



Andy Slaughter MP  
Chair, Justice Select Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

**MoJ ref:** SUB124899

13 June 2025

Dear Andy,

### **The Treatment of Pregnant Women in the Criminal Justice System**

As I committed to, I am writing to share the findings of the work undertaken into the treatment of pregnant women in the criminal justice system, in particular the use of restraints on pregnant women. As previously expressed, I am grateful for your helpful questions, which have drawn attention to this important issue.

In my previous letter of 17 March 2025, I set out the immediate actions I asked officials to take in response to these deeply concerning allegations and committed to providing you with a comprehensive overview of the deep-dive activity and our planned next steps. I am sorry for the slight delay in getting this information to you.

#### **Deep dive review into the restraint of pregnant women**

HMPPS has completed the deep dive review into the use of restraints on pregnant women starting at HMP/YOI Bronzefield and continuing across all women's prisons. This work was done to assess existing practices and processes, alignment with policy requirements, staff knowledge and understanding, and assurance measures. The review consisted of visits to each women's prison to collate qualitative data relating to an assessment period of April 2024 to March 2025. Each women's prison engaged positively throughout this work and displayed the desire to adopt a person-centred approach and were keen to make positive changes, where needed.

Through this work HMPPS have identified the need to review the existing External Escorts Policy Framework and provide managers who complete escort risk assessments with greater clarification of what may constitute 'exceptional circumstances' within the policy, when considering restraint of a pregnant woman. This policy review is already underway and will also consider a bespoke escort risk assessment for women's prisons, including recording the sex of staff undertaking the escorts, which is not a current policy requirement. Observations and discussions from the deep dive review suggest that none of the prisons had carried out pregnancy related escorts with all male members of staff during the assessment timeframe. Importantly, this policy review will seek specialist advice from health partners including NHS England and Health and Justice to further understand the medical implications of using restraints on a pregnant woman.

HMPPS believe there are benefits from increased operational oversight and scrutiny in this area. As such, we have made immediate changes whereby the Women's Group Prison Group Director must be notified of all decisions where restraints are used on pregnant women across all women's prisons. We have also made changes to enhance the management information that is collated in this area as an additional form of assurance.

We value women sharing their experiences with us so that we can continually learn and better the care we provide for them. Working with the Women's Estate Psychology Services Team, we are considering how best to understand women's experiences of attending hospital appointments while pregnant in prison. We are keen to listen and take forward their voices in all future activity. We are also keen to work closely with women, and our stakeholders, to review the current information that we provide pregnant women on what to expect when attending appointments in hospital for the duration of their pregnancy and ensure that this information meets women's needs.

It is important that our staff are equipped with the knowledge and confidence in this area. Therefore, alongside the policy review, we will build the confidence and capability of staff by reviewing the training offer and tools available for them and actively seek upskilling opportunities to ensure clarity and consistency of policy application.

Undertaking this work has identified positive practice, which will be incorporated into the policy review for further consideration and replication across all women's prisons. Positive findings included examples of bespoke risk assessments with detailed qualitative information; meaningful entries on the specific circumstances of the woman at that time, evidencing a person-centred approach; robust assurance processes; strong interdepartmental relationships between security, healthcare and offender management departments supporting effective sharing of risk related information.

Furthermore, there was recognition of the additional support for pregnant women in prison, including mandatory multidisciplinary care planning meetings for pregnant women, exceptional staff and prisoner relationships, the support for women from the Pregnancy and Mother and Baby Liaison Officers, and the wider networks in place for specialist staff working with pregnant women in prison to support their professional development, to learn and continue to improve the care they offer to women.

I would also draw attention to the work of the HMPPS National Advisory Forum on Pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units (MBUs) and Maternal Separation. This forum was set up in 2022 as part of the policy review for Pregnancy, MBUs and Maternal Separation from children up to the Age of Two in Women's Prisons to provide a valuable space for stakeholder engagement and to contribute to future development of this policy area. In addition to HMPPS and MOJ, attendees on this forum include representatives from NHS England, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Local Authority children's services, specialist midwifery services, third sector organisations and academics in the field.

## **Monitoring Compliance in Contracted Prisons**

You have rightly asked about what we do to monitor compliance against current policy in our contracted prisons. As with all our contracted prisons we have a number of measures to hold performance to account. In all contracted prisons we have on-site teams that monitor compliance with the contract and robustly manage poor performance. A range of measures can be taken in the event of poor performance including contractual notices to requiring the provider to address failures and performance points related to contract delivery indicators, which can result in deductions from financial payments. If poor performance persistently recurs, HMPPS escalate through the contractual measures and ultimately terminate the contract if necessary. We have used these contractual levers robustly to address poor performance and will not hesitate to do so when it is required.

In relation to the cases at HMP/YOI Bronzefield you have written to us about, as there is the potential for litigation, it would be inappropriate to comment on the specific incident. However, the on-site contract management team have clearly set out what is expected regarding the care of pregnant prisoners and are taking action to ensure the highest standards are maintained by the provider, Sodexo. HMPPS are holding regular senior level meetings with senior Sodexo managers to continue to hold them to account for contract delivery.

## **Data Request**

We do not routinely collate data on the use of restraints on pregnant women. However, an informal review of information provided by frontline practitioners between April 2024 and April 2025 in all twelve women's prisons suggested that while there was some evidence of using restraints during transport and during appointments, there were no recorded instances where restraints were used during labour. This was based on information from over 650 hospital escorts for pregnant women. This internal exercise is important in understanding the current practices and informing our next steps.

You asked for information regarding the sex of escorting staff. HMPPS are unable to provide as they do not currently gather this information as there is not a requirement to record this on the current external escort risk assessment template. Similarly, HMPPS do not have enough information to identify the sex of escorting staff for all appointments, or to say confidently whether a woman in prison was restrained to a male prison officer at any point during her journey/appointment.

In summary, while concerted efforts have taken place in recent years to support women, particularly pregnant women in prison, it is important HMPPS learns from any scrutiny and uses this to drive progress to ensure these efforts are sustained. It is clear from the work HMPPS has undertaken that policy needs to be strengthened, with the additional assurance measures introduced to support operational delivery. The activity undertaken has highlighted issues regarding the clarity of policy instruction and the capability of managers in conducting escort risk assessments.

This work has been important to understand the current practice into the use of restraints on pregnant women across all women's prisons from 2024 to 2025. However, I am conscious that the scope of this work has been limited in the level of assurance on historic practices across the wider prison estate.

In light of this limitation and the seriousness of the allegations into the restraint of pregnant women at HMP/YOI Bronzefield, I have commissioned an independent investigation into the use of restraints on pregnant women during hospital escorts between 2021 and 2025. Work is underway to formally set out the Terms of Reference. This broader independent investigation will investigate whether the external escorts policy in place at the time was adhered to and if not, what were the key issues of non-compliance and what was their cause, and to identify what steps should be taken to improve the application of policy in practice. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) has agreed in principle to undertake this work, given their knowledge and wider understanding on the restraint of prisoners.

I express my gratitude to the members of the HMPPS National Advisory Forum on Pregnancy, MBUs and Maternal Separation and the Women's Justice Board who will be sharing their skills, knowledge and expertise, as officials deliver on this work.

I thank you again for your helpful questions, drawing attention to this important matter. As someone who was brought up with many foster children, many of whom were living with us because their mothers were in prison, this is an issue close to my heart.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J'.

**Lord Timpson**  
**Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending**