

# Prison Governors Association

Representing: The Prison Governors of the United Kingdom since 1987



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## PRESS RELEASE

**9 May 2024**

### **PRISON GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION – URGENT NOTIFICATION AT HMP WANDSWORTH**

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The decision by Charlie Taylor, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons to issue an Urgent Notification (UN) at HMP Wandsworth will be of no surprise to the Government, Ministry of Justice or to the Senior Leadership of His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS).

The Prison Governors' Association (PGA) has been highlighting the challenges facing our members in Wandsworth and other prisons for years. We are in a position now, where the levers needed to relieve the stress facing many prisons are not available. Although the chronic shortage of staff across the estate has reduced it remains stubbornly high in some prisons. HMP Wandsworth was built in 1851. It has cells designed to hold 964 prisoners. At the time of the inspection, it held around 1500.

The Governor and her team are in an almost impossible situation, trying to maintain security, order and control whilst helping prisoners to reduce the chances of reoffending on release in a prison holding more than 500 more men than it was designed to hold in Victorian times in buildings that haven't been properly maintained by the Ministry of Justice for the last 15 years. The Governor had decided to leave HMPPS early in the 2024 and resigned during the inspection. This is undoubtedly due in part to the personal toll that running a prison like Wandsworth in current times takes on those who do so.

The biggest lever for reducing a prison's population is no longer available as it was when the UN process was introduced several years ago. Then, following a UN, prisons reduced their population by hundreds, allowing a process of improvement to take place. The prison population is around 88,000 in an estate designed to hold less than 80,000, and it is projected to continue to grow. Government policy of locking up more people for longer, making it more difficult to release them, has paralysed a system to the point it is unable to make a difference for prisons which face the gravest of challenges. It is directly impacting on the safety of prisoners, staff and the public. The impact on the health and wellbeing of prison leaders and their staff working in such an environment is significant. It is grossly unfair that our members must shoulder the burden of a crisis which is not

of their making. Neither is it of the making of the Senior Leadership of HMPPS, who still have the confidence of the PGA. It is the Government that needs to act, and act now.

Building more prisons whilst failing to invest in the existing prison estate simply to allow more and more people to be sent to prison is a mistake, it does not effectively protect the public. Ministers have been warned of the consequences at Wandsworth and across the wider prison estate. On sending their report to the Minister in September 2023 the Chair of the Independent Monitoring Board at Wandsworth, Tim Aikens, said:

“Recent events at Wandsworth have demonstrated the shortcomings of the prison system that the IMB has been highlighting repeatedly for many years. Prisoners are being failed and most have a severely reduced chance of rehabilitation upon release. We are told there is significant investment in the prison system, but we see little evidence of this in Wandsworth.”

The PGA call on the Government and Opposition to have the courage to move away from being simply “tough on crime” to putting resources into public services, such as mental health and drug treatment, to reduce the burden on our prisons and really being “tough on the causes of crime.” This simply cannot go on.

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Note for editors:

The Prison Governors Association was founded in October 1987 to represent the higher operational managers in the Prison Service in England and Wales. The PGA was placed on the register of Trade Unions on 6 November 1987 (No. 639T). On 28 July 1988 the Certification Officer under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974 issued the Prison Governors Association with a Certificate of Independence. The status of the Prison Governors Association is that of an independent registered Trade Union.

For more information contact the PGA at [pga@justice.gov.uk](mailto:pga@justice.gov.uk) or telephone James Bryant, PGA Office Manager, on 07846 021597 who can take requests for interviews.

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