

**ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON PENAL AFFAIRS**

**Chair: Pam Cox MP**

**Officers: Tessa Munt MP, Lord Garnier KC, Baroness Prashar CBE**

**Minutes of the meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Penal Affairs held on Tuesday 14 October 2025**

***Prisons and the people in them – an overview***

**Guest speaker: Charlie Taylor  
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons**

**Present**

Lord Bradley  
Pam Cox MP (*Chair*)  
Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill  
Tessa Munt MP (*Officer*)  
Baroness Prashar CBE (*Officer*)

**Apologies**

Josh Babarinde MP  
Lord Carlile of Berriew CBE KC  
Lord Garnier KC  
The Lord Bishop of Gloucester  
Viscount Hailsham, Douglas Hogg KC

**Attendees**

Thea Arch  
Jon Collins  
Andrea Coomber KC  
Mark Day (*Clerk*)  
Sophie Ellis  
Emily Evison (*Assistant to Clerk*)  
Richard Garside  
Faith Geary  
Nick Hamilton  
Leyya Kitmitto  
Jemima Langdon  
Tanya Lightfoot Taylor  
Samantha Patrick  
Jenny Talbot OBE

**Pam Cox MP** opened the meeting at 6pm and welcomed all those attending. Pam introduced Charlie Taylor, HM chief inspector of prisons, to provide an overview of prisons and the people in them. Pam then excused herself to leave to vote.

**Mark Day** took the chair's seat in Pam Cox MP's absence.

**Charlie Taylor:** Thank you very much indeed it's lovely to be here and lovely to see you all. As ever we are at the fickle whims of parliament which means we never quite know who is going to be able to turn up and when.

I am going to talk for about twenty minutes about some of the issues that we see facing prisons. I'll speak a bit about the inspectorate and what we do for those of you who aren't familiar with us. Then I'll talk about some of the main issues that we're seeing within prisons. Then I'll go on to highlight three prisons that I think are doing really well despite the many challenges that are out there. There's a new chief executive of the prison service who I think started yesterday. So, I will conclude by making some recommendations about where I think there may be some fertile ground for him to start digging.

Let me start off by briefly touching on the inspectorate and what we do. We were founded in 1982. I am the seventh chief inspector to hold this role. Seven is an

interesting number because it's also the number of justice secretaries who have been in post in my five-year tenure as chief inspector. I think one of the big challenges in this area has been the churn of prisons ministers, justice ministers and youth justice ministers, particularly over the past five or six years where it feels like it's been something of a revolving door. One day I will test people to see if they can name the last 10 justice secretaries. I think most would probably struggle to do that and if we go on to prisons ministers it'd get even tougher.

In terms of our role, we inspect the 123 prisons across the country. We also inspect immigration detention, court custody and military detention. We also inspect prisons on the Isle of Man the Channel Islands and the three prisons over in Northern Ireland on invitation. Almost all our inspections are unannounced - that means we turn up in the car park of the prison, we ring the governor, and we demand a set of keys and to be let in to the jail.

Inspections consist of a two-week process. Week one involves a survey where we take a randomly selected representative proportion of the prisoners and we ask them what's it like to be in this prison across a whole range of areas, from healthcare to education to time out of cell, to how they're treated when they first come in, to what support they expect when they go back into the community. It's a very long document. We get an incredibly good response rate from prisoners. They're very engaged with the process which is helpful for us because it gives us information about what that prison was like last time we were there as a comparator but also how that prison compares with similar jails across the system as well.

We inspect against our four healthy prison assessments which have now been around for more than 20 years; they were introduced by Lord Ramsbotham originally. Those are safety, respect, purposeful activity and preparation for release. I'll just say a tiny bit about respect because that's a more complicated area. It includes staff-prisoner relationships; conditions in which prisoners are held; the fair treatment of prisoners; healthcare; and whether different groups are treated the same. So, it's a bit of a conglomerate of areas. We score each of those areas, one is poor, two is not sufficiently good, three is reasonably good and four is good.

If we go to a prison we are worried about we will go back and do an independent review of progress within eight months to a year. We will check the progress that jail has made against the areas of concern highlighted at the previous inspection.

If we go to somewhere that is in a catastrophic state, then I have the power as chief inspector to invoke what is called an urgent notification. I can write a public letter to the Secretary of State for Justice, and he or she has 28 days in which to respond with an action plan for that prison. The two most recent examples are Pentonville that we published last week and was in a really, really concerning state. Also, Oakhill secure training centre where we and our colleagues at Ofsted had some very serious safeguarding concerns.

In terms of the population of prisons, there's been a lot of talk about that over recent years because of the enormous pressure that population growth is putting on the system. There are over 87,000 prisoners inside now. That's reduced from more than 88,000 which was the absolute peak in September last year when there was a danger that things were really going to fall over. Prisoners were being housed in police stations because there simply wasn't room. We didn't quite reach the stage we did in 2002 where prison vans were driving around the M25 simply waiting for a space to become available.

Out of that 87,000, there are approximately 3,500 women, there are over 350 children, a massive reduction since the peak in 2022/23.

In terms of why the population has gone up, the first thing is the remand population. Prisoners who either are waiting for their trial or waiting to be sentenced. That's gone up to 17,000. It used to be around 9,000 to 14,000 before the pandemic but due to delays within the court system we're seeing that population has grown enormously. What we hoped would just be a blip and be ironed out over time has become endemic in the system. We regularly find people who have spent two, three, even four years waiting on remand for their case to come through. That's terrible for those prisoners but it's also terrible for victims of those crimes as well.

We've also seen a 36% increase in last year of prisoners on recall, particularly those on fixed term recall. That's about 10,000 prisoners coming back in, often for very short periods of time. These are prisoners who've been released from jail, they have licence conditions and often they're returned to prison not because they've broken the law but because they've broken licence conditions. What we find is many of those prisoners are caught in the cycle of homelessness, mental health difficulties, drug addiction and criminality. For these prisoners, prison is depressingly a place of stability for many of them.

As the result of the population crisis, both the last government and this government have introduced various schemes for releasing prisoners early. These have culminated in David Gauke's review which was published earlier this year. The review was focused on changing the constitution of people's sentences, so that now prisoners will serve a third of their sentence in jail; a third in the community, probably on tag; and the last third we're not entirely sure what they'll do. But only a third of their sentence will be within prison. But of course, it's likely that because they are on licence for such a long time, we'll still see many prisoners being recalled back into custody. I think it's important today to be clear that this solves the prison population crisis, what it doesn't solve is the prison overcrowding crisis. So, in places like Durham, Leeds, Preston, Wandsworth, Swansea, any number of those category B reception prisons across the country which have men in 12 foot by seven foot cells designed originally by the Victorians for one person with an unscreened lavatory in the corner. Those men are often spending up to 22 hours a day locked in that close proximity.

The other big driver of the increase in the prison population, and this will be a greater factor as time goes on, is the increase in sentence lengths. In almost every area, particularly those ones the public feel strongest about, there is a great temptation for politicians in the house to stand up and say we are increasing the sentence from x to y. One example – the maximum sentence for cruelty to animals was I believe six months, and it is now five years. So, one of many areas in which sentence length has simply increased.

In terms of the biggest risk currently facing prisons, it's flashing red on my desk, and I hope it flashes red on the new director general's desk, is the effect of drones bringing contraband into prisons. Organised crime has in effect taken over the airspace above many of the prisons across England and Wales. The biggest package we've so far come across is 11KG in weight. So, this is a new paradigm in terms of the risk that it brings to prisons. Because the profits are so great there is a huge amount of innovation, examples include: a package wrapped in astroturf and dropped onto a football pitch, a package dipped in grass cuttings and dropped into some long grass, a package disguised as a rubbish bag and dropped into a bin. Category A prisons such as Manchester and Long Lartin are being hit very hard by the ingress of drones.

It's important to note, these prisons hold terrorist offenders who are doing life and also serious organised crime bosses who are looking at very long stretches in prison. The risk of contraband is of enormous concern. I think it is a threat to national security.

