



House of Commons
Justice Committee

**Prison safety:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Sixth Report of
Session 2015–16**

**First Special Report of Session
2016–17**

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Justice Committee

The Justice Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Ministry of Justice and its associated public bodies (including the work of staff provided for the administrative work of courts and tribunals, but excluding consideration of individual cases and appointments, and excluding the work of the Scotland and Wales Offices and of the Advocate General for Scotland); and administration and expenditure of the Attorney General's Office, the Treasury Solicitor's Department, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office (but excluding individual cases and appointments and advice given within government by Law Officers).

Current membership

[Robert Neill MP](#) (*Conservative, Bromley and Chislehurst*) (Chair)

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The following Members were also members of the Committee during the Parliament:

[Richard Burgon MP](#) (*Labour, Leeds East*), [Sue Hayman MP](#) (*Labour, Workington*), [Andy McDonald MP](#) (*Labour, Middlesbrough*), [Christina Rees MP](#) (*Labour, Neath*), and [Nick Thomas-Symonds MP](#) (*Labour, Torfaen*).

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/justicecttee and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Nick Walker (Clerk), Jonathan Whiffing (Second Clerk), Gemma Buckland (Senior Committee Specialist), Nony Ardill (Legal Specialist), Christine Randall (Senior Committee Assistant), Anna Browning (Committee Assistant), and Liz Parratt (Committee Media Officer).

Contacts

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First Special Report

We have received the Government's Response to our Sixth Report of Session 2015-16, Prison safety, HC 625. The response came in a letter dated 8 September 2016 to the Chair of the Committee from Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice. We publish this letter as an Appendix to this Special Report.

Appendix: Government Response

I am writing to thank you for the work of the Justice Select Committee in producing its sixth report of session 2015-16, which you published on 16 May 2016.

My predecessor wrote to you on 19 May¹ and 30 June² and provided you with an early response on the steps being taken to deal with the issues you identified and to set out how the Government believes reform of the prison system will enable us to deal with the problems you highlighted in a coherent way.

I am now pleased to provide you with my Department's full response to your Committee's report. Prison safety is the Department's top priority and is fundamental to making the radical reforms I want to make to our prison system. I am under no illusions about the scale of the challenge we face or how long reform takes.

We need decisive action to improve upon the current unacceptable levels of violence, self-harm and self-inflicted deaths. In the last year, assaults have risen by 31 per cent overall, and those on staff have risen by 40 per cent. Self-inflicted deaths have risen by 28 per cent and self-harm has increased by 27 per cent. To reform our prisons and rehabilitate offenders, helping them to be constructive citizens on release, we need prisons to be safe, decent and secure. They must be disciplined and structured places, where prisoners obey the rules and engage with interventions to help them deal with their offending behaviours.

The Government has an ambitious agenda to modernise the prison estate, improve education and empower governors, so that we can tackle issues, like drugs and violence, which are key to cutting reoffending and keeping staff and prisoners safe. By creating purposeful regimes that rehabilitate offenders, prisoners will be less likely to reoffend when they are released, meaning there will be fewer victims in the future. This is a key part of the Government's commitment to deliver a justice system that works for every one of us.

We agree with the committee that it will take a variety of measures to achieve a safer prison estate, and these should be brought together into a single plan. The Government will publish a comprehensive prison safety and reform plan this autumn. In addition to the areas identified by the committee, this plan will also include the longer term reforms necessary to improve the prison system as a whole.

Recommendations

1. Prison Safety

The autumn plan will include specific steps for improving safety in prisons. It will detail the urgent steps required to improve the security in our estate and the safety of staff and prisoners. We are already taking action to improve the situation, which is providing us with a good foundation for the development of a more sustainable approach. We are:

1 [Letter dated 19 May 2016 from Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, to Robert Neill MP, Chair, Justice Committee, on the Justice Committee Report on prison safety](#)

2 [Letter dated 30 June 2016 from Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, to Robert Neill MP, Chair, Justice Committee, on prison safety](#)

- Monitoring the effectiveness of the recent investment of an additional £10 million in the Prison Service to deal with prison safety issues, to ensure we learn lessons and identify good practice. Governors of those prisons who benefited from this extra funding, had discretion about how to spend the money, and the effectiveness of these measures will inform our long term approach to these issues.
- Developing and rolling out operational improvements as identified in your report, including the increased use of body worn video cameras, enhanced staff training for interventions, a multidisciplinary approach to managing violent prisoners, and making improvements to the early days and weeks in custody. We are also working with the CPS and National Police Chiefs' Council to improve the prosecution of offences perpetrated in custody.
- Enhancing the recruitment, and training, of prison officers. We have appointed more than 3,100 new Prison Officers since January 2015, which has resulted in an overall rise in officer numbers by 300. Since January this year, new officers undertake a 10 week training course, significantly longer than the six weeks previously undertaken.
- Working with the Mobile Network Operators and other Government Departments to prevent the use of, illicit mobile phones within prisons. We are also considering secure alternatives, including options for in-cell technology, to enable legitimate family contact which would reduce the demand for illicit phones.
- Combating the use of drugs within prisons through the use of better detection for Psychoactive Substances. We have introduced criminal sanctions for those who throw packages or use drones, to take illicit items into our prison estate and we are trialling a body scanner in Wandsworth prison. We are monitoring the effectiveness of this technology before rolling out further.
- Building five new prisons by 2020 to modernise the prison estate and close the most inefficient out of date jails.

The Government's plan will build substantially upon the work above, and will also examine the evidence and the options for a sustainable, deliverable, long term approach to prison safety and reform. We will consider what additional, urgent steps might be required to improve safety in the prison system alongside what system changes are needed over the longer term to achieve the best possible outcomes from our prison system overall.

Innovation and change will be required to grip these challenges in this system. These are more likely to succeed when led from the front line and our aim is to empower prison governors to provide the outstanding leadership needed to better manage the risks to safety and security in prisons, to secure value for money and get more prisoners the help they need to become law-abiding citizens.

We will create a clear set of measures to hold prison governors to account and make sure they deliver keeping staff and prisoners' safe, improving education and cutting reoffending.

We need also to make sure that we have the right workforce in place to drive reform. We will make sure we have appropriate staffing levels and consider how they are deployed and trained.

Overall, the prison system should promote and reward the right types of behaviour, those that promote safety and regimes that have prisoners engaged in purposeful, educational activity which will help them break the cycle of reoffending.

This plan must be deliverable. It will, therefore, include a clear set of metrics to assess the effectiveness of measures to inform decisions as we roll out.

2. Reporting on progress

We assure the Committee that the Ministry will provide updates on progress against our plans on a six monthly basis. We note the requests made in your report and will write to you separately, alongside publication of the prison safety and reform plan, on the details of the content of these reports.