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MOJUK: Newsletter 'Inside Out' No 943 (22/03/2023) - Cost £1

Serving Prisners: New Early Release Scheme Unveiled By Government

Prisoners are to be let out of jail up to six months before their release date, in a new early release scheme which will help to tackle prison overcrowding. The expansion of the Home Detention Curfew (HDC) scheme will extend the period which prisoners can spend at home, wearing an electronic tag, from 135 days to 180 days at the end of their time in custody. Officials believe the change will free up between 400 and 600 prison places. It means that someone sentenced to four years for burglary, who at present would serve one year and seven-and-half-months in custody, could in future serve only one year and six months. The reform, which requires a change in the law before it can take effect, was set out in a draft Statutory Instrument laid in Parliament early in February, without publicity. It is scheduled to come into force on June 6.

In a letter to the House of Commons Justice Committee explaining the change, Prisons Minister Damian Hinds said that it was intended to promote rehabilitation. However, an impact assessment published by the Ministry of Justice acknowledges that "an additional benefit may be that by reducing demand for prison places, it will reduce crowding and improve prison conditions for both offenders and staff". The move comes as jails are overflowing, with the Operation Safeguard scheme to hold remand prisoners in police cells overnight starting to be used in three English regions in February and being extended across England and Wales in March. The Prison Governors' Association has warned that it will take legal action if the Government tries to squeeze more prisoners into existing jails.

According to the impact assessment, "our best estimate suggests this option will increase the HDC population by up to 450 offenders when it reaches steady state". It goes on: "The current maximum period that an offender may spend in the community on HDC is 135 days. Extending this period to a maximum of 180 days (six months) will provide further opportunities for offenders to prepare for the transition from custody to supervision under licence in the community, while subject to strict monitoring conditions … It is very unlikely that the impacts forecast by this change – around 400-600 reduction in prison place demand – will lead to the closure of prison cells, wings or entire prisons." "The current maximum period that an offender may spend in the community on HDC is 135 days. Extending this period to a maximum of 180 days (six months) will provide further opportunities for offenders to prepare for the transition from custody to supervision under licence in the community,

Over 91 Million Pounds Compensation Paid to 'Miscarriage of Justice" Victims

Three hundred and fifty-four prisoners who had their convictions quashed were paid a total of £91,622,230.35's in compensation from 1999/2000 to 2021/2022. The total is much higher as thirteen claims, which the Ministry of Justice have accepted were miscarriages, have yet to reach an agreement on the total amount of compensation to be paid. Over 1,205 prisoners made claims for that period: data does not say how many were male/female. Just over a third of all claims were successful!

In 2005/2006, 31 claimants shared £14,682,776.36; in 2001/2002, 56 claimants shared £14,400,929.51's. Payments from 1999/2000 to 2011/2012 were £89,539,911.57, an average of £6 and a half million a year. After this 2012/ to 2021/2022, there is a considerable drop to £1,418,717 this over ten years, with no payouts in 2017/18 and 2018/19.

Barry Sheerman MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if his Department can provide data on the (a) number of claimants (b) number of successful claimants and (c) the total awarded in compensation for a miscarriage of justice in each year since 2018.

Minister of State for Justice, Edward Argar: The number of claimants in each financial year, the number of successful claimants and the total amount of compensation they were awarded under the Miscarriages of Justice Application Service (MOJAS) is set out in the table below. Data from 2000 has also been provided for context.

Please note that the number of successful claimants in any given year does not relate to the number of claims made in that year. The amount of compensation awarded in any given year relates to the successful decisions taken in that year, but the amount of money should not be divided by the number of successful claimants as each award is individual to the circumstances of the case. Where an individual has been found to meet the criteria of the statutory compensation scheme, but has not yet been awarded their compensation, this is highlighted in the table.

It should also be noted that the information provided is internal management information and not quality assured to the same level as published statistics and is subject to change.

Financial Year	- Number of Claimants	- Successful Decisions	- Amount of Compensation
1999/2000	n/k	32	£7,461,573.37
2000/2001	n/k	56	£14,400,929.51
2001/2002	n/k	41	£10,297,352.81
2002/2003	95	34	£8,241,042.26
2003/2004	89	36	£10,919,984.48
2004/2005	86	48	£7,769,144.21
2005/2006	90	31	£14,682,776.36
2006/2007	79	29	£7,206,847.83
2007/2008	41	9	£2,439,725.74
2008/2009	38	7	£1,664,795.00
2009/2010	38	1	£981,864.00
2010/2011	61	1	£2,189,151.00
2011/2012	38	3	£1,284,725.00
2012/2013	36	2	£50,480.00
2013/2014	45	7	£239,140.36
2014/2015	43	2	£261,705.82
2015/2016	29	2	£12,492.60
2016/2017	51	1	£93,000.00
2017/2018	36	0	£0.00
2018/2019	59	0	£0.00
2019/2020	98	5	£713,500.00
2020/2021	80	4	£480,400.00
2021/2022	73	4	£231,600.00
2022/23 to 24/02/2023)	95*	*Not all 95 cases have received a decision. There have been 12 sucessful claims. Amounts still to be determined by Independent Assessor	

'Disregarding International Law is One Thing Ditching Democratic Rights Quite Another'

Nicholas Reed Langen, Justice Gap: All of this has been said before. Everyone knows that the asylum-seekers and migrants crowding on the shores of Calais have bigger worries than whether Suella Braverman has made a statement denying the applicability of the ECHR, and that people-smugglers are more motivated by profit than deterred by fear. From here, it is easy, and perhaps correct, to assume that the legislation is not really intended to go anywhere. It is nothing more than bait for the red-tops and an easy way of dividing the Conservatives from Labour ahead of the next general election.

But if we take the government at its word, and accept that this is a piece of legislation genuinely intended to solve the crisis, it may be that the outcome the government expects in the courts is not the one that it will get. Judging from Suella Braverman's comments before the House of Commons yesterday, she is fully aware that the legislation is incompatible with the UK's international obligations. Despite the 'brightest legal minds' in the country (one must pity James Eadie KC, the advocate the government often turns to, if he is trying to construct a legal defence for this) considering the question, no positive answer has been forthcoming. Braverman has been left denying the legislation's compatibility with rights in Parliament while doing the media rounds claiming its compatibility .

Under the everyday principle of parliamentary sovereignty, there is nothing that Parliament cannot legislate for. Parliament may have chosen to enact the HRA and to have asked ministers to make a declaration that any future legislation is compatible with its requirements, but that does not mean that any future legislation must be compatible. In much the same vein, when Parliament instructed the courts in s.3 HRA to interpret any legislation in a manner that is compatible with human rights 'so far as it is possible to do so', that did not mean that a future Parliament could not tell the courts not to use s.3 at all.

From here, it is easy to assume that the legislation will have a relatively easy ride through the courts. The High Court or Court of Appeal may voice concerns, but the general arc of the Supreme Court's jurisprudence over the last few years has favoured deference and has minimised international law. The Supreme Court's view might best be seen as that international law is nice to have, and that the government and Parliament should follow it, but that should they wish to depart from it, there is nothing the courts can do to stop them. In instances such as this, it is for politicians and other people to intervene in defence of international rights.

What this assumption ignores, however, is the common law. The common law and parliamentary sovereignty have a complicated history. At its most simple, the common law is the decisions made by the courts. Unlike the civil codes of the continent, which root almost every law in a promulgated document, drawing on their Roman heritage, the common law is found in the ether. Courts hearing cases would look at the relationship and actions between the parties, and in making their decision would derive broader principles. For instance, many of the foundational rules of contract law, like the need for a promise and an exchange, were not made by politicians, but by lawyers.

In matters like contract law, the relationship between Parliament and the common law is relatively straightforward. If Parliament wants to change the rules of contract, or the rules of planning, it is free to do so. But in questions of constitutional law, the issue is more complicated. Constitutional law goes to the heart of government and the state, with relationship between the courts and the legislature in tension. Some argue that the legislature, by virtue of its democratic legitimacy, supersedes the courts. Others acknowledge that the courts pre-date the legislature, and suggest that the legislature is only supreme because the courts recognised it as such.

What is relatively uncontested though, is the idea that some values cannot be erased by Parliament, no matter how sovereign. For instance, if Parliament was to legislate to abolish the judicial system, or to legalise slavery, many (although probably not all) would look to the courts to strike it down. Equally, if Parliament was try to deny fundamental protections to some subset of society, like access to the courts, the courts could be expected to respond in two ways. Either by denying the legality of the legislative provision entirely, or (as is more likely) interpreting it in such a way so as to limit the effects of the provision.

It is one of these principles that is most intriguing within the government's immigration bill. Every lawyer worth hiring knows that the legislation raises questions of habeas corpus, one of society's earliest and most fundamental of rights. From the Latin, the phrase translates as 'you may have the body'. As a legal principle, it was originally used to challenge the right of the king to detain subjects without trial, forcing monarchs to release the detainee or charge them. The bill does not try and dispute habeas corpus, or try to limit it. Instead, it accepts that the principle still applies. This puts the courts in the curious position where the more modern protections designed to protect refugees and asylum seekers are cordoned off, but the more ancient protections are still at hand.

