



Justice Committee

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice
By email only

31 March 2026

Dear Lord Timpson,

HMPPS Fire Safety Improvement works programme

Thank you for your letter dated 20 March 2026 providing an update on HMPPS' in-cell automatic fire detection equipment programme. I am writing to express the Committee's serious concerns regarding the decision to reverse the commitment to ensure all prison accommodation is fire safety compliant by the end of 2027.

Last year, HMPPS officials stated that 21,000 prison cells failed to meet fire safety standards.¹ It was estimated that, by the end of 2027, approximately 6,000 prison places would still fall short of these essential requirements.

While we acknowledge the legacy of underinvestment and the acute capacity pressures currently facing the prison estate, we cannot accept a situation where the safety of both prisoners and staff continues to be put at risk. The Sentencing Review reforms are expected to ease pressure on the prison estate and so it is concerning to hear that removing the remaining non-compliant cells at the end of 2027 would "inevitably – and significantly – breach critical capacity".

In the last five years there has been a 124% increase in the number of prison fires. According to the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate's (CPFSI) Annual Report 2024/25, there were 2,932 recorded fires in 2024/25.² This has risen by 18% from 2023/24, in which 2,477 fires were recorded. There has also been an increase in the frequency of fire incidents at Young Offender Institutions (YOIs). In 2024/25, there were 70 fires reported in YOIs, an increase from 61 fires in 2023/24 and 37 fires in 2022/23. In 2024/25, all 70 fires started in YOIs were started deliberately.

While we acknowledge that steps have been taken to ensure that every cell not equipped with in-cell automatic fire detection has a standalone battery-powered smoke detector, the National Audit Office's (NAO) 2024 report 'Increasing the capacity of the prison estate to meet demand' stated that standalone smoke detectors do not provide the same standard of protection as automatic fire detection. The NAO's report

¹ [Letter from Chief Executive HMPPS to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee - dated 21 July 2025](#)

² [Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate annual report 2024 to 2025](#)



Justice Committee

also highlights that these places without in-cell automatic detection are at risk of enforcement action by the CPFSI.

It is also concerning that the Department does not intend to set out a new date by which it will complete the works needed for compliance.

Given the scale of the potential impact, the Committee requests further clarification on the following points:

1. What is the current number of prison cells that fail to meet fire safety standards, and what number and proportion of prison places are affected?
2. How is the MoJ prioritising improvement works for the remaining non-compliant cells?
3. What assurances have you received from CPFSI that they will not take enforcement action against non-compliant cells after 2027, and will you publish this correspondence for transparency?
4. What additional mitigations, if any, have you agreed with CPFSI that will allow you to continue to operate the cells despite them not being fire safety compliant?
5. What are the projected cost increases associated with delaying these works, considering the ongoing expense of maintaining temporary, less effective fire safety measures and the rising costs of construction materials?
6. Can you confirm that the necessary funding and resources have been ring-fenced to complete this programme without further delay?
7. We request that the Ministry of Justice informs the Committee as soon as it has established a reliable estimated date for the final completion of this work.

We hope that the Department continues to pay attention to this important issue. I would be grateful if you could provide a response by 21 April 2026.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Slaughter MP
Chair, Justice Committee