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Mr Nirj Deva MP  
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Your reference

Our reference H

Date 13 March 1997

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the conditions in which Roisin McAliskey is being held at Holloway prison.

Following a routine review of her security status Roisin McAliskey remains a Category A prisoner but has been downgraded from high risk to standard risk within that category. As a result some of the security arrangements which have been in operation have been relaxed.

The number of strip searches to which Roisin McAliskey had been subject has already been reduced and she is no longer being strip searched before and after every open visit within the prison. She is now only being strip searched on the same basis as all other prisoners at Holloway. This means before leaving the prison for court appearances and on return to the prison; as part of a cell search and drug testing procedures; on a random basis; or if there were reasonable suspicion she had secreted something about her person.

Further relaxations as a consequence of the security review will take effect from now on. She will be able to attend chapel, to use the gym and the swimming pool, and to attend ante-natal classes with other prisoners. The number of overnight security checks will be reduced so that the light in her cell can be extinguished for most of the night.

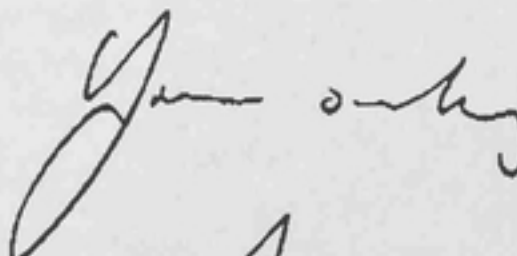

Separately from the review of her security status, Roisin McAliskey applied on 14 February to be located on the Mother and Baby Unit at Holloway with her baby after it is born. Her application was considered, following the normal processes which apply to all expectant mothers, by the Admissions Board at Holloway, who considered the views of independent experts in the development needs of babies, as well as logistical issues.

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The Assessment Board has now advised the Governor that Roisin McAliskey's application should be approved, the Governor has recommended approval and I have accepted this recommendation. She has been told that she may keep her baby with her after the birth. She will, as do all other mothers, have to sign a compact agreeing to be of reasonable behaviour and to co-operate with the ethos and regime of the Unit. Babies in the Unit normally remain with their mothers until the age of nine months.

Both the reduction in security classification and the decision to allow Roisin McAliskey to keep her baby have followed the standard procedures and processes that would apply to any other prisoner.

Alan Walker  
Director of Operations - South