I thought I'd briefly go through a list that a head of security sent me, of what was in one package that was seized: thirteen packages of tobacco; vacuum sealed bags containing half a kilo of cannabis; thirteen other pouches containing cannabis; pink rock substance confirmed as ketamine, MDMA and cocaine weighing 137 grams; three cigarette lighters; 14 iPhones; two Samsung mobile phones; 11 mini mobile phones; seven sim cards; 14 charging leads; a USB stick with memory of 128GB; three Fire Sticks; some headphones; a grip seal bag containing a pair of trainers; two bottles of minoxidil; a black hat; three different types of steroids; a small set of scales; gorilla glue; five Allen keys; and two knives. The reason why the gorilla glue and the Allen keys are getting in is because prisoners have realised they can unscrew the windows, remove the entire window, accept a package from outside, glue the window back again and no one will be any the wiser until they find a ripple effect of prisoners being under the influence within the jail.

Drugs have a massive effect on prisons. Where you have drugs, you have debt, and where you have debt, it often gets settled by violence. In some jails we are seeing as high as 50% of prisoners testing positive for drugs. But in many prisons: Liverpool, Wormwood Scrubs, Lewes, Leicester, Swaleside, we regularly see testing rates which would suggest a third of prisoners are currently under the influence at any one time.

Organised crime gangs are making enormous amounts of cash out of this, so these gangs are finding ever more sophisticated ways of getting drones in. For example, we are seeing prisons targeted by 10 drones at a time to distract staff, and then one drone is bringing in the package. We do not know the true scale of these operations, which is particularly worrying. Organised crime is making an enormous amount of money within prisons, yet prisoners themselves often don't have much money. That gap then is likely being filled by others, such as family members. We have no idea of the scale, but we know that it's happening and it's an enormous concern.

Now I'm going to talk a little bit about purposeful activity; what prisoners get up to in their time in jail. We put out a report yesterday called "Just passing time" and I recommend reading it. We visited 13 prisons and looked at the provision of purposeful activity within those jails and what we found was the following:

First of all, in many prisons there are not enough spaces in education, training and work for the population of the jail. This is particularly a problem for overcrowded jails like Wandsworth or Pentonville which are on a small inner-city footprint.

Second, many of the activities in which prisoners are involved don't give them any of the sorts of skills which are going to be useful for them when they come out.

Third, the working day is too short. Sometimes it's as little as five hours a day which gives no preparation for the world of work outside.

Fourth, many of the prisoners are under-employed in fake wing cleaner type jobs. Often this means standing around, pushing around a mop for an hour and then sitting around and chatting to their mates and vaping on the wing for the rest of the day.

Fifth, attendance rates are shockingly bad. 67% across the 13 jails we visited. That would get any school or college in the country immediately closed.

This has always been the least well-performing of our healthy prison assessments, ever since the inspectorate was founded in 1982. But since the Covid-19 pandemic things have got even worse. Out of the 96 prisons that we've inspected in the last three years, 88 of those have either scored poor or not sufficiently good for purposeful activity.

I now want to say a little bit about three prisons that are bucking the trend.

The first is Oakwood. Oakwood is the largest prison in the country, built in 2012. It's run by G4S. Visiting that prison is such a different experience; prisoners are falling over themselves to tell you what a great jail it is. There is a huge amount of trust that can be earned by prisoners if they do the right thing and they behave well. Much of the infrastructure of the prison and the way the prison works relies on trusted prisoners to take on responsibilities.

But within the prison there are also incredibly high standards of discipline and behaviour expected by those who live and work in the establishment. Last time I visited, there was an ex-services guy who was allowed a visit from his family dog as a reward for his consistently good behaviour. This was something we would never normally see in a jail, but it brought enormous motivation for prisoners who were doing the right thing. I would recommend a visit for anybody who wants to see the way in which a prison can work well.

It is important to add to that Oakwood is the least well-funded prison per prisoner in the country.

The second jail is Lincoln, which is a medium sized crumbling Victorian prison. Lincoln is a category B reception prison with a very transient population. But the jail has confident leadership and a staff team who are absolutely focused on getting the basics right. This means the prison is functioning far better than many of those inner city, Victorian jails.

Finally, I wanted to mention Haverigg which is out on a windy peninsular on the Irish sea, on the edge of the Lake District. It's an open prison with an almost entirely sex offender population. The jail has done remarkably well at getting men into work. It's incredibly hard to get this population into work, many employers do not want to touch them, often for understandable reasons. But nevertheless local data indicated that around three-quarters of eligible men leaving that jail are in paid employment six months after release compared to national average which is nearer to 30%.

So, to finish, I'll talk briefly about the things I think need to change. It's a long list, but I won't go through all of it.

The first thing is governor autonomy. I came from an education background, and I am astonished daily by the lack of autonomy that governors have compared to the amount that I had as a head teacher. Governors tell me they can't spend more than £500 on an individual item without getting permission from the director general of the prison service. So, for example, if a washing machine breaks down on a wing to get a new one you must get sign off from the director general of the prison service.

Contracts are internally let in the Ministry of Justice with little control over them in individual prisons, and getting any building work in prisons can often take years. In

Birmingham we did an inspection before my time and because of that inspection two wings were closed for refurbishment. The inspectorate is now back at the prison six years later and those two wings are still closed. Another enormous concern is Dartmoor, which is closed because of radon gas.

The second area that I'd like to see progress is on training and recruitment. The Unlocked Graduates scheme looks like it is coming to an end. It was a training programme which really focused on getting the best out of people. Prison governors on the other hand do not get any training before they take on the job, so there's not enough training at every level within the prison service.

We must have some target hardening against drones. At the moment far too many drones are getting into prisons. To stop this we need proper windows, proper netting over exercise yards, and we need staff who are properly trained to spot the sorts of nefarious activity that goes on within prisons. We also need much more assertive management of organised crime gangs within prisons so they can't apply their trade.

We also must do a better job of treating drug addicts.

Finally, we must have proper purposeful activity within prisons. The prison service must give prisoners the sort of purposeful activity that will help them get work on release. Prisons have a duty to protect the public by keeping people locked up who've been sentenced by the court. But they also have a responsibility to protect the public by making people less likely to reoffend when they come out, and there are far too many prisoners lying on their beds watching daytime television and taking drugs.

Thank you.

**Mark Day** thanked Charlie and noted that divisions in both houses meant that parliamentarians had to briefly leave. Mark then opened to the floor for questions.

**Richard Garside** said he found Charlie's sobering assessment fascinating. Richard thanked Charlie for giving a clear, well-structured assessment of some of the good things happening in prison as well as the challenges. Richard picked up on the issue of drones and organised crime, and asked Charlie what his sense was from other jurisdictions of the issue, particularly in Europe. Richard asked whether it is a particularly bad problem in England and Wales, or are England and Wales better than some other European jurisdictions?

**Charlie** answered that he recently visited the Republic of Ireland where drones are a serious issue. Prisons there are getting 'fire drones' where the package is set alight, dropped through the netting and then the goods are dispersed amongst the prisons. As a response, Mountjoy prison has erected steel netting over the yards, which still allows light in.

Charlie reflected that what was interesting about Ireland is that they seemed to be able to do that far more quickly than the prisons service over here can do it.

However, Charlie added that prisoners in Mountjoy for example, north of the border, are tripled up with men lying on mattresses on the floors of cells which are only designed for one person, whilst two of the best prisons in the UK are Magilligan that were inspected two weeks ago and also Hydebank Wood.

But drones are an international concern.

Charlie added when he recently met some people from Germany they looked blankly when he talked to them about drones.

**Thea Arch** asked Charlie to expand on Oakwood as an example of good practice. Thea asked what Charlie's interpretation is of the success of Oakwood, especially in terms of rehabilitation, given that funding per prisoner is low.

**Charlie** reflected that when Oakwood first opened it was known as "Joke-wood", so hasn't always been as successful as it is now. Charlie attributed the success of the prison to successive governor's John McLaughlin and Sean Oliver. Both governors realised that with a limited budget the only way they were going to really make the prison run properly was if they really got the buy in of prisoners there.

Charlie then gave an example from the inspectorate's last visit to Oakwood where he saw an unsupervised workshop run by a lifer doing a very long stretch. The workshop took the most vulnerable prisoners who are at risk of being bullied and supported them to build furniture. Prisoners had earned the trust to be able to go and do it.

Charlie summarised that Oakwood has clear systems of management and good rewards in place for people who do the right thing. It's an impressive jail and does show the advantage the private sector can have. The inspectorate doesn't have a view, but sometimes where there is outstanding leadership there appears to be a flexibility within the private sector which there isn't always in the prison service.

**Sophie Ellis** said that she writes the Prison Reform Trust's Bromley Briefing Prison Factfile, which draw heavily on inspectorate data, so thanked Charlie for that. Sophie asked if Charlie could say more on the 'causes of causes' when it comes to lack of governor autonomy. Sophie added that we know it is an issue but asked what Charlie's assessment is of why it is the way Ministry of Justice continues to do things and is there anything we can do to shift things on?

**Charlie** said that he thinks part of this is because of the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic gold command took over and nothing could be done without an ordinance from the centre. This has not changed since. Charlie added that he thinks because budgets are tight at the moment, there is a concern that money might be wasted.

Charlie added he believes this is partly because of the exposure ministers feel. There is a closeness between ministers and individual prisons in a way which doesn't happen with other services like hospitals or schools. This means ministers are very exposed when something goes wrong within prisons. One reason, for example, why the director general keeps very tight control on individual spends is because those spends must be publicly declared.

Charlie suggested what it really comes down to is trust, and he talked about the subsidiarity in Oakwood; responsibility is pushed down as far as possible within the prison. If we want successful prisons, we must do that across the board. So, ministers have to trust the prison service; the prison service has to trust it's governors; governors have got to trust their custody managers; and custody managers have to trust their prisoners. That trust is earned, but wherever possible you want to step away from managerialism and push trust down the food chain. At every level there is a lack of trust within the system, which makes things difficult. As a result, there is passive compliance, rather than people being brave and innovative.

**Andrea Coomber KC** reiterated Charlie's comments on Oakwood and said a visit to the prison was the happiest day she has had during this job and encouraged others to visit.

Andrea added that there were around 3,500 children in the prison system 10 years ago and now there is around 300, yet the quality of custody for children is rock bottom. Andrea asked what Charlie's diagnosis of the problem in youth custody provision is.

**Charlie** answered that he agrees it is a huge concern for the inspectorate. The most violent prison in the country is Feltham A for under 18s. The inspectorate is seeing levels of reckless violence, multi-handed assaults and a level of fear amongst children within that jail which often manifests in retaliating first.

Charlie added that this isn't about money because prisons in the youth custody estate are far better funded than elsewhere in the system. There's around £200,000 to £300,000 per child locked up within young offender institutions at the moment, against £54,000 being spent in the adult estate.

So, it is about understanding the way in which these children need to be supported. Behaviour management is often very weak in these places: it's not entirely clear what the rules are, it's not entirely clear what you get for breaking the rules, but more importantly it's not entirely clear what the motivations are for doing the right thing.

Often, the YOIs will try to keep different children apart, either because of different postcodes or because they've fallen out in the prison. This results in incredibly complicated keep apart lists, for example on one wing we've seen four regimes running at the same time. Inevitably, this means prisoners are only going to be unlocked for short periods of time in the day. In the three public sector YOIs, the unlock time is usually less than six hours a day.

HMP Parc is an example of a jail which is successful in locking up children. Parc has a small 60 place unit within a much larger prison in South Wales. Children are consistently unlocked for 10 to 12 hours a day. The inspectorate's healthy prison test scores are much higher. The prison also has more consistent, better trained staff.

Charlie added that he didn't want to diminish the challenge some of the children in the system are. Given the numbers are now much smaller, many are facing very long periods in prison, and some will have very complex behavioural needs. But nevertheless, there are examples, such as HMYOI Parc, where they can be supported.

**Mark Day** asked Charlie to reflect on some of the other implications of the Sentencing Bill which he did not touch on in his speech. In particular, Mark asked about the proposals around earned release and what these proposals might mean for prison regimes.

