



██████████  
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP/YOI Deerbolt  
Bowes Road  
Bernard Castle,  
County Durham  
DL12 9BG

MoJ Ref: SUB 085318

9 February 2021

Dear ██████████,

**HMP/YOI DEERBOLT: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 OCTOBER 2019 –30 SEPTEMBER 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 September 2020. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has drawn together available data, scrutiny and assurance reports, operational experience and service user perspectives from across the system, layering on evidence, in order to learn from our responses towards Covid-19. This programme of work has been used to inform safety, wellbeing and stability, recovery, future delivery and reform decisions. We are also undertaking a piece of work looking at how we improve future regimes across the estate through engagement with stakeholders including scrutiny bodies and third sector organisations, prisoners and staff at all levels.

Digital delivery in prisons has accelerated for the better, and we want to continue to harness its benefits, especially for video calls and in-cell education. Additionally, with regard to education provision, HMPPS has continued to work closely with all Prison Education Framework and Dynamic Purchasing System providers, both nationally and locally, to support prisons. This has allowed us to enable learning to continue via the provision of in-cell activity and learning packs.

HMPPS's National Framework, which provides a roadmap for easing restrictions in prisons, has been, and continues to be, guided by public health advice alongside an operational assessment of what can be achieved in custodial settings while keeping staff and those in our care safe. The Exceptional Delivery Model for education (prior to the current period of national lockdown) directed staff responsible for education, provider staff, key workers and prison staff, such as the Learning and Skills Managers, to engage with learners.

Since September 2020, we have placed a much stronger emphasis on the quality of all learning materials provided and introduced a national sampling process across all providers and prisons to drive up the quality of all learning packs and other learning materials being delivered to prisoners. The packs in use at HMP/YOI Deerbolt have been through a system of quality assurance by the providers. A regional catalogue of resources has been produced to be used across the North East prisons, and this has realigned learning provision so that quality distance learning can be provided in a modular way, focussing on achievement and engagement.

Video calls are enabling prisoners to have much wanted face to face contact with family and friends at a time when physical visits are restricted. They also provide opportunities not possible before; prisoners reconnecting with family overseas who they have not seen for months or even years, as well as with elderly and disabled relatives who find it hard to travel to prison. We also hear stories of prisoners meeting their newborn children, seeing toddlers take their first steps and being reunited with pets. Special moments can make all the difference at this time. 97% of prisoners who have had a video call say it has had a positive impact on their mental health. Additionally, we have provided tablet computers to allow prisoners to contact families in exceptional circumstances, to attend funerals or contact relatives at the end of life.

As with all our digital services, we are committed to continually improving the video calls service to make sure it meets everyone's needs. We have been capturing data during rollout, including feedback from staff, prisoners and families to enable this. We continue to learn lessons from the roll out of video calls service and will use this to inform both the current service and longer-term planning in line with the recommendations of Lord Farmer's reviews for maintaining family ties. Face-to-face visits is the preferred option for visits (except during the Covid-19 pandemic) and video calls will remain a complementary service.

Despite the concerns raised in your report, it was encouraging to receive your comments that the prison's new management team has brought new energy and enthusiasm, and that the performance of the prison has improved. I was pleased to read that staff/prisoner relationships are good and that equality and diversity management has been pursued with greater energy and effectiveness than in previous years.

I note you have raised a local issue 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 Deerbolt.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lucy Frazer".

**LUCY FRAZER QC MP**

## Annex

### HMP/YOI DEERBOLT: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 OCTOBER 2019 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2020

#### HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

##### **Gangs**

Work has been commissioned to develop HMPPS understanding and identification around gangs and the threat they pose in prison. A 'Gangs' training package will be rolled out to all staff in establishments, the aim of which is to raise awareness and understanding to better identify emerging gang related issues and also to apply appropriate strategies to manage these threats and mitigate risk. A management toolkit for gangs has been developed and rolled out to all prisons. The toolkit assists in identifying a gang related issue in an establishment and also give the establishment options in the form of a toolkit to put together a local strategy to deal with their gang related threats.

##### **Transfers**

The role of HMPPS Population Management Unit (PMU) is purely to facilitate approved moves from one establishment to another. PMU require notification and agreement from both establishments that the reason for the move has been discussed and agreed by both parties and names are supplied for our records on that basis. Once this is received then PMU will book the transport required and notify the establishments of the transfer date.

HMP/YOI Deerbolt has a well-established vision to 'never give up on anyone; to know the person behind the behaviour, so that everyone feels safe'. In practical terms, this means that the staff at the prison strive to understand the individual's circumstances and custodial needs so areas of conflict, safety and support can be identified. In exceptional and appropriate circumstances where it would be very difficult to safely care for someone at HMP/YOI Deerbolt, alternative options will be sought.