



Ministry
of Justice

Sam Gyimah MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

Miss Caroline Thompson
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Ashfield
Shortwood Road
Pucklechurch
BS16 9QJ

20th October 2017

Dear Caroline,

**HMP ASHFIELD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2016 TO 30 JUNE 2017**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 June 2017. 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.

I note your concerns about the limited opportunities for sex offenders to progress to open conditions due to a shortage of available places in the south and south west. We are aware of the demand for additional capacity for category D offenders convicted of sex offences but there are currently no plans to create further such places.

I agree that it can sometimes be challenging for prisons to fully meet all the needs of older prisoners. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) continues to work closely with the Department of Health, NHS England and local authorities to support the provision of the best possible care and support for elderly or frail people in our care. How to best address the needs of the increasing number of older prisoners is part of that dialogue.

Locally, HMP Ashfield continues to work with partners to review the needs of the changing population to ensure that social care needs are met and full access to the prison community is afforded to all men in the prison's care. HMP Ashfield is achieving this by building strong relationships with the local authority to develop robust social care referral pathways to ensure that the men have access to both full social care as well as low level buddy support to support independent living access to the prison community and domestic tasks. Access to services and review of access to care based on the changing population are managed via the Local Delivery Quality board chaired by the Director.

Turning to your concern about the high number of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) prisoners who are over tariff, I wish to assure you that 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.

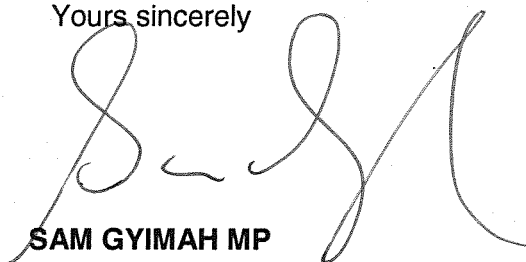
During 2016/17, 46% of all IPP prisoners considered by the Parole Board were released and 24% recommended for a move to open conditions. Less than a third of cases had a negative outcome. The IPP population in prisons was 3,353 at the end of June 2017. This has reduced from 3,528 at the end of March 2017 and 3,683 at the end of December 2016. This group continue to achieve release in high numbers, with 576 first time IPP releases in 2016, the highest figure since the sentence was introduced.

It was encouraging to receive your comments about that you consider HMP Ashfield to be a safe and secure prison in which prisoners are treated decently and humanely. I was pleased to read that the Board views many aspects of the prison to be excellent, in particular the overall quality of healthcare, residential accommodation and the high standard of catering. I was also encouraged to read that with regard to work and vocational training, the prison is operating very well and is providing effective work experience for prisoners whilst also enabling them to acquire vocational qualifications

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Director will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. 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 Ashfield.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Gyimah', written over a horizontal line.

SAM GYIMAH MP

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FOR 1 JULY 2016 TO 30 JUNE 2017**

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Offender Assessment System (OASys)

HMPPS current guidelines indicate that Initial Start of Custody Assessments should be completed within agreed timescales by local establishments or National Probation Service dependent on the risk of the offender. HMPPS continues to review the OASys backlog and has engaged with HMPS and NPS to ensure that reporting on the OASys backlog is improved and communicated to NPS areas. The prioritisation criteria remains in place to support establishments ensure the highest priority cases are completed in full, with a reduced assessment for lower risk cases, ensuring all cases have some form of risk assessment and sentence plan.

There has been a review of Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) and this will address the issues which prisons currently face around completing OASys reports. The new model will move the resource for OASys report completion into the training / resettlement estate and away from local / reception prisons, where there is more time for engagement with the offender and for the plan to be produced.

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, but the new OM model will be in place in all closed prisons by March 2019.