Ministry
of Justice

Lord Keen of Elie QC

The Rt Hon. the Lord Beith
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

MoJ ref:

9 January 2017

Dear Alan

HM PRISON BIRMINGHAM

I made a statement in the House on 19 December about the serious disturbance at HMP Birmingham, following which you asked me whether G4S, who operate HMP Birmingham, had fallen short of its contracted staff numbers at the prison. I did not have the numbers available at the time, but promised to write to you with the information.

G4S assumed responsibility for HMP Birmingham on 1 October 2011 and have a contract to manage the prison for 15 years. HMP Birmingham was the first ever public sector prison to be transferred into the private sector estate. The transfer took place following a competition process, and after a detailed and carefully planned mobilisation and transition period.

G4S currently directly employs 498 staff at HMP Birmingham. This includes 292.5 Prisoner Custody Officers (PCOs) against a target of 302. These figures include 16 PCOs who are undertaking initial training. During the period August to November 2016, there were 31 PCO staff leavers, while there were 48 PCO new starters during the same period. The contract with G4S at HMP Birmingham is output focussed, and therefore staff numbers are not contractual. This is similar to all prisons operated by the private sector. As with all prisons operated by both the public and private sectors, the prison sometimes operates with shortfalls in staffing. When operating on reduced staffing levels, G4S manages this risk by offering overtime to staff in order to cover any shortfall.

The Secretary of State for Justice has ordered a full investigation into the disturbance at HMP Birmingham, which will be led by Sarah Payne, adviser to the independent Chief Inspector of Probation and former director of the Welsh Prison Service.

I have placed a copy of this letter in the House Library.

Yours sincerely,

LORD KEEN OF ELIE QC

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