



Ministry
of Justice

Alex Chalk MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

██████████
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Grendon and Springhill
Grendon Underwood
Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire
HP18 OTL

MoJ Ref: SUB 88013

26 May 2021

Dear ██████████,

**HMP GRENDON: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR
1 JANUARY 2020– 31 DECEMBER 2020**

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

Whilst you have not raised any specific issues of concern for my attention, I fully understand the Board's decency concern around the night sanitation system and the use of cell pots when the system breaks down. In the vast majority of prisons there is modern sanitation inside cells, only in a small number of older prisons such as HMP Grendon has it not proved possible to install in-cell sanitation or the cost of doing so is prohibitively high. In such cases, a system of electronic unlocking is in place. Whilst not ideal, particularly for older prisoners, these night sanitation systems provide access to adequate sanitation and I am pleased to be able to confirm work has already started at HMP Grendon to improve the current night sanitation system. These upgrades also include work on the cell call system wiring and will ensure a better quality of delivery of the electronic system. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has set out further details in response to the in-cell sanitation issue in the attached annex.

I was saddened to hear that three members of staff passed away during the summer of 2020 and recognise the significant impact that this will have had on the prison. I appreciate the continued professionalism of everyone working at the prison whilst having to come to terms with the loss of colleagues and friends. I was also encouraged to note that the support provided by the Chaplaincy during this difficult time has been recognised.

Regarding the positives within your report, it was reassuring to receive your comments that the prison provides a safe environment and has a good community spirit, where prisoners are treated fairly and humanely. I was pleased to read that the preventative actions of staff and cooperation of prisoners during the pandemic ensured no prisoners tested positive for Covid-19 during the report period. I was also reassured to note that effective plans were put in place to shield vulnerable individuals and I am grateful for the hard work and commitment of everyone throughout this difficult time.

It was encouraging that throughout the pandemic prisoners had access to a consistent daily regime, despite some significant staff absences during December 2020 and greater periods of time out of cell

were provided when national restrictions eased. I was also pleased to read that the additional support provided to prisoners to maintain family ties such as additional credit, video calls and photographs to send home has been appreciated. I was also reassured to note that the levels of self-harm have reduced on the previous year and that all staff have completed the suicide and self-harm training enabling concerns about a prisoner's wellbeing to be identified, managed and supported better.

I note you have raised three local issues of concern in your report about re-establishing equality meetings as well as improving re-categorisation and cell bell response times which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues.

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 Grendon.

Yours sincerely,

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

ALEX CHALK MP

HMP GRENDON: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JANUARY 2020– 31 DECEMBER 2020

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

In-Cell Sanitation

As indicated in the Minister's letter, due to the age and design of the buildings at HMP Grendon it would be difficult to change the current sanitation arrangement without major building reconstruction works and at present there are no plans or the funding to increase the number of cells with in-cell sanitation. However, as part of the long-term strategy for the prison estate that is currently in development, HMPPS will be considering the continued use of night sanitation systems and the feasibility of replacing them with in-cell sanitation.

In the meantime, it is recognised that there are challenges with the operation of the electronic night sanitation system at HMP Grendon due to it being dated which makes it prone to breaking down. The system has previously undergone changes to improve reliability, which also saw safety upgrades with the inclusion of alarms to indicate to staff where prisoners had not returned to their cells. However, further upgrades are needed and these are taking place as part of the Fire Improvement Project which commenced in November 2020 to deliver a new fire safety system (including in-cell detection) and misting systems. The upgrade to the night sanitation system includes the replacement of electrical components, such as the computers and software, alongside work on the cell call system wiring which will address the Board's concerns about prisoners communicating with staff. Despite the pandemic and safe systems of work requiring contractors to maintain social distancing, steady progress is being made and the project is expected to be completed by the end of December 2022.

As all of the improvements are being undertaken on a wing by wing basis whilst the prison continues to operate, HMPPS Prison Maintenance Group has committed an additional £200k to support increased maintenance checks and servicing of the night sanitation system. It is also acknowledged that there have previously been difficulties experienced in fully maintaining all aspects of the night sanitation system due to the bespoke nature of the software. However, this has been resolved with an original sub-contractor, experienced in servicing the system, re-instated and assurances provided at site meetings that any system errors can be effectively dealt with in a timely manner. Parts being replaced in the night sanitation system will also be retained should these be required to address faults on those wings yet to receive the upgrades.

Whilst there are benefits to the lack of internal sanitation at HMP Grendon, such as the separation of sleeping and eating quarters with ablution areas, it is accepted that the regime restrictions that have been necessary over the last year to protect prisoners and staff during the pandemic have meant that prisoners have spent much longer in their cell than usual. Therefore, during the core day Monday to Friday to mitigate queuing in the electronic system, enough staff have been deployed to wings to mechanically unlock prisoners in a safe manner whenever required. The prison has also ensured that the processes around issuing hand sanitiser and water have continued to be available and steps have been taken to discourage and challenge prisoners suspected to be throwing waste out of cell windows.