

# Truss must decide how to proceed with Gove reforms

Liz Truss, the first female lord chancellor in more than 1,000 years of the role, arrives at the Ministry of Justice at a time of upheaval in the courts and crisis in jails.

The new justice secretary's in-tray will be dominated by prisons including the immediate issues of safety and drugs along with the future of Michael Gove's ambitious reform proposals. Ms Truss, who was a member of the justice select committee in her first years in parliament, will want to look at Mr Gove's programme, which had yet to produce anything of substance.

She will need to scrutinise his proposals to devolve power to governors to allow them to run their jails with more freedom, which were intended for a white paper in October followed by legislation next year. The ministry has secured cash to build new jails which would enable Victorian prisons to be closed, but decisions will be needed soon if Mr Gove's promise to build five new prisons by 2020 is to be met.

One immediate issue for Ms Truss is how to deal with the growing threat from Islamic extremists in jails in England and Wales. Mr Gove said he was "very sympathetic" to a recommendation from a review that purpose-built units be created to hold a hard core of extremists. However, he admitted it would need the support of the new home secretary.

Plans are well advanced for a £700 million computerisation of the courts service, which depends on £300 million being raised from the merger and closure of court buildings. Ms Truss is likely to pick up that baton, along with plans in the Queen's Speech for a UK bill of rights, which no longer anticipates withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights.

Next week she will have to sign off plans for an overhaul of the courts but whether that timetable will be met is in doubt. These included plans to cut the number of law firms awarded contracts to provide police station advice and to introduce a second round of cuts to legal aid fees.

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