WELSH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE'S EVIDENCE SESSION.

PRISON OVERCROWDING.

Prison overcrowding places immense pressure on both the facilities within a prison and the staff trying to deliver a regime. In 1992 Lord Justice Woolf requested that a new rule be laid in Parliament that prisons could not exceed their certified nominal allocation. Through the mid-90s and into the new millennium as the prison population doubled compared to the disturbances in the early 90s prison Governors were expected to exceed their CNA, local disputes arose as the POA fought to prevent overcrowding and the issues that come with it.

The prison service set up a population management unit and as the population continued to rise a capacity program was introduced that saw the doubling up of previously single cells and the building of new capacity within existing prison walls.

During a time of uncertainty with the introduction of the private sector to custodial services, the performance of prisons was measured on several key performance targets including the cost per an inmate head, during this period it was advantageous for prison Governors to increase the capacity of their prisons to reduce the cost per an inmate head and maintain the performance of their prisons.

The relentless rise in the prison population has meant that the CNA was set aside, yet it remains the benchmark for the HMIP reports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment</th>
<th>Date of HMIP Report</th>
<th>Prisoners Held on Day</th>
<th>Certified Normal Accommodation</th>
<th>Operational Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HMP Cardiff</td>
<td>October 2016</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMP Swansea</td>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMP Parc</td>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>1659</td>
<td>1559</td>
<td>1723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMP Prescoed</td>
<td>January 2018</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMP Usk</td>
<td>January 2018</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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FURTHER PRISON PROVISION IN WALES.

New Prisons bring boosts to the local economy.

The location of any new prison in Wales is a matter for the elected representatives and the people from within the affected communities. The POA believe that we do need new prisons, but they should be publicly managed, as the deprivation of liberty of any individual by the state, is a matter for the state and not private profit.

VIOLENCE IN WELSH PRISONS.
2015 – 2016 – Violent Incidents in English Prisons rose by 23%
2015 – 2016 - Violent Incidents in Welsh Prisons rose by 53%

In 2016 there were a total of 1,266 incidents of assault and serious assault in four Welsh prisons;

HMP Cardiff, HMP Swansea, HMP Usk/Prescoed and HMP Parc, in Bridgend – a rise from 830 in the previous year.

During 2012 Prisons in England and Wales underwent a cost removal program known as benchmarking. Benchmarking was a program of cost reductions that was presented as more palatable than an impending new round of market testing.

The benchmark program was presented to the members of the POA and their conference voted to engage with the benchmark process.

It has since been acknowledged by Michael Spurr that the cuts went too far, as part of those cuts prisons lost some managers but the main reductions to staff were borne by the uniformed frontline grades who were offered civil service voluntary exit packages.

The cuts saw the dynamic of control shift within our prisons, prisoners quickly noticed and became more challenging in their behaviour towards staff and staff did not feel empowered to challenge that behaviour.

Many prisons lost staff from their security offices with some prisons left without enough operational resource in their security departments, officer numbers on visits were reduced, and the Governors ability to carry out cell searching all but disappeared.

Around the same time 2012 / 2013 the then legal highs began to emerge. In 2013 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported that a total of 670,000 Britons aged 15 -24 had experimented with the substances at least once, and that the UK had Europe’s largest market.

The cuts to our prisons left the perfect environment for people to profit from the smuggling in of the then legal substances.

As a result people with no previous connections to drug dealing could access a readily available and very cheap source of drugs to sell within our prisons.

The perfect storm had arrived.

Because of such a readily available drug supply, prisoners found themselves in debt, violence escalated as retribution was delivered.

We saw numerous cases where dealers would tell indebted prisoners that their debts would be wiped clean if they attacked / assaulted certain Prison Officers or other prisoners.

Drugs being brought into prisons bring misery, debt and violence, drugs in prison steal resources away from rehabilitation and impact on planned prison regime delivery.

Until we address drugs and violence in our prisons, everything positive that we strive to deliver remains a wish list.
WHY THE SHARP INCREASE PARTICULARLY IN WALES?

We have significant numbers of English prisoners based in Welsh Prisons, this causes tensions that can quickly turn to violence.

Some prisoners who believe they are located too far away from home to maintain family ties wrongfully think that if they assault staff they will get transferred to a more preferential location.

Tensions between different groups whether by nationality, regionality or gang related further add to the tensions in the Welsh prisons.

The earlier introduction of smoke free prisons within Wales had an impact on prisoners transferred into Wales where the smoking ban had yet to be implemented.

Improved reporting of violent incidents by Governors also contributes to the statistical increase.

I have spoken to POA members in each of the Welsh Prisons where violence has increased;

HMP BERWYN.

The sheer size of the residential units at HMP Berwyn make them very difficult to police, the staff at HMP Berwyn state it’s not just the sheer numbers of prisoners but the fact that the units are so physically large, staff say they can’t be all places at all times, and prisoners have too much space to evade staff.

HMP Berwyn does have excellent links with North Wales police that has seen a record number of incidents within the prison reported to the police, however although those links are commendable it does raise the question of why HMP Berwyn has so many incidents?

Staff experience levels at HMP Berwyn play some part the prison opened with some transfer in of experienced staff, however most Berwyn staff were newly recruited.

Staff at HMP Berwyn inform us that the Berwyn model is unique, they believe that the Psychology Department within the prison has too much influence over management decisions. HMP Berwyn does not display zero tolerance to violence posters, our members believe this was a decision taken by the SMT under advice from the Psychology Department.

The POA were rightly concerned that HMP Berwyn was allowed to open without the workshop provision being completed. They will not be completed until July 18 at the earliest.

We currently have a roll of 1000 prisoners with very limited work activities apart from the gym, education and a small call centre on one of the wings, which in total amounts to about 350 work spaces.

The POA believe this should never have been allowed to happen to a new build prison that supposedly embraces a rehab culture.

Our members at HMP Berwyn believe that prisoners face very low consequences for acts of violence against each other and staff.
The POA believe that HMP Berwyn can be successful if they improve discipline and get the workshops up and running but there must be an acknowledgement that the basics of any prison revolve first and foremost around security, control, order and discipline.

HMP CARDIFF.

Staff at HMP Cardiff feel that they receive a lot of problematic prisoners from England, during part of the reporting period Welsh prisons had gone smoke free yet they were receiving prisoners from England where the smoking ban was adopted four months later. Staff state this caused a lot of conflict within HMP Cardiff.

Cardiff saw large cuts to its staffing and a significant increase in the use of Psychoactive Substances. Staff at HMP Cardiff also felt that unpredictable regimes caused by staff shortfalls and incidents accounted for the rise in prisoner frustration and therefore assaults went up.

HMP SWANSEA.

Staff at HMP Swansea felt that the large influx of new staff and the loss of experienced staff was an issue that affected violence within their prison, at the time of asking their opinion, I was informed that 78 of the 101 Band 3 Prison Officers had less than 2 years’ service.

They indicated that they had temporary promoted staff supervising their wings who had been promoted with 2 years’ service, they stated that there should be training for temporary promoted staff as they just get thrown in the deep and are expected to sink or swim.

Staff at Swansea’s concerns echoed the high levels of drug use in particular PS, they felt it unfair that the stability of their own prison was undermined by having staff put on compulsory detached duty to cover shortfalls in England.

HMP PARC.

I can only base my observations on violence within HMP Parc from their Violence diagnostic tool and the nature and levels of their reported incidents.

Their VDT shows to the year ending March 17.

A monthly average prisoner on prisoner assault rate of between 30 – 35 assaults per a month, and a staff assault rate of 10 -15 per a month.

HMP Parc has had several incidents believed to be gang related including links to London gangs.

MOVING FORWARD.

The POA believe that the cuts applied to the frontline of our service were too deep and the benchmarks that were applied were too severe and the target staffing figures left a service doomed to fail.
The severity of the assaults continues to increase, and the Prison Officers Association are currently demanding that their members are given the tools to defend themselves and prisoners, we believe that all Prison Officers should have a personal issued radio, rigid quick apply handcuffs and PAVA spray. Prison Officers need the tools, we can no longer be expected to simply engage in hand to hand combat with prisoners.

We are working to achieve increases in the actual number of Prison Officers through the introduction of key workers and the eventual role out of the Offender Management in Custody Models as we believe that if prisons that have the right levels of staff, the right levels of prisoner interaction and the right Industrial Relations then prisons can pull themselves out of this crisis.

PROVISION OF WELSH LANGUAGE.

I have had limited response from committees within the Welsh establishments.

HMP Swansea responded and informed me that they currently have 19 staff who speak Welsh, they confirmed that prisoners are asked on reception if they speak Welsh and it is taken into account where possible to locate Welsh speakers together, prisoners who request cell moves so they can share a cell with another Welsh speaker would as a matter of course have that taken into account and a move would be facilitated if both parties are in agreement and the induction processes had been completed. HMP Swansea did say they have noted a sharp decline in the use of the Welsh language, when asked why they felt a combination of out of area (English) prisoners and a reduction in the number of Welsh speaking local prisoners.

HMP Cardiff inform me that they have a total of 14 Welsh speaking staff 7 operational uniform grades and 7 admin grades. HMP Cardiff reported the same decline in the use of Welsh for identical reasons to HMP Swansea.

I have been unable to establish the number of Welsh speakers within HMP Berwyn, however I am informed that new technology installed at HMP Berwyn does support the Welsh Language.

Th POA welcomes diverse recruitment both to the service and to the Union.

I have been unable to establish how many Welsh speaking POA members we have as we do not request such detail within our recruitment procedures. The POA do believe that HMPPs should actively work to recruit staff to match the community in which a prison is based.

April 2018