



Ministry  
of Justice

The Right Honourable  
**Dominic Raab MP**  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Lord Chancellor & Secretary of  
State for Justice

Charlie Taylor  
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Dear Charlie,

### **URGENT NOTIFICATION – HMP & YOI CHELMSFORD**

Thank you for your letter of 26 August, following your full inspection at Chelmsford, HM Prison and Young Offenders Institution. I am responding to this letter as the new Secretary of State for Justice. I look forward to working with you in this role over the coming months.

In your letter, you set out several concerns and invoked the Urgent Notification (UN) protocol. As agreed in the protocol between HMI Prisons and the Ministry of Justice, I am providing you with a response within 28 calendar days of the invocation.

The significant concerns you raised regarding the treatment of and conditions for prisoners are unacceptable. I understand that Chelmsford has experienced acute challenges in the past, as observed during your full inspection in 2018. During that time, Chelmsford was receiving considerable central investment through the Special Measures process, improving the infrastructure, living conditions and staffing levels, amongst other crucial investments. There was evidence of some progress, including your predecessor's Independent Review of Progress in 2019 and our own performance data.

However, the pandemic put significant pressure on prisons. Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) had growing concerns about the establishment and decided to place Chelmsford onto the Prison Performance Support Programme (PPSP) in April 2021. The PPSP is designed to provide intensive and targeted support to a small cohort of struggling prisons, after a period of problem analysis and strategy planning. PPSP activities commenced in June 2021, and it was too early for the impact to be realised at the time of the inspection.

Over the last 28 days, the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS officials have accelerated improvements to the most urgent and serious issues, which I have set out below. I have also enclosed an initial action plan providing more detail on the specific actions that have been completed or are underway.

## **Negative staff culture and lack of accountability**

It is a priority that we nurture a positive staff culture that reflects professionalism and continuous learning and development, which are necessary for staff to confidently and competently maintain order and stability. A series of bespoke training for new and existing staff is underway at Chelmsford. This includes further support for new prison officers, deployment of the national Standards Coaching Team, and implementation of the Confidence and Competence Toolkit. In addition, a local Leadership Charter based on the HMPPS Leadership Code will set out key expectations of all managers and support accountability across the prison.

## **Safety and the wellbeing of prisoners**

In the first instance, the population in Chelmsford will be reduced by 55 prisoner spaces to 695, and the prison will review progress against recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman to ensure they are being implemented with diligence. Recruitment is also underway for additional Listeners, and essential training will be provided on the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) processes to improve the confidence and competence of staff dealing with vulnerable and at-risk prisoners. Chelmsford will also improve assurance of cell call bell response times.

## **Regime, decency and equality**

We will return the prison to a full regime as staffing availability improves and subject to government guidance. The delivery of purposeful work and educational activities will be enhanced, and prisoners will be encouraged to utilise these opportunities. Social visits from family and friends at weekends will be resumed. We have allocated additional funding to expedite a number of improvements to the environment, such as replacing windows and refurbishing showers. We are also taking action to introduce effective systems for the reliable provision of essential kit, including clean clothing and bedding. A Diversity & Inclusion co-ordinator has been appointed to drive equality improvements, and healthcare staff will reassess the pharmacy staffing profile, medication administration arrangements and governance.

## **Reducing reoffending and resettlement**

We are committed to improving resettlement and rehabilitation; thus, a Housing Specialist has been introduced at Chelmsford to support reducing homelessness. Additionally, HMPPS are investing over £20m to provide up to 12 weeks of basic temporary accommodation for prison leavers who would otherwise be homeless, including in the East of England.

The safety and wellbeing of all prisoners and staff is paramount and at the forefront of our work. I hope this letter gives you assurance that we are taking seriously the outcome of the inspection and that we are working resolutely to improve the situation at Chelmsford and the wider system.

Thank you for the robust scrutiny of our prisons. I look forward to receiving your full inspection report shortly.

Yours sincerely



**RT HON DOMINIC RAAB MP**