



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

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

MoJ ref: SUB123523

30 April 2025

Dear Andy,

CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT AND FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF HMP FOREST BANK

I am writing to update you in confidence on the operator competition for HMP Forest Bank.

As you may be aware, the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract for HMP Forest Bank was extended on 20 January 2025 due to delays in the operator competition. A six-month contract extension was signed with the current Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), Agecroft Prison Management Ltd, with Sodexo as the operator. The amended contract included a provision to extend for an additional six months to 19 January 2026 (12 months in total), ensuring the continued operation of 1,460 prison places during the ongoing procurement process.

In March 2025, the decision to award the HMP Forest Bank operator contract to the successful bidder received Ministry of Justice (MoJ) governance approval and the participating bidders were notified accordingly. Sodexo was the successful bidder however, during the standstill period, a legal challenge was received by one of the bidders, triggering an automatic suspension of the contract award. This prevented the MoJ from proceeding with the new operator contract. To ensure the operational stability and continued provision of vital prisoner places an extension to the current contract was enacted, recognising that the further delay to the new contract provided an insufficient timeframe to safely and effectively transition risking the safety of the transfer.

The legal challenge that required us to trigger the extension has since been withdrawn enabling MoJ to now proceed with signing the new contract with Sodexo, who will operate the prison for ten years once the current PFI contract extension expires in January 2026. This also provides Sodexo with a full 6-month mobilisation period, enabling both parties to work together to achieve a safe and effective transition to the new contract. We will be communicating the news of the extension and new contract together to bring stability and certainty to the site and its staff.

HMP Forest Bank plays a vital role for the Criminal Justice System in the Manchester area, holding 1,460 prisoners both in a reception function for those on remand or newly convicted and a resettlement function for those close to release. The continued operation of the prison is essential, and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is working to ensure that the expiry of the existing PFI contract and transfer to new contractual arrangements is delivered with minimum disruption to the functioning of the prison, its staff and its prisoners. Transition to the new contract will be supported by an experienced HMPPS mobilisation team, who will work closely with existing contract managers in Forest Bank. This work will build on the experience and learning from the transition from PFI to new contracts for three other privately managed prisons.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James', written in a cursive style.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending