Dear Bob

PRISON ESTATE MODERNISATION

Following my predecessor’s letter in April I am writing to provide you with a further update on the developments regarding the modernisation of the prison estate. Like my predecessor, I am committed to keeping you and the Committee up to date on these matters.

As the Committee is aware, the Government is committed to a mixed market of custodial services. The Prison Operator Framework will increase the diversity and resilience of the custodial services market in England and Wales, by creating a pool of prison operators who can provide high quality, value for money, custodial and maintenance services and enable us to effectively and efficiently manage a pipeline of competition over the next six years.

Following the launch of the competition in November 2018, and a period of dialogue, my department received bids from six potential providers to get onto the Prison Operator Framework. The framework stage of the competition is designed to test bidders’ strategy, capability and infrastructure to deliver services in any prison. The evaluation criteria focused on key areas such as safety, decency, security and enabling that are fundamental to any prison. Bidders were also tested on their approach to maintenance, mobilisation (for new and existing prisons), staff resourcing models, recruitment and digital strategy. Bids for the framework were evaluated on a ‘pass’ or ‘fail’ basis. A fail for any question means the bidder fails the whole framework and would not be eligible to compete in call off competitions. This phase of the competition involves no financial commitment by the department.

Following rigorous evaluation, including scrutiny of financial stability, we have concluded that all six bidders have adequately demonstrated their capability to deliver services and have been accepted onto the framework; making them approved Framework Operators for the lifetime of the framework (six years). The six successful Framework Operators (G4S Care and Custody Services UK Limited, Interserve Investments Limited, Management and Training Corporation Works Limited, Mitie Care & Custody, Serco Limited, and Sodexo Limited) (three of which already run a private prison(s): G4S Care and Custody Services UK Limited; Serco Limited; and Sodexo Limited) are now eligible to bid in future mini-competitions to operate individual prisons, the first of which will be for the new Resettlement Prison at Wellingborough, which we intend to launch in July of this year.

The Committee will also be aware that HMPPS is not bidding as part of the competition; instead we have developed a Public-Sector Comparator, against which all bids for the mini-competition will be evaluated. It is right that HMPPS focus on delivering safe, decent and secure environments in existing prisons, but we have always been clear that where bids in a mini-competition do not meet sufficient quality or value for money thresholds HMPPS will act as the provider.
This is an important milestone in the transformation of the prison estate, and I am satisfied that the steps taken by my department as part of this stage of the competition will ensure a stable pool of prison providers, who will deliver safe regimes that deliver best outcomes for offenders.

As my predecessor noted in his last letter to you and the Committee, we are committed to replacing ageing prisons. In line with this we have made the decision to permanently decommission and dispose of HMP Blantyre House. After a recent review, it was decided that HMP Blantyre House will not form part of our long-term estate strategy due to its limited size (and limited potential for expansion). It is not considered a practicable or efficient option to operate as a prison. HMP Blantyre House has been closed since 2015 and staff were redeployed to other prisons in the region at the time, most notably the three prisons on the Isle of Sheppey.

Proceeds from the sale of this site will be used to help modernise the custodial estate. I hope you find this update helpful; I look forward to working with you and the Committee in the future.

Yours ever

Robert Buckland

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