

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Y Pwyllgor dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ac Adfywio

The National Assembly for Wales
The Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

Dydd Mercher, 7 Mawrth 2007

Wednesday, 7 March 2007

Cynnwys
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These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau Cynulliad yn bresennol

Assembly Members in attendance

Mick Bates	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd Dros Dro) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Temporary Chair)
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymru Welsh Conservatives
Irene James	Llafur (yn dirprwyo ar ran Janice Gregory) Labour (substitute for Janice Gregory)
Laura Anne Jones	Ceidwadwyr Cymru Welsh Conservatives
Trish Law	Annibynnol Independent
Huw Lewis	Llafur (Dirprwy Weinidog) Labour (Deputy Minister)
Sandy Mewies	Llafur Labour
Leanne Wood	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Swyddogion yn bresennol

Officials in attendance

Carl Close	Swyddog Cyswllt yr Heddlu, yr Adran Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ac Adfywio Police Liaison Officer, Social Justice and Regeneration Department
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Eraill yn bresennol

Others in attendance

Jim A'Herne	Y Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol Rheoli Troseddwyr, Cymru National Offender Management Service, Wales
Kathryn Britton	Swyddog Amgylcheddol, Cadwch Gymru'n Daclus Environmental Officer, Keep Wales Tidy
Mick Giannasi	Dirprwy Brif Gwnstabl, Heddlu Gwent Deputy Chief Constable, Gwent Police
Tegryn Jones	Prif Weithredwr, Cadwch Gymru'n Daclus Chief Executive, Keep Wales Tidy

Siân West

Cyfarwyddwr Dros Dro, Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol Rheoli
Troseddwyr, Cymru

Acting Director, National Offender Management Service, Wales

**Gwasanaeth y Pwyllgor
Committee Service**

Dr Virginia Hawkins

Clerc

Clerc

Claire Griffiths

Dirprwy Glerc

Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.35 a.m.

The meeting began at 9.35 a.m.

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datgan Buddiannau
Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

[1] **Dr Hawkins:** Good morning and welcome to this meeting of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee. Unfortunately, our chair, Janice Gregory, cannot be with us this morning. Therefore, under Standing Order No. 8.20, I call for nominations for a temporary chair.

[2] **Sandy Mewies:** I nominate Mick Bates.

[3] **Leanne Wood:** I second that.

[4] **Ms Hawkins:** Is everyone content with that? I see that you are.

Penodwyd Mick Bates yn gadeirydd dros dro.

Mick Bates was appointed temporary chair.

[5] **Mick Bates:** Thank you very much for the nomination. As you are aware, this meeting is mainly an evidence-taking session. I am sure that you all join me in wishing Janice well; she cannot be here this morning.

[6] I have the usual duties to perform in terms of reminding you that, in the event of a fire alarm, you should leave the room via the marked fire exits and follow the instructions of the ushers and staff. No fire drill has been scheduled for this morning. So if it goes off, it is a genuine alarm.

[7] I also remind you to switch off mobile telephones, pagers and BlackBerrys, because they interfere with our broadcasting equipment—I see that the guilty Members are checking their bags.

[8] The National Assembly for Wales operates through the medium of Welsh and English, so if you require simultaneous translation, please use the headsets provided. The headsets will also amplify sound for those of you who are hard of hearing. The interpretation is available on channel 1 and the verbatim feed on channel 0.

[9] Members of the public are able to access refreshments from the Oriol cafe located on the first floor.

[10] I am sure that I do not need to remind committee members about this, but please do not touch the button on the microphone because it can disable the system, and ensure that the red light is on before you start to speak.

[11] We have received an apology from Janice Gregory; I am told that the other Members are on their way. Are there any declarations of interest? I see that there are none.

9.37 a.m.

Cofnodion y Cyfarfod Blaenorol Minutes of the Previous Meeting

[12] **Mick Bates:** These are the short minutes of the 15 February meeting. I see that there are no comments, so we will ratify them.

*Cadarnhawyd cofnodion y cyfarfod blaenorol.
The minutes of the previous meeting were ratified.*

9.37 a.m.

Yr Asiantaeth Adennill Asedau Assets Recovery Agency

[13] **Mick Bates:** We have a paper to note on the work of the Assets Recovery Agency. It was established to disrupt organised criminal enterprises through the recovery of criminal assets and aims to promote the use of financial investigation as an integral part of criminal investigation. The agency became operational in February 2003. This is on the agenda as a result of a Minister's report in 2004, when committee members requested that the Committee Secretariat arrange for the agency to attend the committee and give a presentation. Unfortunately, due to very full agendas, today's meeting was the first opportunity that we have had to invite the agency here. As much as the agency wished to accept that invitation, it was already committed to attending a House of Commons committee meeting and therefore could not accept.

[14] The agency has instead provided a paper and it has said that if Members have any questions, it will gladly answer them. If there are any questions, we will take them, record them and send them on to the Assets Recovery Agency.

[15] **Sandy Mewies:** I have a few questions; I did not know that the agency was not coming. There are some assets recovery breakdown figures for Wales, but is there a breakdown of figures for north Wales?

[16] **Mick Bates:** Are they not included in the paper?

[17] **Sandy Mewies:** There is a breakdown for Wales, but, from my reading of that paper, north Wales is part of the north-west and I want to know whether there are separate figures for north Wales.

[18] The agency has powers to tax income, and so are those powers used in addition to the confiscation powers, and to what effect? The agency states, in relation to its performance indicators, that it hopes to hit its targets in future, but there are currently challenges to converting disruptions into receipts. Can it outline more clearly what those challenges are?

[19] Where does north Wales sit in the Wales organisation, because it is described in terms of the north-west. I can understand why, but I would like to know the thinking behind that.

9.40 a.m.

[20] **Mick Bates:** You raise an interesting point, but there are breakdowns in the paper of amounts recovered. Do any other Members wish to raise issues? We will be writing a letter on this to seek a response. I see that there are no further comments, so we move to item 4.

**Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol Rheoli Troseddwy'r Cymru
National Offender Management Service Wales**

[21] **Mick Bates:** It is a great pleasure this morning to welcome the national offender management team: Siân West, the acting director, and Jim A'Herne, who was here previously, I believe.

[22] **Mr A'Herne:** Yes, I was.

[23] **Mick Bates:** At committee on 3 May, we had a presentation from Carol Bernard, the then director of the National Offender Management Service in Wales. Unfortunately, if you recall, we ran out of time, and the committee agreed that NOMS Wales should be invited back to pick up the issues that arose from Carol's presentation, and to cover the relationship between NOMS Wales and the probation service. So, it is my great pleasure to invite Siân, the acting director of NOMS, to give her presentation.

[24] **Ms West:** Thank you, Chair, and good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to be here. I am the acting director following Carol's moving on, and Jim A'Herne was indeed here last May with Carol. There were certain probation issues that Jim was able to deal with then; he is on secondment from the probation service, and I am on secondment from the prison service, so between us we can probably cover both bases.

[25] I have submitted a brief paper; since May there has been quite a lot of change and development in NOMS, and I thought that it would be useful to go through some of that for the next few minutes, and then pick up any queries or questions that the committee might have. We provided information on a range of issues following our visit in May, and I hope that all of those links and statements came through to the committee—there were certainly links to papers, for example on restructuring probation to reduce re-offending. We would like to update you today on many the issues and actions, and talk about our relationship with the probation service, to bring you more up to speed with the way things are at the moment.

[26] Basically, the biggest issue of the past few weeks has been the successful Third Reading of the Offender Management Bill in the House of Commons, and what happens next is that it will go to the House of Lords, where our Minister, Baroness Scotland, will speak to it. If the House of Lords wishes to query the Bill, or make amendments, then it will come back to the Commons. It is a Bill that has required an awful lot of care and discussion in the way that it was presented, and, as some of you may know, I do not think that the Third Reading was necessarily a smooth and easy ride. Certain modifications and amendments have been proposed and suggested and are being worked through.

[27] The largest portion of the Bill is about probation and the proposal to eventually dissolve probation boards and turn them into probation trusts. At the moment, the obligation to provide offender management lies with probation boards, but the Bill shifts that obligation to the Home Secretary. Offender management is just as it sounds: it is basically our management of all offenders, by allocating them their own offender manager to follow them through from the first time that they come to our notice to the end, when their order or sentence is finished. The Bill expands on that and sets out how that will be achieved. If and when the Bill is enacted, what we will then start to do is develop the trust status of some boards, and we are still talking about how we will do that. It is unlikely that all boards will become trusts at once on a certain day; there will be a process and a gradual development of some boards into trusts.

[28] One of the issues that the Bill has looked at recently, and it was conceded by the Home Secretary, was his committing to retain the core services and court-related services, which include the provision of reports to court, with the public sector probation service for the next three years. To change that and to put it out to contestability—contestability being the phrase that has been mooted since the inception of the National Offender Management Service three years ago—it will have to be discussed in Parliament. Contestability will give commissioners like me the ability to look at developing ways in which we can secure best value services in the whole field of offender management, custody or community punishment.

[29] We have started that work this year. We are approaching the end of the first year of commissioning, and I will speak about that a little later. On 1 April 2006, the offender management model was started in probation. All offenders are now tiered after appropriate assessment, and they are allocated to an offender manager. Tier 4 includes the most serious offenders who need most intervention and control, and it goes down through the tiers to tier 1, which covers people deemed to simply need a punishment element to their punishment order and do not necessarily need intervention and offender work.

[30] In November, we implemented the first phase of custodial offender management in the prison service, which covers those prisoners who come under multi-agency public protection because they are at a high or very high risk of harm, and those who are in custody having been named, in Wales, by community safety partnerships as being prolific or other priority offenders. The latter group come through the CSPs as people who are deemed to need particular supervision, surveillance, intervention and help. Since November, those two groups of prisoners have also been subject to offender management within prison, which means that an offender supervisor has been allocated to them, and we work closely with their offender manager to construct a sentence plan, which we then implement.

[31] The next phase of offender management in custody should come through later this year, and we will probably begin with another group of prisoners who are serving indeterminate sentences. The committee may be aware that prisoners who are serving a sentence of life imprisonment have been joined by offenders serving a sentence called an indeterminate public protection sentence. There have been such sentences, under the latest Act, which means that there are now many more prisoners with a tariff who do not know their release date, because that depends on their progress.

[32] That briefly covers the Bill and offender management, and I would be happy to come back to those topics later. On reducing re-offending, I have brought copies of our publications for you, which I will leave with the clerk. We have just launched and published our reducing re-offending action plan, which is the product of a hard-worked year with all our partners, and it is a joint action plan and strategy with the Welsh Assembly Government. We are pleased to have spread more than 300 actions across seven pathways that NOMS believes will reduce re-offending most effectively. You may recall that the actions cover: accommodation; education, training and employment; health; substance misuse; children and families; finance, benefits and debt; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. They are the seven cluster pathways, and we now have an action plan that is mainly targeted at 2007-08, but some of those activities stretch beyond that.

[33] We have mentioned the cross-cutting issues in our paper to you. The action plan is deliverable; the actions have been cleared by Ministers as being deliverable and we meet regularly as a partnership and strategy board, which covers many sectors, including the voluntary, community and local government sectors, to monitor the progress of the action plan.

[34] We have a target to reduce re-offending across England and Wales by 10 per cent by the end of the decade. However, the next comprehensive spending review will give us an opportunity to construct targets that fit across Government in a more cohesive way. My colleagues in the Home Office crime team have crime targets, and I have reducing re-offending targets that have clear links to the crime targets, so we are talking about how to come through with targets that can be met, but which are more linked across Government.

9.50 a.m.

[35] On commissioning, I have published a commissioning plan that can be sent to you. The commissioning plan that we published this spring is our first ever commissioning plan, and the nine English regions have also produced a commissioning plan. It is clear that a commissioning plan should only be produced after considerable consultation. We have this one out as a first one after some consultation, but we certainly intend to have a longer process and do more consultation for the 2008-09 commissioning plan because, as a regional commissioner, I am required to produce a plan that says, 'This is how I am going to meet the needs of offenders in Wales so that we can better protect the public and reduce re-offending'.

[36] One of the proposals that we have been discussing in the Third Reading of the Bill is looking at enshrining more clearly our consultation with the Welsh Assembly Government and with Ministers. It is clear that the issues concerning people in Wales need, obviously, full consultation with all who would wish to express a view on what happens to offenders in Wales, their families and their victims.

[37] Meeting the diverse needs of offenders is crucial, because we need to address their offending behaviour particularly. Committee may be aware that, for instance, we do not have any prisons for women in Wales, and I do not therefore have a direct monitoring ability over what happens to women in English prisons who are Welsh or are returning to Wales, but they are firmly on my agenda. There are other diverse groups that we need to be sure that we are monitoring closely at all times through our providers, prisons and probation.

[38] Jim, as my commissioning manager, has worked with me over this year on our service level agreements with the four probation areas: north Wales; south Wales; Dyfed-Powys; and Gwent. We are coming to the end of the first ever of what is a very new process in which we monitor the performance of probation through service level agreements. I also have a service level agreement with the public sector prisons through the operational manager, and we monitor the performance of the public sector prisons at Cardiff, Swansea and Usk Prescoed through those service level agreements. We formally review them every quarter, and we will continue over the next round of service level agreements. At the moment, we are negotiating the 2007-08 service level agreements with slightly different targets, trying all the time to develop our targets and our performance so that we get the best for Wales and do our best to reduce re-offending across those pathways. Providers are engaging positively, and have done so throughout this year, even though it has been a very new agenda for all of us.

[39] As the commissioner, I need to approve the budgets for all those, and as the years go by and NOMS, which is a new organisation, settles in, we are finding that the mechanisms for doing that are becoming clearer. In the area of education and skills, I am directly looking after the money whereas, in England, the learning and skills councils do that. We do not have those councils in Wales, so, by default, I have become the learning and skills council for offenders. I am, therefore, directly commissioning education, and the idea is that, through a short period of a couple of years, we will transfer that to the Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in the Assembly Government.

