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Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP The Mount
Molyneaux Avenue
Bovingdon
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire
HP3 0NZ

MoJ ref: ADR80138

10 August 2020

Dear ██████████,

**HMP THE MOUNT: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MARCH 2019 – 29 FEBRUARY 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 29 February 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 acknowledge the Board's comments about budget reductions. We have recently launched the most ambitious prison building programme for generations, delivering over 13,000 places by the mid-2020s. The Lord Chancellor, the Rt. Hon Robert Buckland QC MP, recently announced that more than £140 million will be spent installing temporary prison cells, repairing and refurbishing prisons, approved premises and young offender institutions and improving IT in prisons. One thousand temporary cells will be installed to increase capacity and help speed up maintenance work, allowing closure of wings at other prisons for refurbishment.

Furthermore, over the period of the last Spending Review 2015/16 – 2019/20, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has seen its resource settlement increase by 17% and its 2020/21 allocation increase by a further 5%. A significant proportion of this funding has been used to increase numbers of prison officers and an additional £156 million allocated in 2020/21 specifically for maintenance and improvement work in prisons. HMP The Mount received over £250,000 of funding to support maintenance and improvements to facilities in 2019/20 with a further £560,000 planned for 2020/21. This programme of investment is expected to continue across the prison estate into future years but will be subject to the next Spending Review. I am pleased that the priority bid for shower refurbishment work at HMP The Mount was granted. Details regarding the interim work plans and Government Facility Services Limited (GFSL) position are enclosed in the annex.

I would also like to address the Board's concerns about instructors' pay and inexperience amongst new prison officers. I am sure the Board is aware that pay for operational prison staff is determined by the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) annually based on evidence such as private sector pay structures, public sector pay policy and UK economy growth and inflation forecasts. HMPPS continues to incentivise and reward good and outstanding performance through non-financial rewards and invest in pay structures. As an example, in 2019 we increased the starting salary for Instructors Pay Band by 3% and, as such, staff in that Band received total increases in salary between 5% and 8% depending on where they were in the pay band. Pay policies do allow for incentives to be offered to address any recruitment and retention pressures subject to a business case being submitted by the establishment.

In addition, prison officers at HMP The Mount who are on the Fair and Sustainable pay structure receive a market supplement of £5,000 per annum. The Prison Officer Entry Level Training (POELT) course has been redesigned recently to a Level 3 Custody and Detention Apprenticeship. Further details about the course and steps taken to improve workplace activity and retain experienced staff are set out in the attached annex, along with HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised for their attention.

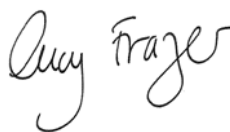
I share the Board's concern about drugs entering HMP The Mount. To reduce the violence that is driven by debt and the operation of the illicit economy, HMPPS is working to restrict the supply of drugs, reduce demand through rehabilitative activities, and support prisoners to recover from substance misuse. You will be aware that HMPPS is investing in enhanced gate security as well as X-Ray body scanners for prisons on an unprecedented scale as part of the £100 million security investment announced last summer. This investment will help them to go further and move faster to tackle the drug supply to prisons. HMPPS has embarked on a rigorous site selection process to distribute this investment and I can reassure you that HMP The Mount is on the priority list and so will be considered in due course.

In addition, HMPPS published a National Prison Drugs Strategy in 2019 to support prisons develop and implement Local Prison Drug Strategies. HMP The Mount received direct support in December 2019 from the Drug Strategy and Delivery Team. This is a multi-disciplinary team including representatives from health and law enforcement, which supported the prison to produce a local drug strategy to meet specific needs. A dedicated Drug Strategy Custodial Manager has been recently appointed at the prison and, just before the Covid-19 pandemic, staff were learning from other prisons with successful drug tackling strategies. As well as this, key risk areas have been netted to reduce the risk of illicit items being thrown into the prison.

Despite these concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments that over the past year the prison has significantly improved the security team and has strengthened defences against contraband. I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report marked for the Governor, which she will continue to keep you aware of as work continues.

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 The Mount.

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

HMP THE MOUNT: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MARCH 2019 – 29 FEBRUARY 2020

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Provision of Category D Places

HMPPS shares the Board's views on how important a role open prisons play in testing and furthering an individual's rehabilitation, especially those who have spent many years in closed conditions. HMPPS acknowledges the importance of effective management of prisoner transfers to open prisons to ensure they are held in prisons that match their security category and associated level of risk to the public. As a result, in January 2020, HMP Haverigg changed from a Category C prison capable of holding up to 268 prisoners, to a Category D open prison initially holding up to 458, with the potential to increase to 570. This change has provided extra capacity in the adult male open estate, including for men convicted of sexual offences. As part of the additional prison places planned, we are also proposing to expand the Category D estate through new accommodation.

Prisoners Serving Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection

HMPPS remains committed to doing all it can to support the progression of IPP sentenced prisoners and to help them reduce their risk to the point that the independent Parole Board determines that they may be safely released. The work to improve the management and progression of those serving IPP sentences has been underway for some time and is continuing via the joint IPP Action Plan, developed in partnership with the Parole Board. HMPPS is prioritising post-tariff prisoners to access rehabilitative interventions, including Psychology Service led reviews and enhanced case management for those with a complex set of risks and needs. Progression Regimes have also been developed at four prisons across the country.

Across the custodial estate, the population of prisoners serving IPP sentences was at its peak in 2012 when it numbered over 6,000. The latest published figures show that the IPP population stood at 1,969 at the end of June 2020, which is itself a reduction from 2,315 at the end of June 2019, demonstrating the improvement in opportunities available to IPP prisoners to progress in their sentence and an increasing number of releases in recent years. It is important to note that, as the unreleased IPP population continues to decrease, of those remaining an increasing proportion are the most complex and challenging cases, meaning the release rate will not be sustainable. As identified by the Board, many of these prisoners still pose a high risk of committing further violent or sexual offences, and have a complex set of risks and needs. These must be addressed before the Parole Board can consider release. This is not a simple task and HMPPS continues to work with these individuals to offer opportunities to help lower their risk to the public.

Regarding the location of IPPs, it is believed these prisoners should be located at an establishment best placed to meet their sentence planning needs in terms of interventions, and prison staff will seek suitable outside locations for those assessed as needing to access certain interventions in other prisons, as promptly as is reasonably possible.

IPP prisoners are prioritised for the Progression Regime (PR). However, they are still expected to meet the eligibility and suitability criteria to be able to participate, as outlined in the Progression Regime Policy Framework. It is important to note that post tariff prisoners will always be prioritised over those who are pre-tariff. However, the following must be considered for a PR where they meet the suitability requirements:

- Indeterminate Sentence Prisoners (ISPs) excluded from open conditions due to an abscond history (once it has been established that they have not evidenced exceptional circumstances for consideration of open conditions);
- ISPs recalled to prison following initial release from an indeterminate sentence;
- ISPs who are within two years of tariff expiry (but prioritising post-tariff ISPs who have had two or more negative parole hearings),

In order to be assessed as suitable for participation in a PR, prisoners must:

- have reached the appropriate point in their sentence for assessment to take place (as described above);
- display willingness to engage in an approach which requires high levels of personal responsibility, and where they are expected actively to confront offending-related behaviour, and take action which will assist in their rehabilitation;
- have a recent record of good behaviour; and be unlikely to pose any evident and significant security risk, either to staff or other prisoners.

Where a prisoner has not been assessed as suitable for a PR, staff will work with them to help them to achieve suitability at a later date. Locally, HMP The Mount has introduced new programmes to support long term and IPP prisoners such as Building Better Relationships and Identity Matters.

Maintenance Work

Although a bid for shower refurbishment work has been granted, in the interim, until such time funds are released for the work to proceed, temporary fixes will be carried out. Likewise, a Clean and Decent Lead has been appointed to help support HMP The Mount with improving the cleanliness and decency across the prison. Measures to improve the maintenance service have been implemented, involving close monitoring of GSFL performance in particular, repair response times and efforts to fill vacant posts.

Some posts at GFSL have been backfilled using agency and sub-contractor labour. Whilst I understand that this does not provide the ultimate solution, it does act as a temporary solution to fill vacant posts until candidates are appointed. In recent weeks the staffing situation has improved and a new Site Manager and Supervisor are now in post.

Custody and Detention Apprenticeship Course

This course will take new prison officers in the region of 12-18 months to complete and includes initial foundation training in a learning environment over eight weeks, followed by on-the-job training in their working establishment. The officers then return to a Learning Centre at six and nine months for further learning and to prepare for the apprenticeship end point assessment. The apprenticeship was planned to be rolled out across the estate in May, but unfortunately, due to Covid-19, has been temporarily paused. New officers will still receive the new and enhanced curriculum associated with the apprenticeship – which is much more practically focussed and aims to instil confidence and competence before they return to wing landings. HMPPS plans to recruit over 100 Apprenticeship Coaches who will be placed in prisons to support the new officers when the apprenticeship is relaunched in 2021.

Recruitment and Staff Support

HMPPS recognises the need to recruit and retain staff to keep prisons secure. Since October 2016, more than 4,700 additional prison officers have been recruited and staffing levels are now at their highest since 2012. HMPPS continues to review practices and do all it can to recruit the right people with the right skills through increased advertising and market facing supplements. The Ministry of Justice Resourcing,

Marketing and Attraction team continues to tailor attraction and communications to address different employment markets and seeks to attract a more diverse candidate pool.

A review of the prison officer recruitment process, job analysis and evaluation of the role was undertaken by an independent Occupational Psychologist. Job analysis indicated that having previous prison experience was not a prerequisite to be a successful prison officer and that any prison-specific knowledge needed is embedded throughout the POELT course and practiced during probationary period. A number of core behaviours and strengths were identified as being critical for successful performance on the job brought together to form a new success profile (examples included a strong work ethic and good judgement).

HMPPS want prison officers to stay and progress their careers, and have improved induction processes to ease transition into the job. These measures are part of the work that is directly being carried out with Governors to address local issues and ensure experienced staff and new recruits remain in the service. Furthermore, People policies have been recently changed to incentivise experienced officers to take a promotion and continue their career in the service.

Locally, two POELT mentors and a Recruitment Advisor are available to support new staff with learning and development at the start of their journey and throughout their employment. HMP The Mount also continues to receive detached duty support from other prisons and expect this to continue until staffing levels improve. A number of ex-staff who had left the service have now returned, which is having a positive impact by improving levels of experience across the prison and staff confidence overall. The return of ex-staff, and the restricted regime due to Covid-19 has given staff time to develop their skills and has improved relationships with prisoners and stakeholders. There are also many opportunities for experienced staff to gain promotion both temporarily and substantively, helping retain ambitious staff. There is also a well-regarded care team in place to support all staff grades through some challenging situations in and outside of the prison environment.

Workplaces

In January, representatives from HMPPS Public Sector Prison Industries (PSPI) visited HMP The Mount to review the waste management and land based activities workshops. PSPI advised that it was within their capability to increase prisoner places and deliver Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB) qualifications using the Band 4 qualified Instructor. PSPI also helped to highlight some other potential areas where workshop performance could be improved.

HMP The Mount have since redesigned a number of workshops and education activities to increase activity spaces. However, for the greater number of the population it is likely that the prison will only be able to offer part time work, whilst a restricted regime is operated due to Covid-19.

New Futures Network (NFN) colleagues are in regular contact with staff at the prison to explore and develop new opportunities for future work. This activity has been paused temporarily whilst prisons operate restricted regimes as mentioned above. NFN national leads are also looking to establish a co-ordinated approach to attracting and enabling current and future work opportunities within all prisons.