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Chair of the Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Forest Bank
Agecroft Road
Salford
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MoJ ref: ADR80473

26 August 2020

**HMP FOREST BANK: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2018 – 31 OCTOBER 2019**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 October 2019. 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.

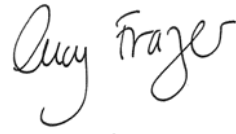
I understand the Board's concern for those foreign national offenders (FNO) that remain in prison awaiting deportation. Prison remains a lawful place of detention for those who are not deemed suitable for transfer following a thorough risk assessment- to an Immigration Removal Centre at the end of their sentence. However, the Home Office are committed to improving the timescales to resolve deportation cases. The Home Office is ensuring that deportation referrals are allocated for consideration as early as possible in the custodial sentence and the Criminal Casework Team has been restructured to ensure processes are streamlined to expediate cases to enable FNOs to be either deported or released from detention as soon as possible. A Service Level Agreement was also signed in January 2020 between HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the Home Office to ensure that wherever possible detention paperwork is sent to the prison at least 30 days prior to the conditional release date. In addition, FNOs are kept informed of the status of their case and the reasons for ongoing detention where appropriate, as well as being notified of the opportunity to apply for bail. However, there are several reasons why FNOs are detained longer than the Home Office would wish, such as individuals being unwilling to engage with embassies regarding travel documents and claiming asylum immediately before being removed. A triage tool is, therefore, under development to ensure issues such as asylum claims are dealt with sooner.

It was reassuring to receive your comments that prisoners are treated fairly and humanely, and are held in an environment that is maintained to a high standard. I was encouraged to read about the quality of healthcare, with those prisoners with mental health issues being well cared for and good substance misuse programmes on offer. I was pleased to note that the Board has recognised the efforts of managers and staff in preparing for the prison's reconfiguration, whilst continuing a high level of focus on Diversity and Inclusion and consulting prisoners. I was also reassured to read about the good work opportunities, positive atmosphere in education and the focus on encouraging prisoners to take on a greater level of responsibility to develop a strong work ethic.

I note you have raised another local issue of concern about the unsupervised play area in your report which the Director will continue to keep you updated on. 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 work from the members of the Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Forest Bank.

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

Regime and Staffing

It is recognised that staff attrition rates at HMP Forest Bank have been higher than desired including the loss of some experienced members of staff to other local organisations such as Greater Manchester Police. The time required to undertake recruitment and selection, as well as the time needed for staff to build their experience and jail craft has also had an impact, which led to some curtailments and inconsistencies in the regime at HMP Forest Bank. Wherever possible prisoners and staff have been informed in advance of any changes to provide as much consistency and continuity in the regime.

However, the provider Sodexo has worked hard to reduce the rate of attrition among staff at HMP Forest Bank and its other prisons. A two-year pay strategy has improved the situation, as well as changes being made to the recruitment and selection process. Improvements have also been made to the training and support available to staff, as Sodexo's Initial Training Course for new officers now includes more inter-personal skills training and shadowing of colleagues to better prepare them for working on prison wings. A mentoring approach after graduation from training also assists with the transition, as does the Custody and Detention apprenticeship that is being run at HMP Forest Bank which new officers have benefitted from. In addition, a number of first line managers have been appointed to give all staff greater support and leadership, and these approaches have improved officer numbers at HMP Forest Bank which is now above its target staffing levels.

More recently, Covid-19 has also resulted in regimes having to be restricted to protect the health and safety of prisoners and staff. However, Exceptional Delivery Models have now begun to be published at <https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/except/> to help prisons plan and introduce safe regimes when they are ready to do so. The Prison Director will continue to inform the Board about the local recovery plan.