[40] The National Probation Directorate is now a part of NOMS. The NPD used to be the people who used to do a lot of the administration and management of probation. The National Offender Management Service has incorporated those people, and they sit within a new directorate of performance and improvement. Commissioning sits in a new directorate of commissioning and partnerships.

[41] Last August, we produced what we were going to call a 'prospectus', but, in the end, we called it a 'public value partnerships document', and I have some copies to leave with you. It sets out last summer's ideas for how we will undertake commissioning and look at the market testing over the next few years of those services.

[42] Within this document, the public value partnerships are the Government-stated aims for introducing a more diverse marketplace. We in Wales have been very aware that, although it is a reserved issue, we need to make sure that it fits within how we deal with the Welsh Assembly Government's response to such things as the Beecham report, for instance. Rebalancing sentencing is mentioned in my report, working with the courts, which are realigning from April to become a Wales-only service in three areas. There is lots of work still to do with sentencers. The sentencers whom I have met are very keen to continue to be informed of those interventions through the courts that work the best, so that they do not see the same people back time and again.

[43] The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs has called me and certain other people to give evidence over the past few months, and we are awaiting its report. Its inquiry is into prisoners in Wales and Welsh prisoners in the prison estate, so it has taken evidence from many people and it has also dealt with queries about what new prison for Wales there should be and where it should be. So, I am happy to explore some of those issues later.

[44] I have also reported on an accommodation pathfinder, which is one example of how we are trying to look at the needs of women. We believe that women returning home from prison, as well as other women offenders, have particular housing needs in Wales. Sometimes, it is not about having a roof over their heads, but about having adequate support. I mention that in the report.

[45] I am also delighted that, as we come to the end of 2006-07, we are about to issue our Welsh language scheme for consultation with our friends, partners, providers and stakeholders. As part of the Home Office, there is a Welsh language scheme for us to abide by; however, we felt that it was important to develop our own Welsh language scheme. We very much feel that we are part of Wales and so we need to be able to communicate in all fora. Jim has recently been to a criminal justice forum in Aberystwyth where our plans for the Welsh language scheme were first mooted. So, we are pleased to be able to launch that for consultation over the next few weeks.

[46] Chair, that covers the issues that I wanted to raise, and I would be pleased to do my best to tackle any questions that the committee may have.

[47] **Mick Bates:** Thank you very much, Siân, for that excellent report. There are some major issues there, and several Members have already indicated that they wish to speak: Sandy, Laura, Mark and Leanne. I am sure that there may well be many questions about the update on the parliamentary side. If people have questions specifically on that, I will take those first, starting with Sandy.

[48] **Sandy Mewies:** No.

[49] **Mick Bates:** You have no questions on that?

[50] **Sandy Mewies:** No.

[51] **Laura Anne Jones:** Is this on the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs?

[52] **Mick Bates:** Yes.

[53] **Laura Anne Jones:** I would like to—

[54] **Mick Bates:** No, I am sorry. Let me start again. Are there any questions on the Offender Management Bill? Do you have any questions on that, Sandy?

[55] **Sandy Mewies:** No, I have some general issues to raise.

[56] **Mick Bates:** Are there any points on that? I thought we would go through Siân's report about the Offender Management Bill.

[57] **Mark Isherwood:** There was a specific question that I wanted to ask on the Offender Management Bill.

[58] **Mick Bates:** Okay, we will take that now. I would prefer to take that first, Sandy.

[59] **Sandy Mewies:** That is fine.

[60] **Mark Isherwood:** I will come to the rest of my questions later. This refers to competitive commissioning, which we discussed last year, and concern was raised then that many of the organisations that would be bidding in competition with the probation trusts would not have the critical mass or the resource to invest as a trial provider without the certainty of an extended contract after the event. What consideration has been given to that in the interim?

[61] **Ms West:** There is an issue about the fact that, at the moment, I am hearing from many people in the voluntary, faith and community sector that they really need to know that there will be a commitment, because they need to build up their capacity to write bids. We are at the point at which building up the marketplace is a strong concern. There is no firm commitment that I can give for now other than that it is clear that I am enabling all our partners in those sectors to think about consortia and perhaps to join with other partners in the private, corporate sector, or with the public sector. Sometimes, a consortium can have strength across all those areas, but can also give the security that smaller organisations may not have. I will develop this theme in our next commissioning plan. I fully accept that it is a strong concern for many sectors.

[62] **Mick Bates:** I see that Leanne wants to come in. Is your question on the Offender Management Bill, Leanne? I am sorry, Members, but it is such an important issue that I thought that we would deal with it first, rather than dilute it by taking it through individual contributions.

10.00 a.m.

[63] **Sandy Mewies:** The problem is that I am not sure what we are talking about. I understood you to be talking about the Bill itself, and how the legislation is going through. There are issues arising from the Bill, but perhaps they are not so specific. I was going to ask something on the issue that Mark just raised, but I was thinking about specific legislation.

[64] **Mick Bates:** Normally, the routine is that Members indicate and ask a series of questions. In this case, because the report was so clear and well structured, I felt that the Offender Management Bill was worthy of its own discussion, and that Members would ask questions on that. I will take Leanne's question now and we will then return to the normal procedure, as I think that Members will be more comfortable with it.

[65] **Leanne Wood:** Which organisations do you have in mind, or which are likely to apply, for contracts for probation work? Is there a list of organisations in south Wales? My understanding is that there is a lack of potential partners. Which amendments do you think have the potential of getting through the House of Lords, and how will they affect how the Bill eventually looks, in terms of what work probation officers will and will no longer do with people?

[66] **Ms West:** It may not be easy to give direct answers to those questions. As regards having a list of people who are in a position to compete, we have suggested through the public value partnerships that we invite people to register with the National Offender Management Service as possible future providers. At this stage, we have a list of partners that we are inviting to events, but I do not keep a list of those people whom I will be targeting as suitable competitors, ready for that point in the future when I will be issuing invitations to tender. We are evolving it so that people can get the feel of what sort of probation services will be, possibly, put out. If, for instance, we take interventions, which is the other half of probation that covers all the programmes that we do and unpaid work, or community work as was, there may well be certain organisations that feel that they could take on the supervision of people on unpaid work over the next few years, and that is spelt out in this. However, I do not have a list that I actively keep of those people in south or north Wales whom I would want to target.

[67] I will come back to your next question in a minute, because Jim may want to add something to that.

[68] **Mr A'Herne:** There are two issues. First, as Siân indicated, through the public value partnership, anyone who is interested in looking at criminal justice business has the opportunity to register. So, at some point, we could look at how many people had registered, and how many people specific to Wales had registered. While I agree with Leanne's point about whether there are sufficient people out there, what we have found, particularly through looking at ongoing partnership work with the prison and probation services at the moment, is that considerable numbers of people are very capable of delivering certain aspects of current work. The expectation is that, next year, the probation services will contract out at least 10 per cent of its work. When we have looked at this year's budgets and this year's contracting out, we have seen that most areas in Wales are already achieving between 7 and 9 per cent. So, they already work closely with many providers. As I am sure that Leanne knows, some of those providers, particularly in the area of substance misuse, are very good and work closely with the probation offender manager, providing treatment, testing, and so on. So, there is a potential for people to be involved.

[69] Finally, a lot of the information that is coming out says that there is encouragement for people to work together. So, while we may look for one main provider, we would not look to contract with that provider unless it provided very clear evidence that it could subcontract work locally and provide services for local communities, because that is one of the big things that we want to achieve. We want to get to a stage at which work is being provided as locally as possible so that it fits in with the people who live in the communities.

[70] **Leanne Wood:** I welcome the fact that that local aspect forms part of your value base, but I am concerned that some of the potential partners may not share the values that probation officers in the public sector are currently trained to work within. I have this awful vision of Group 4 Securicor plc, for example, running anger-management programmes and then expecting existing probation officers to work with it in some sort of way. I cannot imagine how that will work out. I accept your point that there are plenty of organisations that currently work within the probation service and share its values, but I think that this issue of values is pretty important. What we are talking about here is the privatisation of the probation service, though you have called it ‘contestability’. My fear is that the probation service that I worked for, and that I know and love, will disappear, and the probation service of the future will not be run according to any of the welfare-based values and will be more punitive. I also fear that it will do nothing to reduce reoffending in the long term; in fact, it could go the other way.

[71] **Ms West:** Part of how we commission involves ensuring that appropriate care, protection and safeguarding is maintained at all times, and we would not get into partnership with anyone whose value base was going to jeopardise any of those issues. We just have to develop that and go with it over the next few years, but I understand your concerns.

[72] **Mr A’Herne:** We have to be clear though that that does not exclude the private sector. You mentioned G4S, and so I think that we should mention that the probation service already works with G4S. HMP Parc already has seconded staff who work closely with G4S. Interestingly, they like those staff so much that they often try to poach them, so they obviously value the work that is being done by the probation service. G4S is also providing a mentoring scheme, for example, in which it works closely with the voluntary sector. I absolutely take the point that you made, Leanne, but I think that we need to be clear that it is about people with the right views and attitudes being able to provide the right services. That should not look to exclude any specific sector; otherwise, we end up making value judgments about those sectors, which, clearly, we should not be doing.

[73] **Mick Bates:** Thank you, Jim and Leanne. I felt an uncomfortable moment there when I tried to take the discussion as per the report, but, if I may, I will return now—

[74] **Ms West:** There was a second question. Do you want that dealt with now?

[75] **Mick Bates:** Yes, I apologise. Carry on.

[76] **Ms West:** I do not really want to say much, because I am not very confident regarding how I think the amendments will be dealt with in the House of Lords. However, I know that the Lords will examine the relationship between these new trusts and local set-ups and fora, and there may be discussion around who will be sitting on the new trusts and whether members of local authorities will sit on them. As far as I am concerned, we in Wales would be highly supportive of having as much contact as possible with the local agenda—and there are many layers to government. England has local area agreements, and we are now watching how we develop our local service boards and local service agreements in Wales to see how we can fit in with those. While there are other bits in the Bill, those issues about how trusts will be established will be discussed at some length. I am sure that Baroness Scotland will be able to deal with those and reassure Members of the House of Lords.

10.10 a.m.

[77] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for that discussion on the Offender Management Bill.

[78] **Sandy Mewies:** I misunderstood what you said, Chair, because when you said, ‘Keep it confined to the Bill’, I thought that you meant the legislative process, rather than the outcomes; I have questions on the outcomes.

[79] **Mick Bates:** Carry on; I think that we are more comfortable with the user format.

[80] **Sandy Mewies:** It would have been fine if you had said that at the outset; I thought that we were concentrating on the legislative process.

[81] Mark and Leanne have referred to the organisations that may or may not be involved in the future. You are already talking about service level agreements with probation boards and your normal partners, and you will already have service level agreements with organisations such as Cais—they are the sorts of organisations that you would expect to tender. How will you ensure, through your service level agreements, that their work will be monitored and evaluated in the same rigorous way as other partners? That is one issue that I am concerned about.

[82] I am also a bit concerned about the trusts. What are these trusts going to reflect? Are they going to reflect the current set up of the probation boards—the areas that Wales is divided into now—or will they be different? Will they be based on other geographical or regional divisions? Whichever answer you give, has the cost of that change been calculated? Do you have any idea about the cost? There will be a cost, because change always costs money. What will happen? I am slightly concerned by your saying that the timescale for each board to become a trust will not be the same, as that immediately introduces an inconsistency to the system. That means that you will not be able to compare the performance of different areas, whichever areas those trusts represent.

[83] You talk about the reoffending action plan and the current target of reducing reoffending by 10 per cent by the end of the decade, based on the 2003 cohort. I understand you to have said that there will be a revision of targets, in line with Welsh Assembly Government priorities. That is okay, but where are you now on that 10 per cent? That is the only target that I can use now. Where are you now on meeting that target? Are you on course to achieving it?

[84] The accommodation pathfinder project sounds interesting. Do you have a specific location in mind for it? While listening to you, I was wondering whether you were thinking of the support that people need. I totally agree that it is all well and good to put people in an area, but if they have specific needs, they need support. What sort of support are you going to be able to give?

[85] To go back to the other organisations that may or may not be introduced to the system, you talked about tier 4, prolific offenders and the new sentencing regime. That means continuing public protection, does it not? How will you ensure that all the new organisations involved can share information through information communication technology? One of the big problems that we have had in Wales is that there have been major changes between organisations, information is gathered in different ways, which makes statistics meaningless, and the information systems used are often different and cannot manage the information in the same way. I know that the probation board has already gone through a huge information systems change and that was pretty rocky. How will that be managed?

[86] The other, perhaps more important, point is that when all these organisations are working together in partnership, how can you ensure that information is shared, particularly on tier 4, more serious, offenders? People should not come out of prison with a tier-4 tag and be able to go into a voluntary organisation that has no idea of what level they are on. How are you going to do that? I hope that the booklet that you talked about will refer specifically to cross-border issues as well as to the other issues, because, for quite a few of us—particularly those representing areas in north Wales—cross-border issues are extremely important.

[87] You talked about education. One of the disappointing things about our prison service is that we know that failings in the areas of numeracy and literacy often lead younger people into the criminal justice system. I have seen at Styal prison, for example, some effort being made to deal with education. It is not a good service, and I do not think that any of us would claim that it is a good service for young people, but it is getting better. How can you ensure that younger people are given the opportunity to improve their education? Some older people might also benefit from improving their literacy, numeracy or other skills.

[88] Alongside that, I have seen the work that the prison service does in schools, which I found to be very effective. The first presentation that I saw by a prison officer frightened me. The officer laid out a square that represented a cell, and brought in the muggy clothes that prisoners have to wear. I do not think that people realise that prisoners do not have their own clothes—that clothes are recycled. The presentation also talked about the conditions and so on. I think that that gave a number of young people real pause for thought. So, will that sort of educational output continue? Will you, perhaps, be using former offenders who, if they were convinced about it, could probably give young people a good insight into what can happen to them?

[89] Finally, we know that the Chester and north Wales circuit is changing. At the last Social Justice and Regeneration Committee meeting, we talked about the changes, which are not completely on course yet. How will you ensure that there is consistency in terms of rebalancing sentencing? At the moment, the Chester circuit plays out large. These changes are happening, so you have to try to ensure that, after talking to the Chester circuit, the effects are transferred into the rest of Wales, particularly the north Wales area.

