

Press release: Prisons minister visits staff at HMP YOI Winchester to hear concerns from the frontline

- part of an ongoing tour of prisons to get to the heart of the daily challenges staff face
- Minister Gyimah thanks staff at Winchester for their vital work in delivering major reforms to improve safety and reduce reoffending
- follows £100 million investment in 2,500 extra officers across the estate and specific funding at HMP YOI Winchester to help give offenders the skills to find employment on release

Prisons Minister Sam Gyimah has paid tribute to the vital work of the Governor and staff at HMP YOI Winchester in part of a nationwide tour of prisons to hear concerns from staff on the frontline.

The visit comes as Ministers embark on wholesale reforms to the prison system – including an additional £100 million to bolster frontline staff by 2,500 and a major package of safety measures. Winchester has been allocated an additional £584,000 of funding to help tackle the rise in drugs, reduce violence and improve safety.

HMP YOI Winchester is also building a new industries and education workshop, which will help give prisoners on-the-job skills to prepare them for finding work on release.

Training schemes such as these provide valuable vocational work for offenders and can help to break the cycle of re-offending which costs society £15 billion a year.

Today (3 February 2017) the Prisons Minister sat down with the Governor and prison officers at Winchester to hear first-hand the challenges they face and how the reforms and increased investment is helping.

Speaking after the visit, Prisons Minister Gyimah said:

Prison officers at HMP YOI Winchester do a challenging and often dangerous job and provide support for a range of offenders.

I came to Winchester to thank the staff for their vital work in helping turn prisoners' lives around. Schemes to prepare prisoners for employment on the outside are exactly what we want to see across the estate as we embark upon the biggest prisons overhaul in a generation.

“I want to see all prisons becoming places of hard work and discipline where offenders are given the help they need to turn their lives around.

We are investing £100 million to boost frontline prison staff by 2,500 to improve safety and are already carrying out a comprehensive review of our probation reforms to improve outcomes for offenders and communities.

The tour of the prison followed a visit to see the work of probation staff at the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) and the local National Probation Service. The CRC provide a Through the Gate service to support prisoners in the run up to, and after, their release from custody.

Staff from the local CRC work with prisoners at Winchester before they are released into the community to provide a network of specialist support services. This includes providing accommodation, employment and debt advice, support in opening a bank account, as well as offering tailored training and education programmes.

Prisoners released as part of the Through the Gate service are then supervised in the community by HIOW CRC, where they are offered a range of support to help their resettlement into the community and reduce reoffending.

Kim Thornden-Edwards, chief of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Community Rehabilitation Company (HIOW CRC), said:

I am delighted that the Minister took time out of his busy schedule to meet with our staff and people on probation in order to learn more about the service we deliver.

The visit gave the minister the opportunity to see how we work intimately with HMP YOI Winchester to provide a genuinely Through the Gate service, and to also see how we work in partnership with a range of agencies in order to reduce reoffending.

We are committed to supporting people on probation to ensure their rehabilitation and are proud to get the chance to showcase our approach with the minister.

The strong partnerships between staff at HMP YOI Winchester and the local Community Rehabilitation Company represent the wholesale changes that are taking place across the prison system following on from last year's White Paper announcement. This includes giving governors more powers over education, work and health, so they can tailor support to the prisoners in their charge.

The Prison Service is also leading a nationwide recruitment drive to bring in the additional 2,500 prison officers. This week, a new scheme to recruit ex-services personnel into the prison service launched at Newbury Race Course. It will aim to attract the thousands of talented men and women who leave the Armed Forces every year with the right skills, grit and determination to make a real difference to the lives of prisoners. They will use their talent and skills to bolster the frontline and support offenders to turn their backs on

crime.

A new, 2 year graduate scheme called Unlocked has also been launched and will see participants complete a Master's degree whilst working on the frontline.

By having more staff on the ground, staff will be better supported to do the job they came into the Prison Service to do, and spend more time reforming offenders.