



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
David Gauke MP
Lord Chancellor & Secretary of
State for Justice

Peter Clarke CVO OBE QPM
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
3rd Floor
10 South Colonnade
Canary Wharf
London
E14 4PU

9th October 2018

Dear Peter

URGENT NOTIFICATION – HMP BEDFORD

Thank you for your letter dated 12th September 2018, setting out your concerns following the inspection at HMP Bedford and invoking the Urgent Notification (UN) protocol. As set out in the Protocol between you and my Department, I am committed to providing you with a response within 28 days of your letter.

Special measures

HMP Bedford was subject to a Performance Improvement Plan following a major disturbance in November 2016. Following a review in May 2018, Bedford was placed into special measures. As a result of this intervention, an action plan was developed by the Governor and Prison Group Director (PGD) to address concerns and drive forward improvements with support from national specialists. The Special Measures Action Plan prioritised a range of issues at the prison which had or were in the process of being delivered during the time of the inspection. This included support to develop a new staffing profile; providing additional managers to support the development of staff skills; refurbishment of the showers in the Separation and Care Unit; providing resources for a number of window grilles to be installed to improve security, support to improve the governance and a full review of safety by the National Safety Custody Team. Additionally, the operational capacity was reduced by 20 places to facilitate work on improving decency within the establishment.

You acknowledged in your letter to me that local management was working very hard in challenging circumstances and that you believed some benefits would flow from the actions being carried out due to the prison being placed in special measures, as has been the case in other sites. However, you also felt that too many important issues in the special measures action plan had indeterminate or long timeframes for implementation and that placing the prison in special measures did not in itself give assurance that the serious issues you identified during your inspection would be adequately addressed, hence your decision to invoke an UN.

I take very seriously the issues you raised and I am committed to ensuring they are addressed. I set out below an overview of the immediate actions we have prioritised to address the most serious and urgent matters. I also enclose an initial action plan providing more detail on the specific actions that have been completed or are underway.

Order and control

In order to help stabilise the prison we have temporarily reduced capacity by a further 56 places, creating a total reduction of 76 places when taking into account the reduction under the Special Measures process. This reduction, whilst relatively modest, demonstrates a commitment to immediately stabilising the prison whilst balancing the need to provide continued support and capacity to drive improvement at other high-risk sites. Reducing this operational pressure will enable Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to temporarily close one of the five main wings and carry out further training to support inexperienced staff. Additional experienced Supervising Officers and Custodial Managers will also be provided on detached duty to support and mentor new staff and provide assurance. An 'Officer Development Programme' is also being introduced to support staff in areas such as conflict resolution and the appropriate enforcement of expectations in relation to decency, respect and motivating prisoners to attend work and education.

Management resources will be provided to the Care and Separation Unit (CSU), an area of the prison you identified as weak during your inspection. A new operational manager will support the management of the unit and provide oversight of the adjudications process. A Custodial Manager will also be assigned to improve processes and staff leadership so that the unit operates safely and within the expectations of procedural justice.

Getting the basics right

I am clear that we must get the basics of safety, cleanliness and decency in our prisons right. HMPPS has therefore deployed the National Safety Team to provide Assessment Care in Custody and Team (ACCT) case manager training therefore enabling staff to better support vulnerable prisoners. They have also reviewed the local ACCT quality assurance process, thereby providing further rigour to this important area; and are going to undertake a review of early days support to prisoners, a time when we know that prisoners can be particularly vulnerable.

Improving safety at HMP Bedford has also been given further focus by senior managers. The Group Safety Team is working with the prison to embed the Challenge Support and Intervention Plan (CSIP) case management approach to address the high levels of violence. It is also working with the Governor to further develop and embed a comprehensive safety strategy throughout the prison. A violence summit has also been organised, involving staff and prisoners, at which short and medium-term actions for the prison to better manage violence will be identified.

In common with many other prisons HMP Bedford suffers from high volumes of illicit drugs. The HMPPS National Drugs Taskforce will therefore undertake a full diagnostics process which will identify actions to improve the establishment's response to drugs across the three elements of the drugs strategy – supply and demand reduction, treatment and recovery, and continuity of care. In addition, the prison has been prioritised for access to an expanding Group team of drug search dogs, to help reduce the ingress of drugs into the establishment. The prison is also fitting additional window grilles to the most vulnerable areas.

In your letter to me you said that many areas of the establishment were insufficiently clean. The prison will become a national pilot site for the Clean and Decent Project, following a recent clean and decent standards audit which was also piloted at the prison. This project will introduce new cleaning processes, support staff in the organisation and management of prisoner cleaning parties, introduce new painting parties and help implement new approaches to fabric checks to make immediate and sustained improvements to standards of cleanliness throughout the establishment.

Specific work will be undertaken to ensure that the regime is constructive and fully engages prisoners in activity and provides staff with sufficient time and space to undertake their core duties. An urgent action plan is also being sought from the educational supplier to improve retention and attraction to the education department and national contract support will be deployed to drive improvements in delivery. The wider staff mentoring programme will also help coach staff in the correct way in which to improve activities attendance amongst the prison population.

Living conditions

You said in your letter to me that the living conditions in the prison were poor. Under the special measures provision the showers in the CSU have been refurbished. A review of the wider conditions of the prison had already been commissioned by the Prison Group Director and funding is being secured to enable a number of showers and areas of flooring to be replaced.

Consideration has also been given to the current provision of Facilities Management at the prison and HMPPS has deployed an experienced Technical Manager from the Prison Maintenance Group to review the service provided by Government Facilities Services Limited and support the completion of the maintenance backlog. Disabled prisoners located at Bedford will be reviewed to ensure that their basic needs can be met and in any circumstances where this is not the case the prisoner will be swiftly transferred to a more suitable site.

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

I will of course continue to monitor the situation at HMP Bedford to ensure we begin to see improvements. We will take all action necessary to ensure that staff and prisoners work and live in safe and decent conditions.

Yours ever


RT HON DAVID GAUKE MP