



Ministry  
of Justice

**Sam Gyimah MP**  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary  
of State for Justice

Mr Barry Page  
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
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<sup>h</sup>  
29 October 2017

Dear Barry,

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

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 April 2017. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for all the hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations, especially as you continue to be short of Board members.

I was concerned to read your comments regarding an escalation of instability within the prison, assaults by prisoners on both staff and prisoners and the increased use of both drugs and weapons. I want to reassure you that the Government is fully committed to making prisons safe. 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 with 2,500 extra prisons officers, and new security measures to tackle drones, phones and drugs.

Prison officers are some of our finest public servants and we do not underestimate the challenges faced by everyone working in prisons; we are therefore committed to transforming the culture of prisons and supporting staff to help them maintain safe and secure establishments. We have rolled out over 5,500 body-worn cameras across the prison estate, alongside training for staff on how to improve their interactions with prisoners which will contribute to making our prisons safe and effective.

Violence in prison is 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. Independent Adjudicators may already impose consecutive additional days on prisoners who assault staff and there are clear guidelines in place to help make sure that this happens. We are working closely with the Police and Crown Prosecution Service to ensure that offenders face swift justice and that courts have full evidence of the harm caused, in order to impose the strongest possible punishment.

HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) takes seriously the ongoing challenges that psychoactive substances 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.

We have introduced new legislation to control the supply and possession of psychoactive substances in prisons, as well as an innovative new programme of testing, which has been rolled out across the estate.

Prisons have at their disposal a range of security measures to reduce drugs being smuggled into prisons including more than 300 dogs to detect psychoactive substances. We have also introduced new intelligence units in HMPPS 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. We continue to work with our contracted laboratory to analyse data to ensure we are testing for the most commonly misused substances. In addition we are committed to exploring new technology and are currently looking at the effectiveness and feasibility of the use of body scanner technology (which can detect items secreted internally or held on the body) to complement existing searching methods.

I was pleased to be advised that a Dedicated Search Team has been established at HMP Swaleside. This is a significant investment in preventing the ingress of illicit articles into the prison and making it a safer and more secure place. The strengthening of searching processes have resulted in increased finds within the prison and there have been several prosecutions of prisoners' visitors found in possession of unauthorised items.

Drug treatment also has a very important role to play in tackling the problem. Substance misuse services are commissioned through NHS England to provide a range of services. Alongside these treatments, 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.

NHS England continue to work closely with the Governor at HMP Swaleside to implement wing based dispensing as the requirement to reduce the pressure away from the central dispensing area is recognised. Plans are in place to trial an additional dispensing area in October 2017 to reduce the pressure on the central area and evaluate the practicalities of multi-point dispensing. The Primary Healthcare service is presently being re-procured and the safe dispensing of prescribed medication will be one of the main areas of consideration when evaluating the bid.

Turning to recruitment, I understand the need to not only recruit new staff but also retain and pay a competitive salary to those existing staff. HMP Swaleside is classified as among our 31 most difficult to recruit and retain prisons. Therefore, in accordance with the then Secretary of State's announcement in February, all new entrant Prison Officers since April 2017 are now recruited to the mid-point of the pay range rather than pay range minima and are additionally paid a Market Supplement of £5,000. This means that total earnings for a new entrant Prison Officer at HMP Swaleside will be £28,456 with the potential to progress to £29,403. Existing Prison Officers at the prison have also had their pay adjusted to reflect these new arrangements. The Prison Officer Recruitment and Retention Programme are also exploring alternative methods to incentivise potential applicants from surrounding areas.

The increase in staff will provide the capacity for prison officers to deliver a dedicated key worker role and build constructive relationships with prisoners, reduce levels of frustration and, ultimately, reduce levels of violence. We have purposely set out an ambitious recruitment plan that lasts until the end of 2018. This phased approach is to make sure that officers can be successfully inducted and learn from experienced officers.

It was encouraging to receive your comments that the Senior Management Team have been largely successful in regularising and improving the regime in the prison, providing more certainty for staff and prisoners in their everyday activities and to read of improvements to the cleanliness and appearance of the prison, especially the residential wings.

The prison have commenced a refurbishment plan in conjunction with the Facilities Maintenance provider, which includes ongoing redecoration, renewal of key domestic equipment and implementation of revised waste collection schedules, and also involves prisoner representatives to create a shared sense of ownership in maintaining a decent environment.

I am pleased the continued development of the Pathways Service into an Enabling Environment is showing encouraging results and that the Emotional Well-Being Support Centre is having significantly positive results in improving care for prisoners needing support. I congratulate the Mental Health Inreach Team for the national Patient Safety Award and a High Sheriff of Kent award for their Emotional Well-Being work.

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 Swaleside.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S-G', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**SAM GYIMAH MP**

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**HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report**

**Transfers To Resettlement Prisons**

Every effort will continue to be made to enable the transfer of prisoners within the agreed resettlement window. The Governor will personally write to all local prisons and relevant Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) in an attempt to improve the current position. The situation will be reviewed within three months to determine improved engagement and flow and future options considered if necessary.

**Complaints For Other Establishments**

Responding to complaints in a timely fashion is in the interest of both the prisoner and the respondent. In order to reduce the number of outstanding complaints, the Governor at HMP Swaleside now writes directly to the establishment concerned (copying in the Governing Governor). This has proved successful in reducing late responses.

**Attendance At External Hospital Appointments**

The introduction of a greater range of on-site specialist/consultant provision including ultra-sound, Geriatrician, Respiratory consultant and Endocrinologist has minimised the necessity for attendance at external appointments. Given the increase in external hospital appointments to meet the needs of the older prisoner population, a scoping study is currently underway to determine adequacy of current staffing profile. Improved resourcing will also support the obligation to meet nationally agreed waiting times.