[90] **Mick Bates:** Thank you, Sandy. There are several issues there.

[91] **Ms West:** I have them all, I think.

[92] **Mick Bates:** I will tick them off. I counted 11 questions.

[93] **Ms West:** The first question was about service level agreements and how we will ensure that service level agreements of the future are closely monitored. At the moment, the plan is that I will carry on with the subcontracting that we are doing this year, so that I will be requiring lead providers to be, in a sense, commissioners. They will have service level agreements with the smaller organisations. Through my quarterly service level agreement monitoring of lead providers, I will be requiring assurances, with evidence, that they, in their way, are monitoring the delivery of that work with offenders. Is that okay for now?

[94] **Sandy Mewies:** Yes.

[95] **Mr A'Herne:** It might be worth saying that, this year, given that the service level agreements are new, we introduced specific validation exercises. I think that we are the only area to have done this. We have looked at all of the evidence that has been returned to the centre by each probation area, and have gone in as a team, working with the probation areas, to check that that information is correct. We would be looking to do something similar against the contracts and service level agreements with providers.

[96] **Ms West:** The second question was about how the trusts will be organised. Your first concern was about whether they will be geographically the same. The plan is that they will be geographically the same. So, while a few years ago, people might have wondered whether having an all-Wales police force might eventually have led to an all-Wales probation service, that is not on my radar at all. Therefore, the probation trusts will be along the lines of the four geographical areas. In due course, some years down the line, if a particular probation board or trust is struggling to meet the targets and the performance requirements that I set, then a neighbouring probation trust might want to say, 'Excuse me, commissioner, we can do that work better than they can'. Therefore, there are some interesting possible developments some years down the line.

10.20 a.m.

[97] It will cost money. I do not have to hand the current estimates, as it has to go in as part of a thoroughly costed and transparent planning process. There are still many models as to how we will turn boards into trusts. One model that is attracting some approval is the idea that we do it in a phased way. That will have cost-benefit issues, and it will also fulfil a pathfinder role for those people who do it first. So, there may well be inconsistencies; we live with inconsistencies, and we are now able to stand back, look across and try to manage those inconsistencies.

[98] I hope that that is a sufficient answer; I am happy to come back on that.

[99] **Mick Bates:** In other words, there are no costs—no-one has sat down and costed the exercise yet?

[100] **Ms West:** I am sure that my colleagues in the Home Office are considering that, because they have to take a business-issue approach to it. However, they have not worried me with it yet.

[101] **Mick Bates:** You referred to 'Closing the Gap', the police exercise; one of the key issues for us was the fact that the costings were punitive. Are you telling us that the exercise is taking place now?

[102] **Ms West:** I would wish to take confirmation outside the committee that we had started that thinking, although I believe that we have. I can provide you with formal confirmation at a later date. I appreciate the concerns on that, because a lot of money was spent.

[103] **Mick Bates:** Yes, previously on the police.

[104] **Ms West:** On the reducing reoffending action plan—

[105] **Mick Bates:** What about the timescale?

[106] **Sandy Mewies:** What about the targets?

[107] **Ms West:** Do you mean with the reducing reoffending action plan or with the trusts?

[108] **Sandy Mewies:** With the reducing reoffending action plan—they are your targets; will you change them to Welsh Assembly Government priorities?

[109] **Ms West:** No, it would not be specifically Welsh Assembly Government priorities—it would be England and Wales Government priorities.

[110] **Sandy Mewies:** But you have a 10 per cent target—are you on course to meet that?

[111] **Ms West:** The 10 per cent target is challenging. The mathematics behind it are that, in January through to March of every calendar year, Home Office statisticians select a cohort of some 40,000 people who are finishing their order—be it their prison sentence or their probation supervision or order. They then track those people for two years, and a rate comes out of that, which is their rate of reoffending. So, the number of people who reoffended in that time is measured. The service level agreement came into effect last April; so, in terms of our having an impact through agreements with providers, we only started last April, and, in a sense, the first cohort that would feel our impact is this current cohort that is now in its third month of being counted.

[112] There has been some reduction in reoffending prior to NOMS coming through. The concerns are that it is a blunt number, and it would be much more interesting to gather information about how much reoffending is going on, and/or how serious that reoffending is. For example, for someone who took a long time to get back into trouble, and, when they did, their offence was much more minor—a non-violent offence, whereas their previous offences had been violent—that would be seen to be a reduction in their offending. So, there are many complicated elements to this, which, for public protection and for the sake of this, we need to explore. With people under 18—young people—their reoffending is measured over one year and two years, and we do not measure over one year; we are losing, in a sense, those numbers as well. So, as we develop our measurements, we will possibly be looking at volume and seriousness, as well as at over a year's basis, to gauge how many people are getting back into trouble.

[113] **Sandy Mewies:** Is that all you can say on the present system that you have introduced? You told us that it is flawed, but is it 57.6 per cent for 2006?

[114] **Ms West:** Yes, across the board.

[115] **Sandy Mewies:** I appreciate that you will not get any further than that.

[116] **Mr A'Herne:** We will be looking at something that is far more local, though, through the service level agreements. Through the service level agreements, probation areas will have reducing reoffending targets, based on their current offending rates and then there will be an expectation on them to try to reduce those, so we should be able to gather over probably the next two years very local information based on tracking through the police national computer and then we can look at how many of the people going to court reoffend within a six-month period. So we should be able to achieve much more local, up-to-date information that will be far more meaningful to those who work on the ground than something that comes out every three years. So, there is an opportunity to look at this, as Siân has suggested, in much more depth and to look at not just volume but also seriousness.

[117] **Ms West:** You then asked about the pathfinder. Briefly, we would not be looking, necessarily, at a specific location for women returners. It is going to be about a support package but we also want to tie in more explicitly with many other issues that are going through the Welsh Assembly Government and other areas, for example, landlords and support through the voluntary and community sector. For women offenders, life can be extremely complex when they are sole carers of dependants and all of those issues need to be taken into account. If we are going to be able to draw down money for this, we very much want to spend it in exactly the right ways. So it is not necessarily about housing stock; it may well be about support.

[118] On other organisations and information sharing, we would not normally share the tier of an offender because that can change as we carry out interventions to reduce their risk. However, the prolific and other priority offenders are listed and owned by the community safety partnerships, on which there is a lot of sector membership, including the police, local government and the probation service, and I am sure that there are information-sharing protocols within those partnerships, so they can work together on those, and even more so with the high-risk-of-harm people.

[119] For any offender subject to multi-agency public protection arrangements, there are very clear information-sharing protocols. We have all heard of those inquiries where information has not been shared and somebody has been put at risk or something has gone wrong. So, there is a need at all times to ensure that public protection is kept at a maximum by ensuring that the right information is shared with the right people. The protocols are in place and there are statutory boards to ensure that those protocols are complied with and adhered to.

[120] **Mr A'Herne:** I think that it is worth saying that, as I am sure you are aware, with the high-risk-of-harm offenders, there are multi-agency public protection arrangements, and for the last two years those have involved the prison service as one of the responsible authorities. That means that we can start looking at the risk factors while the person is still serving their sentence. Multi-agency public protection meetings will start perhaps six months before release so that we can work out with local authorities, housing providers and other people providing services what needs to be put in place to maintain the safety of the public.

[121] The terminology gets confusing sometimes. Tier 4 is about the offender management model and then you have the different levels within the multi-agency public protection arrangements. Most tier 4 cases would fall within the multi-agency public protection arrangements.

[122] **Sandy Mewies:** The reason why I asked that specific question is because this is not just about public protection; it is about the protection of vulnerable people coming out of prison. In north Wales, for example, we have had fire deaths and there is concern that the Data Protection Act 1998 has been used inappropriately at times and has prevented agencies from sharing information that might have prevented some of these tragic incidents. I have concerns about the big agencies not being clear about the implications of the Data Protection Act and what it means. I am greatly concerned about public protection, and I think that agencies should be aware of whom they are dealing with, but I also have concerns about the vulnerable people who are coming out of prison. There should be a multi-agency approach to supporting them.

10.30 a.m.

[123] **Ms West:** Using the offender management model, the offender manager will ensure that the right agencies are involved, so I hope that we will see an improvement.

[124] **Mr A'Herne:** The model will also ensure that those agencies are informed. There are protocols in place to allow sharing of information. Any partner or organisation involved, through the offender manager, with the offender should be appropriately informed. The issue is about ensuring that the information given is appropriate to the risk and the need.

[125] **Ms West:** There were some more questions. Shall I run through those quickly?

[126] **Mick Bates:** We were late in starting, so it is my intention to carry on until all Members have asked their questions. I think that the next question was on cross-border issues.

[127] **Ms West:** I have the next question down as being about ICT.

[128] **Mick Bates:** Yes. Sorry, it was a question on data.

[129] **Sandy Mewies:** It was a question on whether or not the data have been sorted out.

[130] **Ms West:** Not yet. We have a very big ICT system. OASys, the offender assessment system, is now used for offenders in custody and the community. Our new system is called NOMIS, the national offender management information system. It has already been launched in prisons, and it will be coming through over the next two to three years in prison and probation services.

[131] From what I can recall, there is not a great deal about the cross-border issues. It is very important that, although there are 10 commissioners like me, we are very aware, particularly in Wales, of the need to develop partnerships with, for example, the people who work in the prisons where the offenders are.

[132] **Mr A'Herne:** On cross-border issues, it is worth noting that we carried out a survey across all four probation areas to establish how many offenders were in how many prisons. We found that we were looking at people who had been in 30 or 40 different prisons. So, when you talk about cross-border issues, you are really talking about the whole of England and Wales. We could find that we have a serious, category A, offender in Northumberland, for example. It is a big issue, but some of these are singletons, and so when it comes to looking at resources, there is quite a job to do. However, it is good that these people have been identified; we know where they are and what services they are receiving.

[133] **Ms West:** Education and skills are crucial issues for offenders, in the community and in custody. We now assess all offenders for their basic skills levels. There are a variety of assessments depending on the need. We endeavour to provide everybody with sufficient numeracy, literacy and communication skills, to ensure that they can raise their ability. With young people under the age of 18, we have had a lot of involvement from Estyn in Parc prison, where we have young men under the age of 18. With younger people, the issue is that sometimes they are not that keen on classroom settings, because they may have had difficult experiences in classroom settings before. I just wish to assure the committee that we believe that this is a strong area for growth and development, and I am satisfied that, at the moment, we are certainly heading in the right direction.

[134] **Mr A'Herne:** We have targets. In each service level agreement, with probation and prison, there are specific targets for basic and key skills. These are numerical targets at the moment, but, over the next year, we intend to identify exactly what the need is and to then translate those targets into more meaningful output and outcome targets.

[135] **Ms West:** Moving on to the last two questions, we have outreach possibilities, so we can go to speak to young people about how awful it is in prison. At Prescoed prison, where many of the prisoners work in the community, they are going out to talk to young people to tell them that there is nothing glamorous or lovely about being in prison. On the courts issue, as the courts reorganise, I am setting up a system through the regional courts managers. We need to monitor how things go. Chester is a very large court and is able to do a lot of Welsh work. It is not my place to comment, but I gather that there will be a very strong focus in Chester and in Cheshire for keeping Welsh matters Welsh, even if it is sitting in England. So, that looks very hopeful for the future. I believe that I have answered all your questions.

[136] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you very much, Siân and Jim. I was not being negative, and I should have said, at the very beginning, how much work I think has progressed since the last presentation. We had many questions at the end of the last presentation because things had not moved on very far. I am pleased to see that they have now moved on.

[137] **Laura Anne Jones:** I also welcome the progress that you have made on the education side. My mother used to teach in a prison and, from what I heard from when she came home, it was all very worthwhile.

[138] First, on the new prison in south Wales—I am an AM for South Wales East and I have heard that a site is being looked at in my region—could you expand on that? Do you have more information? Do you want me to ask all my questions at once?

[139] **Ms West:** Okay.

[140] **Laura Anne Jones:** Secondly, you said that you tiered prisoners, but could you tell me now roughly what tier you would put a sex offender or a paedophile in? I live in Llanbadarn in Usk, which is very near Prescoed prison, so I am fully aware of the offenders there and that they regularly abscond and have done so for as long as I can remember from when I was a child. Sex offenders are now housed in that prison, which worries me, the community and my constituents very much. It has made people around the area feel like prisoners in their own homes, particularly the children living directly next to the prison.

[141] Given that 57.6 per cent of people re-offend, can you honestly say that you can put those sorts of people, who are high-risk in my eyes, in an open prison from which they can abscond just by walking over a line—if you have ever been up there, you can see how open it is—and they will not re-offend? Can you be sure at that point, after putting them in that prison, that they will not do that? I want those people to change and have opportunities in life, but I do not think, particularly given shortened sentences, that they are ready to be in that sort of prison. Could you make your views clear on that? It is a very important issue for many people.

[142] **Ms West:** On the new prison, for various factors—and much of this is about the need in terms of numbers—Wales needs a new prison in the southern half of the country. There is a strong desire from colleagues in north Wales to also have an establishment in north Wales, but the current intention is to site a prison in south Wales. We are looking at a range of sites and they have to tick many boxes: they have to be of a certain size and they have to be on a certain flatness of ground and so on. A list of suitable sites has been produced. We are very aware that the Heads of the Valleys region, for want of a better term, is seen as somewhere that many people feel could do with the development and the employment possibilities. No firm decision has been made on the siting of a prison in south Wales. When a firm decision is made, our Minister will write to Mrs Hart.

[143] **Mr A'Herne:** Presumably, you are thinking about the issues about Cwmbran. That has been looked at. The site has many attractions, but issues relating to its appropriateness have been raised and recognised across the parties. Certainly, the Minister has acknowledged those issues and, as Siân said, the search goes on.

10.40 a.m.

[144] **Laura Anne Jones:** I will briefly say that it is important that this does not happen around housing where there are children, and that sort of thing; it does not really—

[145] **Ms West:** It is a very secure establishment—it obviously has perimeter security and procedural security, and therefore—

[146] **Laura Anne Jones:** Still—okay, next question. I will not go into that.

[147] **Ms West:** The question on tiering of offending was about sex offenders. There are guidelines, and every offender manager will assess their offender in the first few days, and the guidelines will be followed. It is very likely that a sex offender would be deemed to need intervention to address their offending behaviour, so they are likely to be in tier 4 or tier 3, and very unlikely—though it depends on the level of the offence—to be in tier 2 or tier 1. There is a range of sex offences requiring various interventions. I can talk more about that.

[148] **Mr A'Herne:** It is worth mentioning that, as I tried to indicate earlier, the issue of tiering can become confusing in relation to the issue of multi-agency public protection arrangements. All sex offenders are registered to ensure that they are covered by MAPPA. The tiering is part of the offender management model, so it is much more of a tool for day-to-day work, if you like, where obviously the level of risk for various people can go up and down, but clearly, with a dangerous sex offender, it is more than probable that they would always remain at tier 4, because they would always require enough intervention to ensure that their risk was being properly managed.

[149] **Ms West:** The final question was about the policy of putting people in open conditions in England and Wales. There are policy issues; every offender who goes to category D prisons has to be fully risk-assessed, and all their respective factors taken into account. To rehabilitate high-risk offenders, we have to reduce their risk and we have to test them in open conditions. We are very aware that, at Prescoed, this needs to be done with all due concern for how we proceed. There is a policy in place that we will continue to put people who may have committed serious offences some time ago in open conditions in order to test them. There is obviously—

[150] **Laura Anne Jones:** You are testing them?

[151] **Ms West:** Yes, because it is much better for their rehabilitation that they go through the various stages of prison security.

[152] **Laura Anne Jones:** Is that part of the test, then? If they walk out of prison and re-offend, do you say, 'Oh dear, they had better be put back in higher security'? That, to me, is putting the public at risk.

[153] **Ms West:** When we assess their level of risk, we include the likelihood of them absconding and re-offending, and, therefore, every care is taken to ensure that the people that we send to open conditions have been risk assessed and deemed to be appropriate to be placed in such conditions.

[154] **Laura Anne Jones:** May I make one further point?

[155] **Mick Bates:** Briefly, because there are other people who want to comment.

[156] **Laura Anne Jones:** I am aware of prisoners who have absconded—sex offenders—and who had their sentences reduced after just one or two years. I am aware of one such prisoner, who had his sentence reduced and then absconded. For me, that amount of time, just a year or two, is not enough for them to have changed. Maybe that is just me, and I do not know the system well enough, but it seems unlikely, unless they have a brain transplant or something.

[157] **Mick Bates:** I think that the point has been made. It is possibly worth commenting on how often the agencies meet, and whether they discuss and reassess each case using electronic communication, or actually come together in a room?

[158] **Ms West:** The agencies meet in person in the case of prisoners under the MAPPAs scheme.

[159] **Mick Bates:** How often would the MAPPAs agencies meet?

[160] **Ms West:** As frequently as is necessary for each particular offender.

[161] **Mr A'Herne:** I think that at Usk prison, rather than Prescoed, they were in some ways ahead of the game anyway, and what they were doing on a monthly basis was having meetings to look at those offenders that might be due to come up for parole consideration, and then the police and the probation and prison services, and other organisations, would come together and look at those. So, those arrangements were in place prior to the development of MAPPAs, and they have continued as MAPPAs has developed. What they would look to do with any MAPPAs case at the moment would be to review a prisoner's situation at least six months before release, and that would involve a multi-agency meeting at a MAPPAs 2 level, which means very serious and imminent danger. So, they would probably be looked at in terms of MAPPAs 2 at that stage.

[162] **Mark Isherwood:** With regard to the point about costs, I fully endorse that. Four members of this committee from four different parties met the police Minister last July, and we had an agreed set of questions for him. One of the questions that I put to him was about the need to invest to save. The answer I received was that it was the wrong question, because he still seemed to believe that the savings in the early days could cover the additional cost. I will be interested to see what response we receive bearing that answer in mind.

[163] You mentioned education and training. My understanding is that up to 70 per cent of people in custody have mental health problems or learning difficulties. When I visited the education wing in a prison on Merseyside, I spoke to prisoners who clearly had learning difficulties and were being put through what they called 'driving tests'. They said that they could get everything right but not within the timescale, so they kept failing the test. There was no programme to support their learning difficulties so that they could start making progress. What action is being undertaken to address the practical delivery and deal with that problem?

[164] I do not know whether or not you are responsible for the rehabilitation process in prison and the bridge to local communities, work and businesses. A prison manager expressed to me a wish to expand its relationship with local businesses; a good example is the kit-car project in HMP Altcourse, which was cited at the criminal justice board conference in north Wales last week, where an ex-offender told us that it had changed his life. More worryingly, land used for other projects, such as a horticultural scheme, has now been used for the construction of an additional accommodation block because of a shortage of accommodation space. Therefore, what consideration has been given to wider rehabilitation needs while offenders are in custody?

[165] We heard reference to ICT. I was in a private meeting with a leading agency two weeks ago, and it talked about the need to share corporate services across the voluntary sector in particular, not just on ICT, but on finance and audit. Many of the smaller agencies do not have the critical mass to do it, but, collectively, there are agencies out there that could do it.

[166] In reference to reducing re-offending, at the same meeting two weeks ago, concern was raised that there is still a revolving door system, because we do not have a proper casework approach when people leave a rehabilitation scheme or a supported scheme. Having gone back to the communities from which they came originally, offenders are returning to prison a few months later with the same problems. No-one should be put in that position without everyone involved in, for example, their substance misuse treatment, education and training, housing and move-on housing support, preparation for work and access to work, being part of the casework process. That issue was only raised with me two weeks ago; it is not a historic problem.

[167] When I met prisoners in HMP Altcourse, they also raised a concern about being moved back to the areas from which they came because of the way that the system is structured. They fear that they will fall back in with their peer groups, pushers and so on. What measures are you taking to address that, bearing in mind the need to engage local communities and not make them feel resentful, as they often do? I dread to use the word 'Nimbyism', and the last time I used it in the Assembly, I had an e-mail from someone saying, 'How dare you call me a Nimby?', but there we are.

[168] In terms of prisons in Wales, you mentioned north Wales, and, at the criminal justice board conference last week, a number of key stakeholders told me that it is nonsense that a new prison is being built in Merseyside, when we should be building a prison in north Wales given the number of prisoners from north Wales currently in Merseyside prisons. An issue was also raised about young offenders and the lack of secure custodial accommodation for them in north Wales.

[169] In terms of the Welsh language scheme, prior to the conference, I attended the national prayer breakfast, at which I met the new Welsh language chaplain who will be going to HMP Altcourse. That is a positive move. How does that fit into the plan? At the conference, I also spoke to John, the senior manager of HMP Altcourse, whom I have met before. He does not call himself 'governor'; he obviously has a more corporate name for it, which I think is 'senior manager'. However, he said that, in terms of the redevelopment after the horticultural plot being built on, they have allocated a room for bilingual Welsh speakers, and I wonder how that factors in with the scheme.

10.50 a.m.

[170] I very much endorse Sandy's comments about the fire and rescue services and the sharing of data. This is something on which we have all been well briefed by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service. They are adamant that some of the 10 people killed recently in fires would not have died if the data had been shared.

[171] On the use of offenders and former offenders referred to earlier, what measures are you taking to build on good practice? I am thinking, for example, of the Prison, Me, No-Way Trust, which engaged with prisoners in their cells. I was on the committee in Flintshire that trialled the project in Wales. The Choose Life project coming out of Walton prison uses ex-offenders very powerfully in schools and colleges. I have been out with them to some of the schools and engaged with young people, but the problem for them, too, is that they have relied on funding from England to fund their north Wales activities. Are you giving that consideration? Also, of course, there are projects such as Touchstone 12, which engages its service users and residents in volunteering in the local community.

[172] **Ms West:** Chair, do you want me to give as full an answer as possible? I am happy to do that, but I could go on for hours on any of those issues. [*Laughter.*]

[173] **Mick Bates:** If there are issues that you wish to expand on, please do so by correspondence with the committee.

[174] **Ms West:** Fine. On issues relating to education and training, learning difficulties and mental health, these are massive problems for prisons; so many people struggle. It is a matter of always improving our assessment of basic skills so that we can identify those people who have a clear learning disability. However, there are far more who have learning difficulties, and it is about finding the right way to help them to gain skills. Through the way in which we commission with custody and community punishment, we want to keep that very much to the fore. I am happy to come back to those issues afterwards.

[175] Using prisons to give vocational training is absolutely vital. Very cramped, Victorian, local prisons do not have lots of space in which they can do an awful lot of vocational training, but I am happy to say that, in Wales, we are doing a fair amount. I was delighted to host a forum on Monday evening—and I am hosting a similar one tomorrow in Llandudno—to which we invited employers from the area to see what is going on in prisons and in the community. We need to give offenders a lot more vocational skills while also increasing their employability, by promoting getting to work on time and being a good team colleague. The kit-car project is lovely, and it was wonderful to see it at the conference.

[176] Rather than give an answer on the point about ICT and smaller agencies, I note it. It will always be difficult to have infrastructure if yours is a small outfit.

[177] With regard to the revolving-door people, it is a concern, as many of them do under 12 months imprisonment and therefore do not get probation supervision, because, under current legislation, that does not apply to those who serve under 12 months. They will often be petty offenders with very chaotic lifestyles, some substance misuse issues, and unstable accommodation. All of that is of great concern, and it will have to be a priority for us over the next few years.

[178] **Mr A'Herne:** We are looking at that specifically in Swansea prison with the Swansea chaplaincy. It works with prisoners and then follows some of them voluntarily outside and continues to support and help them. One of the things that we are doing with the Swansea chaplaincy is asking it to specifically look at some of the people who serve under 12 months, because they are not the only people involved with the revolving door, but there is a big issue of people receiving short sentences going out without support and then coming almost straight back to prison. Projects such as the one undertaken by the Swansea chaplaincy can provide a good input, which currently is not available.

[179] **Ms West:** I noted the comments from last week's conference about the prison for north Wales. The line taken is that the number of people from north Wales who are in custody is not high enough to move the need for north Wales higher up the list. There is much to discuss in that regard, and we could probably discuss it for a while. You will also know that, while I hold the contract for HMP Parc at Bridgend through G4S, I do not hold any formal links with HMP Altcourse. I am just delighted that our relations with Altcourse are so good. John McLaughlin is a terrific director and very aware of Welsh issues. So, we will continue to work with Altcourse. We are delighted that it is on the criminal justice board, and it is a partnership that we are developing. It is interesting to note that Altcourse has been very aware about the Welsh language issues. It has found it difficult to find lots of Welsh speakers, in that particular part of Liverpool, so anything that it does is great.

[180] The fire issue was also mentioned at the criminal justice board conference, and we will take that away and look at it in more depth. On the use of offenders and ex-offenders, we know that the best way to persuade businesses to take on ex-offenders is to use an employer who has seen the benefits of it, almost as an advertisement. As far as reducing reoffending and staying out of trouble is concerned, every time, it is those offenders who have worked through all these issues and sorted themselves out who are brilliant ambassadors for how to do that. I note with interest and some fond memories the projects that you mentioned; it is a terrific thing to do. While I do not directly commission all of them, I am always very pleased to hear of projects where we are using users.

[181] **Mr A'Herne:** There was an offender at Monday's event, was there not?

[182] **Ms West:** Yes.

[183] **Mr A'Herne:** On the event that we held on Monday, we asked an offender to come along to explain what he had done and how he had been assisted, and what difference it had made to him. I appreciate that that is more of a corporate approach, rather than going straight into schools or local colleges, but it was an opportunity for employers to hear about the impact that employment can have on reducing reoffending. It is a powerful message, even more so when it is delivered by an offender who is no longer offending.

[184] **Mick Bates:** I call Leanne finally. We will break in three minutes' time.

[185] **Leanne Wood:** I will be longer than three minutes, I think.

[186] **Mick Bates:** Okay. Thank you for informing me. [*Laughter.*]

[187] **Leanne Wood:** First, I want to address the Welsh language scheme. I welcome the fact that you have chosen to create your own, even though you did not have to. However, if that scheme guarantees services to people through the medium of Welsh should they request them, what will the position be with any services that are contracted out? I understand that the Welsh Language Act 1993 covers only public sector organisations, so if offenders currently have any language rights, could they lose them after services have been contracted out?

[188] This also links into the point that Mark was making about the demand for a prison in the north. What Mark did not mention was the number of people whose first language is Welsh who are serving prison sentences in England. Clearly, there is an issue there around providing rehabilitation in people's first language. While the numbers may not be enough to reach whatever the threshold is, there is certainly an argument for having an institution in the north because of the language issue—even though the fact that we have reached a prison population of 80,000 is, in my view, ridiculous, and so, rather than building new prisons, the Home Office should think about how to reduce the prison population. However, I understand that that is not a matter for you.

[189] I have not read your action plan, but I am keen to know what you are doing to address the causes of crime, and, in particular, what links there are from your perspective between childhood trauma and counselling services. I am thinking particularly of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and bereavement, which were the issues that seemed to come up all the time when I was a probation officer, though there was very little opportunity for those issues to be addressed. In the old days, probation officers could engage in some form of counselling with people, but things have changed a lot—and this relates to the point I was making earlier about values. People's welfare needs are considered to be less of a priority than the need for them to be punished.

11.00 a.m.

[190] I also want to address the question of the reoffending figure, which stands at 57.6 per cent. Is there a differentiation between people who have been on probation and in prison? I understand that there is a difference of at least 13 per cent, and that probation is far more successful in terms of the rates of reoffending than prison is.

[191] You also say that you aim to increase the quality and range of services. What is the problem with the existing public probation service, and what are the quality issues, because I understand that inspection reports have been very positive? You said that cutting reoffending rates by 10 per cent will be a challenge, but maybe we could do that quite quickly by reducing the prison population. If those differentiation rates are as I assume them to be, we could quickly cut reoffending rates by rehabilitating more people in the community.

