



John Thornhill OBE

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1 February 2023

By email: john.thornhill@layobservers.co.uk

Dear John,

LAY OBSERVERS' NATIONAL ANNUAL REPORT 2021 - 2022

Thank you for your national annual report published today. I value the independent scrutiny of the Lay Observers and its role in monitoring the treatment and conditions of Detained Persons (DP) in custody and during transport. I am thankful to you and your members for your continued dedication.

I am pleased to note your positive findings of the overall care offered by escort and custody officers whilst detainees are in their charge. The recognition of how officers manage the needs of the detainees well, treating them with respect and decency and very often go the extra mile to manage their welfare positively in sometimes very difficult circumstances, is greatly welcomed.

However, your report also raises several concerns regarding the safety and welfare of DPs, which I take seriously. I have outlined the actions we are taking to addressing your concerns.

The safety of all staff and detainees is my top priority, and we are ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to deliver a safe, decent, and secure environment for those in custody with welfare being a central focus. For example, we have rolled out the Book a Secure Move (BaSM) platform, enabling a fully digitalised prison escort records (PERs). The last year has improved the functionality and accessibility for all stakeholders. Whilst the system has automated many elements of PER completion, it is recognised that further work is required to ensure all stakeholders provide up to date and accurate information to manage risk.

Prisoner escorts and custody services (PECS) work closely and collaboratively with Youth Custody Service (YCS) to ensure a multi-agency approach to managing complex moves and supervision for the most vulnerable children in our care. Providing a quality service for the Children and Young People (CYPs) in our care remains a priority. Whilst it is acknowledged that staffing, recruitment, and retention has been challenging, PECs continue to ensure that that most at risk are prioritised. An Authority specification was developed to expand and improve the enhanced care provision; however, it was never intended to provide enhanced care in all cases. Moreover, the listing and prioritisation of court appearances is a judicial responsibility and function. The judiciary try to prioritise custody cases, particularly involving children, and will always seek to give priority to vulnerable defendants provided that they are made aware of both the fact of vulnerability and the readiness of the case.

I recognise that there is more to be done to ensure respect, decency and welfare is at the centre of our service delivery as demonstrated by our investment of an additional £20m this financial year. This funding has allowed us to target deep cleans across the estate, including court cells, corridors, kitchens, office areas and vehicle docks. We will continue to raise our standards and challenge any inconsistencies to the highest degree, using your recommendations as a guide for best practice.

I once again thank you and your members for your continued scrutiny of our court custody suites and during transportation.

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Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation