



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

By Email Only

The Right Honourable
Dominic Raab MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Lord Chancellor & Secretary of
State for Justice

MoJ ref: ADR94683

14 March 2022

Dear Thérèse,

MEN CONVICTED OF SEXUAL OFFENCES IN OPEN PRISONS

Thank you for your letter dated 16th February 2022 relating to the abscond of Mr Paul Robson, an indeterminate sentenced prisoner serving a discretionary life sentence for attempted rape, imposed in 2000, with a tariff of 9 years. Mr Robson absconded from HMP North Sea Camp on 13th February 2022 and was recaptured by police officers on the 17th of February in Skegness.

Since being taken back into custody, Mr Robson has been produced at Magistrates' Court for the offences of absconding from prison and theft of a bicycle taken from the prison. There are no indications that he committed other offences during his time unlawfully at large. HMPPS does not tolerate those who breach trust by absconding lawful custody and will seek the appropriate punishment through the Courts as part of our strategy to deter prisoners from absconding. Mr Robson has now been returned to closed conditions and is ineligible for a return to open conditions for a minimum of two years.

I would like to assure you that the decision-making process to assess all indeterminate sentence prisoners' suitability for progression to open conditions is rigorous, with their suitability being considered at multiple levels. Before recommending that a prisoner can be safely transferred to open conditions, the Parole Board will undertake a full and thorough risk assessment. As part of the risk assessment, the Parole Board will consider a number of detailed reports prepared by probation and prison staff, and those who work with the offender, to address their offending behaviour.

The Secretary of State, or officials on behalf of the Secretary of State, then decide whether to reject or accept the Parole Board's recommendation for the prisoner's progression to open conditions.

Since coming into office, I have taken the decision to require that there will now be greater scrutiny of Parole Board recommendations on open prison moves and I will oversee the decisions in the most high-risk cases personally. The transfer of Mr Robson was approved prior to this change of policy. However, even once he becomes eligible again for a move to open conditions, he will be in the unenviable position, having previously absconded, of trying to satisfy a future Parole Board and the Secretary of State that he has addressed his risk sufficiently and can be trusted to warrant any further progression.

Open prisons provide an essential aspect of delivering resettlement needs for many prisoners, and Hollesley Bay is an example of an open prison delivering high levels of support and pre-release preparation for men who have served significant periods in custody or complex needs. This is vital to the protection of the public and the prevention of re-offending. Open prisons play a vital role in helping

prisoners build personal and professional confidence, re-establish family ties and they provide vital work experience through Release on Temporary Licence [ROTL], all which aids desistance and ensures public safety post release.

Where prisoners in open establishments demonstrate behaviours or attitudes that may escalate the risk they pose, they are returned to closed conditions.

When individuals abscond, they do so unlawfully and avoid structured professional risk management support and supervision and it is this that generally leads to an escalation in the risk of potential harm. The police rightly warn members of the public accordingly and by doing so gain the collective support of the community at large to make a swift arrest as they did in this case.

HMPPS has placed significant emphasis on minimising the potential for absconds. In 2003-4 there were 1301 absconds and this has reduced significantly to 101 recorded in the last year. Additionally, all open prisons now have local Abscond Reduction Strategies in place to ensure that the risk of abscond is minimised and to share good practice around the estate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dominic Raab', with a stylized flourish at the end.

RT HON DOMINIC RAAB MP