

14 March 2022

Dear Minister of State

We note your letter, dated 27 January 2022, in which you respond to our report of IMB monitoring at HMP Bullingdon in the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. Our Board has concluded that it needs to reply because your comments about the prison population may reflect or encourage a misunderstanding about overcrowding in the prison.

We have no reason to question your observation that overcrowding in Bullingdon during our reporting year was not unique to this establishment. However, that fails to address our question of whether it is humane to maintain a system which requires large numbers of people to be housed in this way, with attendant consequences for the well-being of prisoners and for the capacity of the system to offer rehabilitation to those who are imprisoned.

Your response confirms that the new building at Bullingdon will accommodate a further 247 prisoners, and that these new cells are intended to meet projected demand that is forecasted to rise significantly, rather than to address the longstanding problem of overcrowding. The Board continues to question whether it is fair or humane for prisoners to have to share cells which were designed for single occupancy, especially since prisoners eat meals and use the toilet in their cells.

Building new capacity in the prison estate offers the Government and HMPPS the opportunity to address the problem of chronic overcrowding and its negative consequences. We urge you to take the opportunity to address this issue.

Yours sincerely

Ursula Keeling
Chair