



Public Accounts Committee

Antonia Romeo
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
Westminster
London, SW1H 9AJ

By email: permanent.secretary@justice.gov.uk
Cc: secondpermanentsecretary@justice.gov.uk

24 November 2022

Ministry of Justice - Accounting Officer Assessments (October 2022)

Dear Permanent Secretary,

In October your department published a number of Accounting Officer Assessment summaries relating to programmes which included your [rapid deployment cells project](#) and [probation workforce programme](#) on the gov.uk website. This letter focuses on these assessments, in particular those that are more recent and which raised issues that previous assessments have not. A full list of the assessments I cover are included in the Appendix below.

The assessment summaries were completed by Dr Farrar, but did not all specify whether you had seen or endorsed them.

A number of the assessments are over a year old. However, as previously mentioned I understand that that you have now revised processes to ensure that assessments are published in a timely manner going forwards. I was pleased to hear from HM Treasury that you have now published all of your outstanding assessments.

There are a number of specific points on which I would be grateful if you could provide further clarification, which are also set out in the Appendix. The Committee will also expect an oral update when you next appear before us.

I request that you respond to this letter by **Friday 16 December**.

Yours sincerely

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts



Public Accounts Committee

APPENDIX

Probation Workforce Programme (PWP)

- **Progress resolving issues about pay.** The assessment states that the programme is largely dependent on its ability to better incentivise recruitment through improved pay. Please provide an update on the extent to which MoJ and HMPPS have been able to resolve this issue.
- **Progress against recruitment and training targets.** The assessment states that the programme relies on its ability to onboard staff in a timely manner. Please provide an update on where HMPPS is up to in terms of recruiting and training staff and how this compares to any targets it has set itself. If there are any gaps in recruitment, please provide details as to whether HMPPS has an understanding on how this is impacting the quality of service provided.

Rapid Deployment Cells Project (RCDP)

- **Reasons for increased costs and a subsequent reduction in places the project will deliver.** The assessment states that the number of places being delivered was scaled back from 1,000 to 480 as the costs of the RDCs have increased significantly. I would be grateful if you could write to the Committee setting out the drivers of the increased costs, which have meant the project will deliver less than half the places originally planned.
- **Impact of the reduced places on capacity.** The assessment states that MoJ was reviewing whether there was a need for the 520 cells it could no longer afford within its budget. Could you please provide the Committee with the details and findings of this review and your current assessment of whether there is sufficient prison capacity in the short-term.
- **Progress with delivering the 480 rapid deployment cells.** The assessment states that the cells need to be delivered by the end of 2022 to meet the projected demand. However, the latest IPA report rated the project as red, which suggests that successful delivery of the project appears to be unachievable. Could you please provide the Committee with more detail on your progress delivering the cells and if you expect all places to be available by the end of the year as planned. I would be grateful if you could include detail on any issues that may prevent you from meeting this deadline and any plans you have in place to manage a scenario where demand may outstrip capacity.



Public Accounts Committee

List of Accounting Officer assessments included in this review:

1	Probation Workforce Programme
2	Four New Prisons FBC
3	Glen Parva New Build Prison – operator competition (FBC)
4	Glen Parva Op Comp (OBC)
5	Rapid Deployment Cells Project FBC
6	Rapid Deployment Cells Project OBC
7	Wellingborough (Five Wells) new build prison- operator competition