[192] Are you expecting any probation officer job losses, and will there be any compulsory redundancies? Would you be prepared to rule those out? With the pre-sentence report writing, I welcome the fact that it will be three years before that situation is reviewed, and that it will remain in the public sector. I am concerned about the potential conflict of interest with that. A probation officer currently writes a report and makes a proposal for a sentence, which is carried out within the public sector. However, if a private or voluntary sector organisation makes that proposal, it is in its interests to propose sentences that go back to its organisation. If a profit motive is introduced to this, it will be in its interests to make as much money as possible. Has that been thought through, and can you give us any updates on the current debate about it?

[193] Finally, I do not know how aware you are of the new Government of Wales Act 2006, which will be coming into effect in May. My view is that there are three parties in the Assembly, but there is little appetite for the contestability of services. However, if there is any room for us to do anything differently in Wales, I am sure that the Members after May will be jumping at the opportunity. Do you know of anything in the legal framework that we could look at in order to devolve certain measures after May?

[194] **Ms West:** I think that I will take the questions that I can give single-syllable answers to. *[Laughter.]* On your last question, we are certainly aware of the Government of Wales Act. I do not know of any framework that could be devolved, but it is not an area in which I have knowledge, so I will look into that.

[195] On your question about report writing and the conflict of interest, we will have to put in enough safeguards so that, if there ever comes a day when we have contracted out the report-making recommendations to court, we ensure that there are enough safeguards in place to ensure that no-one has a conflict of interest.

[196] **Mr A'Herne:** I believe that that was one of the suggested amendments to the Offender Management Bill as it went through its Third Reading. That is probably the reason why the change took place, in that only probation could continue to write the reports. So, yes, it has been recognised and, clearly, any conflict of interest will have to be removed from the process.

[197] **Ms West:** Due to the fact that the probation service is the provider, I am not directly looped into the issues regarding possible job losses there, or whether it is planning strategically for how it will develop its workforce, which means that it will be shifting jobs around. I will not give a direct answer on that, because I am the commissioner, and its workforce is its own issue.

[198] I note your comments on reducing the prison population, and my business is reducing reoffending. I feel strongly that reducing reoffending will reduce the prison population, because, if fewer people have reoffended, they will not go back to prison.

[199] **Mr A'Herne:** It is also worth noting that the Government has acknowledged that it believes that particularly those serving short sentences could be dealt with in other ways, via probation, rehabilitation, and so on. That is recognition of a bigger picture that involves sentences to a large extent.

[200] **Ms West:** The rebalancing sentencing arm of NOMS is open to my influence, and that will continue.

[201] I note your question about improving the quality and increasing the range of services. I do not know whether you required a direct answer on that.

[202] **Leanne Wood:** I want to know specifically whether there are any plans to try to buy in trauma counselling services.

[203] **Ms West:** On the trauma services, we are very aware that people will have many emotional, psychological and mental health issues throughout the process of being involved with the criminal justice sector. We are not specifically requiring anyone to commission services, but we believe that when offender managers assess offenders, they should be crossing the board on all those issues and constructing a sentence plan, so that if there is a clear need for some intervention, it will be provided, whether in the community or in custody.

[204] **Mr A'Herne:** Clearly, we are looking to move towards having a needs-based assessment so that we are asking what the needs of individuals are to help them to stop reoffending and to live productively. So, within that, if there is a need for some form of counselling, that should be identified and then it would be necessary to look for the appropriate person to provide the service. We talked earlier about mental health, and, clearly, the health service has a major responsibility in terms of how it provides services for offenders with mental health problems. In the same way, if we identify a need for trauma counselling, we would need to identify the most appropriate organisation to provide that service.

[205] **Leanne Wood:** In my experience, problems arise when you have someone whose experience of trauma or mental health problem is linked to their risk of reoffending and there are no organisations out there to refer them to. The links between health and probation have been woefully inadequate in the past. Are they going to be improved?

[206] **Ms West:** Through the pathways of health and attitudes, thinking and behaviour, we will be looking at those issues when reoffending is directly linked to the suffering that people have been through early on in their lives. This is particularly marked in the case of many women offenders, but that is not to say that it does not affect men.

[207] On the reoffending figure, there is a difference between those in custody and those in the community. The latest figure that I have seen is around 51 per cent for those in the community. Do you know what the latest figure is, Jim?

[208] **Mr A'Herne:** There is a difference, but it is probably not as big as you might think at the moment. There is also a difference between the reoffending rates for those who serve fewer than 12 months and those who serve more than 12 months. That is where the biggest difference exists. I would not want to be quoted on this, but, in terms of those serving fewer than 12 months, the reoffending rate is around 70 per cent. So, that is where the big difference exists. That is one of the big areas that we need to tackle. As Leanne has clearly pointed out, perhaps those people should not be going to prison at all, or, if they are going to prison, we need to look at what we can do to ensure that they do not get stuck in the revolving door. This is a difficult group to deal with. You can imagine someone going into prison for six months and serving only three months. By the time that they are processed through the system, it is almost time for them to come out of prison. So, perhaps if they were receiving community sentences rather than prison sentences, we could reduce the number of people in prison while also ensuring that they receive appropriate responses to their needs.

[209] **Ms West:** I will link your first two points together. I wish to reassure the committee that we are very aware that there are issues regarding people who need services through the medium of Welsh, and people whose first language is Welsh, who are stuck in prisons in England. We would welcome any further input when we put our Welsh language scheme out for consultation. Having a NOMS Welsh language scheme and being able to say how our providers, whether they are in the public, private or voluntary community sectors, will be operating in terms of the Welsh language will be tricky for us to get right. So, we will need to review and refresh that.

11.10 a.m.

[210] **Mr A'Herne:** We have addressed that slightly in the draft scheme. A section of the draft has gone back to the Welsh Language Board for it to consider, and we have made some amendments to it. We have said that whomever we commission will have to prove to us that they can deliver all the specific Welsh language needs of the people that they are bidding for work for. Even though they may not have a statutory responsibility under the Welsh Language Act 1993, in terms of our commissioning, if they do not tick that box, we would not be willing to commission from them. We are saying, 'Regardless of what your position is'—because not everybody has to prepare a Welsh language plan—'if you are not able to provide the services, why would we buy from you?'

[211] **Trish Law:** I will you give you an easy question. You mentioned earlier that there is no women's prison in Wales. What is the likelihood of the new prison that is on the cards for south Wales being an all-women's prison, or will it end up being a mixed prison?

[212] **Ms West:** It is unlikely to be an all-women's prison. The number of prisoners that we would be putting in our prison for Wales would be around 750 or 800 and, clearly, there are not enough women for that. That is good, because it demonstrates that the courts are aware of where women are housed. There is an issue about the fact that we do not know whether there will be any sort of unit within that prison. There is already a prison in England that is half male and half female, with completely separate entrances, so that the prisoners do not mix at all. So, it is possible and we are going to be very much involved in the service specification and the design of the new establishment. After all, we are the commissioners and we need to be able to consult with all interested parties to decide what goes on.

[213] **Mick Bates:** Thank you. That was a fascinating session. The quality of the discussion was excellent. I particularly thank Sian and Jim for the way in which they have answered the questions in what has turned out to be a very long session, but an extremely useful one. I am sure that other issues may arise. The one thing that I have noted is that you are going to send us a paper on the costings.

[214] **Ms West:** Yes.

[215] **Mick Bates:** Thank you. We will now break for a few minutes.

Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 11.12 a.m. a 11.29 a.m.

The meeting adjourned between 11.12 a.m. and 11.29 a.m.

**Cadwch Gymru'n Daclus
Keep Wales Tidy**

[216] **Mick Bates:** We now have two equally interesting subjects to discuss: Keep Wales Tidy and neighbourhood policing. Due to the extension of the first part of the meeting, I suggest that both of these sessions last for 30 minutes. Are Members happy to accept written replies if they cannot ask their questions during the meeting? I see that you are. In that case, it is my great pleasure to introduce Keep Wales Tidy. We will have a presentation from Tegryn and we are also joined by Kathryn. Welcome to you both.

[217] **Mr Jones:** Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the work of Keep Wales Tidy in relation to community safety. My name is Tegryn Jones, and I am the chief executive of Keep Wales Tidy. My colleague is Kathryn Britton, who works as an environmental project officer in the Aberavon and Sandfields East renewal area.

[218] Keep Wales Tidy is a registered charity, working towards achieving a clean, safe, and tidy Wales. We are a national charity employing around 40 staff and we work in all parts of Wales. The organisation has existed since the 1970s and runs programmes such as the eco-schools programme, tidy Wales week, clean rivers, clean coasts, and the pride in our communities project. We run a number of campaigns, such as the 'Put it out, Put it in' campaign, which will shortly be highlighting the problem of smoking-related litter. We also administer the Blue Flag and Green Coast awards and are involved in Welsh Assembly Government initiatives such as Environment Wales and Waste Awareness Wales.

[219] Keep Wales Tidy has traditionally considered itself to be an environmental organisation. It is only in recent years that we have seen it as part of our work to support the community safety agenda. We are very aware that the quality of the environment can have an impact on the quality of life of local residents. An environment that is littered and which suffers from fly-tipping, graffiti, dog fouling and fly posting will not be a pleasant place in which to live. Its residents will feel less safe to venture out; this will have an impact on their health and their feeling of community.

[220] As an organisation, we strongly believe that everyone should be able to live in a community that is clean, safe and tidy, and that the main responsibility for this rests with people from that community. Our work covers two main areas: we provide advice and guidance to other organisations and we support local groups who take responsibility for their own area.

[221] Keep Wales Tidy has extensive experience of providing advice and support to organisations such as the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities, Assembly sponsored public bodies, community safety partnerships, other voluntary organisations, and the public. I will give you two examples of this work. We provided advice and support to four projects set up under the initiative by the Welsh Assembly Government last year to pilot approaches to tackle anti-social behaviour. More recently we have worked as part of a Home-Office-funded initiative to support community safety partnerships to prepare action plans to tackle criminal damage. Seven action plans have been prepared under this project, providing ideas and examples of good practice that can either be implemented in the short term or fed into the next round of community safety strategies. They include ideas such as different ways of reporting incidents, initiatives to tackle graffiti—street posters, for example—the use of closed circuit television cameras, and how to engage with the community. As part of our written evidence, we have provided you with an example of a strategy that was prepared with Bridgend community safety partnership.

[222] Keep Wales Tidy seeks to empower communities to take responsibility for the cleanliness of their local area. In our view, the only truly sustainable way of achieving clean, safe and tidy communities is to support communities to clear up their local environment and to create an environment in which they feel happy to live. Through our coast care, clean rivers and pride in our communities fly-tipping projects, we annually support about 40,000 volunteers who refuse to accept that their local areas should suffer the consequences of littering, fly-tipping, dog fouling, graffiti, fly posting and vandalism. Our officers support groups to organise clean-ups and support groups to move on to more environmental work, such as improving access to biodiversity, which can turn no-go areas into valuable community resources.

[223] The 40,000 volunteers supported by Keep Wales Tidy include people with a variety of skills, backgrounds and needs. The groups provide an effective way of promoting community cohesion, as people who do not normally interact are brought together by a desire to create cleaner, safer communities. They include older people, individuals with disabilities, the homeless, and people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. In addition, we support groups who perhaps would not traditionally be associated with this type of work; we have provided you with several case studies of our work as part of the papers presented. These include working with the probation service, youth offending teams and community service offenders—that links in with the previous presentation. We work on the rehabilitation of drug users, through initiatives such as the community against drugs team, which is a voluntary scheme, but also working with clients on drugs testing and treatment orders. We work with disengaged youths, undertaking deflection tactics. Several of our groups include school pupils who are near to being excluded from schools, or who have been excluded, and they are provided with practical, environmental skills that enable them to develop other interests and skills.

[224] The quality of the local environment is a key issue for several Communities First areas. We have had approaches from over 70 Communities First partnerships for support to improve local areas. We have an officer—Kathryn—who is based in the Aberavon and Sandfields East renewal area. The quality of the support that we provide is largely dependent on the skills of our staff, and how they interact and engage with people to improve their local environment. I will hand over to Kathryn Britton, who will give you more practical examples of the work that we do.

[225] **Ms Britton:** Currently, I have five over-arching projects that link in to crime and community safety: we are seeking funding to provide a multi-usage games area, we are funding some alley gates for rear lanes, we are raising awareness of identity fraud, we have a project to tackle graffiti, and we are holding waste amnesties in the community.

[226] The funding to provide a multi-usage games area should provide a youth facility at the heart of the renewal area. The site is currently a derelict former play site, so we will be reinstating a play area for the youth of the community. A voluntary group that I support in the area hopes to adopt part of the land adjacent to the site to undertake some greening and planting initiatives. Once in situation, we are hopeful that a designated youth worker will work from the site, engaging with the youth of the community.

[227] We have been successful in getting funding for 16 alley gates, which will gate off eight rear lanes in Aberavon. The lanes are currently no-go areas—they are used for anti-social behaviour and drug misuse. Ownership should be returned to the residents of those communities; they will all have a key, along with the emergency services. Again, once in place, we hope to undertake a greening initiative, by looking for funding to provide hanging baskets for the community to brighten up the rear lanes once they have been gated off.

[228] We have undertaken a graffiti programme since I have been in post. We successfully sought funding to purchase a high-pressure water jet for the youth offending team. This will be made available to the renewal area initially, but, once the graffiti is tackled in the renewal area, it will be available borough-wide. Therefore, the Neath Port Talbot youth offending team should be able to use the high-pressure jet to remove graffiti from all over the sites. We currently remove graffiti in the area via unpaid workers from the probation service and the youth offending team. That is usually done in conjunction with the Neath Port Talbot crime and community safety partnership.

[229] Immediately after Christmas, we became aware of a lot of wind-blown litter being caused as a result of identity fraud. Bags were being ripped open the evening before kerbside collection by people hoping to find privileged information. Therefore, we undertook an awareness-raising campaign with the Neath Port Talbot enforcement officer. We looked in some bags that had been put out two days early for kerbside collection, and, frighteningly, we found a lot of privileged information. We have since undertaken a leaflet campaign, making people aware of this problem, and urging them to shred their papers. When I went to work this week, it was nice to see bags of shredded paper out for the kerbside collection.

11.40 a.m.

[230] On 21 February, I held an appliance amnesty, which was widely advertised before the day, and residents had to book in their appliances to get them collected. This came about because of the need to remove, mainly, fridges, freezers and televisions from the community, as we can no longer take them in the community skips that we organise. They can be taken to the civic amenity sites for recycling, but, obviously, not every resident is able to do that. On that day, I removed 63 appliances from the renewal area. They were mainly televisions, fridges and freezers, but there were some washing machines and tumble dryers. We look upon that as 63 possible incidents of fly-tipping having been prevented. So that is what I am doing at the moment.

[231] **Mr Jones:** In conclusion, we are committed, as an organisation, to supporting people in looking after their own areas, so that they can create the clean, safe and tidy communities to which they aspire. The demand for our support is far greater than our ability to deliver support. As an organisation, our main challenges are how we can boost our capacity to meet the need, and, recognising the fact that there is a great deal of good practice that happens, for example, in Aberavon and Sandfields, and across the whole of Wales, how we can share that to enable people to learn from the experience of others. We are happy to answer any questions that Members have.

[232] **Mick Bates:** Thank you. I am fascinated by the appliance amnesty; it is a wonderful term, especially coming from such a well-understood European directive.

[233] **Mark Isherwood:** Obviously, you are a social enterprise. How do you access your funding, as opposed to the grant funding for the specific projects that you are engaged with? Are you finding that money is readily accessible, or do measures need to be taken to assist you with that? You are an all-Wales body, but in practice, in terms of project engagement, how wide is your geographical reach? Are you engaged in projects everywhere, or do you focus primarily on certain areas?

[234] How well do you integrate and work with other bodies, such as Graffiti Busters in Conwy, which you may be involved with, the Flintshire neighbourhood watch scheme, which engages with disaffected young people, and the drug abuse warning network partnership in north Wales, which deals with all the agencies involved in tackling substance misuse, whether the people involved are technically offenders or not. To what extent are you engaged in cross-generational work? You mentioned certain groups, but are you working with any cross-generational projects?

[235] **Mr Jones:** The funding is obviously a major challenge for organisations such as ours. We are generally quite fortunate to have developed quite good relationships with public bodies in particular such as the Environment Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, and various departments of the Assembly, which recognise the value of our work and fund it. We are always looking for new opportunities. Part of the funding aspect that links to your second question is the fact that we are an all-Wales body. Several of our programmes run across the whole of Wales. An example of that is the eco-schools programme, which has the potential to run across all schools in Wales and on which about 75 per cent of schools are registered.

[236] Our community engagement work is very much funding driven. We have several different projects that engage in different areas. The clean rivers project, for example, which has run for 15 years, works in about 18 local authority areas. By its nature, it works with communities that wish to adopt river areas. That is less of an issue in the south Wales Valleys, where, by their nature, rivers go through the centre of towns. It can be a more difficult issue in rural areas, where rivers may not be located in population centres. The 'Pride in our Communities' fly-tipping project works across four local authority areas in south-west Wales, while our coastal project works in the INTERREG area of west Wales.

[237] We have a vision of merging all the projects so that we can truly support anyone wherever they want. We have a project called 'clean communities', which we are currently trying to fund through various agencies. We had big hopes for lottery funding, but, unfortunately, the lottery did not share our vision. It is quite frustrating for us when we are having to, more or less, turn support for people down purely because it does not meet the needs of funders. Therefore, we have aspirations and abilities to truly support everyone across Wales regardless. We work in all 22 local authorities, but it might cause a bit of a problem if you wanted to work on a river in Pembrokeshire or if you wanted to work on a coastal area in north-east Wales.

[238] I cannot answer your question on whether we integrate with those three particular organisations, but I can find out from officers in north-east Wales and get back to you on that. We work with several organisations. We truly understand that we cannot achieve anything on our own and the organisations that support us also recognise that fact. So, it is very much a partnership approach. The partnership aspect depends on where we work, because the partners in Aberavon and Sandfields might be slightly different from the partners in south-east Wales or in north Wales. We certainly engage with partners.

[239] On cross-generational work, many of our groups, because they spring up in the community, include different groups from within the community, such as older and younger people who might work together in those groups when they would not normally get involved with each other. Some are more confident working in groups of similar people, but we try to ensure that, where possible, every person in the community can contribute towards making their community a better place in which to live.

[240] **Irene James:** I thank you both for your presentations. In my authority, I would have to say that the biggest problem is convincing people that they are the ones who drop the litter and not the local authority. What are you doing to convince people that it is their responsibility to look after the area? You mentioned shredded paper, but it is my understanding that not all local authorities recycle paper, so what are you doing to promote that?

[241] **Mr Jones:** It is a point well made that it is the people of Wales, and perhaps visitors, who drop litter. Local authorities have a legal responsibility to look after and clean public areas or adopted land, as it is known. There has certainly been an improvement in recent years in the skills and operation of that. There is a great deal of campaigning on that. One difficulty of campaigning is using the media, given that the majority of people in Wales access media based in England, which makes it quite difficult to campaign. I mentioned earlier that we are concerned about the knock-on effect of the smoking ban on litter and we need a campaign to target that specifically.

[242] The best way to get people to look after their areas is to support them to do so. If you get people from the outside to clean up those areas, then there is no sense of ownership. Much of our work is about getting people from that community to clean up and look after their area. There is then a sense of local policing, by those people, of various aspects of the community. It is not a fail-safe method by any means, but people are less likely to damage something that people whom they know, or have been involved with, have engaged with. For example, one case study involves a school in north Wales where a group of pupils had been almost excluded. They undertook work with us, and planted 400 trees. Those trees were then vandalised, and they were absolutely horrified by that. So, you can virtually guarantee that they will not engage in that type of activity. So, this is very much about finding the local solutions and that is what we do. Although we are a national organisation, our delivery method is very local—we work with people locally to try to find solutions for them.

11.50 a.m.

[243] On shredded paper, that is more of a discussion on waste. There is a great variety of collection schemes in terms of what is recycled and collected by local authorities. Hopefully, as more money is invested in those services a greater range of materials will be collected and the problem will be minimised as time goes on.

[244] **Irene James:** What are you doing at a local level to promote the fact that local people need to be responsible for litter?

[245] **Mr Jones:** Essentially, we do that through our work. We engage with 40,000 people. I would like to do far more, and my closing statement of the presentation was that that is a capacity issue. I also do not think that it is purely our work—we are a voluntary organisation that has support from the public sector to deliver this work. I accept that we need to do more and I wish that we could. I do not know whether that answers your question—did you have a specific issue in mind?

[246] **Irene James:** No, nothing specific, but I think that we all look—

[247] **Mick Bates:** You should send some of your posters down the table to Irene. [*Laughter.*]

[248] **Irene James:** I have got them, Mick.

[249] **Mick Bates:** I thought that they were pretty controversial—but let us keep off that. [*Laughter.*] Huw is next.

[250] **Huw Lewis:** I want to touch on the issues that you raised in your presentations, which I thank you for. On the issue of civic pride, as it connects to the environment and how people perceive the quality of that environment, in representing an area such as mine I sometimes wonder about the high level of tolerance that people have of a dirty environment—not just the public, but also local authorities. I represent Merthyr and Rhumney, and one of the things that drives me nuts about Merthyr is that it must be the fly-posting capital of western Europe. It is not a difficult thing to manage; organisations have a right to advertise their services, and we should accommodate that and there are ways of doing it—plenty of towns and cities all over Europe have managed to do that. However, when I complain to my local authority about the fly-posting situation in Merthyr, its response is not to do anything because mine is the only complaint that it has had.

[251] **Laura Anne Jones:** [*inaudible.*]

[252] **Huw Lewis:** In many other ways, it is a fine upstanding local authority. [*Laughter.*] It is about the level of tolerance that we have. I read a very interesting article about a scheme running in Scotland, at least as a pilot, of environmental wardens. Part of reinstating civic pride is not just exhortation, which you are engaged with all the time in terms of encouraging people—some enforcement would not go amiss. In the Scottish scheme, the environmental wardens work along the same lines as traffic wardens and issue tickets where they can identify those responsible—with fly-posting, the responsible person is very easy to identify. Quite often, retail premises that do not pull their weight can also be easily identified. I do not know what the outcome was of the pilot scheme—I think it was the City of Edinburgh Council that started it. It would be interesting to know the results, and whether or not Keep Wales Tidy has had any contacts with its Scottish colleagues about how these things had been assessed and rolled out. It seemed to be an obvious way to go about things, and perhaps we could even envelop the work of community safety wardens or police community support officers. I think that Edinburgh went down the line of having a new type of professional to do that work, but that might not necessarily have to be the case if we introduced new powers and new ways of enforcement. What do you think of that?

[253] **Mr Jones:** I will quote the four Es—it requires education, effective operations, engaging with the communities and enforcement, and a combination of those aspects, to tackle the issue. During recent years, much legislation seems to have gone on the statute book giving powers to local authorities, in particular, and some other organisations. The concern that I have is the sporadic implementation of that legislation across some authorities. Some authorities are excellent, and are itching to test the powers of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 that are coming in now to the full. However, in other authorities you can virtually get away with anything, because you know that the enforcement powers will not be used.

[254] I think that there is quite a need for projects such as environmental wardens. Part of the problem with community safety wardens is the fact that if they have enforcement powers, there is a feeling that they may not be able to engage with the local community as effectively with that stick behind them. I think that a balanced approach is needed, which is why you get a variety of options.

[255] One of the issues with fly posting is that it is not done by individuals, but is backed up by gangs and businesses, and they may even be linked to organised crime. There is quite a challenge in handling that.

[256] On the issue of pride, I know that several of you represent constituencies in the Heads of the Valleys region and, during the last week of March, there is a Heads of the Valleys spring clean, which is in its second year. Last year, about 5,000 took part, and I was very pleased that there was a group or an event in every single ward in the Heads of the Valleys region. From what I gather, this year's uptake has already exceeded that figure. Hopefully, that will develop the sense of pride.

[257] We are aware that there is a limit to our saying, 'Do not do this'. We have to come up with solutions, and we look at things like environmental wardens, as you suggested, and try to influence the organisations that have the funding and the powers to implement these so that they benefit the community.

[258] **Mick Bates:** Legislation was passed yesterday that will give powers to community councillors to do just what you suggested.

[259] **Laura Anne Jones:** Congratulations on the work that you have done. It is a very interesting read; you have given us a lot of papers today, but that is great.

[260] As for communities taking ownership, I cannot agree more. In Usk, where I live, the primary school went out and planted flowers and that sort of thing. The pupils had a good relationship with the police, and those two aspects combined mean that, as those pupils went to comprehensive school, or wherever they went, respect remained for the environment and the police, and anti-social behaviour vanished. It is fantastic. Working in partnership there was a good idea.

[261] You have included something about gates at the ends of alleys and so on. I did not know that that was a thing in Wales. I know that it happens in the north of England, but we have that here as well, do we?

[262] **Mr Jones:** Yes, relatively recently.

[263] **Mick Bates:** Just over a month ago.

[264] **Ms Britton:** In January.

[265] **Laura Anne Jones:** You said that you were going to place hanging baskets, which I think is fantastic, to brighten the area up, because it always looks 'prisoneseque', but where will the money come from for that?

[266] **Ms Britton:** For the alley gates or for the hanging baskets?

[267] **Laura Anne Jones:** Both.

[268] **Ms Britton:** The money for the alley gates has come from a worthy community projects pot applied for by the police in the community of Neath and Port Talbot. That is being match-funded by the renewal team, so part of that money has come from the renewal area and part from the police.

[269] For the hanging baskets and greening initiative, I support a voluntary group from the heart of the area where the alley gate will be erected. The group members will look at little pots, possibly the Communities First trust fund and Awards for All Wales, and a little pot like that may look at providing the hanging baskets for that area.

[270] **Laura Anne Jones:** Are those non-Communities First areas?

[271] **Ms Britton:** At present, Aberafan is a non-Communities First area, but we are hoping to get that status. However, Awards for All Wales, and even the Big Lottery Fund and Environment Wales, could support small voluntary groups to provide that funding.

[272] **Irene James:** Is that available to all areas that have the alley gate scheme?

[273] **Ms Britton:** I cannot say for sure, because I only know what is available for the Neath Port Talbot local authority.

[274] **Trish Law:** As I am a relatively new member of this committee, you might have already answered the questions that I am about to ask. Is any input made into the schools with regard to littering? In the 1980s, when my children were quite small, I would take them to Woolworth, they would have a packet of sweets going down the street, and all of a sudden, where has the paper gone? The advert then told people to 'find a bin and put it in', and, if you could not find one, to take it home. I used to make my kids toddle back to pick up the paper that they had dropped.

12.00 p.m.

[275] In addition, as Irene James said, it is people's duty to report incidents of fly-tipping. I live on a mountain and you will often find a lorry going up there with trees or whatever and tipping them illegally. Is it highlighted enough that we, as a public, have a duty to inform the council, police or whoever is responsible for this—it is probably the local council—and to take down the registration numbers and to pass them on? Is that highlighted enough?

[276] **Mr Jones:** To answer your question about schools, our main avenue for engaging with schools is the eco-schools programme, which covers 75 per cent of schools in Wales and has recently benefited from Assembly funding, and that has made such a difference in our capacity to support it. It has eight modules, two of which are litter and waste reduction. It very much works on the citizenship model: pupils will set up an eco-committee and undertake an audit of their school and the surrounding area, and then identify the problems and develop an action plan to meet those problems. Litter is a key issue in that. We also give talks in schools, which involve our officers going in and throwing a bin about the classroom and so on, and employing tactics like that can be very effective. It is very successful in a primary context, but when pupils get to a secondary context and into their teenage years, it is a bit more challenging. Our research indicates that littering is a safe form of rebellion that they can all engage in, and that probably brings us back to the posters.

