

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Penal Affairs

Chair: Paul Maynard MP

Vice Chairs: Lord Carlile; Carolyn Harris MP; Baroness Prashar; Marie Rimmer MP; Andrew Selous MP

Secretary: Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots

**Minutes of the Meeting of the All-Party Group on Penal Affairs, held on
21 June 2023**

**Presentation of the Annual Robin Corbett Award for Prisoner Reintegration
Followed by**

The role of prison employment advisory boards

**Guest Speaker: James Timpson OBE DL
CEO of the Timpson Group**

Present

Paul Maynard MP (in the chair)

Lord Attlee

Lord Bradley

Lord McNally

Apologies

Bishop Rachel Treweek

Attendees

Zoe Burton

Julia Braggins, Minutes

Mark Day, PRT, Clerk

Paul Maynard MP welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced Lady Val Corbett who would present the Robin Corbett Awards for prisoner reintegration.

Lady Corbett said that her husband Robin had chaired this group for ten years until his death. The award honoured his legacy, and she and her family were very proud that this was its tenth year. She continued: 'We call people from prison returning citizens, because that is what they are. But I would like to give you an insight into the sort of people our winners will probably be working with. This comes from a custodial manager in the prison service. He says: 'if I induct 10 new prisoners tomorrow, three will be care leavers; five will have been abused as a child; five will have witnessed violence in the home as a child; most will have had a fragmented education; five will have no qualifications; seven or eight won't have been employed prior to prison; two will have come in homeless; two or three will have had psychosis; five will suffer anxiety and depression; and up to half will have previously attempted suicide'.

The ugly truth is that many in prison need compassion, care, to be heard, to have their trauma recognised and understood, to be healed. Hard labour and boot camps aren't part of a trauma-informed approach. This can be done alongside improving care and support for victims. It's not one or the other.

This quote from Robin sums it up. He said: "Prisons are not full of bad people: they are full of people who have done bad things and most need a chance to change direction."

Now to the winners. The standard of applicants we have had this year was probably the highest we have had so far. Many of the judges are here. All three winners support those released from prison who need a second chance, and when they turn someone away from crime they are making Britain safer. Usually we have a highly commended and then a commended section, but the judges could not separate the two. So this year we have two highly commended winners. They each win £2,000, already transferred to their bank accounts, a beautiful glass plaque donated by James Timpson, and a book called A Life Well Lived which I wrote about Robin.

So, in alphabetical order, the first Highly Commended winner is **Bounce Back**. They started in 2011 as a small painting and decorating social enterprise. Since then, 4,000 people have been trained to get jobs in the construction industry. They work with people six months prior to release so they can earn money as soon as they leave prison, which helps reduce re-offending. That costs us £18 million a year by the way. Bounce Back also help people to gain self-employment status, to avoid any barriers, and they recognise that although returning citizens need support, so do the employers who hire them. Accepting the plaque and the book is the Head of Innovation and Growth, **Fadzai Dzimwasha**.

The joint Highly Commended winner is **Recycling Lives**, which was founded in 2008, with the aim of reducing homelessness and reoffending by supporting men and women into stable housing and employment. Later, food redistribution was added to tackle food poverty. This charity helps hundreds. They are met at the gate of the jail. They are offered support with life skills, and a self-contained flat in their purpose built block – I have been there and I can only tell you that I wish they could be cloned. Housing is such a terrible problem – and they are given permanent employment. Inmates who are working for Recycling Lives in prisons are paid the market rate, but they only get half the money. The other half is kept for them for their release, so that they have some money, sometimes thousands, to put towards rent or transport. So it is a practical way to reintegrate back into society. Accepting the award are **Jonathan Taylor**, Chair of Trustees, and **Tom Carysforth**, General Manager.

The winner of the Robin Corbett Award 2023 is a leading prisoner reintegration charity working with people who have served long-term prison sentences of ten years or more. It is the only charity in the UK focusing specifically on these unique needs. Over 2,000 long term prisoners are released annually and this number is growing. This charity provides tailored support to each individual to plan for their life after prison which creates more purposeful and fulfilling lives and helps our communities become safer for all. The winner is **The Hardman Trust** and I ask their CEO **Kerry Wotton** to collect the plaque and the book, while £5,000 has been transferred to the Trust's account.'

Lady Corbett then invited all the winners and their teams to stand so that the meeting could applaud the work they were doing.

Paul Maynard MP thanked Lady Corbett and the award judges very much and congratulated all the winners. He said it was very positive and helpful to hear about what these organisations were achieving. Moving to the main business of the meeting he was pleased to introduce **James Timpson**, CEO of the Timpson Group and also Chair of the PRT, which provided the secretariat for the APPG. He would be talking about the prison employment advisory boards, having overseen the first of these boards at HMP Wandsworth, and been closely involved in the development of the initiative subsequently.

James Timpson thanked Paul Maynard, and PRT for organising these meetings. It was wonderful to see so many PRT trustees, past trustees, and past directors. He also congratulated the award winners on the work they were doing. It really made a difference in the prisons he visited. He said his wife used to chair the Hardman Trust. He continued:

I am going to tell you two stories. The first is about lists. My wife is very good at giving me lists. When we first got married, I used to go and do the shopping and I used to buy all the food that I liked. So then she started giving me lists and I had to buy all the food that she liked, which was actually a lot healthier. So I got into lists and even today I'm a list person. With all the complexities of my life and my job I am much better off doing lists.

And lists were also very useful when, every year, I would go and see the Secretary of State for Justice. I used to go with my shopping list of things I wanted them to do. As you know, there has been a number of secretaries of state over the years, especially in my seven and a half years as chair of PRT. I would go with my normal list which was: IPPs, discharge grant, universal credit, prison officer training, and employment. Sometimes I would get a very warm welcome, and they would say 'That's a fantastic idea. I will ask my officials to look at it in further detail.' And other times I got all the reasons why it was not a priority at the moment. But I had a stroke of luck when I went to see Dominic Raab, because he bit on the employment part, and my idea about setting up employment advisory boards. So the list was very effective. The last time I met him, when he was still Secretary of State, he had a big briefing pack from his officials. He said 'James I know what you're like. Tell me what's on the list and what I need to do'. So hopefully we got some action there.

Here's where the second part of the story goes, on employment advisory boards and what happened. What I thought I'd do was just talk you through what the thinking was, what we've done, and what the impact has been. And then what is on the To Do list. My vision has always been very simple. I have had this idea for nine or ten years, which is: how can we get employers and the prison working closely together to solve this employment problem? I am sure that many of you have seen this over the years going into prisons, that there are so many talented people living within prisons, but we just can't get them connected up to jobs on release. And there are so many employers open-minded enough to give people a second chance, but they just don't know how to do it, and the system doesn't really work.

So I had a really simple vision. The first is to develop a long-term culture of employment in the prison. The second is to help prisoners get job-ready. And the third is to link up with employers, to give people a chance on release. I thought: keep it simple. Let's just go for three things. Let me give you a little more detail around those.

The long-term culture of employment within the prison: the problem for me has always been the churn of governors and senior leaders within the prison. You may get one governor who is really into employment and pushes it hard: then they get moved to another prison and the whole thing just stops. So how would I get this going in 92 prisons? Well we also needed the prisons to understand that employers like long-term relationships. It's no good it being fantastic for a few weeks. It needed to be something that worked for the long term. I didn't want it to be a flash in the pan.

One of the things that amazed me, and some of you who have been governors will know this, is that there is an annual appraisal in which they receive a bonus at the end of the year. It is scored on various things depending on what is important at the time: security, safety, violence reduction and so on. I kept asking, how much of a governor's appraisal is based on employment outcomes on release? No-one would tell me. Eventually I was told: 0.9%. So 0.9% of their job was to get people jobs. And we know that employment is such an important factor in helping reduce re-offending. Anyway, I had the Secretary of State on my side, and we got it increased to 20%. Obviously, other things went down as a result of that but, funnily enough, the amount of effort, and the importance of employment, dramatically increased. So I feel we established this base. I also feel that governor churn is much slower and that's helping us.

