



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
Robert Buckland QC 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

21 August 2019

Dear Peter,

URGENT NOTIFICATION – HMYOI FELTHAM A

Thank you for your letter dated 22 July 2019, setting out your concerns following the inspection at HMYOI Feltham A 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 the invocation.

I take the issues you raise seriously and have provided an overview of the immediate actions we have prioritised to address the most serious and urgent matters. I also enclose an initial action plan which provides more detail on the specific actions that have been completed or are underway.

Leadership and Operational Grip

Despite the challenges faced by the leadership and staff at Feltham A, you noted that there appeared to be a desire to want to change and to improve conditions for the children in their care. I can assure you that this is the case and a position held strongly both at the establishment and supported by senior managers in the Youth Custody Service (YCS).

To this end, the Prison Group Director and a central support team working with the Governor and senior management team will deliver a nine-month programme of activity including the development of a strategic recovery plan and governance and risk management arrangements, supported by an engagement and communication strategy. Activity will focus on delivery and enablement of HMIP recommendations, leadership, safety, resource and building capability, and accountability.

As you are aware, new placements to Feltham A were paused with immediate effect, and a planned reduction in population took place in order to support the Governor and staff in implementing necessary improvement measures. Placements will not resume until the Prison Group Director and Governor judge that the establishment has achieved the necessary operational stability and can offer a full regime to all children. The leadership team has also been strengthened, including the appointment of a new Head of Safeguarding, and a replacement Head of Residence is also due to be appointed. An experienced Deputy Governor has also been deployed, on secondment initially, to oversee the daily management of the Feltham A including co-ordinating wider support and additional resources from across the YCS at this crucial initial stage.

In addition, the Prison Group Director is undertaking a review of the existing senior management team structure to consider whether a change in structure will further improve the management of Feltham A.

Staff Training and Development

In your letter you noted that relationships between staff and children were poor, with only a small percentage of children feeling cared for by staff, and some staff not engaging appropriately around the children in their care. In order to ensure that staff at all levels are upskilled, have the tools they require to carry out their roles effectively, and engage well with the children, a range of courses and workshops are scheduled between now and December 2019. This includes first line manager courses, workshops on courageous conversations, and training on defensible decision making which will be delivered by national and YCS Human Resources and Learning and Development colleagues to first line managers; orderly officers and custodial managers, as appropriate. Furthermore, the Standards Coaching Team will be adapted for the YCS. A YCS specific team will be selected and trained to support new and existing frontline staff with tasks core to the role of an officer, with specific focus on working with children.

In addition, the HMPPS Prison Officer Guide is being adapted for use in the YCS to increase the confidence and capability of inexperienced staff when working with children. This will include guidance on how to use conflict resolution techniques appropriately.

Safety (Safeguarding)

You raised concerns about the significant rise in violence, self-harm and use of force since your previous inspection. The safeguarding of children in our care is paramount and we take our responsibilities to make improvements in these areas seriously.

The current safety strategy is being reviewed with input and support from National Safety and Psychology Teams. This combined team expertise will help inform the approach taken to improve the care provided to children requiring additional support under Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT). A longer-term PRISM (Promoting Risk Intervention by Situational Management) plan is also being developed focusing on reducing the risk of violence at the establishment; and the recording, capacity and targeted referral of effective intervention programmes for children demonstrating or at risk of harmful behaviour will be implemented. In addition, a child centred reward and sanction policy will be introduced based on the Incentive Policy Framework published in July 2019.

Following the Inspectorate's findings that on many occasions, emergency call bell systems were not answered within five minutes, a review of the cell bell system was conducted with immediate effect. It identified that the slow response rate was due to a number of issues. Broken cell bells have now been repaired and local management procedures are being strengthened to provide assurance that response times are improved. Staff are prioritising their response to cell bells activated by those children that are subject to ACCT procedures and may be more susceptible to self-harm.

It is clear that there needs to be both a change in culture and regime to ensure that incidents of Use of Force take place as a last resort, and that cases are reviewed appropriately. Immediate support has been provided by the national team specialising in Minimising and Managing Physical Restraint (MMPR) and a targeted review of specific Use of Force incidents, focussing on governance and reporting procedures is being undertaken. A local Use of Force Manager has started reviewing all incident where force is used and will ensure that the Use of Force reports, identified as outstanding at the time of inspection, are urgently reviewed with the aim that there is no backlog by the end of November 2019.

