



Official

Sir Bob Neill MP
Chair of the Justice Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

16 September 2021

Dear Sir Bob,

URGENT NOTIFICATION – HMP/YOI CHELMSFORD

Thank you for your letter dated 3 September regarding HMP/YOI Chelmsford. I am responding to this letter as a new Minister of State in the Ministry of Justice and I appreciate this letter was originally sent to Alex Chalk MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice. I can personally assure you that the Lord Chancellor and myself are treating the matter as urgent and of serious concern. We are doing all we can to support Chelmsford and we are committed to sustained and continual improvement at the establishment.

Chelmsford was formally placed into Special Measures in May 2018 and in June 2018 an unannounced HMIP inspection raised concerns regarding safety and purposeful activity. While on Special Measures, a detailed improvement plan was developed in line with priorities identified from the inspection and overseen by senior officials within Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Chelmsford received considerable central investment including complete refurbishment of two landings, new flooring in cells and communal areas, new showers and new serveries.

In addition to this, staffing levels were increased, and the senior management team was strengthened by making three new appointments. All prison officers at the time received further local training to improve their knowledge, skills and confidence, including in the use of body worn cameras and procedural justice.

During the period 2018/19 to 2019/20, there was evidence to support the effectiveness of the Special Measures activity. Our internal performance rating system (Prison Performance Tool), showed the prison improved for 2019/20. There was also external evidence to support progress at Chelmsford, HMIP conducted an Independent Review of Progress in April 2019 which noted some positive progress since the 2018 inspection including "...reasonable progress in addressing violence, supported by additional national and regional resources" as well as "...good progress in improving the quality of care to those at risk [of self-harm] ."

In September 2019 HMPPS discontinued Special Measures and replaced it with the Prison Performance Support Programme (PPSP). PPSP was established to provide the most intensive support available to a very small number of the most challenged prisons. It was at this time that the evidence of support and improvement at Chelmsford gave senior leaders the confidence that Chelmsford could be supported effectively through a local Performance Improvement Plan rather than a place on PPSP.

PPSP activity to support Chelmsford formally began in June 2021, following new concerns about Chelmsford's performance. PPSP support initially took the format of understanding the core underlying challenges at Chelmsford principally through a Culture Review in collaboration with the Safety Team and psychologists. PPSP are currently incorporating staff and prisoner feedback from the Culture Review to develop a structured and sequenced plan of activities that addresses the root causes of performance issues.

The delivery phase of the PPSP programme began in September 2021 for Chelmsford and it is too early to assess its effectiveness. The effectiveness of this PPSP delivery will be measured through internal sources such as the Prison Performance Tool and internal audits and externally through scrutiny bodies such as HMIP.

Some of the PPSP work that has already commenced at Chelmsford includes: coaching and training to prison officers ; funding for additional staffing and supporting leadership in developing a strategic vision ; additional funding to deliver improvements to the estate; and a revised regime management plan alongside upskilling the staff to apply best practice in the future.

I am confident that we will be able to build on the recent successful improvements seen at HMP Bristol and YOI Feltham. If you have any further questions or would like to meet with me to discuss progress on urgent actions taken, please contact my private secretary (ps.lucyfrazer@justice.gov.uk) to make the necessary arrangements.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Lucy Frazer'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

RT HON LUCY FRAZER QC MP