



Mrs Isobel Wilson
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Northumberland
Morpeth,
Northumberland
NE65 9XG

27 July 2017

Dear Isobel,

**HMP NORTHUMBERLAND: 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, particularly as you have been short of members throughout the year. I am sorry for the delay in you receiving a response.

It was encouraging to read that there are robust systems in place to monitor equality and fairness and progress has been made to address under-reporting of some protected characteristics. The considerable efforts made by the prison to improve the balance between the number of prisoners on methadone maintenance and the number on methadone reduction programmes is welcomed and I was pleased to read that progress has been achieved. Your positive comments about the User Voice forum, the new Departure Lounge within the visitors' centre and the work being carried out with older prisoners are also appreciated.

It was very pleasing to learn that prisoners contributed and raised £1,384.50 for a local charity through a sponsored cycling marathon. I welcome and encourage such initiatives and also commend the eleven prisoners who were the first to qualify nationally as self-management and recovery training (SMART) facilitators; this is a remarkable achievement and a platform for other establishments to aspire towards.

I agree that improving family engagement can play a vital role in facilitating a safer and calmer atmosphere within a custodial establishment, and a strong relationship between a prisoner and their family is crucial. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is encouraging and assisting the maintenance of relationships between prisoners and their families and other significant people in their lives to support their social rehabilitation. Evidence suggests that having solid family support is effective in helping to reduce re-offending.

As part of reforms detailed within the Prison Safety and Reform White Paper published in November 2016, from this autumn governors and directors of contracted prisons will be held to account for family services within their prison. To assist prisoners to maintain community links, HMPPS is also developing a measure of the quality of prisoners' family relationships. More recently, Lord Farmer was commissioned by the former Secretary of State to review how men could be better supported in prison and examine the extent to which family engagement helps to reduce reoffending. A report is expected to be published by summer 2017.

I was pleased to read that visits have remained a priority despite pressures on the regime and that the visits' hall has remained a cheerful place enabling families to be relaxed and for children to play. A number of initiatives are taking place locally at HMP Northumberland to improve family ties. These include an increase in the number of family / father and child visits, inviting families to quarterly celebrating success events, a reduction in the cost of telephone calls and the installation of in-cell telephony which is due to commence this year. Virtual visits remain under development and discussions are taking place about appropriate risk assessments in terms of security and safeguarding.

As the Board will be aware, enabling progressive transfers of prisoners is subject to space in the appropriate part of the prison estate becoming available. The speed of transfers, therefore, reflects the availability of places in a particular location or of a particular type. HMPPS remains committed to making the most effective use of the estate to support prisoners' needs, including by seeking to hold prisoners in the most appropriate security conditions, in prisons that are able to meet the need presented by their individual case and while seeking to maintain family ties. The new Director of HMP Northumberland will look at reviewing internal processes to ensure that prisoners are kept fully up to date on their transfer progress.


HMPPS operates an Assisted Prison Visit Scheme which provides help with travel expenses for prisoners' close relatives, partners or sole visitors who meet the qualifying rules on income. This contributes to resettlement by helping to ensure family ties are maintained by those family members, partners or other visitors who would not normally be able to afford regular visiting.

I note your concerns about healthcare resources being insufficient to deliver the equivalent standard of care as that in the community. National Health Service England (NHSE) is satisfied that resources at the prison are sufficient. The existing services are being reviewed and specifications are being re-written in line with changes to the prison estate under the prison reform and estate transformation agenda, and will be re-procured during the next twelve months in line with those amended specifications.

Locally, to support and enable the work of healthcare providers, the head of healthcare works closely with the prison's senior management team and there are regular meetings between operational managers and healthcare providers to address matters of mutual interest. NHSE commissioners regularly review the performance of healthcare subcontractors and are conducting an ongoing healthcare needs analysis which will educate the next round of commissioning. HMP Northumberland will be involved in contributing to a revised set of regional healthcare service specifications.

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 Northumberland.

Yours sincerely

PP **SAM GYIMAH MP**

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Refurbishment

HMP Northumberland has a contractual refurbishment plan which is approved by the Controller annually. This continues for the lifespan of the contract. The new Director will keep you up to date with any developments.

Prisoners with Mobility Issues

HMP Northumberland will be improving the showering / bathing facility in house block 14 and engaging with NHS architects to ensure infrastructure meets identified standards, in particular for those who require palliative care. The new Director is reviewing the facilities for those prisoners with limited mobility, but is satisfied that the current facilities are adequate for the current number of residents. Shower facilities and wheelchair access points to accommodation will be areas the Director will be taking forward so that, with some slight adjustments, HMP Northumberland will be better equipped to look after older and less mobile prisoners.

Initial Need Assessments

HMP Durham is now part of the Teesside reform prison cluster and as a main feeder prison will hold fewer convicted prisoners. It is anticipated that appropriate prisoners will move to HMP Northumberland at an earlier stage in their sentence and planning for this is well underway. In terms of healthcare, this is being factored into the regional healthcare needs assessment and revised service specification, and healthcare providers are actively considering and planning for any changes to prisoner flow and requirement. Addiction support services provided by Lifeline have been realigned to increase the level of support at HMP Northumberland.

The establishment and the learning provider, Novus, are realigning the learning offer to fit seamlessly with the model being introduced at HMP Durham. However, it must be recognised that this is a work in progress and the focus currently remains on ensuring delivery.

In addition to the above, the establishment has embedded its own staff into HMP Durham to meet with prisoners pre-transfer to ensure that any issues are pre-empted prior to transfer.