



██████████
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
The Verne
Portland
Dorset
DT5 1EQ

MoJ Ref: SUB 85795

1 March 2021

Dear ██████████,

**HMP THE VERNE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 AUGUST 2019 – 31 JULY 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 July 2020. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, particularly as the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on your level of monitoring and you were short of Board members during the reporting year.

I understand the Board's request to fund a 24-hour social care facility for elderly, frail, sick and vulnerable prisoners. The Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) recognise the need to provide safe, decent and suitable services, accommodation and support for prisoners of all ages, vulnerabilities and disabilities. Alongside meeting the immediate need of protecting the prison population against the threat of Covid-19, the new prisons being built at HMP Five Wells, Glen Parva and four further sites will provide greater accessibility for those with reduced mobility and enhanced medical needs. It is recognised that nearly 60% of the population at HMP The Verne are older prisoners aged over 50. Models for accommodating older offenders are also being considered as part of the Older Offender's Strategy and, linked to this work, HMPPS is exploring how the prison environment can best support all cohorts.

Social care assessments and input in care is taking place via the local authority, Dorset Council, for those prisoners located at HMP The Verne that require support. However, it is acknowledged that areas for improvement have been identified, such as accessing continuing healthcare for those with complex needs, as well as access to specialist input and palliative training for those who may be at the end of their life. NHS England and NHS Improvement Nursing and Quality leads in the South West region are engaging with the local Clinical Commissioning Group to develop a process to support healthcare providers in the timely application for funding for those prisoners that meet the required thresholds as in the community. There is also a commitment to further embed the principles of the Dying Well in Custody Charter throughout 2021 with research taking place to address operational gaps, define local pathways with hospices and improve holistic care to prisoners and their loved ones.

NHS England and NHS Improvement also has positive relationships with its providers and encourage transparent reporting of situations which are challenging or require flexible healthcare commissioning approaches, such as 24-hour staff or specialist input. The issue regarding dignity and social care support in the evening once healthcare staff finish at HMP The Verne will be raised with providers to ensure the matter can be addressed. It is however encouraging that the Board has acknowledged that the consequences of an ageing population are now recognised and HMP The Verne has a custodial management position to oversee all issues relating to social care from reception to discharge. The prison

also has strong links with the local authority social care lead and will continue to collaborate with Dorset Council on the provision of social care needs for its population via the monthly Local Delivery Quality Board.

Despite your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments praising the Governor and staff for their efforts in the prison's progression in its second year of operation. I too am grateful for all their hard work particularly during this difficult time responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and was encouraged to note that prisoners have accepted the regime restrictions to protect them and staff. It was pleasing to read that the prison is providing a safe environment where staff and prisoner relationships are positive. I was also reassured to note that the prison effectively monitors and addresses equality issues, as well as staff being respectful of all minorities. I note that the prison also received an overall positive inspection by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and I hope that the Board will be able to report further positive developments during the forthcoming reporting year.

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 the community hospital and the resettlement 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 The Verne.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucy Frazer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

LUCY FRAZER QC MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Community Hospital

NHS England and NHS Improvement Health and Justice Team is continuing to develop a business case into the feasibility of creating an enhanced healthcare provision at HMP The Verne based on the community hospital model. NHS England and NHS Improvement will shortly be instructing a consultancy engineering firm to review the building, electrical and other utilities ahead of considering the exact nature and scope of service provision required. HMPPS will be working in partnership with NHS England and NHS Improvement to determine the provision, hospital escorts and bedwatches in the context of the overall prison estate for the South West. The requirement for 24-hour staffing will form part of those discussions.

Resettlement

As part of the 18,000 additional prison places programme committed in the recent spending review, plans are being developed to increase capacity in the category D estate. This will enable more prisoners to move to open conditions. HMPPS is currently assessing which prisons may be suitable for expansion to provide safe, decent and secure environments to support effective rehabilitation. Whilst it is not always appropriate for all prisoners to progress to category D prisons, prisoners are able to continue to receive rehabilitation and resettlement support. HMPPS has implemented an enhanced Through the Gate (TTG) service for prisoners, to improve the resettlement provision in all prisons. The specification includes the requirement that all Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) complete specific, tailored tasks to help prisoners to gain employment, as well as secure and maintain settled accommodation and manage debt and their financial affairs. To support this, the National Probation Service has improved commissioning rates and set minimum levels of funding for the commissioning of TTG services for those leaving non-resettlement prisons like HMP The Verne where the CRC has recently employed a member of staff part-time to deliver TTG services.

It is encouraging that the Board recognises in its report that the resettlement provision is being addressed for the small number of prisoners that are discharged from HMP The Verne. Whilst the TTG provision has been restricted due to Covid-19 restrictions, every effort will continue to be made by HMP The Verne's Offender Management Unit to help meet the needs of those leaving custody within the nationally agreed Exceptional Delivery Model.