



HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS
3rd floor
10 South Colonnade
Canary Wharf
London E14 4PU

Tel: 020 3334 0353
E-mail: preeti.kaur@hmiprisons.gov.uk

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
CHARLIE TAYLOR

Date: 17 March 2026

Deputy Prime Minister
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

Dear Deputy Prime Minister,

Urgent Notification: HMP Woodhill

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 Woodhill that took place between 2nd and 12th March 2026. Our 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.

This is the sixth time we have undertaken a full inspection of Woodhill since 2014 and, as the table below shows, there is a worrying pattern of outcomes assessed as either poor or not sufficiently good. Of particular concern are the continued poor outcomes in safety and purposeful activity observed since 2018, and the deterioration in outcomes in our preparation for release test evidenced at this inspection.

This is the second UN for Woodhill which, despite the substantial support it has received, has not only failed to improve but worsened since our 2023 inspection.

Healthy prison assessments since 2014				
	Safety	Respect	Purposeful activity	RRP
2026	1	2	1	1
2023	1	2	1	2
2021	1	2	1	2
2018	1	3	1	3
2015	2	3	3	3
2014	2	3	1	2

Healthy prison assessment scores:

17/03/26-

- 1 - outcomes for prisoners are poor
- 2 - outcomes for prisoners are not sufficiently good
- 3 - outcomes for prisoners are reasonably good
- 4 - outcomes for prisoners are good

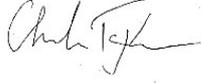
I have issued this second Urgent Notification for the following reasons:

- The prison was not safe. Rates of violence were very high and had increased since our last inspection. At the time of this inspection, only Swaleside (also subject to a UN) had a higher rate of violence among similar prisons.
- The rate of serious assaults on staff was the highest in the long-term high secure estate (LTHSE), while around a third of all violent incidents involved the use of weapons. Unsurprisingly, prisoner perceptions about their safety had not improved since 2023, with 61% saying they had felt unsafe at some point and 39% saying they currently felt unsafe.
- Drugs were far too easily available. Three deaths in the last two years had been classified as drug related. In random drug tests, the positive rate over the past year was among the highest of all adult male prisons.
- Rates of self-harm remained among the highest in the adult male estate.
- Many staff were trying their best in difficult circumstances, but we observed numerous officers who lacked the competence and confidence to set standards, enforce rules or engage with prisoners constructively.
- The prison was dirty and in need of refurbishment, including the long-delayed refurbishment of showers.
- Woodhill was fundamentally failing in its core function as a training prison. Ofsted judged education to be inadequate, and there was hardly any provision at all in January. Classes were routinely cancelled due to a lack of officers to supervise prisoners, and too many men were locked in their cells during the working day with nothing to do.
- Despite most prisoners presenting a high risk of harm to others, offender management, interventions and work to reduce risk were inadequate.
- Although Woodhill is not a designated resettlement prison, the number of men being released from the jail had increased significantly. However, these men received only limited support. Planning for the release of dangerous men was inadequate and risked endangering the public.
- Delays in taking patients to A&E created significant risk and acutely mentally unwell men waited on average 191 days to be transferred to a secure hospital. This was one of the longest delays we have seen.

A new, experienced governor had been appointed to the prison six months ago. He had a clear understanding of what needed to be done and his immediate priority since arriving had rightly been to try to stabilise the prison and bring a measure of predictability to daily routines. However, the problems at Woodhill are serious and have so far proved to be intractable, even with the extra support the earlier UN precipitated. I am in no doubt that the challenges the governor and his staff face will require sustained, significant support from the prison service if they are to succeed at this troubled jail.

This is the third Urgent Notification I have issued for a LTHSE prison within the past 18 months, raising serious concerns about the performance of those jails which hold some of the most dangerous men in the country.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charlie Taylor', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Charlie Taylor