



Mrs Sheila Kimmins
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Erlestoke
Erlestoke
Devizes
Wiltshire
SN10 5TU


28 August 2017

Dear Sheila,

**HMP ERLESTOKE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 APRIL 2016 – 31 MARCH 2017**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 March 2017. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for all the hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations.

It was encouraging to read your positive comments about HMP Erlestoke, despite the challenges it has faced, including the major incident in June 2016, which I note caused significant damage to the prison. I am also aware that another significant concerted indiscipline took place at HMP Erlestoke on 9 July 2017. The incident is currently under investigation.

I wish to assure you that the Government is fully committed to making prisons safe. Violence in prisons is a crime. Any prisoner who commits an act of violence can expect to have action taken against them, which may include a loss of privileges or additional days in prison, awarded through internal disciplinary procedures or referral to the police. A prison safety programme has been established to support establishments in the delivery of safer prisons, and is responsible for implementing the reforms set out in the White Paper published in November 2016. Our prison officers are some of our finest public servants. We do not underestimate the challenges faced by everyone working in prisons and we will continue to support our staff to help them maintain safe and secure prisons.

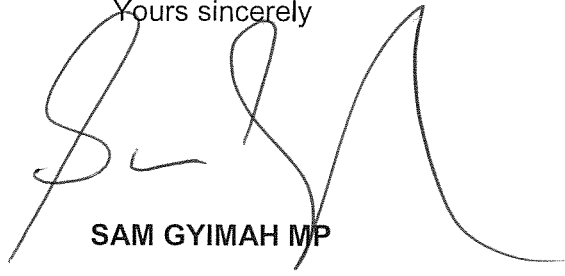
As recognised in your report, the external investigation into the incident in June 2016 made a number of recommendations. Further information on the actions taken by the prison in response to the recommendations can be discussed with the Governor and he will keep you aware of developments as work continues.

I am aware that during the reporting year a new Governor, Deputy Governor and senior management team were appointed and I am assured that this new team will bring new vision and provide further opportunities to help prisoners at HMP Erlestoke. I note that healthcare provision has seen a vast transformation with improved processes and was pleased to learn that the literary festival enhanced prisoners' experiences and Chaplaincy achieved full compliance in faith and pastoral care. I am very grateful to the Friends of Erlestoke who have continued to support prisoners and their families.

HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to the 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 Erlestoke

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Gyimah', written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above the printed name 'SAM GYIMAH MP'.

SAM GYIMAH MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Equality and Diversity

Members of staff with the appropriate experience and training have been ring fenced to address the backlog of discrimination incident report forms via Payment Plus (a voluntary mechanism to cover staffing shortfalls). Equality meetings have been reinstated and there is a renewed focus on equality from the Governor and Deputy Governor. A new head of function and custodial manager will further develop this area.

Facilities Management

The National Service Management Team (NSMT) and the establishment's management team continues to work closely with Carillion to address the problems with on-site delivery. This has resulted in a time bound resolution plan being monitored by the service delivery manager. An escalation process with Carillion's Regional Accounts Director has been evoked to ensure a collaborative approach to the delivery of the resolution plan. NSMT are working closely with Carillion's commercial team to ensure that they are better able to respond to wider issues more effectively and expedite urgent repairs at site level; this includes the catering equipment which has now been installed. Carillion continue to repair the showers (in-cell) within Kennet building and a decision has been taken to submit an estates investment proposal to refurbish the existing shower rooms. New boilers will be installed in the administration block and Sarum unit shortly.

Visits

HMP Erlestoke is committed to improving outcomes for visitors and prisoners and is focused on understanding the full range of issues, ensuring they are addressed without further impacting on visits. However, it must be recognised that this is not a simple or quick process. A wide ranging and thorough review of all aspects of visits is currently underway, with visits booking being a particular focus of the review. HMP Erlestoke is confident that service delivery will be transformed in this financial year. There has been considerable progress made to date; the visitor portakabin is now in use for visitors waiting to enter the prison. The area is heated, has a toilet, soft seating, and facilities for making hot and cold drinks will be introduced in due course. Funding has been approved for a new larger visits searching area and work is scheduled to commence shortly. A seating area is available for those waiting to be searched.

HMP Erlestoke is taking action to move the location of the staff who undertake the visits bookings which will result in an improved efficiency in answering the calls. A new process to make visits booking quicker and more efficient has been devised and is awaiting implementation. For the majority of visits, the visitor is brought into the prison before the arrival of the prisoner, therefore, shortening the waiting period. New furniture will be installed this financial year and additional Sunday visits will be profiled later in the year.

Closed visits are imposed to address inappropriate behaviour within the prison grounds. An initial one month on closed visits will be actioned against prisoners who do not respond to warnings about their behaviour. If a further offence is committed this will result in three months on closed visits.

Movements

A new daily briefing for all operational staff has been implemented, providing a platform to focus on areas which require improvement and to support staff in delivering services. Recent focus has been on staff preventing prisoners from leaving wings without an appropriate movement slip which is beginning to have a positive impact. HMP Erlestoke's Movement Working Party has been tasked with establishing an efficient system to manage movements.

Prison Officers

Nationally, HMPPS is improving the support that applicants and new prison officers receive, engaging with them throughout the process and supporting them through to the completion of their training and probation period. 75 new prison officer mentors are being appointed to lead this work. In January 2017, we launched a new localised recruitment process for 30 of the most difficult to recruit to establishments. It has been designed to enhance the candidate's experience and give governors greater accountability over local outreach.

Locally at HMP Erlestoke, a Band 4 mentor role is solely in place to focus on supporting and mentoring new staff, seeing them through their early days within the establishment right through to their graduation. The mentor role also offers support and guidance during an officer's probationary period. Staff experience is constantly reviewed to ensure that new staff are supported, where possible, by an experienced member of staff.

Psychoactive Substances (PS)

A small number of the 86 'code blue' medical emergencies referred to in your report required ambulance transport to hospital and, of those that were sent to hospital, the vast majority of patients did not have life threatening symptoms and were returned to the prison on the same day. With no 24 hour healthcare cover at the prison there are occasions incidents occur with no healthcare in attendance. In such cases, the out of hour's service is contacted for advice or, if required, an ambulance will be requested. A full report of incidents is presented at the daily operational meeting attended by healthcare management. Minutes of the meeting are added to a shared drive available for all healthcare staff to access, and all incidents are recorded on the individual's case notes on Prison-NOMIS.

HMPPS takes seriously the ongoing challenges that PS and other illicit drugs pose to our establishments and we continue to implement a range of supply and demand reduction measures to address both the availability and use of such harmful substances. This is based on a multi-agency approach working closely with health partners and law enforcement agencies.

Further to last year's response, HMPPS has introduced new intelligence units which are working with establishments and law enforcement partners to develop intelligence on individuals and organised crime groups linked to the supply of drugs in prisons. To deter and disrupt the use of dangerous drugs, we are the first jurisdiction in the world to have developed a drug test for psychoactive substances which as of September 2016 was available in all prisons. HMPPS continues to work with its contracted laboratory to analyse data to ensure tests for the most commonly misused substances. In addition, HMPPS is working closely with health partners to provide information, guidance and support to prisoners, visitors and staff on the impact and damaging consequences of drugs.

Following the introduction of the Psychoactive Substances Act (PSA) in May 2016, there have been a number of successful convictions for possession in a custodial setting, including punishments of 14 months imprisonment. In addition to the PSA, the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 was amended in December 2016 to make all third generation synthetic cannabinoids (a group of psychoactive substances commonly found in prisons) a Class B drug. The amendment to the Act provides another powerful tool to charge those found in possession of PS and carries a heftier maximum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment.

HMP Erlestoke is increasing the levels of suspicion testing and out of hours cell searching in order to disrupt drug supply and distribution. Appropriate sanctions are made against prisoners who use such substances, demonstrating that this behaviour carries consequences. The local substance misuse policy has been revised and the prison has re-introduced meetings around supply reduction and substance misuse. Trained drug dogs are used to detect substances and two automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras have been purchased for positioning outside the prison to detect criminals attempting to throw parcels over the perimeter fence.

The findings following the series of PS forums conducted by healthcare in May 2016 is currently being discussed at the prison's drug strategy meeting. Educational sessions are being planned to support the prison to complete an amnesty for all contraband. A psychosocial facilitator will deliver PS awareness training to new officers.

Medical Escorts

NHS England (NHSE) have been working pro-actively with Bristol Community Health (BCH) to increase the amount of services delivered on-site in order to mitigate demands on escorts to secondary care. This approach continues to improve over time as protocols embed and business cases have been submitted to NHSE to provide additional equipment and staff training to further add to the treatment options on-site. NHSE have created an Escort and Bedwatch sub-group with BCH to regularly review the Escort and Bedwatch activity across the South West cluster. NHSE will work with healthcare providers and governors to ensure that an efficient triage process remains in place to assess patients with urgent issues and that the staff and facilities are available to enable on-site treatment where possible. In addition, plans will be agreed with BCH to ensure that routine patient escorts are not unnecessarily delayed, cancellation or postponement of an escort reasons will be recorded and shared with all partners, where escort availability is not being fully utilised.

Tobacco

As outlined above, out of hours searching has been increased and two ANPR cameras will be installed to help tackle tobacco supply and distribution. Any bank account details found whilst carrying out searches are referred to the police in order to identify any illicit economies. HMP Erlestoke will continue to monitor security intelligence to identify perpetrators who seek to smuggle tobacco into the prison.

All new receptions are currently seen by a trained healthcare professional, given a carbon dioxide reading and offered nicotine replacement (NRT) patches and breakthrough relief. If a prisoner is transferred in from a smoking prison then an eight week (plus an extra two weeks for complex cases) course is offered and, if they are transferred on from a smoke free prison and already on NRT then they will continue with their course.

Whilst there have been several campaigns at the prison for smoking cessation groups, there was no uptake for these groups. Due to a high level of trading and illicit use of NRT patches HMPPS requests a one-for-one swap of NRT patches. Failure to comply with this request results in a review and stoppage of NRT patches, but cessation support will continue.

Mobile Phones

HMPPS acknowledges that the number of mobile phones and SIM cards seized remains too high and is committed to tackling the threat posed by mobile phones in prisons. Measures are in place to detect mobiles in our prisons, but we are looking at new ways of finding and blocking them. We have invested £2 million in prisons to provide them with modern technology to support the detection of illicit mobile phones. Every prison in England and Wales has been equipped with portable detection poles which can be deployed at fixed points such as in reception, and extra portable signal detectors to use on wings to

support searches. HMPPS is also due to commence a procurement exercise for updated portable blockers, which will be placed on the procurement catalogue for prisons to purchase from local budgets.

On 3 August 2016, the Telecommunications Restriction Orders Regulations 2016 came into force. Since the introduction of the legislation, more than 150 illicit devices have been blocked.

Locally, HMP Erlestoke continues to use mobile phone detectors and monitor security intelligence to identify people who try to use mobile phones and regularly requests that Facebook accounts are closed down.

Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) Prisoners

The Imprisonment for Public Protection sentence was abolished by way of the commencement of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act on 3 December 2012, but it was not applied retrospectively. The Government at the time, took the view that it would not be right or appropriate to retrospectively alter sentences that had been lawfully imposed prior to their abolition, the more so in this case because these sentences had been imposed with risk management issues in mind. Consequently, prisoners currently serving IPP sentences will not be released unless the Parole Board authorises it.

However, HMPPS is continuing to oversee positive changes to the management and progression of prisoners serving IPP sentences through the application of the joint HMPPS and Parole Board IPP Action Plan, the purpose of which is to deliver further improvements and efficiencies in the effort to help IPP prisoners' progress towards release. HMPPS is focused on giving IPP prisoners the support, opportunities and motivation they need to progress more quickly when they are reviewed by the Parole Board so that they have the best possible prospect for securing release.

HMPPS recently completed a pilot on a new approach to casework, to augment and enhance existing case progression activity specifically for IPP prisoners. This has facilitated closer working with the Parole Board for the more complex cases, to ensure that parole hearings happen on time and with good quality, current risk assessments and reports. HMPPS is now embedding the lessons of the pilot into all its casework processes. The statutory Parole Board rules have been revised so that, since November 2016, parole panels can release IPP prisoners without progressing to an oral hearing, if it is assessed safe to do so.

IPP prisoners have continued to be released in increasing numbers. This clearly indicates that the work being undertaken under the joint IPP Action Plan to help these prisoners to progress towards release is achieving its aim. During 2016/17, 46% of all IPP prisoners considered by the Parole Board were released and 24% recommended for a move to open conditions. In 2011/2012, 28% of all IPP prisoners considered by the Parole Board were released. The IPP population in prisons was 3,353 at the end of June 2017. This is reduced from 3,528 at the end of March 2017 and 3,683 at the end of December 2016. This group continues to achieve release in high numbers, with 576 first time IPP releases in 2016, the highest figure since the sentence was introduced. The life sentence population was 7,275 at the end of March 2017, which is reduced from 7,338 at the end of December 2016. Life sentence prisoners also continue to achieve release with 371 releases in 2016.

Safer Custody Data

The prison's safer custody team are more than willing to provide the Board with figures on violence levels. These statistics are discussed and analysed at the safer custody meetings, which the Board attends, and included in the minutes of the meeting.