



Ministry
of Justice

Lucy Frazer QC MP
Minister of State for Justice

██████████
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Oakwood
Oaks Drive
Featherstone
Wolverhampton
WV10 7QD

MoJ Ref: ADR 082243

12 October 2020

Dear ██████████,

**HMP OAKWOOD: 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. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, particularly as you have continued to be short of Board members and the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on your ability to gather information.

It was encouraging to receive your comments that prisoners at HMP Oakwood are treated humanely and fairly, and that religious and cultural beliefs are respected and actively encouraged. I was pleased to read that the prison's reception and induction processes are delivered professionally, effectively and comprehensively, and that the Board has observed an excellent relationship between staff and prisoners. I was particularly encouraged to hear about the links the prison has established with employers, training providers and agencies to help prisoners gain meaningful work skills while in prison and gain employment on release. I also echo the Board's praise of the Family Intervention Team for the support they have given to prisoners, visitors and children; the wide range of events they have organised to enhance and maintain family ties are commendable.

Although you have not raised any concerns specifically for my attention, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to the issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex. I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report 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 Oakwood.

Yours sincerely

LUCY FRAZER QC MP

Annex

HMP OAKWOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2019 – 31 MARCH 2020

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

It is unfortunate and regrettable that prisoners' property continues to be an issue. The development of the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework involved a large project undertaken in summer 2019. Following the conclusion of the project, HMPPS has worked closely with stakeholders to consult on proposed changes to the policy. Discussions ahead of consultation with IMB members began with the IMB Secretariat in late February 2020, who proposed meetings take place with Board members in April. In light of the pressures placed on Boards by Covid-19, HMPPS agreed with the IMB Secretariat to pause this consultation until August and September. This work is now moving forward again and the feedback received from IMB members at these meetings will then be considered alongside the comments received earlier this year from other stakeholders, with the intention that the revised draft policy framework will be circulated for wider consultation at the end of 2020.

The new Prisoner Escort and Custody Service 4 Generation contract also began during August 2020 with a new fleet of vehicles which allow for an additional half box of consumable items to the limit of 7.5kg to be carried for each prisoner on top of the existing agreed volumetric limits. In addition to this, HMPPS is looking at what more can be done to encourage prisoners to send out or dispose of excess items to reduce the amount of property that cannot transfer with them. Steps are also being taken to ensure there is a consistent approach when prison staff forward on any excess items to prisoners at their new establishment after a transfer has taken place.

Education

Performance of Education Provider

The Prison Education Framework (PEF) call-off contracts that commenced from 1 April 2019 are very different from the previous Offenders' Learning and Skills Services contracts and, as you will appreciate, there will always be a degree of transition when there is a change in supplier. As the Board identifies, there has been serious concern with the performance of LTE Novus since the PEF contracts began. A large number of provider staff vacancies, a reduction in the quality of teaching and lower attainment/learning outcomes achieved by learners have resulted in delivery falling far short of the agreed annual delivery plan expectations.

To address these concerns, the PEF contracts have a range of supplier obligations plus quarterly performance payments linked to the quality of the teaching. This provides the Governor/Director with the option to withhold a performance payment of 5% each quarter if he or she is not content with the performance of the provider. The contracts also provide commercial levers to seek mitigation and resolution via a formal Improvement Notice procedure, whereby standards such as retention/quality of teaching staff can be brought to account back to HMPPS with time-bound rectification plans from PEF providers.

Due to concerns raised by HMP Oakwood's Director and Learning and Skills Manager, the decision was made to include the prison in a lot wide improvement notice issued to LTE Novus. The lot 15 (West Midlands) improvement notice was issued in February 2020, requiring LTE Novus to address current concerns around the quantity and quality of delivery across the lot, highlighting establishments where issues were considered critical. LTE Novus was contractually obliged to respond and submitted a time bound action plan which has been reviewed and agreed.

This requires LTE Novus to share weekly progress updates with HMP Oakwood, the regional Head of Learning and Skills, the Contract Manager and the Quality Lead. A wider update is also provided monthly to the Prison Group Director, Senior Contract Managers and Ministry of Justice Commercial Team. HMP Oakwood also took the option to withhold the quarterly 5% performance payment to LTE Novus on three occasions.

Initial signs show that the Improvement Notice has had a positive impact on performance. Recent developments indicate that the number of learners awaiting result of their qualification has reduced by 89% from 1,300 (April 2020) to 140 (August 2020). In terms of staff vacancies, LTE Novus have reduced the number of staffing vacancies to two and recruitment for these are ongoing. The other recently recruited staff are now in post with exception of one who is undergoing the vetting process.

The Improvement Notice remains open and is under continuous review by HMPPS. Covid-19 has, however, had an impact on the ability of LTE Novus to deliver some elements of the improvement plan, but all actions remain until HMPPS is assured, and see, marked progress in performance and delivery by LTE Novus at HMP Oakwood.

Monitoring

The Curious Management Information system has been implemented and rolled out to prisons. The system collects and records information to enable the reporting of education and learning delivery within prisons.