



Ursula Keeling

MOJ Ref: ADR95443

Service by Email only

10 May 2022

Dear Ursula,

Thank you for your letter dated 14th March. I recognise the ongoing concerns raised by the Board in relation to the use of crowded cells at Bullingdon, and indeed elsewhere. Holding two men in a cell designed for one is never desirable but continues to be necessary across the estate in order to accommodate all those committed to custody by the courts. There is no easy option to reduce crowding that has been put in place over decades by successive governments. Since 1945, the size of the prison population has increased from around 15,000 to around 80,000 today, and during this period crowding has been used extensively to accommodate deficits between the number of new places built and sustained population growth. However, recent population falls have allowed us to reduce crowding levels, and annually published figures show that crowding reduced from 22.5% to 20.2% between 2018/19 and 2020/21, equivalent to c.4,000 fewer prisoners held in crowded conditions.

The latest prison population projections were published in November 2021. The prison population in England and Wales is projected to increase to 98,500 by March 2026. This is largely a result of the recruitment of an extra 23,400 police officers, which is likely to increase charge volumes and therefore increase the future prison population. Latest projections also incorporate the estimated impact of policies in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, including provisions for changing the automatic release point for violent and sexual offenders sentenced to a standard determinate sentence of 4-7 years, as well as impacts of the Statutory Instrument to increase custodial sentences for serious offenders with a custodial sentence of 7 years or more.

In response, the Government is investing £3.8 billion over the next three years to deliver 20,000 new, uncrowded prison places, including a planned 247 place increase of uncrowded places at HMP/YOI Bullingdon. There may be options in future to reduce crowding levels in the estate (and at HMP/YOI Bullingdon), for example if population growth is slower than projected and there is sufficient headroom in the estate, it will enable targeted reductions of the least suitable prison places (including crowded places), but it is not possible to commit to this based on the latest projected population. Furthermore, it is also difficult to predict how these national trends will play out at a local level and the proportion of prisoners held in crowded accommodation at HMP/YOI Bullingdon will ultimately depend on regional population levels and the demand from surrounding courts.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'V' and a stylized 'A'.

VICTORIA ATKINS MP