

# Prison Governors Association

Representing: The Prison Governors of the United Kingdom since 1987



**PGA Office:** Room LG.27  
Ministry of Justice  
102 Petty France,  
London, SW1H 9AJ

<b>PGA Officers:</b>	President	Andrea Albutt
	Vice President	Adrian Turner
	Finance Officer	Shaun Williamson
	National Officers	Carl Davies Mitch Albutt

Telephone: 020 3334 0456

Email: [james.bryant01@justice.gov.uk](mailto:james.bryant01@justice.gov.uk)

Website: [www.prison-governors-association.org.uk](http://www.prison-governors-association.org.uk)

Twitter: @PGA\_Prisons

## PRESS RELEASE

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001HRS ON TUESDAY 11 OCTOBER 2022**

### **PRISON GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE – PRESIDENT'S OPENING ADDRESS**

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I have been delivering the opening address to Conference since 2015 and in each speech, I have commented on the constant change our Service faces. Today is no different in many ways, but very different in other ways. The uncertainty of the future is greater now than it has ever been.

The world feels a very strange place. The one constant in our lives for 70 years, our late Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth will be sadly missed by millions of people across the Globe. She was always there and now she is not; that sense of loss is very real. There is a terrible escalating war in Europe partly causing a global cost of living crisis, its impact very evident in the UK. A new Prime Minister, known to us in the Service, is developing her policies, but clearly keen on tax cuts. The fiscal hole this creates needs to be plugged at some point, and it looks like public services, if the media is to be believed, are in the firing line once again. It is evident that politics under this new administration will not be softer than the last. A pandemic which, whilst not the issue it was last year, remains a niggling concern coming into winter. No doubt, over the coming year, more unknowns will be uncovered adding to what can only be described as unprecedented times.

Where does the Service sit in this political context and what impact will it have on us as public servants and the work we do? There will be an impact. As is always the case, there is a shift around in the Cabinet and we have a new Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the Rt Hon Brandon Lewis CBE. We have yet to meet Mr Lewis, but initial murmurings are positive in that he is a personable man and interested in our business. He is the 9<sup>th</sup> Secretary of State since 2010; constant change of ministers does have a destabilising effect on prisons. The term "ministerial priorities" is mentioned in many of our engagement meetings, but these disappear into the ether along with the pot of precious taxpayers' money as a new Secretary of State is appointed. This short-termism in strategy is demoralising for a dedicated workforce committed to delivery.

The new Minister is known to HMPPS and already has a relationship with our CEO, Amy Rees, and DG, Phil Cople. Rob Butler has had 15 years involvement in the criminal justice system and requested the Prison & Probation ministerial portfolio. He started at the Independent Monitoring Board of HMP YOI Feltham and as a magistrate, through membership of the Youth Justice Board and Sentencing Council, a non-executive directorship of HMPPS, and now on the House of Commons Justice Committee. He sounds like just the man

for the job, but I will come back to Minister Butler towards the end of my speech as his views on sentencing are very interesting.

That said, we are dealing with the most right-wing administration of recent years, so no doubt the 'tough on crime' rhetoric will be loud and clear.

The fiscal drama facing the country over the coming months and years will ultimately mean that public services will have to share their part of the pain in balancing books. Mood music suggests that the imposition of austerity this time could be more brutal than the Osborne/Cameron years and we all remember vividly what that did to our Service which has yet to recover from the trauma. Terms like 'iron grip' on public spending and 'lean government' seem to confirm the future is going to be challenging. Clearly, Civil Service 2025 (CS2025), cutting 20% of civil servants, approximately 91,000 people has not gone away. Whilst the new PM has not explicitly stated it is her future policy, it would be highly unlikely that cuts will not be made in this area. HMPPS can hold its head up high, as the growth within the Agency since 2016 is much less than other Departments, but there is still an expectation that it will 'do its bit'. Recruitment controls have already been implemented in HQ, but we are assured the frontline will be protected. We will watch and wait!

Another priority of our new CEO is One HMPPS, a principle we should support if it delivers better outcomes within the financial constraints and safeguards the frontline. This large project, bringing two culturally different arms of the Agency closer together is to be delivered at pace, with initial intentions of implementing some structural change by April 2023; this seems a monumental task for such short timescales and caution needs to be exercised so speed does not trump success. Its main aims are to align HQ with the new structure where we no longer have separate commands for prison and probation. This will reduce cost by having a much more streamlined system above the operational frontline, thus delivering CS2025. This process is sensitive, and the PGA are cognisant to the fear and uncertainty our members in HQ may have and will keep this issue at the forefront of our engagement.

At a regional level, there will be greater devolved authority and control and a more integrated approach between Prisons and Probation, hopefully improving outcomes for prisoners, prison leavers and local communities. This does seem familiar to those of us who have been around for a while, a feeling of déjà vu and the DOM model maybe. It will be interesting to see what the differences are and why it will succeed this time, when it failed previously. It will also be interesting to see what the impact is for those working in prisons. Is this a golden opportunity in a more devolved world, to trust Governors and their teams to deliver on the frontline without assurance overload? It is costly, time consuming, repetitive, and often sequenced poorly. It generates a huge amount of work for our members, and does this level of effort, feeding the machine deliver tangible improvements? A brave, mature, burgeoning high reliability organisation like HMPPS needs to trust and give lighter oversight. This would be a huge positive step for Governors and their teams.

One of the greatest challenges facing our frontline members is recruitment and retention of quality staff. Amy Rees has publicly stated this is a key priority for HMPPS. The latest statistics on target staffing figures show only 19 prisons rated green, with 33 rated black or red. We hope that the latest Pay Review Body accepted recommendations will make a significant difference to this situation, but the current cost of living crisis means that this pay rise will struggle to keep up with inflation and may not be enough to encourage people to join and remain in what is a complex working environment. As it stands, according to MOJ People Group, all roles in prisons are proving problematic to recruit into and leavers are outstripping joiners. This situation is critical and unsustainable, particularly against a backdrop of a rising prison population. We used the term 'a perfect storm' a few years ago and it came to fruition; it really does feel like we are on the edge of one again in parts of the system. The coming months will show if the pay uplift has had a positive impact.

This pay rise has been a bittersweet arrival though. Whilst all but one recommendation was accepted, Treasury have not funded the pay award in its entirety, leaving a £65 million unfunded pressure this year,

increasing to £85 million next year. HMPPS will have to look at a longer-term strategy to plug this gap which will require internal efficiencies within the Service.

As a growing system under pressure, it begs the question about Government policy of putting more people in prison. £3.8 billion allocated for 20,000 additional spaces, 14,000 remand prisoners, a record high, and uncertainty about a post-Covid world and the impact on prison population. This coupled with the Criminal Bar Association indefinite strike, makes accurate forecasting of prisoner growth difficult. The unplanned spending of an energy price cap along with sweeping tax cuts and the emergency intervention of a further £65 billion by the Bank of England to prop up pensions is worrying. £400 billion extra borrowing is expected over the coming years according to commentators. Can the Government afford the 20,000 new places following the Fiscal Event? Rumour suggests that capital projects could be the first to be hit with Whitehall finance directors being told to prepare for cuts. If not, then how will it square the circle of a rising population, but insufficient spaces to safely hold them? We know that planning permission has been denied for some of the new prisons.

The PGA are steadfast in our position that we will not support and will vociferously oppose further crowding in an already creaking and stretched prison system. It is unacceptable, and certainly not safe, decent, and secure. This coupled with a recruitment and retention crisis makes any decision to do this highly dangerous for those living and working in prisons, but also the wider public as rehabilitation will be compromised by the toxic environment created through overcrowding. This is the point at which the PGA shouts enough is enough.

There may be some light in this dark tunnel in the shape of Minister Butler. In October 2020 the Centre for Social Justice published a document called Sentencing in the Dock: The case for a new sentence in the criminal courts of England & Wales. It is worth a google and a read. This think tank explored alternatives to custody and whilst not Government policy, the supportive foreword written by our new Minister is exciting and will be explored by the PGA when we meet him. The following is an extract from his foreword.

*“The result is a new custodial sentence. But rather than being served in a prison, it maximises the rapid progress of technology and instead effectively deprives the offender of their liberty by essentially putting them under house arrest in the community.”*

Minister Butler then goes on to say,

*“And rather than solely being a burden on the taxpayer, in many circumstances it enables people to continue working during their sentences, and so to pay taxes themselves. In turn this will allow prisons to focus their efforts much more intensively and constructively on those offenders who absolutely do need to be held behind bars topped with barbed wire.”*

This extract is music to the ears of the PGA. The 14,000 remand population would be an ideal cohort to implement such a policy, reducing the prison population significantly in our most challenging Reception Prisons without undermining public protection and confidence of local communities. We have all learned through Covid how to work in a virtual way, so why not virtual prisons? Technology is there now, and from all angles including fiscal, to shy away from this is a no-brainer.

Minister Butler, the PGA are already sat at the table waiting to support and discuss implementation of such innovation!

The comments I have just delivered pose many questions to which we do not have the answers. Conference is the place for us to get a steer on how we move forward with what is a complex agenda over the coming year. My hope is we leave here on Wednesday with full understanding from delegates of the road you wish us to travel in 2023.

On that note, I declare Conference open for business. I hand the podium over to you and end on a short quote from Winston Churchill, which I ask to be formally adopted over the next 2 days,

*“If you have an important point to make, don’t try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time – a tremendous whack”*

I look forward to lively debate!

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Note for editors:

The Prison Governors Association was founded in October 1987 to represent the higher operational managers in the Prison Service in England and Wales. The PGA was placed on the register of Trade Unions on 6 November 1987 (No. 639T). On 28 July 1988 the Certification Officer under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974 issued the Prison Governors Association with a Certificate of Independence. The status of the Prison Governors Association is that of an independent registered Trade Union. For more information contact James Bryant, PGA Office Manager, on 07846 021597.

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Conference Agenda 2022

Conference Day 1 – Tuesday 11 October, 2022

- 0800 Registration / Tea / Coffee
- 0900 Welcome by Conference Chair, Graham Mumby-Croft
- 0910 Standing Orders' Committee Chair – Procedures and Rules of Debate – Paul Laxton
- 0920 President's Opening Address – Andrea Albutt
- 0930 Guest Speaker: Charlie Taylor, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
- 1015 Resolutions
- 1040 Tea / Coffee
- 1100 Finance Report
- 1110 Resolutions
- 1220 National Officer Reports
- 1230 Lunch
- 1330 Scotland Report
- 1345 Northern Ireland Report
- 1400 Resolutions
- 1525 Tea / Coffee
- 1545 Resolutions
- 1730 Conference Charity, Dementia UK
- 1800 Close

Conference Day 2 – Wednesday 12 October, 2022

- 0930 Guest Speaker: Phil Copple, Director General of Operations, HMPPS
- 1015 Resolutions
- 1100 Tea / Coffee
- 1120 Personal Case and Membership Report
- 1130 Guest Speaker: Simon Shepherd, The Butler Trust
- 1215 Resolutions
- 1230 Lunch
- 1330 Resolutions
- 1530 approx. Closing Remarks: Andrea Albutt, PGA President