



HM Prison & Probation Service

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Meg Hillier MP

Chair
Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
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Date: 5th February 2021

Dear Meg,

**UPDATED RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE'S 15TH REPORT OF SESSION
2019-21: IMPROVING THE PRISON ESTATE**

The government welcomed the Public Accounts Committee's report on Improving the Prison Estate and we are grateful to the Committee for their continued engagement with us, as well as the time given, and expertise shared, from all who gave evidence in the preparation of the report.

Following on from our initial response to the report in November, we have provided an update below on recommendations 1, 2, 5 and 6 which details our plans to create 18,000 new prison places by 2026, improve the existing estate and our long-term plans for the estate which we will be setting out in the Summer. I appreciate that responses to recommendations 1, 2 and 6 are overdue and apologise for the delay in getting these to you.

The issues raised in the report are of great importance and work is ongoing on a number of the areas on which the Committee has made recommendations. We will continue to engage the Committee as we develop our proposals and further updates will follow on the remaining recommendations.

Yours sincerely

Dr Jo Farrar

Annex A – updates on recommendations

Response to recommendation 1

Alongside meeting the immediate need of protecting the prison population from the threat of COVID-19 and ensuring we have the space to implement our cohorting strategies, we will be setting out our long term plans for the estate in the Summer and remain ambitious to improve rehabilitative outcomes for prisoners, whilst creating a more modern and safer environment for both prisoners and staff to live and work in.

As announced at the Spending Review, we have committed more than £4 billion capital funding to deliver 18,000 additional prison places across England and Wales by the mid-2020s. These places will provide safe, decent and secure environments to support effective rehabilitation, help us work towards our aim of reducing crowding in the estate as well as delivering the places needed to continue to protect the public and meet the demand of the courts.

Our Spending Review settlement also provided £315m to improve the condition of the existing estate. This very welcome increase in capital funding will mean that we can make a start on a number of critical refurbishment projects across the prison estate in the next year, including a programme of replacements which will allow us to bring previously decommissioned places back into use in much better condition, again helping us to address the issue of crowding. We will, of course, update you on these plans later in the year.

Response to recommendation 2

We remain committed to delivering the Female Offender Strategy objectives of fewer women entering the criminal justice system and a reduction in their reoffending. Additionally, the strategy is focused on reducing the number of women in custody (especially those on short-term sentences) and achieving a greater proportion managed in the community. Where custody is the only option, women will be held in better conditions with more opportunities for rehabilitation. Our long-term ambition is to ensure the estate offers improved conditions and rehabilitation for the women living there, with an emphasis on:

- ensuring rehabilitative opportunities;
- providing living conditions that are fit for purpose - helping to improve wellbeing and reduce violence, crime and reoffending;
- ensuring women have the most appropriate security conditions with access to necessary services, where consideration is given to enhancing the use of digital technology and prisoner mental health;
- ensuring consideration is given to the different cohorts of women in custody, including older offenders and women with children;
- moving towards a more sustainable way of managing the prison population and estate;
- continuing to compile robust evidence of what works and the impact on rehabilitation of different types of custodial models.

The £315m in capital funding provided in the Spending Review for 2021-22 will be used to improve the existing estate for both men and women. This funding will be targeted on areas of greatest need and highest impact, which includes the women's estate.

We have recently announced plans to deliver an additional c.500 places in the women's prison estate. This is part of the wider programme to deliver 18,000 additional places across the prison estate.

Custody should remain the last resort for women. However, where a custodial sentence is required, investment is needed to ensure we can meet projected demand and improve conditions. The changes, which will be delivered through a mix of open and closed provision at existing women's prisons, will increase resettlement opportunities by giving greater access to open conditions. It will also provide modern, purpose-built accommodation within the closed estate which will improve the custodial experience for women who are not assessed as suitable for open conditions. The new accommodation will be developed alongside parallel investment in community provision and services.

