

Prison Governors Association (PGA)

Press Release on HMP Bedford Urgent Notification

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) decision to apply the Urgent Notification process on HMP Bedford is not surprising but it is disappointing.

In 2009 HMP Bedford scored reasonably well against the then four healthy prison criteria. The next full inspection was in 2014, when the far reaching Government austerity were being implemented. It should be no surprise that HMIP saw deterioration in the prison although it remained fundamentally safe. By 2016 HMIP noted further deterioration along with many other challenging Victorian city centre prisons. At this stage, the unprecedented and savage cuts to staffing had been implemented and the prison was on the now familiar downward spiral. In November 2016 the prison suffered a significant riot and similar to HMP Birmingham, the ability to bring a prison back from such an event when staffing is critical and desperately needed resource is not available is an impossible expectation of a Governor and their team. A Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) was initiated in the prison, but without substantial investment the PIP was doomed to failure from the beginning.

The current Governor has been in post for 15 months. She has a high proportion of staff in the first 12 months of their employment without the confidence or the skills to deal with such a challenging population. Those staff with experience are tired and jaded from working in such a hostile environment. Like many prisons, she has a facilities management contact that fails to maintain the environment to an acceptable standard. She has to work with centralised contracts that are not fit for purpose. Like many Governors before and no doubt after, she is trying to improve a failing prison, care for some of the most vulnerable people in society with her hands tied behind her back. It is once again a classic example of the Government deciding to run prisons on the "cheap" and the burden of this sitting squarely on the shoulders of our Members.