So then we get to the second bit of the story, which is around helping people get job-ready. This is the real nuts and bolts of how the prison operates on a day-to-day basis, so people are much more

likely to be able to get jobs. So we set up the job hubs, which is basically a job centre within the prison. I have been trying for about 20 years to set up job centres in prisons and I have never got anywhere, but calling it a job hub – give it a different name – it seems to work. It is basically a room where people in the prison can go and do practice interviews, they can write their cvs, they can find out about jobs and so on. It is basically a centre of excellence for employment in the prison. Then it's: how do we get people to fill out cvs? How do we get them to have interviews, especially online? More and more prisons are becoming digital, so more and more people can have interviews online. How can they research jobs? Reconnect with employers in the past? How can we help them get bank accounts? How can we help them get their CSCS cards? How do we help them get their ID? How do we support them so that we're taking away the reasons for failure? And also how do we get the data, so we know how well we are doing?

It's quite funny about the data. One of the problems I found with data is that no-one would tell me. The data came from three different sources: the prison, probation, and the DWP. No-one wanted to share the data with each other, even though it is the same data, because I think they all realised that the data wasn't very good. So when we overcame that, and we put the data all together, I then asked if we could have league tables of prisons to show how well they were doing. Again that was a bit of a problem, but we overcame that and now we have league tables of how all the prisons are doing. We needed to get this nuts and bolts bit, to help people to get job-ready, so that they can have a job on release, or even better on ROTL.

The third bit was: how do we link up with employers? This has always been the secret ingredient. We have had ROTL (release on temporary license) for some time. We all know how powerful ROTL is. In our business there is an 89% success rate when we take someone on on ROTL. How do we encourage employers to set up workshops and training academies in prisons? How can we get more and more employers to want to recruit people from prison? So many terrible things happened with Covid, but one advantage was that the employment market changed and far more people were desperate to recruit people. That has changed the perception of lots of organisations about employing people with a criminal record. I think we have now got to the stage where, if you don't employ someone with a criminal conviction, you are no longer a diverse employer. We have actually got to the stage now where finding employers is not the problem. The problem is this nuts and bolts bit in the middle of how we connect up people to jobs.

So then I had to go and find some chairs, who were going to chair these employment advisory boards and give it a go. I thought I'd use the Shackleton technique. I advertised it by saying: you're going to go to prison quite regularly, you are not going to get paid, you're not going to claim any expenses, and it is going to be interesting. Who's up for it? And no-one turned me down. So maybe we should offer more jobs like that. Basically I tapped up my friends. My friends who ran businesses, my friends who I knew were interested in second chances, and had businesses that were of the scale that they could take people on, funding it slightly through their philanthropic efforts. So we started off with Wandsworth, with my friend Rosie who runs Cook the frozen ready meal business. My friend John Murphy who runs Murphy Construction, I said could you do Berwyn? because he lives not too far from Wrexham. My friend Will who runs a brewery, I said could you do Risley? He said yes, not a problem. My friend Mad Simon, would you mind doing New Hall? Yes, he was up for that.

I think some of them were quite shocked by what they found, insofar as there was no commercial vein running through the prison at all. But others were pleasantly surprised. I will give you one example of what happened in Berwyn. John Murphy was going to get his HR team to do a practice recruitment day in Berwyn to start setting up the board. He managed to get a couple of local businesses, someone from the Chamber of Commerce, and the local MP for Wrexham who used to run a brewery. They interviewed 25 men. They weren't thinking of taking anybody on. John met four people who used to work for him, three people whose dads still worked for him, and another

seven who had the skills they really needed on the list. I think that really changed the perception within the Murphy business that this was a really positive commercial thing that they should be doing. That was one of those important moments when I knew we were on the way. Because if that was going to happen in Berwyn, that could happen in every other prison.

So we managed to get to 92 chairs. We have had a little bit of churn, either because I picked the wrong chairs or because their business and personal circumstances changed, but what I have found is that the chairs are often far more passionate about their board than they are about their business. They think it is the best job they have ever had, and they are spending a lot of time on it. Some of our chairs have keys to the prison and are there every week. We have set it up in Scotland now, and I have been trying hard with Northern Ireland, but just haven't got anywhere. I feel it is one of the things that we have set up that is not going to go away – it is too established to go away – and to be fair to the Treasury they have backed it with serious money as well.

The job hubs have been set up. Some of them are absolutely superb – best in class – and some of them are just a room with a sticker on the door, nothing inside. We have still got some more work to do on that. But one of the things that has really made an impact is that the money from the Treasury has helped us to take on two roles. One is the PEL, the prison employment lead, and the other is the banking and identity administrator. The PEL liaises with the employers but also helps sort out the nuts and bolts of what is going on in the prison. The banking and identity person – they have only been there for the past six months – is there to help people get bank accounts and get their cards and so on. When I went to Drake Hall I met the banking administrator who was beaming with pride because she had managed to get a 57-year-old lady, who had never had a bank account, her first bank account. We know that we need those things in place to help people get jobs.

When we started to produce the data and put it into a league table – I know from our own business – the people at the bottom of the league table always say that the data is wrong. That is exactly what happened. In some cases they were right, it wasn't perfect. But we have now got to the stage where the data is trusted, and we have cut the data so that we can compare for example all the female estate, all the D Cats, all the B Cats and so on and a lot of my chairs, because they are hungry business people, they are very competitive, they don't like being at the bottom of lists. So I think having the data, and it being trusted, is something that we can use a lot more in other parts of the estate.

So what has happened to the employment outcomes on release? I am not saying that this is all down to the employment advisory boards. The whole employment market has changed, and governor stability has also had a big impact. Having the different appraisal percentage for governors has made an impact. But at the last month, at six months, 30.4% of prison leavers are in employment. That has basically doubled over the last year, and that is dramatic. (Applause).

So what are the things we still need to work on? Well, the release process is still not great. We are still finding that too many people we offer jobs to, don't have a home to go to, and probation is still up in the air in lots of places in the country. But what we know is if someone is released and they have somewhere to live and they have a full time job in places like Murphy's or in our business, probation basically leave them alone: they let them get on with it.

The whole release process needs a lot more work, especially housing. It is not helpful when there is a prison that is full, because when a prison is full it is difficult for them to release prisoners to go to interview practices and to spend time in the employment hub. We just need more flexibility in the system. I am pleased with the number of prison officers coming through. I have been to some prisons recently where they are nearly up to full staffing again. But having a full prison system with not enough prison officers means that it is going to be difficult for us to get our nuts and bolts bit sorted.

Technology is going to become increasingly important in the prison estate for many things but especially for employment. I want people to be able to go on job sites and research jobs. I want them to keep in contact with employers, especially if they are on remand, to keep those jobs open for them. While technology is helping, we still have a long way to go on that. We still have a big area of concern for me around sex offenders and finding them employment on release. In our business we don't employ sex offenders because we do photo id and we're not allowed to and I just don't think it would work. But I think throughout all of this we still need to bear in mind that we have an increasingly large sex offender population and we still need to give them as much support to find a job as we give the rest of the population.

I still think we have got a job to do to support employers when they are taking people on release. We have been doing it for 20 years, we know what to do, but when you have a new employer going into a prison, they don't understand the language, they don't understand the speed, and we need the prisons to make it easier for them. Because we know if they can get five or six prison leavers in to their business and they realise how amazing these people are, it is going to make it a lot easier for them to keep going in the future. One of the things I have been gunning for, for a long time, and haven't got anywhere is around national insurance holidays. If I take on a care leaver, or someone who is long-term unemployed, or a veteran, I get a national insurance holiday for the first twelve weeks of employment, which is worth about £1600. We use that to help with their housing or special training, we may give them grants to help them with their rent deposits and so on. But that is not the case for a prison leaver, and I think it should be.

I still think we need to do more, not just to encourage employers but also to help employers. When we talk about employers at the moment we are talking about the private sector but I think we should be talking about the public sector as well. I remember speaking to Michael Gove when he was Secretary of State and he said 'What do we need to do to get more employers like you recruiting prison leavers?' and I said 'Before you ask me to do it you should be asking yourself to do it as well'. To be fair he took the challenge on and the MoJ employs over 600 prison leavers, and they say, as we know in PRT, that it has been one of the best things they have ever done. More government departments should be employing people with criminal convictions and I know in my business where one in nine of my colleagues have a criminal conviction it makes the organisation far more effective.

I am going to stop there because my 15 minutes is up. But it wouldn't be possible to have done this without the employers and the chairs chairing the boards. My MOJ colleagues have been absolutely fantastic. New Futures Network, Duncan and Rosie and Sarah McKnight have been incredibly supportive of this, and they have trusted me and the chairs to do it, and it has worked.

Paul Maynard MP thanked **James Timpson** very much and said it was always a pleasure to have one of these meetings where we were talking about a success story rather than just what was going wrong with our prison system. He then opened the meeting to questions from the floor.

Lord Attlee said that he had not known about the issue with regard to National Insurance contributions. It would be a matter of waiting for the next legislative opportunity. If there were a suitable bill it would be possible to run an amendment to put the Government on the spot. That would be up to the House of Commons, and getting it past the Treasury.

Lady Corbett wanted to ask about IPP prisoners. Both Houses had said they should be resentenced but Dominic Raab had said no. Was that likely to change?

James Timpson said he was not the best person to ask. It certainly should change.

Paul Maynard MP said that he was not the guest speaker, and he would talk to Lady Corbett later.

Kameel Khan, tax judge, said it was possible to give a double tax break for the cost of training and salary for two years for formerly incarcerated employees. The longevity was critical, as on other schemes people tended to disappear after six months.

Maria McNicholl from the St Giles Trust said she worked in High Down. The job hub was doing really well there, but she had had no idea who was behind it. 40% of the Trust's staff had been in prison, and she knew that other voluntary sector organisations employed people with convictions too. They would love to become involved with the employment advisory boards.

James Timpson said that the employment boards were encouraged to get people from the third sector on, as well as serving prisoners, although not all governors would allow that. He would mention this again to the chairs, as getting the voluntary sector involved was really important.

Mary Suphi from Bounceback said that the work the boards and the employment hubs were doing was to some extent replicating the work Bounceback had been doing over the past ten years. How could they feed in to the work of the boards, rather than being in competition with them?

James Timpson said that if every prison had an excellent organisation like Bounceback working there, that would be wonderful. But that was not the case. The boards were there to help the prison get people into all kinds of work – not into specific industries. They did not want any one charity or employer to have a monopoly: they wanted as many opportunities as possible.

Lord McNally noted that the three things a prisoner needed on release were a relationship, a home and a job. But the lack of planning before release almost condemned them to failure. How could a proper release plan be organised to give everyone a fighting chance?

James Timpson responded by first speaking about prisoners on remand, a lot of whom had jobs, but because there were so many uncertainties about their release date they found it hard to keep them. That needed some work. The second part related to the whole release process, and he thought the answer was ROTL. Employers who understood how prisons worked went to the Cat D and the women's estates. He thought ROTL should be extended more widely through the prison system. He also thought that housing was the most important part. His company had taken people on, and if they had nowhere to live, the company had to sort it out. He wanted to find a way to link probation with people well before release. There was a lot of fear about leaving prison.

Paul Maynard MP asked if the role of the board had to change in a remand prison.

James Timpson responded that board members had to change their expectations, depending on the prison. For example in the largest Cat D prison, around 68% of leavers would need jobs on release, whereas in Liverpool or Wandsworth they worked hard to get the figures from 1% to 7%. The chairs of remand prisons had their own group, because the challenges were very different.

