



Ministry
of Justice

Sam Gyimah MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

Mr Kevin Whiteside
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Bedford
St Loyes Street
Bedford
MK40 1HG

13th November 2017

Dear Kevin,

**HMP BEDFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2016 – 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 following the concerted indiscipline in November 2016 which resulted in the loss of wings, and as you have been short of members during the reporting year.

I recognise your concerns about staffing levels and the impact these have on the ability to run decent and humane regimes on a consistent basis. The Justice Secretary has been clear that we need to recruit more prison officers if we are to transform prisons into places of safety and reform. An extra 2,500 frontline officers will help drive forward our reforms to reduce violence, improve standards and increase the staff to prisoner caseload. 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.

We have implemented a number of national and local recruitment and marketing initiatives to attract more people to apply to become a prison officer. HMP Bedford is one of 31 sites who have adopted a localised recruitment process which has involved a bespoke attraction and marketing campaign applied to the commuting distance of the prison.

As well as undertaking targeted recruitment, we are doing more to reduce the level of attrition of existing staff. We are investing in a better induction system and are supporting new recruits through a formal mentoring scheme, from the moment they begin training through to completion of their probation period. We have recently launched a Retention Framework and Action Plan, designed to support prisons in identifying drivers of attrition and put in place targeted local interventions. We are currently piloting this at a number of establishments across the estate.

Each establishment's individual Benchmark Report is based on a safe, decent and secure operating level appropriate to that prison and agreed with the Governor and Group Director. The planned increase in officers will facilitate the roll out of the Offender Management model, which aims to reduce violence, improve standards and increase the staff-to-prisoner ratio.

I am grateful to the Board for acknowledging the successful recruitment drives at HMP Bedford, but note your concerns that there will be insufficient staff to deliver a full regime once the prison has reached its full complement of prisoners in November 2017. Whilst the prison will not be fully staffed by then, it will be receiving detached duty support and will be in a position to broadly run a full programme of activity.

I note the Board's request that the personal officer scheme is fully implemented in all prisons. Under the new Offender Management model, we will ensure that every prisoner has a dedicated officer who can engage with them one-to-one. These dedicated officers will have a caseload of six prisoners and will act as mentors for their prisoners – listening out for problems, supporting changes in attitudes and behaviour, and defusing tension and frustration. This one-to-one support from a dedicated officer is at the heart of our prison reforms making sure that offenders get the help they need to quit drugs and get the education and skills needed to find work and leave crime behind.

I note your request to increase the funding available to NHS Trusts to improve the commissioning and delivery of mental health services in prison with a specific emphasis on reducing incidents of self-harm and suicide. NHS England is keen to support the current provider of the healthcare service to contribute to a reduction in self harm and suicide. The provider has revised its mental health pathway this year to ensure a more effective response. In line with HMIP requirements, NHS England commissions a health needs assessment and will ensure that findings are reflected in any variation of the current contract which was awarded to the provider following a tender in 2015. The local partnership board reviews performance and incidents each quarter and has oversight of the operation of the service to enable partners to be alerted to any possible changes that are required. Mental Health provision at HMP Bedford has been prioritised to manage a backlog due to staffing and sick absence. Two established agency staff are providing cover whilst permanent replacements are being recruited and cover will continue to be reviewed at the partnership board and directly with the manager of the Mental Health team.

As recognised in your report this has been a challenging year for HMP Bedford, and it was encouraging to receive your comments about the positive developments that have taken place at the prison. I was particularly pleased to read about the move of the first night and induction centre to E wing and the re-introduction of prisoner forums.

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. HM Prison and Probation Service comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

I am sorry to hear of the problems the Board has experienced recruiting new members. Your concerns have been forwarded to the IMB Secretariat who will respond to you directly.

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 Bedford.

Yours sincerely



SAM GYIMAH MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Heating and Windows

Discussions are taking place within HMPPS regarding the heating and windows contract. Both projects were temporarily put on hold during 2016/17 with a view to whether they will go ahead in 2018. In the meantime, remedial works on the heating system have been undertaken by Carillion on C wing where a number of cells had poor heating.

With regard to the hot weather making various areas uncomfortable, all areas, including cells, have functioning ventilation either through windows or ducted ventilation systems. These are maintained by Carillion via both the planned maintenance schedule and any reactive repairs raised.

HMPPS takes seriously the ongoing challenges that psychoactive substances and other illicit drugs pose to our establishments and continues 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. To combat the issue with throw-overs a window grill install has taken place to all wall side cell windows and there is ongoing repairs completed to these by Carillion, as and when they become damaged.