



# HM Prison & Probation Service

**Director General Operations**  
**HM Prison and Probation Service**  
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Patricia Harding  
Senior Coroner for Mid Kent & Medway  
Cantium House  
Sandling Road  
Maidstone  
ME14 1XD

10 October 2023

Dear Ms Harding

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report of 3 July 2023 addressed to the Minister of State for Prisons and Probation following the inquest into the death of Liam Bentley at HMP Swaleside on 6 June 2022. I am responding on behalf of HMPPS as Director General of Operations.

I know that you will share a copy of this response with the family of Mr Bentley, and I would like to express my condolences for their loss. Every death in custody is a tragedy and the safety of those in our care is my absolute priority.

Following evidence heard at the inquest you have raised concerns around staffing levels and safety at HMP Swaleside. Thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention.

Firstly, I thought it might be helpful to clarify the figures on staffing levels that you have referred to in your report. HMPPS carry out a lot of work to understand reasonable worst case and likely staffing scenarios for prisons, and look to ensure that action is taken to intervene where the recruitment and retention positions look challenging. This includes deploying staff from other sites to supplement the staffing group directly employed at the prison. These figures do not represent the current or future staffing position at HMP Swaleside, in part due to the actions undertaken locally and nationally to improve recruitment and retention.

Ensuring that prisons are sufficiently resourced is fundamental to ensuring that we are delivering quality outcomes for offenders. We continue to monitor staffing levels at HMP Swaleside and, as in other establishments, look to provide short-term tactical support where possible. Where establishments feel that their staffing levels will affect stability or regime, there are a number of ways they can maximise the use of their own resource and seek support from other establishments in the short term, through processes managed nationally at agency level. These include overtime payments and support via detached duty staff from other prisons.

In addition to short-term support, we are seeking to improve the staffing position at HMP Swaleside through a range of interventions across pay, recruitment and retention. This

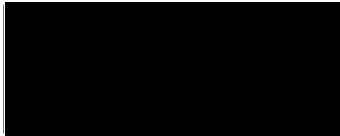
includes the introduction of the new colleague mentor scheme which provides support to those who are new to the prison service to ensure that they feel supported throughout their early careers.

HMP Swaleside is supported by recruitment interventions including Advance into Justice which supports Armed Forces veterans and their spouses into frontline roles; Prison Officer 'Futures' where new recruits are recruited directly to establishments with a strong track record of recruitment but, for the first 23 months, they will be expected to be deployed at a named establishment elsewhere to temporarily reduce their vacancy position; and our National First Time Officer scheme which recruits officers nationally sending them to a prison which has difficulty recruiting, with additional financial support. We also use locally targeted PR activity, including a new recruitment 'landing page' specific to the prison, where prospective staff can view videos of frontline officers from Swaleside to understand what it is like to work there.

The 2023/24 pay award will deliver a pay increase of £2,000 for our lowest paid staff, Band 2 Operational Support Grades, as well as a 7% pay increase for Band 3-5 prison officers. HMP Swaleside is also in receipt of a market supplement, which means Band 3 officers working at the prison receive more pay in order to attract and retain more staff. We hope that this significant investment, which builds on progress from last year's pay award, will have a positive impact on recruitment and retention.

Thank you again for bringing your concerns to my attention. I trust that this response provides assurance that action is being taken to address the matters that you have raised.

Yours sincerely

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Director General of Operations