RE: Decision to chair a short-term review into farm inspection

Thank you for your letter of 21 March setting out the reasons for agreeing to chair a short-term review into farm inspection and how you will balance that with your role as HM Chief Inspector of Probation.

Probation services are critically important and as you say in your latest annual report "probation services can make a big difference to those receiving them and to wider society". Your leadership of the Inspectorate is key to helping to improve probation services.

The Committee is grateful that you wrote to us to set out your reasoning for taking on the role. However, you sent your letter to us just over a month after you had agreement from MoJ Ministers to take on the review role and also after concerns had been raised by several people and organisations, including by David Hanson MP, a member of the Justice Committee, about you taking on this additional role.

The Committee has considered the assurances in your letter on how you will step away from other commitments (such as "doing less active work" in your role as a board member of the Association of Chief Executives) and how you have appointed individual team members to lead on the component parts of the review so that you are not doing the "spadework". Despite this, we remain concerned about the amount of time you can commit to your role at the Inspectorate. We would appreciate further information on practically how you will split your time (for example, will you spend three to four full days at HMI Probation per a week, or will you work five-part days?). The role of HM Chief Inspector of Probation was advertised as a full-time role and it appears that you will be working as Chief Inspector on a part-time basis for the majority of 2018. Our probation services continue to face challenges and without a full-time Chief Inspector, inspection of these services risks being compromised. As you know we are undertaking an inquiry...
on finding solutions to challenges facing probation and will be hearing from you on 17 April.

You state in your letter that the Inspectorate will be carrying out "a more extensive programme of work than ever". Additionally, the Inspectorate is going through a period of change, including moving to a new inspection framework and more frequent inspection of the 28 probation service providers from the next financial year. The Committee is concerned about whether such an ambitious change programme will be delivered without a full-time Chief Inspector providing clear leadership and strategic direction.

We will respond in due course to your letter of 23 March on consulting on your inspection framework and programmes.

If you wish to provide the Committee with any further information or assurances on our concerns raised in this letter it would be helpful if you could provide this to us by Wednesday 11 April.

Bob Neill MP
Chairman
Justice Committee