



██████████
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Ashfield
Shortwood Road
Pucklechurch
BS16 9QJ

MoJ Ref: SUB 83470

24 November 2020

Dear ██████,

**HMP ASHFIELD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2019 - 30 JUNE 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 June 2020. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, especially as you were short of Board members during the reporting year.

I understand the Board's repeated concern about the housing needs of offenders on release from prison. It is widely understood that offenders can face significant barriers to securing suitable accommodation due to pressure on social housing, difficulties in accessing the private rented sector and the availability of support to help with life skills. In addition to the general barriers faced by offenders, those convicted of a sexual offence are more likely to experience additional challenges.

HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is firmly committed to working effectively with a wide range of commissioners, stakeholders and partners to influence strategy, promote access to services and address the housing needs of offenders. At a national level we are working closely with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government and we know that across England and Wales prisons and probation work closely with local partners, including Local Housing Authorities (LHA).

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on LHAs to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. As part of this, LHAs are required to ensure advisory services are designed to meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including persons released from prison. The prison and probation providers are subject to the 'Duty to Refer' and have a statutory responsibility, under the Homelessness Reduction Act to refer anyone at risk of homelessness to the LHA 56 days before they are due to become homeless.

We are continuing to work towards achieving the commitment to 200 additional Approved Premises (AP) bed placements. These additional bed spaces will support the increasing number of referrals into the AP estate. An AP expansion board has set up a strategic business case seeking funds to support the proposed expansion. To date 47 additional bed spaces have been delivered and planning permission has been approved for an additional 26 bed female AP in the South West and a 4 bed expansion in London. The expansion programme has been reviewed to accommodate Covid-19 related issues and is now expected to be complete by March 2024.

It was encouraging to receive your comments that HMP Ashfield continues to be a well-run prison, delivering a safe environment where prisoners are treated fairly and humanely. I echo your praise of the

Director, managers and staff for maintaining the high standards for the prisoners' wellbeing and safety during the pandemic, a view endorsed by many prisoners. I was pleased to hear that the standard of accommodation is high, and that cleanliness and maintenance is good. The promotion of equality and diversity initiatives during your reporting period are most welcomed and I was particularly pleased to read about the work of the chaplaincy team who have played a vital role in supporting prisoners through this very challenging time.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Director 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 Ashfield.

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

Prisoners' Property

It is unfortunate and regrettable that prisoners' property continues to be an issue. The development of the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework is being informed by a project which was undertaken in summer 2019, involving stakeholders across HMPPS and the escort services. The project involved visiting 14 prisons, consultation with staff and prisoners, and engagement with external stakeholders such as the Independent Monitoring Board Secretariat and Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. Its purpose was to support the policy review and identify areas where immediate and more long-term changes may be required to improve operational practice.

Following the conclusion of the project, HMPPS has worked closely with stakeholders to consult on proposed changes to the policy. Discussions ahead of consultation with IMB members began with the IMB Secretariat in late February 2020, who proposed meetings take place with Board members in April. In light of the pressures placed on Boards by Covid-19, HMPPS agreed with the IMB Secretariat to pause this consultation. This work is now moving forward again and a meeting with IMB members took place in August. Consultation with operational colleagues is also expected to resume soon. The feedback received at the meeting with IMB members will be considered alongside the comments received from other stakeholders, with the intention that the revised draft policy framework will be circulated for wider consultation at the end of 2020. While digital improvements are being explored, the nature of that work means that any digital changes are likely to take longer to develop.

As noted in the Board's report, the new electronic property recording system in operation at HMP Ashfield is working well. The system provides a live electronic record of property held in possession and stored. A new cell clearance form automatically provides a list of a prisoner's property to be checked if staff need to clear a prisoner's cell.

Public Protection Contact Arrangements

Further to the response to the Board of 3 June 2020, the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model now mandates a Prison Offender Manager (POM) handover meeting following a prisoner's transfer to a new establishment. The aim of this handover, as with other handovers, is to transfer information to the new POM, so that progress against the sentence plan can progress seamlessly. Using the 'Manage POM Cases Service' POMs can see the case allocation history, including the contact details of who has previously managed the prisoner in another prison. Details relating to all public protection matters, including Persons Posing a Risk to Children (PPRC) provisions must be shared as referenced in the 'OMiC POM to POM Handover Checklist' available on EQuIP.

Establishments are encouraged to liaise with sending establishments when there are inconsistencies over previous risk assessments. Any common themes or risk concerns are shared with the HMPPS Prison Public Protection Lead who can offer additional guidance, support and intervention where necessary. HMP Ashfield has not raised any concerns with the HMPPS Prison Public Protection Lead about ongoing problems with missing PPRC or Child Contact assessments, but this avenue is open to them should they wish. A non-public facing Prison Public Protection website was launched in July 2020 and no other establishments have raised problems associated with missing PPRC or Child Contact assessments.