



Ministry  
of Justice

Lord Timpson  
Minister of State for Justice

**Official**

Lord Foster  
Chair of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

**MoJ ref:** SUB132727

18 March 2026

Dear Don,

**URGENT NOTIFICATION – HMP WOODHILL**

I hope that you are well. I am writing to inform you that Charlie Taylor, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, has invoked an Urgent Notification at HMP Woodhill. I have enclosed a copy of Charlie's letter informing the Deputy Prime Minister of his decision which sets out his concerns. Please note that this letter is embargoed until the Urgent Notification is published by HMIP on 19 March, and I respectfully request that it is not shared until that time.

The Urgent Notification process enables the Chief Inspector to publicly inform the Secretary of State when his team finds urgent and significant concerns regarding the performance of a prison or young offenders' institution. The decision to invoke an Urgent Notification rests solely with the Chief Inspector.

The Chief Inspector has identified a number of serious issues at HMP Woodhill, including around safety with some of the highest rates of violence and self-harm in the male estate. This was found to have been driven by a variety of factors including drugs being too easily available, limited engagement in purposeful activity and weak staff prisoner relationships. The inspectorate found that senior leaders were not sufficiently visible on the wings and some staff lacked the competence and capability to challenge poor behaviour and engage constructively with prisoners. Many areas of the prison were scruffy and dirty, there were concerns around management of public protection risks and the prison was deemed as not fulfilling its function as a Category B training prison with too few opportunities for progression.

I recognise that these are serious findings, made more concerning by the fact that the prison was already receiving increased oversight following the invocation of an Urgent Notification at its previous inspection. Whilst that increased support and oversight has bought some improvements (upgrades to physical security, better induction and reception processes and good healthcare provision), the time needed to turn around some entrenched issues has disappointingly meant that substantive and sustained improvements are yet to be realised. HMIP raises concerns that this is the third UN received by a prison in the Long Term High Security Estate (LTHSE) in the last 18 months. This is something that HM Prisons and Probation has already acted upon – the LTHSE Taskforce has been established and is operating with close Ministerial oversight focusing on the safety and security risks within the LTHSE. HMIP has acknowledged that there is experienced leadership in place with the new Governor who is now joined by a new Deputy Governor. They consider both to have analysed the needs and priorities of the prison accurately, but they have only been in post for a few months so have had limited time to implement these. HMIP does identify that there is now more reliable time out of cell and there are indicators of improved stability, including lower rates of protesting behaviour from prisoners.

The Deputy Prime Minister will respond to the Chief Inspector within 28 days, detailing the immediate actions to be implemented at HMP Woodhill. Action already taken includes the launching of a new Safety Strategy, provision of targeted support to improve the use and quality of Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork for vulnerable prisoners, central support to refine the incentives framework, key work practice and better align staff resource with regime priorities and initiatives to bolster both tactical and staff resources.

Senior officials in HMPPS will take stock of these findings and ensure immediate action to tackle the most concerning issues is taken. Post-UN, senior oversight will continue in monitoring the prison's overall progress and help to drive completion of the actions on the UN action plan to enable sustained improvement at this challenging site.

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.

I am of course massively disappointed to receive a second Urgent Notification for HMP Woodhill. As I have outlined to you previously, there are unfortunately no quick fixes to the broken prison system that we inherited but I am confident that the reforms this Government is progressing, including implementation of the Sentencing Act, will lead to much needed improvements. The Deputy Prime Minister and I are committed to supporting the Governor to improve the situation at HMP Woodhill. I visited the prison in late October to meet the Governor and have confidence that the right support is being put in place to address the persistent issues at the prison. We have already taken concerted action and made decisions that have delivered additional investment in HMP Woodhill to be able to make progress and deliver the improvement needed.

Should you have any questions or want to arrange a call in to discuss in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me at [PS.JamesTimpson@justice.gov.uk](mailto:PS.JamesTimpson@justice.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,



**Lord Timpson**

**Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending**