



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Review of the Support Mechanisms for Front
Line Northern Ireland Prison Service Staff

28 January 2021

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Ms Linda Dillon (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Doug Beattie
Ms Sinéad Bradley
Ms Jemma Dolan
Mr Gordon Dunne
Mr Paul Frew
Ms Emma Rogan
Miss Rachel Woods

Witnesses:

Mr Ronnie Armour	Northern Ireland Prison Service
Mr Brendan Giffen	Northern Ireland Prison Service

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I welcome to the meeting Ronnie Armour, director general, and Brendan Giffen, head of strategy and governance, from the Northern Ireland Prison Service. The session will be recorded by Hansard and the transcript published in due course.

Ronnie, I will hand over to you to give us a brief overview of the key findings. Then, we shall take some questions. Thank you, Ronnie.

Mr Ronnie Armour (Northern Ireland Prison Service): Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am grateful to have the opportunity to attend the Committee to talk about the two reports that were published by the Minister on Monday. I do not propose to go through them in detail in my opening remarks, but I am happy to take questions on any specific issue.

I welcome both reports and want to echo the words of the Minister in thanking Siobhan Keating, Gillian Robinson and Graham Walker for the excellent work that they have undertaken. I hope that the Committee agrees that they are two good reports that will be helpful to us moving forward. They outline clearly what we must do if we are to achieve the level of support that prison officers, past and present, truly deserve. The publication of those reports marked a very good day for the Northern Ireland Prison Service. We look forward to implementing the recommendations in both reports in line with the timescales that are outlined in the Minister's action plan.

It is fair to say that the reports have been well received right across the Prison Service. They give recognition to the work that we have been trying to do. They also chart our course for what we need to do moving forward. I am certainly committed to delivering the reports' recommendations. As you will

know from the Minister's statement, she has asked me to lead a programme board to ensure that we deliver them as quickly as we possibly can.

I am happy to take questions on any specific issues in the report. I know that you have had an opportunity to look at the recommendations over the past few days. I am happy to deal with that now.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Thank you, Ronnie. I note that all the recommendations of both reports have been accepted by the Prison Service, and I welcome that. Obviously, with the progress board, which you will lead, being established, you will take forward the implementation. Who else is on the implementation body that you will lead? At what stage do you hope to be able to crystallise the financial resources that will be needed to put all of the recommendations into effect?

Mr Armour: Next week, I will meet the senior leadership of the Prison Service and will allocate responsibility to different directors and governors to take forward specific recommendations. I will do that in consultation, if we take the current staff, with Gillian and Siobhan. As you know, the Minister has asked them to work with us over the next number of months to evaluate our progress. I have already been in discussions with both of them on the action plan, and I will involve them moving forward. However, initially, it will be an internal group. We will, obviously, have to pull in others across the organisation and, indeed, beyond it for some of the scoping work that we need to do around costing. I am hopeful that, before the end of the financial year, we will have more detail for the Committee on the costing that is required.

With regard to the report on retired officers, for example, we know that somewhere in the region of 1,400 staff have retired over the past eight years or so. We are talking about many thousands back beyond that. I am sure that the Committee will accept, therefore, that it is very difficult for us, at this point, to scope the scale of what will be involved, particularly in providing the service that Graham recommended for retired staff. We will work with the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) to do that. What I can tell the Committee at the moment — and you will know this — is that we are talking about significant sums of money. However, I cannot quantify it at this stage. Hopefully, before the end of the financial year, we will have a better idea.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Did any of the findings surprise you? Obviously, I have had a chance to look through some of the report. It speaks to areas where there need to be changes and improvements. From your perspective, did anything in that cause you concern; recommendations for change that are now being made that had not been identified previously?

Mr Armour: No, there is nothing in the report that jumped out at me as a particular surprise. We have all known — the senior leadership in the organisation, the Justice Minister and the Committee — that there is work to be done here. Over the past three years, we have been trying to make progress on our Prisons 2020 well-being work. I am grateful that the report highlights that and gives us credit for it. I am not particularly surprised about anything that has been recommended. Over the past six months, as Gillian and Siobhan have been doing their work, my sense has been that the issues that were being raised with them were not new. Indeed, Committee members had raised a number of those issues previously, and we were not in a position to take that forward in the way in which we can now.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Yes. I made the comment in the Assembly that, at least, we now have a baseline against which we can measure the improvements that need to be made. I welcome those reports. They identify issues now. That will be very helpful because you, first, need to identify issues in order to seek to change them and then have the structures in place to hold people to account for all that. I welcome the comments that have been made about the Prison Service and your team wanting to do that in an open and transparent way. It is about trying to get the best way forward as opposed to being defensive about things that, perhaps, should have been different in the past. In that spirit, I welcome the efforts that are being made.

With regard to retired officers, obviously, it will be important that the PRRT is recalibrated somewhat and is able to provide the sort of support that may well come forward. I accept that it is difficult to quantify, given that so many of those officers have been retired now for a number of years and may not even wish to engage; they may have moved on. How quickly do you hope to be able to identify the level of need that there may be and to tool up the PRRT to be able to meet that need?

Mr Armour: The first thing that we want to do is engage with the PRRT. We will, obviously, have to put business cases and so forth together. My aim is to have something in place by the second half of the financial year. The action plan talks about service delivery commencing by December. I am very

conscious that it will take PRRT some time to build capacity. There is a risk that, when we introduce this, we may, in effect, be opening a floodgate with regard to the number of staff who might come forward. It is difficult to quantify that, as you have just said. We want to try to get to a position where we can enter an arrangement with PRRT and give it time to scale up so that we can have something in place by the end of the calendar year and, hopefully, a little bit before that.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Thank you, Ronnie. I will bring in other members at this stage. I may have some other points to make in due course. Rachel Woods, you have indicated that you want to speak.

Miss Woods: Yes, Chair. Thank you. Thank you, Ronnie and Brendan. I, too, welcome the reports and the Minister's statement on Monday. Paul has already asked some of my questions with regard to budgeting and finances. I look forward to getting more information from you when it is available. My question relates to an issue that was brought up to me by a constituent. I was happy to be able to feed into the review and bring them in as well. It relates to Civil Service policies, the wording of letters and the use of the term "inefficiency". I appreciate that the issue does not fall under your remit, but that of the wider Civil Service HR. It is in the recommendations as an issue that could, potentially, be dealt with quite quickly. Is that term gone? I know that there were some legal issues. Is there any more information on that? I know that it is quite a minority point. However, it was certainly one that was brought up to me as a recurring issue, especially when people were off work with mental health issues and were being told that they were breaching efficiency. I want a little bit of an update on that if possible.

Mr Armour: That is an important point about those letters. They have been amended. My understanding is that the only use of the word "inefficiency" in the letter is one occasion when it refers to procedures under the NICS inefficiency sickness absence policy. That is the current policy. However, other references to inefficiency, as I understand it, have been removed from the letter. That is a positive development. We will work closely with NICS HR on a number of the recommendations in the report, as you will know. Indeed, next Monday, I will meet the director of NICS HR to start that process. I will raise the issue of the letter with her. My understanding is that that recommendation has been addressed.

Miss Woods: OK. Thank you, Ronnie. That is brilliant.

I just want to raise another point about the Blossoms at Larne Lough project and Maghaberry Prison. I read about that with interest. The report said that staff who had access to the provision identified that it was extremely beneficial, however, the majority of staff who participated in interviews were unaware of it. Is there any intention to roll that out across the prisons estate in the next financial year?

Mr Armour: We have given a commitment in the action plan to look at that. Indeed, the governor of Maghaberry and I visited the Blossoms project just outside Larne about a fortnight ago. We have had discussions with the folk who run it. I have to be honest and say that I did not know a lot about that project. However, I was extremely impressed when I went and spent an afternoon with them to see what they do and how they do it.

When we talk about rolling that out, it is important to set some context. The programme can take up to 14 people at a time. It meets for one half day a week for a period of eight weeks. Therefore, whilst we want to look at rolling that out, and I am confident that we will be able to do that, the numbers that will go through it per year will not be huge. In its pilot, Maghaberry has been focussing on the greatest need. That is what, I think, we will want to do moving forward. Certainly, it is an excellent project. It is well worth going to see it and spending time with the folk who run it.

Miss Woods: Thank you, Ronnie. I will look forward to finally getting to Maghaberry. We have had a number of false dawns because of COVID, but certainly you know that. That is it from me, Chair. I welcome both of those reports. They are very good and very timely.

Mr Dunne: Thanks, Ronnie and Brendan, for your presentation. The issue of sickness absence was discussed briefly in the Chamber. I understand that it has cost around £3 million a year for the past three years. The Minister mentioned the spend-to-save initiative. Obviously, we welcome that. We want to see investment in new processes and support for prison officers and all staff who work in prisons. How will that help to address the major issue that is sick absence?

Mr Armour: The reports, particularly the one on serving staff, are about trying to intervene early to give better support to staff in order to prevent sickness absence where we can. We have been trying to do that through the prisons well-being programme, as the report indicates, over the past couple of years. We have seen our sickness absence rates fall a little bit. If you were looking at the average number of days that officers were taking off in 2015, you would see that it was sitting at just over 21, whereas, in the past year, that came down to 18.7. I know that 18.7 is still too high, and it is a major challenge for us. However, there is evidence that we are starting to make some headway with that. My hope is that, as we implement that report and put even better support mechanisms in place for staff, we can make further inroads in addressing the sickness absence issue to which you refer.

Mr Dunne: Obviously, table 7.1 shows that the absence rate is higher than in any other Department. There is a comparison right across Departments. We appreciate that there are reasons for that. It is important that more is done to try to address those issues. I understand that your staff figure is 1,262. Is that right, Ronnie?

Mr Armour: I can give you the up-to-date staffing figures. The current staffing level for operational grades is 1,320. We have administrative and support staff in addition to that. At the moment, our full-time equivalent is 1,292. Therefore, we are sitting at around 28 staff short of our operational target level.

Mr Dunne: OK. Obviously, as a result of that sickness absence, overtime or additional staff are required to cover it. How is it covered in the day-to-day management of a prison?

Mr Armour: You are right in saying that, if you are at your staffing complement — we are not very far away from it — you would not be expecting to rely on overtime. However, where you have staff absence due to sickness, obviously, we have to cover those gaps, and we use overtime to do that. Over the past year, we have been using very significant amounts of overtime because, as you know, we have been dealing with the COVID pandemic. We have every prisoner in single-cell accommodation, which means that our footprint in each of the prisons is greater than it was this time last year. Obviously, we have to staff that, so we have been using overtime to do that. Each governor will have an overtime allowance per month. During the pandemic, I have been giving them additional hours to cover the pressures of COVID. That in practice, Mr Dunne, is how it works.

Mr Dunne: Yes, so, there obviously is considerable overtime. That, in itself, puts stress on staff if they are continually having to work overtime, including long hours and weekends. Is that an issue that you are concerned about?

Mr Armour: That issue has not been raised with me, but I absolutely agree with the point that you are making. Where staff are having to work additional and lengthy hours, it will certainly add to the tiredness levels. We have not had any issue over the past 12 months or well beyond that in getting volunteers. People work overtime on a voluntary basis; it is not compulsory. We have not had issues getting staff to volunteer. In fact, right across the service, our staff have been exceptionally good over the COVID period in stepping forward and doing some extra hours for us.

Mr Dunne: Thanks for that, Ronnie.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Thank you, Gordon. Next will be Doug Beattie, then Linda Dillon. I can see that Jemma, Emma and Sinéad want to come in. I will try to get you all in.

Mr Beattie: Ronnie, thank you. You are as clear as always in your answers. Like you, I welcome every aspect of this report. I think that it is genuinely first class and takes us in the direction that we want to go. I am certainly not going to try to pick holes in it, but I have a couple of questions, if you do not mind. The first one is around recommendation 1, which talks about pay and grading and then goes onto grading quite a bit. Is there not still an issue that, when it comes to pay and the yearly pay issue, the independent pay review body's findings are not released in a fashion that is timely enough to allow people to look at it, scrutinise it and understand what they are negotiating?

Mr Armour: I will deal with the current year that we are in. The pay review body made its report at the end of September. We have accepted its report, but there were some additional measures that I was keen to take, not least in the context that I think that we are going into a very difficult period with pay, where pay freezes and so on are being talked about. There were some additional things that I was keen to do over and above what the pay review body recommended. Therefore, we have gone into

what has turned out to be quite a protracted negotiation with the Prison Officers' Association (POA) around this, and that has delayed the publication of the report because we cannot publish the report until it is finalised. I have been in discussions, as has Brendan in particular, with the POA. The senior leadership of the POA, its chairman and vice chairman, have seen the report, albeit very recently. I am hopeful that we can reach an agreement with the POA that will allow us to implement the report very quickly and do some additional stuff that we like to do. If we cannot reach that agreement with the POA, we will move forward to publish the report and implement its findings. Without going into the minutiae of it, that is an explanation of the delay this year.

Mr Beattie: Ronnie, I get that. Every year, we have a conversation about that and about the negotiation, and every year — you are right — it is protracted. You have accepted the independent pay review, and you are doing add-ons. Given that the report was released in September, you would expect that, as we move into February, it should be able to be viewed and understood, as should your position in trying to do things in response to it. Listen, I will not rattle on about it. I just have a concern, because, in relation to recommendation 1, there is a need to fix the issue of pay as early as possible to make sure that morale is maintained as regards pay.

Recommendation 5 is about shift patterns. In the Prison Service, there are prison custody officers, night custody officers and main grade officers. Would it not make more sense, given those shift patterns, to have a universal grade and a universal position, and an individual can work nights or days so that we do not have the shortage of night custody officers that we presently have?

Mr Armour: That really takes us back to the grading review that we are doing of all the different grades. We have made good progress on that, but it has been delayed because of COVID. We are hoping to get the grading review completed in line with the commitments that we have made in the action plan. That will then lead us into a discussion about different grades, what they do and how we might have a more — to use your word — universal approach. I am certainly open to that.

The work of night custody officers is different. We want to think very carefully about how we proceed on that. You are right to say that there is a shortfall at the moment, but there is a surplus at the custody officer grade, which is offsetting that. An additional 16 night custody officers have been deployed this week, and a further class will be coming to the college on 8 March, so we are closing that gap. At the moment, there is a shortfall of around 30 overall. We are closing that gap, and I am very confident that we will have that gap closed before this summer.

It is worth saying, just to put that in context, that our last big recruitment campaign was for custody prison officers. That was followed by one for night custody officers. You can see that we have a surplus of around 40 custody prison officers and a shortfall of around 30 night custody officers. It is a matter of timing, but we will have that gap closed fairly soon. In answer to your initial question, yes, I am very open to looking at how we can better use our grading structure.

Mr Beattie: Ronnie, I am in no doubt whatsoever that you are making efforts to fill that gap. I have read about and spoken to people about the issue of night custody officers. You are moving in the right direction, but there is still a differential. That differential means that a night custody officer gets paid less than a prison custody officer who has been brought in to work nights to fill the gap. They are doing the same jobs but are getting different wages. That is why I am talking about having a universal position so that people can do all jobs. That would mean that you could direct your workforce slightly better to where the gaps are, as opposed to being stuck with trying to recruit for one set of positions, when all you need to do is shift your workforce, if that makes sense.

Mr Armour: It absolutely makes sense, and, as I say, we will look at that when the grading review has been completed. That will give us a much better sense and a much better evidence base. The other group of staff that we should not lose sight of is, of course, those working in the prisoner escort service. It is another group, alongside the night custody officers and the custody prison officers. We will look at all of that in the round.

Mr Beattie: Thank you, Ronnie, as ever.

Ms Dillon: Thank you, Ronnie, for your answers so far and for coming to the Committee today. As far as I can see, all the recommendations of the reviews have been accepted. Am I right in saying that?

Mr Armour: Yes, the Minister and I have accepted the recommendations. Some need to be discussed with the Department of Finance; we accept those in principle, subject to discussion with the

Department of Finance. I will open those discussions with the director of HR next week. There will be ministerial involvement after officials have worked through some of the detail. We are supportive of the recommendations.

Ms Dillon: I appreciate that. It is good that Gillian and Siobhan will stay on and do some follow-up work; very often, people do a report and then that is the end of their involvement. That is a positive move. You have been more than open in our conversations to suggestions around how things could be improved. As I have said to you before, that is a positive attitude for anybody in a leadership role.

Will you give me a wee outline of the recommendations that you think will be the most challenging or difficult to implement? This follows on from what Doug said about shift patterns; obviously, a culture change is required to support staff better who are experiencing stress and mental ill health and all that, so it may require a longer timescale. Do you think that recommendations 5, 6 and 7 could be done relatively quickly, or will they also take time? I am asking that on the basis of a conversation that we had with some of the staff when Emma and I were in Maghaberry; you had made some slight changes to shift patterns to improve things for staff. The staff to whom I spoke felt that that was very well received and that it had helped staff morale and improved general working conditions. I know that you are open to all that. It is not a question of whether you will do it but whether it can be done quickly.

