



Justice Committee

Lord Timpson

Minister of State for Prisons,
Probation and Reducing Reoffending

By email only

9 January 2025

CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT AND FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF HMP FOREST BANK

Dear Lord Timpson,

I am writing to you to express the Committee's concerns regarding the future management of HMP Forest Bank.

As you will be aware, HMP Forest Bank has operated under private management since it opened in 2000. This contract is set to expire on 19 January 2025. It remains unclear whether Sodexo will continue to manage the prison, a new operator will take over or the prison will return to public ownership.

It has been brought to my attention that almost £400m of public spending was approved for HMP Forest Bank last year. On 17 December 2024, the Cabinet Office published its Spend Control Data for July 2024 to September 2024. The data includes a substantial sum of £392,051,403 under the heading 'Privately Managed Prisons – Operator Competition – HMP Forest Bank'. According to the publication, this sum was agreed on 3 July 2024. The heading was subsequently amended to remove the direct reference to HMP Forest Bank. This warrants further explanation, as it may signal a shift in the Department's approach to private prison management or could indicate ongoing negotiations with potential new providers.

This continued uncertainty is of great concern to the Committee, particularly given the potential implications for the stability of the prison and the continuity of services at a time when operational issues in the prison system are of importance.

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Should a new private operator be awarded the contract, a long and carefully planned run-in period will ensure that the new operator can recruit sufficient new staff and/or secure the continued service of the old management team.

Further to this, recent reports have highlighted significant issues relating to the conditions at the prison including drug use, rehabilitation outcomes, and overall operational effectiveness. It is also concerning to learn that three prisoners lost their lives in November and December 2024.

We are committed to scrutinising the Government's handling of prison management contracts, and we believe it is imperative that any renewal process is approached with a clear focus on improving outcomes for prisoners and ensuring value for taxpayers. Therefore, it is disappointing that the Committee have not been informed about the development and management of this contract.

Given the impending expiration date and the importance of ensuring transparency and accountability, the Committee would like clarity on the following:

1. Timelines and procurement process:

- Can you confirm who will be taking over management of HMP Forest Bank when the current contract expires next week and how long the new contract will last?
- Does the Ministry of Justice intend to consider transitioning the management of HMP Forest Bank to the public sector?
- What steps are being taken to ensure there is no disruption to operations or services?

2. Transparency and accountability:

- Could you outline what the sum of £392,051,403 is for? If the contract has not been finalised, why was this figure published in the public spending accounts?
- Why has the information about the new management provider not been made available to the Committee and the public, given that the expiration date is imminent?
- What communication has been made to staff and prisoners regarding the potential change in management?

3. Contract performance and review:



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- What steps has the Ministry of Justice taken to assess the performance of HMP Forest Bank under Sodexo's management, including drug use and poor conditions?
- If Sodexo will continue managing this prison, could you provide any recent performance data, independent reviews or reports that inform your decision?

I would be grateful if you could provide a response to the points above by Monday 3 February 2025.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Slaughter MP
Chair, Justice Committee