

Prisons Handbook SoS foreword

The Prisons Handbook is a great point of reference for anyone who wants to learn about the prison system. Governors and their staff, prisoners and their families or representatives, and civil servants alike have come to view it as a reliable source of information.

It is a great privilege to have been appointed as Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice. A key priority for me is to progress the work of improving our prisons to ensure they serve their intended purpose – to protect the public by rehabilitating inmates and preventing reoffending.

A prison system that really works must get the basics right – with conditions that are humane, safe and secure. That means clean and tidy wings, free from violence and intimidation, and protected from the disruptive influx of drugs and mobile phones.

We are well on our way to recruiting an additional 2,500 prison officers by the end of this year. These prison officers will enable our prisons to have a relentless focus on the fundamentals and establish a new culture of respect – with keyworkers to support inmates on their road to rehabilitation.

This regular and reassuring relationship will allow prison officers to ensure that inmates get the input they need to turn their lives around, whether, for example, it is treatment for a substance addiction or a mental health issue – both of which affect the prison population disproportionately.

All of this must be built on solid foundations, so I want to see a firm but fair approach – where inmates are incentivised to use their time in prison as an opportunity to gain new skills, change their behaviour and turn their lives around.

Ultimately, rehabilitation is our goal. So, I want prisons to be places of hope – where prisoners can gain on the inside the experiences they need to live successful, law-abiding lives on the outside.

I pay tribute to HM Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman for the work they do to hold the system to account in that aim, as well as the Independent Monitoring Board, which does such an important job in monitoring standards of care and decency.

Reforming our prisons is not easy or straightforward but the prize – fewer offenders and therefore fewer victims of crime – is one worth fighting for.

The Rt Hon David Gauke MP

Lord Chancellor and Secretary of Justice