Response to recommendation 5

We have previously responded to the Committee's recommendation on publishing a Cross-Government Reducing Reoffending Strategy agreeing that a cross-government approach is crucial to tackle reoffending and reduce crime. We have had to adapt to the impact of COVID-19 over the past year, but cross-government working during this crisis has become all the more important and we know that addressing the complex issue of reoffending is not something that the MoJ can do in isolation.

The government's priorities on reducing reoffending were set out in the Sentencing White Paper in September last year. These highlighted accommodation, employment and substance misuse as the foundations for successful rehabilitation and resettlement and so form the basis of the government's strategy. Minister Frazer wrote to you on 29th January 2021 with further details on our new investment to reduce crime and improve public safety by tackling these key drivers of reoffending. This funding shows the delivery of the strategy in action and comprises:

- £80m for DHSC to increase the number of treatment places for prison leavers and offenders diverted into community sentences.
- £50m of MoJ investment to enhance our Approved Premises, provide temporary accommodation to prison leavers at risk of homelessness, and enhance our rehabilitative approach in at least 11 prisons.
- £20m for the Prison Leavers Project that will test new and innovative ways to reduce reoffending by improving addressing the challenges people face when they are leaving prison

This is in addition to government's manifesto commitments around increasing the number of prison work coaches and development of the Prison Education Service focused on employment and skills. In addition, we have recently published a refreshed strategy on Integrated Offender Management and our wider work to increase take up of community sentences with requirements to attend drug and alcohol treatment and that we use GPS technology for the first time to crack down on acquisitive criminals.

This strategy is reinforced by the Prime Minister's Crime and Justice Task Force which was established to consider matters relating to the prevention of crime and the effectiveness of

the criminal justice system, including driving progress across government on reducing reoffending. This committee includes a wide range of departments and is chaired by the Prime Minister.

We are developing our evaluation approach and will monitor our progress using the provisional priority outcomes and metrics set out at Spending Review 2020. These include the percentage of prisoners in work six months after their release; the percentage of prisoners in settled accommodation three months after release; and the percentage of adults with a substance misuse treatment need who successfully engage in community-based structured treatment within three weeks of release from prison.

Response to recommendation 6

For the 2020 Spending Review, learning from past experiences, we have developed a more robust assessment of the department's requirements, underpinned by a strong evidence base. The most significant lesson from the 2015 Spending Review related to ensuring that the department's funding is less dependent on a small number of uncertain assumptions. We have, therefore, ensured that the funding settlements agreed in the last three years have put the department on a more sustainable basis. To that end our settlements have been agreed without significant assumptions around high levels of short-term spend reductions or unsustainable additional income.

Since 2015, more broadly, we have refreshed and developed a clear and robust strategy with a strong focus on delivery across all parts of the justice system. Learning lessons from the 2015 Spending Review and subsequent Spending Round discussions and negotiations with HM Treasury, we have built stronger and more effective relationships with other government departments that share an interest in or are partners of our justice system. We continue to build and strengthen our evidence base for investment in the system and listen to and use the arguments put forward by our stakeholders. This ensures we are in the best possible position to secure the right level of funding and that we have an engaged workforce and stakeholder groups to then deliver improvements and results for that funding

Reflecting this, in November the Chancellor announced the final SR settlement for 2020-21, which provided significant additional investment in justice. In total the department will receive £8.7bn resource funding and £1.4bn capital funding in 2021-22. This level of funding will ensure we have an effective justice system and support improvements to the prison estate.

This funding includes the largest prison building programme in over a century and an increase in maintenance funding to improve prisons and courts. Specifically, £315m capital funding will be invested to improve the condition of the existing prison estate. We are also investing more than £4bn of capital funding over the next four years to make significant progress in delivering 18,000 additional prison places across England and Wales by the mid-2020s. These additional places will ensure we have sufficient estate capacity and can provide a decent, secure and rehabilitative environment for offenders.

This additional investment in justice and further controls that the department and HM Treasury have agreed around capital funding for additional prison places (such as ring-

fencing), demonstrate both the government's commitments to achieving its justice outcomes and that lessons have been learned from the 2015 Spending Review.

The department will continue to build on both this investment and learning as it prepares for Spending Review 2021.