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Special Edition
Closing and Opening Prisons

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Dr Helen Johnston is Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Hull.

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Tony Lunn is a Prison Officer at HMP Gartree and experienced a prison closure when HMP Wellingborough shut in 2012. He is interviewed by **Chris Gunderson** who works for Business Development Group, NOMS.

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Editorial Comment

Paul Crossey is Head of Young People, HMYOI Feltham.

I am delighted to have been asked to guest edit this special edition on closing and opening prisons. Having been Deputy Governor at HMP Gloucester during the time of the first set of group closures of prisons in 2013, I can empathise with prison staff going through this difficult experience. However, this edition goes beyond that experience with perspectives from prisoners, staff and managers affected not only by prison closures, but also those going through the demanding process of living and working in newly constructed prisons. This collective experience is extended with the thoughts of the people involved in high level decision making both for prisons, and the organisations that provide a service to them.

This edition begins with an article by Helen Johnston who explores the considerable history of some of the prisons recently closed. The article draws on the themes arising from the subsequent interviews in this edition and concludes with the assertion that, while history is not a significant consideration for those at the executive level, it does matter to the individuals living and working in the prisons that are closed.

The first five interviews in this edition are with those that have directly lived through the experience of a prison closure. The first interview with Chantel King, former Governor of HMP Gloucester, emphasises a Governor's desire to provide strong leadership to their staff during a rapid prison closure, whilst managing their own emotional reaction to the situation. In contrast to a speedy closure, the interview of Tony Lunn, an Officer at HMP Wellingborough which closed in 2012, highlights the impact on prison staff when rumours of closure continue over a protracted period. In the third interview a prisoner from HMP Kingston, a high performing prison, provides a unique insight into the impact of a prison closure on his own 'offender journey' through the system. The final two interviews show how prison closures impact on third sector prison providers and the wider local community. Firstly, the Dean of Gloucester examines how his city will manage the aftermath of a prison closure. Secondly, Jo Wells, a manager of the Footprints mentoring project in the South West, sheds light on the often forgotten impact of closures on those who are not directly employed by the Prison Service.

The following group of interviews concern those making the complex and difficult decisions around prison closures and opening new sites. Phil Copple, the Director of Public Sector Prisons for NOMS, talks about the strategic opportunity created for modernisation of the prison estate by the reduction in the prisoner population, coupled with managing the pressures of the government's public sector reform agenda. Jeremy Wright, Minister for Prisons and Probation at the time of being interviewed, expands on the modernising agenda, highlighting how public sector prisons have been withdrawn from market testing, whilst consistently reaffirming the importance of staff-prisoner relationships across the prison estate. Finally, Nick Coleman, Area Manager for NACRO, explains the importance of flexibility and adaptability within successful third sector organisations, when managing a significant programme of changes to prisons.

The final two interviews concern the views of a prisoner and a middle manager that lived and worked through the opening of England and Wales' newest public-sector prison, HMP Isis. Both explore the initial confusion as systems, regimes and relationships become established. In addition, both interviews are testament to the resilience of prisoners and staff, and demonstrate how new opportunities can arise to shape a culture.

The concluding article from Charles Elliott brings together the themes of the final two interviews, examining both the 'chaos' of a newly opened prison, and the process of staff and prisoners 'finding themselves' in a new environment. The article considers the opening of a new prison from a cultural perspective, whilst drawing out conclusions on practical areas such as staffing, procurement and partnership working.

As well as providing voices from a number of perspectives, this edition suggests that there is more to closing and opening prisons than just a managerial process. In particular, it provides accounts that assert that the opening, closing and operating of a prison has moral, cultural, societal and psychological implications. I would like to sincerely thank all of the people who agreed to interview, and be interviewed, for this special edition.

Prison closures:

Thinking about history and the changing prison estate

Dr Helen Johnston is Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Hull.

As someone interested in prison history, the prison closures announced in recent years and particularly those announced in January 2013, have attracted my attention. Some of these prisons are part of our collective architectural history as well as our social and cultural history, in terms of the hundreds of people who have worked or lived in these institutions over the course of their history. Some of the recent closures — HMPs Shepton Mallet, Shrewsbury and Gloucester, have very long histories and tell us a great deal about the broader history of imprisonment in England, a point I will come back to later in this article. The history of HMP Shrewsbury between 1770 and 1877 was also the subject of my doctoral thesis and therefore is a prison of great interest to me. But these closures also raised questions for me; what will become of the buildings now they have been closed? Should or can we think about how we preserve some of this history? Either in terms of the actual buildings or the oral histories, memories and experiences of those from the prison communities inside. The second element that drew my attention was thinking about how the opening and closing of prisons have shaped the whole prison estate and what we can observe if we stand back and take a much longer view across time. By taking a longer historical view, from the late eighteenth century onwards, in this short piece I will endeavour to highlight some of these issues and illuminate the particular contribution and importance of some of the recently closed prisons in the understanding, and making, of this heritage.

Prison building in the period of 'reform'

There are clear points in the history of imprisonment in England and Wales that demonstrate the expansion or reduction in the use of prisons, and the construction, building or removal of prisons from the estate. Of the prisons most recently closed, HMP Shepton Mallet has been on the current site since the early seventeenth century. The original house of

correction was built in 1625 though the prison was rebuilt in 1790 and then extended and adapted by architect George Allen Underwood in the 1817-1820 period.¹ These alterations and extensions places Shepton Mallet prison, like many other prisons across the country, at the heart of a process of 'reform' that occurred in the late eighteenth and into the early nineteenth century.



Shepton Mallett.

This was the first major prison building period. At this time the central government was only loosely involved in imprisonment and so most of the activity came from the local authorities who administered the prisons through the Quarter Sessions court. The magistrates at these sessions governed their local area and made decisions about prisons, policing, the poor law, lunatic asylums as well as roads, finances and the like in their locality. As Sheriff of Bedford, John Howard the prison reformer, knew that it was to these magistrates that he needed to appeal for change and he was pretty successful in doing so. Between 1775 and 1795, over forty-five new local prisons (or gaols or houses of correction / bridewells as they were called then) were constructed. Though it should be noted that these developments were also motivated by the upsurge in prisoners due to the outbreak of the American War of Independence and fears about 'gaol fever'. The courts had continued to sentence

1. Brodie, A., Croom, J. and J. O. Davies (2002) *English Prisons — An Architectural History*, Swindon: English Heritage.

offenders to transportation during the War, filling up the gaols with those waiting for removal, whilst the government held out hope for a speedy resumption of the process (revival never came and it was not until 1787 that convict transportation to Australia began). Gaol fever was also greatly feared. In 1750 over forty people at the Old Bailey had contracted the disease including high ranking officials, and there was unease about the potential for fever to escape prisons into the wider community. Gaol fever also meant that the criminal justice system became a lottery; in Gloucester in 1782, for example, three times as many prisoners died of fever as were executed. Concern over gaol fever also impacted on the design of prisons, it was thought that the lack of ventilation was the cause of contagion as noxious air remained trapped in the building. Leading architect of the time, Stephen Hales, set about constructing devices to expel the putrid air from prisons and as such bellows and ventilators were installed in a number of prisons including Newgate, Winchester, Bedford and Shrewsbury.²

These late eighteenth-century new prisons were the first purpose built prisons; prior to this, prisons had existed merely to detain. They were largely unorganised; men, women, young, convicted, untried, all mingled in unhealthy, disorderly and neglected conditions. These older gaols though, were much more open, the wider community would come and go freely, to sell their wares, trade and associate with prisoners. The aim of the new prisons, from 1775 onwards was to punish, not just to detain, and the construction of these new and quite expensive architectural projects, were designed to portray a message that prisons were to be 'real places of terror'.³ The prison exterior and façade became 'architectural shields' to mask the true purpose of the prison, making what went on behind the façade appear more terrifying.⁴

Not everyone embraced Howard's vision for the practical or philosophical changes required to these disorderly prisons. However, a substantial number were willing to put the county and borough finances to these projects and we can now observe this as a significant moment in penal history, not just in this country, but also across Europe and in America. At a local level, we can still see the evidence of the mark Howard made; numerous streets near local prisons, or where local prisons have been demolished, across the country were called Howard Street and busts of the reformer were also constructed (notably on the gatehouse of HMP Shrewsbury — see image below).

We can also look at the place of some of these recently closed prisons in this reform period.



John Howard HMP Shrewsbury.

HMP Gloucester and HMP Shrewsbury have a fair amount in common. Both were built with Howard's vision in mind; Gloucester in 1791 and Shrewsbury in 1793, during this important moment in prison history, though there had been prisons in both county towns before these new constructions. Both Gloucester and Shrewsbury were designed by William Blackburn, as was HMP Dorchester, built in around 1787 and closed in December 2013. Proposals for HMP Gloucester or the county gaol as it was then, and four smaller rural houses of correction across the county of Gloucester were promoted by Sir George Onesiphorous Paul, county High Sheriff and ardent follower of Howard. Paul worked with Blackburn, a leading architect of the time, to translate Howard's ideas into practice. Blackburn designed or was advisor in the construction of around sixteen prisons at the time of his death in 1790, including those above, as well as Stafford, Oxford, Liverpool (Kirkdale), Preston and Salford.⁵

Howard had firm ideas about the health and organisation of prisons but he was also concerned with the location and the architecture of new prisons. Howard, influenced by the views of Hales about health and airflow, wrote in his thesis that prisons should be in open country, close to running water and perhaps in the rise of a hill in order to get the full force of the wind. This also physically removed the prison from the community; 'to take the prison out of this context was to acknowledge that it would no longer relate to the external world in so familiar a way. It was being abstracted from everyday life and made very special.'⁶

One of the recent closed prisons shows us exactly what Howard was trying to achieve and we can see how

2. Evans, R. (1982) *The Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture, 1750-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3. Ibid: 169.

4. Ibid: 256.

5. Brodie et al (2002), note 1.

6. Evans (1982): 113, note 2.

Howard's principles for the construction of an 'ideal county gaol' were realised in the building of Shrewsbury prison, opened in 1793. As noted, the prison was designed through consultation with Blackburn but carried forward by a Shropshire architect called John H. Haycock, and constructed during the time that Thomas Telford was County Surveyor. The prison was built on, and still stands on Castle Hill, near to the River Severn. At the time it was positioned it was slightly removed from town on its south-east side and near to the Castle (though the construction of the railway through Shrewsbury in the late 1840s, early 1850s meant the prison regained quite a central position next to the railway station). The gatehouse itself was designed by Haycock but the plan of the buildings were constructed on Howard's ideas; pavilions raised off the ground on arcades, each holding a different class of prisoner, allowing the air to circulate and space for walking and association underneath. This became the principle design for the eighteenth-century reformed prison.⁷

At Shrewsbury, Gloucester and Dorchester prisons, the buildings (or wings as they later became) were constructed with this arcading form, with sleeping cells above surrounding courtyards, under which the prisoners would spend their days until lock up at night. This is hard to imagine visually now, as during the 1830s and 1840s when the separate system was in its heyday, the walkways round the sleeping cells were filled in to form something similar to the long wings with cells on either side that we imagine of Victorian imprisonment. However, we can have a glimpse of the latterly developed, late eighteenth century arcading at Shrewsbury prison. Though the prison was gradually altered to the separate system across the 1830s to 1860s, and was rebuilt in the 1880s, some of the arcading remains in the underbelly of the prison and holds the pipes and heating system, as shown in the below image:



Arcading Shrewsbury.

At the centre of the prison stood the chapel. The courts had railed galleries around the outside to give access to all of the sleeping cells; some cells also commanded 'a beautiful view of the country.'⁸ It is important to note that these prisons, built by local authorities, were sources of great civic pride; substantial sums of money were spent on constructing them and for those involved, they marked the progress and civilisation of the society in which they were located.⁹

Victorian prison building

HMP Kingston and the wings to be closed at HMP Hull (though this partial closure has recently been rescinded) are 'classic' nineteenth century prisons; 'monoliths to the Victorian penal imagination.'¹⁰ Hull was built between 1865-1869, on a radial design, prominent at the time. A central tower was constructed from which a number of long wings radiated out, at Hull and similar prisons like Reading and Lincoln these were in a cruciform design. But HMP Kingston was a product of the centralisation of prisons in 1877. When the government took the control of all of the local prisons and formed the Prison Commission to oversee both convict and local prisons they closed over 40 prisons across the estate. This was a substantial raft of closures; if we look back to the reform period then estimates say that there were somewhere between 244 and 317 prisons across the country in the period between 1777 and 1819; by 1865 there were 130 and by 1877, 113 local prisons. After the closures at centralisation there were 69 local prisons.¹¹ Kingston, built after the closure of Portsmouth gaol, also had a radial design, though in a star shaped arrangement, and opened in August 1878. Prisons built in this period were designed to be functionally austere; ideas of reform had given way to a more deterrent philosophy of punishment reflected in the bleak austerity of buildings like HMP Wormwood Scrubs built in 1884, to a telegraph pole design. This austere design was also reflected in the redevelopments across a number of prisons in the 1880s. At Shrewsbury, the buildings were entirely remodelled on this basis across 1883-1888 but this was also hastened by an outbreak of typhus in 1882-3. Two parallel wings were constructed; one for male prisoners and the other for females. The male wing had cells both sides of a central open corridor, three or four stories high; the female wing only one row of cells on a shorter corridor, two stories high. However, John Pratt notes that by the turn of the twentieth century, the tide was turning against

7. Jewkes, Y. & H. Johnston (2007) 'The evolution of prison architecture' in Y. Jewkes (ed.) *Handbook on Prisons*, Cullompton: Willan.
8. Owen (1808/1972) *Some Account of the Ancient and Present State of Shrewsbury*, Shrewsbury: Sandford (1808); Manchester: E. J. Morton republished 1972: 433.
9. Pratt, J. (2002) *Punishment and Civilisation: Penal Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Society*, Sage: London.
10. Jewkes & Johnston (2007): 191, note 7.
11. Brodie et al (2002), note 1.

this austerity and prison authorities attempted to lessen the severity of the prison look by the introduction of flower beds, fountains and landscaping.¹² At prisons like Shrewsbury, Gloucester and Kingston where the town or urban area had developed around the prison, then this was restricted given the space available.

New penal ideas of the twentieth century

Whilst prison history is often about the substantial changes of the late eighteenth and then the Victorian period, there were also important changes in the twentieth century. The closure of Camp Hill, part of HMP Isle of Wight drew my attention for this very reason. During the early decades of the century, fundamental changes occurred in the criminal justice system: the development of probation and aftercare services, more time to pay fines, a decline in the prison population, but also experiments with specialist prisons for particular groups of offenders. The Victorian prison administrators obsession with the use of classification had come undone, the more they classified prisoners, the more they realised that there were some groups who could not be subject to the same regimes. This led to some experiments with institutions developed for particular groups of offenders; habitual drunkards or inebriates, young offenders, those termed 'mentally defective' and those held under what was then termed 'preventive detention'. Whilst the development of Borstals turned into a much longer project, the other specialist prisons were quite short-lived and HMP Camp Hill was purpose-built as a prison for preventive detention offenders as part of this experiment, opening in 1912. The idea was that at Camp Hill inmates would be placed in cottage blocks surrounding an open area, in a 'garden-village' setting in the forest. The idea of a sentence of preventive detention has had far reaching consequences and we can observe today sentencing policies which allow for long periods of detention beyond or after the initial sentence. Although today these might manifest themselves differently, this was the first Act which really allowed for this kind of provision. That said, the specific sentence of preventive detention was a pretty short lived experiment; across about 20 years only around 900 people were ever sentenced to preventive detention, and Camp Hill was adapted by admitting borstal boys from 1931.¹³

By the twentieth century, prisons were also far more removed from public view, they were increasingly placed in remote locations, away from populated areas

and cut off from the rest of society.¹⁴ There were no purpose built prisons until the new Borstal at Everthorpe was constructed in 1958 and then HMP Blundeston in the early 1960s. Most prisons that were developed in the early decades of the twentieth century were in buildings that had a former purpose; old country houses and estates, army camps, aircraft hangars, military hospitals and as such were often in locations away from the centres of towns. They also had more land which could be cultivated and worked on by the inmates of the new 'open' prisons from the late 1930s onwards. From the end of the Second World War to the end of the century, the prison estate was back on a path of expansion, from 39 prisons in 1945 to 136 by 2000, a 'new wave' of prison building occurred in the 1960s and 22 new prisons were constructed. The first was HMP Blundeston, closed in December 2013, which had been opened in 1963. This prison had four T-shaped blocks for cells and was different to the other 'new generation' prisons that appeared during this phase of expansion.

Conclusion

Whilst it is clear that the Ministers and decision-makers have little time for a historical understanding of these prisons, the interviews with governors, staff and people associated with these prisons paint a slightly different picture. These prisons, sometimes for hundreds of years, have been well established parts of their respective communities. The dilapidated buildings and out-dated physical structures may well have made work difficult, but it is clear, from the interviews reported in this special edition, that it is relationships that staff and prisoners have, within these communities that are just as, if not more important. As well as an understanding of the place of these prisons within their 'wider' communities. This short piece has provided a brief glimpse of changing construction and development of the prison estate across over two hundred and fifty years of history. It has also attempted to locate the narrative histories of some of the recently closed prisons into a broader understanding of their place within this history. I hope that there was time for some of the history relating to these prisons to be preserved by people locally. Finally, I would like to thank Gerry Hendry, Governor of HMP Shrewsbury and his staff for accommodating my visit to the prison in the weeks preceding the closure and to all the other Governors and staff that Professor Yvonne Jewkes (University of Leicester) and I made contact with during this period.

12. Pratt (2002), note 9.

13. Brodie et al (2002), note 1.

14. Pratt (2002), note 9.

Interview: Chantel King

*Chantel King is currently Governor of HMP Leyhill. At the time of the prison closures she was Governor of HMP Gloucester. She is interviewed by **Monica Lloyd** from the University of Birmingham.*

The interview took place in March 2014.

ML: How did you first hear about the plans to close Gloucester?

CK: There was a lot of speculation about an announcement for about two weeks before I was told. I actually found out by means of a telephone call the evening before from the Regional Director. He said 'Hi kid'. I can remember that. There are some things I can't remember but I can remember that because of the way he said it and because we know one another well I knew immediately it was going to be Gloucester. I said 'it's me isn't it?' and he said 'Yes, it is. You're one of the jails that are closing.' People assumed I had a lot more notice but that was 7.45 pm the evening before. I had another call about an hour later from the person who was to be my lead from the MoJ asking me if I'd had a call and I said yes. He phoned to introduce himself and to say he would be arriving first thing in the morning with a briefing pack. From the time I took that call at about 9.30 pm to the following morning at about 6.30 am that was all I knew; that there was going to be an announcement the next day.

ML: So the very next day you had to front this up with your staff and prisoners?

CK: Yes, the following day was actually my three year old daughter's first day in pre-school and the plan was to take her into pre-school and pick her up and have a nice afternoon together. No-one knew that and it was irrelevant to most people but for me that day was hugely important. On my way in I was desperately trying to behave normally and not give anything away as the news is embargoed until you get a code word. I came through the gate and it wasn't so long after Christmas and I walked through with a Senior Officer who was carrying a bag of sweets. To make conversation I said 'have you brought your old Xmas sweets in?' and he said 'No, it's my 30 year anniversary in the job today.' It was almost as if everywhere you looked somebody had something about that day. It makes you realise how little you know about other people's lives and it made me more anxious about what I was about to do. Then eventually the two people from the MoJ arrived, which I think we handled quite well because I had booked them in as visitors first thing in the morning so people wouldn't automatically think that they were turning up with bad news. They arrived with a huge information pack and I had a very short window of

time in which to get practical things like notices to staff and to prisoners prepared, and then I had to phone in to a telephone conference of all prison governors at which the announcement was going to be made. We weren't allowed to leave to brief our staff until we heard Michael Spurr say 'Good morning everybody' because that was the code to say that it had been accepted by ministers and I could begin the briefing.

ML: So how did you feel about all this? It must have been a bit surreal?

CK: Yes, I was very anxious because of the importance of what you were about to do. You get used to being a wee bit in the spotlight but you're about to stand up and everybody is going to be looking to see how you are responding and you're aware that what you about to say is going to devastate people. So I was very anxious about it.

ML: Did you get all the staff together?

CK: Yes, I gathered all my senior team first (I had permission to do that) and told them about the closure and asked them to gather all the staff together. When all the staff were ready and waiting in the room I had to walk through them to get to the front. And they all knew that this was the day that announcements were going to be made and that they would hear whether or not we would be closing. There was huge tension around what I was about to say.

ML: Do you remember what you said?

CK: No! Because the previous evening, despite not having a lot to go on I spent a lot of time writing things down that I wanted to say, but when it came to it I stuck to the script. I was given quite a bland script and that helped me quite a lot because it was very emotional and if I had started to talk about things that were very personal to me, about achievements, it would have been even more difficult. At the time it was very important that I got the message across clearly and that it had some consistency with what other prisons were hearing.

ML: How did the staff respond?

CK: They were very quiet. At the end of the meeting, I had made a decision with my Deputy Governor that we would not expect staff to leave the room straight away and resume their duties, but we would leave them to spend some time together, to get

over the initial shock, to have some Functional Heads there and the Care Team, so if they wanted to talk and to have an opportunity to deal with the information they had just been given they could do that with the right people.

ML: Was that your decision to have the Care Team present?

CK: Well, first thing I checked who was on duty and would be around from the care team as we did need them. There were people who were very upset about it.

ML: But you couldn't tell them in advance, so it was their responsibility to switch into care team role at the same time as absorbing the significance for themselves? That must have been very challenging for everybody.

CK: Yes. I didn't stay. I left as soon as I had delivered the information. I gave them the opportunity to ask any questions but there weren't any. I was expecting that; that it would be such a shock, particularly how quickly it was going to be.

ML: How quickly was it?

CK: Well the announcement was made on the 10th January and our last day when we were to hand over was the 28th March. Ten weeks from start to finish.

ML: That really is quite fast when you consider the logistics involved. How many prisoners were there?

CK: 321. So quite small, this is one of the reasons why it shut. But a difficult mixed local population with lots of different needs. There were lots of things to think about but for that hour after the delivery I just needed to get people to refocus, deal with what they'd just heard, and then refocus on the fact that we still had a full prison. I think that worked quite well, having the time to talk about it before returning to work.

ML: So how about telling prisoners?

CK: Well, I left the staff briefing and then had a series of people I had to call. So I called the Chair of the IMB, the Chief Executive of the PCT, all the people who we had key relationships with or contracts with, and immediately after that I met with the PCC (the prisoner consultative committee), which is a group of about a dozen men. And the same time we were behind the scene preparing the notice to offenders. I met with them as a group and delivered the message, and at the same time as I was meeting with them it was announced on the radio. So by the time the guys had returned to the unit a lot

of the other offenders had heard it on the radio anyway. It was that quick.

ML: It feels like you're describing a tsunami, like riding a wave.

CK: Yes. It's a really short window as well. On top of everything else I was checking whether I had told everybody who needed to know as you know they will be offended if they didn't hear it from me. There wasn't a contingency plan for closing a prison, though there might be now actually.

ML: So how did the prisoners react?

CK: A lot of the men had been in and out of Gloucester most of their lives and many were very attached to it. They were thinking about how it was going to impact on them. Where will I go? What happens if I get into trouble again? There was a lot of worry about families. But on the whole they were really good. We didn't have any difficult reactions. The staff and prisoners managed it really well, I was so proud of them all.

ML: Let's talk a bit of the practicalities of it, because suddenly you're faced with a big logistical challenge. What were the implications for other prisons?

CK: Because Gloucester was one of nine to close I think some of that had been missed and there was an assumption that all of these people could go to Bristol, but no-one had thought

about the Young Offenders for whom we had a huge catchment area. There were small pockets of offenders who had really been missed out of the planning and could have had better attention. But Bristol did take the brunt of Gloucester's closure. Their whole demographic will have changed to much more of a remand population. I think a lot of my young offenders went as far afield as Reading.

ML: How about the Unions? Were they part of the closure process?

CK: Not directly. On the first day I called in the POA, the PCS and all the unions who were represented. They were brilliant actually. While lots of people disagreed with the decision, they accepted it. They understood why the prison closures were happening, and had a really mature approach to the bigger picture, which is sometimes unusual. I felt very lucky about that. It still didn't stop them absolutely being on top of the personal issues and wanting to make sure that people were managed properly and that their members got the best deal. And that's right as that's what they're there for. With regard to how

... first thing I checked who was on duty and would be around from the care team as we did need them. There were people who were very upset about it.

they worked with me as the Governor, they were very supportive as they always were once they realised I was doing the right thing. There were no issues with me about the trade unions. They were an important part of the closure.

ML: What did happen to the staff? Do you know how many were relocated and how many took redundancy?

CK: No, the HR was all managed separately. Everyone had a one to one interview and I wasn't involved in that, which is the same for all Governors. You sit outside the HR process which is managed centrally, which is quite right. You have to make non-judgmental decisions about people's lives and it's important that that was very clinical. I was kept informed about how many interviews had been completed and what people were asking for but I didn't know the details about anybody's posting before them. Quite a few people did take voluntary exit. I had some long serving staff and for lots there were some opportunities to take a different path and I hear that some have done really well with new ventures.

ML: So you were confident that the HR side was managed professionally?

CK: I was very confident in it. It was very slick.

ML: How was the transfer of prisoners managed?

CK: We stopped taking prisoners from courts immediately so we took no new men in from the very next day. We then did a huge piece of work about scheduling the emptying of the prison. We knew we had to be empty four to six weeks ahead of the last day to do the decommissioning. We worked out who would be going to court and not coming back over the next four to six weeks, who would be eligible for HDC, who would be time expired. Then for the rump of men who were serving ongoing sentences they were moved on to Category C prisons in the South West. There was a different strategy for all. It worked really well. Each day we came into work there were fewer prisoners. Then when there were very few left we co-located them so that rather than having people in different areas we brought everyone together. That was much better so they didn't feel like they were rattling around. Because it was quite eerie as the jail emptied, particularly when we were down to the last 20 prisoners. And there was about the same number of

A small group stayed on to the very end. Some were listeners, some were peer mentors. They were those who had given a lot back. It was a sort of siege mentality; we were all in it together.

staff. We knew we would have one very small self contained area that was newly refurbished and held about 25 men so we identified that as the last bit to close. A lot of the offenders were volunteers. They said they would stay and help. There were some amazing examples of goodwill. A small group stayed on to the very end. Some were listeners, some were peer mentors. They were those who had given a lot back. It was a sort of siege mentality; we were all in it together.

ML: So, once the prison was empty, the decommissioning started?

CK: Yes, as the prison emptied we started it in small areas. I can't give you the definition of what decommissioning is even though I've been through it! It's just a grand way of saying get everything out. We had to remove everything that identified it as a prison, which sounds like a small thing to do, but every little notice that might have said HMP had to go. Anything that could have identified the building as a prison had to go. Then the real biggie was the stuff around emptying rooms, archiving and destroying, so reams and reams of paperwork, logging everything and if it had to be stored archiving it. It was a massive piece of work. I'm still not sure how we did it but we did. As our offender group reduced and staff who knew

where they were going and were really excited to go went, we moved staff on to archiving. So we had staff working right outside their comfort zone. I appointed leads so I had someone leading on archiving, someone leading on furniture; they were taking on roles that were completely new to them, but just got on with it.

ML: What was the general mood? Was there a can-do attitude?

CK: Absolutely. I like to think that, if there was one thing I did when I was there; it was that even though the staff knew we were going to shut, I wanted them to believe that we could do it well. I wanted them to leave thinking that and they really bought into it so that everybody could say that from the moment we started this to the end we did the best we could. And they really bought into it. I couldn't have done it without the team I had around me.

ML: And they couldn't have done it without the leadership that you gave them.

CK: It could have all gone wrong and it didn't. And that's down to the people buying in to let's make sure we do this right for the offenders and for the staff and just let people know that we just wanted to do a good job. And they did, they did it brilliantly.

ML: That's a really positive story. Can I personalise it a bit and ask about you?

CK: I didn't know what was going to happen to me, not for some weeks and there's no reason why I should have been treated differently than anyone else. I say that because you still have to get on with your day job, and it's hard and you are thinking am I still going to have a job? You just have to keep pushing that to the back of your mind and get on with whatever you're doing and know and trust and have faith that it's all going to be OK.

ML: So you had to absorb everyone else's uncertainty at the same time as managing your own.

CK: It was really hard in my circumstances because I have a really young daughter and I didn't want to move. It would have been incredibly difficult for me to move. In fact I don't know whether I could have done. Although there was a vacancy here everything had to be done fairly and others may have been interested in this post. I get that but it doesn't stop you wanting personal reassurance. I was getting a lot of personal support from the very top and I was being reassured but it doesn't help until someone says there's a job for you. It made me acutely aware of what others were feeling and allowed me to say to them what was being said to me with legitimacy. Everything is going to be OK. These are the parameters you are working within; you will get a posting within an hour of your home, so don't worry about it.

ML: So the way you were being treated you were able to pass on to your staff, which presumably went on down the line, even to prisoners as often what happens to staff is mirrored in the way prisoners are treated.

CK: Yes, for lots of people it was just about the opportunity to say how they felt. They knew I wasn't able to suddenly pull a posting out of my pocket but they just needed to be able to say it. It made them feel better. I do genuinely think that most people got something good out of it, although they did not want to leave Gloucester. And a lot of jails got a lot of good staff out of it as well.

ML: Did you mark the closure at all on the very last day?

CK: We did but we kept it very low key, for lots of reasons. One is that many of the staff had already left to take up new postings, and another reason was that I

didn't want to make it a sideshow. I didn't feel that it was something that should be totally celebrated. It was the marking of the end of something and that was important but I didn't want it to become a marching band. The local MP wanted to attend and I wanted it to be about me and the staff being able to say this was really important to us. It was just with the staff that were left and we did it on Maundy Thursday so that some people were able to come. We did it outside of the prison in front of the flag. I made a small five or ten minute speech and we had the longest serving unified member of staff take the flag down and fold it, followed by a big round of applause and we went to the pub. It was about saying Gloucester city is losing something now, and those who had had anything to do with offenders and their families or children were losing something dear to them. The local MP came and two Mayors came because they had personal connections with the jail but I didn't want it to be a ceremonial event. I wanted it to be for staff so they came along in their ordinary clothes without chains of office. The press came too and a photographer.

ML: Was that helpful?

CK: Yes, I am sure there were people thinking we wanted a big party but it just didn't feel right, so I didn't do it.

ML: Are there any key learning points that you would pass on to anyone else in your position?

CK: I think what's been really good is that has been a lot of debriefing of the governors involved in the first round of closures. We were all offered as mentors for the governors of the next round of closures. One thing that has changed has been the filling of the gap between being told the evening before and the next morning when you receive your briefing pack. Now they courier it to your home the evening before so you can read it and digest it in advance. They provide a more detailed plan that incorporates our feedback. I would just say to those who are going through it make sure you have people who are close to you supporting you. Not just colleagues but also family and friends who are there to look after you. You need a support network. But it's exhausting. It really is exhausting, so take some leave at the end of it would be my best advice. The day after you shut the door take two weeks leave! You run on empty, you personally have to check so much because there are so few of you there. Once the jail is empty it's vulnerable from the outside in a way that it wasn't before. There's so much new stuff that you have to think about.

ML: What are the plans for the building now?

CK: It's just gone on the market in the last few weeks. There's a lot of interest not just in it as an historical building but in the castle ruins that are underneath it too. I would like to see something nice done with it rather than seeing it just left to decay.

Interview: Tony Lunnon

Tony Lunnon is a Prison Officer at HMP Gartree and experienced a prison closure when HMP Wellingborough shut in 2012. He is interviewed by **Chris Gunderson** who works for Business Development Group, NOMS.

The interview took place in January 2014.

CG: Could you describe your time at HMP Wellingborough before the closure announcement?

TL: I joined HMP Wellingborough in 2005 after working at Wandsworth and Highpoint. I spent about seven years at Wellingborough as a Residential Officer. The establishment was a medium sized Category C prison, holding long term lifers and prisoners from the local area. Relationships with prisoners were very positive, incidents were low and there was a strong establishment identity. When I joined I immediately found staff welcoming and approachable. I greatly enjoyed my time at Wellingborough.

CG: Was there any anticipation Wellingborough would be closed?

TL: Two years before the closure announcement Wellingborough was put up for Market Testing with Birmingham and Buckley Hall. We assumed it was a clear choice between staying public or going private. At one point I wondered whether we could close because we needed investment to upgrade facilities. I wouldn't say I anticipated the closure but I was concerned investing in Wellingborough might be more expensive than building new prisons or units. We carried on as normal for the next twelve to eighteen months as preferred bidders finalised their proposals. Bids were submitted and we awaited a decision. But on the eve of the announcements for Birmingham and Buckley Hall the Wellingborough tender was withdrawn. We were told the Wellingborough bid was not proceeding and no long term contract was being awarded. Instead the establishment would operate on a rolling contract whilst a permanent decision was made about our future. Despite this uncertainty staff remained optimistic. There was a feeling we had been considered fit for a tender therefore we must be considered fit to stay open. We had not replaced the staff that left when Market Testing was announced so we were now operating more cheaply. We now became an overspill facility for London and began to take prisoners from across the capital. We had reduced costs, been given a new role and come through Market Testing, and we were feeling positive about the future. This sequence of events made the closure announcement all the more unexpected.

CG: How were you informed that Wellingborough would be closing?

TL: I was on a rest day and got a phone call from a colleague in the prison. He asked whether I had heard the news, I asked what he meant and he said we were closing. I switched the computer on and it was on the BBC website. My colleague told me staff in the jail had been called to a meeting in the Chapel where the Governor made the announcement. The chapel is invariably the biggest space in a prison so it is often where full staff meetings take place and announcements are made. During Market Testing we joked about getting bad news whenever we were called to the Chapel. Previously staff had come out laughing but that day was different. I was told the Governor was crying with staff after making the announcement. This was her first Governor post and she was just as upset as the other staff.

CG: How did you feel when you heard that news?

TL: To be honest I couldn't believe the news. Having emerged from the stress and uncertainty of Market Testing we all thought we were over the worst of it and were cautiously looking forward. The prison returned to normal with a new population and function which gave us more hope. This made the closure announcement more of a shock and I think it hit everyone a lot harder. There were very strong views about the closure both among staff and figures within the local community.

CG: How did your colleagues respond to the news?

TL: I was on duty the day after the announcement and I remember being surprised that there was a lot of good humour when I went into the prison. There was a lot of emotion but staff rallied round to support each other. We were a close group and the situation brought us closer together. I think this banter was our collective way of coping. This coping mentality quickly turned to discussing plans for the future. I remember officers openly discussing the Voluntary Early Departure Scheme (VEDS) and redeployment to different prisons. I remember conversations about the distances to different jails and people huddled round computers looking at maps. Nobody stopped wanting to do a good job each day but every person began to focus on the longer term decisions they would have to make.

CG: How was the news announced to prisoners and how did they respond?

TL: On the day she made the announcement to staff, the Governor wrote to prisoners informing them of the closure. Some staff predicted prisoners would use the opportunity to plan disorder or openly mock the staff but we didn't experience anything like this. The prisoners remained compliant and many were genuinely upset which I had not expected. I recall the life sentenced prisoners that had been with us a long time didn't want to leave. It was a difficult time for everyone.

CG: What was the impact on other prisons nearby and what was the approach to managing that?

TL: The only impact I recall hearing about was some negativity experienced by staff at the prisons they were redeployed to. Sites like Littlehey, Aylesbury, Onley, Bedford, Stocken and Gartree were required to receive our staff at short notice and I heard some of our staff had quite a tough time when they relocated. I am not sure whether this was widespread or what the cause was but I didn't experience any difficulties myself.

CG: What was the response of unions and what role did they have in the process?

TL: Following the closure announcement delegates from the POA NEC Committee visited the establishment to meet with union members. We held a vote on whether to engage with the HR interviews and redeployment process. There were strong views and staff saw this as an opportunity to show our dissent. However the NEC advised the Branch Chair not to take this action. POA members were advised to participate in HR interviews to retain some control over our redeployment. This was sound advice but it unfortunately proved the extent of the support the NEC could offer. The Committee arranged access to legal advisors for those staff requesting it but they couldn't do anything further. In truth I don't think unions had power to do more. We were the only prison going through this at the time and there was nothing the NEC or anybody else could do.

CG: 'How were the transfers of prisoners managed and what were the main challenges to this?

TL: We sent prisoners to a variety of different establishments which took a lot of organising. At one stage we were sending out daily drafts to different

prisons. The Governor decided to move the prisoners that were easiest to locate first. The majority were moved quickly but we had a significant number of the longer term prisoners that for offence or health reasons were harder to place. The real challenge was relocating the oldest prisoners. It was difficult for some to get into vehicles and there are not many suitable units to send elderly prisoners to. I remember several refused including one prisoner in his seventies and we spent a lot of time encouraging individuals onto vehicles. Despite the challenges the population was moved very quickly. In total all 588 prisoners were moved in under

three months. The only prisoners left were a small group of volunteers who had agreed to stay to help with the decommission work.

CG: What physical work needed to be carried out in order to decommission the site as a prison?

TL: A manager was brought in to oversee and plan the closure. I didn't realise prior to this but there is a prison service manual on how to decommission a prison which we had to follow to the letter. All work was planned and tasks were issued out each morning. At the end of each day projects were marked off on the planner when they were complete. These tasks included everything from breaking up items of furniture to securing each decommissioned area. I remember looking out onto the exercise yards and

seeing groups of staff and prisoners breaking up old furniture. As each unit was emptied an inventory was drawn up listing the equipment that was left. These lists were circulated to all other prisons. Each day OSGs and Officers would arrive at the gate with vans. Other prisons were literally stripping the place bare like a prison 'bring and buy' sale. Everything that wasn't taken by other prisons was earmarked for destruction on the yards. Nothing could be sold for profit so a lot of equipment went into skips. I remember about 20 skips going in and out through the gate each day at one stage. We needed so many that the skip company ran out of skips. I recall seeing an entire dentist's consulting suite being stripped out. Because we couldn't sell this it was packaged up by a charity and shipped across to a Hospital in Africa. Personally I didn't want to be part of the decommission work. I wanted to go to a new prison and get on with my job as soon as possible. I wrote to

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the Governor asking to be redeployed as soon as possible. I was lucky enough to get a swift redeployment and was thankful to avoid being involved in decommissioning.

CG: How did people respond to having to carry out the role of closure whilst dealing with their own uncertainty?

TL: Every member of staff was extremely professional and got the work done but I think a lot of those involved in the decommissioning found it very difficult. Everyone handled it in their own way and nobody really talked about it. The main priority was to keep occupied but I am sure it was difficult. As I have said I was pleased to move on as quickly as possible. The process of redeployment was the hardest part. Personally I was just glad redeployment was happening quickly and we were not required to work for a period on detached duty at other prisons but I think some staff found it very difficult and gave the HR representatives a difficult time. I felt they were trying to do their job and I appreciated the fact they tried to place us all quickly. Further delays would have placed additional strain on individuals and families. We were required to provide a list of jails we would consider that were within 75 minutes commute from our homes. I provided five names but in truth I would have considered any commute to keep a job. A few weeks later we received sealed envelopes confirming our postings. I was on a rest day but I went in to discover my fate. I remember walking up to the gate and seeing two colleagues outside. They had received their postings and were trying to find out where their new prison was! I went up to the Chapel and joined the queue. We waited in silence and shuffled towards the front where a woman sat behind a small desk. She had a box full of alphabetically arranged envelopes with each member of staff's name on. You simply gave her your name, she ticked you off a list and handed you your envelope. People took themselves off somewhere quiet to open their letters. I asked someone to open mine for me and he told me we were both going to Gartree. I was lucky to receive a posting that was a similar commute to Wellingborough. A lot of staff

were not so lucky. I remember a lot of staff crying that day.

CG: How did you personally cope with the impact of closure and draw on your resilience to see the process through?

TL: I just wanted to get on with the job. I wrote to the Deputy Governor asking for my redeployment to be brought forward to the earliest possible date. Luckily my request was accepted and I was granted a very quick move. My redeployment letter had been dated 26th September and I started at HMP Gartree in November.

CG: What was the impact on the wider community?

TL: The prison was a big employer in the town so the closure had a big effect. I recall the MP for Wellingborough was extremely vocal in his criticism of the decision. He asked for an opportunity to personally question the NOMS Board and Justice Minister Kenneth Clarke over the decision. He drew a lot of attention to the issue and highlighted the impact on the community. The Mayor was also very supportive but ultimately they could not influence the decision.

CG: How did you mark the closing of Wellingborough?

TL: There was a march out from the gates and a formal ceremony like we have recently

seen at other prisons but I did not want to attend or participate. Every member of staff was also given a coffee mug with the prison crest and the opening and closure dates on but I did not feel this was something I wanted.

CG: What lessons would you take from this closure and what advice would you offer to a member of staff involved in a prison closure?