Regime and 'Non Association'

You noted the challenge in maintaining a safe regime that also enables 'non association' policies for those children that need protection. We are clear that we must get this balance right. There was an increased focus on regime delivery/education in the first two weeks following the Urgent Notification, and national expertise will be provided over the coming months to support the establishment in initiating and adopting a wholesale change of policy, practice, and culture, in relation to how it manages children who need to be 'kept apart' from each other. The new Deputy Governor has been driving a change in approach to managing this issue which has been one of the fundamental problems facing Feltham in recent months.

There has been a real push to reduce the numbers of young people with non-association markers and work on resolving conflicts or potential conflicts, rather than leaving boys separated from each other, sometimes for significant periods of time. There is still much more to do around this issue, but in the weeks since the inspection there has been a considerable reduction in the numbers of children being kept apart, which has seen children able to access better regimes, and a reduction in violent incidents and self-harm.

In practical terms, the establishment is working to ensure that all children have access to a minimum regime that allows daily access to a phone and shower; they can move around the establishment in a safe and orderly manner that allows them to take responsibility for their own behaviour; and allows them to arrive at their activities on time. Considerable progress has already been made. Feltham A has now returned to running a normal daily regime; as a result, attendance at education has improved significantly, and the hours that young people are out of their rooms for has increased, since the inspection.

Health

In response to the Inspectorate's findings that medicines administration was wasteful with only two out of 15 patients attending appointments in an hour and a half, healthcare commissioners and providers (NHS England and Care UK) have taken urgent action. They will be meeting the costs of a 'movement officer' for an initial period of six months to help bring immediate improvement in healthcare access for children. A focused training programme is also being developed to support the risk assessment and management of children with complex mental health problems, including those that self-harm.

At the time of inspection, the Wren Inpatient Unit was used by both residents from Feltham A and B which has not been ideal both in terms of healthcare delivery, and in enabling movement for children at Feltham A to Feltham B. NHS England colleagues are progressing work to reconfigure the Wren Unit, and redeploying health staff and developing dedicated healthcare facilities at Feltham A. This is anticipated to have a significant and longer term positive impact for children, healthcare and prison staff and will enable a better regime in terms of access to healthcare.

Built Environment

In your letter you noted that the fabric of the building was deteriorating. Plans to improve the buildings have been prioritised with refurbishments currently taking place across a number of shower facilities. A programme for further refurbishments to take place throughout the financial year will start with work in decanted units (work has commenced at Heron and Eagle); and will be supported by a review of priority works to ensure that available funding is targeted at priority maintenance projects.

In addition, food serveries across the site will be deep cleaned; and plans are in place to introduce a self help wing painting party, where possible within the delivery of vocational training for children, to improve standards of decoration within cell accommodation and landings. A site survey for in-cell telephony has been completed and funding committed for the roll out of in-room telephony, and Feltham A will be prioritised for installation.

Education

Ofsted judged the education provision at Feltham A to be inadequate in all areas. Consequently, the education provider working in partnership with the establishment, has produced a comprehensive plan to address the issues identified by Ofsted/HMIP. This includes developing a revised profile for the core day which will significantly improve attendance and punctuality across Feltham A.

Furthermore, an experienced Trauma Informed Practitioner will be employed by November to develop a better understanding and awareness of the complexities of the children undertaking Education. They will also develop a training programme which will be delivered to the education team during the Autumn term. This will include training in communication skills. In addition, all children in Education will be assessed in English and Maths over the next four weeks to ascertain their baseline starting point.

Resettlement

In order to ensure that children are well supported for their transition back to the community, from September, new staffing profiles will ensure that staff rosters are designed in a way that family contact is prioritised as a core regime activity, and that children are able to access interventions specific to their need. By October, an escalation process to local authorities will be in place to identify suitable accommodation for those children requiring that support, one month prior to their release.

I hope that this letter reassures you that I have taken the outcomes of the inspection seriously; am committed to improving the conditions for children in our care; and that appropriate action is being taken by the establishment and the YCS over the coming weeks and months.

yours ever,

Robert

RT HON ROBERT BUCKLAND QC MP