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Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP & YOI Bronzefield
Woodthorpe Road
Ashford, Middlesex
TW15 3JZ

MoJ Ref: SUB 084428

28 January 2021

Dear ██████████,

**HMP & YOI BRONZEFIELD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 AUGUST 2019 – 31 JULY 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 July 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 your level of monitoring.

I understand the ongoing concerns about the proportion of women released who have no fixed abode and was grateful to discuss this issue with you and the Lord Bishop of Gloucester on 16 December 2020. Since my response in June 2020 to last year's report, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has now published its national Accommodation Framework. This sets out the Agency's and its partners' responsibilities, such as the local authorities having to ensure that offenders can access and maintain settled accommodation. In preparation for the new unified probation model, a policy framework is being developed, which will mandate actions for prisons and probation staff in supporting the Homelessness Reduction Act Duty to Refer. In addition, as part of the investment in enhanced Through the Gate (TTG) resettlement services, the National Probation Service has improved commissioning rates and set minimum levels of funding to support those offenders leaving non-resettlement prisons.

During the initial Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) secured £8.5 million to support the provision of accommodation for individuals at risk of homelessness on their release from prison. This scheme initially ran between May and August 2020 providing up to 56 nights' accommodation. Seven regional Homelessness Prevention Taskforces (HPTs) were also set up by HMPPS to work with local authorities and other partners to source accommodation for offenders on their release. These HPTs are still active and following the introduction of further national restrictions, an agreement was reached with HM Treasury to reinstate the emergency accommodation. Due to the recent national lockdown announcement funding has been extended until 31 March subject to regular review.

The commitment to deliver 200 additional spaces in Approved Premises is also continuing, with 10 new spaces provided at Hestia Battersea for women. Over the next 12 months there are also plans to expand Crowley House in the West Midlands, open a new site for women in Bristol, as well as identifying a new female site in Wales. Locally, HMP/YOI Bronzefield continues to focus on work to reduce the number of women that leave with no permanent address, including supporting the work of the Community Rehabilitation Companies. The prison has also been working with community organisations to identify areas of best practice and to ensure every avenue is explored in finding women appropriate accommodation.

This includes being instrumental in the development of the Safe Homes Initiative which has recently been presented to the London Mayor's Office of Police and Crime (MOPAC). MOPAC is committed to implementing the recommendations made by the initiative and many of these build on the work already undertaken through the London Blueprint for a Whole Systems Approach to Women in Contact with the Criminal Justice System Delivery Group over the last year.

Turning to the Board's concern about the early release and special license schemes, these schemes helped to create the space needed in the prison estate to implement the compartmentalisation strategy in March 2020. This enabled the MoJ and HMPPS to isolate the sick, shield the vulnerable and quarantine new arrivals, to protect prisoners and staff. However, the End of Custody Temporary Release (ECTR) scheme was only one part of the overall strategy to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Important safeguards were put in place as part of the process to identify prisoners for release, which included checks with prisons and partner agencies about the suitability of the identified prisoners. It was also essential that those released had an address to go to and the HPTs were set up to deal with securing accommodation for those being released from prison. Whilst the ECTR scheme is currently suspended, in total it enabled 262 prisoners to be released between April and August 2020.

I also recognise the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the amount of time out of cell prisoners are receiving. A National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services is in place which sets out the strategy for a staged recovery - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-national-framework-for-prison-regimes-and-services>. At all stages HMPPS has continued to review the regime to offer as many services, activities or time out of cell as possible in conjunction with public health guidance to determine what is safe to deliver whilst protecting prisoner's wellbeing and mental health.

Locally HMP/YOI Bronzefield has continued to deliver in-cell education since the initial nationwide lockdown in March 2020 and began to re-introduce some work as restrictions eased where it was safe to do so. However, following the most recent national lockdown announced on 4 January 2021 only essential work can take place, such as in the kitchens and training kitchen. Work opportunities will expand again when considered safe. To continue to support women's wellbeing, increased opportunities to maintain family contact are being provided with the use of secure video calls and an additional £5 credit per week to use on the in-cell telephones. There are also a variety of peer mentors, such as the Listener Scheme and the Safer Custody Team is providing in-cell distraction packs, as well as support groups for the most vulnerable. In addition, reception testing has now begun, and it is anticipated that this will reduce the amount of time spent on an Reverse Cohorting Unit from 14 to 7 days, subject to two negatives tests.

Despite your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments that the prison is providing a safe environment and prisoners are grateful to staff for their care and compassion during the pandemic. I am also grateful to staff for their efforts and positivity during the pandemic. I was encouraged to note that the accommodation is kept to a high standard and was pleased to read that prisoners are treated fairly and humanely, with equality and diversity work being well managed. I was also sorry and saddened to hear about the death of a new born baby. Every death is a tragedy and my officials will be working with the relevant authorities and will take any recommendations made very seriously.

I note you have also raised a local issue of concern in your report about cell keys which the Director 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/YOI Bronzefield.

Yours sincerely



LUCY FRAZER QC MP