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# Prison Capacity Crisis

PCS members working in Offender Management Units in prisons are under pressure because of over-crowding and the need to free up cell space.

PCS members working in Offender Management Units in prisons have been under massive pressure to take on additional work to free up cell space. Staff have reached breaking point; many report burnout, stress, exhaustion and impact on work life balance due to working additional hours and the pressure of not knowing when they will be given more additional tasks to free up cells.

PCS has raised this issue at the highest levels and has made it clear that the pressure on our hardworking OMU members is unsustainable and could demonstrate a failure in the HMPPS duty of care to our members.

Successive governments have failed to address why the UK has the highest prison population per capita in Western Europe, currently at just under 89,000 and projected by the Ministry of Justice to reach as high as 106,300 by March 2027. A multi-million-pound prison building programme continues, managed by profit-making private companies, while sustained under-investment in the infrastructure of the existing public prison estate continues.

Additionally, police cells are being rented under Operation Safeguard and there are reports that the police in England and Wales are being advised to make fewer arrests because there are not enough cells available.

PCS applauds senior HMPPS leaders who have stated that they will not cross the "red line" and breach safe operational capacity levels in prisons under any circumstances. The alternative would be further overcrowded unsafe prisons, increased violence, increased time in cells with little access to rehabilitation and preparation for release, which would in turn constitute a potential risk to staff, prisoners and the public. PCS is not prepared to accept this risk to our members.

## **Action needed in parliament**

There has been confirmation that the Sentencing Bill will not be heard in parliament due to the general election announcement, meaning the months of

“temporary”, emergency measures will continue.

PCS believes that the incoming government must, as a matter of urgency, address sentencing policy in the UK, to include investment, use of non-custodial sentences and community-based rehabilitation as well as society-wide investment in public services; education, housing, healthcare and employment which would lead to a reduction in crime.

Last week PCS MOJ group conference agreed to continue to support our members in OMUs and to evaluate further actions available if the crisis continues, to oppose offshoring and to oppose the unsustainable building of new, privately run prisons.