



██████████
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
C/O HMP/YOI Low Newton
Brasside
Durham
DH1 5YA

MoJ ref: ADR80717

10 August 2020

Dear ██████,

**HMP/YOI LOW NEWTON: 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 were severely short of Board members during the reporting year. I hope the situation has improved considerably since the submission of your report and the new members have now been cleared to join the Board.

I agree that the issue of women coming into prison as a perceived place of safety remains a concern. Although this also seems to happen in the male estate, it does appear to be more prevalent in women's prisons. As acknowledged by the Board, healthcare staff at HMP/YOI Low Newton work closely with the prison to transfer individuals as swiftly as possible to secure mental health beds, however there are limited places available and it remains challenging. My team tells me that this is as a result of severely limited access to appropriate places of safety in the community which leaves the courts with limited choices and both the Healthcare provider and Health and Justice Commissioners have limited ability to influence the allocation of secure mental health beds as it is not within their jurisdiction.

I am pleased to confirm that a wider piece of work is being undertaken by the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), led by the previous Governor of HMP/YOI Low Newton, to review the issues and practice around women in custody with mental health issues. It is hoped that this project will commence later this summer having been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and preliminary findings are expected early next year. This is of course subject to any further restrictions and changes in both HMPPS and the wider nation.

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.


I appreciate that the concerns raised by the Board are repeated from previous reports, and I was therefore, encouraged to receive your comments that the site is kept clean, tidy, and maintained both inside and outside. I was particularly pleased to note that prison officers treat residents with respect, that interactions between staff and residents have been good and friendly, that the residents are treated fairly and humanely, and that there is a good atmosphere in the prison.

I was further pleased to hear that use of force incidents are well documented with body-worn cameras always worn during occurrences and footage is often used for training purposes, including evidence of

good practice. I was impressed to learn that assessments of teaching and learning show that all were graded as good or better, about the prison's innovation to create a café run by trained residents and about the excellent kitchen service despite a low catering budget, and to hear of the favourable comparison of waiting times for appointments with other local prisons in the North East.

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 Low Newton.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucy Frazer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L' and 'F'.

LUCY FRAZER QC MP

HMP/YOI LOW NEWTON: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MARCH 2019 - 29 FEBRUARY 2020

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prison Roofs

HMPPS can confirm that roofing repair works are to be undertaken by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Projects Team. The project lead has advised the Governor that Roofing Replacement works has now been awarded to a preferred contractor and an initial meeting took place on 19 May 2020. Detailed surveys have been conducted on-site by the contractor and the project programme is currently due to start in October 2020 and completed within the current fiscal year.

In the interim, HMPPS has secured limited funding to carry out repairs to the worst affected areas until the full replacement project can commence. At the time of writing, HMPPS is awaiting the costings from the facilities management provider (Amey) before repair works can begin. If agreeable, the timescale for the repairs will be four to six weeks prior to the main works starting.

Bricklaying and DIY Training Courses

HMPPS can confirm that the Governor is currently reviewing the range of potential activities in conjunction with a community-needs analysis around employment. Once this has been undertaken the prison will be better informed as to what is needed. HMP/YOI Low Newton can then draft a business case where necessary to amend the delivery and potential partner contracts, and/or investment, in order to provide the residents with relevant skills to compliment the local jobs market.

Identification of the space to do this may be impacted by the roofing project completion dates, however, this will be considered during the process. Providing vocational skills for building 'wet trades' is a consideration as this will link with the prison's current Clean, Rehabilitative, Enabling & Decent (CRED) programme.

Extra Funding for Support and Counselling Services

The HMPPS Domestic Abuse Policy Framework was implemented in March this year, and as a result of this HMP/YOI Low Newton is in the process of devising a local Domestic Abuse Strategy which will help the prison to steer the Pathway in the future. The prison currently facilitates the Freedom Programme eight times per year. The Governor is currently considering submitting a business case to obtain further funding to train another Offender Supervisor/Probation Offender Manager to deliver the Freedom Course.

In the community, under Prison Instruction 2018-07 Community Rehabilitation Companies are mandated to provide support to all women who have experience of Domestic Violence. This is addressed at 3 levels. Level 1 allows for documented identification of any history of Domestic Violence and bespoke advice given on support, the options available, and signposting to external services where needed. Level 2 determines that where a need for intervention has been identified, safety planning will be undertaken by the resettlement worker, and where appropriate, support will be given to exit the relationship safely e.g. resettlement to a refuge centre including referrals to specialist support services. Level 3 is the support generally given to the women in our care who are in an active Domestic Violence relationship. This takes the form of liaising with or referring into a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), liaison with childrens services, housing, finance, psychological support, and introduction to Domestic Violence support networks and services. HMPPS also facilitate meetings with the Police and relevant agencies in relation to Claire's Law disclosures.