

## A PERFECT STORM

The retiring President of Prison Governor's Association, Andrea Albutt, took the opportunity to summarise the situation in prisons as a "race to the bottom" during the 13 years she had been in post.

Speaking to the Howard League, on Nov 28, she began with the effects of Tory austerity and continued underfunding and ended with the increasing prison numbers we see today, projected to rise much higher.

**2012** Chris Grayling's reorganisation and the dismantling of probation  
Resettlement prisons which increased 'churn'

**2012** A 'Benchmarking' exercise whereby staff were reduced by 31% while prisoner numbers remained unchanged

The rise in violence, including attacks on staff, self-harm and suicides

Increasingly, staff were obliged to withdraw to a place of safety when they were too few to bring the situation under control; more experienced PTSD

The arrival of the synthetic drug 'Spice' initially undetectable, becomes widespread

**2015** A new business model under Gove

**2016** Under Truss, new agencies brought in that were not up to speed

**2020ff** COVID, leading to 23 hour lock-up; only 159 deaths. Early release scheme planned for 1000s, led to only 30. Regimes have not recovered since, due to staffing issues.

**2021** More police appointed leads to more arrests

Ambitious prison building plan announced but delayed by planning objections, as numbers rise, making it impossible to shut wings and refurbish filthy rat-infested cells

Inspectorate says that one in ten prisons should be closed

**2023** Proposal to rent cells in foreign prisons – Andrea sees this as a public admission of failure. A Dutch prison refuses to extradite to England cos of its prison standards.

Prison Officer recruitment and retention so low that new sites can't not be adequately staffed – which will be an increasing problem with prison units under construction. More frequent need to bring in (expensive) 'detached staff' from elsewhere to cover shortfalls - and the prison service is still expected to make savings!

Prisons now reaching capacity with fewer than 100 male places left, yet longer sentences and remand prisoners stuck in custody awaiting trial pile pressure on the system.

We would all agree with her overall conclusions: "The dialogue and rhetoric on prison MUST CHANGE". Prisons are expected to "pick up the pieces of failed society but are not equipped to deal with them" such as effects of poverty, trauma, mental distress, addiction etc.

Problems have been created as a direct result of government policy. No wonder there has been little consistency with 14 different prison ministers within her 13 years.

Andrea described the current situation as a 'perfect storm'.