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Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Swaleside
Brabazon Road
Eastchurch
Isle of Sheppey
Kent
ME12 4AX

MoJ Ref: ADR 081144

6 October 2020

Dear ██████████,

**HMP SWALESIDE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2019 – 30 APRIL 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 April 2020. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, particularly in the circumstances of the high number of vacancies on the Board members during the reporting year. Your positive comments regarding the co-operation from prisoners and the good work from staff in preventing the spread of the virus, are welcomed.

I note the Board's repeated concern regarding the facilities and maintenance service which impacts negatively on living and working conditions at HMP Swaleside. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Prison Maintenance Group (PMG) remains committed to improving the performance of Government Facility Services Limited (GFSL) across the prison estate. Over the last twelve months audit outcomes have shown that GFSL's statutory compliance rate has risen from 58% to 94% and an overall compliance performance rate of 77% (from 54%). Many of the maintenance issues are largely historical, and I am pleased to note that serious issues are being addressed. PMG has purchased new efficient boilers and, to allow for maintenance works to be carried out, replacement valves have also been purchased to prevent any heating or hot water loss (as previously experienced). In addition, the High Voltage infrastructure is in the process of being replaced and an enhanced planned preventative maintenance programme will be carried out to mitigate the sewer blockages, ensuring drains are kept free from unwanted waste disposal.

As I am sure the Board will appreciate, due to Covid-19 the prisoner working parties group had to be restricted in their activities, which has clearly had a detrimental impact. GFSL have organised a supervisor from another establishment to help support the grounds work at HMP Swaleside. The Governor conducts weekly site tours with the site manager to identify any immediate required actions. He also meets with the GFSL senior cluster lead on a weekly basis to raise performance issues and concerns (rather than monthly which had hitherto been the case).

I acknowledge the Board's update on the condition of the showers. The work on the showers continues as funding allows for each project; refurbishment will be to the new Wandsworth specification and includes new pressurisation pumps for improved performance to the showers on C and D wings.

The old showers on A and B wings will be kept out of use until full refurbishment takes place. All other showers will be kept to a clean and decent standard by GFSL and plans for a small prison maintenance team consisting of professionals and prisoners will be set up to work towards restoring the remaining showers.

I also acknowledge the Board's comments on the issue of rodents and window replacement. The pest control company has taken action by strengthening the bait and testing this in one area of the prison. As a result, staff saw a noticeable decline in the number of rodents and this new bait will now be used in other areas of the prison. It is anticipated that E wing windows will be replaced this year and a project to replace the windows on A, B and C wings is provisionally programmed for 2022/23. I was encouraged to read in the Board's report that considerable effort had been made during the reporting period to improve the appearance and cleanliness of the prison and hope that with the new windows on the wings and the introduction of an outdoor cleaning working party, the standards of cleanliness in the grounds will improve further.


I would also like to address the Board's comments on providing meals for HMP Standford Hill. Providing catering for a relatively large prison population across two sites is a challenging and complex task for the catering team. I appreciate the excellent service this team has provided to date. As part of expansion works at HMP Standford Hill, you will be pleased to hear that a kitchen will be built in 2022. HMP Swaleside will therefore no longer be required to provide meals for Standford Hill's residents. The Regional Estates Manager has confirmed that an Estates Investment Proposal to expand and refurbish HMP Swaleside's kitchen will be submitted this year. In the interim, HMPPS has processes in place to manage the failure of the existing kitchen equipment when this occurs.

Turning to some positives captured in your report, it was encouraging to hear about the three areas of success and innovation, namely the Outreach service, life-limiting illness committee and the external courses provided by The Open University. Likewise, the In-reach mental health service is another positive initiative that is helping HMP Swaleside manage its most difficult prisoners and I also note the excellent end-of-life care provided. I was also pleased to read that HMP Swaleside has made significant progress towards becoming a safer prison and there has been a downward trend in levels of violence for the second year running.

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.

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 Swaleside.

Yours sincerely

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

LUCY FRAZER QC MP

Annex

HMP SWALESIDE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY 2019 – 30 APRIL 2020

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Men Convicted of Sexual Offences (MCOSOs)

MCOSOs will have access to the gym, worship and education. Productive activity work has been increased in areas like warehousing (DHL), fabrication and engineering. HMP Swaleside will develop a much more ambitious vision and strategy to expand opportunities for this cohort (this includes other vulnerable prisoners). Staff have also ensured that MCOSOs have had access to accredited programmes e.g. the Thinking Skills Programme and prior to Covid-19 MCOSOs had access to weekly visits. Access to the library and chapel is largely provided on the wing given the complexity of escorting these prisoners around the prison.

Workshops

The expansion of the engineering workshop has taken the number of meaningful employment placements from 25 to 50, where employed prisoners are able to complete accredited courses. Currently, Public Sector Prison Industries has no plans to increase capacity of this workshop further or introduce additional workshops.

In-Cell Telephony

All cells located in the care, separation and reintegration unit have been cabled and the phones are in working order. Healthcare will be the next area to receive in-cell telephony.

Hospital Appointments

A weekly overview of hospital escorts is monitored by staff at the prison and they work alongside healthcare colleagues to establish which prisoners require attendance at upcoming hospital appointments. However, HMP Swaleside has a limited staff resource capacity to provide medical escorts each day and of course the Covid-19 pandemic has increased this pressure further. HMP Swaleside is therefore working with healthcare partners to look at the feasibility of introducing virtual appointments with consultants through a new technology called Consultant Connect.

Resettlement Services

HMPPS remains committed to releasing prisoners from a resettlement prison. Further to last year's response to the Board HMPPS has implemented an enhanced Through the Gate service for prisoners, including those released directly from non-resettlement prisons like HMP Swaleside, to aid the provision of resettlement.

An additional £22 million per annum has been invested for the remainder of the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) contracts to ensure CRCs deliver this service in resettlement prisons. The enhanced service includes the requirement that CRCs complete specific, tailored, tasks to help prisoners to secure and maintain settled accommodation, gain employment and manage debt and their financial affairs. The National Probation Service is also working to increase commissioning of these services for prisoners coming out of non-resettlement prisons including setting minimum levels of purchasing, to encourage full use of the appropriate rate cards.

Locally, HMP Swaleside has reduced the number of men being directly released from the prison, although for some it is simply not possible to transfer them as their release date does not allow enough time for the transfer to take place. Staff have adopted good relations with HMP Belmarsh to enable resettlement before release to take place. HMP Swaleside's aim is to reduce numbers even further.