



Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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Dear Therese,

HM PRISON HOLLESLEY BAY

Thank you for our helpful meeting on 30 October with representatives of Hollesley Parish Council to discuss concerns about plans to hold category D men convicted of sexual offences at HM Prison Hollesley Bay.

At the meeting some understandable concerns were raised and I hope I gave reassurance to you and the Parish Council that these concerns will be addressed. As I explained, public protection is our top priority and all prisoners go through rigorous risk assessment processes before being transferred to open conditions. This regular assessment means that prisoners are not allocated to open prisons if they pose a threat to public safety.

As I have previously said, there is no intention to proceed with this population change without full consideration of any concerns raised. We will continue implementation planning and we will only proceed with introducing the new offender group when we are satisfied that this can be delivered safely without putting the public at risk. As part of our commitment to transparency and openness, the Governor of Hollesley Bay will continue to meet with local stakeholders to reinforce the relationship between the prison and the local community.

I have addressed the further questions tabled by the Parish Council during our meeting in the accompanying annex.

Again, I thank you for the meeting on 30 October and your continued interest in this project.

RORY STEWART MP

HMP HOLLESLEY BAY: MEETING ON 30TH OCTOBER WITH PRISONS MINISTER

Has the decision been finalised to admit Sex offenders to Hollesley Bay for the first time, or is it still under consultation?

The decision to hold some men convicted of sexual offences (MCOSOs) was announced in July and we are working towards implementation of this group here.

There is no intention to proceed with this population change without full consideration of any concerns raised. We expect that it will take several months to plan implementation, and we will only proceed with introducing the new offender group when we are satisfied that this can be delivered safely without putting the public at risk.

Why was Hollesley Bay chosen compared with other open prisons? Have other prisons been considered and how were they assessed?

The MCOSO population is a growing one and more provision is required nationally to accommodate low risk prisoners. We already have large sites at HMP North Sea Camp in Lincolnshire and HMP Leyhill in Gloucestershire, plus a small site, HMP Prescoed, in Wales, but we still require a better geographic spread. Hollesley Bay has an excellent record of risk management and is ideally located to hold low risk prisoners from the East of England and the South. This will assist offenders with rehabilitation and allow them to reintegrate into their home communities.

All other open prisons were considered for holding sex offenders and others may take on this role in due course.

This is a rural area with a primary school and pre-school within half a mile and an estate of houses of families with children just beyond the prison boundary. There are elderly residents too and many on their own. The rest of the village is less than a mile away. A public road, a designated cycle route and numerous public footpaths cross the estate. What risks were considered as inmates walk along these routes to and from work within the estate?

Prisoners have their security category reviewed at regular intervals. Factors considered during the categorisation process include length of sentence, type of offence and any offending history. Only those considered to be no threat to public safety make it to open conditions.

Men who will be coming to this prison will be approaching the end of their sentence or serving a shorter sentence in the first place. The men will have been helped to change their lives while in prison. Any temporary release will only be allowed where an individual risk assessment shows it is safe to allow them to leave the prison to access work, education or other essential services that can prepare them for release.

All sex offences are serious offences but not all MCOSOs have an interest in school children or have paedophilia tendencies. Many sex offenders committed their offences a long time ago and many of the people who have committed child sex offences did so by abusing a position of trust, often against a family member. No opportunities will exist for offenders to form relationships with school children.

All prisoners at Hollesley Bay will be carefully risk assessed before being accepted into the prison. Many of these decisions will be on a Parole Board recommendation and anyone not complying with the strict regime will be returned to a closed prison immediately. A further rigorous risk assessment is carried out before allowing prisoners to work in the community.

If Sex Offenders are admitted will it be 60% rising to 100% as has been suggested?

There has never been any intention to run an open establishment holding MCOSOs only. The prison will hold a mixture of prisoners with a range of offences, including men convicted of sexual offences. They will all have one thing in common and that is that they will be assessed as not posing a threat to the community..

Under current plans there will be no change to the overall size of the prison population. The ratio of MCOSO to non MCOSO will follow our successful model at HMP Leyhill and HMP North Sea Camp which is around a 60/40 split.

If so, when will it happen?

Once local implementation planning has been completed, I expect these changes will take place by the end of the financial year.

What training has been given to Staff to manage these prisoners?

All staff at Hollesley Bay will be given awareness training at a local level from regional/national psychologists who are involved in the delivery of offender behaviour programmes for MCOSOs. Some staff may have already worked with this group at some stage in their careers at other prisons. A number of learning exchanges have been set up between staff at Hollesley Bay and HMPs Leyhill and North Sea Camp in preparation for the new cohort.

How will prisoners' movements be controlled and monitored?

Any temporary release will only be allowed where an individual risk assessment shows it is safe to allow them to leave the prison to access work, education or other essential services that can prepare them for release. Appropriate conditions can be attached to any release and include provisions for exclusion zones, or limiting places of work. All releases are strictly controlled and approved by senior prison staff, police and the National Probation Service (NPS). Contingency plans exist to deal with the rare occasions when men fail to comply with the strict rules.

Will there be 'no go' areas and more police patrols?

Police patrols and their frequency are a question for the local constabulary.

What job prospects will prisoners have in a rural community with limited opportunities on leaving prison? In Warrington, where a similar proposal was overturned there is a large town nearby with a choice of jobs. Few jobs are available in the Suffolk Coastal area.

Most, if not all, MCOSOs have strict licence conditions to adhere to on release and are subject to monitoring from the NPS for the remainder of their sentence until the term fully expires. Historically, most MCOSOs are of an age that either they are retired or nearing retirement age, however, all their activities whether it be employment or otherwise are determined by the NPS on a case by case basis.

What will happen if something goes wrong?

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has sound contingency plans for all types of eventualities and these can be called upon on a case by case basis as/when needed. HMPPS has an exemplary record in managing risk and all offenders are subject to rigorous risk assessments before they are considered for progression to an open prison and they are subject to equally rigorous assessment before being considered for any type of temporary release as part of their re-integration/resettlement plan back into society.

Most absconders are quickly returned to custody and allocated to a closed prison where they face either a criminal prosecution or internal disciplinary procedures in front of a visiting judge. The individual can receive either an additional sentence, or have days added to their current term.

In 2015, we established a national protocol with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to refer, investigate and prosecute offences committed within prison, when it is determined that the adjudication system is insufficient and a criminal prosecution is appropriate, this includes absconds.

Absconders can face up to a two years' custodial sentence on conviction. Any prisoner who has absconded from prison cannot be returned to open conditions during that sentence. For any subsequent prison sentence, abscond history would be taken into account when assessing categorisation risks.

Hollesley and Boyton Parish Councils request that you keep us informed about decision making and plans so that the schools and communities living nearby can be informed, and reassured. We have written to Gary Lowe of Boyton Parish Council and arrangements are being made for a meeting with the Governor, Jeff Orr, in the near future. Governor Orr will also continue to meet with Hollesley Parish Council while undertaking implementation planning.