Disregarding international law is one thing, but disregarding foundational democratic rights is quite another. Despite the government's acknowledgement of habeas corpus, this is what the illegal immigration bill does. Inherent in the system proposed in the legislation is the refusal of access to the courts by those detained under its provisions. It is almost impossible to reconcile this with claims of habeas corpus from those detained.

The question is what the government expects to happen as a result? It may be that they are thinking that the courts have been put in their box along with the common law, and that despite what Lord Toulson said in Kennedy, the common law has become an ossuary. Such optimism might not be naive given the court's recent decision-making, but it may be futile. Even Lord Reed has shown that when it comes to questions of the common law that go to unquestionably democratic fundamentals, he is unwilling to sit back and give the government free rein. The modern slavery laws might not apply to refugees if this bill passes, but the more ancient ones still will.

Home Office Criticised for not Protecting Victims of Modern Slavery

Red Preston, Justice Gap: Despite it being a legal requirement under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, has failed to fill the Commissioner's post since Dame Sara Thornton resigned on April 30 2022. The Act tasks the Commissioner with encouraging 'good practice in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of slavery and human trafficking offences'. With this role unfilled there is no independent watchdog assessing the Government's approach to issues of modern slavery.

Across 2022, the total number of potential victims of modern slavery referred to the Home Office was 16,938, a 33% increase on the previous year and the most since records began in 2009. The Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesperson Alistair Carmichael, speaking in January, said that 'these record increases highlight the Conservatives' absolute failure to get a grip on the real issues'. According to Carmichael, 'what's worse is that they have refused to appoint a new anti-slavery commissioner for nearly a year now. This heartless government is watching on while this crisis spirals out of control'.

The unfilled Commissioner role has taken on renewed significance in the face of the Government's upcoming Illegal Migration Bill. As part of the Bill, people arriving in the UK illegally would be 'denied access to the UK's modern slavery system'. The Bill has been met

with backlash, with commentators and human rights groups arguing that the bill is inconsistent with the nature and reality of modern slavery. The UNCHR, the UN agency established to protect the rights of refugees globally, released a statement on Tuesday in response to the Bill, noting that: 'Most people fleeing war and persecution are simply unable to access the required passports and visas,' and that 'there are no safe and "legal" routes available to them.'

The UNHCR drew attention to the UK's obligations under international law, saying that 'Denying them access to asylum on this basis undermines the very purpose for which the Refugee Convention was established.' This sentiment was echoed by the EU commissioner for home affairs, Ylva Johansson, who yesterday voiced concerns that whilst she hoped the bill would respect 'international agreements and the Geneva convention,' her 'first impression' was that 'there might be violations here.' The continued vacancy of the position has previously led to accusations from experts that the Government are deliberately avoiding appointing a new Commissioner to limit scrutiny of their actions. With the Government introducing increasingly hostile anti-migrant policies, with the effect of withholding protections from victims of modern slavery, these accusations are likely to gain further traction.

Application by Thames Valley Police for Disclosure- Refused

This is an application made by Thames Valley Police for disclosure to them and to the Crown Prosecution Service, of documents from private law proceedings between the respondents, Ms F (the mother) and Mr G (the father). The mother and father were married in 2011. They separated in June 2021 following an incident, captured on CCTV within the family home, when the father assaulted the mother by strangulation. He subsequently pleaded guilty to an offence of assault. He was made subject to a restraining order against the mother, to last indefinitely, and providing that he was not to go within 100 metres of her home address.

The family proceedings commenced in September 2021. The Court was concerned with cross-applications from each of the respondents. The proceedings came to an end on 20 September 2022. The local authority had prepared a section 7 report for the Court. The author of the report concluded that the children had witnessed serious domestic abuse perpetrated by the father towards the mother over a period of time, and had also experienced abuse directly from him. The author of the report recommended that the father should not have any caring responsibilities for the children, and that the children should not have any contact with their father at all, not even supervised contact.

The father did not attend the Court hearing on 20 September 2022, but wrote an email to the Court in which he criticised social services for what he said was an unfair and biased investigation, said that the CCTV footage viewed had been 'misconstrued', and doubted that the views expressed by the children were truly their own. He said that the mother had illegally obtained recordings of his private conversations, and that it was this evidence that was the foundation of the social services' recommendations. Stating that he had lost faith in the system, he said that he wished to withdraw his application, and would consent to an order reflecting social services' recommendations.