TL: My advice would be to not expect miracles from the HR team but not to treat them as the enemy. If the HR team can support you and help you they will do. They may not have much information at first but will tell you what they can. Even after what has happened I still enjoy the job. I have been in the prison service for 24 years and don't feel I have been treated badly overall.

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Interview: Prisoner A

*Prisoner A was detained at HMP Kingston, and was one of the last prisoners to leave the establishment, staying on to help with the physical decommissioning work. He is interviewed by **Vikki Levick**, Head of Security at HMP Leyhill. The interview took place in January 2014.*

VL: Could you describe your time at HMP Kingston before the closure announcement?

PA: Up until the announcement it was a relaxed jail because it was all lifers there. I had been there since 2010 and through the whole time I was there I only saw two incidents, and both of those I would describe as handbags at dawn. Even though there were a lot of quite notorious people there, it was a steady jail and was very quiet. Originally I didn't want to go down to the South, and Kingston is about as far South as you can get without getting put on a boat to the Isle of Wight; but actually it was a very good place to settle in to. You got a three month settling in period, which helped. It was a relaxed sort of place, and everyone got on.

VL: Was there any anticipation amongst the prisoners that Kingston would be closed?

PA: A lot of the old lifers knew it was coming. There were rumours that any Cat C that had less than 500 prisoners would close, so a lot of lifers knew it was coming. We didn't want it to close, because it was a good jail; but it only boils down to money at the end of the day. Some of the staff knew it was coming too, I'd been told by my personal officer that it would come, and it would only be a matter of when.

VL: How were you informed that Kingston would be closing?

PA: Certain prisoners were told by their personal officers, or other staff they got on well with. There was a note that was sent around to everyone's cell, but by that time everyone already knew.

VL: What were you told were the reasons for the closure?

PA: We weren't really told anything, but everyone assumed it was down to the money. It was a very small prison.

VL: How did you feel when you heard the news?

PA: I felt a little bit wary as I was waiting for my move to open conditions when the announcement came. There were some bits missing from my parole document, so it was taking time for the Secretary of State to sign off on the parole board's decision to award me my Cat-D. I thought that I would be going to North Sea Camp, which is nearer home for me, but as I stayed behind to help close the print shop I ended up coming to Leyhill. I came to Leyhill at the end of February 2013 and I was one of the last twelve to fourteen prisoners left.

We had to empty all the shops, take out the beds etc... we had to gut everything, the only things that could stay in the cells were the toilets and wash basins, everything else had to come out. It was a lot of work. When there were only a few of us left it was really eerie. It was very quiet. We were just unlocked and left to get on with the work we needed to do. I miss a few of the staff there. My personal officer, an officer from the OMU, my psychologist and my boss in the print shop too; they were all good staff that I miss.

VL: How did other prisoners respond to the news?

PA: There was a lot of fear as people didn't know where they were going. People were able to put in requests but that didn't mean you'd get where you wanted to go. They changed the VP unit in Bullingdon into something they called the Kingston Unit, but it didn't really work. It was meant to be a Cat C unit but as soon as you left the unit you were back in a Cat B. They also two-ed people up, a lot of people didn't want to share cells. They were lifers and weren't used to having to share cells. At other jails you got your own cell if you were a lifer. Let's just say that a lot of people that went there ended up in the Segregation unit because they had to share cells. Some people got good moves though. There was a lot of fear about where you would end up.

VL: How did the staff respond?

PA: They were as apprehensive as we were I think. They didn't know what was going to happen to them either. I'm not really sure how it worked for them but I think they got a choice of two or three jails and if they didn't want to take them they would just get put somewhere and have to go there. I know a lot of people took redundancy or retirement. My personal officer took retirement. There was a lot of fear of the unknown for them, just like us.

VL: How was the transfer of the prisoners managed and what issues did this create for you?

PA: There's two ways to answer this really. Some were happy as they were transferred to good jails, or ones they chose to go to. For those that had to go to Bullingdon though, they weren't happy. It felt like they were going backwards as they had to go back to a Cat B jail and Bullingdon did not have a good reputation. The Kingston Unit wasn't any good, it was just a Cat C unit in a Cat B jail and being two-ed up was a major problem. I was happy because I thought I was going to

North Sea Camp. By going there I would be able to build back up my family ties, which weren't as good after I had to come south. I stayed behind though and ended up coming to Leyhill instead, the space I had saved at North Sea Camp was taken by someone else.

VL: Did the closure impact on your ability to complete your sentence plan/interventions in a timely manner?

PA: No not really because I had already been awarded my Cat D, I was just waiting for it to be signed off when the announcement came. The delay in my Cat D though meant that I didn't get to go to North Sea Camp and I stayed back to help with the clearing of the prison.

Our allocations officer pushed to get me a Cat D spot though and managed to get me into Leyhill. It was very quick and I only had 24 hours notice before I transferred to Leyhill.

VL: Did this have any impact on your family/friends in the community?

PA: Yes. I don't get visits at Leyhill because all my family live in the North and it's too far to travel down here. If I had gone to North Sea Camp I would have been able to have visits. Also I knew North Sea Camp, because I had served my first sentence in there when it was a detention camp in 1976. I haven't tried to get a transfer up there though, even though I'd like to. It's because getting a transfer up there would put me back another 6-12 months and I feel better the devil you know now I am settled in Leyhill. I have a good job in the kitchen here, a good room, and I have people I get on with here. I would like to be in North Sea Camp though, I would like to see my family and I would like to get the chance to hold my youngest grandson, but it's just one of those things.

VL: Looking back, has the closure had any significant impact on you or your fellow prisoners?

PA: I can't speak for the other lads. There are people that have gone to other prisons that I miss. You can't really write to them though, as they don't like you writing to other cons here and you have to think too much about what you write in case your Offender Supervisor or psychologist look at your letters. I have some magazines that used to be published in Kingston and looking back at them, it's funny how much Kingston changed over the years, but the staff were always good staff. The staff you didn't get on with just left you alone and the ones you got on with you really

got on with. There were only about 200 in there, so it was like a little community. We were going to have some new opportunities in the print shop, because some new contracts were due to start, but when the announcement came they stopped, and those opportunities will never happen now.

VL: How does it feel to be one of the last prisoners left in such a historic prison?

PA: I don't know really. It's a hard question to answer. You saw a different side to staff there than at other jails. It was a relaxed jail. There was no bullying or anything like that; it just wasn't put up with, the staff sorted anything if it started. They did loads for charity there too, especially up at the gym, they

would do all sorts. A friend of mine, who's been there too, had to go and pick some kitchen equipment up from there a while ago, to bring back to Leyhill and he was able to have a look around. He said it was really strange seeing it again but with no one in it. It's somewhere I'd like to go back and have a look around one day now that it's quiet.

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Interview: Stephen Lake

*The Very Reverend Stephen Lake, the Dean of Gloucester, was in post in January 2013, when it was announced that HMP Gloucester, the local prison, was due to close. He was interviewed by **Martin Kettle**, Home Affairs Policy Advisor for the Church of England. The interview took place in March 2014.*

MK: Could you describe your involvement with HMP Gloucester before the closure announcement?

SL: I had not had any contact with prisons in my ministry before coming to Gloucester, other than occasional fundraising and visits to the cathedral where I worked previously. But Gloucester prison is just a stone's throw away from the cathedral, and in arriving here I wanted to meet as many people as possible. It seemed right to make the connection. I simply rang up the prison governor out of the blue — it was only a name, I had never met her. It was useful — one person leading an organisation meeting another one. So I went for a visit; they were surprised to be asked, they were not quite sure where it would go or what I had come to do. For me it was interesting to see inside the prison, and she took me round and introduced me to some of those in their care. From there we built a relationship upon which was based what then happened.

MK: Did you go in on a regular basis after that?

SL: No, only twice. Part of the story is that I invited their senior management team to visit the cathedral — I went there a couple of times and they came here on a couple of occasions, over about a year. Soon, though, they were told that they were going to close.

MK: Over that year, did you get an impression of the place of the prison in the community?

SL: There were about 350 people who worked at the prison, so in a city that has had a lot of the centre taken out of it, the prison was a significant employer, and because the prison has been there for many years, there is quite a sense of history to the place. There was an understanding that the prison was a part of Gloucester, and not a negative part.

MK: Did your initial contacts lead on to anything else?

SL: Yes. It turned on an occasion when I asked if their senior management team had ever visited the cathedral at all; 'No' was the answer. We do this thing here when initially making contact with partners: I get them along and give them an informal tour of the cathedral, and take them up the tower. Most places in Gloucester you can see from the tower, and it was

good for them to be able to look down on the prison and have some fun, and then come to the Deanery for tea. So that was getting to know them — no problem. Then what happened was that a call came from them, out of the blue, because one of the prisoners had committed suicide. The senior managers were not churchgoers, but because that had happened, there was obviously an impact, and they wanted to give me the name, so that we could put the name in the prayers in the cathedral. They thought that I wouldn't read the name out, but with agreement I did, and they felt comforted that they could refer to someone outside, rather than the tragedy being literally locked in. So that was a positive thing we could offer. The next thing that happened was that we were beginning to talk about the choir going there at Christmas, in the prison chapel — but they closed before that could be done. And then they sent me a photo taken from inside Gloucester prison: someone had taken it, and felt it was really important to say 'that is what you can see when you're inside' (it was a photo showing the intricate stonework of the cathedral rising over the barbed wire of the prison perimeter). You can see a bird flying over, giving that sense of freedom. The fact that that came from them showed they were beginning to get a sense of the spiritual dimension to what we were doing. We also entered into negotiations about whether some of their inmates could come to the cathedral discreetly, on the basis that as some of them might be approaching parole or release. They needed to be able to go to places nearby, public places, where they could leave at a certain time and report in that they had been there, and be back at a certain time: and we were happy to accommodate that. That was something practical that we could offer. Also I arranged for the governor to come to the Bishop's Breakfast, which is a three-times-a-year meeting of local leaders — so now as well as the Chief Constable, and the Lord Lieutenant, and the Bishop and the Dean, and leaders in education etc there was now the prison governor as well. She now felt she was part of the bigger picture, not just on her own. I invited her to come and read a lesson at the Carol Service, so it said 'Governor of HM Prison Gloucester' on the service sheet. Again, it was just bringing the jail into wider public relationship.

MK: It was all going so well — and then ...?

SL: Then the news came that they were going to close — which was a remarkably quick turnaround, something like six weeks or two months. And again a phone call came from the prison, saying 'We need some way of ending, and we're not quite sure what to do; can we come en masse (staff, not prisoners, of course!) to an Evensong?' We said yes, and I made the arrangements. There were about 40 members of staff past and present, with some of their family members, and even some ex-prisoners, who had been in the prison and stayed living in Gloucester. They read the lessons, took part in the prayers — and for them it was a degree of closure. And a week later the prison was gone. So I think really this was at the level of the cathedral saying 'we're here, you're here, what do we need to do to help each other?'

MK: Did you get much reaction in the wider community to the closure?

SL: There was a lot of disappointment in the community, locally, because of the employment, but also — I think Gloucester has had a shaky history, with Fred West, and the shoe bomber, and it was the first place to have riots after the metropolitan centers two summers ago (although we didn't really do the riot very well), and there were mixed feelings, because when you've got names of people who have been in that prison, it's quite good to get rid of that stigma. But what we have now is a much bigger issue, which is that great empty carcass of a building, which is currently up for sale, and is right in the middle of a major regeneration piece of land, which is either going to enable — depending on who buys it — the regeneration of the centre of the city, or be a blight upon it, just simply because it's there. Nothing has been sold yet — there are lots of ideas floating round. Now what we have is something that was a place of employment, a place of understanding that it had always been there and was ok, to being a potential eyesore, or white elephant. So the prison is still very much talked about, as much when it is empty as before.

MK: So you didn't have any notice — the SMT hadn't let you know what was coming?

SL: They really didn't know, not at all. They got a telephone call, and they were just told by the Ministry of Justice, at very short notice. So it really shook them,

employment-wise, and because the prison has been here so long, there were generations of families in the city who had worked there.

MK: Do you think most people who had worked there were local people?

SL: Oh yes — and getting new jobs has led to a lot of them moving away. People think of prisons as places where prisoners go, rather than places of employment that contribute to the local community.

MK: So there has been an impact on businesses and other organisations in the city?

SL: Certainly — for example the local paper shop has seen its business go downhill sharply, just by having been the nearest one to the prison. These things happen, don't they, but you've still got this great big building there that looks like a prison.

MK: Does that link in with any of the other ways in which public sector reforms and cuts have affected Gloucester?

SL: I think there is a cumulative effect in the area of regeneration. Gloucester is a town that was blighted by the planners in the Sixties. It used to have more listed buildings than Oxford; a lot of them were taken down. So we have great parts of the city that need to be redeveloped — and that is the biggest piece of land, that the prison is standing on and adjacent to. Therefore it is a big

factor in the multi-million pound package that is going to have to be put together. I in fact bear some responsibility in this. The Regional Development Agency ceased to fund urban regeneration companies with the change of government, and so the urban regeneration company that was responsible for all of this disappeared. The local council became responsible, and they set up what is called a Regional Advisory Board, which is a voluntary, honorary group of key people who both advise and challenge the Council on regeneration issues. And here, they asked the Dean to be the Chair. So, not only was I involved when it was open, but now I am still involved because with me as chair of that board, which is involved in higher negotiations with the Ministry of Justice and others about its sale, the church is directly involved in the regeneration issue, in its disposal as well as formerly in its life as a working prison.

MK: Looking back on this story, what sort of lessons would you take from the closure, what

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advice would you offer to the prison service and to government when they consider prison closures in the future?

SL: I think that economic decisions must have within them the understanding that there are human consequences. For example, I wonder what the costs were in closing a prison — and I think most of us thought that it probably should close, because it was so out of date — but the costs in relocation of staff, and the impact on places that are struggling for regeneration, and then the closure compounds the problem. And I think that the main priority is joined-up thinking — so for example selling the prison to the highest bidder is not necessarily the joined-up thinking that is going to be working in partnership with the county council, city council and other

landowners to develop this great big site. So by moving out, they cause a problem. They need the capital receipt, to build other prisons with, but it then becomes a problem for Gloucester, rather than for the government. The advice is, in summary, to recognise that these places which have been prisons for many, many years involve a wider impact than simply the economic imperative that a Victorian prison needs to be closed. Prisons are parts of the local community — and what was an active prison is now an empty shell that could be an obstacle to the economic development of Gloucester. So the big issue in closing a prison is — what could its future use be? And I think government has a responsibility to answer that question rather than the sale just being an item at the bottom of an accountant's spreadsheet.



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Interview: Jo Wells

Jo Wells is the manager for Dorset and Somerset at the Footprints Project. She is interviewed by Christopher Stacey, Director (Services) at Unlock. The interview took place in January 2014.

CS: Could you describe your role as a third sector provider at HMP Dorchester before the closure announcement?

JW: The Footprints Project offers support to people leaving custody. We offer a through the gate mentoring service for people that are returning to the Dorset/South Somerset area. Our relationship with HMP Dorchester was that we were an outside agency who would go in (we had keys to the prison), and we would make people aware of the service and see if they were interested. We'd get their details from them in order to find them mentors on the outside, and then organise for mentors to visit men in Dorchester before their release date, so that they built up a relationship. I was the person from Footprints who would frequently go into Dorchester and build that relationship. There was no funding relationship between us and the prison — we are totally independent — we don't have any state funding at all; we're funded entirely by charitable trusts and private donations.

CS: How long had you been involved with delivering services in HMP Dorchester?

JW: The actual project was set up by a Chaplain that was in HMP Dorchester and he initiated the project in 2005. I've been working with them since 2008, but we'd been going in once or twice a week since 2005. I wasn't there right at the beginning, and obviously we had a foot in the door because of the Chaplain, so people were quickly aware of what was going on. But it was difficult with getting other members of staff in, getting security cleared, getting keys, and then just building up a relationship with people throughout the prison. It just takes a long time to do that kind of thing.

CS: Was there any anticipation within your organisation that HMP Dorchester would be affected by the announcement regarding prison closures?

JW: How we interacted with the prison staff themselves was mainly informally. We worked both with the Offender Management Unit (who we had a more formal relationship with, as they did the risk assessments and checking the suitability for individuals to have a mentor) and with wing staff (where the relationship with us was more informal). An example of our strong link with the prison was that we used to go to a quarterly resettlement meeting.

This was primarily an internal meeting, but we were invited, so we were considered to be stakeholders in the resettlement process. In terms of knowing that the prison was going to close, there had been rumours ever since Shepton Mallet closed down that Dorchester was going to be next on the list, but it was never anything formal, it was just the dreaded rumour mill.

CS: How were you informed that HMP Dorchester would be closing?

JW: We heard from the Ministerial announcement. It was awful. All the prison staff were called into the centre on the day that it was made public. It was about 10am in the morning. And then we got a call about 10.45 from somebody that works with us inside, telling us what happened. And then we got a letter from the Governor about a week later.

CS: How did you feel when you heard that news?

JW: It was awful. You expect it to happen, but then when it does actually happen, it's a bit of a shock. You're just not prepared for it. When you hear rumours for such a long time — we'd been hearing them for at least 18 months. We'd also had a meeting with the Governor about 6 weeks before they made the announcement, when she told us that she'd been informed by NOMS/MoJ that Dorchester was to become a Resettlement Prison under Transforming Rehabilitation. And as far as she was concerned, that was to put paid to all rumours about closure. That was 6 weeks before they announced the closure.

CS: How were your staff informed?

JW: We're not a huge project — in terms of paid staff, we have 2 full-time people and a couple of people doing flexible outreach work in the community, and then the rest are actually volunteers, so in terms of people who had keys in the prison, there were only two of us. So after we took the call, we just informed the rest of the team.

CS: How did your staff respond to the news?

JW: It was obviously very disappointing. It impacts on our volunteers because they would now have to be travelling to different prisons.

CS: What was the impact on how your organisation operates?

JW: We're all floundering, to be honest. Since we had the announcement, within 2 weeks the prison's population had halved, so they closed it very quickly.

From October, we've been looking at where people are being moved to, and then building up relationships with other prisons that would take the case load that we were taking from Dorchester. About 50 per cent of our caseload were coming from Dorchester, so for that 50 per cent, we're trying to work out where they going to go to now, and that's just taken time. We go into other prisons, like Portland, and we were also working out of The Verne which has also closed as a prison.

CS: What has happened to your staff working at HMP Dorchester since the closure?

JW: We've located all of the people that we had on our list, they're all over the place, but I would say 60 per cent of them have gone to Portland, and that's not too far away, but that's only sentenced prisoners, HMP Dorchester was also Remand and Local, so they had people on very short sentences there. Although we're not sure about the future of Portland now. We found a few of them in Dartmoor, a couple of them are down in Channings Wood in Devon. One or two have gone to Erlestoke in Wiltshire. And as for the remand prisoners, they are spread between HMP Exeter, HMP Bristol and HMP Winchester, which has huge implications for us because our office is literally 10 metres away from Dorchester prison gate, there's no way we can catch up with remand prisoners at Exeter, Bristol or Winchester, they're all

2 hours drive away. There were other providers going into Dorchester — a policeman that was part of a PPO Unit, Probation would go in there, Substance Misuse workers we're going in to do work, and they can't travel that kind of distance either.

CS: Have you been able to take up new opportunities within newly opened prisons?

JW: We've been building up relationships with the prisons that our clients had been moved to, and the main one of those is Portland. At the end of last year, it was announced that it would be the Resettlement Prison for Dorset, so we were thinking that was great, as we had a foot in the door and a good relationship, but now there's more rumours saying it's not going to be Portland, but actually Channings Wood, so there's uncertainty yet again. It makes you question whether you want to be

spending all of your time investing in relationships in Portland if that's not where we're going to end up going. It takes time to embed in places, and you really need to know — you don't want to be messed about every 5 minutes with different announcements being made.

CS: How have wider public sector reforms combined with the closure program impacted on how you deliver your services?

JW: It's a bit unknown. It's almost as if it's been thrown up in the air and we're waiting for it to come back down. For example, we don't know what's going to happen with the Probation Service. That's still unclear. We know there's people making plans, but we don't know whether they'll be made concrete or come into effect. So, for the next 12 months, we don't really know what's going to happen with Probation. Likewise, with some of the other key statutory agencies that we work with, there's huge cuts locally on things like Local Government, and that's had a huge impact on supported services and things like accommodation and housing. Trying to get hold of a mental health team or arrange a mental health assessment in Dorset is almost impossible at the moment. Substance misuse too — there's cuts everywhere. Because we're funded largely by charitable trusts and donations from local people, our work will continue, but we would like to

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improve and expand, especially now we've got the challenges of travelling a bit further to find our caseload. Looking for other funding opportunities is more and more challenging, because funders are saying that the Government is now going to be providing services to all offenders coming out of prison, so how are you fitting into that? We largely help people serving under 12 months who have no other support, which matches what the Government are saying they're wanting to do. At the moment, we're trying to keep our options open. We go to a lot of meetings where we sit with Probation and say 'this is what we provide, if you're wanting to work in partnership in providing these services, we're happy to work with you'. We've just got to keep our options open. In terms of existing funding, we've never had a problem demonstrating the need for what we do.

CS: Were you able to be involved in marking the closure of Dorchester?

JW: Yes, but it was quite a frustrating process. When we first heard that the prison was closing, we were working with a lot of men that had spent time in Dorchester and they were also quite interested in marking that closure. Some of them had spent the best part of their lives in there, one way or another, and they were quite upset about it, and they had made friends with prison staff, and they wanted to participate in that. We contacted the prison to say 'if you are organising any kind of closing ceremony, we'd like to collaborate as our service users would also like to show their respects to the closing of the prison'. We received quite a curt reply saying 'we don't want prisoners involved', which is always a bit sad. They did have this public closing ceremony, which was organised by the Governor and a couple of staff members in there, which involved the Town Crier, the Mayor, and the media. It involved a ceremonial closing of the gate, bringing the flag down and a quick march. We were invited to that, but it was made clear to us that they didn't want any of our service users present, which is a shame, given that in effect, it was a public ceremony.

CS: What lessons would you take from this closure and what advice would you offer to the government and prison service leading a prison closure?

JW: I think it was very blinkered in that 'the prison' seemed to equal 'people that were employed by the prison service'. We were a partner agency, and we weren't considered to be part of the picture. The same seemed to apply to people that had spent time in there. It's a local community, there's outside agencies going in, people who had been incarcerated there, people who would visit, official and domestic, and we just weren't part of the picture. In future, there should be consideration of the whole picture and the impact it might have on the local community, given it's a local prison. Our job is permanently trying to build a bridge between people inside prison and the community, so that when they come out, they feel connected to that community and they've got appointments in place etc. That's the constant battle that we face. We felt we'd been building that bridge since 2005, but it was almost like there was no recognition of that.

Interview: Phil Copple

*Phil Copple is the Director of Public Sector Prisons. Phil has worked in offender management for over 23 years joining the England and Wales Prison Service in 1990 serving as a Prison Officer before undertaking a range of managerial posts at different prisons and at Headquarters including Governor of HMYOI Deerbolt and Frankland High Security prison. Phil became a member of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Agency Board in 2011 and took up his current role as Director of Public Sector Prisons in January 2013 with responsibility for 110 prisons and 3 immigration removal centres. He is interviewed by **Karen Harrison** who is a Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Hull. The interview took place in February 2014*

KH: What was the rationale for closing public sector prisons?

PC: There are a couple of points worth making first in terms of context setting. I've been working in prisons for 23 years and this was the first time in a generation that we were closing a number of public sector prisons, so it was a real shift for us and all the impacts that go with that. In a more ideal scenario you would probably want to modernise the prison estate incrementally over time and it felt to us that for decades we had never been in that position because we had been building capacity but largely to cope with the numbers in the system, rather than in an effort to modernise. We had a number of prisons where their running costs, their design and their condition was far from ideal. There is something about acknowledging our history and how this was such a lurch from what had happened before, but there is also something quite rational in trying to modernise the prison estate. The other point is that if we can take a step back and try to be objective about it pretty much every prison which has ever been built is going to close one day, that's the natural order of things. For us in terms of the strategic position, we had built quite a lot of new accommodation and we had plans for more to come on stream in 2013/14 and the decision to have such accommodation had been made at an earlier point when the prison population projections had been higher than they were by 2012/13 and we hadn't seen the continued rate of growth. So strategically that created an opportunity for us. We could seek to take out capacity and thereby save money or we could have decided to reduce overcrowding. The context in this parliament was to try and save significant sums of money in the Spending Review so this was one way in which the Ministry of Justice could reach its budget targets. In that financial context there was never going to be too much of a debate which option was chosen. In terms of crowding we do that in a regulated way; it must be controlled and consistent and safety taken into account. We don't think the crowding is unsafe or indecent so it was never going to take priority. We haven't reduced the overall capacity but it has allowed us to modernise the estate. Newer

buildings are cheaper to run in terms of maintenance, capital costs (such as new roofs) design and staff costs. Some of these considerations were relevant in deciding which prisons to close.

KH: How do the prison closures fit in with wider public sector prison reform?

PC: There was an element in our reform programme of an ever more modern estate so that was an important element in trying to achieve that. We set up a benchmarking programme to establish what the new routines and staffing levels were of prisons. There was an issue about managing the impact on people; seeing who wanted to exit via the voluntary scheme and then working out which of the staff we needed to redeploy because of the closure of sites. This fits with the picture of us trying to ensure that we have the right workforce in the right places, so that had to be a part of how we managed it. The brutal short term bit of it, in terms of the reform programme, involves saving a lot of money through two ways: one the benchmarking project and one through changes in the capacity.

KH: Were prisoners' feelings or desires taken into account when making decisions?

PC: In terms of considering prisoners' feelings in reducing capacity, that didn't play any part. When it came to choosing which prisons should be closed it didn't play a part in the consideration as such, but we weren't unaware of prisoner impact. We were mindful of what it meant for prisoners who come through the system and where they were going to go. We had to think about where the right place was for them to go. Some groups were more vulnerable than others, for example women at Downview: we had to plan that very carefully. But there is also the consideration of the services which a prison was providing and the need to provide them somewhere else. So for example, we had sex offender treatment programmes (SOTPs) running at Shepton Mallet, we ring fenced that money and moved it elsewhere, because we didn't want to reduce our overall investment in SOTPs, as we have got a lot of sex offenders waiting to do the programme and it is important that they do it. In Blundeston it had a Therapeutic Community (TC), we didn't ring fence that

money but we had to give a lot of consideration to how we were going to manage that. We talked about moving it to Warren Hill and how the newer accommodation would be suitable and beneficial for a TC. There was a whole raft of considerations for prisoners' feelings and needs. However I wouldn't want to give the impression that these were overriding factors. For example we closed Kingston because of the expense of keeping it open, even though it was performing well and had several settled life sentenced prisoners there. But an awful lot of work went on to try and decide where these prisoners should go. We understood the impact on prisoners — will a move hinder my progress, will I get on with staff etc.

KH: How did NOMS senior managers go about deciding which prisons to close?

PC: We put in place a whole programme management discipline with all its processes and we worked very close with colleagues at the Ministry of Justice estates. There was a whole analytical stage of looking at the running costs of the whole estate and seeing where that ranked places and doing some analysis of places that couldn't really be considered for closure because of their strategic value to the estate. There was a consideration that some prisons would have more complications in being closed than others in terms of for example services. We

also looked at the maintenance back log and where capital investment would be needed in future years. From doing that, and looking at the whole estate, we then excluded those which couldn't be closed. We got a long list, which was then shortened. We then had to weigh up the pros and cons of each prison and eventually we had to identify which were the right ones to close against those criteria. Each time we announced closures we ran the whole process again, to ensure we had the most up to date data. We also factored in operational considerations, so it's not just clinical data.

KH: How do you ensure that between closures, newly built prisons, refurbishments and changes in the type of prisoner held at each prison that the prison estate can cope with changes in the prisoner population?

PC: We tried to take a disciplined programme management approach to those questions and look at

the whole capacity of the system, measuring that against all we know about the needs of the populations. So how it breaks down in different security categories, intervention needs, court areas for remand prisoners etc. The process took all of this into account. In the last couple of years we have been making pragmatic decisions about the new accommodation — where it should be, which type of prisoner it should house, what services it should have etc. We have an ongoing process for doing that. For example at the moment we are working on how we can provide the Through The Gate resettlement through Transforming

Rehabilitation and the Probation Service. We need to work out which prisons will have that discharging function, which ones aren't and we are currently working through that detail. We need to ensure that the right people are in the right places.

KH: Is the public sector in a position to compete for new build prisons such as the one planned for Wrexham in 2017?

PC: Our approach with Wrexham is to question whether there should be competition at all. That is a decision which government is going to have to make and it may not be this government. We have got a model where we have got a reformed public sector division. We have benchmarked the services that we want to deliver; and we are making significant savings as a result of that. We

want an approach where the public sector prison has got the overall leadership and the operational management of the prison in which lots of important services and some key support services are delivered by other people under contract. So we will compete those services. We already have health, substance misuse, learning and education provided by other people, working in partnership with us and we have had that for a long time. These are really important for the running of a prison, but they are not delivered by HM Prison Service. Health and substance misuse are commissioned by other colleagues outside the agency because they are health commissioned and their default is to use competition. There is also a competitive process for education and learning and the money for this sits within another department. We want a different approach to competition, which is not competing whole prisons but having a model in which

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core operational delivery is the public sector but competition for key support services. The alternative is for Ministers to compete it and then we will have to decide whether we bid for it or not. My personal hope is for the former option because it's much more flexible, because we are all public servants.

KH: How was the closure announcement communicated and what constraints to communication did you face?

PC: The very significant constraint was around parliamentary etiquette and that we couldn't announce it openly until a Ministerial Statement had been laid before the House, so that is problematic. A lot of the people who were working in the prison, and prisoners held in those prisons, might be finding out after a lot of other people and it can get out into the media and the social media before you've had the chance to tell those who are directly affected. Also on any given day you will have quite a lot of prison staff off duty and so trying to get the word to them is not straight forward at all. So that was a major constraint. There was a relatively small amount of people at headquarters who knew which prisons were closing and when the announcement would be and then we had special dispensation to let the governing governors know the night before, so they could be telephoned and prepare themselves for telling their staff and communicating to the prisoners the next day and managing the situation. They also had the whole closure process to manage. We did a lot of preparations at the centre to support governors on the day and to support them in the weeks and months ahead in terms of communications. At the centre there were plenty of communication activities with the media by the Press Office in support of and following up from the ministerial announcement and then we had lots of communication with stakeholders and interested parties which we tried to manage from the centre. Michael Spur and I were making phone calls. At a local level several stakeholders had to be told as well. So that was shared between us and the governor. It is fair to say that we learnt — I think it's fair to say that we did this a lot better in September than we did in January 2013. We also learnt a lot on the HR side as well in terms of managing people's expectations and what the process would involve.

KH: How did you support Governors and their Senior Management Teams throughout the announcements and the closure processes?

PC: In terms of support activity, in addition to what I've said (above) the Deputy Directors of Custody were

prominent, as you would expect as the Governors' line manager and also supporting the Senior Management Teams in the prisons. If the Governors had any concerns then the Deputy Directors would help as well. They also provided softer forms of support, but closure is a hell of a thing for a Governor to have to do and relatively few of us have had that experience. Part of the support was that I visited all of the prisons personally. I tried to speak to a lot of staff and prisoners; although in a couple of cases because we moved the prisoners out quite quickly I arrived after the last prisoners had gone. I also spoke to the Governors and Senior Managers. One of the things I was profoundly impressed with, particularly the Governors, but often the whole senior team, was that sense that they had worked really hard to manage the prison through the process, which was difficult. They realised that there was still an operational job to do and encouraged staff to keep focused on that, but also

managed the difficult people issues which arose as part of the process. There were many questions they had to deal with, although the main one is obviously what is going to happen to me. Being asked that by several hundred people is hard. But they managed all that despite the same personal insecurity. It was impressive how people did all this. It was clear that there was a grieving process for some; a sense that we are not all going to be together. People

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went through different phases: anger, denial, acceptance and people can be at different stages at different points. Anger came out at different points. It's easy to step back and be objective about it — every prison will close at some point — but it's different if you are directly affected. That feeling varied because some were expecting closure and some were happy to apply for voluntary exit. For some it was not altogether unwelcomed. But of course some felt very differently.

KH: What communication or engagement took place with local community leaders, NOMS partners and MPs, before, during and after the closures?

PC: MPs got a phone call from Ministers about it — so they were told. Some phone calls were made by the centre to national stakeholders and then we would identify local partners that we needed to communicate with. There were some occasions where the stakeholders didn't appreciate the constraint we had concerning parliamentary etiquette so the initial communication could be quite hostile, unhappy and disappointed; because this was the way they were finding out. There were some examples where the

people working in the prison found out before the management did, because sometimes it might be difficult to tell the Chief Executive because he may not be available all morning for a phone call.

KH: What was the response of the unions and what role did they have in the process?

PC: The unions were aware, at a national level, in broad terms that we had this element to the reform programme and that we had capacity in the system. We would also give them broad steers as we were going along of the fact that we expected there to be more closure announcements, or there would be no more for the remainder of the year. We would also give them briefings where we were in terms of capacity, but they didn't play a direct role in the decision making of whether to close and where to close; and I don't think that they would have wanted to. Most of the unions have got a perfectly legitimate position which is that government should not have closed these prisons but instead should have reduced crowding and improved living conditions for prisoners and working conditions for staff. So it would have been difficult for them to have been involved in the decision making process. We also couldn't have involved them because of the confidentiality surrounding the decisions. Once the announcements were made there was a lot of engagement both nationally and locally with the unions. The national officials tended to visit closing sites and support local officials and local officials were heavily involved with all of the HR processes which went on in terms of trying to consider people's preferences and where redeployment opportunities might be. When I visited the prisons I quite often spoke to the local officials and they usually wanted to speak to me.

KH: What has happened to the staff employed at the closed prisons?

PC: The proportions vary. We had a significant proportion who went on voluntary departure and who expressed that as their preference and then there were others who took it as a least worse option in the scenario, because they didn't want to travel 40 miles to the next available prison. A larger number of people were redeployed to other prisons. We avoided getting into a full redundancy situation and we never had to do that with any of them. We often had places within reasonable travelling distances from people's homes and even where that wasn't the case we redeployed people anyway with a view to managing the position at a later date in terms of getting down to the right staffing level later. For example with the closure of

Blundeston, Norwich is now overstaffed, but we will sort that out in the fullness of time. In the East of England there is a relatively high turnover of staff so you have to think whether it is right to spend public money on voluntary exit departures, when in the fullness of time it will sort itself out. There are also other prisons where we are understaffed, so we are able to have detached duty to support those prisons. So having some extra staff is not a bad thing and is preferable to exiting people who do not want to leave and lose their experience and skills. However, what happened to the staff that we don't directly employ was a bit of a contrast as a lot of them just got made redundant. Some of them got redeployed within the wider organisation, but sometimes there weren't other contracts to redeploy them to. For example, when I visited the Isle of Wight, because we were closing half of the Camp Hill site, this was a difficult situation because most people wanted to stay living on the Island. We therefore decided to look at the cluster as a whole and see how to manage staff for all of the prisons. For the education staff however, Milton Keynes College told staff at Camp Hill that they would be made redundant. They didn't look at the whole site at all. I did try to show our staff that we were trying our hardest for them and that others were just losing their jobs.

KH: Have there been any negative impacts in terms of closing some of the more specialist prisons such as Shepton Mallet?

PC: It would be wrong to say all of this has had no negative consequences because it is disruptive. It would be difficult to say that not a single prisoner in Kingston or Shepton Mallet did not have some detriment out of this, because it is possible that, that could happen. Obviously not intentionally and we certainly took steps to mitigate those risks, but if somebody is on a certain progressive path it can be disruptive, especially if they don't settle in the next prison and they don't do well and revert to some previous anti-social behaviour; you can see how that can happen. It can't, however, be a reason for keeping a prison open. In terms of specialist services, I've mentioned SOTPs (see above) so we tried very hard with that; we have kept the money in the system and reinvested it somewhere else. The same also applies to TCs. So we have tried very hard to protect specialist services. Part of the early consideration was whether this was a place which was providing something a bit special which needs to be provided by somewhere else and if it is then let's make sure that we plan for the re-provision.

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KH: Have there been any lessons learnt from the closure completed by the 31st March 2013 that have been applied to the most recent prison closures?

PC: Yes, I touched on that above. They were primarily in the area of how we manage our people through it. There weren't too many on the operational side of things in terms of managing prisoner impacts, because we did that reasonably well. We had a lessons learning exercise that went on afterwards in the late spring/early summer and we applied what we had learnt. The most significant, however, in terms of volume and importance was about managing people issues. A lot of that I picked up from visiting the seven prisons which we closed in the early part of last year, by speaking to the respective governors. The main issue was about managing people's expectations through the process that they were now going to go through. We had to make sure that we were communicating properly about the detail. Where we had not done this properly in the first round, then you could get a lot of ill feeling and a lot of this went back to us not managing people's expectations. Everyone would have a HR interview and lots of people were dissatisfied by that experience because they went into the room for the interview with an unrealistic expectation of what it was going to involve and what they were going to get out of it; but it was our fault that they had an unrealistic expectation. They thought that they would find out where they were going to go next and when, but we were just at an information gathering stage. We hadn't really conveyed that effectively so we ran into problems. We also learnt that we needed to be extremely sensitive in dealing with people, both collectively and individually. By and large Governors and their Senior Management Teams were pretty tremendous in doing that.

KH: What is your view on the speed that prisons have closed following the announcements?

PC: My honestly held and firm view is that we got the pace of that pretty much right and I think the overwhelming number of people that I spoke to who were affected by the closures agreed with that; but I recognise that some people felt differently. For the most part, I think that it is right to just get on with it at a

reasonable pace. There are real challenges keeping a prison running when everyone knows that it is going to close and some of the running down of the population for some of the local prisons could happen very rapidly, just by us stopping sending new people there. A population could drop very rapidly in just a few weeks and it would seem a bit daft to do anything else after the announcement had been made. The biggest difficulty for a lot of our staff and prisoners was the uncertainty about what was happening next so making it more protracted seemed to me, to be disadvantageous. However it was too quick for some people.

KH: Most of the prisons closed have a long history, such as Reading prisons link to Oscar Wilde. How does it make you feel to make the decision to bring that history to a close?

PC: I wasn't making the decision by myself, so I didn't feel a personal responsibility in that way. I'm not sure Michael Spurr would either. It is quite an involved process involving a number of colleagues carrying out the analysis and so it never felt that level of responsibility.

KH: Did that history or sentiment play any part in the decision making?

PC: No.

KH: How will that history be recorded?

PC: We didn't prescribe anything. For some of them there is already a lot of activity in the recent past — there was a book published by a staff member of Shepton Mallet about the history of the place. There was activity about recording the closure as part of the history of the place. There were steps taken to preserve documents which were of historical interest. There were things done to record the closure day. In Shrewsbury there were photos and videos taken of the last prisoners leaving Shrewsbury. In more than one place there was almost a guard of honour from the staff clapping out the last prisoners onto the bus. There were also closure ceremonies of different types — the formal lowering of the flag, staff marching out of the prison and the local community being involved. In the local towns the community came to clap the staff out.

KH: What will happen to those physical buildings now?

PC: That has to be determined and I think it could end up varying quite a lot, because there are ongoing

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costs just making sure that they are safe. We could end up in the situation where the land is just sold off and someone will come and redevelop it into something else. There are also complications with some of them because they are listed buildings. That set of issues is in the hand of Ministry of Justice estates.

KH: Is there any consideration on the impact on the local community when deciding which prison to close?

PC: There is, but it is fairly limited. There isn't specific analysis done on the impact on the local community. Broadly speaking in terms of our responsibility to the tax payer we had to make those decisions which made sense to the National Offender Management Service with approval from collective representatives and Ministers. If there were concerns of that nature it was really a concern outside of our remit. We were mindful that if a number of places in the same region were vulnerable then we tried to limit how many were closed. Some prisons can be significant players in the local economies and we did have that in mind but it wasn't a formal part of our consideration.

KH: Do you feel that closures and other areas of reform are having an impact on stability across prisons?

PC: Yes. There are clearly a whole set of risks which arise from the reforms and that includes risks to stability. There is good reason to suppose that the prisons system is running pretty hot at the moment and that there are quite a lot of strains. It can be very difficult to unpick what all the different drivers are though. We have seen an increase in some cases of disorder over the last year or so including prisoner protests and barricades. While the vast majority of them are not that serious they have increased. However, we've also seen similar trends in places which have not been affected by the reform in the public sector and we've also seen the same trends in the private sector, which haven't been subject to reform at all. So it does point to the fact that there might be other issues going on as well. I do think the closures have had an impact on some prisoners who are now further away from home than they were; either in this sentence or if they have come back into prison subsequently. There have been a lot of population movements and this can be unsettling for those involved and for the establishments

which have received large numbers. Some prisons are now serving more courts; they have a bigger catchment area now and that produces more strains for them, in terms of business and also the population that they are managing. So there have been some impacts. Broadly speaking I would expect a lot of that to have settled down by now; a lot of people would have been released by now.

KH: How do you personally manage the responsibility of the impact on staff, prisoners and on the community in your decision to close prisons?

PC: It's about having an approach which is reflected by the fact that we have to make a lot of difficult decisions. I don't hide from the fact that this is a set of really difficult decisions. There is something about the responsibility about how you make it so you put in place proper discipline and rigour about how you reach it so it's reached on a proper foundation and with a justifiable basis, so it is never arbitrary or haphazard — that is very important. Not just for the reasons stated in the question but also because of our responsibility to the tax payer and the public; we have to have a completely solid set of reasons for why we are doing what we are doing. We also need to manage the approach comprehensively but also in a way which reflects our institutional values, so we don't stop treating prisoners with decency and respect because they are going somewhere else soon. We need to reflect the need for the system to be overall coherent and for there to be adequate provisions for specialist services. We need to recognise that there were many good business reasons why these decisions were made and to support people through. The Governors all did this very well. We were very clear, the Senior Management Team, that we needed to have a physical presence in this. I was very keen to take that on myself and visit all the prisons and be alongside people and recognise the impacts and learn what we could do better. Also to recognise their professionalism and that throughout the process and despite their own insecurities they were still running the prison well and that I appreciated that and to say thank you. Also to wish them well for the future in whatever it was they were doing.

Interview: Jeremy Wright

*Jeremy Wright is Member of Parliament for the constituency of Kenilworth and Southam. He became Minister for Prisons and Probation in September 2012 before becoming Attorney General in July 2014. He is interviewed by **Sacha Darke**, University of Westminster.
The interview took place in April 2014.*

SD: How do the prison closures fit in with wider Ministry of Justice and public sector prison reform, for example the transforming rehabilitation agenda, and the drive to reduce costs?

JW: Well, as you say, there are two elements to that. There is the necessity to reduce costs. The Prison Unit Costs Programme is, as the name suggests, designed to take costs out of the prison system. We need to do that for all the reasons I don't need to go into around the state of the public finances. But there is also another purpose, and that is to give us the best environment in which to conduct rehabilitation because, as we always try and explain, prison has a number of different purposes. Yes, it needs to punish. Yes, it needs to protect the public. But it also needs to rehabilitate. And it's important that we give Prison Officers and others the best environment in which to conduct that rehabilitation. So, it isn't sensible to continue to try and deliver rehabilitation in old Victorian prisons where the environment isn't conducive to that. I think that in many of the prisons we have which are older prisons, the staff do a fantastic job, but they are doing it despite the environment, not because of it. If you move from that to a purpose-built much more modern environment, not only is it a better place to work, but also it enables you to build more capacity for working prisons for example. So quite a lot of Victorian prisons- you go to any of the Victorian prisons in London- they struggle to fit into the physical estate, the space they want for workshops, and other workspace. If you build something purpose built, then you have the capacity to put in some much more extensive workspace; and we are very much in favour of seeing prisoners work. That's partly for rehabilitative purposes, it's partly to make sure they are gainfully occupied during their custodial period. So, for all those reasons, it's sensible to move from older estate to newer estate and that's what we are seeking to do here.

SD: It was reported in the papers in October 2013 that the prison system was nearing capacity following the closure of four prisons. Following the speed of these closures, does the system have enough resilience to cope with significant population fluctuations?

JW: Yes, and we always keep enough capacity to deal with that, but you also have to factor in something else. And that is that if you keep a large number of empty prison cells that you are not using and you have no expectation of using in the near future, that has a cost. So we shouldn't expect I think the taxpayer to pay for prison capacity that they were not using and we have no expectation of using anytime soon. So, we've reduced the headroom to make sure we don't carry additional capacity that we are not going to need. But that doesn't mean to say that we haven't got the scope to bring some of that capacity back on stream if we need it. And, of course, what we've made very clear is that by the end of this parliament, which isn't all that far away now, we will have more adult male prison places than we inherited at the beginning of the parliament. So, there will be not only now, but in the future, sufficient prison capacity for the courts to send whoever they think it's appropriate to send into custody. That's our primary purpose, we have to provide the capacity that the courts may need. But, as I said, it's quite important that we prove that capacity in the most efficient way, but also in the way that is most conducive to the delivery of rehabilitation. So, what we are doing is we're building new capacity, we're building additional house blocks for existing prisons. The first of those will come on stream later on this year. And then we also have a longer term plan to provide a large new prison in Wrexham, which we expect to be operational in 2017. So there is new capacity coming on stream, but we have what we need to accept those that the courts send to us, and we will always seek to be in that position.

SD: Has the closure program achieved the objectives that you hoped for?

JW: Yes because we have been able to take costs out of the system by making those closures and to move towards a situation where we are going to be providing newer capacity. It's never easy to close institutions and it's always important, I think, to make it clear when you do, that it's no reflection at all of the performance of the staff who work there who, in many cases, have been doing a brilliant job. But, that, in many cases, is despite the environment they're in, not because of it. We've tried very hard to make sure that

we can conduct that closure programme without compulsory redundancies, but in the end you've got to make a rational judgement about how you use the estate that you've got. And if you've got headroom, if you've got facilities that are either very old and not fit for purpose, or which have very substantial amounts of money needing to be spent on them to bring them up to the required standard, then in the end you have to make a fairly hard-headed judgement as to what the best thing to do is. And so that will, in some cases, mean the closure of prisons, and that's why we have taken the decisions we have.

SD: From what you have seen, has the public sector reform programme delivered through the Prison Unit Costs Programme made it more likely that future new build prisons such as the one at Wrexham could be operated by the public sector?

JW: I will answer that, but just to go backwards a bit, the decisions that we were faced with — Chris Grayling and I — when we first came to the job in Autumn 2012, were connected to eight or nine prisons that at that point were being competed. So, we had to decide whether to privatise those prisons as part of what would have been a wider programme of privatisations in the future or whether to say, look, is there another way we can do this? And the other way which we decided we would do this is the, benchmarking programme which came to us as a result of the bids made by the public sector to run the eight or nine prisons which were at that point were being competed. They involved taking costs out of core custodial services, but keeping them in the public sector; but then contracting out ancillary services and things like the repair and maintenance contracts. And that seemed to us to be quite an attractive model. So, the deal that we did was to say to the public sector prison service, look, if you can do this everywhere, then this to us is an attractive model and we can put wholesale privatisation of individual prisons back on the shelf. And that is what we decided to do. The success of that programme — and I think so far so good, but there is more to be done — will certainly influence any decision as to whether or not prisons in the future can be managed on that model or whether we will have to look at a different way of doing that. I should make it clear, no decision has been taken as to how Wrexham prison would be run, but it is certainly true that if the benchmarking process is successful and demonstrates that it can be achieved, then it would

increase the likelihood that we would do something similar at Wrexham.

SD: How was the closure announcement communicated and what constraints to communication did you face?

JW: Well the biggest constraint is that you have to tell Parliament first, so this is an announcement that Parliament has to hear before anyone else does. Of course, you also want to manage the sensitivities of telling staff members about the closure of their workplace and so we want them to know as soon as possible as well. Against all of that, you have also got to factor in that we have got a twenty-four hour media, and almost as soon as something is said, it becomes very public, very quickly. So giving staff the information as soon as we'd want to give it to them,

without compromising the rules of parliamentary procedure, is a big challenge. You can absolutely visualise members of staff who are on their day off or who are not working that particular day, going to see it on the news before they necessarily hear it from their governor; and that's always regrettable. We try very hard to avoid that where we can, and in relation to some of the recent closures, we really have tried hard. I think there was one incident where we were emailing somebody in Greece to give this information because that is where they happened to be. We

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try very hard to give staff that information as quickly as possible because I am very conscious that it is going to come as a shock to them. Although, frankly, in some cases, I think, staff will have a fair idea that the prison's future may not be assured. It's up to me obviously to make sure, first of all, that parliament knows, but also that local Members of Parliament have that information as soon as we can give it to them as well. And then, the Governor will want to give that information to their staff as soon as he or she is able to do so.

SD: What communication or engagement took place with cabinet colleagues and local MPs before, during, and after the closures?

JW: In terms of local MPs, you always want to give them as much of a heads-up as you can. Then, of course, there are inevitably questions that get asked after the event and we need to respond to those and explain the rationale for what we are doing. There is, certainly, a period after the announcement where we field questions on the rationale behind it, but that that's absolutely as it should be. Of course, Members

of Parliament, and indeed members of the public, are perfectly entitled to ask questions about why we've done what we've done. And we think it's important to set out the rationale for each of those changes.

SD: Is it possible to allow wider consultation with the public and professionals, such as with court closure programs and the opening of new prisons such as Wrexham, when considering prison closure sites?

JW: There is, certainly in the opening of a new prison — there is a consultation process and that is of course because we have to go through a planning process, as well as a decision process within the confines of the Ministry of Justice, in order to establish a new prison. I think it's very difficult though, in relation to decisions to close prisons, to engage in any kind of extensive consultation beforehand. Effectively you are announcing at least your consideration of the closure of the prison well in advance and that causes some considerable concern among those who work there. I think if you were to consult on the closure of a prison, that would start people being very concerned. Then concluding perhaps that you weren't going to close that prison, you might have done a lot of damage in the process. So, that is a problem. In the end, we've got to make the best judgement we can as to how best to manage the prison estate, and I think if you consult people who work at a prison asking 'Do you want us to close your prison?' quite a lot will say no. And while it is actually interesting, I find, if you propose to a local community that you are going to build a prison near to them, quite a lot of people will object and say 'No we don't want that, thank you very much.' If, on the other hand, you talk to a community that's had a prison for a long time and say, 'We're going to take your prison away,' then they say 'No, don't take the prison away; we like the prison; the prison has all kinds of benefits to us.' So it is interesting that nobody wants it until they've got it, and then nobody wants to lose it.

SD: Do you feel that larger prisons provide the best balance between rehabilitation, efficiency, safety, decency and security?

JW: I think there are a couple of provisos here: I think it depends what you mean by 'larger prisons', and it depends how that prison is run and managed. I think a larger prison, by which I think we mean two thousand

or so places, is certainly capable of delivering all of those things if it's properly run; balancing the most cost-effective way of delivering the prison estate with the most effective way of delivering rehabilitation. I think we can get that balance right with a prison about that size. What I think people shouldn't run away with the idea of though is that this is the recreation of Titan Prisons, or that this it is the proposal to build, one monolithic structure with two-thousand prisoners in it. It won't be like that. It will be a number of smaller units that together will make up a larger whole. The advantage there is that you're able to create a smaller living environment, but you're able still to achieve the economies of scale of bringing in services for the whole prison. That seems to us the most cost-effective way of

doing it as well as the way in which we can deliver the best facilities. Take Wrexham as a good example. If you look at the plans for Wrexham, then what we're proposing to do is to put two very large spaces for work in the middle of the prison and that's going to give you huge flexibility to do all kinds of vocational courses, forklift driving, warehouse management, bricklaying; all those things can be done if you have the space. And in some prisons that is exactly what is going on, and it's good to see because you are giving prisoners the kind of skills they need if they are going to go and find employment when they

leave. So giving yourself the scope to provide those kind of facilities, it's hugely important for rehabilitation and, realistically, you're not going to give yourself that kind of scope if you are building a smaller prison — you are only going to give yourself that if you are building a larger one. So I think we can get that balance right. It doesn't mean that we can assume it will all happen, we need to think about the details. But I do believe that if you have the proper approach to that balance between cost-effectiveness and providing the right environment for rehabilitation, you probably will end up actually with a prison of around two thousand places. And that is certainly the model we are seeking to follow in Wrexham.

SD: In July 2010 Anne Owers suggested that the age of austerity offered the chance to reform a prison system had become too big to succeed. Is there still a role, as she recommended, for smaller prisons alongside the new larger prisons?

JW: Yes, I don't think I should give the impression that we are overnight going to move to a position

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where all prisons are two thousand places. There will still be a huge range of different types of institution and of course you want that, because different types of prisoner require different types of environment. We have the youth estate to think about as well, which isn't going to be replicating what we do exactly in the adult estate either. Also the female population needs to be accommodated in a different way. It doesn't follow that every prison will look the same. But we do think that you need to move towards a balance of cost-effectiveness with the ability to deliver good rehabilitation and that will move us towards a newer estate rather than to an older estate, but that is going to be a process over a considerable period of time. Our prisons are for people of all different ages at the moment, so it isn't going to be an overnight process, certainly.

SD: In terms of the location of these prisons, the larger they get the fewer prisons we will have and the further people will be held away from their families. Is location an important part of the decision-making process?

JW: Yes, if you take our decision in Wrexham, for example, what we have done there is look at where we have got a deficit between the demand for prison places and the prison places available. I have got a map on my wall of the prison estate and you only have to look at it to see where the big gaps are. There are no prisons in North Wales and we do have a deficit between demand and supply in the North-West of England in particular. So putting something in Wrexham, which is in North Wales, but gives us the capacity to accommodate some of that demand from the North-West of England, is very sensible. You are right that if you move towards larger prisons you will probably end up with fewer of them and of course this is an issue that we see in very sharp relief in the youth estate at the moment. Because of the drop in the population in the youth estate, we can justify fewer institutions. That means that young people, for whom I think distance from home is particularly important, end up being further away. I don't think there is actually much you can do about that because the only alternative would be to have a very small institution in lots and lots of different places and that isn't a viable model. I think we

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do have to accept that there will always be challenges around closeness to home. What I think will help tremendously though is that we intend, as part of our Transforming Rehabilitation Programme, to establish what we call resettlement prisons. For eighty or so of the prisons in the estate at the moment, they will become resettlement prisons. What that means is we seek to get the majority of prisoners into a prison close to the area where they are going to be released for the closing stages of the custodial part of their sentence. Not only is it better for family to be able to come and visit them, but it is also a big advantage in the delivery of rehabilitation. We want to see rehabilitation providers making contact with offenders when they are in the closing stages of the custodial part of their sentence, not just when they have left prison, but well before they have left prison so that they can make those initial contacts. They can start to develop a plan for what is going to happen when that offender walks out of that prison gate so that they are not doing it to an empty world in which they've got no guidance and no support, but they are doing it where they've got a rehabilitation provider already engaged with them who can assist them in that difficult period of transition, and then support them for a period of time thereafter. So, having resettlement prisons makes it easier to deliver that kind of rehabilitation because if you are a rehabilitation provider, you can

concentrate your efforts in a couple of prisons where you are going to be finding the people who you are going to be dealing with out in the community. All of that, I think, is very important to remember when we're talking about where we locate our prisons and the type of prisons.

SD: Another argument put forward in support of smaller prisons relates to prison cultures. Do you think good relationships between staff and prisoners can be delivered in the model of 2,000 population prisons with smaller units within them?

JW: I do, because I think those inter-relationships are important. But you can have that so long as you have got a relatively manageably sized residential unit because that is where most of those relationships are going to occur. Absolutely, if we were building one

block with 2,000 prisoners in it, then I think that would be a valid concern, but I think what you are effectively talking about is, in residential terms at least, a number of smaller prisons on one site. In that case, I see no reason why we can't replicate those kinds of relationships.

SD: How do you feel industrial relations within prisons, NOMS and more widely have been over the period of recent prison closures? How do you think they will be over the next few years?

JW: I think, given that we are talking about a programme of prison closures, given that we are talking about taking cost out of the system, industrial relations are actually rather good, because you can imagine the pressures that there are in conducting all of those activities. I think a large part of it is showing our faith in the public sector's ability to do this by the benchmarking process. We have already worked with the unions to say, look, rather than privatising prison after prison after prison, let's try it this way, let's try working together to deliver these cost-savings. The benchmarking process has the support of the Prison Officers Association which is very helpful and so I think actually, industrial relations are better than people might expect. That doesn't mean to say that there aren't difficulties and, certainly, when you look at the benchmarking process as it's supplied to individual prisons, there are some tough things that need to be done and there are always going to be points of friction. I don't think you could ever pretend that that wouldn't happen, but to be honest, where we have disagreements, we will discuss them.

SD: Most of the prisons closed have a long history, some of which are quite iconographic, such as Reading Prison's link to Oscar Wilde. How does it feel to make the decision to bring that history to a conclusion?

JW: I think that closing any prison is not an easy decision, but I think we have to make a rational judgement as to how we best manage the estate. I don't think that we can allow ourselves to say, 'Well this particular prison has a wonderful history, therefore we must keep it open,' if it is not the most efficient and effective working environment for prisoners and prison staff. Now that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be sensitive, of course, to the history of the building and, certainly, what we seek to do is to preserve the nature of the building to make sure that any future use and any future purchaser of the building and the site

understands fully what they are buying. Local authorities will have an interest in making sure that, whatever the future use of the site may be, it's appropriate in their view. In the end we need to have a prison estate that is capable of delivering the services that we need it to deliver. I don't think that we can take too much account of the long history of the prison, and of course, almost by definition, the longer the history of the prison, almost the least likely it is of being capable of delivering a modern environment that we want to have. That is, as I say, not just for the sake of the taxpayers benefit, although that is important, but it's also for the benefit of prisoners and prison staff who might enjoy the history of the place but probably have rather more frustration about the environment in which they are being forced to work, which clearly isn't designed for the kind of prison regime that we want to run now. So whether it's Reading or whether it's Dartmoor, I think we respect the history, but I don't think it allows us to keep in operation prisons that aren't quite what we want them to be.

SD: As we close small sites and increase large prisons, for reasons of efficiency, what are the potential impacts on the experience of prisoners?

JW: I think the experience of prisoners is partially defined by the relationships they have with staff, but I think it is also defined by the environment in which they are living. I don't think that we do prisoners any favours by accommodating them in older buildings where the maintenance problems are multiple and where the cost of keeping that accommodation up to a decent standard is much, much higher. I don't think that is the right way to do this. My job as Prisons Minister is to provide a safe, secure and decent environment. Not a luxurious one, but a safe, secure and decent environment for all those accommodated in prison and, therefore, I think it is more sensible to do that in more modern buildings than in older buildings. It's also, as I've said, better for prisoners, in my view, to be able to engage in rehabilitation whilst they are in custody. The more we provide the space to do that, whether it's in the classroom or in the workplace, within a custodial environment, the better for prisoners. So I am quite confident that the changes we are making are better for prisoners in the short term and in the long term and better for all of us.

SD: The large prisons that are being constructed are around 2,000 places rather than the Titan prison project, previously rejected,

In the end we need to have a prison estate that is capable of delivering the services that we need it to deliver.

which envisaged prisons holding 3,000. Titan prisons were also designed to have smaller units within them. What differences is it envisaged will be delivered by this change in capacity?

JW: Well, we think that around the 2,000 figure is the best balance between economic efficiency and delivery of the right kinds of facilities. So it is that balance which we think is best struck at around about that figure. We are not in the business of recreating Titan prisons and as you say, the key point here in terms of accommodation and the feel of the place, is that this is not one big monolithic structure. It is a number of different residential units on one site, but where we are able to bring in the benefits of shared services — whether that's the catering or the laundry, there are cost-savings to be made by doing that. I think it is that balance that we need to strike between cost-effectiveness and providing the right environment for rehabilitation. I think the 2,000, or thereabouts figure, is the right balance.

SD: In July 2010 Anne Owers also warned the new Government that there is no such thing as humane containment. As an example, I have visited Wormwood Scrubs Prison twice in the last few weeks. I found landing staff to be concerned that staffing cuts were making it more and more difficult for them to allow prisoners out of their cells. Not only for purposeful activities, but even for association. With this in mind, in the current climate how can prisons be further reformed so as to be more successful in reducing reoffending?

JW: It's an issue and that's why the benchmarking process is never going to be without local controversy. There may not be agreement as to what the benchmarking process says is necessary in terms of staffing levels in order to maintain a proper regime. But the benchmarking process is not designed around a

model that says all prisoners must spend all the time behind their cell doors. The benchmarking process is designed to produce a regime that enables prisoners to get out, to be engaged in purposeful activity, whether that's education, or drug treatment, or work. Actually, we are having some success across the estate in increasing not only the number of prisoners who are out working, but also the number of prison hours worked. I think over a million more hours were worked since 2010 by prisoners and a lot more prisoners working too, so that's going in the right direction. I accept there are challenges around the benchmarking process, trying to take costs out the system at the same time as trying to deliver a better regime is always going to be a difficult one, but I think it's doable. We need to make sure that we are not impeding the opportunities for prisoners to engage in purposeful activity. We want them to engage in it because they want to as well, and that's partly the logic behind the changes to the incentives and privileges scheme. To make sure we are using every lever we've got to say to prisoners, look, you need to engage in your own rehabilitation too. So I don't pretend that this is easy, but the benchmarking process is designed to deliver a proper regime where prisoners do have a chance to engage in their own rehabilitation, and that will mean time out of the cell. Actually, there are some places where the benchmarking process has delivered more prisoner facing time for prison officers than they've had before in that prison, so its not all in one direction. Where there are particular local difficulties, of course, we will look at those, but I'm confident that benchmarking is the best way we have. This is a process that we'd agreed with the Trade Unions as the better way forward. That process is designed to, yes, take cost out, but also to deliver the kind of regime that we want to see.

Interview: Nick Coleman

Nick Coleman is NACRO's Area Manager for the criminal system contracts. He has worked for NACRO for 10 years, prior to that he was employed by the Apex Charitable Trust. He has worked in various custodial settings, most notably HMP Onley (with Apex as part of resettlement work (funded by Custody 2 Work) and HMP Wellingborough. He is interviewed by Tony Corcoran, Governor of HMP Haverigg. The interview took place in January 2014.

TC: What is the process for engaging the VCS when opening a new prison?

NC: Mainly speaking from my own experiences, the core role is fairly integral to prisons work, with the likes of a new build at Littlehey and the opening of Bure. In those examples we were already engaging in area on area-wide resettlement contracts. The process was about bringing other prisons into the existing contract and management in the usual way. If I had been looking to contract organisations to deliver work in those new prisons, I would have been operating through NOMS Procurement. That is how we would have moved it forward. To some extent, speaking from a Prime focus charity, that is a slightly different experience.

TC: How do you go about identifying how the VCS can contribute to a new prison?

NC: For much of the resettlement contracts, because NOMS have a specific need that they would like fulfilling, as an organisation we are well placed to respond. We would look to adapt that to suit the establishment we were looking at. It is difficult to identify how we would look to do something and get the funding.

TC: What practical challenges are there to operating in a new prison?

NC: At Bure and Littlehey the feedback from the staff who were around in the early stages was variable in terms of expectations. They were appointed 5 weeks ahead of the opening and had a lot of training and established relationships in advance. All of that preliminary work was happening in advance of the opening. At Bure particularly, there were delays in security clearance, which had a knock on effect. Recruitment hasn't been an issue for us but because we are fairly established in region (66 Managers within the contract) existing experience and expertise assisted with this. Having identified people to appoint the difficulties were in terms of accommodation, i.e., office and interview space.

TC: Are there any good examples of how the VCS and new prisons have worked particularly well together recently?

NC: Bure and Littlehey, on the whole, are good examples. Bure was more successful than Littlehey due,

in part, to being on site prior to the opening and delays in security clearance; also there were new officers in large numbers. There was a sense that everyone was essentially 'finding their feet'. Bure was more of a challenge for various reasons, including issues with training.

TC: What type of training?

NC: I would be speculating a little, as I was not directly involved. I would expect security clearance, some job specific training and peer training on legislation, etc. Areas that we were involved in and staff expectations about how a prison operates, how to work within the establishment — building relationships with staff, which helps.

TC: What are your hopes/aspirations for the VCS regarding the proposed new prison in North Wales?

NC: To some extent it feels that it depends on how successfully it will link to the government's agenda. It is a changing backdrop to CR which will determine how successful a large prison is. It is well documented that large prisons have logistical problems. From the point of view of our work, thinking about crime reduction, the issue about distance from home is probably the biggest challenge. The fact it is in the North West and therefore has opportunities to be closer to home for Welsh prisoners is welcome, but other prisoners may be further from their home area. The brief for resettlement on such a large scale will depend on how successful moves closer to home towards the end of their sentence are facilitated.

TC: Do you believe that a prison could be effectively run entirely by the VCS? Are there any international examples of this? Why or why not?

NC: I can't see it happening, not exclusively a VCS organisation. The role of prison officers would be something a VCS organisation would struggle with. Expertise and experience generally ... so in terms of knowledge experience and expertise, no.

TC: Do you believe that it is possible for enough VCS organisations to come together to competitively bid to operate a prison?

NC: Not that I know of. I'm coming from an operational background and I'm not aware of anything.

TC: NACRO are a large organisation with good resources — would they bid?

NC: I suspect not, I think even allowing for the size of some organisations, there's still a huge financial requirement there. It feels as though there is still a role there for the Prison Service. From a VCS point of view, we would want to be involved, in that with any new jail there is potential for involvement. We would want VCS input from the outset — but I suspect not at the moment.

TC: Do you feel that larger prisons provide the best balance between rehabilitation, efficiency, safety, decency and security? Is there still a role to be played for the small prison?

NC: I think so, again, it comes back to transforming rehabilitation and how successful that model will be implemented. 2000 prisoners seems to be too large a prison and challenges that I think would be the 'what are the mechanism for moving back to home areas closer to release dates' — if that works well, then a large prison negates some of that risk.

TC: Jails smaller than 400 perform better — best outcomes for prisoners ...

NC: It is a great challenge. It seems to me that the ideal is a larger number of smaller prisons, all operating in a better way within communities and discharge areas, closer to home — essentially every jail working as a resettlement jail holding prisoners and discharging more locally, and then in a position to develop local interventions and links. But that is a very expensive way to run prisons. That brings us back to transformation and outcomes for individuals. Clearly there's some clever thinking that can be done with technology.

TC: Is that what you mean by innovation?

NC: Could be both — in terms of what really is important about new build prisons, is that they need to have successful interventions for prisoners, and dedicated space to deliver them, and there needs to be space to conduct private interviews — particular things that allow VCS organisations to operate in an effective way. There are opportunities to build that in at the planning stage.

TC: Do you consider yourself part of a pressure group, enforcing political views?

NC: It is an aspect of our work, yes.

TC: Is the VCS involved in the decision making regarding prison closures or opening new prisons?

NC: In terms of decisions, the policy element of the organisation about opening new prisons. In terms of closure, it has not been necessarily reactive but on a practical level we have been involved where we have had staff in closing prisons, withdrawing services, etc.

TC: How is the decision to close a prison communicated to the VCS organisations that work there?

NC: In every instance the manager, whichever of our managers was local to that site, was informed. Usually delivery staff and other staff in the establishment are briefed, and then it comes back to the manager to make arrangements from there out.

TC: In terms of Staff surveys, engagement, etc — how do you measure morale? What happens to staff?

NC: Our staff, when we have contracts that cut across a number of prisons within a region, a lot of that is work that we have to do to consider whether we can find a suitable post. We haven't got huge numbers of staff in any one location so we look at whether there are vacancies, or there are likely to be in the near future — but in some cases there's no option but to make someone redundant. In terms of managing

morale, it works best when there is open dialogue with prison managers — in terms of timescales, etc, so everyone can have a clear idea of what is happening. There is also the possibility for directly employed — it is a time of uncertainty for all involved — often Prison Service colleagues that they have been working with for some time, so there is a collective understanding.

TC: What impact does a closing prison have on the VCS workforce and any associated funding?

NC: It presents a challenge for us. Where we have contracts that span a number of jails, often we have certain staff within a management structure that reflects an area of responsibility in a number of jails and it tends to be smaller, more remote jails that close. The number of

. . . in terms of what really is important about new build prisons, is that they need to have successful interventions for prisoners, and dedicated space to deliver them, and there needs to be space to conduct private interviews — particular things that allow VCS organisations to operate in an effective way.

delivery staff affected is low and if we can negotiate some balance in terms of the price, we often still need the same management structure so there is a risk. It is a bit of a balancing act and we tend to go back and negotiate.

TC: Have the recent two rounds of closures made VCS organisations more reluctant to get involved with certain prisons?

NC: It is difficult to say at the moment, it is a competition environment and in the next year or so it may prove to be. Our preference is for contracts that cover a number of establishments, therefore allowing for a management structure that oversees that. A single isolated jail is difficult to manage. These are factors in our risk assessment but wouldn't necessarily put us off. If one of those jails was part of a wider area, we may just have to plan in the knowledge that there is a chance it could close, but it is difficult to second guess these closures. We need to know all of the considerations so it is not a perfect scenario.

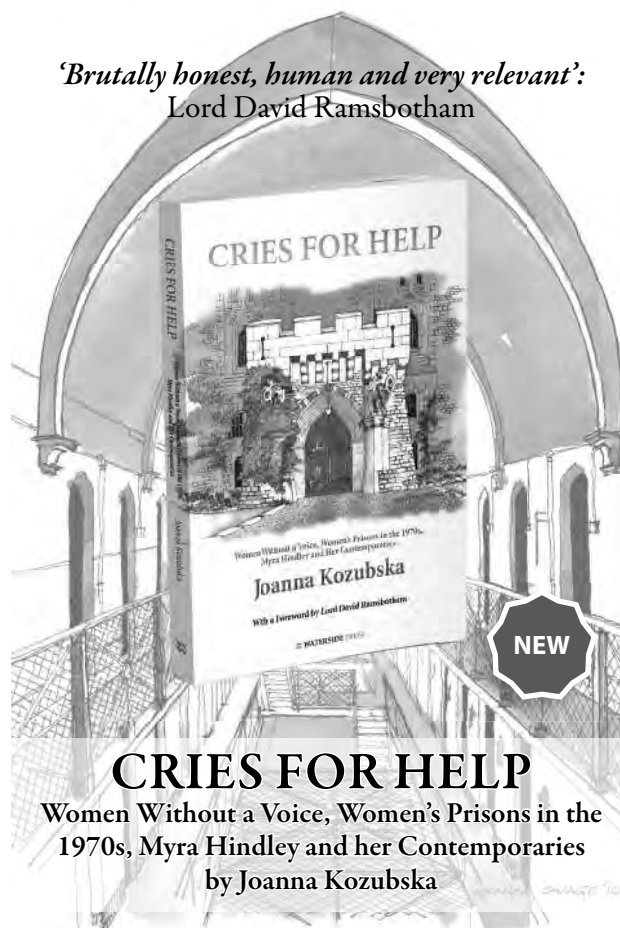
TC: What are the key learning points from a VCS perspective following the recent closures and newly opened prisons?

NC: For prison closures I would suggest create a model that allows enough flexibility to anticipate closures. For most of the contracts we hold, prison closures were a reality and our model didn't necessarily anticipate that. Communication with managers and prison managers, and with NOMS procurement and making sure that operationally, what we deliver continues to deliver up to the closure, and make sure we are looking at reducing the roll, where prisoners are going, etc. That allows us to plan interventions accordingly. Communication about contractual implications for both parties. For opening prisons I would suggest plan from the outset to include VCS. Build prisons in a format (structure of buildings) that anticipates the needs of interventions — office space, interview rooms, etc.

TC: How do you make that decision? Have you got access to information? How do you know what programmes?

NC: In terms of planning the build of the prison, it doesn't matter which interventions, but that there is physical space for those interventions to be delivered. In terms of the planning of the building, they need to anticipate that those things will be happening. They need to think about the group delivery and interview space that is provided and that there will be a requirement for office space to respond to that. Where we have started in each prison, the staff are using OASys, NOMIS, etc, and those things become more integral to the prison service work but also to us. In terms of how successfully they operate, there's still a lot that needs to be ironed out.

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Interview: Prisoner B

Prisoner B was one of the first prisoners to arrive at HMP Isis after it opened. He is interviewed by Michael Fiddler, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Greenwich. The interview took place in February 2014.

MF: How did you feel about transferring to a brand new prison?

PB: I felt alright. I was probably happy because I was in a jail that was old and rundown and this jail was brand new. I probably felt good at the time because it was local for me. I was in Portland before here and it's like four, four-and-a-half hours away.

MF: What were the differences between Portland and Isis?

PB: Portland had a regime. This jail didn't have no regime when it first opened. This prison was new. There was only like two wings open when I first come in 2010. So, it was all new. There weren't that much staff. It weren't better, but it was cleaner. That was the only better thing.

MF: So, has there been a big difference between then and now in terms of...

PB: Yeah, cos it filled out. It got more officers. They got a regime.

MF: What information were you given prior to transfer and what did you know about the prison when you arrived?

PB: I only knew that it was in London. That's all I knew. They didn't give me no information. They just told me that 'you're getting transferred tomorrow. Have your stuff ready by like 9 o'clock. We'll come get you.' And that's it.

MF: Not the name of the place?

PB: Yeah, they gave me HMP/YOI Isis and it's in South London. That's all they said — it's YOI. Only when I got here that I read some stuff and it said what it's about and all that. But, I got no information prior to coming here.

MF: And you hadn't heard of the place?

PB: I heard about it getting built, but I never heard about it. I heard it was a new prison being built next to Belmarsh. I never heard of the name.

MF: How did you hear about that?

PB: Family. This place was getting built from 2009 or 2008. It took them like two years to build this. And it's local as well. So if you hear about a prison being built, then you probably know.

MF: Compared to your expectations, what was different when you arrived?

PB: I didn't really have no expectations because I didn't really know what it was like. I wasn't really given that information. So, I wouldn't have known.

MF: What advantages and disadvantages are there to being in a prison without any 'history'?

PB: Hmmm, disadvantage: don't know what could happen. You don't know who's there, what it's like. Advantage: it's new. I don't know. I don't really think that there's an advantage to it. There are probably disadvantages because you don't know what prisoners are there, what they're like, what the jail's like, what officers are like there. The only advantage is that it was clean. Most prisons ain't really clean. They've been there for like fifty, sixty years and they're a bit run down and that. But here it's two, three years old. So it's still clean and that. Brand new.

MF: Does it still feel new?

PB: Yeah, it still does.

MF: Did you feel safe when you arrived at the prison?

PB: Yeah, officers there and that, so yeah.

MF: Were there appropriate support measures in place for prisoners when you arrived?

PB: No. Not when I come here. There wasn't even that much officers here. Half of them had just started working in prison. So they didn't even know what to do. They had to get officers from other jails to come and help them sort out the jail, to get a regime. I don't think they knew what they were doing themselves.

MF: Was that an odd situation to be in?

PB: This is my first time in prison so I never knew what to expect. I never knew that I was meant to get help or they were meant to give you sources, to tell you like 'you can do this' and 'you can do that'. I wasn't aware of that. So, if they did give it to me, then I'd be alright. But if they didn't, then I wouldn't know. None the wiser.

MF: Were staff confident in the appropriate use of their authority when you arrived?

PB: I think that they were clueless at the beginning, man. I don't think they even knew what they were doing. We probably had the same amount of knowledge as they had about how to run a prison. All they had was just keys.

MF: Did you find all of the services required for prisoners were in place when you arrived?

PB: Yeah and no. I didn't know what was meant to be there. I didn't know what help I was meant to get. So, anything that I did get, I would have been, like, 'cool'.

MF: Overtime, what kinds of things have become accessible that weren't available when you first arrived?

PB: Everything. Education, sentence plans, everything. 'This' [the interview]. If you'd asked the governor to do 'this' when the prison first opened, they'd have said no. Cos they wouldn't have even known what to do. But, now they do. When it first opened, they didn't have nothing. No education, no nothing. Just nothing. It was nuts, there was just nothing.

MF: What was the typical day like then?

PB: They just give you your association from like 9 to 11. Then you're obviously locked up over lunch. Then you get another association from like 2 to 5. Then you get locked up over dinner. Then another association from 6 to 7. Then the next day. Obviously you get fed lunch, dinner, breakfast, whatever. Exercise in the morning. Now, you wake up, you exercise, you can go education, go gym. Before, when the jail first opened, there was only gym and association.

MF: Was it a big shift to have access to these things? Was it better?

PB: Yeah, it was better. For me it was better because it kills most of your day. If you're out of your cell the whole day on association, on the phone or playing pool or going gym, fine, you've got no worries. All you're going to be doing is locked up for overnight. Obviously now, you're only out for education in the morning from like 9.30 to 11. Then you're locked up from like 11 till 1. And then 2 o'clock to 4, education again. That's your day done. But before, you'd just be out the whole day because they didn't know what to do, innit. There weren't that much staff. It was laidback then.

MF: What's education like now?

PB: It's just like every other jail. It's just normal jail education. I'm an orderly, innit. I'm a cleaner and a server on my wing. So, the last time I was in education was a while ago. I think I was in business studies, but it's nothing to NVQ-level. It's nothing to diploma level. Obviously it's good work. It teaches you stuff, but it's not beneficial education that will get you grades that you can come out and use. You probably have to do like 30 courses here to get enough credits to go starting Uni and then wait another year to start on Uni properly because you have to have a certain amount of credits.

MF: How were staff-prisoner relationships in the start?

PB: It was alright. It wasn't really bad or good. It was just normal really.

MF: What effect did being in a brand new prison have on you communicating with external legal advisors, friends and family members?

PB: Good effect. Because it was local. Cos I was far away before. I was like four hours away and now I'm like half an hour away. So it was probably a good effect. It's easier to communicate, easier for visits.

MF: Was there a full range of purposeful activity available to all prisoners from the first day?

PB: No.

MF: What more could the prison have done before opening to ensure your time there was productive?

PB: Probably have a regime. Probably have something in order ready. Like, have the education ready or something.

MF: So, when you say 'regime', what does that mean to you?

PB: Regime's like, say, they give you a timetable of what times your doors will be open, what time exercise, or education will be. What time your meals will be. What times and what days you're allowed to go to the gym. That kind of stuff. A timetable. But I never had that at first. They just opened the doors and they said 'everyone get [association] and then we'll come back in an hour'. Obviously, they never went nowhere. They would be there,

but in an hour they had to say 'yeah, association done.' Then they'd be like 'get 'em out. [Association]'. It was a disaster.

MF: Why do you say that?

PB: Because they didn't know. When the jail first opened, they didn't know what they were doing, innit. They'd just give you [association]. I've never been to another jail that you'd get three associations a day. D-cat jails, like, open jails, they don't even get three associations a day. When we first come in here, they used to give us three hot meals a day. That's how the jail was before, three gym sessions, three [associations], three hot meals. When this jail first opened, it was good. But it just went bad. They started to fix it up, like. They know what they're doing.

MF: Were adequate resettlement services in place from the start (18.52)?

PB: I didn't even know what that was at the start. I didn't even know what resettlement was. I don't think that was there, but if it was there, I would not have known. I got a long sentence, so I wouldn't even have thought about that until a couple of years later. So, I wouldn't have known about it anyway.

When this jail first opened, it was good. But it just went bad. They started to fix it up, like. They know what they're doing.

MF: But is that something that you're aware of now?

PB: Yeah, I am aware of it now. I've probably known about it for like two years. I was eligible for that, like, last year. But, the jail... even though the jail's got better, it's still, in some departments, it's still bad. That department is bad. Resettlement. All that stuff.

MF: Would it be better to stay here, as it's close to your family, or would it be better to go to a Cat-D?

PB: Way better to go to a Cat-D.

MF: Even if it was further away?

PB: I'd go to a Cat-D if it's where Portland is. Way better. I don't really like this jail, to be honest. I've only been in this jail because I turned 21 last year, so I was still a YO. But, if I had the chance, I would have asked to leave like three years ago. I would have asked to leave a long time ago. But where I'm a YO, they don't really transfer you. So I had to wait till I'm 21.

MF: So, why...

PB: Am I still here?

MF: Well, no! What is it about this particular prison?

PB: I dunno. I read it in something it's a 'gang prison', like it specialises in gangs stuff, gang members and trying to reform them. It's a YO. That's why I don't really like it. Cos an Adult jail and YO jails are two different things. YO prison is just kids that are fighting. They're rubbish. But adult jail, you've got old men just doing their own, no problems.

MF: And you'd prefer to be in...

PB: I'd prefer to go to adult jail any time. If I wasn't going home so soon, then I'd be putting apps in every day to get transferred. But I've been here so long, I can't even be bothered. I've got 6 months left. I'll just do the rest in here.

MF: Did the prison cater for all or some of your sentence planning needs?

PB: They cater for all of my sentence plans. After like 2-3 years, they cater for all my sentence plans.

MF: Can you run me through what they involve?

PB: What, the sentence plan? Say if your charge has got a victim, then you would do a course called 'Victims awareness', where you'll have to think about the victim, of the family, the impact of your crime, all sorts. Then you've got another course called 'TSP' — thinking skills project. Then you've got other stuff, like your probation could give you a sentence plan to say 'don't get no adjudications', no nickings for 12 months

or don't go on basic. Every year they'll come and check your sentence plan. They did do my sentence plan in the end. Now, I've cleared all my sentence plan. I've got nothing more right. So mine's done, yeah.

MF: So did you do the TSP?

PB: Yeah, I done that last year.

MF: What was that like?

