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Dramatic Rise in Length of Prisoners' Sentences for Violent Crime

Dami Ojuri, Justice Gap: There has been a dramatic increase in the length of custodial sentences for most serious crimes over the last two decades despite a fall in public concern with the minimum term for murder rising from 12.5 years in 2003 to 20 years in 2020. According to a new report by the Prison Reform Trust, there are almost 11,000 people in prison in England and Wales who will spend 10 years or more behind bars including more than two-thirds (67%) serving indeterminate sentences who do not know when or if they will be released. In 2019, the latest year for which data are available, 124 people were sentenced to custody for 20 years or more (excluding life sentences) and are likely to spend 10 years or more held in custody—four times the number of just a decade ago. There are now over 3,500 people in prison serving one of these long determinate sentences.

Dr David Maguire, the group's director, said that the impact on the justice system would be 'significant and long-term' and its challenges are expected to 'shape the landscape for years to come'. According to the group, public concern about violent crime has actually fallen over the last two decades. The proportion of the public with 'a high level of worry' about violent crime declining from 13% to 8%. A higher proportion of people reported feeling 'very/fairly safe' walking alone after dark, rising from 73% to 78% overall and from 61% to 69% for women. According to the PRT, the changing landscape of prisons will feature an even greater number of older male prisoners who already make up a significant majority of longer-term prisoners. Currently, 99% of those serving long determinate sentences are male, with only 11 women serving such sentences. The finding also indicated an increase in the number of long-term prisoners under the age of 25, of which there are current over 1400. However, most long-term prisoners are older men aged between 40 and 59. The report also confirmed a greater number of BAME male prisoners serving long determinate sentences than in the sentenced prison population overall. Earlier in the week, Home Secretary Priti Patel outlined her plans to introduce tougher sentences for violent crimes whilst emphasising her support for the controversial Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, again, which would introduce tougher sentences for child murders which will be based on the sentencing system for adults.

10-Point Action Plan to Change Prisons and Build Safer Communities

Prisons have failed by any measure. They have fed the crime problem, they have not solved it. The deprivation of liberty is the most serious punishment available to the state. The removal of civil rights as a consequence of incarceration is a profound action. The practical ramifications of imprisonment are immense, from the cost to the public purse to the damage to families. It is time to rethink the purpose, use and experience of prisons so that we do not continue to harm individuals and society. Prison has been used profligately and inappropriately. This needs to change. Prisons should not be used for people with mental illness, people who are merely annoying or different, or people facing immigration issues. Prisons should be run on principles of justice and fairness, treating people with consistency, impartiality and respect. Instead, prisons today are places which embed injustice. Treating people in prison with jus-

tice and fairness would have a ripple effect and help to build safer and fairer communities. Prisons are part of the community. Families, voluntary organisations and visitors should have easy access to, and relationships with, people in prison.

- 1) Stop the prison expansion programme, put legal limits on the population each prison can hold, and end the use of prisons for profit, so that we can reinvest in existing prisons within the public sector
 - 2) Reduce the prison population by at least a half and start planning for reintegration immediately with families and purposeful activities
 - 3) Stop the use of prison for people with serious mental ill-health and improve the health and well-being of people who are 3detained. Drive down self-injury and deaths in custody
 - 4) Reduce the number of Black and ethnic minority people in the penal system. Equality of outcomes should be rigorously monitored and pursued across the penal system
 - 5) Close the failed young offender institutions and secure training centres and use only local authority-run secure children's homes for the very few children who require custody
 - 6) Close women's prisons and introduce small local residential units for the tiny number of women who commit crimes serious enough to merit a custodial sentence
 - 7) Curtail the power to remand people to prison and introduce the possibility of individuals applying to court for compensation if found not guilty
 - 8) Abolish unfair and inconsistent practices, such as the imposition of additional days of imprisonment and arbitrary recalls
 - 9) Reform the prison officer role so that it is a profession with a proper career path, qualifications and training
 - 10) Introduce real work opportunities in prison for long-term prisoners, bringing businesses into prisons to train and employ prisoners and have them paying tax and national insurance.
- Francis Cook, Howard League for Penal Reform

Everard Inquiry Must Look Far Beyond Wayne Couzens

Harriet Johnson, Doughty Street Chambers: When DCI Simon Harding said that police officers viewed Wayne Couzens not as a police officer who was a murderer but as "a murderer who happened to be a police officer", he was perhaps telling us more than he meant to about police culture. You might think that his cue came from the very top, after, in June, Dame Cressida Dick described the police as a body where you might find an "occasional bad'un".

Everything that has come out in the last week – the fact that fellow officers nicknamed Couzens "the rapist"; that he and other officers shared racist, misogynistic and homophobic messages in a private Whatsapp group; not to mention further historic allegations of indecent exposure – has shown that Couzens was not an anomaly: he was merely a symptom.

For those of us specialising in civil actions against the police on behalf of women, nothing that we heard was a surprise. In recent months the news has been full of highly concerning indicators of systemic misogyny within the police force. The Met officer accused of rape by two colleagues, who was not suspended from duty. The Surrey police officer convicted of two counts of rape, one of which took place while he was on duty. The Met police officers who took photos of themselves next to the dead bodies of murdered Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman.

And the problem is not just with police misconduct: it's also with how police officers are treated when their wrongdoing is uncovered. Nearly a quarter of all referrals received by the IOPC (the Independent Office for Police Conduct) relate to allegations of abuse of power for sexual gains. Details of these allegations include requesting sexual favours in exchange for pursuing or not

pursuing a police function, as well as conducting inappropriate or unnecessary searches. Yet between 2017 and 2020, more than half of metropolitan police officers found to have committed sexual misconduct kept their jobs. Is it any surprise, then, that the culture of misogyny persists within police forces up and down the country? On my own desk, as I write, are the cases of women who have turned to police for help only to be mocked, belittled, and ignored.

Shana Grice, whose parents I act for, reported her ex-boyfriend to the police five times for stalking her. She was given a warning for wasting police time. Then he murdered her. Emails about another client between police officers revealed that they had described her rape allegation as “plainly bollocks”, and mocked the account she had given. In that case, independent evidence supporting her claim of rape was mis-read by a junior officer, resulting in no further action being taken against the perpetrator.

The much-publicised figures released in March showing that just 1.6% of rapes reported to the police led to a conviction, confirmed what we already knew: that police forces, as they currently operate, are not serving women who are victims of crime. At times, they are even actively harming them. If the Inquiry into the murder of Sarah Everard and the history of Wayne Couzens is to achieve anything, it must be a thorough and forensic examination of the myriad ways in which the police have failed, and continue to fail, women. Anything less than that means it is only a matter of time until the next Couzens shows himself.

Neglect Contributed to the Death of Sarah Price in Newport Mental Health Unit

The inquest into the self-inflicted death of Sarah Price, a mental health patient at St Cadoc’s hospital in Newport, has concluded today. The jury returned a critical narrative conclusion and a finding that neglect contributed to Sarah’s death on 2 February 2016. Sarah was 23 years old. She was a bubbly, funny and friendly person and part of a large and close-knit family. She had complex mental health needs which started when she was a child, and a learning disability which affected her ability to understand others. She was bullied at school and started self-harming. In November 2015, Sarah was detained under the Mental Health Act after she attempted to take her own life using an item in her supported living house. She was admitted to St Cadoc’s hospital, run by the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. She remained there until her death three months later.

In the days before her death, Sarah reported she was hearing voices, getting louder and louder, telling her to suffocate herself. She made several attempts to access items, like those she used previously, to do this. Staff witnessed this and yet the items were not removed from any part of the ward and Sarah’s risk assessment was not updated. The jury found that on the day of her death staff downgraded her observations, from constant observations to intermittent only, without fully taking into account her risk to herself. They found that her death was contributed to by neglect.

Sarah’s mum Rachel Price said on behalf of the family: “Sarah was profoundly let down by the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board when she was most in need. We have fought for justice for Sarah for since her death in 2016 and justice has finally been done.” Selen Cavcav, senior caseworker at INQUEST, said: “This is the third inquest in the past few weeks to identify issues around mental health patients accessing the same potentially dangerous items. Families expect that mental health units are the safest place for their loved ones, yet too often that is not the case.

It is welcome that this inquest has identified the serious failings in Sarah’s case. There is a clear need for a new national policy on restricted and dangerous items to prevent deaths in future. This, alongside adequate and skilled staffing, is essential to ensure patients are kept safe.”

Majority of Voters Say Police Have Problem With Racism

Left Foot Forward: A poll was carried out by Savanta: ComRes and asked voters to what extent they thought that the police in general have a problem with racism, with 63% of respondents saying they thought the police have a problem with racism, compared to 23% who believe they do not. When it came to age, 72% of those aged 65 and over say they believe the police have a problem with racism, as do 66% of 18-24 year olds. Concerns over racism in the police are particularly high among those living in London, with 70% saying they think the police have a problem with racism, compared to 52% of those living in the West Midlands. When it comes to party affiliation, 73% of Labour voters think that the police have a problem with racism, compared to 58% of Conservative voters.