I gave a short judgment, having reviewed the evidence in the case, including CCTV footage of the assault, the section 7 report and the parties' statements. I found the social services' report to be thorough, balanced and based on a detailed review of all the evidence. I made orders in line with their recommendations, providing that the father should not have any contact with his children, due to the risks he posed to both them and their mother, and consistent with the girls' own wishes and feelings, based on their own experiences of him. I made a prohibited steps order to prevent the father from removing the children from their mother's care.

In addition I made a non-molestation order against the father. Recordings obtained by the mother and handed to the police and social services included material in which it is said he is heard to make threats to kill the mother. It is alleged that he discusses making plans to buy a car to run her over, or to 'kill that cunt', and that on another occasion he is heard to say once the proceedings are over, he is 'going to fucking stab her … I want to see the fear in her eyes'. It is alleged that members of his family discuss killing her. Elsewhere in the recordings, he is said to discuss making plans to relocate to [country anonymised], taking the children with him. I listed a return date on 29 September 2022 to give the father an opportunity to set aside or vary this order, but he did not attend that hearing. The non-molestation order remains in force. The application:On 29 November 2022 Thames Valley police applied to the Court for 'disclosure of statements, documents and as appropriate, testimony that make reference to any covert recordings obtained by Mrs F, and to any threat of harm towards Mrs F by Mr G. TVP also request under practice direction 12G a copy of the final judgement made in the family proceedings.' There is no witness statement in support of the application.

Conclusion: I am not persuaded that I should sanction disclosure of documents to the police in this case. It would be improper for the Court to exercise its discretion in the absence of any evidence from the Applicant supporting its application. Supporting evidence is not merely a technical requirement, it is necessary in order for the Court to undertake the balancing exercise required, and it is necessary for the respondents to know the nature of the applications they are facing and make informed submissions in response.

The applicant requests that I go through each of the documents in the file and make a decision about whether or not they are relevant to the investigation. I cannot realistically or fairly carry out that exercise because I have not been given evidence about the nature of the investigations (other than the headline), the status of the investigations, the information that the police hold already, the gaps in its knowledge, and why there is a need to fill those gaps by applying to the family court. Without a clear understanding of the investigations, I am not in a position to make an assessment of any particular document's relevance to the investigation.

The mother has admitted taking the covert recordings. She was the one who provided them to social services and to the police, and she admitted what she had done when interviewed by the police. The reasons given for wanting further information, as either 'mitigation' or 'corroboration of defence', are not explained and cannot on their own justify disclosure of material from the Family Court. In any event, there would appear to be sufficient information in the police's possession to enable it to carry out an analysis of whether there is sufficient 'mitigation' in terms of the risk posed by the father to the mother to enable it to carry out an assessment of whether or not charges against her should be proceeded with. The father has been convicted of assault against the mother, is the subject of a lifetime restraining order, and protective orders in the Family Court. The police have attended MARAC meetings and have all the CCTV and audio material.

In deciding whether or not to order disclosure under rule 12.73(b) the Court is asked to exercise its discretion. The applicant has not set out in submissions that the Re EC checklist approach should be applied to private law as well as public law proceedings. But assuming the checklist does apply, the Court would need to carry out a balancing exercise, with reference to each of the Re EC checklist factors. It is not enough to have cut and paste the factors into a skeleton argument. I have not been provided with evidence or analysis to enable me to carry out that process.

A key part of the balancing exercise would be to consider the impact upon the welfare of the children of disclosing material that was regarded within the Family Court as confidential. The

documents would be disclosed to the police, to the Crown Prosecution Service, and the application is for the material to be used within any subsequent criminal proceedings, so they are likely to end up in the public domain. Any impact upon the mother is likely to have a significant impact on the welfare of the children. The application has no regard to this at all, and invites me to disclose documents merely on the basis that they may be relevant to their investigation. For all these reasons, the application for disclosure is refused.

1,500 UK Police Officers Accused of Violence Against Women in Six Months

Rachel Hall, Independent: More than 1,500 police officers have been accused of violent offences against women and girls over a period of six months, and less than 1% have been sacked, according to new figures. Overall, 1,483 unique allegations were reported against 1,539 police officers – or 0.7% of the workforce. There were 1,177 cases of alleged police-perpetrated violence, including sexual harassment and assault, reported between October 2021 and April 2022, according to data from the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). Just over half the cases, 653 (55%), were conduct matters, which are usually raised by a colleague within the force. The remaining cases, 524 (45%), were complaints from the public.

Almost two-thirds of the complaints from the public were about the use of force, for example handcuffing or arrest, while 9% concerned harassing behaviour, 6% related to assault and 5% abuse of position for a sexual purpose. For the conduct allegations, 48% concerned discreditable conduct carried outside working hours, while 19% related to sexual assault, 13% to sexual harassment and 6% to abuse of position for a sexual purpose. Just under half the complaints and nearly three-quarters of the conduct cases still had not been finalised when the data was collected, but where cases had closed, 70% of conduct cases (136) and 91% of complaint cases (290) were thrown out, with just 13 officers and staff sacked for misconduct, and nobody fired as a result of public complaints.

The deputy chief constable Maggie Blyth, the National Police Chiefs' Council coordinator for violence against women and girls, said she wanted to see more officers investigated, disciplined and sacked for crimes and misconduct against women and girls. She said the figures "reinforce the urgency and importance of our current mission to lift the stones and root abusers and corrupt individuals out of policing. The vast majority of officers and staff are professional and committed but I know it is shocking to hear about any potential predators in policing and that this can further shake fragile trust." She added that the data was from a year ago and therefore did not reflect work done over the past 18 months to identify wrongdoing, strengthen misconduct investigations and toughen sanctions. She said she hoped that future iterations would show "the impact of those changes", including giving more women the confidence to report concerns.

Publishing an annual assessment of police performance is a new step taken by the NPCC and College of Policing to improve responses to violence against women and girls, and to tackle rampant sexism and misogyny in the force. The document notes that the figures in some areas, especially allegations of domestic abuse and inappropriate sexual behaviour, may be higher since many incidents go unreported, and there are some problems with recording processes, but it hopes it will be a tool for measuring progress. The figures also shed light on the scale of violence against women and girls, which at more than half a million reported crimes represented 16% of all recorded crime from October 2021 and April 2022, with domestic abuse the most prevalent form. Across the 40 police forces for which data was available, 428,355 cases had a recorded outcome, and a suspect was charged in just 6%. In most cases, there were problems with evidence or victims withdrew from the case.

Farah Nazeer, the chief executive of Women's Aid, said the statistics revealed "the staggering scale of violence against women and girls" and had "deeply worrying implications for women's already low levels of trust in the criminal justice system". She called on the government to increase oversight of the criminal justice response to female survivors of violence to hold police forces, crime commissioners, probation and the courts to account and achieve "desperately needed transformation".

The moves are part of efforts to tackle misogyny in policing after scandals including the case of David Carrick, a former police officer who was found to be a prolific sex offender, and the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving officer. Police leaders have asked the Home Office to strengthen existing regulations, including barring anyone convicted or cautioned for this type of offence from policing and re-vetting anyone accused of these types of crimes. Chief constables are also encouraged to use accelerated misconduct hearings. A national threat assessment of the scale of violence against women and girls is due to be made next month.

HMP Aylesbury 'Thrown Into Chaos' by MoJ Policy Change,

Rajeev Syal, Guardian: A prison which specialised in people convicted of violent crimes has been "thrown into chaos" by a policy change introduced by Dominic Raab's Ministry of Justice to cope with a national rise in inmate numbers, an official watchdog has found. HMP Aylesbury was "suddenly and without sufficient consultation, notice or support" changed into a category C training prison in October, the chief inspector of prisons said.

With rising numbers of prisoners needing accommodation elsewhere in the prison's estate, hundreds of category C, or low risk, offenders, have been brought into the jail. About 23% of the prison population remain men aged 18-21 convicted of violent crimes and serving long sentences. The change comes as the government prepares for the overall prison population to rise from 84,000 to 94,000 by March 2025. Pressure on the prison estate has led to police cells being readied for prisoners. Last week, the MoJ began rolling out 1,000 rapid deployment cells across the prison estate to boost jail capacity.

Charlie Taylor, the chief inspector of prisons, said Aylesbury had been struggling with its existing role but was now a "chaotic" prison, which was releasing prisoners with "little or no work" to reduce their risk of committing crimes again. "Challenges have been compounded by this sudden and chaotic re-designation to a category C training jail coupled with extreme staffing problems. The prison needs significant and immediate support from the Prison Service to mitigate the level of risk it presents not only for prisoners held there but also for the community into which high-risk offenders are being released with little to no work to reduce their risk of reoffending," he said.

Inspectors in November and December found a shortage of staff in all grades and disciplines at Aylesbury. This included access to healthcare, time out of cell, education, skills and work and rehabilitation services. In healthcare the situation was so dire that the Prison Service was unable to send prisoners over the age of 40 to because they could not be safely cared for in the jail, the report said. Nearly 40% of prisoners were unemployed and had less than an hour out of their cells a day while many prisoners told inspectors they were unable to shower every day. Those in employment, meanwhile, were frequently unable to benefit from this because of staff shortages, or broken equipment. A MoJ spokesperson said: "We are investing £155m more every year into the probation service. As the report notes, we are also making real progress in providing stable accommodation to vulnerable prison leavers."

Andrew Neilson, director of campaigns at the Howard League for Penal Reform, said: "This report reveals why growing the prison population with little thought for the consequences

creates more problems for everyone. “An understaffed prison which has failed repeatedly to help young adults move on from crime has now been placed under even greater pressure because the government is resorting to panic measures to respond to rising numbers. The result has been disastrous, with little or no support to prepare people for safe release.”

In another report released on Tuesday, HM Inspectorate of Probation found that domestic abuse checks were completed in just under half of the cases examined. The report, which examined 97 cases of people released on licence in depth for up to nine months after their release, also found that: Only four out of every 10 prisoners went into settled accommodation on release from custody. Just 8% of those available for work went into employment. Recall rates were high, with 30% on average being returned to custody – four in 10 of these were within 28 days of being released. There is an 30% shortfall of full-time employed probation officers in post against the required staffing level of 6,160.

Peter Dawson, the director of the Prison Reform Trust, said: “It’s absurd to be skimping on the services that help released prisoners to stop committing crime and to stay out of gaol. But that’s exactly what the government is doing. Endless reorganisations and under-resourcing have undermined that process, and put the public at avoidable risk.” A Prison Service spokesperson said: “We have already taken decisive action to address the concerns raised in this report, including bolstering frontline staff and increasing access to education and work for prisoners. “As the public would rightly expect, we’re also working with others across the criminal justice system and making sure the prison estate is being used effectively while we push ahead with delivering the biggest expansion of prison places in a century.”

8 Children 8 Adults Killed - Army/Police Accused of Cover up Over Use of Plastic Bullets

Stephen Dempster, BBC News: BBC Spotlight has examined declassified material that reveals the Army knew it was too dangerous to fire the bullets at children, but it continued to do so. Documents also show the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was firing a plastic bullet gun never fully cleared for use against people. But this was kept quiet. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) declined to comment, citing legal reasons. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), which took over from the RUC following a rebrand in 2001, said the use of the weaponry is now strictly regulated. The gun firing rubber, and later plastic, bullets was invented for Northern Ireland and designed to deter people rioting by hurting but not killing them. At least 120,000 were fired during the Troubles.

Eight children and eight adults were killed by rubber or plastic bullets during the Troubles. A 17th person was killed by a fall, possibly after being hit by one of the bullets. Others suffered serious injuries, including brain damage and blinding. Some were involved in street disorder. Others were bystanders. 'He never got to grow up': The youngest person to die was 10-year-old Stephen Geddis who was hit by an Army plastic bullet at Divis Flats in Belfast in 1975. Stephen's brother, Jim Geddis, told BBC NI's Spotlight programme: "I remember him being fairly timid. A quiet kid. I'd see him with his little friends. Just an unassuming kid. his little guy never got to grow up and get married, have children of his own. Never happened." Last year an inquest concluded Stephen was out playing and there was no justification for his shooting.

Documents uncovered during the inquest revealed that in 1971 the Army's own Land Operations Manual stated baton rounds should not be used against children. But this instruction was never passed on to soldiers. The Geddis family's solicitor Padraig O'Muirigh claims "there is clear evidence of a cover up". An MoD spokesperson said it would be inappropriate to comment because the soldier who shot Stephen is legally challenging the inquest findings. In 1981, 15-year-old Paul Whitters was hit by a plastic bullet fired by the RUC during street disturbances in Londonderry. He was in a group of teenagers throwing stones. Paul's mother Helen Whitters said: "This did not sit well with me because that's not who Paul was. We weren't political, let's put it like that. I had to face the fact he had a mask on and I still find that hard." However, in 2007 a Police Ombudsman's investigation concluded there was no justification for police shooting Paul.

'We need answers': Recently declassified government documents have revealed the plastic bullet gun used by the RUC in his shooting was never fully medically tested for its potential risks to civilians. Neither the public nor the Whitters family were ever told. Ms Whitters said: "I still want to know all these years later why Paul was shot that night, and I've never got an answer. We do need some kind of an answer. In a statement to Spotlight, Assistant Chief Constable, Alan Todd, sympathised with the Whitters family. He said that policing has changed considerably in the past 42 years and the deployment and use of these weapons is now strictly regulated and approved. He added that if the weapons were used, this is automatically referred to the police ombudsman. Spotlight has also spoken to ex-soldiers who stand by the use of the riot-gun. Colonel Richard Kemp, who commanded British troops, said: "To say that the plastic bullets should never have been used, I think is a foolish thing to say. "The plastic bullet was a lifesaver, not just a lifesaver for the soldiers whose lives were at risk, but also a lifesaver for people involved in the riots."

3 Men Falsely Accused of Raping Eleanor Williams Tried to Kill Themselves

Helen Pidd, Guardian: The men were falsely accused of rape by the same woman said they tried to kill themselves as a result of her lies and one was twice sectioned in a psychiatric unit, a court has heard. Eleanor Williams, 22, from Barrow-in-Furness, was convicted in January of nine counts of perverting the course of justice. Her Facebook claims of being raped and trafficked by an Asian grooming gang sparked a worldwide solidarity movement with its own line of merchandise, Justice for Ellie. It also ignited community tensions in her Cumbrian town, Preston crown court was told.

Police recorded 151 crimes by other people linked to the case, including 83 hate crimes, Williams’ sentencing hearing heard. Her story was shared online by public figures with large followings, including Countdown’s Rachel Riley and the former Greater Manchester police detective Maggie Oliver, the court heard. Supt Matt Pearman said it caused the sort of “open hostility” not seen in Barrow since 1988, when workers at the Vickers shipyard went on strike for 12 weeks. He said Barrow had yet to recover from the impact of Williams’ lies.

Though Williams singled out Asian men in an incendiary Facebook post on 20 May 2020, she also wrongly accused three white men of rape, the court heard. One of them, a trainee electrician called Oliver Gardner, met Williams just once, in what the prosecutor Jonathan Sandiford KC described as “a chance encounter” in Preston on 18 July 2019. The jury was played CCTV footage showing a clearly drunk Gardner asking Williams for a light. The pair then briefly disappeared down a side street, with Williams seen emerging within a minute. He told the jury that the pair had had a brief sexual encounter and nothing more.

In a victim impact statement read to the court, Gardner described his shock at Williams’ claims. “I was being accused of being a rapist, a drug dealer and a human trafficker,” he said. Gardner said the stress of being falsely accused resulted in him being sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Then, 18 months ago, he tried to kill himself and was sectioned again. He said Williams had ruined his life. He had had one final exam to sit before becoming an electrician but “because of what happened I was unable to continue my studies”, he said. Jordan Trengove, whom Williams accused of raping her three times, including at knifepoint, said he also tried to kill himself after spending 10 weeks on remand for a crime he did not commit. In his witness impact statement, the now 22-

year-old described how people painted the word “rapist” on the front of his house and smashed his windows. He was taken to hospital after trying to kill himself, and he has been diagnosed with complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of his ordeal.

After having a son with his new partner, social services told him they had received 60 anonymous tip-offs about him “not being safe around children”, Trengove said in his statement. Forced out of Barrow, he was greeted by his new neighbour shouting: “Rapist – we don’t want you living here.” He said he had been put through “three years of hell” because of Williams’ lies. “I don’t think I will ever fully recover,” he said in his statement. Mohammed Ramzan, a Barrow businessman accused of being the kingpin of an international trafficking ring, opted to read out his witness statement. Frequently becoming tearful, the 43-year-old described trying to kill himself as a result of the “mental torture” he had experienced. He said his windows had been smashed, his tyres slashed, and he felt his reputation had been “destroyed”.

Cameron Bibby, the first man Williams accused of rape, back in 2017 when she was just 16, said people called him a “dirty rapist” online and that he was scared to pick his son up from nursery because of the way people looked at him. He said that after Williams posted her account on Facebook, his neighbours displayed “Justice for Ellie” stickers in their windows, which “intimidated” him. He said he was struggling to find work, having applied for 30 jobs with no success. “I can’t help but feel this is a result of my name being tarnished by the last five years,” he said.

The court heard of reports by two psychiatrists who assessed Williams’ mental state. Dr Martin Lock, commissioned by the prosecution, said he was unable to find a psychiatric diagnosis while Williams continued to maintain her innocence. He found Williams to have an “immature personality and a considerable amount of anger”. Dr Lucy Bacon, who examined Williams several times over the years for the defence, diagnosed complex PTSD as a result of “childhood trauma”. She said there were social services records of such matters. Bacon told the court that Williams was considered vulnerable in prison and that she was being kept on a wing for women with “significant mental disorder”. The court did not hear details of the childhood trauma after the defence said they were not relying on it to reduce Williams’ culpability. YouTube clips showing solidarity protests in Barrow for the Justice for Ellie movement were played at the sentencing hearing. In some of them, the far-right activist Stephen Yaxley Lennon, better known as Tommy Robinson, could be seen interviewing Williams’ supporters as they talked of a police “cover-up”.

