



# HM Prison & Probation Service

**Director General Operations**  
**HM Prison and Probation Service**  
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Miss Laurinda Bower  
HM Area Coroner  
Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire  
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Old Market Square  
Nottingham  
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14 February 2025

Dear Miss Bower,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report of 17 December 2024 addressed to the Governor of HMP Lowdham Grange following evidence heard at the inquest into the death of Mr Anthony Binfield who died at the prison on 6 March 2023 when the prison was managed by Sodexo. I am responding on behalf of His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) as Director General of Operations.

I know that you will share a copy of this response with Mr Binfield's family, 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 a concern about blocked observation panels and how staff manage this challenge, and I share your concern. The covering of observation panels represents a threat to the safety of prisoners, the safety of staff and the security of the prison.

It is crucial that staff carry out regular safety checks on prisoners when they are locked in their cells. Every time staff approach a prisoner's cell they must ensure that the observation panel is clear of obstruction in case of an emergency situation. The obscuring of observation panels is a constant challenge across the prison estate as prisoners continue to cover and block observation panels for a variety of reasons, including for privacy and decency. However, HMPPS has a clear stance on the issue and all prisons must set out to staff what action should be taken if an observation panel is found to be covered or blocked.

I have received assurances from the Governing Governor of HMP Lowdham Grange that since the prison formally became a public sector prison in August 2024, action has been taken to increase staff confidence, skills and understanding of relevant policies and procedures. The prison recognises the inherent risks of blocked observation panels and has taken a number of proactive steps to ensure that staff and prisoners understand the importance of the panels remaining uncovered at all times. There is now a specific

reference made to the blocking of observation panels within the Incentives Policy Framework. This means that prisoners who continue to block observation panels may receive warnings, loss of privileges; or other formal sanctions awarded by a governor grade during a formal adjudication process.

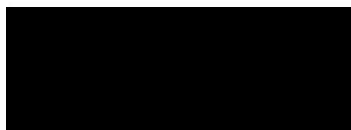
It has been made clear to staff and prisoners that the covering of observation panels is unacceptable. This message is regularly communicated to staff through face-to-face briefings where staff have been reminded of the action that must be taken in circumstances where a response cannot be elicited from a prisoner and where visual observations of the inside of the cell cannot be made. This issue was the subject of notices to staff and a Governor's order on a number of occasions last year, and the most recent reminder was published in January 2025. In addition to regular reminders, all new staff and Operational Support Grades (OSGs) at the prison now receive a briefing on observation panels during their induction period.

It is vital that prisoners also recognise the importance of observation panels remaining clear and the consequences they could face if they choose to block them. This message has been conveyed to the prisoner population through video messages over the last 12 months, with the most recent video message published in January 2025.

In recognition of the fact that blocked observation panels have featured in previous deaths in custody at the prison, a new local prevention of future deaths (PFD) meeting has been established to ensure that matters of concern are kept under review and the enforcement of messages and action from continued learning are discussed regularly.

Thank you again for bringing your concerns to my attention. I trust that my response underscores a commitment to reducing the prevalence of this behaviour and provides assurance that action is being taken by the Governing Governor to address this matter at the prison.

Yours sincerely

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Director General of Operations