

Andy Slaughter, MP
Chair of the Justice Committee
By email: slaughtera@parliament.uk

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Dear Andy,

Prison function changes in the North West, North East & London

As the Lord Chancellor outlined to Parliament on 22 October, prisons continue to face ongoing capacity challenges. A major factor behind this situation is the 70% increase in remand prisoners since 2020, resulting in a population of about 17,000 prisoners currently on remand. While SDS40, the early release scheme, has provided some immediate relief, further operational measures will be needed alongside the Sentencing Review that has been announced.

Capacity challenges are experienced most acutely in our reception (local) prisons, whose primary duty is to serve the courts. As a result, we need to increase the number of reception places in those areas facing the most significant challenges: North West, North East and London. The changes set out below will help to create much-needed prison places to ensure the reception estate can continue to serve the courts.

North West

HMP Liverpool is already a reception prison for adult male prisoners, but in addition, it will start to take young offenders from early November 2024. Currently, the prison serves Crown Courts only, but it will also begin serving Magistrates' Courts from 25 November 2024. As part of this change, Liverpool Magistrates' Court will move to HMP Liverpool from HMP Altcourse. We will then move Bolton Crown Court and Magistrates' Court, plus Wigan Magistrates' Court, from HMP Forest Bank to HMP Altcourse.

North East

HMP Holme House will become a reception prison from mid-January 2025. As part of this change, Teesside Crown Court, plus Middlesbrough and Newton Aycliffe Magistrates' Courts, will move to HMP Holme House from HMP Durham.

London

HMP Brixton is due to become a reception prison. Most of the work is still in progress, but as a first step, we have already returned St Albans Crown Court from HMP Wormwood Scrubs to HMP Bedford. I will write again when we have confirmed the courts that will be aligned to HMP Brixton.

These changes may mean that some people will be in prisons further away from the courts dealing with their cases. However, I trust you will understand that these changes are necessary to ensure the effective running of the criminal justice system and to minimise any impact on courts and prisoners.

If you have any questions, please contact Brendan Christie (Deputy Director, Custodial Capacity) at brendan.christie@justice.gov.uk, or the Offender Flows and Configuration Team at offenderflowsandconfiguration@justice.gov.uk.



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending