



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
David Lammy MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Lord Chancellor & Secretary
of State for Justice

Rt Hon The Lord Foster of Bath,
Chair Justice and Home Affairs Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

Ref: SUB133371

14 April 2026

Dear Lord Foster of Bath,

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO RELEASES IN ERROR

I previously wrote to you in November 2025 following incidents at HMP Chelmsford and HMP Wandsworth, to set out the immediate actions the Government was taking to protect the public and reduce the number of releases in error from prison. In that letter, I announced a national five-point plan to stabilise the system and address the underlying causes of these errors.

I am writing again to provide an update on this work and to share the Government's response to Dame Lynne Owens' Independent Review into Releases in Error. The review, which I commissioned following the mistaken release from HMP Chelmsford, has now concluded and will be laid before Parliament tomorrow, alongside my Statement to the House and the Government's response.

The Statement will set out the context in which these incidents occurred. Years of cuts to staffing, a failure to build sufficient prison places, and chronic underinvestment left the prison system under severe strain. In that context, mistakes of this nature became more likely. I have been clear that this is a complex issue and that no Justice Secretary can prevent every individual error. However, I am determined to reduce the risk of releases in error and that is why I took immediate action by announcing a national five-point plan.

Data and transparency

I can confirm that the number of releases in error under this Government is now falling. In line with my commitment to transparency, I will publish new data tomorrow, showing that from April 2025 to March 2026, there have been 179 recorded releases in error from prison - a 32% reduction on the previous year. While the number remains too high, these figures show that the actions we are taking are having an impact. Progress is being made and the numbers are falling, but it is clear much more must be done. That is why I am committing to reducing releases in error to pre-capacity crisis levels, driving errors down year-on-year, with the ambition of reducing them as close to zero as possible in the coming years.

Update on the five-point plan to tackle releases in error

My department has made substantial progress against this plan, as outlined below and as reflected in the Statement:

1. The new Justice Performance Board, which I am personally chairing, is bringing together senior leaders across the justice system to drive improvement across prisons and courts, with a clear focus on reducing releases in error.
2. Dame Lynne Owens' independent review into releases in error is now complete, and I am publishing the review and an immediate Government response tomorrow.
3. A new urgent query process has been introduced, supported by a dedicated unit and court experts, enabling prisons to escalate warrant-related queries quickly and reduce the risk of error. Since 2 December 2025, this unit has supported over 1,000 warrant-related matters.
4. I announced a £10 million investment towards delivering AI-based solutions to address the root causes of releases in error. A Digital Rapid Response Unit has been established and, following testing in selected prisons, new digital tools to support prisons are being deployed across the estate.
5. Work is underway with partners to simplify the release process and reduce opportunities for error, through the implementation of the Sentencing Act, which received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026.

Dame Lynne Owens' Independent Review

Dame Lynne Owens' review makes 33 recommendations to reduce the number of releases in error. I have carefully considered her findings and, as I will set out in my Statement, will confirm that recommendations requiring action within this Spending Review period will be accepted, with further action to be taken in several areas. I am also committed to the remaining recommendations, subject to future funding decisions.

The recommendations span across data and digital, governance systems and process improvements, policy and procedural, training and culture and are grouped around three core themes.

Supporting victims and improving transparency

The first theme focuses on improving communication with victims when a release in error occurs. My Statement will make clear that ensuring victims have timely information and appropriate support remains a government priority, underpinned by record investment of £550 million in victim and witness support services over the next three years. The Victims and Courts Bill, introduced last year, will further strengthen protections for victims and improve confidence in the routes available to receive information about an offender's release.

Digitalisation and modernisation

The second theme focuses on modernising criminal justice systems through digitalisation and the responsible use of AI to reduce error and improve reliability, supported by up to £82m investment over this Spending Review. This includes up to £20 million in 2026-27 which has been allocated to digitise sentence calculation processes, accelerate staff facing tools, and increase digital and AI capability across prisons. Alongside this, we are working closely with the Home Office to develop Justice ID, to enable staff to consistently identify and track the same individual from first contact with policing, through the courts and custody and into the community. This will be supported by up to £50 million of investment in data foundations and developing Justice ID, with initial uses to be

rolled out this year. We are also exploring how biometrics, such as fingerprints and facial scans, could further strengthen Justice ID. We will begin rolling out biometric fingerprint and facial recognition trials within the next six months, and we expect full rollout of biometrics across the prison estate within 18 months.

Simplification of processes across courts and prisons

The third theme addresses simplifying processes across courts and prisons to reduce sentence miscalculations, strengthen checks, improve information sharing, and enhance training for staff involved in release decisions. Revised Early Removal Scheme guidance has already been published, and £8 million has been allocated to establish a comprehensive manual checking regime across the Crown and magistrates' courts over the next six to nine months.

In addition to the three themes, many of Dame Lynne Owens' recommendations align with wider criminal justice system reform already underway following the reviews led by David Gauke and Sir Brian Leveson. As my Statement will set out, I am committed to delivering them as part of a coherent, phased programme of system transformation. To support this, a new Second Permanent Secretary has been appointed to provide leadership across the criminal justice system, and the Department will continue to work closely with partners.

As I have said previously, public safety is the Government's first duty, and I remain determined to bring down the number of releases in error as close to zero as possible. Our plan will put us on track to return to pre-prison capacity crises levels. The actions we have taken - and will continue to take - are comprehensive and far reaching. Through reform, improved technology and better practice, we will reduce releases in error and restore confidence in the system.

Yours sincerely,

RT HON DAVID LAMMY MP

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David', followed by a long horizontal stroke and a small loop at the end.

**DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE**