

Justice Secretary outlines immediate action to improve Chelmsford prison

- £1.2 million to improve security, safety and living conditions at the local jail
- Reduction in the number of prisoners by almost 10 per cent

Justice Secretary Dominic Raab has today (24 September 2021) announced a raft of urgent measures to improve HMP Chelmsford, including a reduction in the number of prisoners and an additional £1.2 million to bolster security, safety and living conditions.

Action is being taken in response to a number of serious failings at the prison, identified during last month's inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP), which triggered an Urgent Notification (UN).

The Prison Service will cut HMP Chelmsford's population by 55 places to 695 and invest an additional £1.2 million in new windows, generators and showers as well as general maintenance, security and health and safety.

In just 4 weeks, staff have already made significant improvements to the running of HMP Chelmsford, including:

- Deploying a new team of experienced frontline staff to raise standards among new officers – providing coaching and assistance to those new to the job
- Launching regular reviews of mental health support on offer in the prison, to ensure those with mental health issues are getting the help they need
- Introducing a new housing specialist to help prisoners leaving prison into stable accommodation – vital to reducing further offending and cut crime
- Ensuring all new arrivals get access to phones within 72 hours – making sure prisoners can contact family during their first few nights when they can be at their most vulnerable

The action plan published today details how Ministers will continue to build upon these improvements and hold the prison to account over the coming weeks and months.

Further measures include mandatory drug testing for offenders every month; additional 'Listeners' – prisoners trained by the Samaritans charity who provide support to those struggling with mental health issues; and new specialist training for night staff so they can better identify and support vulnerable prisoners during their shift.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Dominic Raab said:

We're giving intensive support to Chelmsford prison to raise standards, support staff and protect vulnerable prisoners. We are providing more experienced staff, specialist training and refurbished facilities.

We have a detailed action plan to help drive down violence, rehabilitate offenders, and reduce reoffending.

The government introduced the Urgent Notification protocol in 2017 to ensure immediate steps are taken to address serious concerns identified by inspectors. The process is triggered when

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons writes to the Justice Secretary following an inspection, with Ministers having 28 days to respond and set out a detailed action plan.

Since 2018, 8 prisons have been issued with a Urgent Notification, with five sites having since been removed from the Urgent Notification process thanks to the significant and sustained improvements put in place as a result of the government's action plans.

The Justice Secretary's response and action plan can be found on GOV.UK. It also sets out how HMP Chelmsford's progress over the coming year will be regularly monitored.

Notes for editors