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Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Highpoint  
Stradishall  
Newmarket  
Suffolk  
CB8 9TG

**Moj ref:** SUB 89665

26 July 2021

Dear ██████████,

**HMP HIGHPOINT: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 JANUARY – 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. I am sorry to hear about the problems experienced with training new members; my team have forwarded your concerns to the IMB Secretariat who will respond to you directly.

I understand the Board's concern about the withdrawal of Jobcentre Plus support for prisoners due to be released. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) withdrew prison work coaches across the prison estate in March 2020, minimising the risk of Covid-19 being transmitted. As part of the Government's Covid-19 response, DWP established a bespoke telephony service to enable those released under the End of Custody Temporary Release scheme to make a Universal Credit claim on or after the day of release. This service has also now been embedded to assist all prison leavers to make a claim for Universal Credit quickly on release, where they are unable to do so online. In addition, as HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) continues to ease restrictions at a pace which considers the unique setting of prisons, DWP has been planning for a return to face-to-face services within prisons. The Board will be pleased to note that Jobcentre Plus re-commenced this activity at HMP Highpoint on 7 June 2021. Whilst this is not at pre-pandemic levels yet, Jobcentre Plus is providing 1.2 full-time equivalent members of staff one day per week.

I recognise the Board's continued concerns about prisoners' property and the request for an urgent review. Further to my predecessor's response last year, I can assure the Board that following the pause in the development of the new property framework project due to the pandemic, the delayed consultation meeting took place with IMB representatives in August 2020. The feedback received from those members was considered alongside the comments received from other stakeholders, and comments from subsequent operational engagement. HMPPS has now circulated the draft property framework with internal and external stakeholders, including the IMB Secretariat and the IMB representatives previously consulted, and the comments received are being considered. The property framework will be published later this year, which will provide greater direction and standardisation on a national basis and has been designed with procedural justice at its core. It also strengthens guidance on known problem areas such as volumetric control and seeks to ensure prisoners' property is managed efficiently, effectively, consistently and with care and respect.

Whilst it is not a requirement of Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) providers to transport property outside the volumetric limit which is currently governed by the current Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 12/2011 – Prisoners’ Property, HMPPS is continuing to take steps to ensure there is a consistent approach when forwarding on any excess property. The new PECS contract also commenced in August 2020 which introduced a new vehicle fleet with an increased capacity to facilitate an additional half bag of property for consumables to the limit of 7.5kg. HMP Highpoint recognises that frequently some property is not transported and remains at the sending prisons, due to the prisoner having accumulated property in excess of the volumetric control limits. Local systems continue to be in place where the prison’s own vehicles are used to collect the excess property, as well as transporting property onto receiving prisons for those leaving HMP Highpoint. HMP Highpoint is currently reviewing its local property policy to encourage prisoners to have property that meets volumetric control limits and allows quicker and increased access to stored property.

Turning to the concern about prisoner’s access to library computers for educational purposes, one of the strategic objectives of HMPPS is to provide the technology and digital tools to support the rehabilitation of those in its care. This includes consideration for how education is provided in prisons and HMPPS has already begun implementing in-cell technology in all Youth Custody Service sites and in nine prisons to enable every prisoner in closed prisons to have access to a laptop or tablet. It is also acknowledged that throughout the pandemic library computers have been unavailable in most prisons due to the restrictions to minimise the risk of transmission of Covid-19. However, HMP Highpoint has access to 16 Coracle laptops which allow access to learning and has enabled learners on distance learning courses throughout the pandemic to continue to type up assessments in-cell before sending to their awarding organisation. Workbooks have not been used to replace any material from a distance learning provider and were only used for Prison Education Framework curriculum to deliver in-cell education. In addition, the Board will be pleased to note that education within prisons has already begun opening its classrooms and libraries for face-to-face delivery and HMP Highpoint is starting to allow prisoners to access the library computers again.

