



Mr Peter Ward
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Isis
Western Way, Thamesmead
London
SE28 0NZ


10 July 2017

Dear Peter,

**HMP/YOI ISIS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JANUARY 2016 – 31 DECEMBER 2016**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 December 2016. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for all the hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations. I apologise for the delay in responding to your report.

It was encouraging to receive your comments that the Governor and her senior management team have continued to welcome the Board's contribution to life at the prison. I was pleased to read that the Governor has introduced some refreshing, positive changes to the prison, particularly around decency and reducing violence.

I understand the Board's continued concerns about the staffing levels at the prison. We recognise that we need to strengthen the frontline to overhaul prison safety and rehabilitate prisoners in order to reduce reoffending. In the Prison Safety and Reform White paper, we announced a £100 million investment to increase prison officer numbers by 2,500.

As of 31 March 2017 there was a shortfall of 15 full time equivalent (FTE) band 3-5 prison officer posts at HMP/YOI Isis. To support the recruitment effort at the site, the prison is one of 30 establishments prioritised to operate a localised recruitment process instead of a national process; this involves a bespoke attraction and marketing campaign and also gives candidates the opportunity to observe the prison environment as part of a familiarisation tour prior to commencing the assessment process and training. Locally, a recruitment advisor is in place to support local engagement and offer the candidate a personalised recruitment experience and a realistic preview of working in a prison environment.

In addition to recruitment efforts, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is doing more to reduce attrition rates across the estate, including at HMP/YOI Isis where leaving rates in the 12 months to end of December 2016 for band 3-5 prison officers was 13.4%. This includes the training of 75 new prison officer mentors to support new recruits through their training and probationary year; HMP/YOI Isis has their own dedicated mentor.

In respect of established staff, higher staffing levels are set to improve the supervision of prisoners, operational resilience and staff engagement with prisoners; all of which will improve prison safety and encourage experienced staff to stay. HMPPS has also designed a number of new schemes to provide career and development opportunities for officers, to ensure that they continue to feel valued and supported in their career progression.

I acknowledge the issues some establishments have in recruiting and retaining staff due to a competitive job market in the surrounding area. HMP/YOI Isis is one of 31 prisons where staff will receive a boost in salary under a scheme offering a higher starting pay and an additional allowance of up to £5,000 per year. An HR attrition rapid response team has been created to visit prisons with rising attrition, in order to gain insight into the key concerns impacting on staff morale, understand why staff are leaving and address issues, producing targeted interventions focussed on staff reliance and wellbeing. It must be recognised that any recruitment and retention programme will not have an immediate impact and will have to be sustained over a period of time in order to address the current situation.

I recognise the Board's concerns about the ongoing cross deployment of staff. At this time it is unrealistic that cross deployment will be eradicated, however, the regime management plan is available to assist in assessing regime curtailment and prioritising cross deployment.

It was encouraging to read that the Board commends the announcements about increasing Governors' empowerment. Governors will have greater control over a wide range of areas, including more freedom to decide how they spend their budget, design their regime and set their staffing levels. Prison Service Instructions, Prison Service Orders and key outcomes from Service Specifications are being deregulated and replaced with policy frameworks which will set out the minimum mandatory requirements to ensure a safe, decent and lawful system.

It is vital that contracts for goods and services such as catering used by prisons deliver what Governors need to run a decent regime. As contracts expire and are retendered, feedback will be sought from Governors and their teams about their requirements and, wherever possible, included in the contract specification. From early 2018 Governors will have control over their devolved education budget and an increased choice over who provides the education in their prison, and how it is organised. Governors will also be asked whether they want the ability to use an alternative procurement route if the contract does not provide what they need. In the meantime Governors will have access to a contracts register which will provide them with the information they need to understand key aspects of the current main contracts used by prisons, in particular whether they are able to investigate alternative supply arrangements or must use the existing national contract.

I note the Board's comments that additional funding is required for education, learning and skills. However the current allocation of funding for Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) delivery at HMP/YOI Isis is sufficient to meet the needs of the population. The staff vacancies in the OLASS team have prevented the delivery of the full curriculum. A curriculum review is in progress to maximise opportunities for learners to develop their employability skills and increase their chances of securing meaningful employment on release from custody. The funding allocations are also under review and will be adjusted in response to any change resulting from the reconfiguration of the prison estate.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. The HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Justice Secretary and I appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Isis.

Yours sincerely



SAM GYIMAH MP

HMP/YOI ISIS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2016

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Sentence Plans and Offender Assessment System (OASys)

HMPPS continues to review the OASys backlog and the prioritisation criteria remains in force. This ensures the highest priority cases are completed in full, with a reduced assessment for those lower risk cases. The current offender management model is also being revised; the new model will ensure there is increased time for building effective relationships with prisoners, and also a more robust approach to prioritising assessments.

In-cell Telephony

A programme to install in-cell telephony is underway. It is hoped that approximately 20 prisons will have in-cell telephony installed each financial year, although it is not possible at this stage to indicate in which tranche HMP/YOI Isis will be included. In the meantime, HMPPS is exploring options with BT to increase the number of phones on landings at prisons where in-cell telephony has not yet been installed.

Prisoners' Property

A review of the national Prisoners' Property policy was due to be finalised last year. Unfortunately, this has been delayed to take into account current considerations about reducing litigation claims related to prisoners' property. We will look again at the policy in the light of this work to make sure that prisoners' property is managed as effectively and efficiently, as possible. We expect to be able to issue a revised policy in 2017. In the meantime, when any prisoner's property levels exceed the volumetric control limit for in-possession items, they will continue to be encouraged to send items out, or have them disposed of, to avoid the risk of loss and cost to the tax payer for the transfer or storage of items.

Vocational Courses

During the curriculum review in 2016 it was decided that more vocational provision was required, hence the move to industrial cleaning, health and safety and hygiene. These courses are welcomed as they all strengthen the CVs of prisoners; increasing their employability. This review included the closure of the highly successful and well attended arts classes. Such courses provide the opportunity for rehabilitation, and there is a growing body of evidence to suggest they can have a significant impact on prisoners' lives, particularly in helping them move away from crime. Following a series of focus groups, the provider is currently in the process of implementing taster courses in Arts, Money Management, ICT, Emotional Intelligence and Basic Cookery.