

Press release: 10 prisons project gathers pace

- one of a raft of measures to tackle violence and drugs with over £3 million allocated already to 10 of the most challenging prisons
- part of new approach being piloted to improve standards and security

A new x-ray body scanner has been installed at HMP Leeds as a project to turn around 10 of the most challenging jails gathers pace, Prisons Minister Rory Stewart announced today (Friday 4 January 2019).

The scanner will allow staff to search offenders on an intelligence-led basis for drugs and other contraband concealed inside their bodies. Evidence found on prisoners can be used to support disciplinary action or criminal prosecution.

The scanner will help to break the cycle of violence that is fuelled by drugs and other illegal items, meaning prisoners can start the process of rehabilitation. X-ray scanners at the other jails involved in the '10 Prisons Project' will follow in the coming months.

All 10 prisons have at least 4 metal-detecting wands in place and most of the prisons have trace detection machines that can be used to identify mail that might contain psychoactive substances.

The project was announced in August to tackle the serious problems facing 10 of the most challenging prisons in the country. This was backed up by £10 million of funding.

Other measures implemented so far include:

- Enhanced leadership and more resources. Each prison now has a number of specialist staff and teams in place, including a drugs strategy manager, additional entry searching staff, and more dog handlers.
- Changes in the prison environment to improve decency, providing clean and decent sanitation as well as refurbished cells and shared areas.
- By Christmas, the start of the roll-out of violence reduction training for staff on wings.
- Nine of the 10 prisons have received a 'drug diagnostic' visit to help them understand their drug issues and improve processes and procedures

The work in these prisons will be used as a template for the wider estate and will help to inform priority areas for future investment and development. These 10 prisons are leading the way, with successful interventions being shared widely.

Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said:

These 10 prisons are setting the way for a new approach, a new ethos and a new direction. I am pleased to see the progress being made, and I thank the governors and staff working tirelessly to improve their prisons.

With enhanced physical security, a drive to improve decency, and more training and support for staff, the prisons are showing what a difference can be made on the wings. Ultimately, this will help to prevent further reoffending and keep the public safe.

The project is part of a wider effort to restore stability to the prison estate. This year the government has announced an additional £70 million investment in safety, security and decency.

This included £16 million to improve conditions for prisoners and staff and £7 million on new security measures, such as security scanners, improved searching techniques, phone-blocking technology and a financial crime unit to target the criminal kingpins operating in prisons.

This has come against a backdrop of rising prison officer numbers, with more than 4,300 now recruited and staffing levels at their highest since 2012.

Notes to editors

- Geographical groups of prisons in Yorkshire, the north Midlands and London have been selected for the project. The prisons are: Hull, Humber, Leeds, Lindholme, Moorland, Wealstun, Nottingham, Ranby, Isis and Wormwood Scrubs.
- We have allocated £3.3million, with the whole of the initial £10 million due to be spent by the end of this financial year.
- All 10 prisons now have a Drug Strategy manager, an additional 8 staff for entry searching, 4 extra drug-detection dogs and 2 extra dog handlers.