1 April 2019

HMP BIRMINGHAM

I am writing to advise that tomorrow I will confirm the future plans for HMP Birmingham following the step in initiated by HMPPS and also the Urgent Notification received by the Secretary of State from HM Chief Inspector of Prisons on 20th August 2018.

We have concluded with the full agreement of G4S that the best way forward now is for the contract to be ended and the prison brought back under public sector management.

The situation at HMP Birmingham was totally unacceptable which is why we ‘stepped in’ in August 2018 and why we continued to do so in February 2019. We were always clear that the prison would not be handed back until we were satisfied that sufficient progress had been made.

The prison has made some good progress - both we and G4S have however recognised that there is still much more to do to deliver further improvements.

Both we and G4S have recognised that there is still much more to do to deliver further improvements. It has become increasingly clear that G4S alone were not able to make the improvements that were so badly needed, and that additional ongoing support from the public sector Prison Service was required to ensure that the prison gets the stability and continuity that will be necessary for sustained progress.

This means that on 1 July 2019, HMP Birmingham will return to public sector management. We have agreed a settlement with G4S paying us £9.9m to cover the additional cost to the MoJ of its ‘step in’ action - meeting our previous public commitment - and which also includes an amount to cover essential maintenance works.

Our responsibility is to make sure that prisons are properly run for prisoners and the public. At Birmingham, we must accelerate the good work that has already commenced to stabilise the prison for the longer term. The foundation for that is making sure that we have a clean, decent and safe prison. That is the foundation from which we can do all the other things we want to do—in particular, rehabilitate people, change lives and ultimately protect the public.

It is also important for staff and prisoners to know what the future of the prison looks like and to remove uncertainty. Paul Newton, the Governor who has been running the prison during step in, will remain in
post following the transfer back into the public. We will continue to work closely with G4S to support the prison and to make the transition as smooth as possible in the meantime for both staff and prisoners.

This is the right decision for HMP Birmingham but we continue to believe that prisoners and the public benefit from a mixed economy of provision. We are going to remain in a situation where the majority of our prisons will continue to be run by the public sector, but the private sector has a role to play. The private sector has delivered real value for money and some new approaches that have been really impressive.

By and large, that experience has been positive. In fact, if you look at G4S itself, its performance at Oakwood, Parc and Altcourse has been impressive. They are good prisons. So are others such as Bronzefield, Ashfield, Forest Bank and Thame-side, run by other private sector providers.

What we need to focus on now is building on the positive work achieved to date at HMP Birmingham. It is clear that we have made progress and got some of the necessary basics on the right track to drive improvement; specifically, with the deployment of experienced HMPPS staff, managers and specialists we have significantly increased staff confidence, gained greater order and control and improved day to day regime delivery. I am confident that we are beginning to get a grip on the issues driving violence and that we will see the results of this in the coming months.

Progress on decency has also been made; two of the three large Victorian wings, which did not meet our expectations, have been taken out of use, and the third will soon be fully out of use as another, newly refurbished wing builds to full occupancy. Cleanliness has improved across the site.

They are also tackling some of the key security risks. A Dedicated Search Team has been introduced and improved, intelligence-led searching has been yielding good results.

In conclusion I strongly believe that this decision is the right one for HMP Birmingham at this time. I am pleased that G4S have also recognised this and are working with us to deliver better outcomes for prisoners and a better working environment for staff. I look forward to being able to report further good progress at HMP Birmingham in the coming months.

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RORY STEWART MP