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12 February 2018

Dear Peter

URGENT NOTIFICATION – HMP NOTTINGHAM

Thank you for your letter dated 17th January 2018 by way of an Urgent Notification of the particular concerns the Inspectorate has following the inspection at HMP Nottingham. As set out in the Protocol between you and my Department, I am committed to provide you with a response within 28 days of your letter.

I take very seriously the issues raised by the Inspectorate and we are committed to following up recommendations made in the report.

The prison has been in Special Measures for some time and this has meant that steps were already being taken to support the prison to address safety as your report recognised. For example, a comprehensive assessment of the prison's violence reduction strategy, policies and operating arrangements has taken place to ensure that good practice guidelines are followed. The revised policies were introduced in November 2017; but more needs to be done to improve the situation.

Below I set out the immediate actions we have prioritised to address the most serious and urgent issues which we must fix to deliver effective and sustained improvement in the longer term. I also enclose an action plan providing more detail on the specific actions that have been completed or are underway.

Safety

An urgent safety audit has been carried out and safety specialists will be deployed to provide intensive support to the prison in a range of areas in need of improvement. They have contacted the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, in advance of publication, to understand and implement the learning from the more recent deaths at the prison. The self-inflicted death of a prisoner at Nottingham last week further underlines the importance of this and related work at Nottingham.

A private space will be created at the prison for reception interviews.

Additional resource will be provided to reduce the backlog of violence incident investigations and security intelligence reports.

I can confirm that the issues with the Body Worn Camera operating system, which meant they were not fully in use at the time of the inspection, has been resolved and the system is operational again across the prison.

An early assessment will be carried out at the prison by the HMPPS Drug Taskforce to identify any areas of vulnerability so that action can be taken to tackle drugs supply, prior to a 'deep dive' diagnostic review across all aspects of drug strategy.

To help stabilise the prison, the decision has been taken that HMP Nottingham will not hold young adult offenders for a temporary period and we are removing the current group of young offenders either directly or at their next court appearance. We have also made the decision to prioritise moving category B prisoners out of HMP Nottingham into the long term high security estate where their needs will be better met.

Inexperienced Staff

You also found that the lack of confidence prisoners had in staff was having an adverse impact on the prison's stability. It is inevitable when increasing prison officer numbers that you do increase inexperience and we need to address this.

The prison will undertake a training needs analysis for staff at all levels and build a comprehensive plan to be delivered over the coming months with dedicated HR support. We will enhance mentoring for new recruits so that experienced staff can offer further support.

HMP Nottingham has a number of staff in post who have been trained as key workers, as part of the commitments in the White Paper, and who have been specifically trained to engage positively, but also appropriately challenge, prisoners. This will help motivate prisoners to make the most effective use of their time in custody and to assist them in accessing appropriate help whilst in custody.

Leadership and management grip

I am pleased that you found the leadership team to be enthusiastic and committed, which in itself is important for driving performance improvement. They have also demonstrated their ongoing commitment through the development of these further plans, which I welcome, and are keen to continue to build this culture across the prison.


From April 2018 changes will be made to the Prison Group structures meaning that Group Directors will have smaller commands to increase their oversight and provide enhanced management grip. Nottingham will be one of only four prisons in the new North Midlands Group. This will support increased oversight in the delivery of the action plans developed in response to the HMIP reports. Central oversight of this by the HMPPS scrutiny unit will also add an additional layer of assurance to this process.

Living conditions and regime activity

All of the above will be underpinned by a concerted effort to ensure the basics are in place including appropriate standards of cleanliness, repairs that are completed quickly, observation panels that are unblocked and cell bells that are answered swiftly. Regime improvements will enhance prisoners' opportunity to take up regime activity.

A further plan responding to all your recommendations will begin to be developed as soon as we receive your draft report and recommendations. We plan to publish this to coincide with the publication of your full inspection report, outlining our long-term strategy to deliver sustained improvements at HMP Nottingham.

I hope that this letter reassures you that we are taking seriously the outcomes of the inspection and that action is appropriately being taken by the prison and the wider system to address those actions over the coming weeks and months.

Yours ever


RT HON DAVID GAUKE MP