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Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Maidstone
36 County Road
Maidstone
ME14 1UZ

MoJ ref: ADR 79706

6 July 2020

Dear ██████████,

**HMP MAIDSTONE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MARCH 2019 – 31 MARCH 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 March 2020. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, especially as you remained short of Board members during the reporting year.

I appreciate the Board's concerns regarding unmet needs at HMP Maidstone, and elsewhere across the estate. It is unfortunate and frustrating that the work outlined in my letter of 30 August 2019, particularly regarding the Care and Separation Unit (CSU) accommodation and the unsuitable location of two supervision cells there, did not come to fruition. Due to competing priorities within HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), funding was not available to relocate the CSU, however, a reduced bid was successful to create two new supervision cells on Kent wing (including a door and gate system to meet constant watch specification, replacement of cell lighting, flooring, upgrade to fire alarm system, creating a break out room for interviews and in-cell sanitation refurbishment) and to redevelop a new sports hall. My team advise me that initial planning discussions have commenced and although the work schedule is yet to be agreed, it is anticipated this work will take place over the course of 2020-21. However, as I am sure you will appreciate, completion dates may be subject to further review in the light of Covid-19 impact.

Likewise I agree it is unfortunate that, due to insufficient funding and other competing priorities, the shower maintenance and work to the visits hall did not form part of the imminent programme of works. On a separate note, I am however pleased to note the portacabins have worked well to provide showers after sporting activities.

Turning to the Board's concern about communication and timescales involving foreign national offenders (FNOs), Home Office officials advise they are committed to ensuring that all processes are expedited wherever possible. They aim to ensure FNOs are either deported or released from detention within a reasonable timescale and are kept informed of the status of their case and the reasons for ongoing detention where appropriate. A Service Level Agreement was signed in January 2020 between the Home Office and HMPPS to ensure that wherever possible detention paperwork is sent to a prisoner at least 30 days prior to their conditional release date. In addition, a triage tool is under development to ensure issues such as asylum claims are dealt with sooner, staffing issues are being resolved so that immigration surgeries can resume and the Criminal Casework team within the Home Office has been streamlined so that teams run more efficiently. Monthly meetings are held between officials in the Home Office, HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice where any issues can be addressed. Likewise, the surgeries held at HMP

Maidstone to improve prisoner information relating to immigration issues will resume again on a regular basis.

Despite the Board's concerns, it was encouraging to hear that staff at HMP Maidstone have shown remarkable levels of commitment given the heightened risks of Covid-19 and have continued to take into account the individual needs of the prisoners despite challenges. I am also pleased to hear of the improvements the prison has achieved during the reporting year and in particular, the opening of the new on-site laundry, which I note is having a positive impact on the day-to-day lives of the prisoners.

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 Maidstone.

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

Staff Absence

Last year levels of staff sick absence did present a challenging time for HMP Maidstone, however, absence levels have since reduced and eight new prison officers have joined the prison during the reporting period.

Through the driving of key work delivery the number of recorded key work sessions was showing a steady increase prior to the restrictions of Covid-19 and since introducing the restricted regime, these sessions have been used to engage with the most vulnerable prisoners.

Sporting Facilities

The shower portacabins have enabled HMP Maidstone to run a full programme of outdoor activities as well as making full use of the weights room. There are currently no further plans to provide outdoor exercise equipment as this would require additional funding.

Prisoners' Property

It is unfortunate and regrettable that the publication of the new Prisoners' Property policy framework (informed by a project that involved 14 prisons) is still ongoing. The development of the new framework is being informed by a project 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 IMB 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 the IMB Secretariat have proposed that the meetings now take place between August and September. The feedback received from IMB members at these meetings will then be considered alongside the comments received earlier this year from other stakeholders, with the intention that the revised draft policy framework will be circulated for wider consultation at the end of 2020.

The Prisoner Escort and Custody Service (PECS) take steps to transport property which falls within the agreed volumetric limits with prisoners when they transfer between establishments. A new fleet of vehicles will be provided through the PECS 4 Generation contract starting in August. These new vehicles will be able to transfer an additional half box of consumable items for each prisoner. In addition to this, HMPPS is looking at what more can be done to encourage prisoners to send out or dispose of excess items to reduce the amount of property that cannot transfer with them. Steps are also being taken to ensure there is a consistent approach when prison staff forward on any excess items to prisoners at their new establishment after a transfer has taken place.