Anthony Entwistle. A5364AC, HMP Full Sutton; Troubles With the Parole Board and the SSJ

A recent issue of "Inside Out" concerned me somewhat. It seems that many organisations that have been essential for advice and help in the past are succumbing to the effects of old age and the inevitable result. This is a great pity because many long-term problems seem to be coming to public attention after many years, if not decades, of denial of official wrongdoing!

I have taken the bull by the horns with my current Parole Review/Hearing issues. However, both my solicitors and my representations were (accidentally lost, again!), and when I sent replacements, the Parole Board refused my request for an 'Oral Hearing in public. I then submitted a reconsideration with cogent reasons and issues that had to be addressed. The Parole Board accepted my representations on this matter and instructed all previous reports to be rewritten, taking account of the matters I challenged. A provisional date for a hearing (in Puolic) is approximately June/July, and the review is to be chaired by a Judge!

Guess what? The Secretary of State for Justice (SSJ) objected to this result (without any actual reasons in rebuttal). This was then decided upon by someone utterly different to the

previous decision-maker! I then requested a further reconsideration, for which I await an answer. The time period for such is now up, and I have not heard from them yet. Bear in mind that all representations I have produced in the past have initially gone missing. This has happened in at least the last two paroles I have dealt with.

Curiously, when the Parole Board or any official communication is given to us, we must sign for it in the record book! However, when we have to return the official establishment documentation or initiate communication in that direction, no one officially has to sign for it! This makes it easier for them to claim that we have not produced the documents in question or, more pointedly, that we are lying about giving them to some official staff member! I am about to find out if the 2nd Parole Reconsideration has actually got there!

I have been looking at a "Part 87-Application for Writ of Habeas Corpus". I am also examining "A Guide to Private Prosecution Procedure in England and Wales". To quote the Private Prosecution Guide: (1) A member of the public can bring a private prosecution for any offence unless the offence is one for which the consent of the Attorney General (AG) or the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) is required before a prosecution can take place. Section 6(1) of the Prosecutions of Offences Act 1985 (POA). (2) The private prosecution is commenced by laying an 'Information' with the court, followed by the issue of a Warrant by a Magistrate's Court. Rule 7. 2 of the Criminal Procedure Rules (Crim. PR).

For the "Habeas Corpus", I have included a page from the Open University research I now have more than enough concrete evidence to present a valid Criminal Appeal. I only provided a fraction of the evidence I have accumulated to the Parole Board Reconsideration, whereby they initially agreed to an Oral Public hearing! Trying to assemble all the threads of evidence I have managed to obtain into a coherent and easily understandable narrative is frustrating. Mainly because of the ducking and diving that the authorities have attempted to obscure and prevent any of this evidence from ever seeing the light of day! Even now, I am getting odds and ends of information, which is either direct evidence or points me in the right direction to chase more evidence.

The irony is that the Prisons have provided use of "Legal Laptops", and as long ago as 1996/7, when in HMP Whitemore, I witnessed an ex-police armourer, who was convicted of selling confiscated guns to the IRA,- had his own Laptop and Printer in his cell, 24/7, to further his Criminal Appeal! Yet, everyone since then has been refused the facility of being able to use their own laptop,

They did provide some limited "Legal Laptops" (3-perWing) some years ago, where you could create and assemble documentation. However, recently the refurbished supply of Legal Laptops have no facility to import legal documents (no memory stick/CD port!). You cannot put anything on (by way of a memory stick or CD, which was available on the first iteration. Whatever document you create, you then have to copy 'Longhand'; you cannot even print it! "Progress"!

Sorry if I have gone off a bit. I will inform you all of my progress as it happens, OK!

Prisoners Who Have Married Behind Bars

Martha McHardy, Independent: It is currently legal to marry in the UK if you are in prison but prisoners who want to get married have to apply to the governor of the prison. Around 60 prisoners applied to get married last year, but new legislation could mean prisoners serving whole-life terms would be banned from ever getting wed. Under Justice Secretary Dominic Raab’s Victims’ Bill — due to be unveiled in the next fortnight — rapists and muderers serving whole life terms could be banned from ever getting married. It is currently legal to marry in the UK if you are in prison, but prisoners who want to get married have to apply to the governor of the prison. And governors have the power to object to this request, which means it’s not always guaranteed.