**Charlie** answered that earned release is not really that. It is a policy where prisoners will get out after a third of their sentence provided they don't do anything bad. Charlie added that the model isn't the same as the Texas model where you are rewarded for behaving well. It is actually that if you can simply survive without doing the wrong thing then you'll get early release.

Charlie added that we will have to see how it plays out by the numbers. In many prisons adjudications often can take an enormously long time quite often the charges get dropped because the prisoner has moved on or been released.

Charlie added that another big implication of the bill is the recall provision. The bill plans to increase fixed term recalls to 56 days, which is longer than the current short, fixed term recall. However, this raises questions about what prisons can do when they get someone back in the jail for 56 days. The inspectorate understanding is that the prisoner will spend the first 10 days in a reception prison and then be shipped to a category C prison for the last 40 or so days of their sentence. This means there will be a huge burden on category C prisons which aren't geared up for this kind of population. But there will also be a large population coming through prisons who will only spend 10 days in the jail before they are shipped. What is the prison supposed to do with those people beyond detoxing those have got drug issues, identifying mental health difficulties, and offering very basic medical care? The answer is probably not a lot.

**Jenny Talbot OBE** asked Charlie if there were any additional positive examples he was able to point to. Or, based on the three prisons from his speech, if there was any way of sharing these learnings.

**Charlie** answered that he believes prisons are not very good at learning from each other. There is not that habit of continual improvement that has been seen in education for example.

But the thing to be positive about in prisons is the quality of some of the people who are in there. There are many brilliant prison governors. Charlie added that he believes these are most dedicated public servants out there of any role in public service, who work unbelievably hard and carry a huge burden of risk on their shoulders, and do a remarkable job. If they were able to be freed from some of the managerialist shackles, he thinks we would see great things from those people.

Charlie added that there are some amazing people in every rank in the prison service who are doing remarkable things, often in very difficult circumstances. In every jail you also come across prisoners who have found some spark to help them turn their lives around. So in amongst the gloom there are some real shining lights of positivity, and we should hang on to those.

**Pam Cox MP** asked Charlie for his thoughts about foreign national people in prison, moving them on, and whether this is happening consistently.

**Charlie** answered that there are three foreign national prisons across the country for people to finish off their sentences. But there are also lots of foreign national prisoners dotted around the country. Often these prisoners face specific issues, for example not speaking English or not being able to get access to the Home Office.

The inspectorate has seen the Home Office step up its game in terms of providing access, but decision making is still incredibly slow. For example, in Huntercombe prisoners are waiting until the very end of their sentence before anyone makes a decision about whether they can be offered voluntary deportation. This is a missed opportunity, and prisons could be emptied earlier.

This has improved in the last year, but many prisoners continue to go on to immigration removal centres. Only 40% of people who make it into an immigration removal centre are actually removed from the country. So, there is something very

clunky about the chain between prisoners who are foreign nationals who have committed a serious offence and them being finally put on a flight and removed from the country.

**Pam Cox MP** asked whether it would be fair to say that this is not a priority, given everything else that is going on in prisons?

**Charlie** responded that it is an area the inspectorate often complains about. This is particularly the case in prisons where there is a big population, such as Wandsworth. Because of the prison population crisis, it does seem like the prison service has got better at making a decision to either release them or send them to immigration removal centres. This means there are fewer examples now of people being held in custody under IS91s because those prisoners now tend to be shipped to immigration removal centres more quickly than in the past.

**Pam Cox MP** asked about the numbers of foreign national people in prison.

**Charlie** confirmed there are around 10,000. That consists of large numbers of Eastern Europeans, and then foreign national people from further afield. Often who are very unlikely to get deported because they are coming from a country where they would probably require refugee status.

Charlie added that there is a lot of fear and anxiety from the foreign national population, particularly those who have been brought up in Britain, who spent 20 years here, have three children and are being deported.

**Tessa Munt MP** asked given there are around 10,000 foreign national prisoners, why are there only three dedicated prisons for foreign national prisoners? What triggers people being sent to them?

**Charlie** answered that the population in those three prisons have usually already served a lot of time, so tend to be relatively stable.

Charlie added that what you find with other groups of foreign national prisoners is people on very short sentences who will do their time in somewhere like Wandsworth. Their sentence is too short for them to be shipped to one of the foreign national prisons. Or there are people who are doing a really long stretch in a category A or B prison who wouldn't be appropriate to be moved to one of the three foreign national prisons which are designated category C.

Charlie added that life is particularly difficult for foreign national prisoners who are held in jails where there is only a handful of them, and in a more obscure part of the country, because there aren't systems in place to be able to look after them. The more there are, the more the prison is geared up to looking after that group.

**Pam Cox MP** asked whether PRT does much work on foreign national prisoners.

**Mark Day** answered that PRT publishes statistics on this group and does also get calls from foreign national prisoners to PRT's advice service. This group often have very particular issues. The advocacy around this is difficult because it is quite a contentious subject, so a lot of the work PRT does tends to be about addressing misconceptions. He added that there are two charities that are doing a lot of good work in the area. One is Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID). The second is Hibiscus Initiatives, who specifically look at foreign national women.

**Leyya Kitmitto** asked what can be done to deal with the issue of remand given the large and increasing population of people being held on remand.

**Charlie** answered that he thinks court closures is a huge issue at the moment. Many courts are not operating at full capacity and you'll often see courts closed on Fridays. This is partly because there aren't enough judges, partly because there isn't enough money and partly because in many cases the estate is in such a mess. So, for example court buildings that are having to be closed because of RAC or because the roof is falling in.

As ever, it is a justice system, and all the different cogs should interact, but they don't always. So sometimes it feels like the cogs are spinning freely. Whenever ministers in one part of the justice world make a decision there is always a knock-on effect in other bits of the justice world. That is what we are currently seeing with courts.

Charlie added that it's a big worry because remanded prisoners are likely to be more violent. They are also the most likely to be assaulted and the most likely to die by suicide. They are also often the most vulnerable. Often, they're coming in from the street, detoxing off drugs or alcohol. Sometimes they have committed an offence against a family member which means they are cut off from anything outside. A big proportion will have never been in prison before.

Charlie summarised that dealing with the flow of remand population would take the pressure off the crumbling Victorian prisons which is where almost all remanded prisoners end up.

**Tanya Lightfoot Taylor** thanked Charlie for his talk, particularly around drugs and drones. Tanya added that criminal gangs are quite influential and often able to get people to do their dirty work for them whilst they remain clean. For prisoners who are under duress, in debt prior to coming into prison, or who have lost their job and want to provide for their family, that route might seem quite attractive. So, Tanya asked what would Charlie suggest the prison service could do to make that lifestyle less attractive?

**Charlie** responded that one of the areas the inspectorate is particularly worried about here is young people. There used to be Young Offender Institutions where 18–24-year-old prisoners were kept separately. The number of those prisoners has reduced over time, and those prisons were not always great places. But what it meant was those men were not exposed to some of the more experienced prisoners who would have pulled them in to organised crime type activities at a much deeper level.

So many of the young men in prison are involved at a street gang level, on the periphery of organised crime. But not involved in a meaningful way. The danger is they go into prison, and they do get pulled in. It's about a number of things. First, it's about managing more aggressively those prisoners because if you're an officer working on a wing those are the prisoners you're worrying about least. You're worrying about the one getting on the netting or screaming in your face or manifesting mental health breakdown. But the really polite, charming guy who offers to help you out, who often has the best job on the wing. You don't necessarily want to take on that prisoner, why would you, they aren't causing you a problem. So, it is a challenge to the prison service to really think about managing those prisoners in a more assertive way. Those prisoners respond to incentives in a way which other prisoners don't necessarily. These are very bright people who are well connected.

Charlie concluded that he believes it should be much more of a priority. But there is sometimes a squeamishness about really taking on some of these organised crime gangs. It has to be done because the level of criminality in prisons is just staggeringly high.

**Mark Day** thanked Charlie for his presentation and for taking everyone's questions. Mark called the meeting to a close at 7pm.