

David Whalley
National Chair
Lay Observers
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E14 4PU

MoJ ref: ADR128669

24 November 2025

Dear David,

LAY OBSERVERS

Thank you for your letter of 16 October regarding your concerns about the Prisoner Escort and Custody Service (PECS) transportation, and for sight of your report on the subject, which proved a thought-provoking read.

I would like to start by taking the opportunity to express my gratitude once again to you and your members for the continuing vital role that you play in helping to ensure that detainees being securely transported are treated with respect and dignity. Your report highlighted several key themes which I will address in turn.

In respect to your concern that some individuals are being transported to court when not required or not fit to stand trial, or that those with disabilities are being sent to inaccessible courts: transfers to court are requested by prisons and police forces through the Book a Secure Move (BaSM) IT system and detainees are assessed as fit to travel by the agency requesting the move. PECS suppliers are contractually obligated to collect and escort all moves booked on BaSM. The destination is also determined by stakeholder not the PECS supplier. However, I recognise the disruption caused when individuals are transported unnecessarily or to inaccessible courts. The PECS contract management team is working with stakeholders to reduce these occurrences. In the case of prisons, this has included encouraging the use of video links when appropriate.

With regard to the late arrival of detainees, PECS contractual performance for delivery to court stands at 99.88%. We do, however, recognise that this assessed level of performance differs from the experience of those working in courts, which experience delays beyond the control of the PECS suppliers. In particular, the national challenges we face with prison space availability has meant that around 16% of moves to courts are from non-aligned prisons; this increases journey times, impacts the PECS supplier's resources, and can lead to late deliveries. We recognise these challenges and remain committed to working with stakeholders to identify practical steps that reduce delays.

On the subject of men, women, and children being transported together in the same vans, particularly from police custody, the PECS contract allows for this. Where it is possible to arrange dedicated transport, children will be collected separately but this can be challenging to plan when

moves are requested at short notice. I share your concern about the impact on vulnerable individuals. The separation screen facility should, therefore, be used on all occasions when women, men and children are transported together, regardless of offence.

I recognise the concerns raised about handcuffing in public view. PECS suppliers are required to follow HMPPS national policy, which determines handcuffing is based on individual risk and not a blanket policy. In areas that are not secure, decisions on restraint must remain proportionate and sensitive to individual circumstances, while ensuring public safety is appropriately considered. Risk assessments are documented and subject to managerial and medical approval, and alternatives to restraint are considered.

Finally, I want to reiterate my appreciation for the Lay Observers' role in highlighting these important issues. The HMPPS PECS contract management team will review your findings carefully and consider where improvements can be made. They will continue to hold suppliers accountable for any contractual failures and apply remedies where appropriate. I look forward to receiving your future thematic reports and maintaining this constructive dialogue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James', written in a cursive style.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending