



██████████
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Huntercombe
Nuffield
Henley-on-Thames
RG9 5SB

MoJ Ref: ADR 081137

6 October 2020

Dear ██████████,

**HMP HUNTERCOMBE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JANUARY 2019 – 31 DECEMBER 2019**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 December 2019. 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 during the reporting year.

I understand the Board's ongoing concerns about the resettlement provision for foreign national offenders (FNOs). Despite some delay due to Covid-19, work to significantly improve the resettlement provision to FNOs across the prison estate in England and Wales is progressing well. The stakeholder engagement referred to in my response to the Board in November 2019 has now concluded. Steps are being taken to ensure prisons have sufficient resources for FNOs and new funding has now been provided to support delivery at HMP Huntercombe. This includes FNOs who are either deported overseas or released into the UK. Further support will be provided to prisons and FNOs through a national advice and guidance team and my officials will be working closely with the prison governors throughout the next phase of this work.


In the meantime, HMP Huntercombe remains committed to improving resettlement prospects for its FNOs returning overseas. To inspire others the prison has produced a short film about a Hungarian prisoner who has successfully rebuilt his life in Budapest as a personal trainer using the qualifications gained in the prison's gym. Whilst on occasions the Resettlement Officer at HMP Huntercombe has been re-deployed to support other duties, the role has mostly been deployed to visits during Covid-19 to support prisoners to engage with their families and visitors through videocalls.

Despite your concern, it was pleasing to note that the efforts and successes achieved in preparing prisoners for release have been commended. I was reassured to receive your comments that prisoners are treated humanely and the prison is operating safely, having seen a reduction in violent incidents and opened Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork documents. It was encouraging to read that a high state of cleanliness is being maintained and I am informed by the Governor that this continues to be a priority. It was also interesting to hear about the beehives which will provide further release on temporary licence prospects, in addition to the increased opportunities already achieved to support post-release employment at local organisations.

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. HM Prison and Probation Service (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 Huntercombe.

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

Annex

HMP HUNTERCOMBE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JANUARY 2019 – 31 DECEMBER 2019

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Offender Assessment System (OASys)

It is recognised that the OASys backlog has been a long standing issue not just at HMP Huntercombe, but across the prison estate. However, the introduction of Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) included staffing resource for OASys assessments in training and resettlement prisons, and as staffing has increased over the last year there has been a reduction in the OASys backlog across the estate. HMPPS has also introduced a national OASys taskforce to support prisons in clearing the backlog of assessments.

Locally it is acknowledged that the Offender Management Unit at HMP Huntercombe was not sufficiently staffed during the reporting year, however, the prison has continued to work hard to address the backlog despite still receiving around 40% of prisoners with their OASys incomplete. Although the prison has the second largest backlog of 121 across the estate in June 2020, this has reduced from its peak of 180 in August 2019. All offender manager posts have now been filled providing the prison with increased resources within its OMU. The prison has also been engaging with the national OASys taskforce and has a plan to deal with its OASys backlog.

Immigration Detention

Informing prisoners in good time of the intention to remove them from the country is recognised as essential to enable both prisoners and staff to prepare for life after prison. While prisoners of interest to Immigration Enforcement may be lawfully detained beyond their conditional release date (CRD) under the IS91 authority to detain process, the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Home Office and HMPPS requires IS91s to be served a certain time before the CRD to reduce last minute uncertainty.

During the first half of 2019, the SLA target was at least seven days prior to the CRD so that prisoners knew a minimum of a week in advance whether they were going to be released or served with an IS91. The SLA was amended half way through 2019 to state that *'documents should be sent to the prison no later than 30 days prior to the CRD'*. Whilst the amendment represents an improvement to the process by providing earlier notification to prisoners and prisons, during the second half of 2019 the SLA target was missed in 41 out of 77 cases. The Home Office recognises this is unacceptable, causing unnecessary anxiety to prisoners and impacting on a prisons ability to treat prisoners fairly. The Home Office Criminal Casework is undertaking work to make improvements having established a taskforce to improve early decisions on removal and HMPPS managers have been assisting to improve information sharing. The effectiveness of this activity will be evaluated during in 2020 and the issuing of detention paperwork continues to be monitored.

Vaping

Evidence so far indicates that, unlike the serious harm to health from inhaling second hand tobacco smoke, inhalation of second hand vapour from e-cigarettes or vaping devices causes little or no harm to others. However, it is recognised that this vapour, especially as it comes in a range of flavours, can be an annoyance for third parties and prisons should seek to limit this as far as is practicable.

The closed prison estate was successfully transitioned to being smoke free in August 2018, whilst the open estate continues to permit prisoners to smoke only in designated areas outside at certain times of the day.

Following this successful transition, the national Smoke Free Policy Framework was published in January 2019 which made clear where prisoners could vape in a smoke free prison i.e. that e-cigarettes (both disposable and rechargeable) can only be used in prison cells. The framework also enables non-smokers, defined as those not using vapes or electronic cigarettes whilst in custody, to request not to share a cell with a vaper and this should be accommodated. Operationally it is rare that a non-smoker would have to share a cell with someone who uses a vaping device and prisons are expected to find alternative accommodation as a priority, which was the case when smoking was permitted in prisons. If due to operational requirements there is a need to allow a vaper to share a cell with a non-smoker this would be for the shortest period possible and recorded on Prison NOMIS. HMP Huntercombe always considers a prisoner's preference about with whom they share a cell and the prison is reviewing its local policy to ensure consistency with the national framework.

Kitchen Replacement

The project to replace the kitchen and the Sanctuary space to provide a modern multi-faith facility is moving forward and is currently out to tender. Site visits by potential constructors took place in July 2020 and work is provisionally expected to begin in May 2021 with the project taking around a year to complete.

Maintenance

Repairs have been carried out to the gym roof and the prison has adopted the centrally negotiated facility to lease gym equipment from Origin Fitness. During June and July 2020 new equipment was delivered to replace the equipment in the main and wing gyms. Regarding the heating and hot water issues, all four of the main boilers have been replaced in the last two years. Extra funding has been issued to upgrade a number of local plant rooms and new heat plate exchangers are scheduled to be installed to improve the hot water supply in Howard and Fry Units. In addition, all the faulty window ventilation systems reported have now been replaced.