facilities are needed. The union added that it also needs better training and confidence building, and one rep said plainly: they need a reset and to pause to make things safe.

There was also a transparency discussion. The employer described a future where the model is linked to Annex G, with a record of what resource went in and why, and where stability problems and drift from the model could be identified. There was even a suggestion that branch committees having access to some of the data could improve trust, because it would give both sides visibility rather than forcing arguments in the dark.

Key work then came back in. The union questioned why key work is being handled through WDM at all, arguing it was brought in as a safety measure and now looks like it could be reduced “through the back door” as part of modelling. The employer admitted the key work letter was written from a resourcing perspective and suggested an approach based on capacity, sessions, and population type (women getting more, young adults staying the same). The union challenged the logic and asked whether “settled” prisons need less key work.

The employer tried to link it to churn and contact time, and listed high churn examples to show why reception prisons are different. The union challenged the quality argument too: how do you measure quality, especially when the managers responsible may be very inexperienced?

The open estate debate got sharper. The employer said the reason for not having key work in open is cost, not because they think it’s a bad idea. The union argued that risk is being pushed into open prisons with no resource, and that non-engagement is already high. The employer suggested the sentencing review might change the picture, and they talked about an example of a well-run open prison that built community activity and internal work when external work wasn’t available, but the union said you won’t replicate that everywhere. The most severe warning was that it will take a headline incident before open estate risk is taken seriously.

By the end there was at least a clearer set of actions. The employer team committed to: look again at maximum CM spans of control (and align with any existing modelling guides), revisit early morning roll checks, produce a summary of regime discussions, create a clearer key work table showing sessions against operational capacity and training hours, produce a “target staffing model” explanation, and fix model outputs that were said to be wrong. Industry was explicitly taken out of the model for now because it was “too complex,” with a commitment to future engagement and current provision prevailing in the meantime. The union also asked whether any “minus” could land on residential roles at certain prisons; the response was that they don’t expect residential reductions, but a governor could choose to apply changes that way locally.

Overall, the feel of it was: you’ve got a model that can describe a minimum day on paper, but it struggles when you put real-world pressures into it — self-isolators, meds, violence, self-harm, searching, escorts, churn, inexperienced staff, and the simple fact that safe delivery is slower than it used to be. The union kept pushing for realism, profiling, and transparency. The employer kept coming back to “budget allocation,” “bronze minimum,” and the limits of what can be funded, while accepting in places that key pressures remain unfunded and that the model will never cover every variable.

Meeting Closed.

WDM Face To Face Meeting Leeds 7th October 2025.

Attendees

Tom Head – WDM Lead.

Kate Carse – WDM Project.

Jonny Callan – WDM Project.

Dave Todd – POA Vice Chair

Sarah Rigby – POA NEC.

Phil Hannant – POA NEC.

Andy Baxter – POA FTO.

This meeting started with the employer asking what people wanted to cover, and the union saying straight away they wanted their Annex A response included. The employer’s instinct was to avoid “back tracking,” but the union pushed for updates and feedback on the points they’d already raised, like custodial manager spans, and for the Annex A response to be part of the record.

The employer said they’d given some feedback already and had deliberately avoided leaning on policy language too much, focusing instead on practical principles like keeping spans of control under control. They then tried to move the conversation onto key work and said the document they’d produced was meant to describe what sessions would look like and that it effectively “pushes in” around 350 FTE.

The union pulled it back to the sentencing review and the wider context: changes are coming, especially around the open estate, but there's no new finance. The union position was that even if the sentencing review drives more people into open conditions, the work doesn't disappear — and some things that might have been “Cat D work” will end up being done in Cat B and Cat C too as sentencing gets streamlined. The employer said they've been talking to the sentencing review team and that it's currently being described as nil cost, but in reality it will have to become a resourced model once decisions land. They also said they already have concerns about the changing prisoner profile in open prisons and expect the open estate will need to be revisited. A point was made that even a relatively small uplift into open prisons (they used 60 FTE as an example) would be noticeable, which underlined how thin things are.

Tagging came up as another example of “new work being treated as free.” The union said tagging is expanding (with multiple tag types) but it's still zero-resourced — people still have to be processed through reception and supervised, so if it expands it needs staffing. There was confusion around what the sentencing review is actually trying to do (tagging, HDC, sentence thresholds), but the employer summed it up as being aimed at keeping the population manageable, and governors are already pushing back because “temporary” measures have a habit of becoming permanent. The union also flagged recalls rising as part of the knock-on effect.

There was then an argument about local engagement and whether the employer's documents were effectively relying on governors to do the right thing. The employer asked if the union was happy with wording that assumed local engagement and a local Annex A process, and said they'd be willing to take that out. The union response was that some governors won't even submit required paperwork when their Annex G changes, and if anything changes grades the union represents it becomes a formal disputes issue anyway. The employer said governors are expected to sign off that they've issued the required paperwork and that changes are financially viable.

The employer also offered to strip out language that was over-complicating things — for example references to very granular deployment ideas — and to clarify that the model output is not “the budget” but a starting point for target-setting, with governors then developing the actual staffing figure locally. The union warned this could backfire: if a governor genuinely profiles the work and shows they need more than the model output, where does the money come from? The employer's answer was basically “same as now,” just with a model output as the baseline and then an impact assessment and challenge process involving senior leadership and the governor. When asked directly where the money comes from if a prison makes that case, the employer said there is central money but couldn't say exactly where from, which fed into the union's wider point about everything being presented as “do more with what you've got.”

Key work then became the main fight again, but this time it was framed even more sharply as a consultation legitimacy issue. The employer view was: they've built a key work model and they want to consult on it through this process. The union view was: it should be separate, because of its history and because it sits closer to terms and conditions and health and safety mitigation than it does to a generic staffing model. They referenced the OMIC review and argued key work was meant to be part of sentence planning but has never been delivered properly because it's constantly dropped for detached duty and other priorities. They described it as a hard-won safety control measure, not a pot of time that can be raided to increase “non-effective” or cover other gaps.

The union's strongest point was basically: you're removing a safety control at the worst possible time. Violence is high and rising, and key work has “never had a chance” because it's always the first thing sacrificed. They used a blunt comparison: it's like telling staff not to bother bringing a safety tool into work for a day — it's a control measure, and removing it increases risk. The employer accepted that any reduction isn't positive, but they also argued they aren't stripping resource out, they're “realigning” it. The union pushed back that even if the posts exist on paper, if governors keep dropping key work to hit core delivery pressures, the practical effect is the same: it disappears. The employer also pointed out that switching the model back would pull about 350 out of it, which reinforced the union's view that key work is being treated as the only accessible “open goal” for finding resource.

They then asked whether the new CEO had signed off on implementation. The employer said not on implementation, and that they've already said they don't want to go near open estate or high security sites for big changes because it's too risky. The employer described the approach more as: use the model when new accommodation comes on line, to introduce change in a controlled way, but not to reduce staffing. The union responded that they've already compared target staffing figures against payroll headcount and they don't see major surpluses out there anyway. The employer said they haven't gone into that level of detail and that their modelling assumes establishments are at target staffing to start with, which the union challenged because most sites are below target.

Some actual headline numbers were then put on the table. The employer said nationally they'd look to remove 29 OSG posts, and put in 288 FTE overall, including 154 supervising officers and 51 custodial manager increases. They linked the OSG reduction to moving more nights onto Band 3 officers and said they've formalised things like mother and baby units and first night centres as Band 3. Another comment was that the 29 OSG posts equates to about 12 sets of nights, and the employer predicted around 100 sets of nights could move around overall. The union asked if the employer is involved in the nights review; the answer was no.

There was a hint that wider shift pattern changes (like continental shifts) could come up through the nights review. The union kept bringing it back to safety: nights are already too thin, and moving posts around risks "robbing Peter to pay Paul."

A big chunk of the conversation was basically the union saying: this programme is repeating old mistakes. They said the work was sold at the start as something that would help evidence better staffing and improve spending review outcomes, but what they're seeing is another benchmarking exercise and another attempt to quantify doing everything with the resource already in the system. They explicitly referenced making the same mistake as 2013. They also said nothing is getting better; it's getting worse — population has gone up since the project started, violence keeps rising, and key deliverables aren't being met.

The employer response was a mix of acknowledgement and limitation. They said they've tried to account for what they can, that the model doesn't cover everything, and they can only work with what they've got. The union said they appreciate hearing that honesty, but it needs to come from higher up than this team, because frontline staff are being set up to fail: you can't list a pile of residential duties, label them "wing duties," and pretend they can be delivered without reducing stress and burnout or delivering the organisation's stated safety priorities.

There was also an exchange about practical mitigations that have reduced violence in the past. One example was handymen/facilities work: the employer suggested prisons shouldn't divert officers to handyman work and should fix the facilities management provider instead. The union strongly disagreed and said the issue is the contract, and that having handymen reduced prisoner frustration and therefore reduced violence against staff, especially where vandalism wasn't covered. That was a good example of the union's wider theme: safety isn't just staffing numbers — it's whether the system removes predictable triggers that land on officers.

Another big theme was trust and transparency. The union said some governors don't share WDM outputs and that it creates mistrust. There was mention of past practice where benchmarking updates were shared in confidence, and a call for trust to be rebuilt. The employer said things are mixed: sometimes the union is at the table locally, but in other places relationships are broken, and numbers can change so people are cautious about sharing too early. The union view was that not sharing creates exactly the mistrust that then poisons local implementation.

By the end, there wasn't any neat resolution. The employer's "where are we?" moment landed a response of "it is what it is." The union's closing line was that they will fight it "tooth and nail." The meeting ended abruptly and bitterly, with a clear sense that the gap hasn't narrowed: the employer is talking about starting points, live models, and limited envelopes; the union is talking about safety controls being stripped out, consultation being hollowed out, and a model that doesn't match the operating field. The meeting ended with a symbolic union comment for the employer to close the door on their way out.

Meeting Closed.

WDP Meeting 5th December 2025.

Jonathan Callan - HMPPS WDP Team Tom Head - HMPPS WDP Lead Kate Carse - HMPPS WDP Team
Dave Todd – POA VC Sarah Rigby – POA NEC John Butler – HMPPS WDP Team Phil Hannant – POA NEC
Derek Stanton – ER HMPPS Andy Baxter – POA FTO

Tom opened by saying they're still waiting for extra money through the Spending Review. The current plan, if anything comes through, is to focus it on a small set of priority prisons — around 15 sites have been identified — and outside of that there's nothing new to report.

The employer then tried to “close out” where things are, saying they've written back to confirm they consider the process concluded and that they understand the union isn't happy. The union pushed back hard on the tone of that, saying it's “a bit rich” to frame it as simple unhappiness. They said their response has been through their national committee and the concerns were shared widely. Their main point was also forward-looking: the new sentencing bill is likely to create major knock-on issues, so they want this engagement to stay open so it can deal with consequences as they develop, rather than being wrapped up and reopened later in crisis.

The employer replied that because the bill hasn't passed, they're only talking about possible resourcing implications at this stage. The union said that's exactly the problem — they don't yet know what will happen in the open estate or Cat D, and while they're in sentence review meetings, there's still “no meat on the bones.” There was then a more practical discussion about capacity expansion prisons. The employer said those sites will, by default, be picked up by the model because additional accommodation triggers modelling changes.

They offered to give the union a heads-up list of which prisons are likely to be affected and said they've already had local union reps in the room at some sites. They also referred to a challenge process where the operational line can push back on the model locally. They agreed to share the list of expansion sites and said if any financial allocation is confirmed, they'll come back with next steps.

The union asked the key question: what happens if there's no SR money or other funding? The employer said they would still work with capacity sites because those changes are unavoidable, but if there's no money to fund the wider model they may narrow focus to areas with little change and lean into the sentencing review process instead. They also said they need to take a decision back through a senior forum on the big, disputed areas, especially key work and non-effective time. One of the options they floated was whether to implement the new key work/non-effective model specifically on capacity expansion sites as a first step.

The union's response was immediate: if that happens, they would advise branches to enter dispute. The employer accepted that and said they need to warn senior managers that dispute is a likely outcome and factor that into any implementation approach.

There was a clear improvement on transparency: the employer asked whether the union wants the draft models for capacity expansion sites shared, noting that draft outputs have been shared in the past. The union said yes, and the employer agreed to share them.

They then turned back to key work and non-effective time. The employer said the priority sites are mainly reception prisons, young adult sites, and women's prisons, and they don't expect key work to be reduced at those sites. The real question they're wrestling with is how key work hours get “built into” training time and how that would work in practice.

The union pushed back from an operational reality angle. They said they are already in discussions about personal officer work in the open estate and the pattern is the same: more and more gets pushed under “wing duties” without extra resource. They said they're looking at a short-term fix and then a longer-term policy

framework because there isn't a proper framework at the moment. They repeated the wider warning they've been giving throughout: you can only "ring-fence" so much time, and once flexible work is gone, the whole approach collapses — which is why, in their view, the residential part of the WDM doesn't work.

The employer responded by pointing back to their general approach: looking at layout, expectations, profiles, roles, and what actually gets done, and then linking that into RMP-type thinking. The union said that's fine only if there's still flexibility in the system — but in their view there isn't.

The employer then floated a more specific scenario: if funding did come through for priority sites, they might allocate resource *above* existing key work to increase non-effective time. But they raised the key practical issue: if they put (for example) six extra staff in to increase non-effectives, how do they stop those staff simply being pulled straight back into core delivery gaps? The union answer was blunt: you can't. They gave the obvious example — if someone goes sick on nights, the extra capacity will get swallowed immediately. The employer then tested the water: would the union engage in talks about increasing non-effective time if it's genuinely above the key work model? The union said they would still dispute if needed, even if framed as "above key work."

On next steps, the employer suggested a face-to-face "desktop" session early in the new year focused on the priority sites or capacity sites, to walk through what the model changes would actually mean in practice. They also raised how ongoing engagement should work: whether monthly catch-ups make sense, or more/less frequent, or ad hoc. The union preferred regular contact so discussions don't become constant catch-up exercises.

The open estate came back into the conversation. The employer said there may be read-across between the priority list and open sites. The union again highlighted the personal officer issue as evidence of wider "disharmony" — they believed the work had been taken out, but in practice some governors have reintroduced it at zero cost by claiming it sits inside job descriptions. The employer agreed the open estate is a "mixed economy" and suggested there may be underlying resource implications worth exploring. They floated the idea of joining the sentence review workstream so the modelling team and the sentencing work are not operating in silos. The union's response was dry but telling: it would be the first time the right hand talks to the left. The employer agreed there needs to be better join-up and said they don't think teams would object.

Finally, the union flagged another emerging red line: case management work and the risk of probation tasks being pushed onto operational POMs. They said they're watching it closely and have set clear boundaries. The employer said they have a "watching brief." The union suggested early thinking is that probation officers will be mainly out in the community. The employer declined to comment.

Overall, the tone was: the employer wants to formally conclude the current loop, but the union wants the engagement kept open because the sentencing changes are likely to destabilise assumptions quickly. Both sides also acknowledged that if implementation is attempted on capacity expansion sites — especially around key work and non-effective time — dispute is a realistic and immediate risk.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PRIVATE SECTOR SERVICES

National Committee for Private Sector Services Annual Report 1/1/25 – 31/12/25

Introduction

SODEXO

At **HMP Northumberland**, POA members are represented by a highly experienced and dedicated committee. Their commitment and willingness to engage constructively with management has helped to foster extremely positive and productive industrial relations within the establishment. The work carried out by the POA representatives is widely respected, and their efforts ensure that members' voices are heard and that staff welfare is a priority in the workplace.

SERCO

Serco operates a number of establishments including **HMP Lowdham Grange**, **HMP Dovegate**, **HMP Fosse Way**, and **HMP Thameside**. While the Prison Officers Association does not currently hold formal recognition rights within these establishments, there remains a strong and committed POA membership across them all. Members are represented by the union's Full Time Officers whenever support or guidance is required. The POA remains fully committed to supporting these members.

Serco also operates the **Brook House Immigration Removal Centre** and **Tinsley House Immigration Removal Centre** at Gatwick. At these centres, POA members benefit from the support of a capable and determined committee that works tirelessly on behalf of the workforce. Their dedication to defending members' rights was demonstrated in a recent High Court action against Serco, where the company was ordered to pay £750,000 to employees after breaching trade union law.

GEOAMEY

GeoAmey provides prisoner escort and custody services. The Prison Officers Association does not currently hold formal recognition. The union maintains a strong and loyal membership among staff working in these roles. The POA continues to play an important role in supporting these members, with Full Time Officers readily available to provide representation, advice, and assistance whenever required.

Across all these sectors, the POA continues to demonstrate its commitment to representing members effectively, promoting fairness, and maintaining strong professional standards within custodial and related services.

Terry McCarthy
Assistant General Secretary

G4S

It has been a busy year for G4s, where we have members with many challenges to overcome. Following a protracted period, all three G4s branches with recognition have agreed a two-year deal – Five Wells, Oakhill, and Oakwood. All three branches put in a lot of work to achieve this result. The demand for support has increased from members and this has placed considerable pressure on branches this year. Branches have fully embraced recruiting new members, which in the fluid nature of employment has involved a lot of persistence, and the hard work has paid off. Thanks to all who have taken the time to support members in what has at times been challenging circumstances. Well done.

Angela Montgomery
Assistant General Secretary

Mitie Care & Custody

The POA membership across the Mitie Care & Custody contract has continued to rise despite some recruitment freezes and workforce reductions through natural wastage.

During this year, the MTC operation at Manston STHF was TUPE transferred to Mitie Care & Custody. The MTC members were ably supported locally in one-to-one meetings by the Manston Committee, and national officials engaged around the transfer measures. This further increased the POA membership at Manston.

The year began with a redundancy consultation for a group of 48 staff who were recruited to reopen additional asylum courts (IMA) ahead of the proposed Rwanda project.

Following the collapse of the Rwanda project, the additional IMA court staff were surplus.

The POA engaged with Mitie Care & Custody and all POA members at risk were found redeployment opportunities within Mitie Care & Custody. There were no compulsory redundancies for POA members.

The pay talks became lengthy and entrenched as Mitie constantly offered a just-below-inflation pay rise. The talks lasted through the summer and into the winter, when Mitie confirmed a full and final offer of 3.5% plus back pay would be made available in the Christmas pay. This was put to ballot and accepted.

The year ended with another significant set of redundancy talks covering the ICE and international removal ITC tutors.

Although the POA do not have recognition, we do have a significant membership amongst the tutor group.

The POA supported members at over 50 one-to-one redundancy interviews announced just before the Christmas holidays.

One member took voluntary redundancy, two members found new employers, and the remaining POA members were retained within the smaller training group or redeployed to other training opportunity within care and custody.

A stricter adherence this year to the Mitie One Code on staff conduct has given rise to a higher number of disciplinarys than earlier years.

When HMP Millsike opened, the POA did not gain recognition as Mitie has a recognition agreement with Community for its large residential facilities such as IRCs. Its first prison was also encompassed under that agreement.

The POA have offered their support to HMP Millsike as some legacy members have remained in membership.

The geography of the Mitie Care & Custody contract makes representation and membership communication very challenging. We represent around 1,200 members across 43 sites in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and France.

The Manston committee go from strength to strength and our reps at Manchester, James and Emma, at Swinderby, Alex and Sam, Dino at Yarl's Wood, Sharon at Glasgow Airport, Ally in Northern Ireland, Mark in France and Pete at Dover KIU – you are the backbone of the POA across this contract.

Thank you all for your hard work and relentless support.

Andy Baxter
Assistant General Secretary

MINUTES OF NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PRIVATE SECTOR SERVICES (NCPSS) MEETING VIA TEAMS 24TH APRIL 2025

Present:

Steve Gillan –General Secretary
Mick Pimblett – Deputy General Secretary
Andy Baxter – FTO
Angela Montgomery – FTO
Steve Lewis – Minutes
Paul Foster – HMP Northumberland
Steve McKenna – HMP Northumberland
Kirsteen Brown – HMP Oakwood
Dawn Doyle – HMP Oakwood
Martin Griffin – HMP Five Wells
Michaella Robinson – Manston STHF
Callum Cory – Manston STHF

1) Chair's opening remarks:

The Chair opened the meeting and thanked all those in attendance for their ongoing hard work and support. Membership has continued to increase steadily.

The Union has now signed a voluntary recognition with MTC Group. And the first formal meeting has taken place

The Chair thanks all those in attendance, and their committees for all hard work he knows they put in daily to support members and the Union.

2) Apologies:

Stuart Imbimbo – Mitie C&C ICE
Gavin Dore – HMP Five Wells
Phil Fairlie – FTO

3) Minutes of Previous Meeting – 17th and 18th December 2024

Discussed and carried as a true record.

4) Matters Arising:

Action point:- Follow up rep from Thompsons to attend to talk about Employment Tribunals Ongoing

Action point:- Follow up for Thompsons to arrange visit from Coroner to attend to discuss DIC and ACCT/ACDT Ongoing

Action Point –Branches to try to get and share the training costs and Churn and what the % turnover rate is Ongoing

Action Point - Training in supporting members at PPO/DIC Investigations Ongoing

Action Point – SL Send out Joiners and Leavers Lists to Branches Done

5) Conference 2025

The lack of attendees to give sectoral updates will be difficult. A discussion took place on how to adapt to deliver a successful fringe.

It was highlighted that this was intended as an avenue to allow private sector operators to come and see the POA and how we operate as a Union.

It was proposed that for one year only we divert from the rules and not hold a Fringe and meet up as a committee, due to the drop out and nonattendance of many of the employers, that on this occasion it was not in the unions interests to hold the fringe.

Action Point – cancelation of Fringe

6) Updates from Branches

Five Wells

209 members the committee are attending ITCs to recruit new staff as the join. They have had 2 DICs where investigations are ongoing.

A 2% pay offer was not accepted by committee, talks ongoing.

ACCTs also causing increase workloads for Staff and becoming a point of contention and concern

Northumberland

Membership back up over 300 for the first time in a few years, with many rejoining having previously left.

Pay offer was a single cash payment, it split the membership due to the way it was presented by Management.

The branch wished to thank the welfare committee for the support one of their members had received. There has been a big win with Thompsons at Employment Tribunal, this is well known within the workforce and in helping with recruitment.

Accts failures are being scrutinised and every failure is being referred to the police. . The directions sent out from Phil Copple has caused problems across the country, which the NEC are taking forward at National Level.

POA ICE

Pay Submission has gone in and an initial meeting has taken place but as yet no offer has been made. High numbers of disciplinaries are happening across the country. Recruitment has resumed as management did not get as many staff to join ICE in the south following a redundancy process with the overseas escorting part of the business. They still have recruitment and retention difficulties in the north of the country.

They have had an escape from escort, though the detainee was caught again within minutes. This is being investigated, and two members are currently suspended.

Oakwood

A pay offer is 2% has been made and negotiations are ongoing.

The referrals for Thompsons were causing some problems and they too are having some issues with the ACCT system and referrals to police.

An update was given on the basics of how to access Thompsons, in and out of working hours. Primarily via the completion of Legal Aid Forms

Membership checks must be done as some incidents, particularly police investigations as these may have taken place prior to membership

SMOR, welfare checks following a position drug test. Are clashing with ACCT checks in many cases.

All branches advised that, if management want to introduce new policies and procedures they should share these with the local committee with a view to seeking agreement.

Manston STHF

Membership has dropped slightly to 660. Management are looking to reduce staffing by 200 over the next 12 months. This, it is hoped will be achieved through natural wastage and no redundancies are expected.

3 of the marquees used to hold detainees are targeted to close, but recent numbers suggest this may not be possible.

The committee are in discussions regarding the provision of new uniform to staff at Manston

A submission had been put in but as with ICE, management are currently unable to make an offer due to awaiting contractual annual increases they expect from the Home Office.

Gatwick

The long running Pay Dispute is now listed to go to a Tribunal hearing on 4th-6th June 2025

Oakhill

Pay Submission sent into management but again offers not matching expectations.

MTC

Pay Submission has been sent in and a 2% offered made. This was below inflation and other indices which had been asked for. Management are taking this away to seek further direction from the parent Company in America and will come back to us in due course.

Though expressions of interest had been sort, we have not yet been able to form a branch committee for MTC and this issue will be revisited after Conference.

Action Point – revisit committee nominations for MTC at Manston

Closing remarks

It was highlighted to all those at the meeting that, should the need arise the option to make an application to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) to force financial disclosure, was an avenue to consider if the employers do not make, what are considered reasonable pay offers in this year's pay round.

Memorabilia

When prepping for conference any additional memorabilia that may be available should be taken and distributed in Eastbourne.

Action Point – take any available memorabilia to Conference.

7) Membership Data

The membership has again increased and shows a healthy growth. The need to approach staff who leave the union but are still employed was stressed.]

Action Point – SL Send out Joiners and Leavers Lists to Branches

8) Date of next Meetings:

2nd and 3rd July Quorn Grange Hotel
October Via Teams TBA
3rd and 4th December Quorn Grange Hotel

MINUTES OF NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PRIVATE SECTOR SERVICES (NCPSS) MEETING HELD AT QUORN GRANGE HOTEL 2ND AND 3RD JULY 2025

Present:

Mick Pimblett – Deputy General Secretary
Steve Lewis – Minutes
Paul Foster – HMP Northumberland
Steve McKenna – HMP Northumberland
Kirsteen Brown – HMP Oakwood
Dawn Doyle – HMP Oakwood
Heran Limbachai – Gatwick IRCs
Ionut Cirstea – Gatwick IRCs
Gavin Dore – HMP Five Wells
Stuart Imbimbo – Mitie C&C ICE
Alex Bratton – Mitie C&C ICE
Nigel Ridge – Manston STHF

1. Chair's opening remarks:

The Chair thanks all those in attendance, and their committees for all hard work he knows they put in daily to support members and the Union.

Unfortunately, due to unavoidable diary commitments the Thompsons presentation planned for Thursday has had to be cancelled. This will be rearranged.

Thanks for the good attendance and participation at Conference 2025.

Rules and Constitution, needs to be highlighted that members need to ensure meetings are documented. This became evident at the recent Gatwick IRCs legal case. Also ensure branches follow the rules regarding nominations for NEC elections.

Branches were reminded to ensure that monthly returns to membership are made monthly.

2. Apologies:

Steve Gillan – General Secretary
Phil Fairley – FTO
Andy Baxter – FTO
Angela Montgomery – FTO
Terry McCarthy – FTO
Martin Griffin – HMP Five Wells

Kimberley Hoang – Oakhill STC
Michaela Robinson – Manston STHF
Richard Adzobu – Oakhill STC

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 24th April 2025

Discussed and carried as a true record.

4. Matters Arising:

Action point:- Follow up rep from Thompsons to attend to talk about Employment Tribunals. Ongoing

Action point:- Follow up for Thompsons to arrange visit from Coroner to attend to discuss DIC and ACCT/ACDT Ongoing

Action Point –Branches to try to get and share the training costs and Churn and what the % turnover rate is. Ongoing

Action Point - Training in supporting members at PPO/DIC Investigations Ongoing

Action Point – cancelation of Fringe Done

Action Point – revisit committee nominations for MTC at Manston. Done.

Action Point – take any available memorabilia to Conference. Done

Action Point – SL Send out Joiners and Leavers Lists to Branches Done

5. Conference 2026

Wording of motions – should be more inclusive to include all employers not just HMPPS

Action Point – MP to put to Standing Order to add a point to request for motions to ensure they refer to all employers not just HMPPS.

Start discussions now on invites to Conference and arrange the Fringe. There was a discussion about how to take this forward. Questions were put as to whether there may be a need to amend the rules

It was proposed to invite contract oversight Controls, contact monitors or Procurement Department/s

Action Point – Seek potential for these to attend

Action Point – Seek to get an Immigration Minister to attend.

6. TUPE:

Northumberland only has 2 years left on its contract before a tendering process. the branch are looking for guidance on who to support of otherwise any bids.

Union Policy is that all prisons should be publicly operated. It is not clear yet if there is an In House Bid.

7. Information for collective bargaining purposes:

A paper was circulated including a draft letter, the disclosure of information is a legal requirement the union

can pursue.

Action Point – share paper with Branches electronically so they can adapt it as necessary

Action Point -

8. Pay Bargaining:

There is a need to make our submissions and negotiations more professional. There was a long discussion on the use of the CAC and formal requests for details financial information from employers

Action Point – circulate all pay submissions to branches as examples.

9. Updates from Branches

Five Wells

Pay three weeks ago, 2% rejected. As yet no feedback. AM to press more senior management. Seems the Director is dragging his feet.

ACCTS still causing issues. Staff still not learning and could end in court

New shift patterns not working, raised with management. Cross over issues and the non-payment of overtime.

H&S miss communications from Senior Managers, this will be raised.

Facility time problems are becoming more common and not being addressed locally and we may need help from national Officials. Though ITC attendance is managed well.

DSO middle manager role causing questions, particularly in relation to ACCTS. Branch needs more clear guidance on what this role should include and what it should not.

SMARs, WISPs being used to cover for not using ACCTs properly. No such this as a “welfare checks”. Should be ACCTS.

Branches should raise disputes on these issues to get them progressed. Management have to progress a dispute or grievances

Northumberland

Pension claim is hopefully coming to a positive conclusion. Another successful Legal claim with Thompsons.

Bats, newts causing delays for expansion

Cannot recruit new staff. OSGs or SOs. So cant escort contractors to fix the RACC

Salary sacrifice on pensions for low paid still requiring clarification but being looked at.

Staff not understanding the importance of ACCTS and there is a belief that someone will end up in court.

Staff are not getting off duty on time on a regular basis.

POA ICE

Pay talks ongoing, next meeting tomorrow. Recruitment taking place but not keeping up with the leavers in places.

Appears an issue with mandatory cuffing in insecure areas has now been resolved.

It has been announced that Mitie have won the contract to operate Campsfield House.

Oakwood

ACCT issues too. SMORs have been done away with

Pay talks have stalled and 2% rejected. Branch needs to review the recognition agreement and go into dispute to force the issue to the next level.

It may be necessary to apply to ACAS and submit the formal request for information.

Manston STHF

Site is either very busy or has no detainees. There are many questions over the merger with MTC.

Disciplinary case load remains high.

Pay talks are ongoing with early offers disappointing.

Gatwick

Legal claim outcome is not yet been announced though the legal team believe the case is strong.

Pay is balloted on £1,400 (around 4.4%), £300/year non-consolidated for Tornado staff.

Asked for a Site Visit by MP and TM

MP asked to set up meeting with the HO to discuss problematic operation issues at Gatwick. Management hide behind "HO said!" when there is a belief it is Local Management issues and decisions.

Action Point – Arrange visit to Branch. MP-TM

MTC

Pay Submission has been sent in and a 3% offer made, which if accepted will be back dated to 1st April 2025. Though expressions of interest had been sort, we have still not yet been able to form a branch committee for MTC and this issue will be revisited after Conference.

It was announced last week that the MTC Contract with the Home Office ends on 31st September. As of the 1st October staff will transfer to Mitie Care and Custody. This will require the TUPE transfer of around 300 staff.

Once this had happened it will be necessary to merge the Manston STHF and MTC Manston Branches into one branch.

Action Point – upon completion of the TUPE Transfer seek to merge the two Manston Branches.

10. Membership Data

The membership continues to show a healthy growth. The need to approach staff who leave the union but are still employed was stressed. Branches were asked to complete a mapping exercise of their branches to help identify potential areas for recruitment.

The use of the joiners and leavers list was stressed.

Action Point – SL Send out Joiners and Leavers Lists to Branches

11. Date of next Meetings:

3rd and 4th December Quorn Grange Hotel

MINUTES OF NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PRIVATE SECTOR SERVICES (NCPSS) MEETING HELD AT QUORN GRANGE HOTEL 3RD AND 4TH DECEMBER 2025

Present:

Mick Pimblett – Deputy General Secretary

Phil Fairley – FTO

Andy Baxter – FTO

Angela Montgomery – FTO

Terry McCarthy – FTO

Steve Lewis – Minutes

Paul Foster – HMP Northumberland

Steve McKenna – HMP Northumberland

Kirsteen Brown – HMP Oakwood

Dawn Doyle – HMP Oakwood

Heran Limbachai – Gatwick IRCs

Gary Ayton – Gatwick IRCs

Kelly England – HMP Five Wells

Stuart Imbimbo – Mitie C&C ICE

Nigel Ridge – Manston STHF

Harjinder Saundh - Thompsons

1. Chair's opening remarks:

The Chair thanks all those in attendance, and their committees for all hard work he knows they put in daily to support members and the Union.

2. Apologies:

Steve Gillan – General Secretary

Martin Griffin – HMP Five Wells

Gavin Dore – HMP Five Wells

Kimberley Hoang – Oakhill STC

Michaela Robinson – Manston STHF

Richard Adzobu – Oakhill STC

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 2nd 3rd July 2025

Discussed and carried as a true record.

4. Matters Arising:

Action point:- Follow up rep from Thompsons to attend to talk about Employment Tribunals.

Action point:- Follow up for Thompsons to arrange visit from Coroner to attend to discuss DIC and ACCT/ACDT done

Action Point - Training in supporting members at PPO/DIC Investigations done

Action Point – Seek potential for these to attend

Action Point – Seek to get an immigration minister to attend.

Action Point – Arrange visit to Branch. MP-TM to Gatwick done

Action Point – upon completion of the TUPE Transfer seek to merge the two Manston Branches. Done

Action Point – SL Send out Joiners and Leavers Lists to Branches

5. Conference 2026

A discussion took place as to who/what is wanted at the fringe? It was felt that a look at how the Home Office contract monitor work would be useful.

After the next one I want Action on controllers and Home Office. Also invites the immigration minister as a speaker.

Action Point – invite controllers, contract monitors for particular departments

Action Point – invite the immigration minister as a speaker to Conference .

6. Thompsons Solicitors

A detailed talk from Harjinder Saundh, from Thompsons Solicitors, on Deaths in Custody and coroners' courts. The talk also covered other areas where they support POA members.

Action Point - to find out and provide the name of the legal contact from each private sector employer for Thompsons to contact regarding the recuperation of costs in the case of DIC.

7. Pay deals

Pay timelines to be used earlier in the process. 181 letter to be the first stage of the process next year. Each contact pay increase dates are different.

All branches encouraged to look at Labour Research Pay Deal pages.

User name POA

Password Paydeal

Action Point - Prepare 181 letters

Action Point – recirculate 181 documents

8. Updates from Branches

Manston

Large number of cases Disciplinary and grievances.

Expected a large number of green days in the coming weeks. This can cause issues with boredom and complaints, both staff on staff and staff against management. The longer it goes on the worse it can get.

Pay deal was 3.5%

MTC tupe completed. So 300 new staff to be trained in Mitie operations and 600 to be trained in RHR operations to make sure all staff can cover all areas of work.

Senior staff suspensions, have taken place. This has become an item of a great deal of rumour and speculation with little or no firm information coming out. It was noted that this is how it should be, in terms of company statements or information in such circumstances.

Northumberland

There is a new IR Manager taken up post. It is hoped this will lead to better communications and partnership working.

Pay submission is in claiming £2,000 for all staff

New accommodation is coming on line, but staffing adequately is problematic.

Prisoners use of Spice remains a problem for the establishment.

A DIC case ongoing which could have significant consequences.

The prison had a good HMIP report.

POA ICE

Pay resolved 3.5% initial 1.75% carrot of Xmas payment.

Big north south divide over the outcome.

Retention recruitment a big problem. Need female staff but management reluctant to undertake gender based staff recruitment.

2 staff developed DVT issues.

50% of escorts carried out by male only staff

Purge on Flexible working arrangements.

Last HOMEs 13 staff sent 11 failed. Left sitting around until the next course can be done in January. NTRG looking at what happened on this course and potential conflicts.

Lots of driver behaviour issues ie speeding.

Redundancies announced from IR and Training department.

Oakwood

Clearance problems for new staff. 15 new staff not cleared their vetting. FSCL changed their policy. now doing enhanced police DBS check.

Private sector employ prior to clearance being completed. This is not the same the same with the Police and prison services. There has been a tightening of the procedure.

Pay 4% from October 2025, 3% from next April.

Membership growing but retention is not good.

Gatwick

Legal claim Serco appealed, awaiting outcome.

This years pay deal 5.62% 8% less welp ais staff retention problem

Tinsley TOM gone up but no staff increases. Questions have been asked about this

Some investigations are taking a long time and this is being questioned. Time of process on its own is not enough to take an issue to ET.

Insufficient working radios and cameras for the workplace. Branch advised to ask for the risk assessment.

Management asking staff to shadow each other with one radio. This is not workable.

Control room is not working properly due to cameras being down. This is making the landings unsafe. Too cold due to equipment storage in there. This is minuted in the monthly meeting and if is not resolved will lead to a dispute.

9. Membership Data

The membership continues to show a healthy growth. The need to approach staff who leave the union but are still employed was stressed. Branches were asked to complete a mapping exercise of their branches to help identify potential areas for recruitment.

The use of the joiners and leavers list was stressed.

Action Point – SL Send out Joiners and Leavers Lists to Branches

10. Date of next Meetings:

TBA

LEGAL

Annual Report 2025

The full report of legal services provided by Thompsons Solicitors will be presented at Annual Conference 2026. The audited accounts will detail the costs associated with POA Legal Services and provide full transparency to the membership.

Throughout the year, the Legal Aid Committee has met monthly to consider applications and appeals, with the NEC making final determinations on members' appeals in accordance with the POA Rules and Constitution.

The Committee has continued to progress matters diligently and effectively on behalf of POA members, ensuring that cases are handled fairly and consistently within the established framework of the Union's Legal Aid Scheme.

The scheme operates strictly in accordance with the Rules and Constitution. The Legal Aid Committee has provided legal representation and assistance across a broad range of matters, including Legal Advice and Assistance, Police and NHS Fraud Investigations, Coroners' Court proceedings involving self-inflicted deaths, Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority claims, Personal Injury and Stress claims, and Employment Law claims. The Guidelines clearly state that legal assistance will not generally be continued where the prospects of success do not justify further support or where the likely costs would be disproportionate to the potential benefit of pursuing the claim.

There is, at times, criticism when Thompsons Solicitors advise that a case should not proceed. However, such advice is based entirely on the criteria agreed by the membership and set out within the POA's Legal Aid Handbook. Thompsons act in accordance with these rules and provide objective legal assessments in every case.

Since Conference 2024, Thompsons have recovered over £1,400,000 in compensation for POA members. This is in addition to the substantial work undertaken on criminal cases and representation in Coroners' Courts.

Members receive 100% of the damages awarded, with no deductions for Thompsons' fees or POA charges. Unlike many firms, Thompsons are committed exclusively to claimant-only work, representing injured or mistreated individuals and never employers, organisations or insurers liable to pay compensation.

The benefits of these cases extend beyond the financial compensation secured. The outcomes support Branch Officials and Health and Safety Representatives in improving workplace practices and preventing similar incidents in the future. They also demonstrate the clear value of the Union's legal services and its longstanding partnership with Thompsons.

Since the last Conference, Thompsons have also provided legal advice on a range of additional issues, including Medical Inefficiency Compensation, Nasal Naloxone, matters relating to the European Court of Human Rights, Employment Rights Act, the Local Dispute Resolution Procedure, Prison Dog Transportation, and the Serco High Court Challenge.

Despite numerous legal challenges over the past year, the POA has continued to operate within the £1.2 million legal services cap, a figure that has remained unchanged since 2008. Working in partnership with Thompsons, this reflects strong financial management and real value for money for the membership.

It is clear that the POA remains a Union committed to supporting its members with comprehensive legal assistance and specialist expertise. Finally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Nadine for her continued dedication and support in her role as the staff member responsible for Legal Services.

Terry McCarthy
Assistant General Secretary

CONDUCT COMMITTEE

Conduct Committee Annual Report 2025

Since the publication of the last Annual Report, the Conduct Committee has considered four cases referred to it.

Of these cases, one resulted in a formal censure of the member concerned, two were determined to have no case to answer, and the remaining case is currently ongoing.

In accordance with POA policy, all work undertaken by the Conduct Committee is carried out in full compliance with the relevant provisions contained within the POA Rules and Constitution.

I would like to record my sincere appreciation to the members of the Conduct Committee for their diligence and commitment throughout the past year. I would also particularly like to express my gratitude to Angela Sinclair for her exceptional secretarial support to both the Committee and to myself.

Duncan Keys
Chair Conduct Committee

PARLIAMENTARY

POA Parliamentary Report 2025

Prepared by Solidarity Consulting (April 2026)

Contents

Overview and summary

Campaigns: Safety and Security (Safe Inside)

Pension Age (68 Is Too Late)

Maintenance (Bring It Back)

Skilled Worker Visa Salary Thresholds

Legislation: Employment Rights Bill (Right To Strike)

Sentencing Bill (Electronic Monitoring)

Annex A: Trade Union Co-ordinating Group

Annex B: Links to selection of debates

Overview and summary

The first full calendar year of the new Labour Government saw increasing attention on the dire state of our prisons, with debate raging inside and outside of Parliament about overcrowding and early release schemes, serious prisoner violence against staff and other inmates, the dangers of drones and a small number of high-profile releases in error. It also saw several significant and hard-fought-for wins by the POA, from PAVA in the youth estate, mandatory body armour in high-security prisons, an exemption (for now) for prison officers from new skilled worker visa thresholds, an above-inflation pay rise and more. This is testament to the tireless campaign work of the union and the higher regard in which its members are held by the new Government, but it is only the start – action must be taken on pension age, the right to strike, outsourcing and more if we want to turn our failing prison service around.

To advance parliamentary campaigning over 2025, the POA have continued to co-sponsor the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group (JUPG) alongside sister unions Napo, PCS, UCU and the Police Federation of England & Wales, with secretariat support from Solidarity Consulting. The JUPG is co-chaired by Liz Saville Roberts, MP for Dwyfor Meirionnydd and the Westminster leader of Plaid Cymru, and former Unite general secretary Lord Woodley, while Labour's Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) and Conservative Lord Balfe are vice-chairs. Current membership stands at over 150. POA press releases, reports and briefings, including top lines, background info and suggested questions/actions, are regularly circulated to JUPG members, encouraging them to participate in relevant debates and to table and support selected motions and amendments.

The POA are also part of the Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance (JUPA), which includes the other JUPG unions alongside RCN, BMA, Royal College of Podiatry (who joined in June 2025), Unite, Unison and the GMB. JUPA was formed in 2019 to co-ordinate campaigning for better health and safety conditions in prisons, with five key principles including “tackling violence against all staff in prisons, including the targeting of violence against women workers”, “preventing exposure of all staff to Spice/psychoactive substances” and “safe staffing levels of prison officers and all staff working in prisons to ensure we can achieve the other objectives”. JUPA launched the Safe Inside Prison Charter in 2020 after a mass survey of union members (updated in 2021 and again in 2025 – see Campaigns: Safety

and Security, below), and has continued to inform supportive parliamentarians throughout the year about the problems facing all prison staff, while holding regular meetings with HMPPS health and safety officials. And with fellow JUPG and JUPA members Napo, PCS and UCU, POA are also a member of the Trade Union Co-ordinating Group (TUCG), alongside RMT, Equity, BAFWU, NEU, URTU and FBU. The TUCG is a comradely area for inter-union discussion and to co-ordinate campaigning activities in Parliament and beyond (see Annex A).

The Labour Government's ministerial team saw a major shake-up in the September reshuffle, sparked by the resignation of Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) as Deputy Prime Minister – with David Lammy (Tottenham) taking this role and moving from Foreign Secretary to Justice Secretary, replacing Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham Ladywood), who became the new Home Secretary. Mahmood replaced Yvette Cooper (Pontefract, Castleford & Knottingley), who replaced Lammy as Foreign Secretary, completing this triangular shift. Lord James Timpson stayed on as Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, as did Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) as Victims Minister and Sarah Sackman (Finchley & Golders Green) as Courts Minister, but new junior ministers Jake Richards (Rother Valley) and former judge Baroness Levitt replaced former JUPG co-chair Lord Ponsonby and Sir Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe), who became a whip. POA member Sally Jameson (Doncaster Central) stayed on as Mahmood's parliamentary private secretary, moving with her boss from Justice to Home in the September reshuffle. Now free to speak on Justice matters, she paid tribute at the Sentencing Bill's Second Reading that month (see Legislation: Sentencing Bill, below) "to my friends and former colleagues at His Majesty's Prison and Young Offender Institution Moorland who I served with prior to the general election. They are some of the bravest and most dedicated people I have ever known and, as only the second prison officer ever elected to this place, I want to use my time on these Benches to ensure that their voices are heard." She added:

***Sally Jameson:** The Conservatives nearly brought our prison system to the point of collapse; it is frankly beyond comprehension. Under them, we saw huge rises in violence, self-harm, drug abuse, overcrowding and an abject failure to build the spaces we needed. Rather than deal with that crisis, rather than face up to the challenge, they called a general election.*

For the Opposition, Robert Jenrick (Newark) continued throughout 2025 as the Conservatives' shadow justice secretary (defecting to Reform UK in January 2026), as did former Justice Select Committee member Kieran Mullan (Bexhill & Battle) as shadow prisons minister and former justice minister Lord Keen of Elie as the shadow minister in the Lords. In the Civil Service, Dame Antonia Romeo was promoted from Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice to the same role at the Home Office in April (before being promoted again to Cabinet Secretary, the head of the Civil Service, in February 2026), replaced by Jo Farrar, a former CEO of HMPPS – a role held by Amy Rees until she was replaced by former MOJ COO James McEwen, while Sarah Coccia became COO for Prisons.

Andy Slaughter (Lab, Hammersmith & Chiswick) continued throughout the year as chair of the Justice Select Committee, while his fellow Labour MPs Pam Cox (Colchester), Linsey Farnsworth (Amber Valley), Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West) and Sarah Russell (Congleton) continued serving on the committee alongside him. The two other Labour seats on the committee are filled by Matt Bishop (Forest of Dean), who replaced Alex Barros-Curtis (Cardiff West) in March, and Tony Vaughan (Folkestone & Hythe), who replaced Mike Tapp (Dover & Deal) after Tapp was made Immigration Minister in the September reshuffle. Conservatives Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) and Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West & Shirley) continued on the committee throughout 2025. For the Lib-Dems, Tessa Munt (Wells & Mendip Hills) also stayed on throughout the year, while Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset & North Poole) replaced Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) after he was elected as party president in November and was replaced by Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) as the party's justice spokesperson.

The POA's impact on Parliament was clear at the start of the year when national chair Mark Fairhurst was called as a witness to the Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee's inquiry on Prison culture: governance, leadership and staffing in January. Covering the key concerns of his members, Fairhurst was especially damning about governors who ignore staff warnings "that there has been a lot of violence on their wing this week, they know the wing is full of weapons, drugs and mobile phones, and that they want to lock down the wing to search every cell and get rid of

those items”. The Justice Committee in the Commons, informed by the POA, questioned HMP Liverpool governor Rob Luxford the following month, with chair Andy Slaughter asking about the “disputes between you and staff” – to which Luxford admitted there had been an “expectation” that recent changes at the prison “would see a potential increase in violence” (see Campaigns: Safety and Security, below).

MPs also condemned the unrealistic and cruel pension age of prison officers throughout the year, after ministers claimed in January that the Government had “requested advice from officials” on the matter, under questioning from new SNP MP Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North & Moray East). However, Logan was still asking where this advice was in December, with new Minister Jake Richards only prepared to say that “we will be updating the House on that issue in due course”. Meanwhile, longtime POA champion Grahame Morris (Lab, Easington) tabled Early Day Motion 2207: 68 Is Too Late Report by the Prison Officers’ Association, in November after the union conducted a survey of members that “received the largest response to any member consultation the union has undertaken”, as highlighted in the motion (see Campaigns: Pension Age, below).

Alongside other prison unions, the POA are calling for outsourced maintenance contracts to be brought back in-house, after a decade of privatisation has led to a £2 billion “backlog” in repairs – in other words, £2bn of squalor (see Campaigns: Maintenance, below). Having tabled EDM 571 on Prison Maintenance Insourcing in December 2024, JUPG vice-chair Kim Johnson asked written questions about whether the public sector would be allowed to bid for these contracts in the future, to which she was told that ministers “will not be inviting public sector bids for the provision of maintenance services for prisons” because an assessment by the previous Government had “determined that a privatised solution was the preferred option”. And furthermore, when asked in June by new left Labour MP Brian Leishman (Alloa & Grangemouth) to release the report “for full transparency and to avoid any accusation of a cover-up”, Minister Sir Nic Dakin could only claim that “a lot of the information is commercially confidential”. Meanwhile, at the Justice Committee in March, MOJ Permanent Secretary Antonia Romeo claimed she “could not be more enthusiastic to be scrutinised by Parliament” after committee member Sarah Russell warned of “a danger that there could be a perception – I only say “perception” because, to be clear, I am absolutely not making this allegation myself – that the civil service worked with contractors to produce contracts that made it difficult for us as representatives effectively to scrutinise what goes on”. After HMPPS CEO Amy Rees insisted that “setting up a contract in which we were somehow in cahoots with a provider who was not providing would make my job extremely difficult”, Russell replied:

***Sarah Russell:** I am not suggesting that you are personally corrupt. I want to be extremely clear that I absolutely am not suggesting that whatsoever, but a question needs to be asked about how that functions.*

The difficulty faced by overseas recruits was also a hot topic throughout 2025, with Fairhurst telling Peers in January about some such officers who were “sleeping in their cars because they have no accommodation” – and others who had even “set up camp in a wooded area opposite the prison where they are working”. Then in July came the announcement that changes to skilled workervisa salary thresholds would mean overseas prison officers wouldn’t be eligible to work in the UK – and some would even face deportation. Labour, Lib-Dem, Green and Plaid Parliamentarians all piled pressure on to the Government to reverse this outrageous decision, with JUPG co-chair Liz Saville Roberts even tabling a “prayer” motion against the changes, before Justice Secretary David Lammy announced a U-turn shortly before Christmas (see Campaigns: Skilled Worker Visa Salary Thresholds, below).

2025 also saw the passage of two key pieces of Government legislation, with amendments tabled on the advice of the POA. The Employment Rights Bill, delivering on a manifesto promise to upgrade workers’ rights, was the perfect opportunity to push back against the draconian ban on prison officers taking industrial action, with POA honorary life member and former shadow chancellor John McDonnell (Lab, Hayes & Harlington) tabling amendments in the Commons repealing the notorious Section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. At the Bill’s Report stage in March, McDonnell reminded MP that, “in 2019, the POA faced high six-figure fines in the High Court”, and that:

John McDonnell: *When it took action on health and safety grounds by convening meetings of members, it was threatened with legal action and the union leaders were threatened with imprisonment. Ironically, it would have been interesting to ask who would lock them up—but that is another question altogether.*

These amendments were retabled by Corbyn-appointed Lords Woodley and Hendy when the Bill came to the Upper House (see Legislation: Employment Right Bill, below). Meanwhile the Sentencing Bill, which followed a Government-commissioned review by former Tory Justice Secretary David Gauke, was introduced in part to tackle severe overcrowding across the prison estate by making more use of tagging and community sentences. But amid rumours that prison officers would be asked to tag prisoners pre-release, instead of this being done by contract-holders Serco, JUPG officers Kim Johnson and Lord Woodley tabled amendments to the Bill banning this from happening. And although these amendments weren't successful, the Government made a commitment in the Lords that the responsibility for fitting tags would remain firmly with Serco – no prison officers involved (see Legislation: Sentencing Bill, below).

Back at the Lords Committee in January, Fairhurst told Peers bluntly: “We need to be a stand-alone service like we were back in the 1990s when we were under the Home Office. We do not need the MOJ interfering because, first, it cannot get anything right and, secondly, it is full of bureaucrats and non-operational staff.” He continued:

Mark Fairhurst: *We have got non-operational staff with no experience of prisons writing prison policy telling us how we can do our job. That does not work. We are a law enforcement agency. We need to stand alone on our own two feet with our own budget, without restrictions from the MoJ. It is the same with probation. Probation needs to be a separate entity so it can be successful again. It needs to be under local governance. Leave the MoJ to serve justice via the courts and leave the Prison Service to enforce the law in our prisons as a separate entity.*

If anything, the problems identified by Fairhurst at committee have just worsened throughout 2025 – and with the Government's popularity continuing to plummet in 2026, now is the time for ministers to listen to their own frontline workers and do whatever it takes to turn our failing prison service around. Only by listening to their workers – who understand the problems and solutions better than anyone – will ministers be able to restore our public services to the level of quality expected, and if the public stop believing that Labour are going to make their lives better, then populists on the left and right are ready and waiting to take their votes. Labour are in the last-chance saloon – and they ignore the unions who founded the party at their peril.

Campaigns: Safety and security (Safe Inside)

Prison safety and security were fiercely debated in Parliament throughout 2025, kicking off shortly after the return from Christmas Recess with POA national chair Mark Fairhurst giving evidence to the Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee (14 January) for its inquiry into prison culture. Following a warning that morning from Chief Inspector Charlie Taylor that urgent action was needed to stop drones bringing drugs and weapons into jails, Fairhurst explained that the POA “have been telling our employer for at least the past five years that drones are a major security risk and will destabilise our prisons”, insisting on the “need to invest in technology to block the drones from delivering to prison cell windows”. However, he continued:

Mark Fairhurst: *We consistently get ignored. It falls on deaf ears. It seems to be the case that if it costs money, it will not happen. We know that there is technology out there to block drone signals. If you look at a prison in Guernsey—they have what they call a sky wall whereby a drone approaches the prison wall but is diverted and returns to sender. Why cannot we invest in our prisons in such technology to prevent drone deliveries?*

Ominously, he warned “it is only a matter of time – I will state it publicly – before a firearm makes its way into a prison”, adding: “We know there are drones out there that have a capability to lift a 75-kilogram load. That is somebody off the exercise yard.” Then turning to the recruitment process, he insisted it was “simply not fit for purpose” and highlighted how: “Everything is done remotely via Zoom.” Explaining that governors “do not know who they are getting through the door until they turn up after training”, he asked: “What other occupation does not interview people face to face?” And turning to the crisis of violence across the estate, Fairhurst warned that some governors simply refused to listen to their frontline staff, asking:

Mark Fairhurst: *What about the concerns of staff who are telling their senior management team that there has been a lot of violence on their wing this week, they know the wing is full of weapons, drugs and mobile phones, and that they want to lock down the wing to search every cell and get rid of those items? Then the senior management say, “No. Get them unlocked. Provide a regime”. That is not safe; that is ignoring the concerns of front-line staff. A bit of sympathy, empathy, common sense and listening to the troops on the front line is needed. We need to respect what they say and the concerns they raise.*

After Committee member Baroness Hughes of Stretford asked why the POA were no longer co-operating with the Chief Inspector, Fairhurst explained this was “because Mr Taylor wrote a scathing remark about staff at Wetherby who had saved a young girl’s life” and “was not happy with the actions they took”. And he added:

Mark Fairhurst: *The actions they took were the right thing to do at the right time because of the circumstances they faced, but he criticised them for that. I asked him to apologise because he admitted to me in private that they did the right thing. That is not what he wrote in public, but I asked him to apologise, and he refused. If he wants to apologise to my members at Wetherby for his scathing comments, which were bang out of order, I will happily re-engage with him. As far as I am concerned, he is not fit for purpose, he needs to be replaced and we need an overhaul of the Chief Inspector of Prisons.*

Baroness Hughes: *And you think that is a reasonable professional response from an organisation?*

Mark Fairhurst: *Yes, I do. I am here to back my members; I am not having them criticised for saving a young girl’s life by someone who is so out of touch that they do not know the reality of life in our prisons.*

The impact this violence has on the mental health of prison officers was also discussed, with Fairhurst asking Peers: “When a prison officer deals with trauma, who deals with our trauma? What support do we get when we are cutting people down, covering up cuts or trying to resuscitate someone who has tried to take their life? Who looks after us? Who do we offload to? There is nobody.” He continued:

Mark Fairhurst: *There are volunteer prison officers to deal with trauma who are TRiM trained and there are staff care teams. Who do they offload to when I offload to them? We have asked year after year for professional support on site in every prison. During the core day, Monday to Friday, there needs to be a psychologist, a trained mental health nurse and a counsellor. I do not care who they are. Employ someone so that when I have just dealt with a traumatic incident, I can go off the landing and offload in private to a professional. They can signpost me to additional support in my community if I need it. This might stop me from going off sick, leaving the service or getting PTSD, which more and more members are being diagnosed with because there is no support in place. Do not hit me with the argument that we cannot afford it, because long term it would be cost effective. It would probably save billions in staff sickness and getting rid of people on capability payments. If everything comes down to cost, we will get nowhere. It is time to invest in the service and it is time to invest in people, who are the biggest asset.*

Later that day (14 January), MPs debated the Chief Inspector’s warning about drones after shadow justice secretary Robert Jenrick was allowed an urgent question on the topic: “To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if she will make a statement on the national security risk of drones being used to deliver weapons to high-security prisons.”

Minister Sir Nic Dakin insisted that “we are working hard to deter, detect and disrupt the use of drones” but “it is not possible to talk in detail of the tactics we use to disrupt drones, given the obvious security implications”. He added:

Sir Nic Dakin: *What I can say is that His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service invests in targeted countermeasures such as improvements to windows, netting and grilles to stop drones from successfully delivering cargo such as drugs and weapons. In January 2024, restricted fly zones were introduced around all closed prisons and young offender institutions, supporting police and prison staff to disrupt illegal drone use.*

Ignoring his party’s neglect of prison security during its time in Government, Jenrick highlighted how “organised crime gangs can deliver drugs, phones and weapons such as zombie knives to inmates with impunity due to the absence of basic security measures such as functional CCTV, protective netting and window repairs”, adding that “the Chief Inspector said that the potential for escapes or hostage taking is of enormous concern. This could not be more serious. The situation has become, in his words, a threat to national security.” Sir Nic hit back, asking: “Who had 14 years to grip this situation?” adding that Jenrick “will know that drone sightings around prisons increased by over 770% between 2019 and 2023 – on his Government’s watch”. He continued:

Sir Nic Dakin: *Much like everything in our prisons, his Government have left it to us to fix the broken system and clean up their mess. It is a bit rich for him to come here and lecture us when he had 14 years to put this right.*

Having been freshly briefed by Mark Fairhurst immediately after the Committee session, Grahame Morris told MPs that “the Prison Officers’ Association has been saying for the past five years that the threat of drones destabilises our prisons and poses a massive security risk”, adding:

Grahame Morris: *Let me draw the Minister’s attention to the anti-drone system at HMP Guernsey, which very effectively prevents that threat. Can we expect this new system to be implemented in all prisons in England and Wales?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *Anything that works will be built upon – that is part of it. Drone technology has been accelerated through the Ukraine war. We know that we need to work very hard to keep ahead of the felons on this.*

Other MPs piled in, with new Labour MP Kevin McKenna (Sittingbourne & Sheppey) revealing: “I have talked to prison officers, who are my constituents, as well as working in the constituency, about the problems they face day in, day out – it takes more than a few signs saying ‘no drones’ to stop those drones.” And he asked:

Kevin McKenna: *What is the Minister doing to listen to prison officers and the Prison Officers Association, and to support them in tackling this? Those officers face threats and pressure from organised crime. Will he meet me to discuss this further?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend; if he could drop me a note to remind me, I will do that. This week, the Prisons Minister is meeting officials from the Prison Officers Association. Whenever I visit prisons, as I do regularly, I meet the Prison Officers Association representative in that prison. They are key partners in tackling the problems that we have inherited from the previous Government.*

Another new Labour MP, Jake Richards, who would later be promoted to junior minister in the September reshuffle, pointed the finger of blame at the Tories and poked fun at a former PM:

Jake Richards: *This is a long-standing problem, and the previous Government did not do anywhere near enough to deal with it. What they did do, when former Prime Minister Liz Truss was Lord Chancellor, was arrange for more dogs to bark at drones around prisons, which they assured us would work. Has the Ministry of Justice done an assessment on how effective that policy was?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *I think everybody agrees that that policy was barking.*

The following day (15 January) the same question was repeated in the Lords. Shadow minister Lord Keen of Elie highlighted how, “at HMP Manchester, almost 40% of prisoners have failed standard drug tests”, while “the Chief Inspector of Prisons has reported that criminal gangs now, in effect, control the airspace above this high-security prison using drones”. He continued:

Lord Keen: *There have been recent and rapid developments in drone technology. First-person viewing drones, GPS-controlled drones and others are all capable of delivering not only drugs but weapons and even explosives. Will the Minister address not only the existing security failures at HMP Manchester but the possible introduction of electronic countermeasures at high-security prisons such as HMP Manchester?*

Prison Minister Lord Timpson agreed that “drones pose a major and serious threat to all our prisons” but insisted: “I cannot share the counter-drone tactics as that would play into the hands of sophisticated and serious organised criminals.” And he warned that “the prisons I am visiting now are very different from the prisons I visited 15 or 20 years ago”, adding:

Lord Timpson: *The buildings are often in decrepit states of repair. We have a lot of new staff who are still learning the skills of being a prison officer and we have an awful lot more to do to ensure that people, when they are in prison, spend their days purposefully, not just sitting in their cells.*

Lib-Dem Lady Hamwee pointed out that “a major component of security regarding prisons must be stable, expert and sufficient staffing” and highlighted Fairhurst’s evidence to her committee the previous day:

Lady Hamwee: *When it gave evidence to our Justice and Home Affairs Committee, the Prison Officers’ Association referred to the recruitment process as being simply not fit for purpose and said that it was not surprising that corrupt and underqualified officers were being recruited – referring in particular to online interviews. Can the Minister give the House any news about improving the recruitment process and the number of staff?*

Lord Timpson: *Having run a business for many years and tried to find fantastic superstars to work with, I am well aware that we always want to find the best colleagues to work in our prisons. I am very engaged with the POA team as well. Noble Lords may be interested to know that we are currently at 99.5% staffing levels. That does not mean that everybody is trained and in the right place, but MoJ colleagues have made good progress on that. As regards the way recruitment works in our prisons, professionally trained assessors always take part in the interviews.*

JUPG co-chair Lord Woodley also highlighted how “yesterday the Justice and Home Affairs Committee heard from the chair of the Prison Officers’ Association that it was only a matter of time before arms were sent into prison via drones”, adding:

Lord Woodley: *There were even concerns that, with drones now being able to carry 75 kilograms, they could be used to facilitate some form of escape. Can the Minister please explain what anti-drone technologies we have in place, and will they be whizzed out across the rest of the empire?*

Timpson repeated the line that, “due to security reasons, I cannot go into any details on the measures that we have and that we will have”, but claimed “we will spend £520 million on maintenance over the next two years, because we have inherited prisons in such a bad state. A lot of that money will be spent on repairing nets, grilles and windows.”

Giving evidence on drugs in prisons to the Justice Committee the following month (25 February), Chief Inspector Charlie Taylor warned the threat from drones was a “paradigm shift”, while “the amount of money that organised crime is making from drugs has increased”. He added that “it is not just drugs that we are worried about. We are worried about other things such as weapons getting into prisons as well.” He continued:

Charlie Taylor: *At Manchester Prison, they found that many of their windows were broken and replaced them with new Perspex windows. Very quickly, the prisoners realised they could burn holes through them with the element from their kettle. They now have new windows at Manchester Prison, which, fingers crossed, will be unbreachable.*

Also giving evidence were a number of prison governors, including HMP Liverpool governor Rob Luxford. Local MPs Dan Carden, Paula Barker, Kim Johnson and Ian Byrne had previously been informed directly by POA general secretary Steve Gillan and national chair Mark Fairhurst, who serves at Liverpool, about Luxford’s poor conduct towards his local POA Committee, with whom he’d cut off direct contact and restricted facility time after threatening members with disciplinary and dismissal for exercising their health and safety rights. A visit to the jail had been organised for 7 March, with a follow-up meeting with Minister Timpson soon afterwards. Justice Committee chair Andy Slaughter had also been informed about Luxford’s approach to industrial relations, which had been reported in the Liverpool Echo and on the BBC. Slaughter picked his moment near the end of the session, asking “one final question in relation to staff” to Luxford:

Andy Slaughter: *You also said—not wanting to put you on the spot, Mr Luxford—that there have been disputes between you and staff at Liverpool prison recently. You are not the only one, but that clearly is a cause for concern. Can you tell us about that and whether it is now resolved?*

Luxford insisted that, “as a prison, our key objective is to improve our regime, time out of cell for prisoners and getting prisoners into activity and education”, but this “has been impacted by consistently high sickness levels, which has stopped us being able to deliver what we need to do”. And clearly flustered, he admitted:

Rob Luxford: *The impact over the last couple of months has been an increase in some violence. The increase in prisoner-on-prisoner assaults during January was also matched with an increase in prisoner-on-staff assaults. We have re-rolled the prison. Part of that was an expectation that a change in the prison would see a potential increase in violence, but the staff believe that that had become too high risk and we went through a position where staff withdrew to a place of safety.*

This, Luxford claimed, “was an incorrect use of the staff’s ability to raise concerns” because “they had not followed a process of raising that through health and safety, with me and management, and through the unions”. He continued:

Rob Luxford: *It ended in a position where, for a few days, we had an impact on the regime and a position where it became a lot of communication with the staff and with the unions to get people back into full work. We have returned almost immediately to a full regime and, I am hoping, have moved past that point. For the last two weeks, we have been running a normal regime, prioritising getting prisoners into work and activity.*

Andy Slaughter: *This arises out of staff’s concerns about their safety and their response to that.*

Rob Luxford: *It does, yes.*

Andy Slaughter: *Do you feel that that has now been brought under control?*

Rob Luxford: *Yes. We continue to work with staff. We continue to work with the unions. I have a visit with four MPs in two weeks' time, who are going to come in and independently see the prison, which I encourage. No assault on a member of staff is ever tolerable, but the incidents as they happened were managed well and we have managed to get through that. These were very individual incidents, nothing linked, and, as such, allowed us to return to normality at the soonest possible point.*

Andy Slaughter: *Do you feel that you have the confidence of the staff now?*

Rob Luxford: *I have full confidence that we prioritise the correct level of regime, with safety being the priority of everything we do. We have that balance right. Against all of our comparators, we are working well and we are performing well.*

Slaughter brought up drones at the next Justice Questions (11 March), highlighting how, “last month, the Justice Committee heard evidence from governors of prisons with some of the highest drug use rates in the country” and warning that, “from detecting drones to body scanners and physical barriers, they all felt under-resourced in technology and investment”. He asked:

Andy Slaughter: *What is the Secretary of State doing to better equip prison staff to keep drugs out of prisons?*

Shabana Mahmood: *We have already pressed ahead with further measures on X-ray and baggage scanners, and we are taking action to deal with the problem of drones. My hon. Friend will be aware that, for security considerations, I am not going to give the detail of some of those mitigations and of our proposals for tackling drones, because they are used by those involved in serious organised crime. However, I can assure him that I, Ministers and all officials, including those working across the prison estate, are seized of this matter, and we are determined to crack down on drones bringing drugs into our prisons.*

New Tory MP Rebecca Paul (Reigate) highlighted how “prison officers do an important job, and I thank every officer at Downview Prison in Banstead”, located in her Reigate constituency, adding:

Rebecca Paul: *It is extremely concerning that the number of assaults on staff at Downview more than doubled between 2023 and 2024. What steps is he taking to ensure that officers are protected in their day-to-day jobs?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *As the hon. Member rightly says, prison officers do an outstanding job. The work of the Prison Service is to make sure they are properly supported and protected in that role, and that is what is going on.*

At the next Justice Questions (22 April), Mahmood highlighted the horrific terrorist attack 10 days earlier on three prison officers in HMP Frankland with hot oil and makeshift blades, pointing out that “the bravery of the officers involved undoubtedly saved lives”. She added:

Shabana Mahmood: *Since the attack, I have suspended access to kitchens in separation centres and close supervision centres. An independent review will ascertain how the incident was able to happen, what more must be done to protect prison staff and, more widely, how separation centres are run, and the prison service will also conduct a snap review of the use of protective body armour. In addition, I can today*

announce that His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service will trial the use of Tasers in our prisons. Wherever we can strengthen our defences to better protect our staff and the public, we will do so.

New Tory MP Jack Rankin (Windsor) highlighted how “personal protective equipment is now worn in all kinds of jobs where people may have to deal with dangerous situations” and insisted “we should all be ensuring that our prison officers come home safe to their loved ones,” adding:

Jack Rankin: *Unions have called for this measure, and I can assure the Minister that they have the full support of those on the Opposition side of the House. Will he act—not in two months or six months, but now—to protect prison officers before it is too late?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *That is part of the review that has been announced. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor is meeting the Prison Officers Association tomorrow. These things need to be done rightly and properly, and that is what will happen with this Government.*

A fortnight later, another terrorist prisoner carried out a serious assault with boiling water on an officer at HMP Belmarsh, and the following Monday (12 May) shadow justice secretary Robert Jenrick was granted an urgent question on “the failure of the prison estate to protect staff from serious and sustained violence by high-risk inmates”. Minister Dakin started the debate by praising prison officers as “some of the hardest working and bravest public servants this country has”, and highlighted new rapid reviews into self-cook areas, Tasers and body armour, to report the following month. This wasn’t enough for Jenrick, who asked: “Why has every prison officer exposed to dangerous inmates not already been provided with a stab vest – not in June, but today?” He continued:

Robert Jenrick: *I have spoken to officers who say that attacks with boiling water are not uncommon. Will the Minister commit to ordering the removal of every kettle from high-risk prisoners—not in June, but today?*

These are good questions – but perhaps Jenrick himself would be better placed to answer them, as it was his own Government who consistently refused the POA’s many urgent requests for vests and restricted regimes as violence soared. Now in opposition, Jenrick appeared eager to back the union’s line: “This culture of appeasement and protecting the rights of convicted terrorists and criminals over the safety of our officers must end now.” If only he’d felt like that when he was a Cabinet Minister. Without shame, he continued:

Robert Jenrick: *I want to say this as clearly as I can. I warn the House now that, if the Government do not get a grip, a prison officer will be killed.*

Sir Nic Dakin: *We are managing the most complex people in the most complex system. Our prison staff have to manage extremely dangerous people, and they do it with real bravery. We will do whatever it takes to keep them safe. That is why we have already taken the actions that we have.*

Next up was Andy Slaughter, who pointed out that “the poor reputation of some prisons, including rising violence, makes recruitment more difficult”, which he described as “the legacy of 14 years of starving prisons of resources”. And he asked:

Andy Slaughter: *What are the current Government doing to improve the recruitment and retention of prison officers?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *My hon. Friend is completely correct: we inherited a prison system in crisis, where prisons were on the edge of collapse. Reducing violence in prisons is a key priority. That is why we have taken the actions we have in building new prisons and in the sentencing review: to ensure that we always have prison spaces to lock dangerous people up.*

Lib-Dem justice spokesperson Josh Babarinde highlighted how “no prison officer should go to work in fear that they may leave in an ambulance” and called on ministers to “get a grip”, adding:

Josh Babarinde: *The Prison Officers Association, which is holding its conference in my constituency this week, has requested more protective equipment. The Ministry of Justice is reviewing that, but will it accelerate the review to ensure that officers get that support now, not next month? Recruitment and retention issues also compromise prison officers’ safety, so what are the Government doing to address that?*

Sir Nic insisted that, “immediately after the incident at HMP Frankland, the Lord Chancellor, the Prisons Minister in the other place and I met the Prison Officers Association. That was a significant discussion, and commitments were made to ensure that things were addressed properly and correctly.” Adding that “the Prisons Minister will be speaking shortly at the Prison Officers Association conference”, he continued:

Sir Nic Dakin: *The reviews that are in place are being done in fast time, but they need to be done properly so that we can learn the lessons and take the appropriate actions. They also need input from the people who know exactly what is going on: those in the workforce and those who manage our prisons.*

Slaughter and Babarinde’s fellow Justice Committee member, new Labour MP Warinder Juss, spoke next, pointing out that “overcrowding in prisons is a cause of increased violence towards our prison officers, and that is a direct result of how the previous Government dealt with our prisons system”. Former minister Esther McVey (Con, Tatton) insisted that “any prisoner who assaults a prison officer should automatically forfeit any right to early release and all privileges”, while her fellow Tory Sir Julian Smith (Skipton & Ripon) insisted “there is a long track record of Taser use in the UK, and it would seem that we could also accelerate the use of Tasers in prisons as quickly as possible”. The minister replied:

Sir Nic Dakin: *I agree with the right hon. Member that this needs to be looked at as quickly as possible. This summer, an operational trial on Tasers will be launched, involving specialised officers, to help staff respond to high-risk incidents more effectively. The findings of the trial will inform any future decisions about the use of Tasers in the prison estate. We need to learn from what we do so that we can get it right in the future.*

John McDonnell thanked the Minister “for the working relationship he has established with the union since coming into office”, but asked:

John McDonnell: *Could I ask him to liaise with the POA and urgently bring forward a report, prison by prison, about staffing levels and the timescale set aside for training staff, particularly to deal with the violent prisoners they are dealing with at the moment?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *I am very happy to continue to work with the Prison Officers Association and other staff associations working in the prison sector to try to address the issues that my right hon. Friend rightly raises.*

Next, new Labour MP Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) pointed out that “violence in prisons escalated for years under the previous Government, who left our prisons at breaking point”, and asked: “What is the Minister doing to bring down levels of violence in our jails?” Sir Nic insisted: “A violence reduction training module is available to all staff to help them better understand the drivers of violence and how to mitigate and manage those risks, including the use of a case management model for those at raised risk of being violent.” Then another new Labour MP, Jayne Kirkham (Truro & Falmouth), told MPs about a prison officer she met, “who got an award for his bravery in dealing with one of the many incidents at the prison”. Heartbreakingly, though, she added:

Jayne Kirkham: *He took his daughter to receive the award, and afterwards she begged him to stop doing the job. He no longer was a prison officer after that. What are the Government doing to halt the levels of violence and increase staffing levels?*

New Tory MP and Justice Committee member Sir Ashley Fox highlighted how “the safety and security of our prison officers should always come before protecting the rights of convicted criminals” and called on the Minister to “provide stab vests and Tasers for all officers who request them”. Sir Nic agreed that “the safety and security of our prison staff must always come first and foremost”, adding: “I have already indicated that a review is going on. That needs to be done properly and effectively, and we will come back and inform the House in due course.” Next, JUPG co-chair Liz Saville Roberts pointed out that “unions have been raising the problem of safety and violence against staff in prisons for years under the previous Government, which underfunded them and let them down,” and she asked:

Liz Saville Roberts: *Will the Minister commit to meet unions at the launch in July of the newly updated “Safe Inside” prisons charter developed by the Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance, a coalition of nine unions representing workers in prisons, and that His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service will accept the recommendations in the charter?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *I am happy to meet those unions and the right hon. Member on the charter. Obviously, until we see the charter, it is difficult to know where things are going on that, but I am sure that HMPPS will be proactive in working with all the associations on getting the charter right.*

Highlighting the recent “horrific attack on prison staff at HMP Frankland” in her constituency, Labour’s Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) criticised “the lack of commitment around the issuing of stab-proof vests on the high-security estate” in the Prisons Minister’s reply to her letter, insisting:

Mary Kelly Foy: *That is a key ask from the Prison Officers Association. While I welcome the Minister’s words today when he said that it will be looked into, I ask that it is done at pace because too many prison officers are worried about whether they will come out of work in their own vehicle or in the back of an ambulance.*

Sir Nic Dakin: *Where an assessment is needed for stab-proof vests now, they can be deployed, but following the recent incident at HMP Frankland, HMPPS has commissioned a review to establish whether it is necessary for prison officers to wear protective body armour routinely. The review will inform any decision on the use of protective body armour on the prison estate and will report in June. June is next month, so it is happening pretty quickly, and rightly so because this is an urgent issue.*

Simon Hoare (Con, North Dorset) insisted that, “in the interests of the retention and recruitment of prison officers” he hoped that “the Minister and the Department will move speedily to a position whereby the wearing of anti-stab clothing and the carrying of Tasers and other equipment becomes de facto and routine, rather than merely happening in response to gleaned internal intelligence”. Sir Nic agreed “it is crucial that prison officers are equipped with the right protective equipment to do their job safely and securely”, before new Labour MP Luke Akehurst (North Durham) highlighted how “many of my constituents work at HMP Frankland”, adding:

Luke Akehurst: *I met representatives of the Prison Officers Association last week. Two of the concerns they raised were about equipment. They said that during the horrific terrorist attack by Hashem Abedi, they were unable to use batons because the space was too small to wield them, and he was so enraged that pepper spray had no effect on him. They clearly need additional equipment, so what steps are being taken on that? If, as the POA told me, activist lawyers and the courts are insisting that dangerous terrorist*

prisoners have access to kettles and the ability to use kitchens, will the Government consider changes to primary legislation to enable those privileges to be removed from that category of prisoner?

Sir Nic Dakin: *Let me say straightaway that access to kitchens has been immediately withdrawn. A review of equipment is taking place. The point that my hon. Friend makes about the intelligence he has had from prison officers at HMP Frankland illustrates the complexity around that issue. That is why we need to take our time to get this right while moving at pace and coming back to the House fairly quickly.*

Another new Labour MP, Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East), also told MPs that he'd met constituents who are prison officers, adding: "They agree with the former Justice Secretary who said that prison officer cuts were 'too much' and led to overcrowding and unsafe conditions." He continued:

Tom Hayes: *This Labour Government are rebuilding the trust of prison officers with a 5% pay award, whereas the Conservatives ran away from making such an award. What engagement does the Minister have with prison officers to understand what safety changes they want, particularly the use of Tasers and stab-proof vests?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *My hon. Friend makes a good point about the way in which the Government immediately recognised the need for an uplift in pay, in line with the independent pay report, and took action straightaway. As I said, immediately after the terrible incident at HMP Frankland, the Lord Chancellor, the Prisons Minister in the other place and I met the Prison Officers Association. Lines are open with all the other staff associations across the piece. It is important that we work with them to address this issue properly.*

And another new Labour MP, Chris Vince (Harlow), told MPs that, "from speaking to friends of mine who have worked in the Prison Service over the last couple of years, it is clear that this is not a new problem, and it is vital that we tackle it", asking: "Will the Minister echo his commitment to ensure that everyone, whether they are a retail worker in Harlow or a prison officer in Belmarsh, is safe at work?" Sir Nic insisted: "I absolutely give that commitment," before adding:

Sir Nic Dakin: *This Government will do all we can to make sure that people are as safe as possible when they go to work. Nobody should suffer what happened to these very brave, wonderful prison officers doing their duty; that should not happen to anybody when they go to work.*

The urgent question was repeated the following day (13 May) in the Lords, but before then Lord Woodley had a question on what the Government were doing to "improve the morale, recruitment and retention of police, prison and probation officers". After Minister Timpson praised "the amazing work of police, prison and probation officers, and the importance of our recognised trade unions in representing them", Woodley insisted:

Lord Woodley: *In a civilised society, our police, prisons and probation services must never be run on the cheap. Crumbling prisons and shortages of prison and probation staff are endemic. Therefore, does the Minister agree that it was a terrible mistake by the last Government not to protect these vital public services, which are so important to protecting the public, when they unleashed their short-sighted and counterproductive austerity agenda?*

Lib-Dem spokesperson Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames used the opportunity to raise the recently released Rademaker Review into bullying, harassment and discrimination within HMPPS, pointing out that "last week the Minister promised a 'seismic shift' to improve professional standards across the Prison and Probation Service". He added that Timpson had "described reports of bullying, discrimination and harassment as 'a wake-up call and an opportunity to change'," before highlighting:

Lord Marks: 7.8% of prison officers leave every year. Low morale is a major contributor but so are pay and conditions, given the challenges they face. What extra resources will the Government put into recruitment and retention in those services?

Minister Timpson replied: “Last week we announced that we would agree to all 12 recommendations of the Rademaker review, and we are very grateful to one of HMPPS’s non-execs, Jennifer Rademaker, for all the work she did on it”, adding:

Lord Timpson: It is totally unacceptable that our staff have to work in conditions where they are bullied, belittled and sexually harassed, and as Minister I am determined to stamp it out. Retention rates are not where I would like them to be. I am working very hard to make sure that HMPPS is a world-class organisation. That means high rates of training, high rates of morale and high rates of success.

Shadow minister Lord Sandhurst also highlighted the crisis in retention by pointing out that “the Ministry of Justice reported a 12.5% leaving rate among band 3 to 5 prison officers for the year ending December 2024”, asking:

Lord Sandhurst: Considering that the number of new recruits decreased by 35.4% during the same period, will the Minister explain what practical steps the Government are taking to improve both recruitment and retention among prison officers?

Lord Timpson: The latest figures are that we have 97% of the number of staff we need in our prisons, but clearly we still have a bit to go. Also, a number of those staff are yet to be fully trained and in the right place. Before I was asked to come and do this role, I did a full review into the training of prison officers. I am fortunate that it is more likely to happen now I am in this role, because training is a big part of the reason why some of our staff leave too early. We want to make sure that people build their whole careers in the Prison Service, because the skills they learn—those soft skills about how they speak to prisoners and offenders—really make the difference in helping turn someone’s life around.

Following this, the Lords then addressed the repeated question on protection of prison staff, with Lord German highlighting the “19% increase in the number of assaults on prison officers in the last year and a shortage of prison officers”, asking: “That is a bagful of problems for the Minister – does he have an emergency plan for these problems, and what will he do to ensure that our prison officers are safe and that there is a sufficient number of them?” Minister Timpson insisted that “we will not tolerate any violence against prison officers”, adding:

Lord Timpson: In the past few weeks, since the recent serious attack at Frankland, we have announced a number of steps to improve prison officer safety, including trialling Tasers, suspending the use of self-cook areas for certain prisoners and reviewing whether protective body armour should be made available to front-line staff. We also have a zero-tolerance approach towards extremist gang activity in prisons. Staff clamp down swiftly on any threatening behaviour. Our staff turn up to work to help people turn their lives around, not to get assaulted.

The Prisons Bishop, the Lord Bishop of Gloucester, pointed out next that “the training for prison staff is woefully short: a matter of weeks – I think that people would be shocked to hear how short that is”, and asked:

The Lord Bishop of Gloucester: What is being done to expand that training and development so that staff not only feel valued but are equipped to deal with such a wide range of situations?

Lord Timpson: I share the right reverend Prelate’s interest in prison officer training. When I did my review into their training, it was clear that the period in which they have to learn the detailed and complex skills to do the job is too short. I have launched a trial in London called the Enable programme, where we are giving far more time to training. I believe that we should have a 12-month training programme rather than

one of a matter of weeks. We should also give officers the time to learn the more subtle skills of being an officer. It is clear to me that one of the best ways to tackle the problems in our prisons and Probation Service is to ask the people who do the job.

At Justice Questions a fortnight later (3 June), Shabana Mahmood spoke of “my anger at recent attacks against prison officers”, explaining that, “after the awful events at HMP Frankland, I commissioned a review into the use of protective body armour, and today I can announce that I will mandate its use in close supervision centres, separation centres, and segregation units in the high security estate”. However, her shadow Robert Jenrick insisted that “brave prison officers are under attack, and I am warning again that, if the Government do not act now, an officer will be killed on the Justice Secretary’s watch”. He continued:

Robert Jenrick: *After the Southport killer, Axel Rudakubana, allegedly attacked an office with boiling water, he is now bingeing on treats such as Maltesers and Pringles. When will the Justice Secretary strip Rudakubana and monsters like him of those privileges and put them in solitary confinement? When will she finally have the backs of all our brave prison officers, by giving each and every one the protection that they need in the form of high-collar, stab-proof vests, and not just a privileged few in the most limited circumstances?*

Shabana Mahmood: *Let me give the shadow Secretary of State a much-needed education, because he appears not to know that under the Tory Government violence on staff in our prisons soared and experienced officers left in droves because of it. That is the inheritance I received, and that is the mess that this Government are clearing up. He will know that I have already acted on suspending the use of self-cook facilities, and Jonathan Hall is looking into the HMP Frankland attack. I have made the announcement on body armour, and I will not hesitate to take any further action, but unlike him I will not take “headline-grabbing” measures, just for the sake of a headline.*

A fortnight later (18 June), Sharon Hodgson (Lab, Washington & Gateshead South), presented her petition on anti-stab and anti-slash protective gear in prisons, explaining:

Sharon Hodgson: *I rise to present this petition in the light of recent horrific attacks on prison officers by inmates. Debate about whether prison officers should all be provided with anti-stab and anti-slash gear has been brought to the forefront of political discussion recently. We know that attacks can happen in any prison, as it did to my very brave constituent Claire Lewis, who as a result set up a Change.org petition calling for mandatory protective gear—it currently has 32,000 signatures. We must ensure that this is available to all officers, not just those working in high-security prisons.*

A week later (25 June), MPs held an “Estimates Day” debate – at which departmental budgets are discussed – on the criminal justice system. Andy Slaughter warned: “In the 12 months to December 2024, there were 10,600 assaults on prison staff,” which he pointed out was “an increase of 13% from the previous year and the highest number of assaults on prison staff recorded in one year”. And he added:

Andy Slaughter: *Overcrowding, increased drug use, violence and self-harm contribute towards a distressing environment in prisons such that the vital function of prisons to rehabilitate offenders can be almost impossible in some institutions. We are undertaking a major inquiry into rehabilitation and resettlement, which I hope will shed more light on these troubling pictures.*

The following month (7 July), JUPG co-chair Liz Saville Roberts tabled Early Day Motion 1612 on the “Safe Inside Prisons Charter”, which “notes with alarm the rising levels of violence against prison staff [and] the toxic culture of unacceptable behaviour within HM Prison and Probation Service identified by the Rademaker Review into bullying, harassment and discrimination”. The EDM insisted that “frontline workers in prisons need a greater say in policies directly affecting their health and safety, including around the accurate reporting of health and safety violations

and secondary exposure to psychoactive substances”, and “welcomes the updated Safe Inside Prisons Charter by the Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance, a coalition of 10 national trades unions representing the majority of staff working in prisons, which sets out the principles of a positive health and safety culture and safer systems of work in such a uniquely challenging workplace environment”. The EDM also “calls on the Government to instruct HMPPS to adopt the Charter in full immediately as part of an urgent strategy involving all prison unions to reduce violence”. Rademaker herself spoke to POA Annual Conference 2025 in May, and also to the JUPG in December, which resulted in a number of work-streams to hold HMPPS to its promises to change the professional culture in the Prison Service.

MPs again warned about rising prison violence at Justice Questions (8 July), with new Labour MP Sarah Edwards (Tamworth) highlighting how “there has been a spate of attacks at Swinfen Hall Prison, which holds young offenders, in my constituency”, adding:

Sarah Edwards: *Drugs, phones and weapons are often dropped in by drone. The families of prisoners are concerned for their safety, and prison officers are at risk. What steps are the Government taking to prevent drones and to tackle the high levels of violence in our prisons?*

Shabana Mahmood: *Under the last Government, between 2019 and 2023, drone sightings around prisons increased by over 770%. As I have said, we are investing £40 million in bolstering security measures in our prisons, and we are currently trialling new anti-drone netting on the long-term, high-security estate to tackle drone incursions.*

Liz Saville Roberts used the opportunity to raise the Rademaker Review and the relaunch of the Safe Inside charter that day, highlighting how “prison staff are facing record levels of violence and working in such a toxic environment that, according to the Rademaker review, workers are too afraid to raise complaints about bullying and harassment”. She asked Mahmood:

Liz Saville Roberts: *Does the Lord Chancellor therefore welcome today’s relaunch of the updated “Safe Inside” prisons charter by the Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance, a coalition of 10 trade unions representing the vast majority of prison staff? If so, will she join us this evening to hear more about safer systems of working in prisons?*

Shabana Mahmood: *I believe the Prisons Minister may well be attending the event that the right hon. Member mentioned. I will happily pick that up in my regular conversations with trade union officials. She is right to highlight the scale of violence across our prison system. We are already taking measures, and I hope that the combination of sentencing reform and investment in our prisons will bring down the level of violence we are currently seeing.*

At Justice Questions following Summer Recess (16 September), the new Justice Secretary David Lammy insisted that “the safety of our prison staff is a No. 1 priority for me”, adding:

David Lammy: *That is why we are investing £40 million to stop the contraband that puts our hard-working staff particularly at risk. We are also rolling out protective body armour for use in the highest security units and trialling the use of Tasers for specialised staff.*

The Safe Inside charter was highlighted by Grahame Morris, who told MPs that, “last week in Brighton, the TUC unanimously backed the ‘Safe Inside’ campaign promoted by the Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance calling for urgent action against record-high levels of prison violence and second-hand exposure to psychoactive substances”, asking:

Grahame Morris: *Does the Secretary of State agree that current conditions are quite intolerable for prison staff and that the Prison Service needs to be held directly accountable for the health and safety of everyone who works in prisons, all of whom deserve to be safe inside?*

David Lammy: *I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. We are talking to the unions. I hope that the £40 million we have put in will be able to alleviate some of the problems, but he is right that the assaults on our staff are entirely unacceptable.*

At the ministerial statement after Conference Recess on Prisoner Release Checks (27 October), Lammy insisted that “a single release in error is one too many” but claimed they were a “symptom of the system that we inherited from the Conservative party”, adding:

David Lammy: *Jails were full—almost to breaking point—and there was the threat of a total collapse in law and order. The fact is that we were left with prisons reeling from historic funding reductions: a 24% real-terms cut between 2010 and 2015, and 30% cuts in staffing. Today, we have been left with over 50% of frontline prison officers having less than five years’ experience. When the system has been brought to its knees, it is little wonder that errors like this happen.*

Lammy stood in for the Prime Minister at PMQs (5 November), where he was questioned on another recent high-profile release in error. Shadow defence secretary James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) asked several times whether any “other asylum-seeking offender has been accidentally let out of prison”, which Lammy refused to answer:

James Cartlidge: *I am going to ask the Deputy Prime Minister the question again. Can he reassure the House that since Kebatu was released, no other asylum-seeking offender has been accidentally let out of prison? It is a very specific question for him to answer.*

But Lammy could only claim that, “after Kebatu’s release, I put in place the toughest checks we have ever had in the prison system”, and Cartlidge continued with his ambush:

James Cartlidge: *The right hon. Gentleman is the Justice Secretary; he is responsible for the justice system, and he needs to take responsibility. I am asking him a straight question and I am going to repeat it once more, for the avoidance of doubt, because he did not answer it twice. He is here to answer questions, so can he reassure the House that since Kebatu was released, no other asylum-seeking offender has been accidentally let out of prison? It is a clear question. Can he give an answer?*

David Lammy: *Get a grip, man! I know I am the Justice Secretary. That is why I am at the Dispatch Box, also as Deputy Prime Minister. We know that. [Interruption.] I am not going to pray in aid. Dame Lynne Owens is a former deputy commissioner in London and was head of the National Crime Agency. It is for her to get to the bottom of this work. We know that there have been spikes since 2021 under the hon. Gentleman’s watch. When did he come to this House and apologise?*

Cartlidge calmly repeated his question:

James Cartlidge: *People in Epping and right across the country want to know the answer, so I am going to ask the right hon. Gentleman this question again. He is the Justice Secretary. Can he reassure the House that since Kebatu was released, no other asylum-seeking offender has been accidentally let out of prison? Can he answer the question?*

David Lammy: *I have got to tell the hon. Gentleman: I spent 14 years in opposition and I did a hell of a lot better than he has just done. I have answered the question. Under the Conservatives’ watch, prisons were in a mess. Suicides went up, prison officers were cut, and 20,000 neighbourhood police officers were lost.*

We have deported more people in the last year than they deported in the last five years. Please, I am not going to take any lecturing from the hon. Gentleman.

Immediately after question time, Cartlidge raised a point of order, revealing there had indeed been another mistaken release:

James Cartlidge: *The Telegraph is reporting that a police manhunt has been launched for a second asylum seeker who was mistakenly freed from prison. Can you advise me on how I can ask the Justice Secretary whether he was aware of that when I asked him about it repeatedly in Prime Minister's questions?*

Mr Speaker: *You have put it on the record, Mr Cartlidge. Let us move on.*

The Lords debated accidental prison releases a week later (10 November), with Labour's Lady Carberry of Muswell Hill asking: "What work is being done to improve prison officer training to reduce releases in error, as a matter of urgency and in the long term?" Minister Timpson replied that "the Ministry of Justice has a programme called Enable, around how we develop the skills of our fantastic staff", explaining:

Lord Timpson: *In the short term, we have introduced new checklists that are more robust than ever and asked for duty governor sign-off on releases. We are investing more money in training for our staff. That is not just for staff who are joining the service; it is important that we invest in the staff who have been with us for some time. The offender management unit does complex work. I have spoken to governors who have been in the service for many years. When they look at the release checks that the offender management units must do, they cannot believe how much more complex it has become over the last few years.*

Labour's Lady Ramsey of Wall Heath asked "what, if any, impact the previous Government's austerity measures and policies over a decade or more have had on the Prison Service today", with Timpson replying: "I have been visiting prisons and been interested in this area for 25 years, and with the previous Government I saw a lack of investment across the board." He expanded:

Lord Timpson: *There are three specific areas. First, they did not build enough prisons and did not maintain the prisons that they had. Secondly, they reduced the staffing levels as part of austerity, to the extent that lots of very experienced staff left, and that was especially so in probation. Thirdly, and connected with errors on release, there was a lack of investment in digital technology to help our hard-working staff, who spend hours and hours with boxes of paperwork, when it would be far more efficient and accurate if they had digital support to help them.*

Former Conservative minister Lord Garnier highlighted how, "when I was last in opposition, in the 2000s, I was shadow Prisons Minister", adding:

Lord Garnier: *Even though there was a Labour Government, nobody ever said that it was the Labour Government's fault that people escaped. Can we have a little less of it being said that it is the last Government's fault? In the 2000s, there were people escaping, there were high levels of suicide and high levels of violence against prison officers, and there was sewage flowing from the top floors of prisons into the lower floors. The whole estate was in a shambles and the staff in a state of low morale. Let us solve this problem together. The Minister and I know that this can be done. I ask him not to fall into the trap of reading out the Whip's notes.*

Lord Timpson: *The noble and learned Lord and I know each other very well. I hope he knows that I have my own view on this, because, like him, I visit lots of prisons all the time. It is clear that our prisons need investment and that we need to build new prisons. Only last week I went to a new prison which will be*

opening in 2028. These are modern, highly efficient prisons that are there not just to keep the public safe but to rehabilitate people. The problem that we are trying to fix is a long-term problem. It is not just about buildings; it is about people and how we support our staff to deliver an amazing service in rehabilitating people so that when they leave prison they do not come back.

Former JUPG co-chair Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede, who lost his ministerial role in the September reshuffle, revealed: “I visited HMP Wandsworth last Thursday and was told that there are about 2,000 releases every year from there,” adding that he had been visiting the Independent Monitoring Board:

Lord Ponsonby: *One of the issues that it raised with me was a review that is going on into the IMB process and the secretariat that supports the IMB. Does my noble friend agree that IMBs are vital? They tell truth to power, truth to Ministers and truth to the inspectorate. Will my noble friend write to me to tell me about the process of review of IMBs which is under way and assure me that the IMBs are fully valued?*

Lord Timpson: *My noble friend is absolutely right that the independent monitoring boards in our prisons do a really vital job. In every prison I go to, I try to meet the IMB leaders—the chair—and last week I met the national chair of the IMBs, Elisabeth Davies, to talk through how their plans were going. I know they struggle on recruitment in certain prisons as well, but the work they do, walking the wings, speaking to prisoners and speaking to staff, is absolutely vital.*

The following day (11 November), Lammy made a statement on further mistaken prisoner releases, in which he highlighted how “prisons are still struggling with violence”. He continued:

David Lammy: *The safety in custody statistics show an 8% rise in the rate of assaults in the year to June 2025. Systems are archaic; every prisoner’s sentence is worked out on paper. Consideration is given to the type of offence and the legislation that covers it, and there are more than 500 pages of sentence management guidance. I pay tribute to prison officers, who are doing an incredibly important job, but as the Prison Officers Association has said, “Prisons throughout the country are underfunded, understaffed and operating under relentless strain.” Frontline prison officers were cut by a quarter between 2010 and 2017. That is around 6,000 fewer people, and it means that there are fewer experienced staff, which places more pressure on the system. Unsurprisingly, mistakes happen in those circumstances. Indeed, from 2010-11 to the end of 2023-24, under the previous Government, there were 860 known releases in error from prisons.*

And he pointed out:

David Lammy: *If Governments cut officers by almost 50%, as the Conservatives did in office, and then recruit new officers, as we have attempted to do, those are then very junior people. They are working hard, and I thank them for all that they are doing, but in those circumstances mistakes will be made.*

Andy Slaughter spoke next, insisting that “the level and circumstances of such releases are symptomatic of a deeper malaise”, asking Lammy:

Andy Slaughter: *Will he look at the Justice Committee’s current reports on drug culture, organised crime and the lack of education and work in prisons? Will he commit to tackling the underlying breakdown of order and discipline in the prison system, which, over years of decline, has made many prisons unsafe, chaotic and unfit for purpose?*

Lammy replied: “My hon. Friend of course knows that this is a system that is incredibly hot, frankly, because violence is up, self-harm is an issue, and there is the issue of things arriving in prison by drone, particularly drugs”, adding:

David Lammy: *We have staff doing the best they can in very difficult circumstances. My hon. Friend knows that no Government, in just 16 months in office, could turn around the austerity that this public service saw.*

New Lib-Dem spokesperson Jess Brown-Fuller insisted that, “if the situation was not so serious, it would be laughable”, adding: “Since the mistaken releases of recent weeks, I have heard horrendous reports from prison officers inside prisons of prisoners being identified by low-quality black-and-white photographs printed on paper and a few basic questions on personal information—information that could be readily shared between inmates—before being cleared for release. That is not good enough, especially when we now have biometric technology that is used for visitors to prisons but not for inmates.” She continued:

Jess Brown-Fuller: *Like most of the justice system, our prison system was mismanaged and underfunded by the previous complacent Conservative Government, so we appreciate that the Labour Government inherited this mess. However, the number of mistaken prisoner releases has risen sharply on their watch and they cannot continue to risk public safety, particularly given that it took them a whole seven days to realise that a prisoner had been mistakenly released and that they are seemingly blaming an email being unread for the most recent error.*

The statement was repeated two days later in the Lords (13 November), with Minister Timpson highlighting how “releases in error are symptomatic of a system stretched to its limits”, adding:

Lord Timpson: *I pay tribute to the prison staff working under incredibly difficult circumstances. What we are talking about here is a paper-based system, with individual prisoners’ sentences worked out every time they arrive to a new prison. Prison staff must consider the type of offence committed and each individual piece of legislation it comes under. This process has become increasingly complex in recent years, owing to the previous Government’s early release programme and the scheme this Government were forced to put in place upon coming into office to prevent the collapse of our prisons. A 2021 review found more than 500 pages of sentence management guidance. Of course, prison staff go through full and proper training before they start their jobs, but the reality is that prisons suffered staffing cuts of around a quarter between 2010 and 2017. That is around 6,000 fewer people. The knock-on effect is that, today, over half of front-line prison staff have less than five years’ experience. That makes mistakes more likely.*

Lord Foster of Bath, chair of the Justice and Home Affairs Select Committee, pointed out that, “although we have more and more prisoners, we have fewer and fewer prison officers”, adding:

Lord Foster: *They are leaving at an alarming rate, so we need to address some of the staffing issues. The Justice and Home Affairs Select Committee and the Chief Inspector of Prisons have been highly critical of the recruitment procedure for prison officers, which is done via Zoom with no face-to-face interviews; of the in-service training of those officers; and, in particular, of the assessment of the in-service performance of those officers—often, no records are kept of any discussions with them. Does the Minister accept that all those issues relating to staff in our prisons also need to be addressed to ensure that we have a higher calibre of staff who are less likely to make mistakes, including mistaken releases?*

Lord Timpson: *The noble Lord is right that we are 100% dependent on the good will and ability of our staff. Our staff in the Prison and Probation Service have been heroic over the past few years, dealing with Covid, early releases and so on. We expect a lot of them and we need to improve their training. That is why we have the Enable project, which I worked on before I came into Government. We also need to up our game on retention, because we do not want to lose experienced prison officers.*

A week later (20 November), the Conservatives were granted an urgent question on separation centres, with Shadow Justice Secretary Robert Jenrick asking the Government to “make a statement on the implications for

national security and the management of terrorist offenders following disruption to the separation centre regime". Minister Alex Davies-Jones insisted that "separation centres are a vital part of our strategy to manage those who pose the most significant terrorist risk", adding:

Alex Davies-Jones: *Our prison officers are some of the hardest-working and bravest public servants in this country. It is right that they feel safe as they work to protect the public. That is why, following the attack at Frankland, we mandated the use of protective body armour in our highest-risk units, including our SCs, for the first time. The Deputy Prime Minister has recently announced a further £15 million investment in safety equipment, including to roll out up to 10,000 pieces of body armour to up to 500 staff trained in the use of Tasers.*

Lib-Dem Will Forster (Woking) warned that "violent attacks on prison staff are on the rise", adding:

Will Forster: *We have seen high-profile cases of prisoners, including one from my constituency of Woking, being accidentally released. What assurances will the Minister give us, as MPs, that public safety and the protection of prison staff will be prioritised in the under-resourced prison system that the Government inherited from the Conservatives?*

In reply, Davies-Jones noted the "chronic underfunding of our Prison Service and our criminal justice system over 14 years of Tory austerity" and insisted: "We are slowly beginning to pick up the pieces of what was left of our criminal justice system when we came into office 18 months ago, and this is yet another example of how the previous Government failed to keep us safe and failed to invest in our Prison Service." Labour's Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent & Rhymney) highlighted how "the Frankland attack was awful" and asked:

Nick Smith: *Given that body armour is crucial to the safety of prison staff, can she please tell us more about its procurement, so that prison staff are protected as best as possible, as soon as possible?*

Alex Davies-Jones: *It is right that we equip our prison officers with the most robust security and protection possible. That is why we are working with them, with the unions and with governors to ensure that all steps are taken.*

Later that day (20 November) Andy Slaughter took questions on his Committee's recent report on Reoffending and Rehabilitation in Prisons, highlighting how "around 80% of all offending is reoffending" and adding:

Andy Slaughter: *That figure alone suggests there is a serious issue, and that His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service is not currently serving its stated mission of rehabilitating the people in its care. The purposes of prisons are clear: punishing, protecting the public, and rehabilitating offenders. The opportunity for offenders to be rehabilitated in prison should not be considered a luxury; it is a fundamental necessity to ensure that those who have done their time can return to society as law-abiding citizens.*

But, he continued, "the evidence we received, however, paints a starkly different picture", adding:

Andy Slaughter: *Instead of being places of reform, too many of our prisons have become places of stagnation, where offenders languish and rehabilitation opportunities are scarce. Our inquiry into rehabilitation has taken place amid a prison capacity crisis. Overcrowding, staffing shortages and deteriorating infrastructure have created conditions that actively undermine rehabilitation. The Committee found that the current conditions across the prison estate are simply not conducive to reform.*

And focusing on staff retention, he warned:

Andy Slaughter: *In the 12 months to 30 June 2025, there was a leaving rate of almost 12% among prison officers. These staffing shortages are not just an operational inconvenience, but a public safety risk. As we heard recently, in the year to March, 262 prisoners have been released in error. Overworked staff, outdated systems and inadequate training have meant that when officers are stretched to breaking point, the likelihood of administrative errors skyrockets. Current levels of wrongful releases are not isolated blunders, but symptomatic of a system under intolerable strain. Alongside that, high turnover, poor recruitment processes and limited professional development have all contributed to a culture that hinders rehabilitation. Governors lack the autonomy to lead effectively, and the current staffing model is unsustainable. The Committee recommends that prison staff should receive training at least annually, with more frequent support as they progress through their careers.*

Pointing out that “education is the cornerstone of rehabilitation”, he highlighted how “prison education is underfunded and poorly delivered”, adding:

Andy Slaughter: *Participation rates are low—50% of prisoners are not in education or work. For those who do take part, Ofsted ratings remain poor, with 75% of prisons inspected in 2024-25 rated “inadequate” or “showing no improvement”. It is therefore unsurprising that two thirds of offenders are not in education or work six months after release from prison. Given that, we are alarmed by reports of significant real-term cuts to prison education budgets of up to 50%. We expect the Government to clarify the rationale of any budget reduction.*

At the Lords repeat of the separation centres question two days later (25 November), Lady Ramsey asked if the Government were “doing enough to keep our prison staff safe”, adding: “With increasingly violent prisoners challenging authority, what else is being done?” Minister Timpson replied that “one of the things that surprises me going round prisons now compared with 25 years ago is how much more violence there is on our wings”, adding:

Lord Timpson: *That is probably due to a combination of the amount of drugs in our prisons and the number of people with severe mental health issues, but also people serving very long sentences. We are investing in protecting our staff. As my noble friend said, our staff do an amazing job, often in very difficult and dangerous situations. That is why we have invested £15 million in 10,000 personal body armour jackets and suits. We are also training 500 staff in how to use Tasers. Every other week, I speak to prison leaders. Last week, I spoke to the governors of the long-term high-security estate, who told me how much reassurance the staff have had from the fact they are now getting investment in this extra protection.*

At the last Justice Questions of the year (16 December), Andrew Rosindell (Con, Romford) asked what ministers were doing to improve the security of prisons, with Minister Jake Richards insisting that “prison security is a top priority”. Rosindell replied:

Andrew Rosindell: *I thank the Minister for his helpful reply, but as he knows full well violence, illegal drug dealing and escapes are on the rise in prisons, with a shocking 12% increase in breakouts across England and Wales since 2024. That is risking the safety of all our communities. Dangerous criminals are also being released in error. When will the Justice Secretary take responsibility for this utter shambles, get a grip on the situation to ensure that dangerous criminals remain locked up behind bars and do the job he is supposed to be doing to keep the British people safe?*

Jake Richards: *I am constantly aghast at the chutzpah of the Conservatives, who left the prison system in utter crisis after 14 years. Prison officer numbers reduced under them, and prison places hardly rose at all. We are stabilising the prison system and investing in security measures to ensure that we have a prison system that is fit for the future and safe for the public.*

New Labour MP Michelle Welsh (Sherwood Forest) asked what was being done to improve safety in prisons, with Richards insisting: “We are enhancing security measures and easing crowding to curb violence and improve safety in prisons, as well as looking at measures to improve meaningful activity to increase welfare.” He continued:

Jake Richards: *We are investing around £15 million in protective equipment to help keep frontline staff working in prisons safe, including expanding the use of Tasers and providing more protective body armour.*

Michelle Welsh: *Lowdham Grange prison in my constituency is a failing prison, and I have been inundated with correspondence from prisoners, families and staff who on a regular basis inform me about unsafe conditions and a toxic culture of bullying, as well as incidents of violence, drugs and self-harm, many of which are not recorded; and there is no access to healthcare professionals. Since the last inspection in 2023, 10 prisoners have died. The prisoners have also had 32 days of lockdown in the past two years, and the prison has the worst possible rating for safety. Does the Minister agree that it is time for the Government to make a direct intervention in this prison?*

Jake Richards: *I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that important case, which is very much on the radar of the Ministry of Justice. I will raise the issue personally with the Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending in the other place. I am personally committed to this issue, and I will visit Lowdham Grange in the new year, hopefully with my hon. Friend, to meet the governor and others to discuss those critical issues.*

With prison violence at record levels, the issues of safety and security are not going away, and the JUPG is committed to holding the Government to account and campaigning to ensure that ministers do everything possible to keep prison staff safe at work.

Campaigns: Pension Age (68 Is Too Late)

New SNP MP Seamus Logan used the first Justice Questions of the year (28 January) to highlight the unrealistic and cruel pension age of prison officers, asking Minister Sir Nic Dakin about the impact this has on recruitment. Sir Nic insisted he was “committed to improving the retention of experienced staff” and revealed that the Justice Secretary “has requested advice from officials on the pension age of prison officers”. Logan followed up by pointing out that, “in Scotland, the ‘68 is too late’ campaign by the Prison Officers Association enjoys cross-party and Scottish Government support, but the UK Government have refused to take action on this important issue”. He continued:

Seamus Logan: *The current retirement terms ignore the reality of the frontline role that prison officers perform in prisons on a daily basis across the UK. It is a dangerous role, and no less so than that of firefighters or the police, who enjoy very different terms. Although justice is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, the pensions of Scottish prison officers are controlled by the UK Government. So will the Minister or the Secretary of State commit the Government to reviewing the current prison officer retirement age of 68, and will he meet me to hear this case in more detail?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *As I have said, the Lord Chancellor has requested advice on this matter. We promote our strong employee total reward package as part of our recruitment. The terms and conditions of the civil service pension scheme are some of the best in the public sector, with a low employee contribution rate and a significant employer contribution rate of 28.97%. However, that does not mean it is not a right and proper question to ask, and if the hon. Member wishes to have a meeting with me, I am quite happy to meet him.*

The campaign was raised again at the next Justice Questions (11 March) by POA honorary life member Ian Lavery (Lab, Blyth & Ashington), who highlighted how, “last year, assaults on prison staff were up by 19% and serious assaults were up by 22%, yet the pensionable age of prison officers is still 68 – it is simply too late”, asking:

Ian Lavery: *Can the Minister update the House on any discussions he may have had with officials regarding that industrial injustice and say when these loyal public servants might expect to see this long-standing issue corrected?*

Recognising “the unique and challenging role that prison officers play in protecting the public and reducing reoffending”, Sir Nic repeated his line from January:

Sir Nic Dakin: *The Lord Chancellor has requested advice from officials on the pension age of prison officers, and we will continue to engage with trade unions as we work through this complex issue while considering the wider fiscal context. I am meeting the hon. Member for Aberdeenshire North and Moray East (Seamus Logan) to discuss this important issue next week, and I am very happy for my hon. Friend to join that meeting if he wishes.*

Nothing productive came from that meeting, and so Logan raised the issue again at the urgent question on protection for prison staff (12 May) following the horrific attacks on officers at HMP Frankland:

Seamus Logan: *The Minister very graciously found time in his busy schedule to meet me and colleagues recently to discuss the “68 is Too Late” campaign. Does he agree that recent events prove the tremendous pressures on our prison officers and staff, and will he give an undertaking to me and the House that, during the course of this Parliament, the terms and conditions of prison officers could be reviewed, especially with a view to the “68 is Too Late” campaign?*

But the Minister would only thank Logan “for meeting me earlier in this Parliament to discuss these issues”, insisting that “these things rightly need to be kept under review, and the conversations taking place with the workforce through the Prison Officers Association and other bodies will continue to make progress on this matter”.

Kim Johnson raised her concerns about pension age at the Estimates Day debate on criminal justice (25 June) after telling MPs that “I support the POA’s ‘Bring it Back’ campaign for insourcing prison maintenance”, explaining:

Kim Johnson: *I also support the POA’s campaign on retirement age. Asking officers to work until they are 68 in such a high-stress, high-risk environment is simply unsustainable. Sixty-eight is simply too late.*

Logan pressed the matter again at the last Justice Questions before Summer Recess (8 July), asking minister what progress had been made on “reviewing terms and conditions of service for prison officers”. Sir Nic paid “tribute to the essential work that our prison officers do, day in, day out” and highlighted how “this year’s pay award delivered another real-terms pay rise for our frontline prison staff”, but avoided mentioning pensions, leaving Logan to ask him directly:

Seamus Logan: *I was in correspondence with the Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending last October, but he sits in the other place. In January, I was advised by the Minister in this place that the Secretary of State was awaiting advice about the range of terms and conditions issues for prison officers. I was also advised later in the spring, again from the Dispatch Box, that it was right that the situation was being “kept under review”. I thank the Minister for the thoughtful and sincere way in which he has engaged with me in recent months, but given that I have been asking about this issue for nine months, can he provide an update today on progress with the advice, and on exactly what is being reviewed?*

But Sir Nic would only “reaffirm that the Lord Chancellor and the Department are fully engaged with the Prison Officers Association on this and other issues”. Another Scottish MP, Brian Leishman, also raised the POA’s campaign, asking if ministers had considered “the potential impact of lowering the pension age of prison officers on prison officer morale”. Sir Nic repeated his line that “prison officers benefit from the civil service pension scheme, which offers excellent public sector terms, low employee contributions and a 28.97% employer contribution”, but conceded:

Sir Nic Dakin: *We recognise that pension age is an important issue for prison officers. That is why we are fully engaged with the unions on this issue.*

Brian Leishman: *The last Government hiked up prison officers’ pension age to 68, and then walked away from negotiations that were set up to partially reverse that unfair and unrealistic policy. This devastated morale, which is now worse than ever, especially with violence against staff at record highs. Are this Government prepared to do what it takes and clean up yet another Tory prisons mess? Will Ministers finally get back around the table with the Prison Officers Association to negotiate a fair pensions deal for its members?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point to the fact that this is yet another Tory mess that we have inherited. As I have said, we value the work of the POA, and we recognise the significant work of prison officers and the strength of feeling on this issue. We will continue to engage with the POA and others to try to find the best way forward.*

The DUP’s Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) followed this up by warning “there is an increase in turnover, with prison officers leaving early, while the problem of the pensions continues”, asking:

Gregory Campbell: *Can the Minister increase the intensity of discussions with the POA to try to reach a more satisfactory outcome to which the Department and the prison officers concerned are amenable?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. We need to make progress on this issue, and we are determined to do so.*

In November, Grahame Morris tabled EDM 2207: 68 Is Too Late Report by the Prison Officers’ Association, which “welcomes the publication of the 68 Is Too Late report by the POA union, based on its survey of members about the pension age of prison officers, which received the largest response to any member consultation the union has undertaken”. The motion, which has been signed by over 30 MPs, noted that this new report “is part of a campaign to end the injustice of prison officers being required to work until the age of 68, while other uniformed services such as the police, fire service and armed forces have a normal pension age of 60 or under”, and “agrees with the 99% of prison officers surveyed who call on the UK and devolved governments to enter into talks with the POA over providing prison officers with the option to access their pension at 60 with no financial detriment”. It added that “expecting prison officers to work until almost 70 years of age at a time when the prisoner population is rising, the average age of a prisoner is mid-thirties, violence is increasing and the influence of organised crime is expanding is both dangerous and unrealistic”, and that “a retirement age of 68 risks the safety of prisoners and prison officers, and that for successful rehabilitation prisons rely on well-trained, motivated and confident officers working in safe and fully staffed establishments”, while calling on the Government “to negotiate in good faith with the POA to end this pension injustice for prison officers”.

At the next Justice Questions (11 November), Mary Kelly Foy asked about “the potential merits of lowering the pension age of prison officers”, which new Minister Jake Richards agreed was “an important issue for frontline staff and our recognised trade unions that represent the views of their members”, insisting that “officials met POA representatives earlier in the autumn to discuss pension age and will continue to engage with them on this important issue”. Kelly Foy then highlighted the new POA report, calling it a “heartbreaking read” in which “prison

officers describe how unrealistic and, frankly, cruel it is to expect them to walk the landings until they are almost 70 years old and the effect that it has on morale". And she asked:

Mary Kelly Foy: *Does the Minister accept that at the heart of the prisons crisis, there is a crisis in how prison staff are treated by the state, and that resolving the pensions crisis should be a top priority for any Government who are serious about fixing our jails?*

Jake Richards: *I am grateful for my hon. Friend's question, and I take this opportunity to praise and thank the prison officers who do a remarkable job in what are often trying and appalling circumstances. As I said, the Government will continue to engage with the relevant and recognised unions, as well as with prison officers themselves. I know that the Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Secretary is meeting the POA in the coming days.*

Gregory Campbell again echoed the union's concerns:

Gregory Campbell: *Given the existing retirement age for prison officers and the increase in the number of violent offenders in prison, along with the increase in illegal substances getting into prison, does the Minister not agree that it is time urgently to review the age at which prison officers retire, as many older prison officers are looking to retire?*

Jake Richards: *As I have already said, it is absolutely right that we continue to have those discussions with the relevant trade unions. Let me be absolutely clear on behalf of the Government: we understand that the work and working conditions of prison officers are getting harder, and we are in the business of trying to help them.*

At the final Justice Questions of the year (16 December), Logan again tried to get some answers, welcoming how "Ministers have responded helpfully to me on two previous occasions regarding the '68 is too late' campaign". He continued:

Seamus Logan: *On both occasions—last January and most recently in writing in September—the Government indicated that they were prepared to amend or at least review pension provisions. Indeed, a working group was established to examine similar terms currently in place within the Ministry of Defence. Can the Minister provide an update on the working group's proposals and the Government's intentions?*

Jake Richards: *The Government regularly meet trade unions and the Prison Officers Association. I will take this opportunity to put on record again our thanks to prison officers, who do an extraordinarily difficult job in difficult circumstances, and we will be updating the House on that issue in due course.*

Logan, Leishman, Campbell and Kelly Foy, along with other members of the JUPG, will no doubt continue to raise this vital issue until the Government finally make a fair and reasonable offer to POA members.

Campaigns: Maintenance (Bring It Back)

The multi-union campaign to insource prison maintenance received a blow at the start of the year, with an answer (7 January) to a written question from Kim Johnson, who asked "whether the public sector will be allowed to bid for new contracts for the provision of maintenance services for prisons". Johnson had tabled Early Day Motion 571, Prison maintenance insourcing, the previous month, which has been signed by 38 MPs. The EDM "notes with alarm the rising levels of squalor and disrepair in prisons, with the National Audit Office estimating the maintenance backlog has doubled to £1.8 billion in the past four years" and warns of "recent reports by the Independent Monitoring Boards highlighting how broken and outdated windows make it easy for drones to deliver drugs and

weapons, while prisoners are bitten by rats and venomous false widow spiders, yet there is little accountability when maintenance providers' performance falls short". The motion also "recognises that outsourcing of prison maintenance has proved to be a false economy, with the taxpayer picking up the tab for contractors' costly failures", calling on the government "to cancel plans for retendering these contracts and to bring all prison maintenance back in-house at the earliest opportunity, in keeping with its pre-election pledge to oversee the biggest wave of insourcing for a generation".

But answering Johnson's written question, Minister Sir Nic Dakin insisted that "the Ministry of Justice will not be inviting public sector bids for the provision of maintenance services for prisons" because "a 2023 assessment undertaken in partnership with the Cabinet Office determined that a privatised solution was the preferred option for meeting prison maintenance service needs". However, the Government refuse to release this assessment due to commercial secrecy, and in an answer to a follow-up question by Andy McDonald (Lab, Middlesbrough & Thornaby East) on "the potential savings to the public purse of awarding prison maintenance contracts to the public sector", Sir Nic insisted that "new contracts for the provision of maintenance services for prisons[...] are being competitively tendered" and that, "as the procurement process is currently live, information regarding potential savings is commercially and market sensitive and therefore not able to be disclosed at the current time".

The dire state of prison maintenance was raised a week later (14 January) at the urgent question on drones, with Justice Committee chair Andy Slaughter pointing out that "what makes it easy for drones to access prisons is the appalling state of prison maintenance", highlighting how "there is a £1.8 billion backlog, which did not accrue in the past six months", and asking:

Andy Slaughter: *What is the timetable for repairing the problems in prisons and getting to grips with that maintenance backlog?*

Minister Dakin agreed that "the prison maintenance programme that we inherited was in a state" and "that is why the Chancellor announced in the Budget a £500 million boost to the prison maintenance budget over the next couple of years". Lib-Dem spokesperson Josh Babarinde also blamed the last Government, highlighting how "a National Audit Office report said of the then Conservative Treasury's investment in prison maintenance and security that 'capital budget allocations for prisons have been well below the level needed'."

Later that month (23 January) JUPG co-chair Lord Tony Woodley asked about "the potential merits of insourcing all prison maintenance", to which Minister Lord Timpson repeated that "a 2023 assessment conducted in partnership with the Cabinet Office determined that an insourced solution was not the preferred option for future prison maintenance services". He continued:

Lord Timpson: *Financial analysis determined that an outsourced option would be more cost-effective and would deliver the best value for money. The Government have therefore initiated a programme of work that will put in place new contracts for the provision of maintenance services for prisons, which are being competitively tendered. However, I am keeping this approach under constant review to ensure we get the best value for taxpayers' money.*

Woodley insisted "it is undeniable that a decade of prison maintenance privatisation has been an absolute disaster" and that "a disgraceful experiment has gone badly wrong and it blights the lives of everyone living and working in prisons", before asking the Minister:

Lord Woodley: *Does he agree that it is more than time to kick out the incompetent and greedy privateers and bring maintenance back in-house, which is far more cost-effective, and make much more use of works*

departments to give prisoners valuable extra skills through in-house maintenance and light repairs? I think this is called Q-Branch.

Timpson replied by highlighting how “the prison estate suffered historic underinvestment by the previous Government over the last five years, which has led to a growing backlog of maintenance tasks and shocks to the estate from dilapidations”, and made a commitment that, “as future prison maintenance contracts approach expiry, we will conduct detailed assessments to inform decisions about whether to continue to outsource services, alongside our usual performance management process”. But, he insisted:

Lord Timpson: *Stopping the contract process we inherited last year would have meant incurring additional costs and delivering less value for money. I am glad that the noble Lord mentioned Q-Branch, which is an innovative model that has empowered prisoners to build new skills and play a part in keeping their prisons running smoothly by undertaking tasks such as basic cell restoration, painting and decorating. It is currently active in 25 establishments and I am exploring how we can expand it further, alongside a similar operation called CRED, which helps build skills within prisons that can be used on release to get a job and not reoffend.*

Lib-Dem Lord German raised the problem with faulty equipment, insisting that “probably half of the security cameras around the perimeters of our prison estate are not working” and asking:

Lord German: *Is that because they are too old or did the original contracts not include appropriate maintenance so that these cameras can be made to work for our security and that of prisoners?*

Lord Timpson: *The noble Lord is correct that the security of our prisons is of utmost importance and that we need all our security apparatus working correctly. We have had years of underinvestment in our prison estate. I am pleased that the Government are spending £520 million from this year until the end of 2026 on lots of projects, including improving our security.*

Labour’s Lord Davies of Brixton insisted that the Minister “must be aware, from reports in the press and his own extremely diligent visits to the prison estate, that something needs to be done about the poor quality of prisons”, and asked:

Lord Davies: *Will he therefore revisit the ideological decision by the previous Government not to allow the public sector to bid for maintenance contracts when the existing contracts run out at the end of this year?*

And fellow Labour leftwinger, former National Union of Teachers leader Lady Blower, pointed out that “powerful voices, including the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee and the Justice Committee in the other place, have highlighted how costs have soared while conditions have crumbled in prisons since privatisation”, calling on the Minister to “take very seriously both the value for money question and the urgent need to consider insourcing – that is, having public maintenance of prisons”. Timpson agreed that “it is vital that the Government are led by the evidence and deliver value for money for the taxpayer”, adding:

Lord Timpson: *HMPPS has worked closely with the Cabinet Office to undertake a detailed assessment of prison maintenance requirements and how best to deliver them—I have even read all 175 pages of it. While they consider insourcing, the current evidence indicates that the private sector is best placed to provide a safe and decent estate, supported by effective maintenance that delivers value for money. I am continually monitoring performance and will keep my mind open to the best future options.*

At Justice Questions the next week (28 January), JUPG co-chair Liz Saville Roberts asked what ministers were doing “to improve prison conditions”, with Minister Sir Nic Dakin insisting that the Government had “inherited historic under-investment in maintenance and a rising prison population”, adding:

Sir Nic Dakin: *That is why we have already published our 10-year prison capacity strategy and have plans to invest £220 million in prison and probation service maintenance in '24-25, and up to £300 million in '25-26.*

Liz Saville Roberts: *I rise as the co-chair of the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group. The emergency extra money to tackle the squalid state of our prisons is welcome, but given the £2 billion maintenance backlog, the reality is that the extra money will not touch the sides. This shows exactly why the privatisation of prison maintenance is a failed model. Private contractors may win contracts on low bids, but billions come in as extra cost later. Does the Minister seriously think that current prison maintenance providers offer good service and value for money to the taxpayer?*

Sir Nicholas Dakin: *The right hon. Lady is right. We inherited contracts that were already well progressed; for best value and to move things forward quickly, we decided it was important to keep going with that process. However, I can assure the House that we have an open mind regarding private and public sector contracts in the future. The important thing is to get bestvalue for money and get the job done.*

The following day (29 January), Andy McDonald led a Westminster Hall debate on “Outsourcing in Government Departments”, at which several MPs raised the problems with prison maintenance. McDonald started his speech by highlighting how, “at the height of the covid pandemic, the now Chancellor set out her concerns about outsourcing”, quoting Reeves:

Andy McDonald: *Furthermore, she added: “A shadow state has emerged and it is unaccountable to the people. Even before the pandemic, the government spent an extraordinary £292bn on outsourcing over a third of all public spending and that level is rising year on year. The public pays for these contracts yet so often it cannot adequately scrutinise many of them. This secrecy must stop.”*

McDonald agreed “we need a hard stop to new outsourcing”, explaining that “not only have the Government inherited poorly performing outsourced contracts but there is concern that they might be about to re-let to private providers that have already failed in His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service”. He continued:

Andy McDonald: *In the halcyon days when I was a member of Select Committees, we made trips to other jurisdictions and we were met with horror by other parliamentarians who found it anathema that prisons were in private hands. They thought that it was contradictory and unacceptable for anybody other than the state to be involved in incarceration. There is a fundamental question we need to ask ourselves. The Government have the opportunity to put this right by insourcing facilities and estates management, rather than increasing the profits of private companies. If prisoners are living in squalor, those union members are working in squalor. Just as unions have argued that it is not too late to invite in-house tenders, it is now time to invest in existing prisons—not just new prisons—by ensuring that the Prison Service runs its own maintenance and facilities management.*

He explained to MPs that prison maintenance in England and Wales “was fully privatised in 2015, with Amey winning the contract for the north and Carillion the one for the south, later replaced by Gov Facilities Services Ltd – GFSL – which took over its contracts”, leading to “a race to the bottom”, adding that “10 years later there is widespread prison squalor and an estimated maintenance backlog of almost £2 billion”. He continued:

Andy McDonald: *Amey and GFSL’s contracts were extended in 2020 and are up for renewal over the coming months. The prison unions are calling for maintenance to be brought back in-house—not with GFSL, but with a return to full works departments in every establishment. However, the Government have previously stated that the public sector will not be invited to bid for the new contracts, after a 2023 assessment apparently determined that a privatised solution was the preferred option for meeting prison*

maintenance service needs. It was welcome that the Prisons Minister, Lord Timpson, recently promised: “As future prison maintenance contracts approach expiry, we will conduct detailed assessments to inform decisions about whether to continue to outsource services”.

I was pleased to hear the Prisons Minister tell the House yesterday that the Government still have an open mind on maintenance contracts. The private sector has completely failed to deliver on its promises around prison maintenance, with staff, inmates and the taxpayer all paying the price. Will the Minister explain why the Government seem to be following the last Government’s privatisation plans, despite the obvious failure of running key prison services for profit?

And he finished by quoting Reeves again:

Andy McDonald: *In her speech in 2021, the Chancellor said that “under Keir Starmer’s Labour government we will see the biggest wave of insourcing of public services for a generation.” It is now time to deliver just that.*

Brian Leishman followed by quoting the same pledge by Reeves, telling MPs he “was delighted by our party’s pre-election pledge to oversee the biggest wave of insourcing for a generation, so that we can see a change in culture from the continuous erosion of service provision, the reliance on the private sector and the race to the bottom”. And turning to prisons, he insisted:

Brian Leishman: *Our prison estate is crumbling after years of neglect, with prison maintenance privatisation being an example of escalating costs while service provision deteriorates. For our prisons to be the rehabilitation facilities that society needs them to be, they cannot be the decrepit and fetid facilities that so many are currently. Likewise, no worker—especially not hard-working prison officers, who have a physically, mentally and emotionally demanding job—should be expected to go to their place of work, and carry out their duties to the standard they want, and is expected of them, in an environment that makes their role so much harder and unpleasant.*

Like so many problems the Government face, these are not issues that are of our making. However, they are our problems to sort now, and a problem like prison maintenance does have a solution. The Government should take the leap, and stop the overwhelming reliance on the private sector to provide services. It is time the Government trusted themselves to provide a solution. We can then invest in people and provide a quality of service that looks after workers, communities and the infrastructure of our country.

Grahame Morris pointed out that “outsourcing has become deeply embedded in our public sector, yet it remains an inefficient and flawed model”, while “trade unions and MPs have repeatedly warned that it prioritises private profit over fair pay, secure jobs and quality services”. He added:

Grahame Morris: *My good and hon. Friend the Member for Alloa and Grangemouth (Brian Leishman) gave some excellent examples of that in prison maintenance contracts. I encourage Members of Parliament to visit the prisons serving their areas, speak to the governors and look at the eye-watering sums that are being charged by private contractors for really quite simple jobs. It is not value for money by any measure.*

After the JUPG asked POA members in January via circular to send stories to the secretariat about the problems with outsourced maintenance in their establishments, a new briefing was prepared calling for this work to all be brought back in-house. The briefing was widely covered in the media, including in The Times and Sky News. Maintenance contracts were under the microscope when MOJ Permanent Secretary Dame Antonia Romeo, HMPPS

CEO Amy Rees and HMPPS COO James McEwen appeared in front of the Justice Committee (4 March). Rees explained “there are two levels at which we do maintenance”, adding:

Amy Rees: *The existing permanent contracts are for small maintenance and small works. Anything significant goes out to contract. All the stuff we are talking about is priority 1 maintenance. Replacing a boiler, replacing a roof, building a new wing and doing fire work projects all go out to specialist contractors.*

Pam Cox widened the discussion to include all MOJ contracts:

Pam Cox: *I understand from the House of Commons Library team that there are 450 contracts in total, but the Committee heard from Minister Timpson that in fact there are 1,112 active contracts delivered by 539 suppliers with HMPPS. For the purposes of the Committee and anybody watching, could you set out broadly the types of organisations that MOJ contracts with in relation to prisons in particular? I am thinking about non-outsourced prisons and the kind of activities they cover.*

Revealing that “about £5 billion of our spend is in contracts”, Romeo explained:

Antonia Romeo: *We work with a large range of contractors, from SMEs to very large organisations, in the sort of things we contract on. We have property construction services, which would be people like Kier, Wates and Laing O’Rourke. You did not ask about private prisons, but, as you know, we contract with those. We also have IT digital services—Microsoft, Vodafone, Amazon Web Services, BT. We have the aforementioned facilities management, so Amey, OCS and Equans. We have resourcing contracts to help us with resourcing through Alexander Mann, Brook Street or Hays, and we have prison services: Serco, Bidfood, DHL and Hovis. That is a neat segue for Amy to say something about prisons.*

Amy Rees: *The boss has covered it. There is everything from the actual delivery of things. Healthcare is often contracted, but not commissioned by us; it is commissioned by NHS England and devolved in Wales. Then you have things like education contracts, done in lots or nationally, right down to things like how we buy Snickers, bed sheets, clothes or uniforms for staff. There are some things that are done locally, such as commissioned rehabilitative services, or things that you might buy in, like very specialist advice, which is often quite local—some from very small organisations. There is peer support and that kind of thing.*

Cox responded that, “as a committee, we have heard quite a lot of concerns about the scrutiny of the performance of many of those contractors”, warning that “we have a prison maintenance backlog, we have fire safety risks in some cases, we have an insecure estate that allows in drones and weapons, we have prisoners locked up for 22 out of 24 hours with little access to purposeful activity” – and insisting: “We are all minded to ask about the performance of those contracted services.” And she highlighted how “prison governors have reported their concerns to us on this, as have witnesses to the committee”, adding:

Pam Cox: *Last week, Dame Carol Black, the Government’s independent adviser on drugs, said she thought the current commissioning framework for healthcare in prisons was not fit for purpose. She found it difficult to get data on that because it was deemed commercially sensitive. We also heard in the same session from Charlie Taylor, chief inspector of prisons, who said that he did not have full access to data on the commissioning arrangements, or the performance of contracted services, again because of commercial sensitivities.*

She then highlighted how “our briefing pack today is full of examples from the National Audit Office”, with “quite alarming findings by them on the performance of everything from court IT systems, court escort systems, electronic tagging and monitoring to prison maintenance. It seems that wherever you look there are concerns about the performance of these contractual arrangements.” And she asked:

Pam Cox: *Why does the performance of services contracted to deliver public value for money in courts, community justice and prisons not seem to be subject to full public scrutiny?*

Antonia Romeo: *I am going to ask Amy to say something about prisons and Nick will want to say something about courts, but what do you mean by not being “subject to full public scrutiny”?*

Pam Cox: *I mean that the chief inspector of prisons and we as a Committee do not have access to the data on performance. We absolutely understand commercial sensitivity, but our focus is on performance. If they were performing well, we probably would not be asking these questions, but, given the situation we have observed in prisons, performance may be a factor. How are we monitoring that?*

Antonia Romeo: *You have hit the nail on the head because a lot of this will be subject to commercial confidentiality, but why don't I ask James to say something about that first and then we can talk about prisons and courts in particular, if that is helpful?*

James McEwen: *The contracts themselves are published, so you have that degree of scrutiny. To your point on performance, some of that is commercially sensitive. [...] On facilities management, we have the third-party suppliers that Amy has talked about and others. We have an in-house facilities management company, GFSL, which was set up after the collapse of Carillion. All of those suppliers have been working with us to ensure that cells that are taken out of use because of vandalism or damage are returned to use within 24 or 48 hours. There has been a spectacular improvement in those areas. Just for balance, a lot of suppliers are really working with us on some of the challenges we face.*

Committee chair Andy Slaughter agreed that “obviously some parts of it will be commercially confidential – for example, maybe the bidding process”, but asked:

Andy Slaughter: *If you are awarding competitive contracts, surely it is a matter of public record who has bid the lowest, how it has been marked and what happens there. Equally, if you are going to penalise a company that has won a contract, what you fine them and for what reason, and what percentage of the contract that is, should also be published. It sounds to me as if you are hiding behind commercial confidentiality not to reveal very much at all.*

James McEwen: *It depends on the terms of the contract—*

Andy Slaughter: *It shouldn't, should it?*

James McEwen: *And when they are let and what is there. I understand the point the Committee is making. Where we cannot put performance information into the public domain, we are very happy to come and brief the Committee on those areas.*

Fellow Labour member Sarah Russell asked whether “the contracts themselves stipulate what is and is not commercially sensitive information, and who writes the contracts” – to which Romeo replied: “The contracts are obviously subject to agreement, and in some cases they would.” But Russell warned:

Sarah Russell: *There is a danger that there could be a perception—I only say “perception” because, to be clear, I am absolutely not making this allegation myself—that the civil service worked with contractors to produce contracts that made it difficult for us as representatives effectively to scrutinise what goes on. What would you say to that? Are there mechanisms in place to scrutinise this that are not us that currently we are not seeing?*

Antonia Romeo: *I have not heard that allegation before. As the Chair has already said, this is my third time in front of the Committee this calendar year. We could not be more enthusiastic to be scrutinised by Parliament.*

On what is available, we are bound by the terms of the contract, but what I see in the Ministry of Justice are people in teams, all represented here, working incredibly hard to focus on the delivery of that contract. In some cases, notably in Amy's area, if the contract fails, we have to step in. We do not want them to fail; it is not adversarial. A good contract is one where we are getting the best possible value for money for the taxpayer; where we have complete transparency so that we are able to scrutinise what that performance looks like; where the performance bears relation to the actual outcomes, because at the end of the day we are trying to deliver for the people in the street, for the citizen; and where we are able to scrutinise that and, where needed, hold them to account. There is a large number of penalty clauses in different aspects of the contract that we would have to administer, but often we work with the contractor. [...]

Amy Rees: *From my perspective, I do not know what my motivation would be to do that since we are trying to run a very complex, difficult and risky organisation in which I need all of the players to deliver. Setting up a contract in which we were somehow in cahoots with a provider who was not providing would make my job extremely difficult.*

Sarah Russell: *I am not suggesting that you are personally corrupt. I want to be extremely clear that I absolutely am not suggesting that whatsoever, but a question needs to be asked about how that functions.*

Repeating Rees's claim that "it is in your interests to work with the contractors to make sure that things are better", Conservative member Linsey Farnsworth warned: "My concern is that because the contracts are clearly not working, as we hear time and again, and we have given you some examples from the frontline, as it were, it must take up a lot of your time and effort trying to work with them." He asked:

Linsey Farnsworth: *What is the answer for the future so that you are not spending a lot of time trying to hold their hands in some respects, to get the contracts to work properly? Is it about having more public transparency, maybe leveraging, to make sure that the contractors themselves set their mind to the fact that they cannot fail, because people will know about it in a much clearer and more transparent way?*

Rees admitted "it is true that it takes up a significant amount of our time to manage these contracts", and insisted that "the ultimate answer is that we have to make the operating environment more stable for anyone to operate in", adding:

Amy Rees: *The first starting point for me genuinely is not the commercial considerations, because that would suggest that the people I work with are motivated in that way. For a start, a lot of the people I work with in those contracts might have been civil servants or worked in my world before, particularly in private prisons. They genuinely and generally are motivated to do a good job in what they are in charge of.*

At the next Justice Questions (11 March) Brian Leishman pointed out that "prison maintenance privatisation has been a complete and utter disaster" and asked: "When will it be taken back in-house?" Minister Dakin insisted "we are investing approximately £500 million over two years in prison and probation service maintenance to improve conditions across our estate" but conceded:

Sir Nic Dakin: *It is fair to say we have inherited a system in serious need of repair. The estimated cost of bringing the prison estate to a fair condition and maintaining it till the end of the decade is £2.8 billion. The programme is now under way, and we hope that we will make as much progress as possible.*

Kim Johnson expanded on this at the urgent question on protection for prison staff (12 May), when she highlighted how “this Government inherited a violent, squalid prison estate, which makes the job of prison officers much more difficult and dangerous”, adding:

Kim Johnson: *The privatising of maintenance has contributed to overcrowding and the spiralling of violence towards prison officers, so can the Minister explain why contracts are being retendered? Also, will he release the report recommending more privatisation, so that we can all understand the logic behind this decision?*

Insisting that the matter was “always under review”, Sir Nic claimed that “contracts were in place when this Government came into office that needed to be taken forward to ensure that our prisons were kept as safe as possible”. He didn’t answer the question about releasing the report.

The Public Accounts Committee’s report on prison estate capacity later that week (14 March) highlighted how “HMPPS’s maintenance backlog has doubled from £0.9 billion to £1.8 billion between 2020 and September 2024”, adding that “MoJ estimates it needs £2.8 billion to bring the estate into a fair condition”. Describing the £520 million funding for maintenance over two years as “a small proportion of the £2.8 billion it estimates it needs to bring the estate into a fair condition”, the PAC called on the MOJ to “produce a business case setting out steps to address the prison estate maintenance backlog much more rapidly”.

And at Justice Questions (3 June), Brian Leishman raised the issue again, insisting that “we need effective scrutiny of privatised contracts for prison maintenance because those contracts have been detrimental for prisons” and calling for the 2023 report to be made public:

Brian Leishman: *Will the Minister release the last Government’s report recommending more privatisation of prison maintenance, suitably redacted if necessary, for full transparency and to avoid any accusations of a cover-up?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *My hon. Friend will be well aware that a lot of the information is commercially confidential, but we are investing up to £300 million in 2025-26 to keep our prisons safe and secure, and we have a prison estate conditions survey programme in place to better understand our estate.*

Johnson returned to the subject at the Estimates Day debate on criminal justice (25 June), pointing out that “privatisation has been a costly failure” because:

Kim Johnson: *Basic repairs remain undone, squalor is widespread and the maintenance backlog is estimated to cost nearly £2 billion. I support the POA’s “Bring it Back” campaign for insourcing prison maintenance. The promised biggest wave of insourcing in a generation must start here. In our crumbling prisons, where contracts have failed, conditions are decaying and dangerous for both staff and prisoners.*

And later in the debate, Justice Committee member Pam Cox highlighted how “the maintenance backlog has ballooned to £1.8 billion”, telling MPs that, “time and again, the Select Committee has heard about poor contract management, and a failure around transparency and value for money across a range of contracts, from education to maintenance to drug and alcohol services”.

In the Upper House, Lord Woodley secured a question asking the Government “what steps they are taking to insource prison services” (5 November), which his fellow Socialist Campaign Group peer Lady Blower asked in his place. Minister Timpson repeated his insistence that “this Government inherited a well-advanced plan to outsource contracts after a 2023 Cabinet Office assessment concluded that in-house capability was not sufficient to make insourcing viable”, claiming:

Lord Timpson: *Insourcing would be reliant on retaining staff from current suppliers, but labour market constraints and public sector pay rates were not likely to be attractive. Outsource providers consistently exceed the targets set and outperform GFSL across the majority of KPIs. My job now is to ensure best value for money from these new contracts until 2031, when we will reconsider all options for future provision.*

Blower responded by highlighting how, “as a former trade union leader, I have seen time and again what privatisation does – the public end up paying a higher price for poorer-quality service while private profits soar”, adding:

Lady Blower: *Prisons are no exception, with outsourced maintenance and education examples of a lack of value for public money. Retendering these contracts is, I believe, a mistake. Can my noble friend the Minister therefore instead make the case for the Prison Service to benefit from a wave of insourcing?*

Lord Timpson: *The decision to outsource maintenance contracts was based on a detailed Cabinet Office assessment that concluded that the MoJ did not have the in-house capability to deliver the desired services, and that achieving this in the same timescale would have been costly and would not offer value for money to the taxpayer. Our intention is to look at the options of insourcing again in 2031.*

As the debate widened to include other outsourced prison services, Timpson insisted that, “with regard to electronic monitoring, we inherited a problematic contract and, although it is performing much better now, there is still some way to go”, revealing that:

Lord Timpson: *Serco’s leadership team has been in my office a number of times and we are working really well together. I recently visited its Warrington office and saw its performance, which really is improving. What we need to do is get to a point where the service that it delivers is excellent.*

And highlighting how “we imprison lots of people who have skills we could use in a prison, and it is important that we use more of them”, he explained:

Lord Timpson: *We have two schemes—one called Q-Branch, the another called CRED—operating in 70 prisons, where about 750 prisoners are employed each month. In HMP Lewes, the team repainted and sorted out all the floors, saving huge amounts of money. So I want to see more prisoners doing more work in prisons.*

His Tory shadow, Lord Keen of Elie, asked Timpson whether he agreed that “publicly managed prisons are not delivering better rehabilitation outcomes than privately managed prisons”, to which the Minister replied:

Lord Timpson: *I can show you some excellent private sector prisons and some excellent public sector prisons, and I think we need to learn from each other where we have areas of excellence and of poor performance. One thing I look out for is the quality of leadership in a prison. It does not matter whether it is a public sector prison or a private sector prison. I believe that too much of the performance of a prison is dependent on one leader, and that is the situation in both types of prison.*

Labour’s Lord Watts brought the debate back to maintenance and the ability of the public sector to keep its own jails clean and secure:

Lord Watts: *My Lords, the Minister says that the Prison Service has not got the capacity at the present time. Will he take between now and when the new contract is due to go out again to build capacity in the Prison Service, so that it can actually compete with the private sector?*

Lord Timpson: *The noble Lord will be well aware that we have lots of maintenance issues in our prisons, 25% of which are Victorian. In HMP Preston, the first governor was appointed in 1790, and in 1791 at HMP Lewes. Dealing with the maintenance on those is very complex and often requires a hybrid model, because we are dealing with lifts, fire systems and often very complicated things.*

Lib-Dem Lord Mohammed of Tinsley called on “the Minister to draw on local government experiences around private provision and insourcing”, highlighting how:

Lord Mohammed: *What is really important is how the contract is drawn up and—more importantly—how that contract is managed, to make sure that we get the best outcomes for our prisoners, so they are rehabilitated when they come out of prison, and also so there is value for taxpayers.*

Lord Timpson: *I completely agree. Having run a business for a long time, and paid a lot of tax, I am very aware that I want it spent wisely. Let me give one example: BT does the majority of our phone contracts in our prisons, for prisoners to make calls to family and friends. I managed to reduce the cost of those calls by 20% by working with BT, and I think holding suppliers to account is part of my job. Maybe they do not like to come and sit in my office, but they frequently do and I challenge them to ensure we get good value for money.*

And former Liberty director, Labour’s Lady Chakrabarti, asked that, “when the Minister is considering the 2031 review, will he think not just about the commercial, value-for-money aspects but about the constitutional aspects of privatised incarceration and coercion as well?” Timpson would only agree to “make sure that we hold all operators to account between now and 2031”, adding: “This applies to us, running 115 prison sites, and to the private sector. Hopefully there will be announcements soon on the direction we will be going in.”

The dire state of the estate was raised again by Andy Slaughter when he gave his Select Committee statement on Reoffending and Rehabilitation in Prisons (20 November), describing how “the prison estate is in a state of disrepair” and that “dilapidated buildings and broken infrastructure limit access to rehabilitative spaces and contribute to poor mental health”. And he asked the Government how they planned to fix this:

Andy Slaughter: *Despite recent capital investment, it remains unclear how the Government intend to address the £1.8 billion maintenance backlog. That backlog is not just a financial figure; it represents real barriers to rehabilitation. We call on the Government to provide a clear breakdown of how funding will be used to address the backlog and to ensure that investment is targeted at improving prison conditions and rehabilitative activities.*

It is clear that just throwing more money at failing private companies is not going to fix this scandal, yet ministers are sleepwalking into the privatisation trap set by their predecessors – while refusing to release the last Government’s logic for doing so. JUPG members will continue to press for maintenance to be brought back in-house, and to insist that ministers make good on their party’s pledge to oversee “the biggest wave of insourcing for a generation” – starting with the prison service, where this wave is so desperately needed.

Campaigns: Skilled Worker Visa Salary Thresholds

In his evidence to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee in January, POA national chair Mark Fairhurst revealed he had heard “horror stories” about overseas recruitment, with “recruits from overseas turning up at the gate with suitcases and family in tow asking, ‘Where’s my accommodation?’ We do not supply accommodation.” He continued:

Mark Fairhurst: *We have had examples of overseas recruits sleeping in their cars because they have no accommodation. Apparently a bunch of overseas recruits, because they have no accommodation, have set up camp in a wooded area opposite the prison where they are working.*

And to make matters much worse, in July the Government announced changes to skilled worker visa salary thresholds that would mean overseas prison officers would no longer be eligible to work in the UK – and shamefully, that officers already here would face deportation. JUPG co-chair Liz Saville Roberts immediately tabled a “prayer” against the changes in the form of Early Day Motion 1686: Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules (15 July), and raised the issue two days later at Business of the House Questions (17 July):

Liz Saville Roberts: *I refer the House to my registered interest as co-chair of the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group. Substantial changes to skilled worker visa thresholds will automatically come into effect on 22 July under a procedural anomaly that permits no opportunity for debate. Trade unions have warned that thousands of the UK Government’s own staff could face deportation because their pay will now be too low. That includes prison officers, whose going rate appears to fall short by at least £3,000. I note my early-day motion 1686, which I tabled against the statement of changes. Will the Leader of the House grant a debate in Government time to scrutinise those decisions? Otherwise, how will that scrutiny be done?*

Leader of the House Lucy Powell promised to “ensure that the relevant Minister responds to the right hon. Lady” but insisted: “We have had to get net migration down from record levels of nearly a million a year over the last year of the previous Conservative Government, which was unacceptably high and put pressure on our housing and services,” adding:

Lucy Powell: *That is why we have had to look at the appropriate levels of pay and income and the skills that this country needs in order to ensure we are giving skilled worker visas to people in the areas we need and not giving visas where British workers could fill those roles.*

A week later (23 July), Saville Roberts’s JUPG co-chair Lord Woodley used a question on the jobs market to raise the issue:

Lord Woodley: *Changes to the skilled worker visa mean that public sector workers, including prison officers, can now face deportation because the salary threshold has jumped over their wages—which ignores why we wanted them here in the first place. Therefore, will the Minister make the case to the Home Office that prison officers should be exempted from this arbitrary limit and that their employers should also help to pay their legal costs?*

Government whip Lord Mike Katz conceded that Woodley “makes a very strong point”, but insisted: “He will be aware that in the recently published immigration White Paper, the Home Office outlined the steps it is taking to reduce net migration while supporting the labour market across all sectors.”

After Conference Recess (27 October), Kim Johnson used the ministerial statement on Prisoner Release Checks – following the release in error of Hadush Kebatu from HMP Chelmsford – to raise POA visa concerns, warning that “the immediate, reckless skilled visa rule change risks forcing hundreds of experienced overseas officers out of the service overnight”. Adding that, “at HMP Liverpool, 40% of staff could be affected”, she asked:

Kim Johnson: *Will the Secretary of State explain how stripping our prisons of trained staff will make them safer or help prevent further failures like those seen in Mr Kebatu’s case?*

New Justice Secretary David Lammy insisted that “the Prisons Minister is talking to Home Office colleagues about these very issues at this time”, but Saville Roberts pressed the Justice Secretary further, insisting that “everyone here will want to make sure that this kind of outrageous error never happens again”, adding:

Liz Saville Roberts: *The chief inspector of prisons warned today of a “systematic problem” of increased releases in error, citing “very busy people, often quite inexperienced, with huge caseloads”. He also warned that prisons are dependent on west African officers whom we might now lose thanks to the changes to visa thresholds that are expected to cause “an enormously damaging effect” on some prisons. With that in mind—because the Government have control over it—will the Justice Secretary press the Home Office to look again at how changes to the skilled workers visa are directly causing prison staff shortages and worsening prison performance?*

David Lammy: *I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for putting on the record the challenge we have with junior staff. I am very grateful for the work in our prison system of those staff, who are much beloved, who have come from west Africa, largely Nigeria, to support the system for a period of time. I recognise the challenges that the right hon. Lady articulates and, of course, as she would expect, all such matters are under discussion.*

The Greens’ Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) also questioned Lammy on the looming crisis, highlighting how “the Secretary of State rightly talks about prisons reeling from historic funding and staffing cuts, yet he admits that other current Ministers have added to this problem by changing the visa rules in July, which will force many overseas prison officers out of the country”. She continued:

Siân Berry: *He just called them “much beloved” staff and just said that he recognises the challenges, so will he confirm that he has asked the Home Secretary to look again at her visa changes for these prison officers?*

David Lammy: *It is my job to ensure that we have the right amount of prison officers in the system and that they are supported to do their job. Of course the hon. Lady would expect that that is a No. 1 priority for the Department: the right number of prison officers to do the job, recognising that many of them now have little experience as a result of the changes that were made under the last Government, but also the right number of probation staff, and we are doing both.*

And for the Lib Dems, Paul Kohler (Wimbledon) also expressed his concerns to Lammy, highlighting the “staffing crisis in our prisons that his Government inherited from the brass-necked Tories” and pointing out that, “with too many officers leaving the profession and too few joining, is it any wonder that mistakes like this happen increasingly frequently?” He continued:

Paul Kohler: *While the Ministry of Justice has sought to address the prison officer shortfall by recruiting overseas, the Home Office, as we have heard, is undermining those actions by raising the payment threshold for the skilled worker visa. I have a simple question. Is the Justice Secretary asking the Home Office to add prison officers to the skills shortage list—yes or no?*

David Lammy: *As I have said, it is right and proper that the Home Office has a thorough regime for skilled workers, and I support it in that endeavour. It is also important that we have the bank of prison officers that we need, and it is my job to ensure that we have that, whether they are able to come from abroad or—as the vast majority do—from our own country.*

A fortnight later (10 November) in the Lords, Lib-Dem Lady Janke asked “what assessment has the Minister made of the raising of the skilled workers visa threshold and its impact on the Prison Service, in view of the current difficulties?” Minister Timpson would only reply that “the Government want to bring down net migration, and we

are supporting the staff who are affected. I have to say that the staff I have met do a fantastic job and we want to support them as much as we can.”

Three days later (13 November) Lady Bennett of Manor Castle (Greens) highlighted “the importance of having experienced prison officers” but warned:

Lady Bennett: *Prison officer unions point out that 2,600 prison staff face deportation because the Home Office has raised the salary threshold to £41,700. Is the Minister talking to the Home Office about this situation and seeking a solution?*

Lord Timpson: *The noble Baroness is right that these staff are doing fantastic work and we are lucky to have them, but it is also important that net migration comes down. We are supporting those colleagues and having ongoing conversations.*

Former Blair-era Minister Lord Boateng warned a fortnight later (26 November) that “hard-pressed and hard-working prison officers, who happen to earn less than £41,700 per year, will, as a result of this Government’s policies, find themselves deported when their visas expire”, asking:

Lord Boateng: *Given the impact that will have on the already strained criminal justice system, will the Minister undertake to ask his colleagues to think again about that policy?*

In reply, Government whip Lord Lemos claimed: “I totally understand the problem” but insisted that “these are all matters under consultation and we will make sure to try to avoid unintended consequences where we can”, adding that “we take very seriously the problem that my noble friend has highlighted”.

