



[REDACTED]  
Chairs, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Pentonville  
Caledonian Road  
London  
N7 8TT

MoJ Ref: ADR 081509

5 October 2020

Dear [REDACTED],

**HMP/YOI PENTONVILLE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 APRIL 2019 – 31 MARCH 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 March 2020 and I welcome you as joint Chairs. 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 for the prison with sadly the loss of two staff members to Covid-19. I appreciate the hard work and professionalism of everyone at the prison whilst having to come to terms with the loss of a colleague and friend.

I acknowledge the Board's comments about investing in the fabric of the prison to provide a safe and rehabilitative environment. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) remains committed to the delivery of extensive structural works to HMP/YOI Pentonville's main entrance and a redesigned gatehouse incorporating enhanced gate security screening at reception. In addition, £1.5 million has been allocated for decency based projects to be carried out during this financial year which includes A, C, E, G and J wing showers. Further funding will be sought to allow for the refurbishment to outstanding works on D and F wings. Refurbishment work to the Segregation unit is now complete and significant resource has been devoted to painting and cleaning the prison in areas such as the toilets. Likewise, Government Facility Services Limited have been tasked to tackle the vermin issue.

There are currently no plans to reduce HMP/YOI Pentonville's prisoner population, projections of the prison estate have meant that all existing prisons, other than those already earmarked for closure, are required. However, to take account of the complexities of running a regime during the pandemic, the operational capacity was reduced to 1078 (slightly lower than the maximum number the prison can hold).

I would like to emphasise to the Board that ensuring prisons have sufficient capacity to cope with demand is a crucial part of the Government's effort to create a more effective justice system. That is why the Prime Minister reaffirmed HM Prison and Probation Service's (HMPPS) commitment to provide an additional 10,000 prison places to help create a modern, efficient estate that is sustainable into the future. My officials have been working with partners across the criminal justice system to understand and manage the impact of an additional 20,000 new police officers joining the force will have on the system.

Regarding the Board's questions about installing CCTV and replacing the remaining windows (including grilles) of the prison, funding has been secured for CCTV to be fitted on E and F wings over this financial year and MoJ Estates are funding a rolling programme to replace all cell windows throughout the establishment (at around 100 windows fitted per annum). HMPPS Prison Maintenance Group will ensure that the windows requiring the most urgent need for replacement are prioritised.

I support the Board's view about a continued investment in the technology evidenced during lockdown and am convinced that technology can play an important role in helping offenders turn their lives around, both within prison and after release. Government departments have worked at speed to bring in this new technology to the forefront. In May 2020 we announced that secure family video calls would be introduced at prisons and in young offender institutes across England and Wales, and I am pleased that the facility is now available in over 100 establishments (exact figure stood at 107 on 1<sup>st</sup> September). Whilst the current video call service is a temporary measure, intended for use whilst contact with family and friends is limited as a result of social distancing measures, HMPPS is considering a longer-term solution for video calls in line with Lord Farmer's review recommendations in August 2017, focussing on those who do not receive face-to-face visits under normal circumstances. Aside from family video calls, we have also supported virtual telemedicine and face-to-face compassionate end-of-life calls.

Furthermore, HMPPS has been working rapidly to enhance the capability of video prison conferencing facilities. This work has been central to the Lord Chancellor's, the Rt. Hon Robert Buckland QC MP, ambition to keep courts sitting so that justice can be served. The key benefit enables criminal justice service professionals (CJSP) to remotely join video calls between a court and a prison using the existing video hardware (whereas previously CJSP needed to be physically present in court). Similarly, this new technology also allows CJSP to join remotely on video calls facilitated at the prison associated to consultations on case proceedings.

Steps are being taken to increase video conferencing capacity at some locations through revising and extending operating hours during the weekdays, and in some cases on Saturdays. Alongside this work, HMPPS are increasing the number of video link outlets at several critical sites where capacity is limited, as well as to support specialist courts, including the youth and women's estate. This work will provide HMP/YOI Pentonville with additional video rooms, providing nine which can be used as legal visits for prisoners. In addition to this, the modular buildings that currently house the video-equipment where the court-facing work takes place will be replaced. This environmental improvement should significantly improve the courts' user experience. The equipment installed during Covid-19 will continue to be a resource for prisons to help increase the number of hearings and associated consultations by video.

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 the two other issues raised in your report for their attention are set out in the attached annex.

Turning to some positives captured in your report, I note the Board's acknowledgment to the staff in response to the Covid-19 outbreak and welcome the efforts made by the new Governor since he joined. Your comments on the Wellbeing Centre's national award achievement as best team in clinical services and on the high-quality provision within the creative arts are encouraging as well as the intensive courses available to prepare prisoners for release.

I have not been able to visit HMP/YOI Pentonville due to Covid-19 but my team will make arrangements for me to do so when it is safe and convenient.

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 Pentonville.

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/YOI PENTONVILLE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2019 – 31 MARCH 2020

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

##### **Drug Dogs**

HMP/YOI Pentonville's dog team has strengthened since the Board's report. Two dog handlers are on site and the kennel area has been refurbished to ensure facilities are fit for purpose. A review of the dog provision is currently underway across Public Sector Prisons South, and this will look at strengthening sites which do not have adequate dog cover. From September 2020, changes to the South directorate team will enable dogs to be deployed more flexibly between prisons allowing for greater parity. HMP/YOI Pentonville will liaise closely with the dedicated team to increase the provision of dogs.

##### **Offending Behaviour Programmes (OBPs)**

Funding for OBPs is allocated centrally, and any increase or change is considered as part of a national strategy. The delivery of accredited OBPs is an expensive activity, targeted where there is the highest need and delivered at sites with a population most suited to the current delivery model. Needs analysis are carried out annually and this has highlighted that HMP/YOI Pentonville does not have the right population profile to make OBP delivery effective at this time. In terms of future reconfiguration, HMP/YOI Pentonville may become a part Reception and part Resettlement prison, and this potentially may well lead to revisiting the OBP position. HMP/YOI Pentonville now facilitates the Time to Change programme which targets young adults, in particular those involved in gang affiliated activity.