PB: It was alright. They just give you booklets to fill out with loads of writing. Makes you write about your crime, what was you thinking of the time of doing it, what are you thinking now? You got to keep thinking of stuff. It's alright though. It's good.

MF: Could you take those skills and apply them in the future?

PB: Yeah, cos it tells you to like think before you do stuff. Or, think of your relatives or stuff like that. Say if you got anger problems, before you'd just lash out and that. But, now you've ridden the sentence, next time, think and then think of your family. Say, if you do get another sentence, what would happen? So, yeah, you could use it in the future. It would be alright.

MF: How was the victims awareness course?

PB: It was probably better than TSP. They brung in a victim. every week for 6 weeks. They say how they felt. Then they show you videos and that. It was alright, yeah. It was good. It just makes you think, innit. It makes you think a bit more about stuff.

It's not just you stuff can affect.

MF: How has the prison changed over the time you have been here?

PB: It got better, it got worse, it got better, worse, better. Yeah, it's rocky. I dunno. At first it was alright. And then, too many fights would happen. They wouldn't know what to do then. They would punish everybody. There'd be no association or there'd be no gym. Like, it's gone better and bad. I don't think the regime is any good in here. Normally you was allowed to get clothes and that sent in as much times as you want. Then they tried to say you're allowed to get clothes handed in on a visit once every three months. Then they tried to say you're allowed to get a post in once every three months. But now they're saying you're not allowed nothing handed in no more. It's nuts. I got my stuff handed in from time ago, before this happened, so I'm alright. I got loads of stuff. But some people ain't got nothing. Like they got one pair of boxers and socks throughout the whole week. I don't really think this jail has got better. For them it has because it's easier to run. We used to get association

Say if you got anger problems, before you'd just lash out and that. But, now you've ridden the sentence, next time, think and then think of your family.

everyday. Now we get it three times a week. Three to four if you're lucky. Used to get gym everyday. Now you get it three times. It's always short-staff or there's always a problem. Weekends, sometimes something happened. Like there could be an alarm bell or there could be short staff. Or the staff have to go help on the visits because there's not enough officers there. Always something. It's the regime again, innit. This regime has never been good in this jail. There's nothing you can really do, innit. So just bide your time and get on with it. It's like that Panorama stuff. You have to come in, record it and see and you'll realise. This is fucked up. If you done that in here, then you'd know what it's really like. They'll say 'ah, there's not enough staff, nothing we can do, stay behind your door'. And then done. Obviously you get fed. I come everyday to clean the wing and that so I'll get my shower, but they'll say to people that's not an orderly 'you're entitled to one shower every three days. By law.' That's what they say. So, yeah. They've always got an excuse. They're never wrong. You have to bide your time and leave it. There's nothing you can do, innit. Cos you're in a jail anyway. So, you can't really complain. If you was in like North Korea or somewhere, you'd be fucked. But you're in a fresh jail, so you get food, there's no point really complaining because nothing's gonna happen anyway.

MF: Do you really think that?

PB: I don't think it would change. Maybe in like five years it would change when it's got proper amount of staff. Since it opened, it's never had a full amount of staff. There's never been a month when there's full staff and everything runs perfect. Like, I'm not really trying to make this place better or worse. I just want to ride my sentence and then get over and done with here. Just move on. Hopefully I never come back to this place. Hopefully I don't do no more crime. This is the first time I've been in prison. I got sentenced to nine years, first time ever. I learnt my mistake. I'm trying to do my sentence and get out of here. I don't want to help this place, I don't want to break this place. I'll tell people how it is. Like, if I get asked a question, I'll tell them the truth about it. Like the jail is terrible, but there's nothing I can do or say that can help it. The only way things get helped is when like something serious happens like someone's human rights get breached and there's evidence for it. Or someone gets hurt or something. So, unless that kind of stuff happens then there's no evidence to put forth to back these up, if you know what I mean.

Since it opened, it's never had a full amount of staff. There's never been a month when there's full staff and everything runs perfect.

MF: Have you been able to get involved in shaping the way the prison operates?

PB: Nah, we've tried to say to governors, can we do this or do that. Can we have like more sessions of gym, but they don't listen. So, nah. Me, personally, I don't know if someone had opportunity to way to shape it round, but I haven't personally.

MF: So is there no mechanism to do that?

PB: No, no prisoner meetings. The only way you could do it is if you complain. Put a complaint form through and then the governor will read it and he'll write his response to you. That's the only thing you could get. It would take like a riot or something for that to happen. And nobody really do that in here. You'd get another charge for that. You get more time. That's pointless. Might happen one day. You never know. But I personally won't be involved in that. I just want to get out of here to be honest.

MF: Do you feel that larger prisons provide the best balance between rehabilitation, efficiency, safety, decency and security?

PB: I dunno. I was thinking about this question. Some ways, yes. Some ways, no. Small prisons, it's easier to control, innit. But a larger prison...I dunno. It would probably be the same way to control because you'll have more staff. This jail only holds 600 people. I don't

know if that's a lot or small to be honest. If it's a lot, then I think larger jails are good. Cos, it's easier. If this is a small prison, then I think small prisons are good. Even though there's no regime, it's still controlled. Like, no one's ever escaped. Officers've never been held hostage. Obviously officers get assaulted, prisoners get assaulted, but there's never been like a major breakdown of the jail where's it got to be sectioned off and everyone's got to be out of their door, counted for. So, I dunno. Big prisons, small prisons, who knows, man.

MF: What would be the upper end, do you think, for a prison if it was large?

PB: Like a thousand or something.

MF: What about a smaller prison?

PB: To be honest, I think a smaller prison would be better than a larger prison. I think more offenders would get more help. Cos there's less people to look out for. If you've got a thousand offenders, you're just going to do it by the book, but if you had like 200 prisoners or 400 prisoners, they get more of a chance to gain something from the prison. Not to come back.

MF: And that would go for all of those things: 'rehabilitation, efficiency, safety, decency and security'?

PB: Yeah.

MF: I went to an American prison with about 2000 inmates...

PB: That's nuts. That's why we're lucky here man. These prisons are nothing like them. Them ones are crazy. No television, they're banged up like 23 hours a day. That's why I don't really complain. Obviously, no one wants to be here, innit. Like you messed up, you done what you done, you're young, but it's not the end of the world like. This [the legal visits room in which the interview took place] could be someone's office on the outside. This room right here. It's clean. The cells are clean. Toilet, sink, mirrors, windows. Can't really complain. I think it depends on people's sentences. But

it depends on the person as well. Everyone's different. I've never had one day where I thought, 'yeah, this is easy, like.' I've never had one day where I think 'man, I can't do this.' I've always just...ride it out. I've never stayed in my cell and been like 'this is easy, man.' It's not easy. Where your family's out there, you've got loved ones and that. It's not just you that you're affecting, innit.

MF: What lessons should prison managers take from opening this prison and what advice would you offer to a Governor/Director opening a prison?

PB: Make sure they have a regime and that education and that is ready from day one. Cos this jail didn't have nothing when they first opened. So I'd just tell them, make sure they know what they're doing. And good luck!

Interview: Tina Taylor

Tina Taylor is the Head of Drug Strategy and Healthcare Provision at HMP/YOI Isis. She was posted to Isis over a year before it opened, and performed a Custodial Manager role as part of the commissioning team. Tina joined the Service as a Prison Officer in 1998 at Wandsworth. She was promoted to Senior Officer in 2002 and to Principal Officer in 2005, and was a member of the POA Branch Committee for a time. She is interviewed by William Payne who works in Business Development Group, NOMS. The interview took place in February 2014.

WP: Would you tell me about the role you performed when you were posted to Isis, before the prison opened and you started taking prisoners, and the role you have performed since?

TT: Initially I was recruited as the security manager — I was transferred from Wandsworth in my substantive grade (Principal Officer) but it was a little strange because in practical terms we didn't actually have a prison let alone any prisoners! But because Isis was being built within the perimeter of Belmarsh, security was clearly important. We had prison staff on site to maintain security. It is quite challenging actually, I learnt a lot about managing what were at times the competing interests of the contractors, on the one hand, and ours in preserving the integrity of a Cat A prison on the other. We had probably about 12 OSGs (Operational Support Grades) at the time recruited by Belmarsh as 'casuals' to enable the construction and these were supplemented by agency OSGs. It was interesting making them security conscious in a prison way without unnecessarily impeding the work of the constructor and the many sub-contractors. Construction was scheduled as a '77 week build'. It started October 2008 and it was handed over in April 2010. In addition to managing the OSGs, my role was to provide the interface between the contractors and the Governor. During this time I also started drafting security policies and procedures that we'd use in the prison. It was a strange combination of things but really interesting.

WP: What was most interesting about that period then because as you've just pointed out you're a prison manager and you didn't actually have a prison to manage: what were the lessons you learned during the construction phase?

TT: I guess in development terms it was really good actually liaising with other agencies, stakeholders that kind of thing, learning how to juggle people's priorities. The contractors wanted to build a prison and we wanted to maintain security and sometimes those two objectives weren't co-terminous! From a very practical point of view, we needed to find ways of ensuring our policies and procedures were adhered to but without imposing such constraints on the contractor that added delay and therefore cost.

WP: Were you still the Security PO when the prison began to take prisoners in 2010?

TT: I was temporarily promoted on Residential when we prepared to open the prison.

WP: So you were centrally part of the reception of the first group of prisoners and settling them all in.

TT: Yes we outnumbered them, which was a novel experience! The prison opened as it was always designed to be — for the 18-24 age group with the over 21s as Cat Cs — on the assumption that it was going to be roughly two thirds Young Offender and one third adults.

WP: What were the biggest challenges that you personally and the establishment faced in opening?

TT: Recruitment and we still haven't recruited a full complement three and a half years later. In the last calendar (2013), we continued to have significant staff turnover, and not just because we were a new prison. Some people chose to leave the Prison Service, some were dismissed and many gained promotion, all of which made staff stability more difficult to achieve. In 2013, 64 per cent of all Band 5 managers were newly promoted or appointed in the year; all Offender Supervisors were newly appointed; 64 per cent of the residential Supervising Officers were either newly or temporarily promoted; and we experienced a 55 per cent turnover in Band 3 Prison Officers; a 22 per cent turnover in administrative staff; and a 34 per cent turnover in the OSG group.

WP: Compared even to an average for London and the South-east, that's extraordinary. I will return in a minute to the implications of this but would you first say something about one or two of the other challenges?

TT: I guess there's a natural fear that you don't have everything prepared. We did have a huge project plan so in theory everything was on there — every policy we needed to write, everything we needed to order and so on. We had a few disasters along the way. We realised that people had ordered the wrong things because the descriptions on the catalogue were a little bit woolly and thought we had ordered key pouches for staff only to discover that actually we'd ordered the

kind of sealed pouches that you use for a cell key on nights and things like this so there were last minute panics around that. But by and large these were small hiccups in what was a pretty big project. The biggest preparation problem was the staffing. Lisa Smitherman, the Governor, had made very clear that she wanted an 'Isis ethos', that it would be community-based with an emphasis on being 'Isis friendly' — informal but with discipline. She did much to set the tone. For example, we have a 'Segregation Unit' — it was never ever going to be called anything else 'Care' or 'Separation Unit' or anything else' — it would be, and is, a Segregation Unit. We aimed to recruit 50 per cent of the officer group internally and the other 50 per cent from external campaigns. There were a number of other factors around in NOMS at the time, such as restructuring which also affected us. We also suffered as those prisons sending us staff couldn't recruit fast enough to backfill the vacancies we were creating, which meant they wanted to keep their staff for the maximum possible time. This meant that the internal candidates didn't arrive when it would have been most helpful to us.

WP: What was the proportion of new staff it was hoped that you'd have?

TT: We'd hoped to have about 60-70 per cent new staff across all grades and it probably wasn't that far off it when I look back on it although that feels very high to a lot of other people. Looking back, we also struggled to get staff with sufficient experience, many officers were relatively new recruits themselves, very few had more than five years service. With the exception of one Dog Handler, everyone else's experience was in single figures pretty much apart from the managers. We went through about nine recruitment campaigns in the first year or so. Many staff arrived only just before we opened making it more difficult. The other thing that was challenging was that everything was on paper. It's was not like having a prison which was already in operation which has become accustomed to its institutional routines and there is a natural confidence in the way things happen day-to-day. When you join an existing prison either as a new member of staff or on transfer, there is by and large a routine and well-established system to slip into: everyone knows what happens, and the challenge is just for you as the new person to learn. Opening a new prison, it's all new to everyone. In spite of all the preparation we did — we had all the policies,

procedures and systems written down; and we'd walked through things and undertaken various exercises — it still felt new and unfamiliar when we opened. Of course, that's the nature of operational work in prisons, it's not until you 'go live' and start actually doing what you've planned that you find out what you don't know and how well things are going to work.

WP: Let's return to the issue of staffing which is such a fundamental part of building culture. You mentioned how difficult it was to recruit, why was that do you think?

TT: I suspect it's a London issue because to the best of my knowledge London prisons have always been short staffed. The last time that I know Wandsworth was fully staffed was in 1998 and that was in preparation to open refurbished wings. I think pay may also have something to do with it, especially for new staff — they don't get paid much more than they would for doing a lot of unskilled jobs in the area and it's pretty hard going. Also, a number of the new recruits weren't particularly well-prepared in terms of their own expectations — and that may be because a lot of the staff we recruited are a lot younger than you used to see. When I started I sensed there were more people joining as officers with a bit more life experience behind them. A lot of the officers we recruited were

A lot of the officers we recruited were in their early twenties, and many didn't see being an officer as a job for life which is more likely to be the case if you join in your thirties or forties.

in their early twenties, and many didn't see being an officer as a job for life which is more likely to be the case if you join in your thirties or forties. On the other hand a lot of them were very highly qualified — and it's the same with the OSGs. I did 17 days of interviews and huge numbers of them have got psychology, criminology degrees, that kind of thing so it's probably not something that they were planning on doing for life either. It's a foot in the door somewhere within the criminal justice system and some experience but not necessarily what you got that degree for.

WP: What sort of lessons would you say the Service has got to learn from what Isis has experienced, about the way in which it recruits and what it does to recruit people?

TT: What amazes me — and I know one of my colleagues raised this at a QandA session with Michael Spurr a couple of years ago at Scrubs — was the fact that we don't interview our officers. They go along to an assessment centre, but we don't sit down with them and actually spend 10-15 minutes just getting a feel of

what they're like and what they're expecting. It comes as a shock to some people that you expect them to be at work at half past seven on a Sunday morning! It seems that it just didn't occur to them! I was on the POA Committee at Wandsworth and we actually found that a lot wouldn't join the POA until they were subject to an investigation or disciplinary proceedings over their attendance — an awful lot of those centred on basic work discipline, coming to work when you are supposed to that kind of stuff. It seems completely obvious but somehow we have forgotten to test those sort of 'job ready' skills we need as well as the aptitude and ability which the assessment centre can assess. I think there is more we should be doing to ensure people we are recruiting join with their eyes wider open than they sometimes are.

WP: Would you tell me about the training or induction and familiarisation you prepared for new staff here and how well that worked?

TT: I've mentioned the planning — which included walking through situations and running various scenarios like pretending there was an alarm situation somewhere so responding from one area to another so that they would learn the routes around the prison and the quickest way to get places — but we also tried to think of the small things which oil the wheels of operational routines. But there are so many and it was only when we can to put them into practice that we realised that we had assumed there was a common way of doing something only to find out that there are various different ways.

WP: An awful lot that happens in prison turns on tiny little things happening or not happening. What's the way round that, is it a bit about opening a new prison requires a bit of try it and see it and we will find it's a bit of trial and error?

TT: I think we always knew there was going to be some elements of that. We wrote a set of 'know your job sheets' for almost everything we could reasonably think of so you could walk into a different area of the prison, pick up the folder, pick out the sheet and know what to do. It's still a puzzle that we missed things. Several of us had visited other YOIs to learn some lessons from them as well as keeping our hand in operationally but what we discovered was that, although we were dealing with the same prisoners what we learned at other establishments didn't always

apply in Isis. For example, in the new wing at Rochester we learned prisoners there didn't like the smoke detectors in the cell, they keep covering them up and blocking them thinking they're cameras, so we thought we must learn that lesson. But at Isis they weren't bothered by them, sometimes the same prisoners. Why on earth would prisoners in Rochester think that about their new build and not come in here and say the same thing. You just can't work out the logic of it sometimes or the lack of logic.

WP: Were there other big challenges you recall, perhaps things which proved more challenging that you'd expected or vice versa?

TT: With staffing levels we have a constant challenge around actually making sure prisoners can have enough access to showers and so on. We always knew we'd never have in cell showers — that was a really big design fault — the cells here are the smallest that comply with Prison Service standards. The new units at Rochester have in-cell showers and it was built before we were. If you were building a prison now, we have to ensure there are showers in cells otherwise ensuring prisoners get showers becomes a regime activity in its own right rather than a personal hygiene issue we can expect prisoner to address. And, I'd say the same about access to telephones — put them in the cell.

WP: What else did you learn about the design of the prison that you would have changed if you had had the benefit of hindsight?

TT: There were just all sorts of small things such as discovering that each the four spurs on the house block itself is very much sound proof from the hub office in the centre of the spurs. When you're on a spur you can only hear what's happening on there, you can't hear anything from outside. So if you're on the hub in the centre between the spurs all you can hear is a general hubbub but you can't hear anything specific. Also, as the spurs weren't designed with an office, communication between the staff on the spur and what we call the hub officer (the old 'movements' or 'admin officer') was difficult. We ended up putting a radio onto each spur and put it onto a separate net without having to bother comms to say 'can you switch the showers on and off'. We also converted what had been a kind of storeroom on each spur into a little office and installed a telephone and a computer.

We wrote a set of 'know your job sheets' for almost everything we could reasonably think of so you could walk into a different area of the prison, pick up the folder, pick out the sheet and know what to do.

Additionally, because of the teething problems we had with prisoners' kiosks, there were other things staff on the spur needed to be able to do otherwise it would cause frustration for prisoners when you can't give them an answer about their spends or visits for example. And we discovered that the more astute prisoners were booking up every visit they could according to the VOs that they had, with no intention of actually using them but actually sitting on it and using it as a form of currency.

WP: Going back to opening the prison, in what numbers did prisoners arrive?

TT: We had an agreement and we received probably between 24 and 36 prisoners every week until round about December/January after opening. We were quite conscious that Littlehey had had real problems with their YO side after they'd opened that and certainly didn't want to take the risk of having the roof off the place just after we'd opened it.

WP: And did that work?

TT: It was pretty good. It meant that obviously the staffing levels felt quite heavy at the time and there were more staff than we required for things but it did let people double up on jobs, get to learn from each other and so on. If you've got someone competent in a job someone else could then shadow them and give you that kind of time that you don't have necessarily in an operating prison.

WP: Conversely did that cause a problem when the population built up did staff feel more stretched?

TT: Probably, I think it came as a shock sometimes to find that there weren't people to hold hands anymore, this was life in the real world. Walk into any prison and the prisoners will know that you're new and some of them will pick on that and try and push things. But in a brand new prison, the staff don't really know the routine because we haven't set it in stone, and the prisoners don't know it; nobody knows it. You have a situation where a lot of people aren't quite sure and are constantly doing a bit of 'suck it and see', all of which can become quite unsettling for staff and for prisoners.

WP: What were the things you did in those early days that went really well?

TT: What we did do well which paid dividends was spending time training to respond to alarm situations, running round the prison and occasionally rolling on the floor with each other and actually letting people try out their Control and Restraint on each other in a cell or on a floor as opposed to a nice padded dojo. That was

quite useful, giving people confidence and learning to deal with the adrenaline rush. Also, just preparing new staff for some of those experiences and the noise. That was useful, we did that well.

WP: In terms of incidents, was it every day, was it really hard work?

TT: In the early days there weren't lots of incidents but it was pretty busy. The first big incident we had was on ED association probably in the September. A young man managed to start a big fight one evening on association. There's something about this age group, quite often it's a bit of a pack mentality. It was the first time that a lot of the staff had seen an incident like this. There were three or four managers on duty that evening as well as the staff that were profiled to be there for association, so we all ended up in the middle of it. Staff do bond together in difficult incidents. We

had two hospital escorts that evening so we did almost everything that we could have thought of in one incident. The incident gave staff confidence in one another, in their training, in our systems and in dealing with behaviour that several of them were worried about.

WP: This was probably good for prisoners as well because they actually could see that something as big and horrible as that was controlled and contained?

TT: Yes, that's right. Nobody was backing off anywhere and

there was certainly no element of anybody watching other people doing things. During the incident, I didn't at any moment feel like there was going to be a riot and we were going to lose the wing but we certainly knew that we were going to have a tough evening. We quickly learned what the staff were made of, who was going to volunteer to do things and show willing because it took a certain amount of bravery for some of them.

WP: Did people recognise at the time that it had had that effect?

TT: Yes it was immediately obvious. I think people suddenly felt that they actually had something to be proud of and suddenly realised being a prison officer isn't just about opening cell doors, getting people to exercise or getting them to work or whatever but actually getting involved with things as well, we have some great days and we have some horrible days and it's just a real mixture of stuff.

WP: It's getting on for four years ago since Isis opened, where is the prison now in terms of its development?

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TT: In some ways it feels really different, some things are very settled, some of the routines are quite settled and so on but there are other things that feel like we haven't moved on. We've gone through constant change as a service which has felt relentless. We hadn't much fat on the bone in staffing but by 2011 we had to open the second house block a bit quicker than we'd wanted and were absolutely reliant on detached duty staff. This meant we probably didn't progress in a lot of ways during that period. And here we are again, we've got six staff on detached duty from Downview but to be absolutely honest while it's nice to have them, it's not the same as having your own staff and you're dependent on whether or not they buy into doing things while they're here.

WP: You have pointed out how constant change and staff difficulties have frustrated the bedding in of early achievements. Can you point to particular things that if there wider issues hadn't arisen you would have prioritised in getting bedded in?

TT: I think it's probably around staff-prisoner relationships. We have been heavily criticised on this by the Inspectorate and in the Measure of the Quality of Prisoner Life. We know this was an issue and we laid on training and while we are getting there we haven't yet got the confidence to get this right.

We have learned that we didn't have enough people with experience of working with Young Offenders. It's different from working with adult men and women. There's a particular knack in being able to speak to young offenders sometimes especially when you're saying something they don't like and sort of pre-empting how they're going to react because they do go from 0 to 60 in a nano second. It's about learning how to plant your idea into their head so they suddenly think it's their idea and they've decided the outcome themselves and it's quite a skill getting staff to learn that as well and getting prisoners to take that on board from you.

WP: Just stepping back a minute from the immediacy of your experience, if it was said we're going to open a brand new prison in London and we want you to open it for us, what would you do differently?

TT: We'd need to be a bit cuter about the design, understanding from the plans for the buildings what the operational implications will be. For example, if I show you what are meant to be the segregation

exercise yards you'll look at them and realise there isn't room to swing a cat, literally. Somehow on paper, it wasn't obvious. Fortunately, we converted something that was on the plans as being a landscaped garden into an exercise yard.

WP: What about the organisation, what more could NOMS do better to support the opening of Isis?

TT: The recruitment's the obvious bit and that was difficult. We couldn't even recruit a Head of Learning and Skills, we really struggled with that so there were some issues at those kind of levels and it felt very last minute to having the healthcare provision agreed as well. I think probably the hardest thing we had for a long time was the lack of kindness from colleagues elsewhere, not necessarily among managers elsewhere

and so on but just in general. I think we always knew it was going to be difficult to open a prison, it was going to be bumpy and we thought it would probably realistically take us two or three years to settle in. Kennet and Bure were also new but and while we did learn some lessons from them, they had different cohorts of prisoners. The first inkling of how difficult things would be was probably Littlehey, which opened its new unit about six months before we opened.

WP: A minute ago you used a really interesting phrase that there was 'a lack of kindness' from colleagues elsewhere, what did you mean by that?

TT: Every time staff went out to a meeting somewhere or were on a course somewhere, as soon as people knew where you were from, they didn't cold-shoulder you but appeared to slightly mock us. It may have been operational humour — and we did pop up regularly on the ops report with incidents — but we appeared to be picked on because we were new. It was as though colleagues were constantly doubting out operational competence. It's a huge milestone that we are no longer seen like that. People don't appreciate that it's not easy opening a prison — most places have had decades to try it and get it right, we'd had six months. It was hard having colleagues constantly tell you that it is bad. However, I remember one of the IMB saying that your staff are really proud of the fact that it's hard here and they've stuck it out and they've managed it and they've survived. So it sort of bred that mentality amongst some people and kind of strengthened them. But on the whole, it was very wearing being told by others about their perception of what Isis was about.

People don't appreciate that it's not easy opening a prison — most places have had decades to try it and get it right, we'd had six months.

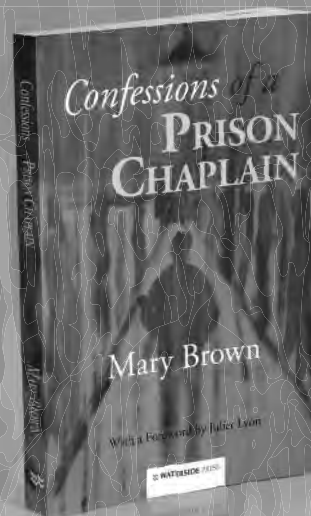
WP: How do you manage the gangs issues?

TT: It's such a small site so it is difficult to try and separate people. We didn't have a designated vulnerable prisoner unit when we opened. We said we're an integrated prison, we don't do separation. But actually, if you're a member of a minority gang and you're hated by lots of other people, we have a duty to try and do something to make sure you're not going to get assaulted every time you show your face out of your cell door. One of the ways we are better at managing this is that the Police Intelligence Officer now automatically looks at all our new receptions and tries to pre-empt some of the gang issues which may arise. It took us a long time to get there and do that kind of thing. What happens in the community affects what goes on here. So, if there's tension between gangs outside, we get tension in here. We learned the hard way about the importance of gathering this information before and how you're going to manage it. So we do things like a monthly gang meeting with Trident to keep on top of that.

WP: Inevitably, we haven't been able to cover every aspect of such a large and complicated achievement, so is there anything else you would say about the experience from which others could learn?

TT: Enjoy it, you'll probably never do anything like this again. It is a privilege to be involved in opening a new public sector prison. Be proud of what you've done. Remember not to let the good stuff get overshadowed (it's very typical Prison Service to get weighed down by the negative) and remember that although you've put everything into it, one day you will have to hand your baby over to others so don't be disheartened when people want to change things. Expect the unexpected — honestly, you can't think of everything and nothing will prepare you for things like the phone call as duty manager to tell you that a crane's toppled over into the infrastructure of a building!

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Juliet Lyon

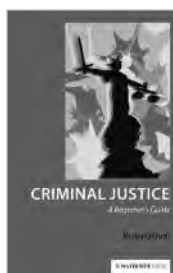


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Reflections on the downside of ‘the best job in the world’

Dr Charles Elliott is an Associate of the Prison Research Centre at the Institute of Criminology, Cambridge; and the Co-Investigator of an ESRC research project on Diversity in three South Yorkshire Prisons, based in the University of Bradford.

This essay reflects on some of the issues that were raised in the two interviews about opening a new prison. It first discusses the climate around the process of planning and opening a new prison. We then turn to more specific questions such as staffing and procurement. The essay ends with the question with which Tina concludes her interview.

One of the things that strikes me most forcefully from the interviews — and which is entirely consistent with my own experience of observing the opening of a Cat C prison — is the sense of chaos in the early stages, first of planning and then of building up prisoner numbers. Each planning team — Security, regime, procurement, staffing — is closely bonded. These are hand picked, high performing individuals, with a burning sense of purpose and shared motivation. It is these characteristics that led the Deputy Governor at a new prison to describe the run-up to opening as ‘the best job in the world’. Despite that enthusiasm, there is a downside. The preparative teams have not worked together before; they have not performed this task before; they have not had to interact so intensely with other specialists before; and, in all probability, they have not had to meet such tight deadlines before (tight, that is, in relation to the enormity of the task before them.) With the best will in the world (and that is a fair assumption in this context), there are rough edges, inconsistencies, overlaps, confusions, gaps and misunderstandings which can leave individuals and teams feeling that they are wading in concrete in the dark and without a compass — against the clock.

Even language becomes unstable. People talk of induction — and then find some are thinking of the induction of staff and others of prisoners. When that confusion is cleared up (hopefully quite quickly), it becomes apparent that in the matter of staff induction some mean a half day conducted tour round the establishment with a few reminders about the fundamentals of security; while others mean a five day course on the purpose, nature, style and values of the prison, with team building exercises and intense interpersonal interactions. The world of security is riddled with such potential confusions: consider the phrase ‘perimeter security’. Depending on the type of establishment each individual comes from (and I

immediately exclude the High security estate), it could mean anything from a wall with razor wire on it, to daily searches of the interior and exterior aprons, the fitting of PIRs and lights, CCTV, and close liaison with the Police on suspicious activity within fifty yards of the outside of the wall.

If language becomes slippery, it is hardly surprising if the very nature and purpose of the prison becomes hard to communicate in a way that new and diverse staff can comprehend and relate to. Tina from Isis tells us that the Governing Governor was very clear about the kind of prison she wanted to create and the values that would undergird it. Great. I wonder, though, how many staff, six months after the opening, could relate these high ideals to their own daily routines. That comment is by no means meant critically: it is rather to draw attention to two immensely difficult tasks: communicating organisational values in a comprehensible and acceptable way; and enabling staff to ingest and adhere to those values in the hurly burly of the first few months of the jail’s existence (especially when the jail is chronically understaffed, as Isis was.)

Tina does not tell us by what means the Governing Governor (No 1) had decided on the values she wished the jail to live by. I am always sceptical of the chances of success of a process in which the No 1 (or someone higher up the food chain) decides that the new jail will exhibit values A, B and C and then ‘tells’ the workforce that this is how they are to think and behave. Given all the pressures on each actor throughout the start up period, the chances of these values even being properly understood in all their implications, much less so absorbed that they actually become determinative of subsequent behaviours, are, to put it at its best, slim indeed. I think there is much more chance for an upward inductive process where the values arise from the shared experience of the whole work force. That, of course, takes time and money: both are in short supply. To its credit, NOMS did enable such a process at Kennet. How far it was more successful has never been scientifically assessed. Impressions are that it made a difference during the tenure of the first No 1, a charismatic leader; but that it quickly waned thereafter.

I am not suggesting that the rough edges I discussed above are not smoothed in the months leading up to the opening; but I am suggesting that they are often not

perfectly smoothed — and that this translates into the experience of the early arrivals among the prisoners of the much reported (and seemingly much resented) ‘chaos’, ‘confusion’, ‘inconsistency’ ‘lack of regime’... all eloquently condemned in the interview with the prisoner from Isis.

What these complaints tend to ignore is that each individual prisoner brings with him (or her) a set of expectations which, largely unconsciously, s/he imposes on the new prison. The familiar expression of this is: ‘Why can’t they make it run like it did at HMP S? There was never any of this hassle there’. Or : ‘We didn’t do it like this at HMP X’ or ‘It was much better at YOI Y’. And the no less familiar and equally draining : ‘Well, we were allowed it at HMP T’. These expressions of unfavourable comparison are pointing to something deeper and more difficult for the newly arrived prisoner to grapple with: a mix of insecurity (because all the old pecking orders have disappeared and new ones are going to have to be established: that can be a painful — both literally and metaphorically — business); anxiety, because old identities have had to be shed and new ones now have to be formed; and uncertainty, because who can you trust, among staff and prisoners both, in this new, strange environment? Naturally some personality types deal with these issues more confidently than others.

The crucial point, however, is that these questions are only hammered out by shoving at boundaries, most obviously the boundaries imposed — with more or less confidence and competence — by the new staff. But here is a paradox. Staff often report that prisoners are unusually ‘quiet’, ‘co-operative’, ‘compliant’, ‘easy’ in the early stages of the build up of the prisoner population. How can this be reconciled with prisoners ‘shoving the boundaries’ as reported above? There are two explanations. First, because both staff and prisoners are new to the prison, neither is entirely sure when the boundaries are in fact being ‘shoved’. What the prisoner thinks is the boundary may well be within the margin of tolerance. Second, inexperienced or disoriented staff may lack the confidence to define the boundaries — and then defend them. The prisoners may indeed be on the margin, but the raw staff may not realise it — and report that the prisoners are fully compliant. Certainly it seems to be common that when the jail is up to capacity, the staff’s sense of easy compliance diminishes sharply.

How does this look from the standpoint of the staff, and especially the wing staff and the instructors who

have daily contact with the prisoners? It is uncanny how the issues facing the prisoners also face the staff. There are the same issues of establishing pecking orders, structures of primacy, conventions of deference, interpretations of rules (for some reason, rules around property seem a peculiarly fertile area of disagreement and multiple renegotiation) and above all of boundary definition and defence; and there is the same period of probing and testing (very much like the ‘phoney war’ of 1940.). Oddly (or perhaps not) I have myself witnessed brilliant examples of the very best of jailcraft during this period: sadly, they subsequently seem to get squeezed out of the repertoire by diurnal pressures of ‘doing the basics’.

The staff are almost literally ‘finding themselves’ during this period, irrespective of how comprehensive or sketchy their formal induction. The role of first and second line managers at this point is crucial. With luck and judgement some of them will have been members of the planning and implementation teams and will therefore have a better idea than many of what the senior managers are trying to achieve. The issue then becomes how faithfully they deliver that aim in the way they manage and mould their teams. And that in turn will depend on how proactively and imaginatively they are themselves managed. But here we are back to familiar territory.

The same issues of identity, supremacy, boundary definition, and boundary defence re-emerge. These more senior people will, however, have former models of all these things well burnt into the tracks of their minds — and therefore the possibility of conflict becomes all the greater. In my experience, the period between the fourth and ninth month of the opening of a new prison is extraordinarily — and often painfully — replete with examples of these issues being worked out, sometimes fortissime. Unplanned departures rise, sometimes alarmingly.

Now if you put all these perspectives together, it is easy to see why the early months of a new prison feel, to both staff and prisoners, so dis-ordered, un-settled, uncomfortable and in-secure. The oddity is, however, that despite these undoubted feelings of a strange alienation, there is also, from all sides, a commitment to ‘make it work’, to ‘create a genuinely new prison’, to ‘find a new way forward’, to ‘create something unusual’. It is when these two worlds of meaning collide that the sense of disorientation and sometimes disillusionment are at their strongest. No wonder some new prisons find that some of their ‘best’ staff depart in less than two years..

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Having explored the affective context of opening, we need to get down to some of the administrative basics. Of these, perhaps the most important is the recruitment of staff for the new prison. As in many areas, there is a major gap between the approach of the private prisons and those in the public sector. Put crudely, the former recruit a far higher proportion of young people (often immediately post tertiary education), many of whom do not see the Prison Service as a life long career. They are trained in house and gain their early experience of jailcraft by supervising the early arrivals of prisoners. The public sector, by contrast, seeks to recruit from the existing stock of experienced officers, which can bring its own problems of different — and occasionally incompatible — traditions and expectations. (But see Tina's statement that Isis recruited a large number of over qualified youngsters, new to the Service and almost certainly not intending to make it a career.) The power of the network of contacts among the planning teams cannot be over-emphasised: it is usually that network that identifies and hopefully attracts the early recruits. It will, however, only go so far; and in a rapid build up (which is now the norm), those networks cannot deliver the quantity required. It is at this point that the maintenance of quality becomes a major problem. Other public sector prisons will not happily release their best staff and will seek to maximise the delays built in to the system. The new prison cannot afford those delays and has to take what 'the market' offers. Caveat emptor! Unfortunately, time pressures do not allow for much caution and it is here that the quality of the recruits is likely to dip alarmingly — a situation made all the worse by the fact that whatever induction process was offered to the early arrivals is likely to be curtailed or even abandoned for these later arrivals. As the Isis interview demonstrates, turn-over figures can become stratospheric.

A somewhat different pattern is evident with the recruitment of prisoners. Almost inevitably, established prisons will send their more difficult prisoners, despite instructions to the contrary from Region or HQ. I have noticed special glee in public sector establishments as they contemplate the pleasure of off-loading their hardest cases to a new private sector prison. The receiving prison usually has little control over its incomers, except perhaps in the earliest days.

The 'difficult' prisoners — at least in my limited experience — tend not to be the violent or high risk (who

are usually excluded from transfers to a new prison anyway); rather they tend to be the needy, the demanding, the litigious, the manipulative and sometimes the controlling. These are, almost by definition, the kinds of prisoners who need the attention of the most experienced officers. They are unlikely to get it in public sector prisons and will almost certainly not get it in private prisons. As the interview with Tina from Isis demonstrates so well, a new prison is most unlikely to have the range and depth of experience in wing staff and civilian staff (in education and industries) that this kind of prisoner needs. There are two possible outcomes: the prisoner conditions some of the staff; or he gets so angry, frustrated and inverted that he does something stupid and a 'Littlehey event' becomes more likely.

I turn now to an issue hinted at in both opening interviews — purchasing and procuring. In general — and certainly there are some weird exceptions — the public sector has robust procurement procedures. There may be cost ceilings that seem too low or arbitrary, but overall the system is so well established and oiled, one may say, so amply by the sweat of generations, that, apart from detailed oversights by the planners (one new prison found there were no ladles in the kitchen), procurement is not likely to prove a major issue. It is not so in the private prisons. Even a large contractor has only a small

number of prisons and some of them may have been inherited from the public sector in fully functional form. So equipping a new prison from scratch, (one estimate is that 40,000 orders have to be processed for a medium sized Cat C prison) can be a formidable challenge to an organisation for which the new prison is little more than a pimple on the procurement department's spread-sheet. So horror stories abound. One of my favourites (the truth of which I have been able to establish) is the No 1 having to max out his credit cards to buy drugs for the Health Centre three days before the prison opened. The Procurement Dept of the major company concerned had never had the need to buy drugs before and could not produce the necessary protocols.

That raises an associated theme, again touched upon in the Isis interview — namely forming relationships with outside bodies, from the NHS and Police to the volunteers who will work in the Visits centre. The NHS is notorious in this regard. Establishing a contractual relationship with the local Trust can be slow, cumbersome, frustrating and immensely time consuming

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— even with goodwill on both sides (and that is quite an assumption.) But at least there is a ‘face at the table’. For the third sector and especially some of the smaller, more specialised units that cannot be taken for granted. They work, as it were, on and through established relationships, almost kin networks. By definition these are born out of time; they cannot be summoned on demand. ‘You can buy a dentist’s chair; you cannot buy a couple of ladies to make the tea in the Visits centre.’ But the latter may add at least as much affective value as the former.

Lastly, I want to explore a fascinating theme that came from the Isis interview, one that seems to have stopped the interviewer in her tracks. Tina complained of the lack of friendliness from the rest of the Service. She — and by extension her senior colleagues — was made to feel something of a pariah, and, she alleges, others took pleasure in the difficulties and failures that the prison experienced in its early years.

We need to ask what is going on here? (Tina herself seems to have only the most tentative diagnosis, perhaps from a laudable sense of loyalty to her disloyal colleagues). Let’s start by putting these regional (or similar) meetings in context. They are a well-bonded

group, with their own dynamics; their own strategies and even their own humour. Into this comes not just a newcomer, but a favoured newcomer, one who has been hand-picked by very senior people in the Service to have the privilege and responsibility for opening a new and innovative jail. Professional jealousy is perhaps inevitable, especially in the absence of a firm containing presence from senior managers. And the more innovative the new prison strives to be — and Tina tells us the No 1 had very clear ambitions in that respect — the greater will be the implied criticism of the existing establishments. And therefore the more trenchant the schadenfreude when it seems to fail.

Maybe there is something a little more primitive operating here. Perhaps the new prison represents the favoured youngest sibling who is both threat to and judge of the rest of the family; the Joseph figure in short. If that is right, we are in another world, one in which fantasy ousts reason and primitive fear makes common courtesy impossible. It takes wise and patient leadership of an exceptional quality to help a group through this position. And like most other large organisations, the Prison Service is not well endowed with such leadership.



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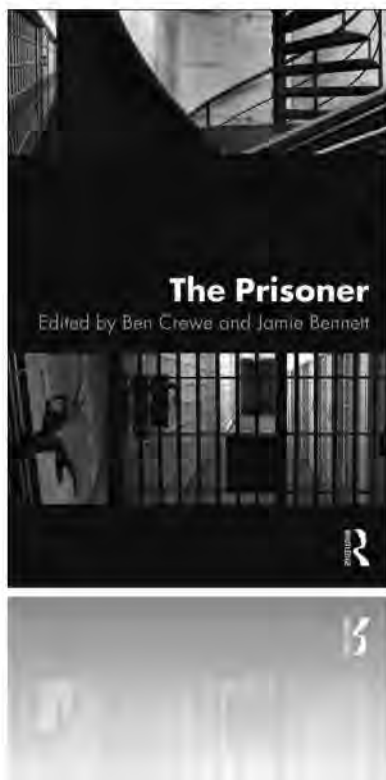
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