



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

22 November 2016

Dear Bob

ESCAPES FROM HMP PENTONVILLE

Thank you for your recent letter accepting my invitation to meet to discuss the employment strategy. As part of your letter you asked for further information about the recent escapes from HMP Pentonville. The following information seeks to provide some detail about the incident and the immediate follow up actions, but as you will appreciate this is subject to both a police investigation and investigation by the National Offender Management Service at the present time.

On the morning of Monday 7 November, Matthew Baker and James Whitlock were discovered by staff to have escaped from a cell at HMP Pentonville. The prisoners are believed to have escaped from their cell window and effected their escape over an external wall during the early hours of the morning. The internal investigation, undertaken by a senior official, will explore the circumstances of the escape, the adequacy of the physical and procedural security at HMP Pentonville and establish any learning and further action required.

Matthew Baker was arrested on Wednesday 9 November and James Whitlock was arrested on Sunday 13 November and returned to prison custody where they await sentencing following the escape.

As an immediate response, a number of actions have been instigated at Pentonville including, but not limited to:

- a full lock down search of the prison
- deployment of additional staff to support delivery of the regime
- enhanced CCTV monitoring
- deployment of ground security dogs within the prison as well as working with The Met police to increase patrolling along the external perimeter
- a full assessment of the physical security of the prison

As you are aware public protection is our top priority and we take escapes from custody extremely seriously. We have announced a major shake-up of the prison system, with 2,500 extra prison officers and new security measures to tackle drones, phones and drugs to help make prisons places of safety and reform.

The Justice Secretary has always been clear that it will take time to address these long-standing

problems and we must grip the real challenges and risks that we face in the shorter term.

That is why we have already invested £14 million for more than 400 extra staff in ten of the most challenging prisons, formed a taskforce to manage down potential flashpoints of unrest, as well as launching a £3m intelligence hub to stay ahead of the criminal activity taking place from and within our prisons.

I sincerely hope this provides you with sufficient details with which to inform your Committee meeting on Wednesday 23 November and I look forward to speaking to you further on Prison Safety and Reform on Tuesday 29 November.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Gyimah', written in a cursive style.

SAM GYIMAH MP