[277] As far as the fly-tipping goes, far more needs to be done so that people accept the fact that littering, fly-tipping and so on are crimes. Fixed penalty notices are issued across Wales for a number of them. For fly-tipping, the penalty is up to £50,000, so I would certainly encourage anyone who has any information to report it. I also know that there is a bus-back campaign and that some adverts were produced recently by Environment Agency Wales to highlight the issue of fly-tipping and the fact that it is a crime. Hopefully, that will raise consciousness. I have a feeling that that is one of the major issues that will affect us over the coming years, particularly in rural areas, but it will also affect urban areas.

[278] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for those comprehensive answers.

[279] **Trish Law:** I have one quick question. Could it be highlighted in local papers, as is done with speed cameras, that a litter enforcement officer is in a certain area on a certain date? It would make people aware, and make them think, 'Is he or she on my back when I drop this piece of litter?'.

[280] **Mr Jones:** Views on that vary, to be honest. Briefly, in some ways, we will never catch everyone who litters, but perhaps we want to create an environment, as happens with speed cameras, in which people think that they will be caught. If that is the tactic that will make that happen, we need to follow it.

[281] **Mick Bates:** We end on a very interesting suggestion, and I can now see litter cameras.

[282] **Trish Law:** No, litter enforcement officers.

[283] **Mick Bates:** Okay. Thank you very much for your presentation, for the way that you have answered the questions and for your continued enthusiasm for the concept, which is infectious. The eco-schools programme is a tremendous one. Thank you for your evidence.

12.03 p.m.

Plismona Cymdogaethau Neighbourhood Policing

[284] **Mick Bates:** We will now receive a presentation from the deputy chief constable of Gwent Police, Mick Giannasi, on neighbourhood policing. This is a follow-up action from when Carl Close, who I also welcome, attended the committee on 8 June last year. At that meeting, the committee received a presentation in respect of recommendations from a seminar on putting communities first and community reassurance in Wales. You have received the background paper, so I hand over to Mick for the presentation.

[285] **Mr Giannasi:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. The paper that you have received sets out the context of neighbourhood policing and some of the background, and it explains what neighbourhood policing is. It explains that it is a developing programme of work that fits into a broader context of a citizen-focused policing service and that we have been developing this over the last two or three years and that it is still a work in progress. In the 10 minutes or so that I have, I hope to add value to that by using examples from Gwent of what it looks like in practice. I know that you do not like PowerPoint presentations, but the slides that have been prepared are a guide for me of some of the issues that I will cover and it might help you to follow what I say.

[286] The paper describes the policing dilemma of the late 1990s and the first few years since 2000, and the fact that crime has fallen quite dramatically, and not just reported crime, but people's experience of crime, through things like the British crime survey. We are talking about a 30 per cent or 40 per cent reduction over the last five to 10 years. However, people's fear of crime continues to grow in some areas. For example, people's fear of car crime continues to grow, yet car crime has dropped by 10 per cent to 15 per cent in the last five years. So, there is something amiss. There is no doubt that, on a range of indicators, police efficiency has improved considerably, whichever way you choose to look at them. However, until very recently, people's satisfaction with policing has been falling. More worryingly, it has dropped after contact, which means that people have a better perception of the police before they contact them than they do after contact. That is very worrying for the leaders of the service. Over the last five years, we have been concentrating on that and trying to get to grips to understand it.

[287] If you turn the page, you can see that, over the last five years, we have spent a great deal of time and effort in trying to understand what people are looking for from the police. This slide describes what we believe people are looking for: safety; security; and reassurance to go about their lives without being interfered with or without being victims of crime. They want a police service that is accessible, that responds to needs, and which is visible and familiar, because familiarity breeds reassurance. Also, people want a quality service that is fair and equitable, so, regardless of who you are or where you live, you are entitled to the same level of policing service. We have looked at ourselves and done some soul searching, and we think that we are reasonably good at incident response within our resources.

[288] We are doing well in terms of crime management, but in the area of local policing, often described as neighbourhood policing, there is a gap. It is something that people want more of and something that we have not provided enough of, and we have not really been citizen focused. Our services have been designed around efficiency and economy and have been largely driven through successive policies rather than by finding out what people are looking for and delivering that kind of service. At times, our service quality is patchy, and the paper goes into some of the background and explains why that is the situation.

[289] For the past two years, the focus in policing has been very narrow. It has been about delivering a citizen-focused service, and about creating a more modern, diverse and professional workforce to deliver that service. You will be aware, because you have heard a number of presentations about it, of the protective services gap, which is about creating the capacity to deal with those things that people do not always see, such as terrorism and serious organised crime, but have to be dealt with in a civilised society.

[290] You will be familiar with the next slide, which is about Making the Connections and its broad scope. On the section of the slide that reads, 'placing the citizen centre stage', you will see that there is almost a complete fit between what the Assembly seeks to deliver for the people of Wales, in terms of local services, and what citizen-focused policing is about. I will not go into detail, but on the next slide is our definition of citizen-focused policing, and you will see that you cannot get a card between the two aspirations for public service. We are working closely with the Making the Connections team to ensure that we can learn from each other and move forward in a compatible way.

[291] Over the page, you will see how we are doing this. In Gwent there are four key strands to the delivery of citizen-focused policing. All our staff receive quality of service training, and I will come back to that, if I may. It sounds like a management buzzword, but it does have some substance to it. Leadership is a key issue, and we are spending time with our supervisors and front-line managers. We are reviewing all our services front-to-back to ensure that they are citizen focused, but the foundation—the bedrock—of delivering citizen-focused policing is neighbourhood policing, and that is something that we are very passionate about. It is something that every force in Wales is committed to, and, in our own time, and at our own pace, we are all working towards the delivery of neighbourhood policing.

[292] What is neighbourhood policing? People say that it is a new way of doing business, but it is not—it is traditional policing with a modern edge. As it says at the bottom of the page, some people say that it is 'Dixon with attitude'. We do not call it that; Dixon was a fictitious character and therefore never existed. However, it involves those principles of working for and within your community, of understanding and then responding to the community's concerns, but in a fairly hard-edged way. Neighbourhood police officers will more often be seen crashing doors down and executing drugs warrants than doing the softer side of policing, because it is about results. It is delivered by dedicated teams, which are visible, accessible, familiar and engaged with their communities, and accountable to local communities for what they deliver.

12.10 p.m.

[293] It is a four-stage process. It is about understanding the concerns of communities; gathering intelligence; identifying what troubles people the most—and I will talk about the process by which we do that shortly—by working with people, rather than for people, to try to resolve those issues; and working in partnership with other agencies. That is where there is a clear fit between 'Making the Connections' and neighbourhood policing, which is our shop-front service, because the rest of the organisation has to be behind it or it cannot be effective.

[294] Neighbourhood policing is not a throw-away concept that we dreamed up overnight; it is based on some solid research on what people are looking for, and the four basic needs of access, influence, intervention and answers. That is what people are looking for from the police. They want access—not when we want to give it to them, but when they need it, and in the right place at the right time through a variety of means. People do not just want to use technology or the telephone; they want face-to-face contact, and they want to write in. We are looking to develop all those means so that people can have whatever contact they want.

[295] People want to influence the police. They do not want to be told that the problems in their area are those of burglary, violence and car crime; they are often more concerned about litter, graffiti and the quality-of-life issues that make their area an unpleasant area in which to live. In the past, we have not listened to that as we have concentrated on what we think is important. Neighbourhood policing gives people the opportunity to influence the policing agenda, and I will comment on that later. There is no point in our being there unless we do something about these issues, so intervening with partners and communities is the key to this. Traditionally, we have not been good at providing answers. We do lots of good work and get results but we do not often tell people what we have done. So, the neighbourhood policing model is built around those four principles, and we are working hard on them.

[296] The next slide is the Gwent neighbourhood policing model. I will not go into it too much as Carl's paper describes it in some detail. A sector inspector in each area is responsible for a local neighbourhood policing team, which is a multidisciplinary team of police officers, community support officers, local authority wardens, special constables and volunteers, with the organisation supporting it.

[297] The next slide shows the engagement process that I mentioned. Time does not allow me to go into it, but you will see that we have developed quite a sophisticated process to ensure that police officers are routinely engaging with their communities. By that, I mean that we try to understand what is happening by attending local focus group and public meetings and asking them about their priorities. We then select those priorities and are held accountable for delivering against them.

[298] To give you an idea of what neighbourhood policing looks like in Gwent, page 8 shows our structure. There are five unitary authorities and we divide those into three basic command units and 22 sections, and we have 96 neighbourhoods. A neighbourhood is defined as a collection of one or more wards that fit together and provide a suitable basis for a policing unit. In the last two years, we have shifted around 20 per cent of our capacity from response to neighbourhood policing. So, Gwent Police employs around 2,200 people, and 511 of those are now purely dedicated to neighbourhood policing.

[299] The next slide shows the typical make-up of a neighbourhood team. This is the team from Pill, Newport, which has around 40 officers, between 10 and 12 of whom are dedicated neighbourhood police officers. They are led by a sergeant, and the crime and disorder reduction officer works closely with the local authority on problem solving and target hardening.

[300] I have then provided three examples of neighbourhood policing in action. Operation Dalton is the programme implemented by the neighbourhood policing team in Pill, which has, effectively, turned around a crime-ridden community that had gun and gang problems and made a huge difference for local people. Operation Hawkwind is operating in Trevethyn in Torfaen, which, again, was a troubled community that was disengaged from the police and was not talking to us. The neighbourhood team went in there and opened a one-stop shop with the local authority, and started to combine services. They have carried out a lot of enforcement activity around tackling criminals on the estates, and issues regarding public space. The feedback that we are getting from people indicates that it is a different place in which to live, and there is huge enthusiasm for what neighbourhood policing is doing. The third example is the kind of problem that we have traditionally been criticised for not resolving. In Blackwood, there is a problem with boy-racers—I do not think that we can actually call them ‘boy-racers’ as it is not politically correct, but you understand the problem. No-one got to grips with that for years, and the neighbourhood teams in Blackwood now have a real grip of that problem, working closely with local councillors, the local authority and the local AM, and they have made a difference. The problem has not gone away, but they have had a huge impact on it.

[301] I have described some early signs of success and I was not going to leave without telling you how good our performance is. I am not suggesting that that is entirely down to neighbourhood policing, but we have a great deal of confidence that neighbourhood policing is starting to make a difference: crime is coming down in most categories, anti-social behaviour has improved slightly, we are detecting more crime, our staff appear to be happier because they are coming into work more often, road casualties are down by a third, and victims of crime, when they become victims, are more satisfied with their treatment. The real area of concern is that these figures from the British Crime Survey are two years old, and yet we are still seeing that lower level of public satisfaction. I am fairly confident, and we will be held to account for it next year, that, when the new British Crime Survey is done, we will see big changes in satisfaction and confidence because we have provided what people are looking for. One swallow does not make a summer, but in our assessments of public confidence, we have seen an improvement of about 50 per cent in public confidence over a period of two years. If that filters through, that will be great.

[302] Finally, I come to the quality issue, because we are conscious that people want a quality service. I will just give some reassurance that, while we are focusing on structures and putting people out on the ground, we are also focusing on quality. We have not really focused on that area in the past. What I have laid out very briefly is our quality of service programme, which we are calling Listen, and it includes some very basic principles. We are drilling into officers that if they follow those principles every time, they will provide the kind of service that people are looking for.

[303] That was a very quick gallop through. I hope that it has given you a flavour. What I have described is what is happening in Gwent. Whichever force or area you represent, you will find similar things taking place, because it is a national programme being delivered across England and Wales, through a national delivery team.

[304] **Mick Bates:** I have a list of four members who wish to ask questions, and I am sure that we can get through them in the remaining 14 minutes.

[305] **Leanne Wood:** It interests me that you started by saying that the fear of crime continues to grow even though the statistics say that the crime rate is reducing. Increased police visibility would be one way of trying to allay people's fears. Do you have any other ideas of how, generally as a society, we could look at this problem, because there is no logic there? We need to bring people's fear of crime in line with their experiences.

[306] I wanted to ask about arrest targets. I understand that the police forces of England and Wales have a Government target to arrest 1.5 million people a year. That target was criticised recently by Rod Morgan, who recently resigned his post as chair of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales. Young people are more likely to commit crimes in public places; therefore, if police activity is focused on young people on the streets, Rod Morgan said that it was like picking low-hanging fruit. Could you tell us what you are doing through the neighbourhood policing model to ensure that you are not just picking off the easy targets?

[307] I will only be another two minutes. Can you tell us what the ratio is of police community support officers to police officers? Do you have any concerns about budget shortfalls? During the debate on police restructuring, it was said by a number of people who gave evidence that the neighbourhood policing agenda would lose out because resources would be diverted to level-3 protective services. Could you tell us about that?

[308] Finally, on Police and Communities Together meetings, I think that it is great that you are doing a lot more to try to engage the community and to try to get people to decide on their priorities, and that you are being held to account on that. My concern is that these meetings are attended by the usual suspects—the same people who go to all community meetings. The people who you really need to engage are younger people, therefore, what are you doing to try to ensure that younger people engage with the PACT process?

12.20 p.m.

[309] **Mr Giannasi:** I will take those in order, if I may. On the first issue of the fear of crime, we live in a technological age in which people are fed a daily diet of crime, misfortune and tragedy from all over the world. We know, from research, that people are more concerned and their perceptions are more influenced by what is happening at a distance—on the television—than by what is happening in their local communities. We have to try to tackle that. It is a huge problem. We also know that people are influenced by the daily diet of crime and disorder that they are fed by their local newspapers. That quite often cancels out the good work that is being done out on the streets. We often give mixed messages about crime; we use words and terminology that are not particularly helpful. We are actually creating that fear by trying to gather information about crime and encourage people to come forward. It is a common problem for all forces and we all tackle it in broadly similar ways. Neighbourhood policing is the key, because people are more likely to believe you when you talk to them face to face and tell them the reality about crime in their area than the spin that they sometimes see in documents.

