



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
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URGENT NOTIFICATION – HMP BRISTOL

Thank you for your letter dated 11 June 2019, setting out your concerns following the inspection at HMP Bristol and invoking the Urgent Notification (UN) protocol. As set out in the protocol between you and my Department, I am providing you with a response within 28 days of your letter.

You raised a number of important issues, which I take seriously, 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; and have taken the opportunity to outline HMPPS's new performance recovery arrangements, which will be replacing special measures. I also enclose an initial action plan providing more detail on the specific actions that have been completed or are underway.

Safety

Firstly, I want to assure you that immediate action has been taken to ensure that prisoners can telephone the Samaritans from in-cell phones; and local assurance process have been put in place to maintain this. In addition, swift action has been taken to ensure the hotline for family and friends of those in crisis to call and report their concerns, is checked regularly; and delays in getting prisoners' in cell telephony accounts activated have been rectified.

You raised in your letter that you had concerns about the extraordinarily high number of prisoners, one in ten, who were identified as being at risk of suicide and self-harm (SASH), and were being managed through Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) case management processes. You believed this number to be unmanageable. This has arisen in part as a result of healthcare staff seeking to comply with a coroner's recommendation to apply a lower threshold of risk when considering whether an ACCT is required. To address this safely, HMPPS' National and Group Prison Safety Teams are working with the health provider to improve the understanding, identification and management of risk relating to ACCT. In addition, the Safety Teams are facilitating further workshops and coaching for ACCT case managers. These aim to improve their understanding of risks and triggers to manage the ACCT process more effectively, including the appropriate closure of ACCT plans. The Safety Teams are also assessing the current quality assurance processes and are making improvements.

Additional work is being carried out to ensure Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) fatal incident investigation report recommendations are fully implemented and embedded at the prison.

You also raised concerns about the prison's first night arrangements. With immediate effect, improvements are being made to the identification of safety risks, ensuring that prisoners have access to

basic kit, that rooms are fully equipped before occupancy, and that staff are aware who first night prisoners are and are supporting their attendance at inductions.

Violence reduction

In common with many other local prisons, HMP Bristol suffers from high levels of violence. An interim Head of Safety is therefore being appointed to oversee the effective implementation and embedding of Challenge, Support and Intervention Plan (CSIP) case management for violent offenders; supported by the National and Group Safety Teams. The Head of Safety will also oversee the segregation unit and will work with the National Evidence Based Practice Team to adopt a whole prison approach to positive behaviour; facilitate rehabilitative adjudication workshops with staff; and introduce a reward based system to better manage behaviour thereby reducing reliance on adjudications and use of force. In addition, a full time use of force co-ordinator will be identified to ensure that the recent work to improve processes will be further developed and embedded.

I am pleased that your team observed positive outcomes in the work to reduce drug use at the prison which is a major driver of violence in many establishments.

Living conditions and decency

I am clear that we must get the basics right in terms of living conditions and decency in our prisons. Significant capital expenditure of £1.65million has already been invested at Bristol. This has enabled major refurbishment work to be carried out on D wing and other repair activity to occur across the prison such as servery and shower refurbishments. However, I recognise that there is more to be done as funding becomes available to make further improvements.

As you note, much of the accommodation at the prison remains in poor condition. HMPPS reduced the population at Bristol by 120 in July 2018 to allow for the refurbishment work on D wing to happen. This reduction in occupational capacity will, as previously planned, be maintained for the rest of the calendar year to allow further self-help redecoration and minor refurbishment to take place. This will include some flooring repair, cell pointing, cell furniture renewal and toilet and sink deep cleans.

I note that despite improvements there remains a substantial backlog of maintenance work and infestations of cockroaches are common. HMPPS' Prison Maintenance Group will continue to ensure that the Facilities Management provider, Government Facilities Services Limited, is closely monitored to reduce the maintenance backlog further to an acceptable business as usual level. In recent months pest control visits have been increased to one per week.

You said in your letter that several prisoners you observed had unmet care needs at the prison and that you felt the social care arrangements at Bristol were inadequate. The prison and Bristol Council have committed to put in place a memorandum of understanding and information sharing agreements by the second week of July 2019; and the Prison's Group Director will work with the social care commissioner to ensure that the current procurement is focussed on delivering improved social care.

Regime

I acknowledge your comments about regime delivery at the prison being unreliable, activity places not being utilised and poor education and library provision. To ensure improvements, the prison is continuing to embed new staff profiles, a new core day and key workers across all wings. This is being underpinned by training to improve staff capability and a local strategy to ensure that attendance across all activity places is effectively prioritised and enabled. Further work is planned in the short term to refine the prison's activity allocation process.

A new education facility is due to open at the prison in August 2019 and immediate changes have been made to the onsite management of the education provider. Furthermore, local and national prison industry experts will convene to design the available purposeful activity offer. Activity places will be designed in collaboration across providers to maximise impact and the potential for learning and skills development. In addition, the library provision has been immediately improved through extended access on Friday afternoon and weekends. Local assurance processes have been put in place to monitor attendance.

Resettlement

Your letter said that about 80 prisoners are released from Bristol every month but 47% were released homeless or into temporary accommodation which does little to enhance their chances of rehabilitation. This is an acknowledged issue in the Bristol area and therefore a homelessness pilot is due to start. This will involve 80 men from the prison who would be homeless, or are at risk of being homeless, on release. Support will be provided to these men during the last 12 weeks of their sentence and for two years post release with the long-term aim of reducing reoffending and preventing homelessness.

Management grip and special measures

You said in your letter that if special measures are intended to provide support for the Governor of a struggling prison; they have failed at Bristol. Furthermore, you said that you had no confidence that the prison will achieve coherent, meaningful or sustained improvement in the future. Therefore, to demonstrate an enhanced management grip at the prison, immediate work will be undertaken with the Governor and senior management team to develop a strategic recovery plan, which is underpinned by robust governance, risk management and communications processes. Activity will focus on the enablement of your recommendations and building management capability. Deployment of the HMPPS' Standards Coaching Team will also be prioritised for Bristol to support the development of new and existing frontline staff with a focus on improving the consistency and quality of those tasks core to the role of a prison officer.

Further assurance mechanisms will be put in place, with the national Operational System and Assurance Group undertaking an independent assessment of progress against your recommendations; and undertaking a further review on safety at Bristol, including the follow up to PPO recommendations.

HMPPS is currently reviewing special measures arrangements in order to provide a shorter term sequenced programme of support for a small number of sites. Under these performance recovery arrangements, work will be undertaken with the prison Governor and SMT to develop a strategic recovery plan, governance and risk management arrangements and an engagement and communication strategy. Activity will focus on the delivery and enablement of HMIP recommendations, leadership, safety, resource and building capability. HMPPS officials plan to discuss these new arrangements with you and your team, and I would be very grateful for your input to ensure we develop an approach where we can be confident performance is managed in the way you describe.

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gauke' with a stylized flourish below it.

RT HON DAVID GAUKE MP