Black people are nine times more likely to be stopped and searched by police than white people, official figures for England and Wales show. A total of 577,054 stops were carried out across England in 2019-20, with 76% leading to no further action. Black people were 18 times more likely to be stopped under section 60, under which no reasonable suspicion is required. The data for arrests from 2019-20, also shows that black people were more than three times more likely to be detained than white people, and BAME people more than one and a half times more likely. More than half of those who answered the survey also say that the police has a problem with Islamophobia (52%) compared to 26% who think they do not. 58% of those aged 18-24 years old say that the police have a problem with Islamophobia, compared with 40% of those aged between 55-64 years old. Concerns over Islamophobia in the police were particularly high among Lib Dem and Labour Party voters (64%) each, compared to 48% of Conservative Party voters.

Responding to the survey findings, Habib Kadiri, Research and policy manager at StopWatch UK said: “The figures hint at a growing unease with the lip service police pay towards tackling crime while policing Black and Brown bodies as a form of social control. We observe this in our work with people from marginalised communities who are subjected to overpolicing, and in the racial disproportionality of police stop and search practices. The survey findings will come as no surprise to anyone who has witnessed how street policing affects those communities. We are painfully aware of the fact that the actions of the most violent policing units in the country are driven by deeply entrenched stereotypes of who Black and Brown people are and what they do.” A spokesperson for MCB said: “What the data suggests is deeply concerning. The disproportionate impact of police policies such as stop and search on ethnic minority communities, has negative consequences on perceptions of the police and weakens community relationships. Islamophobia, and institutional racism more broadly, is real, and pervasive throughout civil society. We welcome the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)’s thematic focus on race discrimination. We look forward to it’s conclusions and working with Police forces to better understand and engage Muslim Communities.”

Does Anyone Care? The Mental Health Crisis in Our Prisons

Vicki Cardwell, JusticeGap: Mental health provision in prisons is in a terrible state. So terrible that MPs across political divides are calling for ‘root and branch reform’. In a damning report by the influential Justice Select Committee current services are described as ‘disjointed and incoherent’. The report passed by largely unnoticed in the media when it was published last week, with one story in the Morning Star. You could be forgiven for thinking we, the public, don’t care. You could be forgiven for thinking that when all of us are up against it, with so many young people in particular facing the mental health toll of disrupted education and social isolation, we, the public, don’t have the headspace or empathy to think of those behind locked doors.

Let's stop there. There are glimmers of hope, signs that people do care about what happens to people in prison. Today, Spark Inside launches a new campaign focused on young people's mental health and wellbeing in prisons. As part of the project we commissioned a new YouGov poll to find out what the public thinks. We were pleasantly surprised. Almost three quarters of people (72%) think that, taking into account the different priorities in the prison system, there should be specific support for prisoners' mental health and wellbeing. The survey also asked people about the purpose of prison. Almost two thirds (62%) say a top priority of prison is to rehabilitate. So people do care. They do care that people leave prison with the best chance of success, turning life around and leading crime-free lives. So let's not fall into the trap of saying 'no-one cares'. They do.

A cross party committee of MPs care too. The committee's inquiry discovered that only 10% of people in prison access mental health support, yet 70% of people inside are thought to have a mental health problem. Bob Neill, the Chair didn't pull his punches, 'We have a duty of care to those who are in prison and we must do more to live up to it.' What's also disturbing is the data is so lacking that, as Neill points out, the scale of unmet need is unknown. At Spark Inside our coaches work with young people aged from 15-25 so they can realise their untapped potential. Our priority is to shine a light on getting the right wellbeing and mental health support for them. We know from neurological studies that particular challenges exist due to later psychological maturity, and that children in custody are three times more likely to have mental health problems than those in the general community.

The voices of young people, in or after prison, are at the heart of our investigation. Tyler, a 22 year old man who was recently in custody awaiting bail told us: 'I think that's one of the worse periods for my mental state, but in the year, I've kind of sucked it up and was like d'you know what it is? I started to read more, I started to exercise and then I have little episodes where ... I go back into that sunken feeling, so I think I'd say I was feeling depressed. Especially I had a lot of other stuff going on outside of the case, so all of that adding onto the case made it bad, especially in lockdown as well, you couldn't really do nothing.' The message coming from what we've been told so far is that young people who ask for help in prison are told they don't meet the criteria for appropriate services. Too often it's a tick box culture.

In our project we will also focus on the impact of race. Young Black men are overrepresented in prisons. Young Black people are nine times more likely to be imprisoned than young white people. Our campaign will make constructive recommendations for tailored support for their mental health and wellbeing. Four years ago David Lammy in his review of 2017 identified ways to address the neglected specific needs of Black people in prison. Fast forward to 2021 MPs still conclude the Black population in prison are worst served for their mental health.

Nathan, a 26 year old Black man told us he couldn't get mental health support: 'A lot of people just need someone to vent to... like they don't have to solve your problems, but I think just listen to it, just try and take your time with the person you're dealing with in those situations, because there's gonna be a lot of things going through whoever's mind at that time, and they might not want to talk about it. It has to be genuine, people doing their jobs have really gotta care for people that they're dealing with and have empathy.' As well as the public's views on mental health provision in prisons, we wanted to gauge people's understanding of the background to race, mental health and young people in prison. 81% in the YouGov survey think experiences of racism can have a negative impact young person's mental health and wellbeing. Perhaps post-Covid and in light of Black Lives Matter the British public is waking up to the deep-rooted issues around structural racism. So, yes the public does care. They do care that the mental health and wellbeing of people in prison is taken care of and that rehabilitation is prioritised in prisons. MPs care. It's time for wellbeing in prisons to be prioritised alongside physical health, time for professionals working in prisons to get the right guidance. The time is right for change.

Taras Nykolyn's Brutal Prison Murder: MoJ express "Deep Regret"

INQUEST: Taras Nykolyn died in a brutal and sustained attack in what was supposed to be one of the prison system's most secure units. He was killed in a planned attack by three other prisoners in the Managing Challenging Behaviour Strategy ("MCBS") unit at HMP Woodhill on 5 June 2018. An inquest has concluded identifying serious issues. Evidence was heard that Taras' attackers were apparently just "bored" (as they put it) and frustrated after a planned move to another prison had been cancelled days earlier. The prisoners – all of whom had recent records relating to serious violence against other prisoners as well as against staff – obtained and smuggled two "shanks" on to a caged exercise yard. These consisted of razor blades and improvised handles. They also obtained a ligature. These were used over the course of 28 minutes while staff looked on. The ferocity of the violence, the number of the perpetrators, and the absence of specialist resources meant that it was impossible for staff to go in earlier.

Several officers were unable to give evidence because they were too traumatised by what they saw over the course of that 28 minutes. The rest spoke of its impact on them. Several spoke of how particularly disturbing it was that the prisoners returned repeatedly to the body, even after Taras was obviously dead, mutilating it further. Some suggested that it appeared they were trying to remove his head. Following the disclosure of an internal lesson learning review (which senior officers in the prison had not seen until just before the hearing started) the Ministry of Justice accepted that the standard of searching on the unit had been poor, that risk assessments of prisoner association had not been sufficiently quality assured, and that there should have been a more rigorous assessment of exercise on the yard. The latter might have included a review of the use of dogs, PAVA spray, and pyrotechnics. None of that had been available or authorised for use by the team who had to be assembled at speed.

At the conclusion of the hearing the Ministry of Justice also apologised for these failures, expressing its deep regret. The apology was addressed to Taras's family, but also to the court, and to the prison officers. The jury went further. In its narrative conclusion it found that the poor quality of the searching, and of the risk assessments, had led to Taras's death. The jury also expressly recorded findings about: - Insufficient re-training of staff in search techniques, with staff having to rely on initial training received over many years previously. - A failure in the control and monitoring of razor blades issued to prisoners. - Failures of dynamic risk assessment including irregular scheduling; inconsistent attendance at meetings; failures of information sharing; insufficient detail and inaccuracies in minutes; and inadequate review of the relevant decisions both locally and centrally. - The absence of resources, and contingency planning, for an attack on the yard.

These findings followed evidence about staff shortages at Woodhill, which meant that officers had to be brought into the unit from elsewhere in the prison. This meant that, although those centrally responsible for the MCBS unit believed staff had been specifically selected and trained for working in this particularly dangerous environment, in fact many had not been.

One junior officer told the inquest that not only had he not been selected to work on the unit, but he had asked not to be placed there. His request had been refused, and he had also failed on appeal. He was told he still had to go for reasons of "operational need". The attack occurred on his first full day on the unit. The inquest also heard that there had been no change of approach, either to the risk assessment of association, or to the risk assessment of the yard, following a previous incident. In late 2014 a prisoner had attempted to kill another prisoner on an adjoining yard in the same specialist block. In early 2021 the High Court found that the risk assessments in that case had been negligently conducted.

Taras had been 49 years old when he died. He had had no history of violent offending until 2014 when he attacked someone whilst he was experiencing what seemed to be a psychotic episode. When on remand for that offence he killed another prisoner in what appeared to be another psychotic episode. He spent time in a secure mental hospital and, at the time of his death, was supposed to be being monitored for a return there. None of this, however, was considered in his risk assessments. As the jury conclusion reflected, no one from the healthcare team was present at the dynamic risk assessment meetings that were supposed to consider association risk

The inquest also heard that Taras was physically unwell. He had required an operation on his jaw that had been delayed. During his months long wait he had not been able properly to eat, and so had lost weight. The MCBS unit had been designed to provide a framework for the care and case management of prisoners whose behaviour is dangerous, disruptive, and/or particularly challenging to manage whilst in custody, and those considered to present a high risk of harm to others, to try to break the cycle and prevent further harm'. The unit was supposed to have a high psychological input but the inquest heard that at Woodhill it had been impossible to recruit a full time psychologist to carry out this work. The sessional psychologist told the jury that at the time of Taras's death none of the three assailants had been engaging with her. Previous engagement had been very intermittent.

The MCBS unit has since been closed. The intention had been to move the prisoners to HMP Long Lartin so that the Woodhill unit could become a separation unit housing extremist prisoners, but that move was cancelled because the staffing at Long Lartin was not ready. The three assailants have since been transferred elsewhere in the prison estate. Mr Brabbs, who was the only one of the three who agreed to be interviewed, said his new regime was "a lot better" and he was now "happy" where he was.

Searching: It was accepted prior to the start of the inquest by the Ministry of Justice that the "searching of prisoners and the razor blade policy: the quality of the searching and control of razor blades were not sufficiently quality assured. The searching therefore was poor, with omissions in checking items and prisoners given scope to distract staff." CCTV revealed that physical rub down searching of the prisoners was cursory and the use of a metal detector wand was not thorough. Prison officers also gave evidence stating that they had not had any refresher training in searching since becoming prison officers, in one case 22 years, despite updated prison service instructions on searching. It was accepted by all that a properly conducted search would have revealed the weapons, and a former governor was clear that had they been found, the exercise would not have been allowed to go ahead until a thorough further search (including of cells where further weapons would have been found) and reassessment of risk had been carried out.

Risk assessments: The inquest heard that a previous violent attack had taken place on the yard of the Close Supervision Unit in 2014. There was no evidence of any internal or external investigation taking place and no changes to procedure or risk assessment of the exercise yard were introduced. The only risk assessment that could be found was dated 2013 and was very unclear. At the time other MCBS units in the country did not have communal exercise. There was no contingency plan in case an incident was to take place on the yard and staff did not have the equipment or numbers of staff to intervene without considerable risk to themselves.

Following the conclusion of his inquest Taras' wife said: "I have been very shocked and saddened to hear the evidence at the inquest. I have heard how staff were not adequately trained to do their jobs and officers were just brought in to fill gaps, that prisoners did not have sufficient therapeutic input or any initiatives to put them on right path. I was particularly concerned with the evidence

I heard from the former head of security in the prison who took no responsibility for the failings in relation to searching of prisoners and had made no changes to the system as a result. They had also not been provided with the internal investigation designed to learn lessons. No lessons have been learnt. Where is the accountability? These officers are still in their posts or have been promoted. I always voiced my concerns about Taras being on that unit as I did not feel that was the right place for him. He came into the prison system but found that the system gave him no hope that one day his life could change when he would be released. In my opinion the prison system utterly failed him and he died in the barbaric and inhumane circumstances."

Christina Juman of Deighton Pierce Glynn who represents the family said: "Another thing that this inquest has shown is that there is a real issue with secure units like the MCB unit at Woodhill taking prisoners into specialist environments in order to progress them, but in fact brutalising them and making them worse. There was little or no progression for any of the men on that unit and sadly that resulted in the loss of life Taras Nykolyn in the most brutal way."

Umteen Thousands More Criminals to be Tagged to Cut Crime/Protect Victims

Doninic Raab, Minister for Justice: Almost 26,000 extra offenders will be tagged over the next 3 years under an ambitious £180 million plan to expand the use of electronic monitoring to cut crime. Around ten thousand of those will be prolific robbers, thieves and burglars fitted with GPS tags as they come out of prison. This world-first project – which began in April – expanded to half of England and Wales last week and will now be funded for a further three years. It recently saw the first conviction using location data to pin a thief to the scene of further crimes and is deterring others from reoffending. The intention is to roll it out nationwide, if successful at curbing crime and helping police catch offenders.

In another world-first, alcohol monitoring tags will also be used on more than 12,000 prison leavers known to commit crimes when under the influence over the same period - helping keep them off alcohol altogether or limit their drinking to reduce the risk of them reoffending. It follows their successful use on offenders serving community sentences since last October to help cut the £22 billion cost of alcohol-related crime. Over 3,500 high-risk domestic abusers will have their whereabouts monitored using GPS tags to protect victims and children from further trauma. The tags may also help the Probation Service discover relationships that offenders are keeping secret so they can alert new partners.

The £183 million investment will help almost double the number of people tagged at any one time from around 13,500 this year to approximately 25,000 by 2025. Deputy Prime Minister, Justice Secretary and Lord Chancellor, Dominic Raab MP said: This major increase in high-tech GPS tagging will see us leading the world in using technology to fight crime and keep victims safe. From tackling alcohol-fuelled violence and burglary to protecting domestic abuse victims, we are developing tags to make our streets and communities safer. A £19 million Innovation Fund will be used to test different ways of using existing technology to cut crime and foster the development of new types of tags. An area of particular interest is whether new technology could be developed which would notify police or probation staff if an offender has been taking illegal drugs.

GPS tags have been used nationwide since 2019 to monitor offenders' compliance with licence conditions and court requirements, including exclusion zones. Judges can order them as part of bail conditions and the Home Office will increase its use of GPS tagging devices for foreign national offenders to monitor 4,500 at any one time by the end of next year. Alcohol monitoring tags, which measure alcohol levels in sweat, have been ordered for over 1,500 offenders serving community sentences since they were first rolled out in October last year.

NI Prisons: Services for At-Risk Inmates Over-Stretched

BBC News: A review of health services for prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide has found the system is under considerable pressure. It also found demand for services was greatly exceeding capacity. Previously, the Prisoner Ombudsman criticised the care provided to vulnerable people in custody. Between 2012 and 2019, there were 18 suicides and 5,217 recorded incidents of self-harm within Northern Ireland's prisons. The review led by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) was commissioned by the ministers for justice and health in July 2020. While the RQIA has found evidence of improvement and examples of good practice, it says there is a need for further improvement around commissioning, planning and delivery. It said there were long waiting times for mental health appointments, for addiction appointments and for transfer to acute mental health beds within hospital. It also highlighted a significant lack of psychological support for people with a history of personality disorder and trauma.

The RQIA said: "Many committed prison service and healthcare staff are already working with great compassion and dedication to make things better for vulnerable people in custody, but co-ordinated effort is needed across the criminal justice and health and social care systems to improve outcomes. The expert review team has made 16 recommendations which, if fully implemented, will support better outcomes for vulnerable prisoners - including the avoidance of harm; better prospects for treat Achieving this is a considerable challenge in a highly-complex system with limited resources. Success depends on sustained commitment and deepening partnership across the criminal justice and health and social care systems, recognising that prisons are not a place apart but a part of society."

Health Minister Robin Swann and Justice Minister Naomi Long said they would consider the review findings and work together to implement its recommendations. Prof Siobhan O'Neill, Northern Ireland's mental health champion, said: "The report identifies the need for a government-led strategy, accompanied by additional funding, to deliver interventions and support for people in the care of the prison system who have suicidal thoughts and behaviours. It is vital that the report's recommendations are fully implemented." Briege Donaghy, chief executive of RQIA, concluded: "RQIA is committed to monitoring the care provided to people in custody, as part of its statutory role. We will work in partnership with the Criminal Justice Inspectorate, and with the skilled and dedicated staff in the Northern Ireland Prison Service and in the Health and Social Care system to make sure that services are improved for these particularly vulnerable people."

UK Put on Global Watchlist for Curbing Civic Freedoms

Andy Hull, Each Other: A new global watchlist highlighting nations where there is a serious and rapid decline in respect for civic space has named the UK as a country of concern. In September, CIVICUS, a global alliance of civil society organisations from 175 countries which is dedicated to strengthening citizen action throughout the world, published the latest edition of its watchlist. It cites the UK as a country where civic space has narrowed, criticising a recent reduction in the respect and protection which the UK government affords people's rights to associate, assemble peacefully and freely express their views.

The report argues that Article 11 of the UK's Human Rights Act, which protects freedom of association and assembly, is under repeated government attack. In particular, it draws attention to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, currently in the House of Lords, which both threatens equalities and proposes new limits on protest and demonstration. CIVICUS also refers to concerns regarding Freedom of Information (FOI) in the UK, with select jour-

nalists seemingly being blacklisted and their FOI requests processed by a secretive Cabinet Office clearing house. At the same time, some organisations in UK civil society fear the chilling effect of a Charity Commission which the government appears keen to politicise.

A raft of other relevant legislation has either recently been enacted or is still working its way through parliament. The Judicial Review and Courts Bill is set to water down an important tool with which members of the public can hold the state to account. Simultaneously, the Elections Bill, with its proposals for mandatory Voter ID, threatens to disenfranchise millions of electors, reducing the efficacy of the ballot box as a mechanism for accountability too. Plus, the Overseas Operations Act and the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act limit the answerability of UK armed forces, secret agents and undercover police.