It was reassuring to receive your comments that prisoners have received fair and humane treatment, as well as being accepting of the restrictions to maintain their safety. I was pleased to read that the relationships between staff and prisoners have been good and every effort has been made to provide opportunities for prisoners to socially interact, maintain contact with their family and limit the time spent in their cells. I am grateful to everyone working at the prison for their continued hard work and professionalism during this difficult time. I was also encouraged to note that incidents of violence, self-harm and drug misuse have fallen during the reporting year. However, I was saddened to hear that there was one death in custody whilst attending a local hospital; every death is a tragedy and my officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

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 Highpoint.

Yours sincerely,

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

**ALEX CHALK MP**

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

### HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

#### **Facilities Management**

A review of services included within the scope of the facilities management agreement with the provider, Gov Facilities Services Limited (GFSL), was conducted in August 2020 and monthly performance monitoring since shows progress in the timeliness of completed reactive repairs. For the six months leading to August 2020 timeliness was 64% whereas the six months to June 2021 was 81%. Whilst improvements towards the 90% target level can be demonstrated, it is recognised that recruitment and consistent performance with the required levels of quality assurance remains a challenge for GFSL at HMP Highpoint and one that is yet to be fully met. The Governor also continues to have concerns regarding the ability of GFSL to manage a site the size and complexity of HMP Highpoint and these concerns have been escalated to the Prison Group Director. The Governor continues to hold weekly meetings with GFSL to discuss concerns regarding the maintenance provision and monthly contract meetings continue to challenge performance.

The recent growth in local construction is believed to have had an impact upon GFSL's ability to recruit into certain roles. GFSL continues in their efforts to recruit tradespersons into various remaining vacancies including an electrician, painter and three plumbers. Two of these plumbing vacancies are being filled using sub-contractors and the third is subject to an accepted offer of employment. To improve leadership locally a new Deputy Site Manager post has been recruited to support the existing GFSL Senior Site Manager and Facilities Management team at HMP Highpoint.

#### **Kitchen Equipment**

It is recognised that the maintenance provision for catering equipment at HMP Highpoint has been inconsistent. A lack of ownership by GFSL, coupled with sub-contracting the maintenance of catering equipment to a provider located on the Isle of Wight have impacted upon response times. However, the current affected equipment is being addressed and in June 2021 the GFSL Site Manager reviewed all the equipment in the kitchens to assess what items remain fit for purpose. Where items have been identified as beyond economical repair HMP Highpoint will need to fund its replacement subject to suitable finances being in place. In some instances, the prison has opted to hire equipment rather than purchase so that the quality and productivity of the kitchens is not impeded. In addition, GFSL is reviewing its contractual arrangements with the catering maintenance provider to ensure effectiveness and a site lead has been appointed to oversee the maintenance of kitchen equipment to enable improvements in this area. GFSL's progress is continuing to be monitored and relevant action plans will consolidate all site defects.

#### **Record Transfer**

Where there are instances of prisoners transferring to HMP Highpoint with delayed handover information this does not inhibit any clinical management as medical records are on SystmOne which is fully accessible at the point of transfer. In the case of complex prisoners where a handover between sending and receiving prison is beneficial, the healthcare provider at HMP Highpoint, PracticePlus, will follow up with the sending prison within one working day. If information is not forthcoming, matters can be escalated via the Datix incident reporting management system that is shared with NHS England. Where handovers have not been received in a timely manner at HMP Highpoint, there has not been any trends where a specific prison is causing concern which has required the matter to be raised with the relevant Prison Group Director office.

The Board will also be assured to note that procedures have recently been reviewed with a new 'The Person Escort Record (PER) Policy Framework' being published on 19 April 2021. This framework provides guidance on the use of both paper and digital PERs, which includes healthcare and handover sections within the records. To ensure prison records are transported safely it is also a requirement of PSI 33/2015 – External Prisoner Movement, which states; *“Prison records must not be handed to escort staff in a form which would lead to loose papers or other items being lost. They must be correctly filed, labelled and bagged with the seal numbers recorded on the PER in order to ensure that they arrive safely, and to manage the risk of a data loss.”*