



Ministry
of Justice

Sam Gyimah MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

Helena Simms
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP & YOI Styal
Styal Road,
Wilmslow, Cheshire
SK9 4HR

25 September 2017

Dear Helena

**HMP/YOI STYAL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2016 – 30 APRIL 2017**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending April 2016. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for all the hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations.

I share your concern about the value of women serving short sentences being returned to custody and the impact recall can have on efforts to rehabilitate offenders and employment, accommodation and families. The Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) 2014 introduced for the first time the requirement for offenders sentenced to less than 12 months to be released on licence and subject to probation supervision. This was an important measure to tackle the unacceptably high levels of re-offending among this group of offenders who previously were released with no supervision or support. Failure to comply with licence conditions can, of course, lead to recall to custody.

I recognise the particular impact this has had on women offenders because they tend to receive shorter sentences, so following the ORA we saw an increase in the number of women being recalled. The re-offending data for offenders who have been released under the ORA provisions will be available later this year so we do not, therefore, have the evidence yet on whether the ORA has reduced re-offending by offenders sentenced to less than 12 months.

I am clear that recall should be used where there is a need to protect the public from further offending and not for what are sometimes described as 'administrative breaches'. We are, therefore, pursuing measures to help ensure that probation (the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies) are given the tools and support they need to keep as many offenders as possible on licence in the community and that recall is focused where it is necessary for public protection. For example, new powers for probation to vary licence conditions, without having to go back to the prison governor, so that supervising officers can respond more quickly to changes in behaviour and avoid the need to recall where possible.

We will also be publishing later this year a female offender strategy, announced in last Autumn's Prison Safety and Reform White Paper. The strategy will have a focus on promoting early intervention and improving community provision for women as I believe we should take every opportunity to divert women out of the criminal justice system and work towards reducing the prison population.


I was pleased to read of the range of services provided by the Women's Centre with a number of external agencies providing regular 'clinics' for women. Having specialist services in the community for women is vitally important in order to reduce offending and reoffending. To help enable this, the Government is already investing one million pounds over five years to seed fund the development of whole systems, multiagency, holistic approaches to female offenders and women at risk of offending.

It was also encouraging to receive your comments about the work of the reducing re-offending and resettlement team, demonstrating a real commitment to make things happen for the women including working in collaboration with staff in Education to find either employment or education for women on release.

I was pleased to read of that significant emphasis is placed on maintaining family ties with a large number of women able to go home for weekends, the success of family days and the help given in those in the Mother and Baby unit to develop the necessary skills to care for their children thus preparing them for family life in the community. I also agree the scheme to allow the women to learn to budget and cook for themselves is excellent preparation for release.

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 (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/YOI Styal.



SAM GYIMAH MP