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Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Portland
104 The Grove, Easton
Dorset, Portland
DT5 1DL

MoJ Ref: SUB 082279

14 October 2020

Dear ██████████,

**HMP/YOI PORTLAND: 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, especially as you were short of Board members during the reporting year.

I understand the Board's continued concerns about the number of prisoners released with no fixed abode. I would like to assure you that it is a priority for the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to ensure that offenders find somewhere safe and secure to live following their release from custody. My officials are working closely across Government to access the elements that are not directly within our control.

As the Board will be aware the Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018, launching a £100 million initiative to reduce and ultimately eliminate rough sleeping across England. As part of this strategy the MoJ and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), invested approximately £6.4 million in a pilot scheme which operated between August 2019 and July 2020. The pilot aimed to help ex-offenders secure suitable accommodation from three prisons, namely HMPs Pentonville, Bristol and Leeds. It focused on male prisoners who were sentenced to 36 months or less and identified as being at risk of homelessness. Around 300 individuals enrolled onto the pilot and subject to its evaluation, lessons learned will be used to inform future accommodation provision for offenders via the new Probation model. I can also confirm that HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has recently published its national Accommodation Framework that sets out the Agency's and its partners' responsibilities including local authorities, as well as how to build on successes and work together to ensure that offenders can access and maintain settled accommodation.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the MoJ secured £8.5 million to support the provision of accommodation for individuals released from prison during this unprecedented period. The scheme ran between May and August 2020 providing up to 56 nights' accommodation ensuring some offenders can be accommodated in to late October 2020. This scheme was open to individuals who met the appropriate criteria, including all those at risk of homelessness following release from prison. Other cohorts were also considered such as residents in Approved Premises and Bail Accommodation Support Services that were at risk of homelessness.

The MoJ & HMPPS will utilise the learning gathered from this scheme to help develop longer-term improvements and will draw on that learning as part of wider reforms to probation services.

The National Probation Service in leading the creation of a Homelessness Prevention Task Forces (HPT) across Dorset during the Covid-19 outbreak also aspires to continue to develop these forums, alongside key partners, to embed an effective solution to meet the housing needs of prisoners released from custody. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole local councils have recently established their multi-agency Homeless Reduction Board, which will support and compliment the work of the HPT. Whilst it is recognised that there have been challenges with dedicated Employment, Training and Education (ETE) provision by the Dorset, Devon & Cornwall Community Rehabilitation Company, recruitment of ETE job coaches and co-ordinators is underway to address this and provide an improved service to probation staff and those leaving prison. In preparation for the launch of the Dynamic Framework competition, which will be used to procure rehabilitation and resettlement interventions in each area and give voluntary organisations the opportunity to deliver services through the probation system, significant analysis of prison leaver and offender need has been undertaken across the South West, which will inform the contracting of future services to better meet identified need.

The local resettlement provider, Catch 22 at HMP/YOI Portland has established good working relationships with independent housing providers across all of the prison's resettlement areas. I understand a particularly strong relationship has been developed with Hope Housing in Bournemouth and Catch 22 team recently visited them to gain an understanding about their service, what they offer and who they will or will not accept. They have also visited other providers areas such as Bristol Night shelter, the local authority hostel in Bristol and Wick House. Housing providers have also been invited to the prison enabling them to see how HMP/YOI Portland works to rehabilitate offenders and exchange information.

HMP/YOI Portland also has a local strategy to engage with large organisations to hold employment days as they are likely to have a footprint in all the prisons release areas. A recruitment event has previously taken place with the Army which sparked a lot of interest and further days were arranged with the Navy, Airforce and a second Army recruitment day but had to be postponed due to Covid-19. However, the prison intends to rearrange these when it is safe to do so and has plans for further recruitment days featuring the NHS, Fire Brigade and Ambulance Service. The prison also has good relations with local employers such as MKM Builders and Travis Perkins who sponsor two construction workshops and provide vouchers for tools on release to those who have completed construction courses. HMP/YOI Portland will continue to engage with employers to try and forge opportunities for prisoners on release.

Despite your concerns and recognising the prison has more work to do to improve and address HM Inspectorates findings from their visit in 2019, it was encouraging to read about the multi-disciplinary approach to improving safety and fair treatment, with initiatives such as Keyworker, Beaufort supporting living unit and the introduction of Challenge Support Intervention Plans (CSIP) contributing to a reduction in the number of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and prisoners self-isolating. I was pleased to note prisoners have good opportunities to input in to diversity issues and that the diversity and race equality action team has been making progress on equality matters. It was also encouraging to hear that the collaboration between operational and healthcare staff has improved during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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/YOI Portland.

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

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prison Maintenance

It is acknowledged that the service delivery of the facilities management provider, Gov Facility Services Limited (GSFL) has been a concern. However, recent capital bids and the prison's Senior Management Team (SMT) and HMPPS Prison Maintenance Group (PMG) Service Delivery Manager (SDM) working closely to challenge the provider have helped resolve some maintenance issues. It is recognised there is further work to do and GSFL have a new Cluster Lead and Site Manager at the prison who are taking a proactive approach which is beginning to make a positive impact and the SDM and Site Manager continue to hold formal meetings every two weeks to progress outstanding issues.

The showers on Raleigh and Benbow wings have been refurbished and £500,000 has been secured to improve the water pressure issues and refurbish the showers on Nelson and Grenville wings. Covid-19 has unfortunately meant progress with these improvements has been slow but it is expected the work will be concluded this financial year. As an interim measure the showers on the ground floors have been fitted for use and the issue with water being cold has been rectified. While HMP/YOI Portland awaits the installation of in-cell telephony which is due in the next roll out phase delayed by Covid-19, £9k funding has been approved to increase phone access on Collingwood and Benbow wings and to repair damaged underground wires. The cleanliness of external areas of the prison have also improved with the introduction of daily outside cleaners to pick up litter on exercise yards throughout the prison as well as walkways and staircases.

The prison is also working through a local refresh plan using a prisoner working party and Benbow wing is a good example of what the prison has been able to achieve. The refurbishment includes all cells, stairs, railings and landings being cleaned and repainted and is now being replicated on other wings. During 2020 every cell that required toilets to be screened had these fitted and all toilets and taps have been de-scaled. In May 2020 a large order of lockable bedside cabinets, wardrobes and mattresses were evenly distributed throughout the prison and a follow up inventory of all wings was undertaken to identify any additional furniture required. This was ordered in June 2020 and on delivery will ensure that every cell (or prisoner if in a double cell), will have a lockable bedside cabinet, wardrobe and table. The Head of Residence and residential managers have also set expectations that every cell has a pre-occupancy check and is repainted prior to occupancy where required. Arrangement for kit exchange has also improved following the prison purchasing £60,000 worth of kit in 2019.

All workshops have a risk assessment carried out at least annually as per the *Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999, Regulation 3*, to assess the hazards within a place of work and to implement control measures to reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practicable. In addition to the statutory requirement, health and safety (H&S) inspections are carried out with the frequency based on risk, which for most workshops is quarterly. Other checks are also carried out such as monthly SMT inspections and reactive monitoring thorough Accident Investigations following all reported accidents or near misses that occur. In June 2019 HMP/YOI Portland was subject to a H&S Audit which found that all the workshops inspected were clean, tidy and well managed. Since then an issue with the dust extraction for the closed carpentry workshop and a report of mould were swiftly resolved.

Prisoners' Property

It is unfortunate and regrettable that prisoners' property continues to be an issue. As the Board will be aware, 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.

Prisoner Transfer with Health Issues

It is recognised that this is a complex area as health requirements are individual to the prisoner and prisons have a duty of care at the point with which the prisoner presents with the health concern. It should be noted that prisons have to be cautious holding back a prisoner from progressing due to a medical condition, as it is possible that a prisoner may seek to legally challenge this decision. It is acknowledged that during the past year there have been a few occasions where prisoners have been transferred into HMP/YOI Portland and concern has been raised by the Healthcare provider. However, where concern has been raised the matter has been escalated and has resulted in appropriate health provision being provided and where necessary relocation of the prisoner to a prison that is better suited to the individual's health needs.

Equality Issues

HMP/YOI Portland's monthly Equality Action Team (EAT) meeting analyses all available data to ensure that any evidence of inequality is investigated and challenged. Work on protected characteristics continues to be developed locally with all protected strands now having a Senior Management Team (SMT) lead. Prisoner representatives from all areas of the prison attend the EAT meeting and report that they now have a voice and action is being taken. Discrimination Incident Reporting Forms (DIRFs) are also scrutinised at the EAT meeting and the reasons for their previous low use have been discussed and tackled with the support of the prisoner representatives with prisoners considering issues are now being resolved at the appropriate level. In addition, the demographic data of all prisoners in trusted or sought after work is now a standing agenda item for consideration by the EAT meeting and action has been taken to address this with recent data evidencing a more balanced demographic breakdown in these roles. However, allocation to key employment opportunities is continuing to be monitored by the Activities Hub.

While equality training plans have had to be put on hold due to Covid-19, staff on Beaufort wing will in due course receive in house Equality and Inclusion training which if successful will enable roll out to the rest of the prison. The Mental Health In-Reach Team have also agreed to give training to staff on a broad range of mental health issues and trauma training is plan for Care and Separation Unit and Collingwood wing staff, so that they are better equipped to deal with the most complex prisoners.