



Ministry
of Justice

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Meg Hillier MP
Chair
Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
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By email: pubaccomm@parliament.uk

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Dear Chair

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the Public Accounts Committee at the recall hearing on 11 February. During the hearing, the Committee asked us to write on a point that was raised. This letter responds to that request.

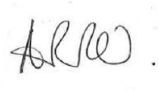
Reducing the length of the prison officer recruitment process (Q38)

As previously recommended by the Committee, we have significantly improved the time required to hire candidates and bring them into the prison service. This has been achieved by introducing a bespoke and automated recruitment process, introducing more frequent communications with candidates, and speeding up our ability to process documents provided by candidates as part of their pre-employment checks.

This progress has continued throughout the pandemic. While we had to pause training and recruitment during the early stages of the pandemic, training restarted in May 2020 and recruitment in August 2020. Since November 2020, we have been operating fully online assessment centres. This has reduced our reliance on physical buildings and has allowed us to increase significantly the number of available assessment centre places. We expect this to result in further improvements in the time it takes to hire in coming months.

The improvements in recruitment have supported our public commitment to increase the number of officers in the prison service. Between the end of October 2016 to the end of December 2020, we have increased the number of Band 3-5 prison officers from 17,995 to 21,564 – a net increase of 3,609 FTE.

Please let me know if you require further information.

Yours ever

ANTONIA ROMEO