



██████████
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Ford
Ford Road
Arundel
West Sussex
BN18 0BX

MoJ Ref: SUB85907

24 March 2021

Dear ██████,

**HMP FORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2019 – 31 OCTOBER 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 October 2020. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, especially as I note you were short of Board members. My condolences to the Board on the passing of ██████, a dedicated and valued member. I was also saddened to hear of a death in custody during the reporting year; every death is a tragedy and my officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

I acknowledge the Board's concerns about the handling of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Under the ROTL policy framework, the prison, placement provider and prisoner enter a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This is explicitly not a contract of employment and does not make a prisoner undertaking a work placement, an employee. Placement providers were not able to register under the furlough scheme as prisoners are not employees. However, it was discovered that some prisoners had in fact entered into arrangements with their placement providers, separate from the arrangements outlined in the ROTL framework. Advice was therefore issued to prison governors on 9 June 2020, so that relevant providers could be invited to decide whether to apply for furlough. The providers had until 31 July 2020 to make a furlough payment claim on behalf of employees (for those furloughed for at least a full three-week period between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2020).

Turning to the Board's comments about the curtailment of ROTL, it is acknowledged that ROTL is a valuable tool to support resettlement, but it also presents an increased risk to the safe operation of prisons during the pandemic. As the Board are aware, most ROTL was suspended in March 2020 as part of measures to help limit the spread of the virus. However, HMPPS did re-introduce ROTL when and where it was safe to do so via two Exceptional Delivery Models before the second national lockdown in November 2020. Wider use of ROTL has been paused again due to the current national lockdown, but it remains available for essential Covid-secure work placements, or for compelling, compassionate reasons. The resumption of the full ROTL provision is intended when and where it can be delivered safely and will take account of changes in the national restrictions.

Turning to some positive points captured in your report, it was reassuring to hear that all staff members have been commended by the Board for keeping everyone safe during the Covid-19 lockdown. I welcome the Board's exit survey questionnaire, a good initiative in accessing information directly from prisoners while you undertook your monitoring duties remotely. I was pleased to hear that Ford Forward Community

Chaplaincy charity received a High Sheriff's Award and welcome the Chichester College Ford Campus School of Construction, which when fully opened will create opportunities for prisoners to strive.

I note you have raised some other 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. The Governor would particularly like to thank you, [REDACTED] (outgoing Chair) and the Board for your support in his first year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Chalk'.

ALEX CHALK MP

HMP FORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2019 – 31 OCTOBER 2020

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Accommodation

HMPPS Prison Maintenance Group has been working with Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL) and the Governor on several key projects. The older billet style accommodation has now been decommissioned, decanted and will be demolished over the next few months. There are new temporary cabins on site that do offer single occupation, with shower and toilet facilities per prisoner. With the decommissioning of the huts more cabins will be installed on site beginning April 2021, and these will also offer each prisoner a personal shower and toilet. A temporary reduction in operational capacity has enabled this work to be completed.

In the pipeline there is a Ministry of Justice (MoJ) project to build a new wing which will give a permanent solution to the accommodation issues at HMP Ford. The new unit will include in cell sanitation and decent showers fit for purpose including general amenities. The Estates team have been working on shower refurbishments to A wing, and more work will follow. Estates have also installed a kitchen in A wing and further new kitchens will be developed in this area to improve on the lack of decent kitchen facilities. There is a specification under development to see the removal of C wing cladding and replacing the windows.

Work with MoJ partners is also underway to redevelop the Healthcare unit, and whilst the business case is still under development this is being worked on at pace. GFSL continue to maintain the site to an acceptable standard, and whilst it is recognised there have been issues with catering equipment and laundry facilities, all the equipment issues have now been resolved and are currently in working order.

GFSL are working hard to improve repair response times and are in dialog with their service contractors to minimise any down time. GFSL and the Service Delivery Manager are working closely to capture all performance related data and will be using this to drive improvements across the contract.

Prisoner Access to IT Equipment and Systems

There are issues around allowing prisoners to have open and full access to the internet and there is a requirement to have controls in place when allowing prisoners access to the internet to ensure the security of the prison, staff, prisoners and the general public. This is outlined in Prison Service Instructions (PSIs) 25/2014 *IT Security Policy* (in Section 16) and PSI 04/2016 *Interception of Communications in Prisons and Security Measures* (Sections 2.70 – 2.74).

It is appreciated that access to IT and the internet is very important in rehabilitating prisoners, which is why approved solutions such as access to Virtual Campus IT suites have been installed nationally in prisons across the country.

In terms of prisoners being able to make a claim for Universal Credit (UC), in addition to limitations around accessing the internet, it is also currently not possible for prisoners to claim UC while they are in prison due the complexity of the UC delivery programme. Prison leavers who are unable to access the internet can now call a bespoke telephony line to make a UC claim on release. However, MoJ colleagues continue to work closely with DWP to improve and speed up the claim process to ensure that prison leavers can receive a UC payment as soon as possible after being released.

Workforce

In response to the Board's concerns about the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff, HMPPS remains committed to achieving a national target of 14% of all staff recruited from a BAME background. HMPPS is continuing to increase awareness and widening the use of the Civil Service Life Chances Programmes to encourage diverse groups to apply to roles across the department. HMPPS welcomes and encourages applications from everyone irrespective of their background, identity, experience or circumstances, and from particularly those underrepresented in the workforce.

Improved diversity data on ethnicity has enabled HMPPS to spot disparities and identify trends, which supports activity to help recruit BAME prison officers in greater numbers and increase the number of senior BAME prison officers. Here is a summary of HMPPS Annual Staff Equalities report 2019/20 which captures workforce statistics on recruitment diversity: -

- **All Prison Officer Entry Levels:** BAME candidates made up 18.2% of applicants and 11.0% of formal offers accepted between July 2018 and June 2020. These proportions varied over the quarters ranging from 14.5% to 29.9% for applicants, and 7.1% to 17.6% for offers formally accepted.
- **Public Sector Prison Officers:** BAME candidates made up 17.4% of applicants and 10.7% of formal offers accepted between July 2018 and June 2020. These proportions varied over the quarters ranging from 12.0% to 25.2% for applicants and 7.1% to 17.2% for offers accepted.
- **Youth Custody Service Prison Officers:** BAME candidates made up 31.9% of applicants and 22.7% of formal offers accepted over the whole period.
- **Officer Support Grades:** BAME candidates made up 18.8% of applicants and 12.6% of formal offers accepted, with large variations between the quarters.

Whilst regional recruitment activity focusses on volume recruitment campaigns, the impact of this at HMP Ford is minimal as the attrition levels remain relatively low, which limit significant changes to the workforce.

As the Board are aware, the population demographic for West Sussex is predominantly white and this is proving an obstacle for attracting BAME candidates to join HMP Ford. Recently some staff of BAME backgrounds have arrived on transfer to the prison.

One of HMP Ford's priorities for the year ahead is Diversity and Inclusion. The Governor will be looking at establishing and addressing some of the cultural differences between HMP Ford's staff and the prison population. Whilst the Governor may not be able to significantly influence the ethnicity of the workforce, he can ensure that a rehabilitative culture, procedural justice, enhanced transparency and additional staff training to be at the forefront of HMP Ford's vision and embedded across local policy.

Regarding the issue of disparity on the number of ethnic prisoners at HMP Ford in paid work. Although there are no restrictions on who can apply for employment opportunities (provided they meet the criteria), the Governor will examine the application process to ensure parity and equity of access and will look at developing additional monitoring mechanisms.