



HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS

3rd floor
10 South Colonnade
Canary Wharf
London E14 4PU

Tel: 020 3334 0353

E-mail: Amarpreet.kaur@hmiprisons.gov.uk

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
CHARLIE TAYLOR

Date: 9 October 2024

The Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

Dear Secretary of State,

Urgent Notification: HMP Manchester

In accordance with the Protocol between HM Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Ministry of Justice dated October 2019, I am writing to you to invoke the Urgent Notification process following our unannounced inspection of HMP Manchester that took place between 17th September and 3rd October 2024. The Protocol sets out that this letter will be placed in the public domain, and that the Secretary of State commits to respond publicly within 28 days.

At this inspection we found a concerning decline in outcomes in three of our four healthy prison tests and leaders had made little progress in addressing our previous concerns. Organised criminal activity, serious violence, widespread drug use and staff who lacked confidence and capability had led to an unstable environment. Outcomes in safety and respect had collapsed and the prison was not fulfilling its core function as a training prison, with very poor delivery of education, training and work. Only one of the 17 concerns we raised at our 2021 inspection under our tests of safety, respect and purposeful activity had been addressed in full.

My reasons for this Urgent Notification are:

- The number of weapons and other illicit items found in recent months was amongst the highest of all prisons holding adult men and the proportion of prisoners testing positive for drug use was very high at 39% over the last 12 months. Despite this, there were many examples of poor physical security, including, for example, a failing CCTV system. It was taking far too long for HMPPS to install more secure cell windows (which were themselves already being breached), or to replace damaged netting over the exercise yards that might deter the frequent arrival of drones delivering illicit packages.

- In our survey, more than half of the prisoners said they had felt unsafe at some point while the prison's own data indicated that it was amongst the most violent of all adult male prisons. The rate of serious assaults was the highest of all prisons holding adult men and it was continuing to increase. Violence against staff, including serious assaults, was also higher than the average for similar prisons. The formal adjudication system was in disarray.
- Since the last inspection, there had been six self-inflicted deaths and a further three deaths with suspected links to drug abuse. There had been a steep rise in the rate of self-harm and was now amongst the highest of all prisons holding adult men. The triggers for self-harm included boredom, drug use, debt and frustration about basic needs not being dealt with by staff. There was too little help given to those in crisis and only 26% of prisoners who said they had been supported through the ACCT process felt cared for.
- In our survey, hardly any prisoners (3%) thought the culture at the prison encouraged them to behave well. We witnessed a lack of order and control on some wings, with officers failing to challenge very poor, antisocial, or even criminal behaviour. Many officers were new to their role and struggled to manage prisoners correctly while also demonstrating appropriate care and compassion. Some very aggressive attitudes by prisoners were not dealt with robustly and there was little to reward those who tried to behave well.
- Outdoor areas around the prison were often heavily littered and many of the wings were filthy. Leaders at every level had allowed poor standards of cleanliness to endure, including in the gate lodge, many of the staff rooms and some showers on the wings. Chronic rodent infestation, including rats, persisted - particularly in and around the segregation unit - which was made worse by the amount of food thrown out of windows. Many cell windows were smashed, and prisoners were ripping up foam from mattresses and pillows to push into window frames to stop the cold from getting in.
- Time out of cell was poor and our survey results were significantly more negative than similar prisons. About a third of officers were routinely unavailable for operational duties, leading to the implementation of a restricted daily regime which left many men locked in their cells for extended periods of time. Further curtailments were common, for example when more staff were needed to escort remanded men to court and back. During our checks we found 38% of prisoners locked in their cell during the working day.
- The prison was not achieving its role as a training prison. In our checks, only 19% of prisoners had left their wing to attend purposeful activity. There were significant weaknesses in the provision of education, training and work. Attendance was low and too many places remained unfilled.

Despite these findings, there were many staff members and leaders who worked with huge dedication in what were often very difficult circumstances.

Continued support and investment by HMPPS will be necessary if Manchester is to confront the organised gang activities and reduce the supply of drugs and other illicit items which were so clearly undermining every aspect of prison life, particularly safety.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charlie Taylor', written in a cursive style.

Charlie Taylor