



Mr John W Evans
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Huntercombe,
Nuffield
Henley-on-Thames
RG9 5SB

13 November 2017

Dear John,

**HMP HUNTERCOMBE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JANUARY – 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 the Board was short of members during this reporting period.

I was sorry to read of the death in custody and can understand how upsetting this must have been for everyone in HMP Huntercombe, especially as this was the first self-inflicted death in the prison's 70 year history. Whilst every death in custody is regrettable and the prison has rightly paid a great deal of additional attention to the potential impact on prisoners when they get news of immigration decisions, I am pleased both the Prison and Probation Ombudsman and Coroner concluded that there was no failure on the part of the prison in its care of this prisoner and that Board is content that the Duty of Care within the establishment is good.

I understand the Board's concerns for the repatriation process at HMP Huntercombe, including the level, clarity and timeliness of communication with prisoners and the prison. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) will therefore look at communication around the repatriation processes so that prisoners and staff are kept informed of the progress of their case.

I accept that access to legal advice can at times be difficult, especially now the Migrant Help service has been withdrawn due to funding constraints. I can however assure the Board that HM Huntercombe offers a network of NVQ Level 3 qualified peer mentors who are able to support prisoners. Although these mentors are not able to advise prisoners, they can facilitate access to necessary forms and ensure they are returned to the Home Office within the correct timescales.

Work is underway to improve telephone access at HMP Huntercombe and an additional PINphone will be installed on each of the four larger units. The Digital Prisons Team are also working with the prison to find a way of introducing a video call system developed by the providers of the Prisoner Voicemail service, which does not compromise wider IT security.

I note your concerns over the level of resettlement support for prisoners at Foreign National Offender (FNO) only prisons such as HMP Huntercombe. Together with the Home Office and other Criminal Justice System organisations, the Ministry of Justice is looking again at the resettlement activity currently offered by FNO only prisons to ensure it is commensurate with the specialist function of these prisons.

The TRACKS system, an internet or CD based tool providing help and advice to migrants, provides basic generic information on different countries rather than providing any individual support for employment or accommodation needs for the FNO. As the programme is only updated around once a year, HMP Huntercombe is looking to utilise additional resources from the new Offender Management Model to provide staff who can deliver bespoke support to each prisoner to manage their successful removal from the UK.

I acknowledge the Board's concerns for the resources required to strengthen the provision for education, learning and skills. The recent publication of the White Paper "Prison Safety and Reform" HMPPS has stripped out unnecessary rules and governance from the education contracts to allow governors more oversight and control of existing services. HMPPS will also be making prison governors fully responsible for the education delivered in their prisons so that they can buy the services they think are most appropriate in their individual prison. This means governors will be able to decide how to structure their education, who provides their learning delivery and how they will spend their budgets effectively.

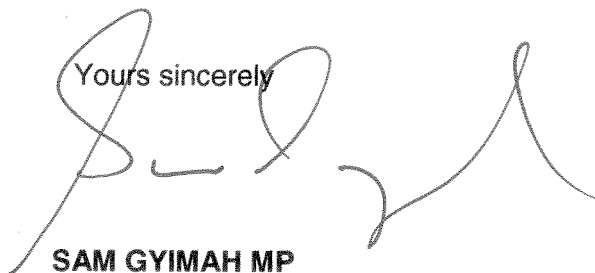
The payment difficulties associated with the Virtual Campus (VC), have now been resolved and it continues to offer a broad range of content, including education, training, and resettlement resources, as well as live access to whitelisted websites using the internet. Support, advice and additional training is also available from the HMPPS VC team so that all users and education providers are aware of the features and content available on the VC and are able to best utilise this resource.

It was encouraging to read that despite the Board's concerns HMP Huntercombe continues to be a well-run prison with prison management, staff and contractors all working well collaborating together. I am also pleased prisoners appear content with the regime delivered and the prison is considered safe, compared to the prison estate in general, with few violent incidents. It is positive the Board have recognised HMP Huntercombe deals with prisoner complaints fairly and that the number of applications to the Board have continued to fall.

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. 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 Huntercombe.

Yours sincerely



SAM GYIMAH MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Staffing levels

Following a number of retirements and resignations over the past year, which impacted on staffing levels, the appointment of a local Recruitment Adviser has increased prison officer numbers significantly with further successful candidates currently awaiting Prison Officer Entry Level Training,

This general improvement in staffing levels has resulted in an increase in the number of trained Assessment, Care in Custody & Teamwork (ACCT) Assessors.

Maintenance Contract

The problems highlighted within the IMB annual report have been identified as a national issue, therefore Directors at the MoJ and HMPPS have agreed a contract reset, which aims to address any issues, and should increase the first time fix reactive repairs. Additional staff brought into establishments will assist in reducing outstanding maintenance and speed response times. A pilot is currently being trailed at two establishments for three months, one in each contract area. If successful they will be rolled out fully once the pilot data has been assessed.

Carillion Directors are part of the working groups within the reset, which also include representatives from HMPPS, MOJ, Contractors and Governors representatives.

HMP Huntercombe continue to have a good working relationship with local Carillion managers who are conscious of the impact of works on the safe and decent running of the prison. Issues are addressed at regular fortnightly meetings and the Governor is also a member of the newly-established Governor Scrutiny Panel for the contract reset.