



HM Prison & Probation Service

Director General of Operations
HM Prison and Probation Service
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Sean Cummings
Assistant Coroner for Bedfordshire and Luton
The Court House
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Bedfordshire
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14 November 2025

Dear Mr Cummings,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report of 24 September 2025 following the inquest into the death of Steven Hart at HMP Bedford on 29 March 2023. I am responding on behalf of His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) as the Director General of Operations.

I know that you will share a copy of this response with Mr Hart's family, and I would first 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.

You have expressed concerns regarding the monitoring of safer cell (now known as ligature-resistant cells) doors for potential ligature points, the effectiveness of communication in relation to risk information and the importance of carrying out appropriate observations.

I can confirm that interim measures have been put in place at HMP Bedford to ensure that the ligature-resistant (LR) cells are now serviceable. The LR cell observation panels have temporarily been replaced with an approved lockable observation hatch. A full review of all LR doors has been completed, alongside an urgent assessment of the current door and observation panel design. Additionally, Government Facilities Services Limited has undertaken a further review of the locking mechanism within the LR cell observation panels to ensure they remain fully serviceable. In the longer term, a proposal to replace the existing LR cell observation panels with a model that meets current safety specifications – designed to reduce the risk of prisoners from opening them inside the cell - has been issued for tender. It is hoped that the replacement of the LR cell observation panels will progress at the earliest opportunity.

Furthermore, the prison is taking a more proactive approach to identifying cell defects. Daily accommodation fabric checks (AFCs) are in place and carried out consistently throughout the establishment. AFCs are now subject to additional scrutiny and are designed to incorporate checks to identify any damage or deterioration of individual cells. Should a significant defect be identified during these checks, the cell will be immediately taken out of use until remedial work has been carried out and the cell is returned to a serviceable condition. Where a cell requires remedial work, the process is documented and monitored to ensure a timely resolution and accountability.

Handover procedures have also been strengthened to ensure that vital information is communicated effectively. Staff are supported through clearer expectations in relation to information sharing when there is evidence of a prisoners change to risk or presentation. Time has been allocated to facilitate comprehensive handovers between shifts, particularly in relation to those who are being supported by the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) process.

In addition, a robust quality assurance process has been introduced for ACCT observations. This includes regular sampling and review of CCTV footage to confirm that ACCT observations are being completed and recorded in accordance with local policy. Where discrepancies are identified, they are escalated and investigated in line with the national protocol, with referrals to the police where appropriate.

All serious incidents are now investigated thoroughly, with any findings documented. Recommendations arising from these investigations are actioned and monitored, ensuring improvement is implemented where appropriate. Any themes identified through investigations are used to inform staff training and where necessary performance management, ensuring continuous learning is taking place and embedded into practice.

Staff have been reminded, and received additional training and support where necessary, on the importance of escalating incidents and ensuring that ACCT reviews take place when risk increases.

I hope the measures outlined above provide you with reassurance that the matters of concern that you identified arising from the circumstances of Mr Hart's death have been addressed.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the Director General Operations.
Director General Operations