



Ministry
of Justice

Sam Gyimah MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

Mrs Maureen Lewis
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Altcourse
Higher Lane
Fazakerley, Liverpool
L9 7LH

11 December 2017

Dear Maureen,

**HMP ALT COURSE: 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 as you have been short of members during the reporting period despite membership increasing.

I understand your concerns that prisoners with complex mental health and behavioural issues are being held in the Care and Separation Unit and Healthcare Unit for significant periods whilst awaiting assessment for transfer to secure hospital units. Referrals from any prison into specialised commissioned services are handled by NHS England. For those individuals who are assessed by the clinical team as requiring a secure bed, a bed will be accessed immediately, if available, or the prisoner will be placed on a waiting list until a bed becomes available. The waiting list for beds is now scrutinised and prioritised based on clinical need and urgency on a weekly basis. This process has been implemented over the last year to ensure that prisoners are kept waiting for the minimum period of time possible and that clinical urgency is considered.

NHS England is working with partners across the criminal justice and immigration removal system to improve services for offenders and detainees with mental health difficulties. A comprehensive ten point plan has been developed that summarises all the work underway which will be published towards the end of 2017 and describes a number of initiatives that will improve the pathway to and from prison to mental health hospitals.

NHS England is currently carrying out a service review across all adult medium and low secure services which is considering a number of issues including the future demand and capacity required. The pressure being experienced within prisons is being considered as part of the review and new service specifications have been developed, including greater clarity in relation to accessing assessment services and forensic outreach and liaison services. Optimum service modelling work has taken place for prison mental health services which have redesigned current services to develop prototypes which can be piloted in 2017/18. The learning from this modelling has also been embedded in the new prison mental health and learning disability service specification, which is currently out for public consultation. In relation to high secure services, a review of the clinical model and specification is also underway, including a focus on access assessment services.

The current Prison Transfer and Remission Guidance published by the Department of Health in 2011, is being reviewed, with a focus on ensuring that the timescales within the guidance take into account clinical urgency and need. It is anticipated that publication of two new documents, one for prisons and another for immigration removal centres, to replace the current guidance will take place in April 2018.

Locally, HMP Altcourse has set up a re-integration unit which supports prisoners who have behavioural issues and aims to support them in returning to their original unit.

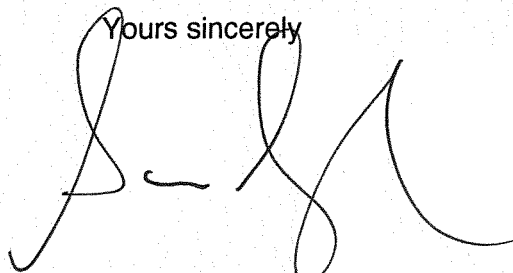
I was reassured to read that prisoners are treated fairly at HMP Altcourse and that safer custody is now seen as an integral part of prison life. It is encouraging that the increased staffing levels have had a positive impact throughout the prison and this has contributed to a reduction in violence and self-harm.

I am grateful to the Board for recognising the compassion shown by those staff that delivered palliative care to seriously ill prisoners during the year, and the professionalism and commitment of the Care and Separation Unit staff, even when dealing with the most challenging of prisoners. It is pleasing that the Board also highlights the significant increase in the number of prisoners involved in purposeful activity and the success HMP Altcourse has had with the Welding Academy and Recycling Lives.

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 Altcourse.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Gyimah', written in a cursive style.

SAM GYIMAH MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Smoke Free Prison

As the Board will be aware, HMP Altcourse became smoke free on 18 September 2017. The introduction of this was managed and monitored during the lead up and implementation phase, and support was put in place for all prisoners who wished to access it. In relation to the reduction in violence, the prison continues to monitor the impact this has had, particularly in terms of violent incidents, and is committed to working towards achieving a safer prison for all. As highlighted in the Board's report, the security department is also taking further steps to tackle illicit items entering the prison.

Healthcare

Staffing

It is acknowledged that a number of nurses have left in the past six months. Recruitment has taken place and it is hoped that vacant posts will be filled shortly. In the interim, agency staff have been used to cover vacancies; the majority of whom have worked at the prison before and know the processes and protocols.

Since the end of October 2017 The Gables has no longer been the GP provider. HMP Altcourse is in talks with a large Liverpool practice to become the next provider. In the meantime a locum agency is being used and is rostering the same GPs who already work at the prison. HMP Altcourse will have monthly meetings with all GPs to ensure they are aware of, and are following, healthcare policies and protocols to maintain consistency.

Access to Education

Many of the patients admitted to Healthcare for medical interventions are not well enough to undertake educational courses. However, based on an individual need HMP Altcourse will provide educational material if requested. The prison is currently supporting a prisoner who is completing an Open University course whilst located in Healthcare.

All patients in the Healthcare Unit have access to the Library on a weekly basis as part of the published regime. For those that cannot physically get to the Library, there is a facility to deliver reading material to healthcare.

Vulnerable Prisoner (VP) Waiting Room

Improvements cannot be made to the VP waiting room without the structure of the building being altered. However, HMP Altcourse has started a system whereby the GP conducts his surgery on the VP wing every Friday, negating the need for some VPs to go healthcare. VPs will still need to attend healthcare for urgent appointments outside of Fridays, as well as dental appointments, but the numbers are such that the waiting room does not become overcrowded and the waiting time is less.

Joint Working Arrangements

All partnership agencies are mandatory attendees at the bi-monthly Reducing Reoffending meeting which is chaired by the Head of Offender Management. In addition, there is now a monthly Partnership Board meeting, chaired by the Community Rehabilitation Company Manager, which all key partners are invited to. One of the key aims of both meetings is to discuss better ways of working together, which will give the best outcomes for prisoners at HMP Altcourse.