Kameel Khan noted that as regards central government, there was no real funding of the non-profit sector. The infrastructure existed for helping people to re-enter society, as the speaker had said. The Second Chance Act in the US allowed federal funds to be used by non-profits, and was a game-changer. But here there were no funds channelling into this huge third sector. Why not?

James Timpson said that there had been more money going to the mayors of cities like Liverpool and Manchester for housing, to tackle homelessness and also for people leaving prison. So some money was getting through. Also, of the charities they worked with, around 80% were fantastic but 20% were not, so there was a question about how things could be better coordinated. For him, the real focus should be on housing, as that was the biggest problem.

Lord Bradley said that there had always been initiatives to help, but the problem was that they were not coordinated. For example there was a good new initiative called Reconnect being rolled out by NHS England, primarily focused on health needs. He had visited a hub in Durham which was designed to reconnect leaving prisoners back into the local community. They started work within the prison about 8 weeks before they left and the hub brought together the voluntary sector, the probation service and employment, and worked with the other initiatives going on within the prison. This partnership model worked much better than siloed initiatives, and supported community sentences as well.

James Timpson said one of the problems he and other employers had was that they invited people in prison to work for them, but they didn't turn up. There was about a 20% drop-out rate. If they did not have the other building blocks in place, they would not have the confidence to turn up.

Elton Gilbert from Switchback reiterated that one of the main problems people in his organisation raised was homelessness. Could the speaker raise this with the Housing Minister, to ask that prison leavers be made a priority for housing?

James Timpson said that he knew how much of a problem this was. The employment leads and the banking and identity administrators in prisons were spending much more of their time now on housing. He said when he met the Secretary of State he would mention it again.

Pia Sinha noted that there were prison accommodation leads as well as employment leads. She noted that some governors were naturally more interested than others in employment on release, but the interest of all governors had been warmed up by the league tables. Had the boards been working with governors, alongside the employment leads?

James Timpson said that some governors had been hostile to the idea of the boards, and he had had some difficult conversations with them. The other problem was that some governors did not understand business, and business language. He hoped he would have a slot at the next governors' conference, to give governors the confidence that the boards were there to help them. Of the 92 boards, about 60 were working really well, and for the ones that weren't, it was either because the chair or the governor was not engaged. The biggest help was lower governor churn, so that the board, the chair and the governor could build good working relationships.

Jon Collins from the Prisoners Education Trust wondered how far the boards were able to work with education departments in the prison, so that education, training and skills and qualifications were aligned.

James Timpson said that employers were coming at it from the point of view that they were not looking for employees with degrees, or even necessarily literacy: they needed people who wanted to work and had the personality to get stuck in. They needed people to learn to fill out a CV and be able to present themselves well at interview. They were also focusing on construction, hospitality and retail, as those were the three industries that took the biggest numbers, and had the greatest flexibility, so it did not matter where you were released.

Alexandra Marks from the Hardman Trust said she was also chair of a homelessness charity, working in Birmingham and subsequently in Manchester and London. The way they had dealt with the problem was to recruit people who had a spare room which they were prepared to rent to someone on a temporary basis, with support from the charity, because they had a job. They got paid by the employer, and the individual had somewhere stable to live while they accumulated the skills to live on their own, and the funds for a deposit. Although small-scale, the model had been extremely successful.

James Timpson said he would be interested to learn more. Recycling Lives offered an excellent example and he urged those present to visit them in Preston to see their work. His own parents had been foster carers, and 97 children had come to live in their house over the years. He knew the importance of a caring and safe place for people to be. His own company and several others had a philanthropic pot, to help pay rent deposits if need be, as they knew how important that was. But you could not just rely on the good will of employers.

Paul Maynard MP thanked James Timpson for an inspiring presentation, and thanked everyone for coming. The group would be reassembling in the autumn for a new session of meetings.