

Press release: Justice Secretary enforces robust action to improve prison safety

- Prisons Chief Inspector can now directly alert Justice Secretary where serious failings are found in establishments
- Justice Secretary will publish his response and a plan of action within 28 days of the report being received
- The urgent notification process is part of a package aimed at improving the safety of people in prisons

A new process introduced by the Secretary of State, David Lidington, will mean that prisons that require urgent attention will have 28 days to introduce tough measures that will drive improvement.

From today (30 November 2017), and for the first-time, the Secretary of State will be directly alerted by the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMIP) if an urgent issue needs addressing to ensure that recommendations are acted upon immediately.

A team of specialists will be brought together to ensure immediate action is taken, along with a more in-depth plan to ensure we see sustained improvement for the prison in the long term.

This team, who are accountable to Ministers, will have 28 days to set out what steps the prison and department are taking to improve safety and bring the prison up to the required standard.

Secretary of State, David Lidington said:

Openness and transparency are powerful instruments of change and I believe we should be accountable so the public can see exactly what we are doing to turn prisons into safe places where offenders can change their lives.

“A team of specialists will now respond when HMIP trigger Urgent Notification to urgently drive improvements and ensure that prisons are safe, secure and providing a regular regime.

To implement these actions plans and improve safety, the recruitment of an additional 2,500 prison officers is key and we are already halfway towards reaching that target.

This process forms part of the broader work of the Secretary of State to enhance our responses to external scrutiny.

Peter Clarke, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, said:

I welcome the new 'Urgent Notification' protocol which the Secretary of State for Justice has signed and which will now play a key role in the work of HM Inspectorate of Prisons to inspect the treatment and conditions for many thousands of prisoners and other detainees held in custody.

In particular, I welcome the principle of transparency and accountability underlying this new protocol. The Secretary of State has accepted that he and his successors will be held publicly accountable for delivering an urgent, robust and effective response when HMIP assesses that treatment or conditions in a jail raise such significant concerns that urgent action is required.

Senior officials in HMPPS and MOJ will be directly involved in the work to ensure immediate action is taken, along with a more in-depth plan to ensure we see sustained improvement for the prison in the long term.

Notes to editors:

- [urgent notification](#) is a new process where the Chief Inspector of Prisons can inform the Secretary of State of any urgent and severe prison problems found on an inspection
- Secretary of State will have 28 days to publicly report on action taken to resolve issues raised by HMIP
- response at the 28 day point will focus on urgent and severe issues
- there will be a longer-term plan to support sustained improvement
- there are already taking a number of steps being taken to improve safety in the prison estate, including an investment of £100 million to boost the front line by 2,500 additional prison officers
- we are also investing to make sure our dedicated officers have the tools they need, including £2 million for body-worn cameras