



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

15 November 2022

Ministry of Justice - Accounting Officer Assessments

Dear Permanent Secretary

In September your department published a number of Accounting Officer Assessment summaries relating to programmes from your prison expansion portfolio on the gov.uk website. Specifically sub-projects of your prison expansion and refurbishment and accelerated houseblock programme. This letter focuses on these assessments, in particular those that are more recent. A full list of the assessments I refer to are included in the Appendix below.

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

A number of the assessments are over a year old. However, I was pleased to read in the Second Permanent Secretary's response to my previous letter, dated October 6, that that you have now revised processes to ensure that assessments are published in a timely manner going forwards.

There are specific points on which I would be grateful if you could provide further clarification, which are set out in the Appendix. Please could you respond by **Monday 28 November.**

I will share a copy of this letter with the Chair of the Justice Committee, Sir Robert Neil MP, the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Treasury Officer of Accounts.

Yours sincerely

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts



Public Accounts Committee

APPENDIX

1. **Prison expansion programmes – expanding and refurbishing existing prisons and the accelerated houseblock programme**
 - **Plans for the portfolio as a whole.** It is not clear from the assessments or information in the public domain, exactly what is being built and when or what progress the Ministry has made to date. Could you please provide clarification of the different sub-projects making up each programme including prison names, the type of new places planned and the number of places they will provide.
 - **Overall affordability of the portfolio.** The assessments suggest that there may be issues around delivering all 20,000 places with the designated funding, particularly in the context of inflation and increasing costs. Could you please provide more detail on this risk including current forecast spend and whether in light of these issues, the Ministry has re-assessed which projects and the number of places it will be able to deliver with the available funding.
 - **Staffing risks.** One of the assessments suggests that staffing the new places is a risk across the prison expansion portfolio. Could you please provide an update on progress in recruiting staff for the new places and how you plan to mitigate the risk going forwards.

Assessments referred to:

1	Womens Estate OBC - AOA Memorandum.pdf
2	Houseblocks & Refurbishments - HMP Stocken FBC - AOA Memorandum.pdf
3	Houseblock Expansion OBC - AOA Memorandum.pdf
4	Houseblocks & Refurbishments - HMP Liverpool FBC - AOA Memorandum.pdf (sharepoint.com)
5	Houseblocks & Refurbishments - HMP Birmingham FBC - AOA Memorandum.pdf
6	Houseblocks & Refurbishments - HMP Birmingham OBC - AOA Memorandum.pdf
7	Cat D OBC - AOA Memorandum.pdf
8	Cat D Phase 2 PBC - AOA Memorandum.pdf
9	Accelerated Houseblocks PBC1 AOA Memoranda.pdf
10	Accelerated Houseblocks PBC 2 - AOA Memorandum.pdf
11	Cat D Phase 1 FBC - AOA Memorandum.pdf
12	HMP Norwich FBC - AOA Memorandum.pdf