[310] We have started to deliver local policing summaries, which is a legislated activity where we now deliver focused local information to people about crime in their area. We have been very specific about how crime in their area compares with other areas and what it is like in their neighbourhood and not necessarily what it is like in the wider area, which might be more significant. Some forces are experimenting with providing more detailed information on the internet. I appreciate that many people do not have access to it, but it is one way of getting information across to people. We are looking at advertising, and are about to apply for planning permission to put up some huge advertising hoardings in strategic locations to tell people, for example, how much the crime rate has reduced in their areas. We are moving away from percentages, because they do not mean anything to people. We are talking about victims and fewer victims. So, we have a programme of activities to try to reduce the fear of crime. We know that actions speak louder than words. That is why neighbourhood policing is key. We are taking a broad-ranging approach. Other people can sometimes help, as we sometimes send conflicting messages. We are looking to work with partners to try to get that message across.

[311] There is no target for arrests, but there is a target for offences brought to justice. As you said, it is 1.25 million offences. That does not necessarily mean that people are arrested, and it does not give us a target for arrests. We have a target for detections. A detection is an act that results in someone having some sort of criminal justice outcome. There is no doubt that it has focused activity: if you are given a target, you target those things. There are easy pickings. If I am being perfectly honest, I will admit that some forces have chosen to go for them; we have not in Gwent, and I am not sure that other forces in Wales have done so either. We have focused on maximising the impact of those things that we are dealing with. We make sure that we submit quality files of evidence so that, when people are arrested, they are convicted rather than getting off in court. We are making sure that we are targeting the most significant offences. Our priorities are burglary, car crime, and violence; they are not around soft targets. We have deliberately avoided that. As you said, there is always a temptation to pick the low-hanging fruit, because you have a target to reach. We are trying to avoid that, and we are getting across to our officers that it is about impact and having an effect on people's quality of life rather than getting to the figures.

[312] We have a broad range of indicators. There are qualitative indicators to balance out the quantitative ones. We are as concerned about how people feel, having been dealt with as a victim, as we are about getting the arrest. It is difficult, because that is the world in which we work.

[313] I would now like to refer you back to page 8. We currently have 119 police community support officers in Gwent and around 1,500 police officers. So, the PCSOs make up around 8 or 9 per cent of our staff. The original plan was to aim for a figure of around 200 PCSOs, but, as you are probably aware, the funding was redirected and so the numbers have been capped. It will level out at around 130, which will be around 10 per cent. PCSOs are important as they fill a gap that police officers cannot fill: they are the visible, reassuring presence. We would like to see more of them, but we do not have the funding to do that without reducing police numbers—unless people want to work in partnership with us. I know that most forces, along with one of our local authorities, have seen the benefits of PCSOs and want to work with us to buy them in. We are continuing to push for more PCSOs, but, at the moment, the external support for that is constrained. Therefore, we will level out at around 130, which is around 10 per cent.

[314] On budget shortfalls, over the next three years—to 2011—we face about a 9 per cent real terms reduction in funding, which is a significant chunk. Over the last three years, we have saved around £6 million or £7 million in efficiency savings, so the fat in the organisation has been well and truly chopped out. Unless we can find some way of restructuring and reorganising our capability, we face cuts in services over the next three years. I am not telling you anything new, because I believe that that has already been presented to you.

[315] In Gwent—and the other forces are doing the same—we are looking at it from two angles: what can the four forces do together to cut costs and provide the same service more efficiently, and what can we do as a force to look at how we provide service, to ensure that we focus on what is most important? The chief constable has just announced—and, again, this is management speak—a fundamental review of how we do business, looking at the demand and whether we are fit for purpose, because we have to chop out about 7 per cent of our costs, which is a challenge. Will that affect neighbourhood policing? We are determined that it will not. We believe that our level of neighbourhood policing is sustainable, and we believe that the savings must come from back-office services and support.

[316] Finally, on PACT, this is rather like the Hoover, which has almost become the name for the thing that you clean your carpet with. PACT is a brand name that was invented, I believe, by West Mercia Constabulary. The concept is a community meeting, where the police, the local community and local elected officials get together to try to identify and resolve problems. That is what people refer to as PACT. I believe that we will call them CSATs in Torfaen and Monmouthshire, they are called MOPs in Newport, and Cando in Caerphilly. Therefore, it is the concept rather than the name that is important.

[317] The usual suspects are important, and we should not devalue the input that those people make. However, as you will see from the colourful chart at the top of page 7—the neighbourhood engagement process—the PACT meeting is just one tool in the box of community consultation. We are doing visual audits, for example, which is about getting local people to walk the streets with a camera, taking pictures of the things that affect them most. We are doing leaflet drops in blocks of flats and asking people to tell us what their problems are. We are talking to young people through focus groups and youth workers, and we drop postcards through people's letterboxes, saying, 'Write in and tell us what your three concerns are'. Therefore, the PACT is one tool in the box, and we know that we have to be much more focused on people's concerns, and reflect them much better. We are putting a lot of effort into that.

[318] A lot of good practice is emerging, and some good stuff is going on in different places. We are trying to pull it all together, so that we get a consistent approach—wherever you live, you should get the same level of quality.

[319] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for those comprehensive answers to Leanne's questions.

[320] I intend to finish the meeting in a few minutes. However, three Members still wish to ask questions, so please make them brief. If there are questions that Members wish to ask when I close the meeting, would you be happy to provide a written reply to them?

[321] **Mr Giannasi:** Yes.

[322] **Mick Bates:** Thank you.

[323] **Irene James:** I will be brief, Chair.

[324] I was delighted to hear what you said about neighbourhood policing. My comments and questions about the fear of crime have already been addressed. I was particularly delighted to hear you mention boy-racers in Blackwood, which has been a huge problem. Do you believe that that shows the way forward? Everyone worked in partnership—local traders, the police, the local authority, and everyone else—to pull the system so that, I will not say that we stopped the problem, but we have partially solved it.

[325] **Mr Giannasi:** That epitomises what neighbourhood policing is about. However, more than that, Carl's paper refers to the concept of neighbourhood management; as a society, that is where we have to go next. It is not just the police, or just some agencies working with local people. If we can align ourselves, and get neighbourhood cleaning, neighbourhood graffiti removal, neighbourhood care, and neighbourhood local services, we will start to make a difference. It is local people talking to the local service providers who make neighbourhood policing work.

[326] **Mick Bates:** Thank you. It is good to hear a positive note.

12.30 p.m.

[327] **Huw Lewis:** My question follows directly on from that, and is on neighbourhood management. I pay tribute first to the transformation in attitudes, and the level of service. However, I think that Mick is right to point out something that has been agitating me for some time, and it seems to be difficult to get this into the debate, as some local authorities in particular are reluctant to take it on, and that is the night-time economy. That is an aspect of neighbourhood management, particularly as it relates to town centres. There is almost an acceptance that the economy after dark is for a tiny section of the population, namely young adults, and that it is about alcohol, fast food and nothing else. It does not cater for families or older people or for cultural and artistic activities of any kind—I am not trying to be highfaluting about it; I am just talking about things like going to a pantomime at Christmas, for example. Many towns in the Gwent area, for example, and further afield have, as a colleague of mine described it, a lager-and-kebab culture. This is bad economics, because it is forever picking the pockets of a small section of society to no great end—a few people rather than the community as a whole are being enriched by this—but huge policing challenges come with it. Could we look forward to a neighbourhood management culture that, as you mentioned, takes into account the fact that we have to civilise spaces in our communities? To hand an entire town over to one kind of retailer and customer for 12 hours a day is not a sensible way of going about things.

[328] **Mr Giannasi:** That is absolutely right. I think that lights are coming on all over the place and people are recognising the need to work together. We are working better with local authorities and they are now starting to think carefully about planning issues and longer-term spatial issues. For the first time, chief constables have been involved in spatial awareness issues and working on long-term planning. The four chiefs are meeting with the Welsh Assembly Government Cabinet and they are starting to talk about health issues, for example, relating to the night-time economy. People fight on the streets and get injured, there is a backlog for the ambulance service to pick them up, and when those people go into the local accident and emergency department, those who are genuinely ill cannot access services. We are all hurting ourselves, because services are not co-ordinated. So, we are starting to talk to the health sector now and we are telling it that we could save it an awful lot of money if it came forward and started to deal with some of the alcohol-related issues out on the streets, so that we do not end up with people every night in accident and emergency departments.

[329] We are working quite well now with the licensing industry following the last change in legislation; for example, most city centres now have glass initiatives, where they are starting to look at plastic glasses as opposed to glass ones because of the injuries that can be caused. So, the signs are there.

[330] Neighbourhood policing is as much a town-centre issue as it is a rural or estate-based issue. We have neighbourhoods that are focused on city-centre communities and we are starting to make those differences. It is slow—it could be quicker and it needs a boost. Without pointing the finger—I do not do it in that way—if the health sector, which is now starting to realise the potential, came on board, it would be a huge step forward in trying to tackle some of the night-time economy issues.

[331] **Mick Bates:** That is a massive issue and I have raised it many times. The drinks industry has to engage more in a responsible drinking culture. That would help. I know that this will continue to be an issue.

[332] Mark, do you have a question?

[333] **Mark Isherwood:** First, I should disclose that the Chair is himself a bit of a boy-racer, in the nicest possible way, but I will not go into that.

[334] An organisation that is not customer focused is a failing organisation, as we know from the public and voluntary sectors, and getting it right from the ground up saves time and resources. In that context, what impact is this having on intelligence gathering in communities?

[335] On crime reporting and recording, there has been some concern in the media recently that there is an incentive for officers to use on-the-spot penalties rather than record the crime, and that figures are distorted because of targets. Is that allegation fair?

[336] With regard to the funding issue that you have touched on, in my region we are seeing reductions in the numbers of community beat managers and the number of wardens. Yes, we are seeing an increase in the number of community safety officers, but, often, they are an alternative, rather than an addition, to what you are referring to as neighbourhood teams. Perhaps you could respond to that point.

[337] Laura asked me to ask a couple of questions on your report. You stated that, by 2008, every area in England and Wales will have a dedicated neighbourhood policing team. Where will the officers come from? You said that, by April 2007, every community will see increased patrolling and so on. Laura said that, in her area, she has not noticed the increase. Given that this is supposed to happen by next month, where are those offices coming from? With regard to rural policing, and call centres and call handling, which you say have improved, how is this having an impact in rural areas where people are often unaware of how to access the call centre?

[338] **Mr Giannasi:** On crime levels and recording crimes on the spot, the definition of what constitutes a crime is so broad that it makes no difference how you deal with it. A fixed penalty notice, for example, is still recorded as a crime. Low-level issues such as drunkenness and low-level violence or public order offences are all recorded as crimes. Tackling some of these issues actually has a negative impact on crime levels, strange as that may sound. If I send officers out into one of our towns and tell them that I want a zero-tolerance approach and that I want lots of people being issued with fixed penalty notices for drunk and disorderly behaviour, it pushes my crime levels up, which is perverse. So, there is no escaping the crime recording framework. It is tight and closely regulated, and we are audited and inspected. We have to operate within very tight tolerances; if we do not, as would be the case with any business, effectively, our records would be stamped as unreliable. Therefore, we have very close tolerances on crime levels.

[339] There is an issue of neighbourhood policing pushing crime levels up. As you say, when you talk to people and engage with them, they tell you things that they could not tell you when you were driving past at 30mph in a police car. So, we are collecting more intelligence. I could not quantify that, but, at the same time, it is pushing crime levels up. Whereas before we did not know about graffiti, we now know about it because we are asking people what the problems are.

[340] On reductions, I cannot speak for other forces, but in Gwent, there have been no reductions; we do not anticipate making any reductions, and the chief constable is determined that we will not. We have seen the benefits and we know how popular it is with people. This is the foundation, and we cannot afford to cut services in neighbourhood policing.

[341] The target for all areas to have neighbourhood policing teams is 2008. There is a schedule for a sort of enhanced neighbourhood policing programme. So, some forces are focusing first on those areas with the most significant problems, in terms of higher crime and deprivation levels; they will then roll it out over 2008. In Gwent, we have gone for a blanket approach, based on the idea that everybody deserves neighbourhood policing now. Therefore, we are doing it all in one programme, which we started about 18 months ago.

[342] The problem with rural communities and visibility is that it is very difficult to let people know that you are there. For example, I have been out on patrol in Usk, where I have patrolled for four hours with the neighbourhood officer and been unable to find anyone to let them know that we were there and protecting the community. Particularly in winter, it is very difficult to find anyone to tell. We have got to get smarter about that, and find different ways of letting people know. The PACT meetings, leaflet drops, letters: these are the ways that we are going to make a difference on that.

[343] We have seen significant improvements in call handling, but those improvements have really been to do with the handling of the call and the satisfaction that people have with the quality of the call, and not necessarily the resolution to the problem, so that is work that we have still to do. We must work harder to get the right resources to the right problem at the right time. That is one of our overarching problems.

[344] We are trying to rationalise numbers, so that you do not have to look through the phone book to find one of 10 numbers and work out which one is yours. Most forces are now going for a single contact number, which they heavily promote. It is also important to ensure that the old number connects people to the new number, so that people have to make only one call. There is a national drive on call handling. We recognise that it is the door into the police service for most people, and so we are investing significantly in trying to improve that process.

12.40 p.m.

[345] **Mick Bates:** I will have to draw the meeting to a close now. I thank everyone for their attendance, and, in particular, I thank Mick and Carl for their presentation, and for the way in which they have answered questions.

[346] I remind Members of two issues before we close. The next, and final, committee meeting will be on Thursday, 22 March, here in the Senedd. I also remind you of a joint committee meeting tomorrow, 8 March, from 10.30 a.m. until 12.30 p.m. in committee rooms 1 and 2, when the annual report of the Children's Commissioner for Wales 2005-06 will be discussed. Papers were sent to us on 2 March.

[347] With that, I thank you all again for your attendance on what was an interesting and informative morning.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12.40 p.m.

The meeting ended at 12.40 p.m.