

Chair's Report - AGM Tuesday 12th May 2026

Last September one of our vice presidents - David Lammy MP - was appointed Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain and Secretary of State for Justice, and so by default becomes our NAOPV President. He also serves as Deputy Prime Minister.

James McEwen was appointed as the new Chief Executive Officer of HMPPS in October. He began his civil service career in 2002 at the Department for Work and Pensions and went on to work at the now-defunct Department of Energy and Climate Change before joining the MoJ in 2016. Since then, McEwen has held a variety of roles, including deputy chief executive of the Legal Aid Agency and group finance director.

Executive Committee changes

Sadly, one of our stalwart members and trustees Diana Turner passed away in the autumn after a long illness. Diana was a committed OPV and long serving and well-respected regional secretary for South West England & South Wales, in addition to her sterling work on the executive committee. A full obituary appeared in our January 2026 e-bulletin. RIP Diana.

John Kennett, who was our Chair from 2022-24 has had to retire as an OPV due to ongoing health issues.

Regional Forums

In my Chair's report last year, I summarised the background on the reasoning behind the plan to initiate regional on-line forums and I am pleased to acknowledge the support from the AGM resolution submitted by David Davies, OPV in HMP Guys Marsh, in contributing to the progress of this venture.

During the past year, branch meetings have been, and continue to be held periodically in the South West & South Wales Region, hosted by regional secretary Kathy Govett, with these having been attended by OPVs and invited prison staff. Participants have been able to air their views and concerns and the meetings provide an opportunity for interaction with some of the issues raised including: review of guidelines for visiting on wings vs visits halls; communication issues e.g. the disappointment in learning after the event that a visited prisoner has been transferred to another location; ACCT documents; training issues including the possibility of introducing in-house training.

This particular regional forum has agreed to continue meeting on a quarterly basis.

We would still like to extend this practice to other regions and particularly to involve those OPVs who visit in prisons where there is no NAOPV branch, often in remote locations that may have only a minimal number of active OPVs. In such situations OPVs can feel isolated and with little or no support when required.

The concept is however, open to all and can only work with your involvement and participation and so I invite any interested OPVs throughout England and Wales to contact myself or Jenny Haigh via the email addresses below.

Notable Prison Population Trends

In June 2025 in England and Wales the prison population continues to age. In 2025 4% of prisoners were under the age of 21, compared with 13% in June 2010; while 18% of prisoners were over the age of 50 compared to 9% in 2010.

Prison sentences have been lengthening with 48% of determinate prison sentences being over 4 years in 2025 compared with 36% in June 2010.

Foreign nationals made up around 12% of the prison population and this rate was around the same in June 2015.

Since 1900 the prison population has increased in size almost fivefold, going from just over 17,400 to around 85,600 at the end of 2025.

In January 2026, the UK government introduced significant reforms to prison sentencing and release, aiming to manage overcrowding and reform the justice system, known as the "Earned Progression" Model (30% Rule). Under the new proposals, prisoners will be eligible for early release after serving a minimum of one-third of their sentence in custody. This is not automatic with release depending on behaviour, including completing rehabilitation courses and demonstrating that they are turning their lives around.

The average cost of keeping a prisoner in England & Wales is now understood to be in excess of £53,000 per annum, and significantly more for specialised and high security needs.

The overall percentage of remand prisoners remains around 20%, which is a particular concern for OPVs who visit in remand prisons. About 2/3 of these are awaiting trial, with the other 1/3 having been convicted, but awaiting sentencing. In those establishments holding remand prisoners, the true level can be in excess of 70% of that prison's population and so with such individual's residence time often being only a few weeks, it rarely provides an opportunity for an OPV to develop any meaningful rapport with such individuals, which is hardly conducive to creating a meaningful experience for the OPV.

Ongoing Project

The NAOPV is currently an Unincorporated Charitable Association and the executive committee continue to analyse and appraise the benefits and challenges in changing status to a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation). A particular aspect of such a change is to develop a new format constitution, based on a Charity Commission template, which is quite involved and will take time to perfect. Consequently, the intention is to continue with the process with the intention of presenting a final draft in readiness for the 2027 AGM.

Roy Hanley – Chair

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