At the last Justice Questions of the year (16 December), Kate Osamor (Lab, Edmonton & Winchmore Hill) also warned that “Home Office changes to skilled worker visa thresholds will impact large numbers of prison officers who have migrated from countries such as Nigeria”, adding that “the Prison Officers Association has made it clear that the prison system could collapse if this policy is applied”. And she asked:

Kate Osamor: *Will Ministers please update the House on what conversations are ongoing with the Home Office and whether there will be any exceptions?*

David Lammy: *My hon. Friend is right to put on record the huge support that we have had, particularly from west Africans, in our prison system, for which I am grateful. I am in discussions with the Home Secretary and hope to update the House on that shortly, but I do see a way through.*

Facing such cross-party pressure in Parliament, shortly before Christmas the Government announced a temporary exemption for prison officers already in the country, until the end of 2027 at the earliest. This is a major victory for the POA, but it is vital that this exemption is made permanent going forwards, and JUPG members will be on hand to ensure this is the case.

Legislation: Employment Rights Bill (Right To Strike)

The POA have long fought against the ban on prison officers taking industrial action, and in 2024 – 30 years after Section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 imposed this draconian restriction – the union relaunched its campaign to end this gross violation of members’ basic human rights. At the start of 2025, national chair Mark Fairhurst was questioned directly about the campaign by crossbencher Lady Prashar at the Justice and Home Affairs Committee (14 January), when she asked: “Would you like the right to strike?” Fairhurst insisted that

“of course we would, but the Labour Government have already told us, despite in opposition saying otherwise, that they are not going to give us back the right to strike – that ties our hands, does it not?” He continued:

Mark Fairhurst: *We have no human rights at work. We have got no basic trade union rights. Why? They restored the right to strike in Scotland in 2015. The sky has not fallen in there. In fact, industrial relations have improved. I do not even have the right to tell my members to work to rule, to refuse to work overtime, or to stop volunteering for tasks for which they receive no monetary benefit. I do not even have the right to do that. So we have no rights. It does not stop us and it will not stop me in the future from doing the right thing by my members to protect their health and safety if people do not listen and act. But why would you not give us our right to strike back? It is ridiculous.*

That same day, a small “Bill Committee” of MPs debated amendments to the Employment Rights Bill – Labour’s flagship legislation to improve workers’ rights – tabled by POA honorary life member, John McDonnell, that would repeal the hated Section 127. At the Bill’s previous stage, 2nd Reading, in September 2024, McDonnell and his fellow Labour leftwingers Richard Burgon, Mary Kelly Foy and Brian Leishman had all called for this legislation to include the ban’s repeal. But back at the committee, with no supportive MPs present to move the amendments, new Tory MP Peter Bedford (Mid Leicestershire) did so himself – but only to say how much he disapproved of them:

Peter Bedford: *Why am I moving a new clause tabled in the name of the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell)? I asked myself that question. I believe that it is important that the Committee hear and debate in full every proposed amendment to this truly awful Bill. Indeed, this is why my constituents in Mid Leicestershire sent me to this place. [...] Even though I find the views of the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington completely unagreeable, he has been sent to this place to put on record what he believes is right. It will be interesting to see how many on the Government side agree with his new clauses. In layman’s terms, new clauses 2 and 3 relate to allowing prison officers the right to strike. I am sure their instinct is to support these new clauses. I will take the time to outline why I believe this would be a step in the wrong direction.*

Highlighting how “prisons are essential for every functioning society”, Bedford then proceeded to insult every officer who works in them: “The prison guard – or screw, to use the colloquial vernacular – plays a crucial role in maintaining these key purposes.” He then cherry-picked the statistics to claim that, “in 2024, there were more than 23,614 prison guards in England and Wales – this increased by 5,000 during the term of the last Conservative Government”, neglecting to mention that previous Conservative-led Governments from 2010 onwards had slashed officer numbers in the name of austerity. He then turned directly to the right to strike, absurdly asking:

Peter Bedford: *What would happen in these prisons on strike day? Would prisoners be able to do as they pleased? Would they be left in their cells? [...] Who would be there to care for them if something terrible were to happen? Most importantly, for my constituents, who is there to stop these prisoners getting out of the prison grounds? We could have a situation whereby, within a short journey of Mid Leicestershire, hundreds of inmates are on the run.*

Quoting YouGov polling from 2019, he claimed that “52% of the public thought that prison guards should not be able to strike. Incredibly, even through tough times, that figure has increased to 54%.” And he ended his speech by insisting that “the crux of the argument against new clauses 2 and 3 is public safety and the lack of supervision should they be accepted. I therefore hope that they are not added to the Bill.” The Lib-Dem spokesperson on the Bill Committee, Steve Darling (Torbay), then claimed that “my residents would be horrified that these proposals are seeing the light of day in the Committee”, adding:

Steve Darling: *I am shocked that Conservative Members are putting them out there. I expected us just to pass on by them, but I want to make sure that it is on the record that the Liberal Democrats do not support these rather peculiar proposals, which have only seen the light of day thanks to a Conservative Member.*

Insisting that “it is clearly a novel approach to a Bill Committee to move an amendment and then speak against it”, Employment Rights Minister Justin Madders explained that, “under the current legislation, prison officers are prevented from taking industrial action, and their pay is governed by the independent Prison Service Pay Review Body, which acts as a compensatory mechanism for that restriction”. He continued:

***Justin Madders:** Indeed, one of the first actions of this Government was to accept the pay review body recommendations for 2024-25, and we delivered on our commitment to launch the 2025-26 pay review body process in September, three months earlier than the previous Government did. Our written evidence to the body for the next pay round was published on 10 December, paving the way for a timely pay round. We are well positioned for that process to conclude. We need to ensure that everyone who works in a prison has the right to decent conditions and a fair reward for their hard work. The Government are committed to achieving that, but I believe that we can do so without the need for legislative change.*

Prison officers are essential to maintaining order and control in prisons. A withdrawal of their services, as we have heard, even if only partial, would create a risk to order and to the life and limb of individuals. There are limited contingency plans in place to deal with strike action and, during such incidents, reliance on a narrow pool of operational managers and support from the police would create risks. I am sure that Members do not need that spelling out. This would also result in significant disruption to the operation of the courts and the police, representing a significant risk to public safety. I know that the POA is very keen, understandably, to have this proposal enacted. Its representatives have met the Justice Secretary recently, and they continue to do so, and I have spoken to them. I understand their view, but we cannot agree to this at this point. I do not know whether the amendment will be pushed to a vote—I suspect that it will not be, from what the hon. Member for Mid Leicestershire said—but we will not support it.

When the Bill moved to its next stage, Report (12 March), the amendments were debated in the main Chamber, with McDonnell delivering a barnstorming speech pulling apart the disgraceful comments made at Committee, reported in full here:

***John McDonnell:** I wish to deal with new clauses 8 and 9, which relate to recognition of the POA’s right to strike. I therefore also declare that I am an honorary life member of the POA. The word “honorary” means that there is no financial relationship, and I am assured that I would not even get a south-facing cell or an extra pillow.*

New clauses 8 and 9 try to restore the fundamental right of prison officers to take industrial action in its various forms. The union has existed for 90 years and, although organised as a trade union, it has never taken any form of industrial action that has endangered the prisoners the officers care for, other staff or the wider community. Through all of its long history, there was an industrial relations climate in which negotiations took place and disputes were resolved.

Then in 1994, the Conservative Government, under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, made it a crime to induce any prison officer to take strike action, or even to work to rule. The trade union was told very clearly that that would be a criminal act and any trade union officer organising action, even a work to rule, could be prosecuted. What the Government then did—this was why people became extremely cynical at the time—was to plan increases in the pension age, make extensive salary cuts and cut staff numbers. There was no way the union could fight back in any form to protect its members.

Some hon. Members who were about at the time may recall that, in 2019, the POA faced high six-figure fines in the High Court. When it took action on health and safety grounds by convening meetings of members, it was threatened with legal action and the union leaders were threatened with imprisonment.

Ironically, it would have been interesting to ask who would lock them up—but that is another question altogether.

When the police had their right to strike taken away, it was almost like a covenant and they were given very specific commitments around how they would be protected on pay, pensions and conditions of work. That was never offered to the POA and there was never any negotiation like that, where it would at least be given some security in return for the loss of that right. That was never given.

The POA took the Government to the European Court of Human Rights in 2024 and the case was accepted. The Court urged the Government to engage with the union in good faith over what remedies would be available. The then Government refused to engage and the current Government are still not engaging, so one of the reasons for tabling the new clauses is to urge the Government to start engaging with the union around that particular issue.

All the union is asking for is that its members be treated like any other workers and for the Government to engage. The right to strike in Scotland was restored 10 years ago and there has been no strike action since. That has created an industrial relations climate that is conducive to working together—not to entering into conflict but to negotiating problems out. I think that that is a result of both sides knowing that there is the alternative, if necessary, of taking part in industrial action.

As most people know, industrial action in public services is often not a strike; it is usually a work to rule to start off negotiations. I have been a member of a trade union for 50 years; I have been a trade union officer, a lay official and so on. Every union that I have known, where there is any form of industrial action that in any way involves a public service, always puts in place negotiated arrangements to protect the people that they are serving—that is not just life and limb protection, but often ensures a standard of service that is still acceptable to people. I therefore urge the Minister to get back round the table with the POA.

There was a debate in Committee on this matter, which angered people and angered me. I have gone over the debate. It showed a shameful disrespect for prison officers and an ignorance of the role that they play and the working environment that they work in. There are references to screws and guards and things like that, and about how, somehow, if the right were restored, the union would allow prisoners to run amok and put the whole community at risk. That is never the case—it never has been and never would be. There is a lack of understanding about what those workers put up with. As many hon. Members know, there is overcrowding. Prison officers deal with prisoners with huge mental health issues, drug problems and health problems overall. There are record levels of violence in prisons and prison officers are injured almost daily as a result of assaults.

I have to say that the disrespect demonstrated in the Committee was part and parcel of the demoralisation of even more of our workers in those key roles. I therefore ask the Minister to re-engage, to get back round the negotiating table and to recognise that the issue will not go away. These members want their basic trade union rights back and, if necessary, they will go back before the European Court. I believe they will win and that we will, unnecessarily, go through another period in which the demoralisation of workers continues because of people's lack of respect for their basic trade union rights. We are suffering real problems in recruitment and retention, so I urge the Government just to take that one step back to the negotiating table with the POA.

Responding for the Government, Minister Madders thanked McDonnell “for his persistence and his active engagement on behalf of prison officers”, but claimed “there is limited contingency to deal with industrial action, and during such incidents the reliance is on a narrow pool of operational managers with some potential for very

limited support from the police and Army in limited circumstances. That creates operational risks and is not sustainable for any period of time.” He continued:

Justin Madders: *My right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington referred to what he classed as disrespect to prison officers during that debate in Committee. I just put on record that there was certainly no disrespect shown by those on the Government Benches; we value and respect the work that prison officers do. I know that he will continue to pursue this matter, and I suggest that he contacts the Ministry of Justice, which has the remit. I hope it will be able to engage on the matter in future.*

When the Bill moved to the Upper House, the same amendments were tabled by JUPG co-chair Lord Tony Woodley and Institute of Employment Rights chair Lord John Hendy, who kicked off the debate in Committee (10 June) by explaining that the amendments seek to “restore to prison officers the right to take industrial action”. He continued:

Lord Hendy: *It was taken from them—50 years after its founding—by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The ILO permits restrictions on strikes on inessential services but requires one of several preconditions: the restriction must “be accompanied by adequate, impartial and speedy conciliation and arbitration proceedings in which the parties concerned can take part at every stage and in which the awards, once made, are fully and promptly implemented”. The Prison Service Pay Review Body was imposed on the Prison Service. Governments did not regard themselves as bound by that until the present Government, who have promised that “every last penny” of the PSPRB recommendations will be fulfilled. The problem is that that does not resolve the issue of the right to strike.*

My amendment seeks to remove the ban, but if the Government do not accept lifting the ban on prison officers taking industrial action, to comply with the rule of law and the requirements of the ILO they must institute an arbitral machinery. The members of the arbitral body must be “appointed on the basis of specific guidance or criteria and have the confidence of all parties”. They must provide “adequate, impartial and speedy conciliation and arbitration ... in which the parties concerned can take part at every stage and in which the awards, once made, are fully and promptly implemented”. It also means that if the PSPRB is to undertake that function, it must be given a remit outside simply pay. That body currently does not enjoy the confidence of the POA. I beg to move.

The former TUC general secretary, Lady O’Grady of Upper Holloway, highlighted how the groups of amendments under discussion sought to “shift the balance of power a little bit more towards working people”, before focusing on prison officers’ right to strike:

Lady O’Grady: *I just want to very, very briefly say a word on Amendment 253 and underline the very grave sense of injustice that prison officers feel about the removal of what is a fundamental human right, the right to withdraw your labour, back in 1994. There is a sense that that did not in any way improve the Prison Service; I think many of us would agree that the Prison Service has subsequently faced huge challenges. We know of the huge problems that prison officers face very often, day to day, in their workplace: violence, poor conditions and vermin. I stress the appeal made by the noble Lord, Lord Hendy. Given the grave sense of injustice that is felt by people who not only stand up for fellow workers as members of the POA but stand up for a service that we could become proud of as a country, a prison service that also, I hope, does the job of rehabilitating people, we must look to engage with the POA to find a remedy to the real sense of injustice that they feel.*

But Lib-Dem Lord David Goddard of Stockport insisted that “the way to protect prison officers is not to enshrine the right to strike but to remove the reasons why they would want to strike”, which he claimed was “about improving the Victorian conditions that we have in 2025 prison systems, where people go into prison and come out worse criminals or nine out of 10 as drug addicts or whatever”. And on Woodley and Hendy’s amendments specifically, he said:

Lord Goddard: *I hear why it is being done, I understand why it is being done and I know that it is not got a hope in somewhere else of getting through. But I thank the noble Lord for bringing it forward, because sometimes it is good to realise that things that we used to do are perhaps today not even politically correct to do. Human rights and the rights of people who go every day to work, to earn a living and support their family, need airing and need protecting. I know this is a probing amendment, but I thank the noble Lord for bringing it because it is interesting. Now and again it is good to be reminded of how it used to be and how it can be now.*

Speaking for the Government, Minister Lady Jones of Whitchurch praised Hendy and O’Grady’s “very impassioned contributions” and insisted: “The Government will do whatever it takes to protect prison officers, and my thoughts are with the brave officers who were recently attacked at HMPs Frankland, Belmarsh and Long Lartin.” She continued:

Lady Jones: *Though their work is largely out of view of the public, prison officers play a vital role in keeping both the public and those in our care safe. As a result, they are prevented from taking industrial action under the current legislation. As compensation for that restriction, their pay is governed by the independent Prison Service Pay Review Body process. The Government have committed to accept the recommendations from that review process, except in “exceptional circumstances”.*

But, she insisted:

Lady Jones: *Industrial action, even if only partial, would create unsustainable and significant risks to safety and security in prisons. The Prison Service has limited contingencies available to deal with industrial action, relying on a narrow group of operational managers, with some potential for very limited support from the police and Army in some circumstances during such incidents. The Prison Service and the POA have developed a strong working relationship in recent years, and it is the Government’s hope that this position continues going forward. I can tell my noble friend Lady O’Grady that we continue to work with both sides, and we hope to find a more substantial way forward on these issues. With this in mind, I ask my noble friend Lord Hendy to withdraw his amendment.*

Winding up the debate, Hendy noted that “prison officers in Scotland have the right to strike”, adding:

Lord Hendy: *It seems inexplicable to me that those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are deprived of it while those in Scotland enjoy it.*

Grahame Morris’s EDM 228: Ban on prison officer industrial action (tabled in October 2024), which highlights how the ban “leaves prison officers unfairly and dangerously at the mercy of prison service management and without leverage to challenge Government policy with respect to pay, terms and conditions”, has been signed by over 30 MPs, while in January 2026 the European Committee on Social Rights declared that the Government were in breach of prison officers’ human rights. The Bill received Royal Assent on 18 December, becoming the Employment Rights Act 2025, and JUPG members will continue to call at every opportunity for the right to strike for prison officers until Labour keeps its promises of the past and repeals Section 127 – as part of a new “Employment Rights Bill 2.0”.

Legislation: Sentencing Bill (Electronic Monitoring)

Alongside the chaotic early release schemes aimed at easing the prisons capacity crisis, the new Labour Government commissioned former Tory Justice Secretary David Gauke to conduct a review into sentencing reform, which was debated in the Commons as soon as it was published (22 May). Explaining that “the review was tasked with addressing the fact that our prisons too often create better criminals, not better citizens”, and that, “instead of

cutting crime, they are breeding grounds for it”, Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood told MPs she accepted Gauke’s key recommendation of “a three-part sentence called the earned progression model” whereby, if prisoners “follow prison rules, they will earn earlier release” – as early as a third way through their sentence. She continued:

Shabana Mahmood: *In the second part of the progression model, offenders will enter a period of intensive supervision. That will see more offenders tagged and close management from probation. The Government will therefore significantly increase funding: by the final year of the spending review period, an annual £1.6 billion will rise by up to £700 million, allowing us to tag and monitor tens of thousands more offenders.*

Following fears that ministers would use this opportunity to make prison officers fit tags before release, instead of that being the responsibility of privateers Serco, which has the contract for this, Kim Johnson tabled amendments New Clause 2 at Committee and then New Clause 25 at Report, both of which had the same three demands:

- (a) electronic monitoring is overseen by the Probation Service;*
- (b) the fitting of necessary apparatus for the purposes of electronic monitoring may only be undertaken by those in the employment of an organisation with responsibility for delivering electronic monitoring; and*
- (c) the fitting of necessary apparatus may not be undertaken by an employee of HM Prison and Probation Service unless the responsibility for the delivery of electronic monitoring is held solely by HM Prison and Probation Service.*

Parliamentarians across the political divide spent the year condemning Serco’s appalling performance, for example at Justice Questions (8 July), when Lib-Dem Joshua Reynolds (Maidenhead) pointed out that, “in 2013, Serco was fined £68.5 million for overcharging the Government for electronic tagging, but it was still awarded the new £200 million contract in 2023”, adding:

Joshua Reynolds: *Given the Secretary of State’s comments in March that the performance of Serco was “not good enough”, can the Minister explain what a private company actually needs to do for the Government to see it as unfit to hold a contract such as this one?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *While the performance of Serco has been unacceptable, as the hon. Gentleman says, we have made progress, and performance is improving. We have imposed fines for poor performance, and will not hesitate to employ further contractual remedies or other measures should they be required, but this is a contract that we inherited from the Conservative party, and we are doing our best to make it work.*

Andy McDonald: *I thank the Minister for that response, and this Government are doing their best to make things work, but Channel 4 has revealed that the contract with Serco was fundamentally failing. In the answer to my written question in June, Serco’s performance was still deemed to be unacceptable, so where are we with bringing Serco around to perform properly? If it does not do so, will the Government consider cancelling that contract and bringing those services back in-house?*

Sir Nic Dakin: *All options are always under review, but as I have said, performance under that contract is improving. The Prisons Minister in the other place is gripping this issue, and we will get to where we need to get to.*

The Sentencing Bill had its first debate after summer recess (16 September), at which Justice Committee chair Andy Slaughter highlighted how “the success of the measures in the Bill relies heavily on the use of electronic monitoring, primarily through the use of tags”. Grahame Morris continued the theme, insisting that, “as we expand the use of tagging, we should try our hardest to reduce private-sector involvement, partly because it has proved to be such a costly failure in the past and partly because this new form of punishment should be harnessed and used for the public good, not private profit”, adding that the extra money “must not be used simply to line the pockets of rip-off failing privateers”. POA member Sally Jameson explained that, “having served as a Justice Parliamentary Private

Secretary until only last week, this is the first time I have been able to speak on these departmental matters in the Chamber since I was elected,” before turning to the Bill itself:

Sally Jameson: *I am also pleased that the legislation recognises that prisoner behaviour should dictate whether they are released as part of the earned progression model. Although it is important that we are able to manage population numbers, it should not come at the detriment of support for good behaviour and punishment for bad. The additional powers to extend the number of days added at adjudication level are important. I am keen to explore in more detail with the Minister how we can use and improve the adjudication system to enforce that. I am sure he will be pleased to hear that, as a trained adjudication liaison officer myself, I have many views on how to strengthen the system so that prisoners who are violent—they are, frankly, the chief trouble-causers—face maximum penalties, and we capture those who should not benefit from the earned progression model. I ask Ministers to consult operationally experienced voices at every level of implementation to ensure maximum impact in that area.*

Morris again raised union concerns about electronic monitoring at the Bill’s next stage, Committee (21 October), explaining that “my intention is to support the Bill, but also to seek to improve it”, adding that, “on that basis, I have had extensive discussions with the justice unions, notably the prison officers in the Prison Officers Association, probation officers in Napo, prison educators in the University and College Union and, indeed, staff in the Public and Commercial Services Union”. Turning to tagging, he explained:

Grahame Morris: *I have added my name to new clause 2, tabled by my good friend my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson), which seeks to ensure that the Probation Service, not Serco or any other private company, oversees this increasingly important criminal justice technology, as is the case in almost all of Europe. The key to the success of the Bill is the tremendous opportunities for this new generation of electronic tagging of offenders.*

And, he insisted:

Grahame Morris: *The new clause would also ensure that it is not the responsibility of an already overstretched Prison Service to tag offenders before release—not when Serco is being paid handsomely for this contract. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick has pointed out, such contracts were awarded by the previous Conservative Government, and Serco, as the provider, has suffered considerable financial penalties. I would like to pose a number of questions to the Minister, which I hope he can respond to either in his speech or at a later date. Does he agree with Napo and the POA that, with such a huge expansion of electronic monitoring envisaged by the Bill, the safeguards set out in new clause 2 are sorely needed? Does he also agree that we urgently need a full debate about whether we want the public or the private sector in operational control of electronic tagging?*

Speaking to her amendment directly, Kim Johnson told MPs that it “seeks to provide oversight mechanisms for electronic monitoring, which the Bill proposes increasing hugely”, adding that “tagging plays an important part in our criminal justice system, and if used correctly and ethically, it can help reduce crime and protect the public, while giving victims confidence that justice is being served. However, there are numerous problems, and those must be addressed before any further expansion, particularly the massive profits made by private-sector companies.” She continued:

Kim Johnson: *Failing private-sector contracts are at the heart of the problem, particularly those with Serco and G4S, now acquired by Allied Universal, which has a murky and well documented history of over-charging and under-delivering, and which has been fined tens of millions of pounds as a result. I agree with the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee in the other place, which last year said it was “remarkable” that Serco and G4S had been reappointed to provide tagging services after they had “been investigated by the Serious Fraud Office and subject to fines for misconduct and a deferred prosecution agreement”.*

Calling on ministers to “use this decisive moment to bring tagging firmly into the public-sector Probation Service, as is common in the rest of Europe, and out of the hands of failing and fraudulent privateers”, Johnson continued:

Kim Johnson: *The Government have promised the biggest insourcing in a generation, and if they fail to insource these services, they should consider demands by the unions to make the companies that make and provide the tags also fit the tags, pre-release. That is in my new clause 2(2)(c). I remind Members of the appalling case of Gaie Delap, a Just Stop Oil activist in her late 70s, who spent extra weeks in prison because Serco could not find a tag to fit her. The companies making millions from these contracts should be sanctioned, so that they deliver services correctly. They should not be allowed to rely on overstretched prison staff to pick up their work. Will the Minister assure the House on that point? The fragmented privatised system creates huge delays and inefficiencies, and provides financial challenges for the people whom it supervises, who, for example, have to charge tags without having access to electricity, or money to pay for it.*

However, at a Lords question (5 November) on Prison Services Insourcing, Lib-Dem spokesperson Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames raised in-prison tagging as something “that might benefit from insourcing when the review is undertaken”, saying that this “could easily be undertaken within prisons by prison staff [because] numbers of prisoners have been released untagged into the community, causing risk to the public and potentially leading to unnecessary recalls when appointments are subsequently missed”.