At the Conservative Party Annual Conference in Manchester, cabinet ministers laid out their stall for shrinking the country's civic space further. Lord Chancellor Dominic Raab pledged to 'overhaul' the Human Rights Act during this parliament, before the independent panel set up by the government to review the act has even concluded its deliberations. Meanwhile, Home Secretary Priti Patel mooted new Criminal Disruption Prevention Orders which would enable the imposition of pre-emptive restrictions on would-be protestors.

CIVICUS is calling upon the UK and other governments to end the erosion of fundamental freedoms which their monitor documents. Its members argue these human rights form the bedrock of an open and democratic society.

Prisoners: Gender Recognition - Sex Between Inmates

Lord Blencathra: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Wolfson of Tredegar on 21 July (HL1789), what steps they plan to take to prevent pregnancy among biologically female transgender prisoners in the male prison estate.

Lord Wolfson of Tredegar: Sex between prisoners is not permitted. Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service ensure the safety of all prisoners by managing prisoners on a case-by-case basis and consider any relevant risks (including risks to, or from, the prisoner, as well as the risk of self-harm). The NHS England and NHS Improvement constitution mandates that all healthcare delivered within prisons must be equivalent to healthcare delivered in the community and the fact that a patient is a prisoner should not impair their access to any healthcare they require. All secure and detained settings therefore ensure that prisoners have access to appropriate contraceptives, which are prescribed or made available as necessary. This applies to both the men's and women's estate and includes all prisoners. There have been no recorded incidents of prisoners becoming pregnant in the male prison estate.

Lord Blencathra: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Wolfson of Tredegar on 21 July (HL1789), whether biologically female transgender prisoners in the male prison estate have access to contraceptive devices. How many pregnancies have been reported in the male prison estate in each of the last five years; and whether they will provide a breakdown of the outcomes of any such pregnancies.

Lord Wolfson of Tredegar: Sex between prisoners is not permitted. Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service ensure the safety of all prisoners by managing prisoners on a case-by-case basis and consider any relevant risks (including risks to, or from, the prisoner, as well as the risk of self-harm). The NHS England and NHS Improvement constitution mandates that all healthcare delivered within prisons must be equivalent to healthcare delivered in the community and the fact that a patient is a prisoner should not impair their access to any healthcare

they require. All secure and detained settings therefore ensure that prisoners have access to appropriate contraceptives, which are prescribed or made available as necessary. This applies to both the men's and women's estate and includes all prisoners. There have been no recorded incidents of prisoners becoming pregnant in the male prison estate. The NHS England and NHS Improvement constitution mandates that all healthcare delivered within prisons must be equivalent to healthcare delivered in the community and the fact that a patient is a prisoner should not impair their access to any healthcare they require. All secure and detained settings therefore ensure that prisoners have access to appropriate contraceptives, which are prescribed or made available as necessary. This applies to both the men's and women's estate and includes all prisoners. There have been no recorded incidents of prisoners becoming pregnant in the male prison estate.

Prisoners: Failing to use Female Pronouns

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Wolfson of Tredegar on 20 July (HL1761), what is their policy on whether prisoners whose sex assigned at birth was female should use female pronouns to refer to prisoners who identify as female but were assigned male at birth if such prisoners (1) have, or (2) do not have, a Gender Recognition Certificate; and whether there would be any consequences for failing to use female pronouns in such cases. [HL2647]

Lord Wolfson of Tredegar: The Ministry of Justice and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service are committed to advancing equality and eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation, including based on gender reassignment status as defined in section 7 of the Equality Act 2010. The prohibition on discrimination in relation to gender reassignment applies regardless of whether someone has a Gender Recognition Certificate. Incidents where a prisoner uses incorrect pronouns for another prisoner will be considered on a case-by-case basis, in line with the Prisoner Discipline Procedures policy and the Prison Rules. Prisoners may sometimes make an honest mistake in relation to pronouns and disciplinary action would not usually be appropriate in those circumstances. However, if an officer deems it appropriate to place a prisoner on report, the rule against 'using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour' (PR 51 (20)) may apply. The adjudicator will weigh each incident on its own merits. The policy stipulates that an offence motivated by another person's protected characteristic(s) under the Equality Act 2010 is an aggravating factor and may merit referral to an Independent Adjudicator.

Children Locked in Cells for 23 Hours a Day in G4S Managed Oakhill Youth Jail

May Bulman, Independent: A monitoring report into Oakhill secure training (operated by G4S Care and Justice Services) centre in Milton Keynes by Ofsted, the Prison Inspectorate and the Care Quality Commission warns that "widespread failings" are having a "significant impact" on the care and well-being of child inmates. Records published by the centre, which currently holds 46 boys between the ages of 12 and 17, show that children have spent approximately 19 hours per day on average locked in their rooms - increasing to 23 hours on some days. Inspectors said there were concerns over the accuracy of the centre's data, indicating that the time children have spent locked into their rooms could be higher than that reported by the centre. Campaigners said the Oakhill report should be the "final straw" and that the government should close secure training centres to ensure that children in trouble are "given the care and support they need".

Anna McMorrin MP, shadow minister for victims and youth justice, described an "alarming pattern of failure" across the youth justice system and accused ministers of "repeatedly failed to act on past warnings". "It is time for the government to commission an independent review of youth custody, as Labour have called for, to get a grip on this spiralling crisis," she said. As well as highlighting concerns about the long periods boys spend in their cells, the new report notes that the temperatures in children's living units and in other parts of Oakhill were "too high", leading to an environment in summer months that is "not conducive to positive care". There was no means of cooling the children's living units or staff administration areas. This makes living and working at the centre very uncomfortable at best," the report states.

Children told inspectors activities were being cancelled at the last minute, usually linked to a lack of staffing. The centre's records show that, on the vast majority of days in July and August 2021, minimum staffing levels to ensure the safe and appropriate care of children were not met. Staff told inspectors that their morale was "very low" and that they did not feel supported by managers. The report notes: "The way in which centre staff encourage children to develop positive behaviours and social skills is in disarray." Inspectors conclude that children's day-to-day experiences are "very poor" and that "little progress has been made" since similar concerns, particularly those relating to staffing, were raised by inspectors at the previous inspection in May 2021.

Andrew Neilson, director of campaigns at the Howard League for Penal Reform, said: "The distressing realities revealed in this inspection report echo what the Howard League has seen through its own legal work with children in custody during the pandemic and before, with boys locked in their cells for hours on end without fresh air or face-to-face education. The Howard League opposed the creation of secure training centres in the 1990s. In the decades since, hundreds of boys and girls have been harmed and abused while private companies have profited from their misery. This report on Oakhill should be the final straw. It is time to close the secure training centres and ensure that boys and girls in trouble are given the care and support they need."

A spokesperson for Oakhill said the safety of children was "paramount", adding: "Earlier this year, staff numbers at Oakhill were severely depleted by the impact of Covid-19 as significant numbers of staff were required, under prevailing regulations, to self-isolate at home. In these unprecedented circumstances, managers at Oakhill had to adopt a restricted operating regime, including remote learning for children from their rooms." They said that since the Ofsted visit, Oakhill's operating regime for children had "improved" and that over the past month children had been able to spend on average 12 hours out of their rooms daily and education in classrooms had been "restored". The Ministry of Justice has been approached for comment.

Serving Prisoners Supported by MOJUK: Derek Patterson, Walib Habid, Giovanni Di Stefano, Naweed Ali, Khobaib Hussain, Mohibur Rahman, Tahir Aziz, Roger Khan, Wang Yam, Andrew Malkinson, Michael Ross, Mark Alexander, Anis Sardar, Jamie Green, Dan Payne, Zoran Dresic, Scott Birtwistle, Jon Beere, Chedwyn Evans, Darren Waterhouse, David Norris, Brendan McConville, John Paul Wooton, John Keelan, Mohammed Niaz Khan, Abid Ashiq Hussain, Sharaz Yaqub, David Ferguson, Anthony Parsons, James Cullinene, Stephen Marsh, Graham Coutts, Royston Moore, Duane King, Leon Chapman, Tony Marshall, Anthony Jackson, David Kent, Norman Grant, Ricardo Morrison, Alex Silva, Terry Smith, Warren Slaney, Melvyn 'Adie' McLellan, Lyndon Coles, Robert Bradley, Thomas G. Bourke, David E. Ferguson, Lee Mockble, George Coleman, Neil Hurley, Jaslyn Ricardo Smith, James Dowsett, Kevan & Miran Thakrar, Jordan Towers, Patrick Docherty, Brendan Dixon, Paul Bush, Alex Black, Nicholas Rose, Kevin Nunn, Peter Carine, Paul Higginson, Robert Knapp, Thomas Petch, Vincent and Sean Bradish, John Allen, Jeremy Bamber, Kevin Lane, Michael Brown, Robert William Kenealy, Glyn Razzell, Willie Gage, Kate Keaveney, Michael Stone, Michael Attwooll, John Roden, Nick Tucker, Karl Watson, Terry Allen, Richard Southern, Peter Hannigan