



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Official

Andy Slaughter
Chair of the Justice Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

24 October 2024

URGENT NOTIFICATION – HMP WINCHESTER

I am writing to inform you that Charlie Taylor, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, has invoked an Urgent Notification at HMP Winchester. I have enclosed a copy of Charlie's letter informing the Secretary of State of his decision which sets out his concerns. Kindly note that this letter is embargoed until the Urgent Notification is published by HMIP on 24 October, and I respectfully request that it is not shared until that time.

The Chief Inspector has identified a number of serious issues at HMP Winchester, particularly regarding violence, the state of the prison environment, poor living conditions, increased levels of self-harm, the availability of drugs and lack of testing, limited time out of cell, and lack of staff competence and confidence. HMP Winchester has the highest rate of assaults on staff of all reception prisons, and the prison environment was described as dilapidated, neglected, and dirty. This is all extremely concerning but I can assure you that work is already underway, led by the Governor, to address these issues and I am confident that this will create a safer environment for both prisoners and staff.

The Secretary of State will respond to the Chief Inspector within 28 days, detailing the immediate actions to be implemented at HMP Winchester. The Inspectorate will publish their full inspection report within three months, in accordance with standard practice. We will also develop a comprehensive action plan to address all concerns made in the full inspection report.

This Urgent Notification, following so soon after those at HMP Rochester and HMP Manchester, is yet more evidence of the state of crisis in our prison system. This Government inherited that challenge, but the Lord Chancellor and I are determined to meet it head on and deliver sustainable improvement across our prison estate. At HMP Winchester we will work with the Governor and his team to provide all possible support to turn the prison around.

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My Private Secretary will be in touch to arrange a call to discuss the Urgent Notification and any concerns you may have, but in the interim, should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at ps.JamesTimpson@justice.gov.uk.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Timpson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

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**HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
CHARLIE TAYLOR**

Date: 23 October 2024

The Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

Dear Secretary of State,

In accordance with the Protocol between HM Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Ministry of Justice dated October 2019, I am writing to you to invoke the Urgent Notification process following our unannounced inspection of HMP Winchester between 7th and 17th October 2024. The Protocol sets out that this letter will be placed in the public domain, and that the Secretary of State commits to respond publicly within 28 days.

This is the fourth time we have inspected Winchester since 2016 and it is a prison that has persistently underachieved. At this inspection, the jail attracted our lowest healthy prison assessment in three of our four tests – safety, respect and purposeful activity – with many of the concerns raised at our previous inspection in 2022 still to be addressed. Despite reporting some encouraging indications following our independent review of progress (IRP) in November 2022, we found that outcomes had now deteriorated in many critical areas. The prison remained one of the most unsafe in the country, and many men lived in very poor conditions, without access to purposeful activity and frustrated by the inability to get even basic things done.

I have issued an Urgent Notification for the following reasons:

- Violence had increased since our last inspection and was very high. Serious assaults against staff were the highest, and serious assaults against prisoners the second highest, of all reception prisons. Prisoners reported that violence was occurring because of drugs, debt, and frustrations at staff failure to deal reliably with even the most basic requests.
- The prison environment was dilapidated, neglected and filthy, and standards of accommodation were very poor. Many cells had graffiti, which was often offensive, insufficient or broken furniture and damaged phone sockets. They were often cold or poorly ventilated, causing damp and mould which was so bad that we questioned whether some were fit for habitation.

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- First night cells were in very poor condition, with lots of graffiti, and often similarly inadequately equipped. In our survey, only around a quarter of prisoners said they were offered a phone call when they arrived, and some men waited weeks to have their telephone numbers approved so that they could contact their family.
- The rate of self-harm was the third highest of all reception prisons and had increased since our last inspection. Many prisoners were frustrated by a lack of activity, insufficient mental health support and an inability to use phones to contact their families. There had been two self-inflicted deaths since our last inspection.
- In our survey, 47% of prisoners said that it was easy to get illicit drugs. Despite the prison identifying the supply of illicit items as a serious security risk, all drug testing had been suspended for five months during 2024. Random drug testing had only recommenced during August, returning a positive rate of 41%.
- There were weaknesses in physical security, including the fabric of B wing where a prisoner had removed his cell door. More than a third of CCTV cameras were not working, and substantial investment was needed to fix failing infrastructure across the prison site.
- Most prisoners were unlocked for only 2.5 hours a day, and our checks found less than a third of men were engaging in purposeful activity during the working day. Overall effectiveness of education, skills and work was graded 'inadequate' by Ofsted, and leaders had not sufficiently developed the rehabilitative function of the category C site.
- While the full quota of prison officers had been recruited, and staff-prisoner relationships were generally better than at our last inspection, there was still an urgent need to build staff competence and confidence. Although we found some motivated middle managers, most lacked experience. Not enough had been done by leaders to make sure processes worked consistently and that prisoners' basic needs were met.

We acknowledge that the prison group director had recognised the challenges and shortcomings of the jail, and the HMPPS Prison Performance Support Programme had very recently drawn up a delivery plan, but this was yet to have an effect.

The poor outcomes we found at Winchester represent systemic failings under the oversight of HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice and will require sustained support and investment if the prison is to provide decent living conditions, improve safety and security, and operate effectively.

Yours sincerely



Martin Lomas, Deputy Chief Inspector
On behalf of Charlie Taylor, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons