



Mr Raymond Smith
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Highpoint
Stradishall
Newmarket
Suffolk
CB8 9TG

20 July 2017

Dear Raymond,

**HMP HIGHPOINT: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JANUARY - 31 DECEMBER 2016**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending December 2016. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for all the hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations, particularly as you have been short of Board members during the reporting period.

It was encouraging to receive your comments that despite the many challenges faced by the prison, there is a commitment towards the humane treatment of prisoners and the dignity agenda. I was pleased to read that there is a strong emphasis on developing employment skills and some good examples of new vocational courses, initiatives and innovations taking place at the prison. I am grateful to the Board for highlighting the positive contribution made by the prison's business and community engagement team in improving rehabilitative opportunities.

I understand your concerns about the impact of staffing levels on the prison. In November 2016 HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) announced a £100 million investment to increase prison officer numbers by 2,500 across the prison estate. HMP Highpoint will receive an allocation of these new staff to increase overall staff headcount, but exact numbers have yet to be determined for every prison.

Early this year HMPPS launched a new localised recruitment process for 30 of the most difficult to recruit to establishments (including HMP Highpoint). The process has been specifically designed to speed up recruitment and places prison governors in charge of the process. HMPPS has also launched a new Prison Officer Apprenticeship scheme that will help increase diversity and make it easier to join the Prison Service.

Local initiatives have been deployed at HMP Highpoint to support national campaigns for prison officer recruitment and candidates are being supported through the application process. Work is being undertaken to support new staff during their training and probationary period, in order to improve retention and provide support in the crucial first months as an officer. Recruitment initiatives for operational support grades are also taking place and it is anticipated that the prison will begin to see an increase in its staffing levels over the coming months. In the meantime, the prison is supporting vacancies with the deployment of agency staff and offering overtime incentive schemes for existing staff.

I note your continued concerns that prisoners are still arriving at HMP Highpoint without an up to date offender assessment (OASys) and your request for a review of sentence planning and OASys.

Offender supervisors at HMP Highpoint are working consistently to improve and reduce the number of outstanding OASys. Staff have been ring-fenced to reduce redeployment to other tasks and the prison is working with the probation team to engage their support. The delivery of offender management has been revised and the new Offender Management (OM) model addresses the issues around completing OASys reports. The new model moves the resource for OASys report completion into the training/resettlement estate and away from local/reception prisons. Additionally, the model removes the dual offender supervisor/supervising officer role, and offender supervisors are replaced by offender managers, who will be based in the prison. Roll out of the new OM model has commenced within the 10 pathfinder sites and HMP Berwyn. HMPPS is currently working through the roll out schedule into the wider estate, and the new OM model will be in place in all open prisons by March 2019.

I note your concerns that the maintenance service provided by Carillion has not improved during the reporting year. Since December 2016, tripartite meetings have commenced with the prison, HMPPS and Carillion, and these have been very beneficial to all parties. In January 2017 HMPPS carried out a complete audit of the specifications that are embedded in the contract. This highlighted a number of failures within the delivery of the scope of works and Carillion were tasked with producing an action plan to address these failures. The action plan is under constant review and updated accordingly. A further audit has been completed on the statutory and mandatory fire compliance at HMP Highpoint and the action points from this will be completed by Carillion shortly. Progress is being tracked and all parties are content that significant progress is being made.

There have been a number of projects delivered on site in the last six months including the installation of window grilles, CCTV projects, shower refurbishments and LED lighting; all of which have improved the decency and security of the prison. In addition, Carillion has made a number of improvements to the external visitor centre, including the donation of children's DVDs.

I also note your continued concerns about the handling and transportation of prisoners' property, as well as the communication between establishments when property goes missing. HMPPS understands the importance of property to prisoners and strives to ensure it is managed as effectively and efficiently as possible. It is in the interests of both prisoners and staff that property is dealt with promptly, fairly and with attention to detail. A review of the Prisoners' Property policy is currently taking place alongside a national project to improve the handling of claims and prevent the causes of litigation. This work will feed into the prisoners' property review. HMPPS expects to issue a revised policy during 2017.

HMP Highpoint has committed additional resource to the reception function to support and manage property promptly and as efficiently as possible. The prison takes complaints about property very seriously and is working to ensure that wherever possible incidents of lost/damaged property, and claims for compensation, are reduced. Where property complaints are connected to a previous establishment, every effort is being made to resolve these issues or, where appropriate, compensate prisoners.

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 Highpoint.

Yours sincerely



SAM GYIMAH MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Personal Officers

In accordance with Prison Service Instruction 75/2011 – Residential Services, there is no mandatory requirement for a prison to have a personal officer scheme in the adult estate. HMP Highpoint has, however, always been committed to providing the scheme, but staffing pressures have led to some difficulties in continuity. As staffing becomes more stable and settled the scheme will be restored.

Role boards and cell cards will be used to identify personal officers. As soon as a prisoner arrives on the unit the identified personal officer will introduce themselves or, if not on duty, will do so as soon as possible. These measures have been implemented on the induction unit and will be extended across the establishment.

The Governor remains confident that staff have a good understanding of the individual needs and circumstances of the men in their care. Regular wing visits are conducted by the senior management team and staffs' understanding will be tested during these visits, as well as ensuring that prisoners are aware of who their dedicated personal officer is.

Canteen Meetings

Consultation on canteen issues is now a standing agenda item at the bi-monthly prisoner forums.

Accommodation and Decency

Privacy screening for multiple occupancy cells is provided using approved purpose made curtains or screens. These provide a level of decency, whilst also ensuring prisoners are visible to staff. It is difficult to further improve the privacy of in-cell toilets without potentially compromising the safety of prisoners. As the Board will be aware, there are communal facilities on the units and the use of shared toilets is, therefore, limited to times when prisoners are locked in their cells.

An ongoing programme of refurbishment and cleaning is taking place at HMP Highpoint. Whilst units are issued with suitable cleaning materials, the design of some toilets and the hard water found in the region, do mean that toilets have a build-up of lime scale. Quotes have been obtained via the maintenance contractor to have specialists visit the establishment to professionally descale the toilets.

Segregation Monitoring and Review Group (SMARG) Meetings

Plans are in place to reintroduce the SMARG meetings during the second quarter of this financial year. Going forward these will be held quarterly and will be arranged in advance.

Access to Justice Computers

The updated Access to Justice policy is currently undergoing consultation with the Government Legal Department and publication is anticipated in the coming months. The Governor will ensure that an up to date notice to prisoners is re-issued clarifying the application process for Access to Justice computers.