

Prison Governors Association

Representing: The Prison Governors of the United Kingdom since 1987



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PRISON GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION (PGA) PRESS RELEASE

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HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS (HMIP) REPORT ON HMP WANDSWORTH

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The Prison Governors' Association (PGA) is not surprised by the overall findings of the HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) report on HMP Wandsworth. The report describes a prison which is performing in a way no one would wish to see, and we are saddened and upset that our members, and those they lead, must work in these shocking conditions; the level of overcrowding is unacceptable and must be reduced at the prison if there is any chance to deliver sustained and meaningful improvements in the regime and the built environment. It is not acceptable that prisoners live in such overcrowded and squalid conditions.

Our members are key to making prisons work. Along with their teams, they are tasked to look after people society no longer wants, or trusts, to live freely amongst us. It will be prison staff who will eventually be charged with looking after the people we have seen displaying the most revolting behaviour over the last week, and they will do so striving to meet the expectations HMIP assesses prisons against.

The well-rehearsed impact of austerity and the devastation this continues to cause makes the work of those in some of our prisons a near impossible task. The expectations set by HMIP are challenging, and rightly so. Even in the small number of prisons which are not overcrowded nor understaffed these expectations are not easy to achieve. The conditions at Wandsworth are, by far, some of the most challenging to be found across the prison system; we have confidence that the majority of those who work there are doing their best, but we genuinely believe that too much is being asked of them.

We believe what is desperately needed at Wandsworth is an immediate and substantial reduction in its operating capacity to at the very least its uncrowded level. Substantial investment is required to fully refurbish the prison, bringing the built environment to the same standards found in modern day prisons. The reduction in capacity has been proven to be the only option which works in bringing

about sustainable improvements in other equally as challenged prisons. For this to happen, and in the current climate, the level of investment and reduction in capacity would likely require sign off by the Prime Minister.

The level of reduction required is unlikely to happen, due to the failure of the previous Government to properly plan and take heed of warnings given to them; space is running out. As we expect to see a surge in the demand on prison spaces increase over the coming weeks, prisons like Wandsworth, up and down the country, will be expected to continue to overcrowd to unacceptable levels. We welcome the news that investment is going into Wandsworth, but this will not fundamentally change the fact that it will remain an overcrowded Victorian prison.

There is not one event that can be blamed for the decline at Wandsworth, which has led to the appalling conditions being endured by prisoners and staff today; it remains our firm belief that what we are seeing now is the direct consequence of austerity, a lack of grip on sentencing policy, and prisons becoming too political. Our previous Government ran prisons into the ground; the previous Prime Minister avoided making the decision to introduce SDS40 against the advice of officials and Ministers.

Our members retain our full support and confidence in the work they do; what is required now is decisive action by Government to ensure prisons are sufficiently resourced to deliver safe, decent regimes.

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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 or telephone James Bryant, PGA Office Manager, on 07846 021597 who can take requests for interviews.

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