



Ministry
of Justice

Alex Chalk MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

██████████
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Isis
Western Way
London
SE28 ONZ

MOJ Ref: 88832
30 June 2021

Dear ██████████,

**HMP/YOI ISIS: 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 the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on your ability to gather information.

I understand the Board remains concerned about prisoners with severe mental ill health and personality disorders. It is acknowledged that the complex needs of some individuals do present a challenge for both HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) healthcare providers in prison. Where a prisoner has a severe mental health need that warrants detention under the Mental Health Act, they should be transferred to a secure hospital and this currently takes too long.

However, I wish to reassure you that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and HMPPS are determined to improve the transfer process, ensure delays are reduced and avoid prison being used inappropriately. This is dependent on strong collaborative efforts with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHSE&I and a White Paper titled, Reforming the Mental Health Act, was published on 13 January 2021. The White Paper builds on recommendations made by Professor Sir Simon Wessely's Independent Review in 2018 and provides a commitment to introduce a statutory time limit of 28 days for transfers to mental health hospitals from custody. NHSE&I published new good practice guidance on 10 June 2021 which sets out the timeframe for completing the assessment, transfer and remission of individuals detained under the Mental Health Act in more detail - <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/guidance-for-the-transfer-and-remission-of-adult-prisoners-and-immigration-removal-centre-detainees-under-the-mental-health-act-1983/>. A new independent role to oversee the transfer process has also been committed which will further help to reduce unnecessary delays.

In addition, the Mental Health Service Specification (2018) will be reviewed later this year by NHSE&I the responsible commissioner for these services, following which areas for improvement will be identified. To further improve efficiency across the pathway for transfers to a secure hospital, new performance metrics are due to be implemented during 2021-22 to monitor referrals, assessments and transfers. It is also recognised that the diversion from custody into treatment can be a more appropriate pathway for some

individuals rather than serving a short prison sentence. Work is therefore continuing to ensure that individuals with vulnerabilities are identified early in the criminal justice system.

More broadly, the National Partnership Agreement for Prison Healthcare in England between the MoJ, DHSC, HMPPS, NHSE&I and Public Health England sets out a co-ordinated approach to deliver safe, decent, effective healthcare in prison. NHS-led mental health Provider Collaboratives are key in managing the patient pathway and addressing the needs of their local population. Work is underway to develop a whole-pathway approach for the care of individuals in prison. To also support the needs of individuals in prison with neurodivergent conditions and to establish a clearer picture of the prevalence and national provision for this cohort, the MoJ has approached HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Probation to conduct an independent review of neurodiversity in the criminal justice system. The findings of this Call for Evidence will be published this summer and will inform a training toolkit for frontline staff, which will include upskilling on speech, language and communication needs.

As the Board was informed by my predecessor in response to last year's report, NHSE&I and HMPPS jointly commission the Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) pathway programme which provides a psychological consultancy service, including at HMP/YOI Isis. The OPD pathway also provides some treatment services in selected prisons, alongside services which help individuals consolidate gains made in treatment or progress into treatment depending on their circumstances. Although HMP/YOI Isis does not have a treatment or Psychologically Informed Planned Environment service located in the prison, appropriate individuals can be referred onto other prisons where they meet the admission criteria.

Despite your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments commending how the prison managed during the pandemic, maximising prisoners time out of cell where safe to do so and keeping positive Covid-19 cases low. I was encouraged to read that prisoners were appreciative of the efforts to provide a range of activities to make the time in cell more manageable, as well as the support provided to allow contact with families to be maintained. I too am grateful to everyone working at the prison, who should be proud of their efforts during this difficult time. I was pleased to note there has been substantial improvements in the cleanliness of wing spurs as well as food hygiene practices. However, I was saddened to hear there was one death in custody; 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/YOI Isis.

Yours sincerely,

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

ALEX CHALK MP

HMP/YOI ISIS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JANUARY 2020 – 31 DECEMBER 2020

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prison Officer Recruitment

It would neither be practical nor economical to undertake Prison Officer recruitment locally and there are no plans to do this. Whilst some elements of the recruitment process were undertaken locally in the past, this tied up significant numbers of prison staff in the process and led to multiple applications from candidates who were assessed again for a job in a different prison. The digitalisation of recruitment has also added to the need for central management. It is much more effective for a prisons local resource to be devoted to ensuring that those who are recruited are properly supported and inducted into their new roles to support retention and staff engagement.

As the Board has identified, the process for recruiting and training a prison officer is lengthy, with initial training taking three months. It is a thorough process to identify the right candidates, with potential Prison Officers being assessed on a variety of measures for ability and behaviours. It is recognised that pre-employment and vetting checks can also take time to complete and delays can be experienced, particularly in determining a start date due to the individual having to give notice to their current employer. Therefore, recruitment planning and allocation to fill all funded Prison Officer posts is undertaken between nine months to a year ahead.

Generally, a good match is made between the numbers leaving HMPPS and new recruits starting. Planning and projections are reviewed monthly, with the Governor and the Prison Group Director able to request additional allocations, change the target staffing level, or the projected leaving rate within the plans to support a prison's recruitment needs. It is acknowledged that during the past year it has not been possible to match the supply with governors' requirements due to the pandemic. Little new recruitment took place for a period of nearly six months between April and September 2020. It has taken time to recover, but it is expected that the shortfall will be addressed at HMP/YOI Isis throughout the summer as new Prison Officers take up post.

Property

Further to last year's response, following the pause in the development of the new property framework project due to Covid-19, a 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 framework with internal and external stakeholders, including the IMB Secretariat and the IMB representatives previously consulted, and the comments received are being considered. The 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 transfers were restricted during the pandemic, it is encouraging that the number of IMB applications about the loss of property during transfer to the prison or at another prison reduced since the Board's last reporting period from 82 to 34. In addition, Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) received only one complaint during 2020 regarding the loss of a prisoner's property. The Board was previously informed about the new PECS contract and this has commenced now, introducing the new vehicle fleet with an increased capacity for consumable items.

Research

The HMPPS response to the pandemic has been swift and decisive and the measures put in place have undoubtedly saved lives. However, it is acknowledged that the actions taken to reduce contact in custody continues to impact on the wellbeing of staff, prisoners and the ability to deliver the interventions needed to turn prisoners' lives around. HMPPS has put in place funding to help mitigate the impact of regime restrictions and promote prisoner wellbeing. The importance of the quality of interactions has also been recognised during the pandemic and key work will have an important role to play in the recovery.

Since March 2020 a total of 13 studies have been approved by the HMPPS National Research Committee relating to the impact of the pandemic. At present none of these studies have reported yet, but these are nationally spread and include studies led by HMPPS, as well as external academic bodies with eight having a specific focus regarding the experiences of prisoners within the restricted regime. In addition, through the OPD pathway an Economic and Social Research (ESRC) grant has been successfully secured to examine the impact of Covid-19 on a group of prisoners who are screened into the OPD pathway, as well as staff. NHSE&I is also undertaking a needs analysis for mental health across the estate. While this is not explicitly examining the impact of the pandemic this will consider the levels of mental health need and include any issues that have arisen as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions.

Regime

A National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services was published in June 2020 which set out the strategy for a staged recovery - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-national-framework-for-prison-regimes-and-services>. The easing of restrictions in prisons is guided by public health advice alongside an operational assessment of what can be achieved in a custodial setting while keeping staff and prisoners safe.

Whilst there has been a gradual easing of lockdown restrictions in the community again, prisons present risks and challenges different to those in other settings. HMPPS will therefore continue to ease restrictions at a pace which considers the unique setting of prisons. Not all prisons will move at the same pace, as they must demonstrate readiness and gain agreement from local health authorities, before easing restrictions. However, the Board can be assured that the focus is on enabling prisons to recover, expand regimes and begin to address the backlog of activity created by Covid-19 restrictions as soon as it is safe to do so. The Board will be pleased to note that HMPPS is now re-opening the Stage 2 gateway for prisons currently delivering Stage 3 regimes.

Education

In line with Government restrictions and to maintain the safety of prisoners and staff, prisons reverted back to Stage 4 of the HMPPS National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services during the second wave of the pandemic. This restricted face-to-face contact with learners to prevent outbreaks, however, HMP/YOI Isis has since received approval to move to Stage 3 and the London Prison Group Director is keen to maximise education delivery as swiftly as it is safe to do so.

Local plans are in place to reintroduce face to face teaching as restrictions ease, but there will still be a blended approach at least in the medium term, which considers the learning from the delivery during the pandemic. It is accepted that different types of learning benefit from different levels of practical and face-to-face contact, which will be considered in the delivery planning. It is also the prisons intention to respond to individual learner needs and delivery planning is now taking place quarterly, rather than annually, to allow swifter adaptation. The Board will be pleased to note there are currently 134 courses being undertaken at HMP/YOI Isis despite the current challenges, which is an improvement from the position at the end of 2020.