Mr Armour: Most of those things can be done this year. We have outlined a timescale towards which we will work for each recommendation. I share your view that the review of shift patterns is a very important aspect of the report. I also welcome the fact that the authors recognise that that is complex and that I have a balancing act to deliver. In Maghaberry, you saw where we have made changes. I am very keen that we address work-life balance issues, but, equally, I have to be mindful that there is a business to be delivered. We need to be sure at all times that we have the right people in the right place at the right time. The implications for us of not having that are around prisoners being locked in their cells. That is not acceptable to us. We have worked extremely hard to make sure that that is not the case. There is a balance. I want to appoint somebody relatively quickly who will look at the shift patterns and the profiles and come up with something that is acceptable to staff and will allow us to deliver the important business that we are tasked with delivering.

We have tried to flag up things in the action plan that we think that we can make progress with quickly. Probably the most difficult one will be putting that service in place to support staff. The report talks about a bespoke service. It recognises that there are procurement issues and so forth. That will take a little bit of time. That is probably one of the more challenging ones, but it is perhaps the most important one to deliver. We will do everything that we can to do that as quickly as possible. For some of the HR issues that are being highlighted — for example, the occupational health processes — there are complexities, but I am confident that we will find a way through to deliver Siobhan and Gillian's recommendations. The right thing to do is to keep Gillian and Siobhan working with us. The report is excellent; it is evidence-based and you could not argue with it or anything in it. Having Gillian and Siobhan almost as mentors for me working through this will be really helpful, and we will get a beneficial outcome for all concerned.

Ms Dillon: I appreciate that. Chair, I hope that you will allow me one more quick question to follow on from what Doug said. Maybe that needs to be looked at and a need for a universal approach. I understand what you are saying about the challenges. We talked about sick leave; more detailed work may be needed on that and on whether some of it is related to work-life balance and all those issues. That needs to be looked at in the round. I understand that there are finance issues around staff, but when we try to save money, it ends up costing money on sick leave. That is where we need to look.

I will comment, rather than ask a question, on the bespoke service. There are really good examples of best practice in other parts of the world, so maybe we should look at those.

Mr Armour: I absolutely agree. We will look at best practice to see what is best for our staff. Having Siobhan and Gillian alongside us will be helpful. To be fair, they have done some of that work. It will be very useful to have them as a point of contact.

Ms Dillon: No problem. Thank you, Chair and Ronnie.

Ms S Bradley: Thank you, Ronnie and Brendan, for the presentation. I will not go over issues that have already been raised, but I want to put on record my welcome for the report. In particular, I like its proactive approach. It attempts to get in early before any problems arise and to get engaged actively. The action plan reflects fairly the adoption of the recommendations and a real, dated attempt to

timeline it, which is always reassuring. Sometimes the Committee has to chase that type of information. I also put on record my thanks to Gillian and Siobhan. It is good that they will keep their handprint on this and will follow and monitor it. The timelines are succinct, so what is the reporting mechanism back to the Committee? It is good that we have an opportunity to speak to you so directly. Will there be an opportunity for us to monitor progress as and when it happens and is recorded?

Mr Armour: I would certainly welcome that. When we put the action plan together, we wanted it to be ambitious. I wanted to demonstrate to the Minister and, indeed, to the Committee that we are determined to drive this forward, notwithstanding all the current challenges around COVID. I will report regularly to the Minister. It is, of course, a matter for the Committee as to how it wants me to report to it, but it might be helpful if I came back to the Committee in late June or early September to update you on the action plan and the work that we have done so that you can keep a watching brief and a handle on progress. I am very happy to come back at any time, but it might be useful to do so around those milestones. By the summer, we will be able to demonstrate very clear and visible progress, and, as I said, I am happy to come back at any time to update the Committee on the work that we are doing.

Ms S Bradley: Thank you, Ronnie.

Ms Dolan: Thanks, Ronnie. I have just one question: are there any training programmes or personal development programmes for Prison Service staff, or will this be a totally new approach for the service and the staff?

Mr Armour: We have our own training department at the Prison Service College. We have a lot of mandatory training, which is carried out by our excellent tutors at the college. We also do recruit training for new people coming in and training for different grades of staff in a range of areas — for example, mental health. We are already doing some of the training that the report recommends, but we still need to do other recommended aspects of training. We want to put it all together as a package in our training provision.

Ms Dolan: That is great. I was just wondering in case it was new and, if so, whether there would be a culture shock and a negative kickback. If it is already more or less in place, it should be fine. Those are all my questions.

Mr Armour: Staff will welcome the training; I do not think that there will be any resistance to it

Ms Dolan: Thank you.

Ms Rogan: Hi, Ronnie. I hope that you are well. Recommendation 2b states:

"interviews are not solely based on competency and should also be situational based to test areas such as resilience, attitude to self-care".

Has any thought been given to how that would look or work? This is very simplistic, but I was thinking that, if you apply for a job, you take an aptitude test to assess how you react to stressful situations? As you know, when Linda and I were in Maghaberry a few months back, we met some of the staff, and, to be frank, it opened my eyes to the situations that they have to deal with. It is not just a case of locking up prisoners and turning the key; they have a caring responsibility and have to rehabilitate and reintegrate prisoners into society. Without those staff, that would not happen.

Mr Brendan Giffen (Northern Ireland Prison Service): Recently, we ran promotion boards for the position of senior officer. As part of that process, we brought in a situational judgement test. We worked with a company to develop that along with our Prison Service College, a senior governor and people from the POA. We are starting to develop some thinking around testing situational judgement and how people would react to certain situations in a prison setting. We do a half-hour interview with candidates, and it is very difficult to get a flavour of the job. Over the past few months, a few of our unit managers have taken on a project to look at how we can better recruit. Part of that is not only how we go to interview but how we develop our website to show situations on it so that people can get a feel for the job before they apply. We want to take a multidisciplinary approach.

Ms Rogan: That is great, because it leads me on to my second question — it is more a comment — on that. The recruitment process tries to attract people to the job. The people whom I saw at

Maghaberry did not match my stereotype of a prison officer; there was a range of people from different walks of life. When you think of a prison officer and the job advertisement, how do we attract people from all sections of the community to think, "Actually, that is a job role that I could do"? How do we attract those who are under-represented in the service to that role?

Mr Giffen: To be honest with you, I could not agree more. We are actively looking at that. We have made great progress in the past number of years with women coming into the service. You will probably have seen that. The number of women in the service is around 30%, whereas, historically, it was much lower than that. You are right: there is still progress to be made, and we are very focused on that.

Mr Armour: I also agree with you, Emma. In the past, I have been open with the Committee and have said that we have an issue in attracting staff from across the community. For our part, we are very keen to address that. We have the Prisons Unlocked programme, which we are keen to take out to schools, universities and the community. At the minute, we are limited in what we can do because of the ongoing pandemic, but we are keen to reach into all communities to give people across the country a very clear understanding of the role of a prison officer. For far too long, people in society have had a view that prison officers simply swing keys and lock doors. You have highlighted very well for us that there is much more to the job.

I see prison officers as part of the caring professions. Yes, we have to hold people securely and safely if they are sent to us by the courts, but there is a great opportunity in prisons to do so much more with people in their rehabilitation and in seeking to reduce the likelihood of their reoffending when they leave.

Over the past number of years, we have been able to refocus the service around our purpose, and the Programme for Government has helped with that. Our purpose is to support and challenge people to change and to reduce rates of reoffending, which is to the benefit of us all across society. It is about how we get the message out to communities that a career in the Prison Service is very worthwhile and that it is a job that you can come to and make a real difference because you will be dealing with some of the most challenging and vulnerable people in society. I am very keen to work with the Committee to look at ways of better reaching out into the community to attract recruits from right across society.

Ms Rogan: I have no more questions. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): OK. Ronnie, that concludes the session. Thank you for your contributions. It will be ongoing work, and I know that individual members will want to follow up on it. I am keen to get a more formal update, certainly before the summer recess. It would be helpful if we could aim even for a written paper that outlines how the action plans and recommendations are being taken forward and implemented before the end of June. We will write to you formally. If members are content, we will seek a follow-up on how the action plan is being implemented before the end of June, when the summer recess begins. Thank you, Ronnie.

Mr Armour: Thank you.