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Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Altcourse  
Higher Lane  
Fazakerley,  
Liverpool  
L9 7LH

MoJ Ref: SUB 083975

15 December 2020

Dear ██████████,

**HMP ALT COURSE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 JULY 2019 – 30 JUNE 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 June 2020. 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. I understand this has been an extremely difficult period and I was sorry to hear that two prisoners sadly passed away due to Covid-19 and two prisoners died from other causes. I appreciate the hard work and professionalism of everyone at the prison for managing under these circumstances.

It is recognised that the older prisoner population is increasing and that both the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) need to be prepared for how they can provide safe, decent and suitable services, accommodation and support for prisoners of all ages. The Model for Operational Delivery (MOD) for Older Prisoners gathers together key evidence, relevant literature and good practice examples from across the estate to aid Governors/Directors in their planning, so that they can cater for the needs of older prisoners. The MOD was developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Prison Reform Trust, RECOOP (resettlement and care for older prisoners' organisation) and the Association of Members of the Independent Monitoring Boards. While it cannot alone address the physical limitations of parts of the estate, the MOD does provide a means of improving the services and care commissioned and provided for older men, including those with acute levels of need. HMPPS is working with Governors and Directors to help them make best use of the MOD as part of the move towards a reconfigured prison estate.

As recognised by the Board, HMP Altcourse has developed an excellent older prisoner strategy. Social care needs at HMP Altcourse will continue to be met and adaptations made to cells where necessary. At a national level, HMPPS is exploring how the prison environment can best support older prisoners and is updating security categorisation and allocation processes, which will help to ensure the older population are held in the most appropriate setting.

With future new prisons that are being competed as part of the £4 billion investment to provide 18,000 new places that are decent, safe and secure, HMPPS will be testing bidders' solutions specifically with regard to meeting the needs of older prisoners. Each new prison currently being built will have four disabled-access cells per house block and three low-mobility cells per floor so that prisoners are not bound to the ground floor and can integrate easily with other prisoners.

Other measures include surface finishes known to aid way-finding and orientation for those with reduced cognition or visual impairments (colour and signage); additional grab bar points in toilets and shower areas with dedicated shower rooms with space for carer assistance; and adjustable furniture in cells/rooms and kitchenette areas to accommodate wheelchair use. To use HMP Five Wells as an example, the Category C adult resettlement prison under construction in Wellingborough, this new prison is designed to have elevators throughout the building, raised flower bed planting areas to provide age-appropriate activity (for accessibility and interest reasons), a cardio-gym, medication dispensary, kitchen and activity space on each landing, including access to two group rooms on each unit that could be set up as an older prisoner activity centre. In addition, there will be a painting plan to maximise orientation for individuals with dementia or other age-related illnesses.

I note the Board's concerns about HMP Altcourse's inpatient facility and having a dedicated mental health unit. NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) reviewed the upper floor of healthcare in February 2020 and were interested in opening a unit primarily for mental health patients. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic this has not progressed further. However, a full health needs assessment is currently being carried out at HMP Altcourse prior to the potential transfer of commissioning responsibility for health and social care services to NHSE&I. The purpose, function and structure of the inpatient unit will be considered as part of this process. Likewise, the Government is committed to reforming the Mental Health Act and we are working closely with Department for Health and Social Care to respond to the recommendations of the independent review, chaired by Professor Sir Simon Wessely, which includes recommendations about improving the transfer process to secure hospitals. A White Paper will be published in the coming months.

Turning to the delays in scheduling inquest hearings, the Senior Coroner for Liverpool and Wirral has confirmed there are currently three outstanding inquests in connection with deaths at HMP Altcourse, the hearings will be held between mid-January and April 2021. To ensure that all relevant evidence is considered, the Coroner will only list an inquest hearing when the criminal investigation outcome and the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman findings report, and any other investigations have been concluded. As I am sure the Board will appreciate, the social distancing restrictions of the pandemic had a huge impact on the Coroner's ability to hold jury inquests, in particular on the number of people who could attend, and these inquests can only be held in one of the Coroner's two courts. The Senior Coroner had to make an important decision earlier this year in balancing the health and safety of court users which also led to some delays. The Liverpool and Wirral Coroner Service has, however, recently installed protective screens in the court room(s) to enable jury inquest hearings to resume (subject to jury and witnesses' availability, as they may have to self-isolate).

Turning to some positive comments captured in your report, I was pleased to hear that all areas highlighted by the Board in last year's report have continued to improve. It was also encouraging to hear that the management of violence and self-harm during lockdown have been effective, and some useful lessons learnt, and that in the last six PPO reports no recommendations were made for the healthcare department.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Director 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 Altcourse.

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**

## Annex

### **HMP ALT COURSE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2019 – 30 JUNE 2020 HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report**

#### **Prisoners' Property**

It is unfortunate and regrettable that prisoners' property continues to be an issue. The development of the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework is being informed by a project which was undertaken in summer 2019, 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 Independent Monitoring Board 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. A meeting with IMB representatives took place in August. The feedback received from those members will be considered alongside the comments received earlier this year from other stakeholders, and comments from the operational engagement which is now taking place. There has been a slight delay in HMPPS being able to circulate a revised draft policy framework because of the need to ensure enough operational engagement. It is anticipated that the draft framework will be circulated for wider consultation at the beginning of 2021.

#### **Treatment Programmes for Men Convicted of Sexual Offences (MCOSOs)**

HMPPS has begun significant work in the last year across the prison estate to review and better understand prisoner needs for Offending Behaviour Programmes (OBPs). Improved systems of data collection are also being developed. After an initial review to scope the number of prisoners identified and awaiting a particular OBP / needing a further assessment for a specific programme, it was determined that other than the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) no prisoners at HMP Altcourse were awaiting access to other OBPs.

Since HMP Altcourse has taken prisoners from local courts MCOSOs have decreased. Reconfiguration is currently taking place and although the prison will still hold MCOSOs next year, in future they will be required to transfer MCOSOs out to an appropriate prison within 10 days of sentencing. HMP Altcourse will cater more broadly for a shorter sentenced prison population and short OBPs like the TSP are considered as the most appropriate provision. This programme remains popular with prisoners at HMP Altcourse and is open to medium and high-risk prisoners across several offending types. The current provision for HMP Altcourse will be kept under regular review. If at the annual needs review an alternative programme is identified which better meets local need this will be explored.

Due to the specialist nature of some programmes it is essential that they are delivered by experienced staff in the main locations where delivery is both viable and effective. Offender Managers will refer individuals to appropriate services whether this is locally within HMP Altcourse or to another establishment. This is the best route to determining what individuals need and how best this can be achieved. Not all prisoners will be suitable for OBPs and there are a range of other services for example education, employment skills, mental health and substance misuse services available to support individuals in risk reduction activities, which the Parole Board can take in to consideration.

HMPPS recognises the wider concerns around prisons being able to cater for a range of complex health concerns where OBPs are required. This is regularly reviewed as part of the wider estate and services review to ensure individuals have the best opportunities to access. For instance, the health provision in the training estate and the distance prisoners must travel are recognised concerns. For a Category B sex offender, the nearest prisons with OBP provision needs are within the Northamptonshire area or the Isle of Wight, which won't have inpatient facilities.