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**HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
CHARLIE TAYLOR**

Date: 26th July 2023

The Rt Hon Alex Chalk KC MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

Dear Secretary of State,

Urgent Notification: HMP Bristol

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 as result of our unannounced inspection of HMP Bristol between 10th and 20th July. 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.

What is most concerning is that after our last inspection in 2019, we also issued an Urgent Notification in which we highlighted many similar failings to those observed during this inspection.

This is the fifth time we have inspected Bristol since 2013 and as the table below shows, it continues to be a prison with apparently chronic and intractable problems. This is most starkly shown in our three most recent inspections in which the jail attracted our lowest healthy prison test scores for both safety and purposeful activity.

Healthy prison assessments since 2013				
	Safety	Respect	Purposeful activity	RRP
2023	1	2	1	2
2019	1	2	1	2
2017	1	2	1	2
2014	2	2	2	2
2013	2	1	1	3

I have issued an Urgent Notification for the following reasons:

- Bristol remained one of the most unsafe prisons in the country. The levels of recorded violence including serious assaults on both staff and prisoners were higher than most other adult prisons.
- There had been 8 self-inflicted deaths since our last inspection and another suicide immediately after the inspection. This means that 7 prisoners have taken their lives in the last 10 months. One man had also recently been charged with murdering his cellmate.
- In our survey, 46% of prisoners said it was easy to get drugs in the prison, and it was clear to see the physical effects of long-term drug misuse in the population.
- The strategies employed to reduce these high levels of violence, self-harm and drug misuse had not been effective. Leaders had failed to set high enough standards of behaviour, sanctions were ineffective, and prisoners were not being motivated to behave. Low-level poor behaviour often went unchallenged.
- The prison was overcrowded, with almost half the prisoners living in double cells designed for one man. A significant minority were in single cells with no internal sanitation. Despite this, the capacity of the prison had been increased on several occasions since the last inspection.
- The majority of prisoners were locked up for almost 22 hours a day. The proportion of men allocated to education, skills and work was too low and attendance was poor.
- The health provision was not sufficient to meet the needs of prisoners many of whom were struggling with mental health problems. There were long delays in transferring the most unwell prisoners to secure hospitals and some of these acutely unwell men were being managed in segregated conditions.
- There was no key work, and busy officers struggled to forge good relationships with prisoners to motivate them to make progress. Emergency cell bells were often left unanswered, a significant risk in a prison with so many self-inflicted deaths.
- Leaders had neglected work to reduce reoffending or planning for future release. Work to support family ties had also deteriorated since the last inspection, and a quarter of prisoners left homeless on the day of release.
- Many of the senior team were new to post which continued a pattern of instability in key roles. Leaders at all levels had consistently overestimated performance and did not have a firm grip of the many challenges facing the prison.

Despite these findings there were many excellent, dedicated staff in the prison who were doing their best to support the men in their care.

It will take long-term concerted effort from leaders at the jail and from the prison service to make Bristol into a safe and decent prison.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charlie Taylor', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Charlie Taylor