At the Bill’s Committee Stage in the Lords (1 December), former TUC general secretary Lord Brendan Barber of Ainsdale stood in for Lord Woodley, who had tabled Johnson’s tagging amendment. Barber was clear that, “as a lifelong trade unionist, I have seen too often the damaging impact that privatisation can have on public services; in pursuit of maximising profit, costs are too often cut to the bone, often starting with workers’ pay, terms and conditions. The quality of service goes down, while the cost to the taxpayer goes up, and we are left with the worst of both worlds.” He continued:

Lord Barber: *Privatisation has failed especially badly when it comes to the justice system. Probation is the classic example: it was part-privatised by the last Government, who had to renationalise it five years later because the service was close to collapse. Take prisons: private prisons are on average 47% more violent than public prisons, according to research published by the Guardian. Yet still we build more of them, with, of the three new prisons announced by the Government, two to be run for profit. Quite apart from the practical problems that come with outsourcing, it seems to me to be morally wrong for private companies to profit from prisons or probation, or indeed any part of our precious justice system.*

Turning to Woodley’s tagging amendment, Barber explained that “there are two aspects to this which were previously explored by my honourable friend Kim Johnson in the other place”, adding:

Lord Barber: *First is the call for the Government to give serious consideration to taking electronic monitoring out of the hands of the private sector, which has failed us so badly on too many occasions, and into the Probation Service, where it belongs. As was mentioned at Second Reading, this is a key recommendation from the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, arising from its excellent inquiry into tagging. It is common throughout Europe for the probation service to be in operational control of tagging day to day, so why can we not do that here? There may be strong voices in the MoJ saying that it is impossible, that the state does not have the capability to do this, but I urge the Minister to fully investigate the feasibility of insourcing this vital work, examining relevant international experience closely.*

And raising POA concerns, he continued:

Lord Barber: *The second part of this amendment deals with a specific issue that has been raised by the Prison Officers' Association, which is concerned that its members will be told to fit tags on prisoners, pre release, as part of the Bill. If a private company such as Serco has the contract for electronic monitoring, surely it must be its staff who fit the tags, not hard-pressed prison officers. Prison officers already facing immense pressures day in, day out should not be expected to take on such additional responsibility. I hope that in his response the Minister will be able to offer assurances that unless the whole tagging system is brought into the public sector in a well-planned and well-resourced way, prison officers will not be asked to take on this extra work. I beg to move.*

Responding, Government whip Lord Lemos agreed "it is important to be clear that it is the responsibility of the electronic monitoring field and monitoring service provider, Serco, to perform the duty of installing and monitoring the output of electronic monitoring devices". And, confirming the campaign win for the POA, he continued:

Lord Lemos: *The Ministry of Justice has recently launched a pilot to test the fitting of electronic monitoring devices before offenders leave the prison gates, instead of at a home visit. This goes to my noble friend Lord Barber's third point. We are doing this so that we can begin monitoring them immediately, in the crucial period just after leaving custody. The approach is initially being tested in six prisons. I therefore reaffirm to my noble friend and the Committee that it absolutely remains the responsibilities of Serco to install tags at these pilot sites and of Probation Service staff to manage the prison leavers to whom they are applied. The pilot will be subject to proper evaluation so that we can take forward the operational learning and evidence it generates to inform future practice. I hope that that reassures my noble friend that the changes we are making do not change the responsibilities for applying the tags. With those reassurances in mind, I hope that he will feel able to withdraw his amendment.*

Lemos also addressed another Woodley amendment, first moved by John McDonnell in the Commons, which banned any outsourcing of community service sentences – a key concern of JUPG sister union Napo. Promising Peers that "the privatisation of unpaid work is absolutely not being considered", the Minister insisted: "We do not intend to privatise the delivery of unpaid work, but we should encourage joining up with local businesses and charities to determine how best to expand projects further and to deliver work that has the greatest community benefit." The Bill received Royal Assent in January 2026, becoming the Sentencing Act 2026.

Annex A: Trade Union Co-ordinating Group

The Trade Union Co-ordinating Group (TUCG) brings together 11 national unions (BFAWU, Equity, FBU, Napo, NEU, NUJ, PCS, POA, RMT, UCU and Urtu) to co-ordinate campaigning activities in Parliament and beyond. The Chair of the TUCG was held by Equity for 2025 and has passed to Napo in 2026. During the period covered by this report, activities undertaken by the TUCG include:

- held AGM and Parliamentary Reception 2025;
- distributed briefings and event invitations ahead of the Employment Rights Bill 2nd Reading and Committee stage;
- executive heard from Amanda Walters from the Safe Sick Pay campaign on the need to increase the rate of SSP, and Jessie Hoskin on the End Not Defend Sexual Harassment campaign;
- held joint fringe with Institute of Employment Rights at the TUC Women's Conference 2025;
- co-ordinated joint letter to Keir Starmer from 11 general secretaries opposing the disabled welfare cuts;
- organised strategy discussion of general secretaries about co-ordination and reform of the TUC;
- held joint STUC 2025 fringe in Dundee on the Employment Rights Bill with the Institute of Employment Rights;
- held fringe with PCS at TUC Disabled Members Conference in Bournemouth on stopping the disability welfare cuts;

- circulated briefing to Peers urging support for Lord Henty's amendments to Employment Rights Bill;
- organised joint online rally with Arise ahead of the June Spending Review statement, opposing social security cuts;
- held TUC Congress fringe on "Restructuring the Economy" with speakers including Rachael Maskell MP;
- held Labour Conference 2025 fringe on "Can Labour Still Deliver the Change we Need ... and Stop the Rise of Reform?" with the IER and Campaign for Trade Union Freedom, with speakers including Ian Byrne MP and Kim Johnson MP.

TUCG can be found on X (formerly Twitter) @TUCGinfo and at www.tucg.org.uk

Annex B: Links to selection of debates

Tuesday 14 January: Mark Fairhurst oral evidence to the Justice & Home Affairs Committee inquiry: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15211/html/> (POA written evidence: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/133715/html/>; Inquiry report: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5901/ldselect/ldjusthom/153/15302.htm>; Government response: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/49543/documents/263981/default/>)

Tuesday 14 January: UQ on Drones in High-security Prisons: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-01-14/debates/3EAE8FBA-B110-4C1A-A5F2-CE64AE2E5C49/DronesHigh-SecurityPrisons>

Tuesday 14 January: Employment Rights Bill Committee: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-01-14/debates/d2b10026-04dd-47ed-b352-21789b4f85b9/EmploymentRightsBill\(TwentiethSitting\)#contribution-5D08A18F-F49A-4263-96E0-D2E16C5B9B8B](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-01-14/debates/d2b10026-04dd-47ed-b352-21789b4f85b9/EmploymentRightsBill(TwentiethSitting)#contribution-5D08A18F-F49A-4263-96E0-D2E16C5B9B8B)

Wednesday 15 January: Lords repeat UQ on Drones in High-security Prisons: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-01-15/debates/CEEF23F2-EEEE-431A-BFC2-24F4A87EF596/DronesHigh-SecurityPrisons>

Thursday 23 January: OQ on Prison Maintenance Insourcing: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-01-23/debates/4F15EEE5-2317-4B86-BC44-06B4FBAEB80F/PrisonMaintenanceInsourcing>

Tuesday 28 January: Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-01-28/debates/33DA8F1A-8B22-4E09-8F5F-1F69F0AF973F/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Wednesday 29 January: WHD on Outsourcing in Government Departments: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-01-29/debates/A7163E29-FE95-428B-8EE4-6DEDB361536E/OutsourcingGovernmentDepartments>

Tuesday 25 February: Justice Committee evidence from Rob Luxford: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15421/html/> (Liverpool Echo piece <https://www.liverpooecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/hmp-liverpool-governor-avoids-question-31080836>)

Tuesday 4 March: Justice Committee session with MOJ Permanent Secretary Antonia Romeo, HMPPS CEO Amy Rees and MOJ COO James McEwen: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15467/html/>

Tuesday 11 March: Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-03-11/debates/7A0DD3B4->

[81A7-4A17-8230-D77C4D12DB0B/OralAnswersToQuestions#main-content](https://hansard.parliament.uk/OralAnswersToQuestions#main-content)

Wednesday 12 March: Employment Rights Bill Report stage: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-03-12/debates/D532A0C0-8B26-4BE4-B61A-36908DB2CBA7/EmploymentRightsBill>

Tuesday 22 April: Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-04-22/debates/C0EEFB2F-8C87-4C69-9F15-934C64686313/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Monday 12 May: UQ on Protection of Prison Staff: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-05-12/debates/04B72C9A-7380-4778-95B7-26A05C4B53C7/ProtectionOfPrisonStaff>

Tuesday 13 May: OQ on Police, Prison and Probation Officers: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-05-13/debates/A974D0D1-95C0-4843-8825-53E929989257/PolicePrisonAndProbationOfficers>

Tuesday 13 May: Lords UQ repeat on Protection of Prison Staff: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-05-13/debates/D833DB0D-B9CA-47EF-A02E-727C48582CDD/ProtectionOfPrisonStaff>

Thursday 22 May: Statement on the Independent Sentencing Review: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-05-22/debates/A8FD73FC-8365-4C86-9486-F22F6C175877/IndependentSentencingReview>

Monday 2 June: Lords repeat Independent Sentencing Review: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-06-02/debates/1BF100C1-186E-474D-BD66-234CF3686725/IndependentSentencingReview>

Tuesday 3 June: Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-06-03/debates/387D3322-EDFD-458B-AF3A-8C310C8D14F4/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Tuesday 10 June: Employment Rights Bill Lords Committee: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-06-10/debates/FECF08F1-AF17-42BF-A78C-6666064DB76C/EmploymentRightsBill>

Wednesday 18 June: Petition on Anti-Stab and Anti-Slash Protective Gear in Prisons: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-06-18/debates/A6101C70-BCCB-4561-BD6B-77967CD74CA2/Anti-StabAndAnti-SlashProtectiveGearInPrisons>

Wednesday 25 June: EDD on Criminal Justice: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-06-25/debates/4328F5CE-EC40-4668-BCFF-2A434293CEE4/CriminalJustice>

Tuesday 8 July: Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-07-08/debates/DE6033B8-29F0-4D7A-BFB0-8BE603EF2155/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Thursday 17 July: Business of the House: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-07-17/debates/99911FD4-617A-407A-BA82-8DF8F1D54E9D/BusinessOfTheHouse>

Wednesday 23 July: OQ on Jobs Market: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-07-23/debates/E4A70691-792A-4A88-9134-D0C8DD455802/JobsMarket>

Tuesday 16 September: Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-09-16/debates/31ED419B-62F5-420A-8D70-E44994F4BE0C/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Tuesday 16 September: Sentencing Bill Second Reading: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-09-16/debates/89B65B06-F0A6-478D-A485-847E07BA46A1/SentencingBill>

Tuesday 14 October: OQ on Prisoners and Reoffending: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-10-14/debates/6A2F6F9A-CA0D-4547-BE11-39080204F013/PrisonersReoffending>

Tuesday 21 October: Sentencing Bill Committee stage: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-10-21/debates/590DBEF3-EA64-4317-A051-939CE275C66C/SentencingBill>

Monday 27 October: Statement on Prisoner Release Checks: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-10-27/debates/4A84C22D-27A7-4E57-99E1-46966DC42A04/PrisonerReleaseChecks>

Wednesday 29 October: Sentencing Bill Report stage: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-10-29/debates/38B50B65-D95F-4021-A354-699D651378BF/SentencingBill>

Wednesday 5 November: PMQs: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-11-05/debates/87B89E2F-C48F-441A-BDB4-194BD111F0A6/Engagements>

Wednesday 5 November: OQ on Prison Services Insourcing: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-11-05/debates/4BEABC54-0BAB-4504-B548-000ED8E1ADBF/PrisonServicesInsourcing>

Monday 10 November: Lords PNQ on Accidental Prison Releases: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-11-10/debates/00E86B42-4082-4DA8-AA6B-7F2E6D44B220/AccidentalPrisonReleases>

Tuesday 11 November: Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-11-11/debates/BC6878BC-A979-403D-A902-B1C9B72D0702/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Tuesday 11 November: Statement on Prisoner Releases in Error: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-11-11/debates/229800C4-41AB-4C86-9A69-8711A663572A/PrisonerReleasesInError>

Thursday 13 November: Lords repeat statement on Prisoner Releases in Error: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-11-13/debates/4E510C92-852D-4588-AE60-1DCB91A3CDD8/PrisonerReleasesInError>

Thursday 20 November: UQ on Separation Centres for Terrorist Offenders: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-11-20/debates/97B99A4D-B812-409A-9799-184D9490F4E7/SeparationCentresTerroristOffenders>

Thursday 20 November: Select Committee statement on Reoffending and Rehabilitation in Prisons: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-11-20/debates/107EB1EB-B422-4DA2-A373-2E08271BD820/ReoffendingRehabilitationInPrisons>

Tuesday 25 November: Lords UQ repeat on Separation Centres for Terrorist Offenders: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-11-25/debates/5B32C92B-A245-4DE6-9F15-A0E542180BF1/SeparationCentresTerroristOffenders>

Wednesday 26 November: OQ on Visas: Highly Skilled People: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-11-26/debates/9EB196D3-7AD1-4563-805D-E1A19127BD79/VisasHighlySkilledPeople>

Monday 1 December: Sentencing Bill Lords Committee: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-12-01/debates/1085C68A-B945-431B-96F2-E5168FF019A6/SentencingBill> & <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-12-01/debates/CCAFDAA9-9D33-4905-BE5C-A87C0A52F526/SentencingBill>

Tuesday 16 December: Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-12-16/debates/98548EB9-B0B2-44E8-9716-7E2A90F0DE8F/OralAnswersToQuestions>

SCOTLAND

Scotland Annual Report 2025

INTRODUCTION

PAY NEGOTIATIONS

We were engaged in pay negotiations throughout the early months of 2025 and received two offers from the Employer that we deemed unacceptable, and they were rejected.

A further offer was made in late May, which was a two-year offer and amounted to an 8% increase with an inflation guarantee clause attached. It was an identical offer to that given to the NHS in Scotland, including our members in the State Hospital, Carstairs. The make-up of the offer was a 4.25% in year 1 (2025) and a further 3.75% in year 2 (2026).

The offer was put to ballot in the month of June and was overwhelmingly accepted by the members (92.3%).

SNC ELECTIONS

In this period, we had an SNC election for two posts. John Devine and Karen Ewen were the current post-holders, and both were successfully returned to their posts.

Their terms of office are until May 2029.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Kilmarnock membership 18 months ago, while still a private prison, was 110. By the end of December 2025, the membership increased to 256.

Private-sector membership in general 18 months ago was 40. By the end of December 2025, the numbers were 61.

CAMPAIGNS IN 2025

Overcrowding Survey
Survey and focus groups
Breaking Point Report
Crisis Point Reached Report

We engaged Unity Consulting to conduct surveys and focus group discussions with the membership in Scotland on a variety of issues affecting them and the service this year. The first of those was on the ongoing overcrowding, and members were asked to describe the impact this was having inside the prisons and on the staff directly.

The focus groups and interviews with members also looked at issues such as organised crime gangs within prisons, drugs and their supply routes, mental health issues amongst prisoners and the complexity of the current populations.

All this information led to the publication of two reports in the year. The Breaking Point report was produced in May 2025 and was used as material for a drop-in session we held in the Scottish Parliament in June, where

we had a very healthy turnout of MSPs across all political parties.

The second report was titled Crisis Point Reached and was launched at our Annual Conference in October 2025. This publication was very wide ranging in its coverage of issues that members had voiced their views on, and is being used now as a document for engagement with the SPS and the Scottish Government as we seek to tackle those issues raised.

MEETINGS WITH THE CABINET SECRETARY FOR JUSTICE

There were several meetings with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice over the course of the year. The most prominent issue for discussion was overcrowding and its impact on the service's ability to deliver safe and secure, productive prisons. Other key features were OCGs, drugs, weapons, violence, mental health, and drone activities.

STUC UNION LEARNING

The POA were again successful in bidding for funding through the STUC Union Learning Bid process, and we were able to provide learning opportunities throughout the year. This work was coordinated and initiated by Karen Ewen, SNC member.

SCOTTISH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Conference was held at the Peebles Hydro Hotel on 29th & 30th October 2025. We had an address to the conference from the new Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sara Snell. She spoke of her first few months in post in Scotland and what her impressions were of the prison estate and its service provision.

The Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service, Teresa Medhurst, also addressed conference, having previously announced her retirement taking place in March 2026.

We were also addressed by the National Chair Mark Fairhurst and General Secretary Steve Gillan.

It is a tradition of Scottish conference to organise fundraising for a chosen charity each year and we managed to raise a very impressive £8,739 for Beatson's Cancer Charity. This charity was picked, and the donation was given, in the name of Andy Hogg, our previous FTO and one of our Honorary Life Members, who had sadly passed away in March 2025.

We also conducted our third foodbank collection at conference, again this year for Peebles foodbank, and we collected over 450 kilograms this year. We also donated £1,250 in cash to the Peebles foodbank.

CURRENT SNC MEMBERSHIP

John Cairney - SNC Chair
Jim McCabe - SNC Vice Chair
William Reid - SNC Treasurer
Karen Ewan – SNC Member
Eddie Cruse – SNC Member
John Devine – SNC Member
Mark Meikle – SNC Member
Phil Fairlie - SNC Assistant General Secretary for Scotland

Regards



PHIL FAIRLIE

Assistant General Secretary

CIRC/01/25	20 January 2025	SNC Election & Timeline	All Members	P Fairlie
CIRC/02/25	20 January 2025	Comms Meeting	All Chair & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/03/25	23 January 2025	Overcrowding Survey	All Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/04/25	29 January 2025	Staff Calculator	All Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/05/25	30 January 2025	iTrent launch	All Members	P Fairlie
CIRC/06/25	04 February 2025	Female Leadership Course	All Female members	P Fairlie
CIRC/07/25	04 February 2024	Focus Group Applications	All Members	P Fairlie
CIRC/08/25	06 February 2025	Reminder of overcrowding survey	All Members	P Fairlie
Circ/09/25	12 February 2025	Core Day	All Members	P Fairlie
CIRC/10/25	13 February 2025	Reminder on Survey & Focus Groups	Branch Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/11/25	13 February 2025	Reminder on Overcrowding survey	All Brach Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/12/25	17 February 2025	General update	All Members	J Cairney
CIRC/13/25	10 March 2025	Andy Hogg Honour Life Member	All Members	P Fairlie
CIRC/14/25	13 March 2025	MORS Policy Review	All Chairs & Sec	SNC
CIRC/15/25	19 March 2025	Andy Hogg's funeral arrangements	All Members	P Fairlie
CIRC/16/25	02 April 2025	TUC Courses	Branch Chairs & Sec	SNC
CIRC/17/25	09 April 2025	SNC Ballot results	All Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/18/25	14 April 2025	Pay Talks Update	All Branches	P Fairlie
CIRC/19/25	22 April 2025	General Update	All Members	J Cairney
CIRC/20/25	19 May 2025	Comms Meeting	All Chair & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/21/25	23 May 2025	Pay Offer	All Membrs	P Fairlie
CIRC/22/25	02 June 2025	Copy of the Capabilty Report	Branch Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/23/25	12 June 2025	Pay Ballot Result	All Members	P Fairlie
CIRC/24/25	13 June 2025	General Update	All Members	P Fairlie
CIRC/25/25	23 June 2025	Scottish Conference 2025	All Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/26/25	23 June 2025	State of the Service Report - Survey	All Members	P Fairlie
CIRC/27/25	04 July 2025	Comms Meeting	Branch Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/28/25	15 July 2025	Focus Day Comms	Branch Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/29/25	18 July 2025	Branch Monthly Returns	Branch Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/30/25	21 July 2025	Focused Day	Branch Chairs & sec	J Cairney
CIRC/31/25	05 August 2025	Call for Special Delegates Meeting	Branch Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/32/25	15 August 2025	Update Focused Day	Branch Chairs & Sec	J Cairney
CIRC/33/25	20 August 2025	Special Delegates Conference	Branch Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/34/25	25 August 2025	Comms Meeting	Branch Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/35/25	03 October 2025	General Update	All Members	J Cairney
CIRC/36/25	13 October 2025	Trussel Trust Peebles	Branch Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/37/25	03 November 2025	Conference Thanks	All Members	P Fairlie
CIRC/38/25	02 December 2025	Monthly Returns	Branch Chairs & Sec	P Fairlie
CIRC/39/25	18 December 2025	Neurodiversity Course	All Members	K Ewen
CIRC/40/25	19 December 2025	General Update	All Members	J Cairney

(Annex A – Circulars 2025)

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Annual Report 2025

As I enter my third term of office as Northern Ireland Area Chair, I remain committed to representing and supporting our members with diligence and integrity.

The Area Vice Chair, Darren Cooke, has fully established himself in his role and continues to work proactively to advance the POA agenda on behalf of the membership. The Area Committee has, as always, been fully committed to enhance the working lives of our members.

Once again, the pay settlement for the year was agreed collaboratively by the Area Committee and NIPS through the Pay Review Body, with all monies owed subsequently issued to staff through their salaries.

Throughout 2025, the Area Committee continued to ensure the One Officer grade negotiations were for the betterment of members. NIPS continued with their One Officer roadshows across establishments. The outcome of this initiative will be determined following a workplace ballot of members.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Geoff Willetts for laying the wreath at the Arboretum on Remembrance Sunday on behalf of Northern Ireland members, as we honoured the colleagues who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

During the year, the Freedom of the Antrim Newtownabbey Borough was conferred upon the Northern Ireland Prison Service, recognising its longstanding service.

Hydebank Wood received commendation from the Inspection Committee, achieving top marks across multiple categories – an accomplishment that reflects the professionalism and dedication of the staff.

The threat faced by Northern Ireland Prison Service staff remains significant. I urge all colleagues to remain vigilant and always prioritise their personal safety.

It continues to be a privilege to serve as your Area Chair and to acknowledge the exceptional work you carry out with commitment and resilience during these challenging times.

With fraternal best wishes.

Ivor Dunne
Area Chair NI

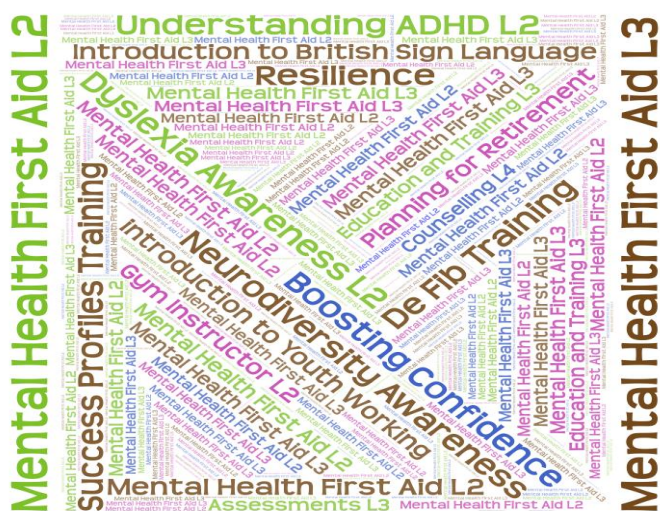
POA LEARNING

POA Learning Annual Report 2025

Union Learning Fund Project Wales

The POA's Wales Union Learning Fund project, Learning and Skills Development Opportunities Wales, started on 1 April 2025 launching a three-year project.

During the 2025/2026 year we have supported **288 colleagues**, with over **130 achieving Accredited qualifications** and a further **150 completing non accredited learning opportunities**.



One of the big projects of the year has been providing Level 2 and Level 3 First Aid for Mental Health qualifications, working in collaboration with a Community Interest Company and local training provider in Wales who specialise in men's mental wellbeing. 52 staff completed their Level 2, with 15 progressing on to their Level 3 qualifications. They showed real commitment to their learning, to be able to support friends, colleagues and men in their care.

13 colleagues have signed up for self-study learning and will complete their qualifications during the next year, on topics such as Advice and Guidance, Education and Training and the CAVA assessment course.

We have invited local experts to provide masterclasses in Resilience and Boosting Confidence and overcoming Imposter Syndrome, which have been very popular, as well as Success Profile training. Several colleagues have let me know they secured promotions this year following the training. These are now available to watch on demand on the website at www.POAlarning.cymru

And in partnership with Adult Learning Wales, we have provided places for staff to complete qualifications in neuro-diverse conditions such as Dyslexia and ADHD, providing knowledge and ideas for support and resources which will benefit members, family and men in our care.

Finally, by collaborating with the NAPO WULF project, we have provided places on the St Johns Ambulance Defibrillator course to learn how to use De-Fib equipment in an emergency. Groups from the Visits team in HMP Cardiff, HMP Usk and HMP Parc have completed the course.

Coming in 2026

We will shortly be restarting the Introduction to Working with Young People project at HMP Berwyn thanks to the support of the team, creating a further 60 places to learn essential skills for working with young people, addressing four key fundamentals:

- understanding the principles of Youth Work;
- recognising the impact of a consistent, trustworthy adult presence in a young person's life;
- exploring adolescent development, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and neurodiversity as factors influencing behaviour;
- learning effective communication and de-escalation techniques to prevent harm.

We have exciting opportunities to study L2 Counselling, British Sign Language, Presenting Confidently, more neurodiversity qualifications and Sketch Noting, all coming soon.

If you are interested in knowing more about the WULF project and how it can support you or your team, please contact me at: liz.parsons@poauk.org.uk

Liz Parsons
POA WULF Learning Manager

DECEASED MEMBERS 2025

NAME	BRANCH
LEONA ROBINSON	FORD
MATTHEW SYMES	DOWNVIEW
DAVID "GARETH" MORRIS	BURE
KELVIN SMALL	NORTHUMBERLAND
TRACEY DALTON	ADDIEWELL
OLUSEGUN BELLO	ISIS
PETER BARTLE	HULL
ANDREW HOGG	HLM
PETER DOOD	USK
IAN MAXWELL	ASHWORTH
TIMOTHY CUBISON	BRIXTON
ROBERT MCLEAN	SHOTTS
GRAEME BAILLIE	SHOTTS
MARTIN CLARK	BROADMOOR
ANTHONY FREEL	HLM
FRANK THOMPSON	WYMOTT
CHARLES LAUGHLAN	GREENOCK
ALEXANDER DUNN	SHOTTS
DEAN BLADEN	DURHAM
MAXINE ROBINSON	ISIS
STEPHEN BATTLE	KILMARNOCK
PAUL ANDERSON	MOORLAND
DANIEL KENNARD	MANSTON
TIMOTHY CAMM	WANDSWORTH
FINLAY SPRATT	HLM
RICHARD EVANS	LIVERPOOL
RICKY COLE	VERNE
MATTHEW FITZPATRICK	WAYLAND
DANIEL DUNN	HINDLEY
PATRICIA BURGESS	HLM
DAVID MILLS	WHITEMOOR
BATEMAN MELODY	FULL SUTTON
BARRY BURNS	PERTH

