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Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP/YOI Rochester  
1 Fort Road  
Rochester, Kent  
ME1 3QS

MoJ Ref: SUB 082318

13 October 2020

Dear ██████████,

**HMP/YOI ROCHESTER: 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 impacted on your ability to gather information.

I understand the Board's continued concern about drugs and the need to improve technology and interventions to tackle their use in prisons. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is investing in enhanced gate security and x-ray body scanners on an unprecedented scale as part of the £100m investment announced by the Prime Minister last summer. The technology will be used to detect and deter the entry of contraband into prisons via prisoners, visitors and staff, as well as expanding HMPPS Counter Corruption Unit so that prison staff are more resilient to attempts to influence them to help supply drugs. This linked with closer working with police and health colleagues will support those leaving prisons to continue to engage with services to manage their substance issues. The enhanced gate security includes the installation of archway metal detectors and x-ray baggage scanners, additional staff and drug dogs to increase the level of searching. A rigorous site selection process to implement the investment in up to 50 prisons is underway with the first wave of 16 sites announced in January 2020. Further sites will be announced as implementation progresses and HMP/YOI Rochester is being considered.

Locally, new security cameras are assisting HMP/YOI Rochester to identify illicit items thrown over the prison wall and a support visit from the National Drug Strategy Team helped identify other supply access routes. The Head of Security and Drug Strategy also continues to engage with the national team to ensure the prison is up to date with best practice to support prisoners both in custody and on release. While the prison has sufficient work and education places for all prisoners to occupy them, as the regime continues to safely return as part of the Exceptional Delivery Models, the previous focus which saw attendance improve to an average of 85% at these activities, will continue. A review of A Wing as the Drug Recovery Unit is ongoing and the intention is to implement a dedicated workshop for A Wing, as well as different movement times to minimise mixing with prisoners from other wings. In addition to the Serenity Garden which was a positive introduction during the year, the Reducing Reoffending Team are devising other wing activity provisions and wings managers are working with the Forward Trust to improve and develop wing based interventions.

It is recognised that the substance misuse services at HMP/YOI Rochester use a different staffing model to other Kent prisons due to the procurement exercise taking place when HMP Rochester was thought to be closing.

However, this will be rectified in the forthcoming NHS England and Improvement (NHSEI) Kent Adult Prisons procurement for a Prime Provider model 2020/21 to bring all healthcare contracts into one service, which has unfortunately been delayed due to Covid-19.

Turning to the Board's continued concern about the number of prisoners that are 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.

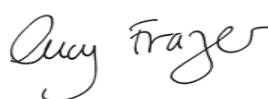
As the Board will be aware the Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018, launching a £100 million initiative to reduce and ultimately eliminate rough sleeping across England. As part of this strategy the MoJ and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, invested approximately £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. HMPPS has also 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 eligible 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. The MoJ & HMPPS will utilise the learning gathered from this scheme to help develop longer-term improvements and as part of wider reforms to probation services. Locally, the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) now has a full time member of staff leading on housing issues following ending their contract with NACRO and whilst the prison regime has been restricted due to Covid-19 the CRC has attended the prison each week providing housing support.

It was reassuring to receive your comments that the prison continues to provide a safe and decent environment where levels of violence have decreased. I was pleased to read that prisoners are treated fairly and staff are providing sympathetic and effective care despite the challenges that they face from those with substance misuse or mental health issues. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic it is encouraging that Key Workers have proved effective in engaging prisoners about the restricted prison regimes. It is also reassuring that Diversity and Inclusion work continues at a high standard identifying trends and possibly discrimination and discussing issues with prisoners openly and constructively.

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 Rochester.

Yours sincerely



**LUCY FRAZER QC MP**

## Annex

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

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

##### **Prisoners' Property**

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 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.

It should be noted that sending prisons are responsible for recording property and sealing bags before they become the responsibility of Prisoner Escort and Custody Service (PECS). The PECS 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.

Locally at HMP/YOI Rochester it is recognised that on occasions the quality of cell clearances has been impacted by work pressures and available staffing. However, the Heads of Residence have devised new wing management checks and cell clearances have been incorporated within these checks undertaken by custodial managers to providing weekly assurance.

##### **Transfers**

As part of reconfiguration of the adult male estate, which introduces new offender flows as well as addressing the imbalance of supply and demand, a new allocation protocol will be introduced. The allocation protocol principles support movement of prisoners to the right prison at the right time. This includes people who are recategorised. The allocation protocol seeks to reduce the number of people being directed back to a local prison and instead directs prisons to consider the most suitable prison for the individual to most effectively meet their needs. An escalation route through the operational line has been established into the protocol to manage any transfer issues.

It is recognised that the speed at which transfers take place can be subject to space constraints in appropriate parts of the prison estate becoming available. However, in 2019 HMP Woodhill began its transition from a core local to a Cat B training prison with a Cat A trial function and specialist units. In addition, at the beginning of February 2020, HMP Manchester also started its transition from a core local to a Cat B trainer prison with a Cat A remand function. When both prisons have fully transitioned this will provide approximately 1300 Cat B training places to the prison estate.

Due to Covid-19 there are currently restrictions on transfers taking place to maintain safety, with a national agreement in place to accommodate exceptional requests which ensure an appropriate destination is agreed. Where prisoners are awaiting transfer and have to be located in the Care and Separation Unit at HMP/YOI Rochester they are seen daily by healthcare, chaplaincy and the Duty Governor, as well as continuing to receive visits from their key worker.

Staff also ensure the individual is provided with regular updates and has activities to keep them occupied such as distractions packs, reading and writing material.

### **Category D Spaces**

HMPPS shares the Board's views on how important a role open prisons play in testing and furthering an individual's rehabilitation, especially those who have spent many years in closed conditions. HMPPS also acknowledges the importance of effective management of prisoner transfers to open prisons to ensure they are held in prisons that match their security category and associated level of risk to the public.

In January 2020 HMP Haverigg changed from a Category C prison capable of holding up to 268 category C men, to a Category D open prison initially holding up to 458 category D men, with the potential to increase to 570. Whilst it is accepted these places are not in the south this change has provide extra capacity and opened up other space in the adult male open estate. As part of the programme to deliver 10,000 additional prison places this also includes the expansion of the Category D estate and HMPPS are currently assessing which prisons may be suitable for expansion. Separately, as the Board is aware the former Medway Secure Training Centre, which closed in March, was temporarily reopened as an annex to HMP/YOI Rochester, housing up to 70 category D prisoners and was successful in providing a steady flow of transfers in to the category D estate. HMPPS has since successfully completed the decant of the annex in August, with prisoners transitioning to Category D prisons or reaching the end of their sentence which is enabling HMPPS to decommission the annex in preparation to hand the site back to the Youth Custody Service at the end of October.

### **Roll Count**

The changes in the roll check procedures were implemented due to a national requirement however, due to the layout of HMP/YOI Rochester it is recognised that these changes created challenges at times for the prison. Therefore, an alternative approach was introduced at the prison and appeared to be successful immediately prior to Covid-19 curtailing regimes across all prisons. As the regime at HMP/YOI Rochester continues to safely return at part of the Exceptional Deliver Models the previously successful roll check procedure will continue to be used.

### **Vermin**

The Facilities Management provider GFSL have increased the visits by Rentokil and the baiting regime at HMP/YOI Rochester and following monitoring over a three month period the new regime has proven to be tackling the vermin issue. The prison is also taking preventative measures on some of the wings to prevent rodent entry such as the installation of brush bars to doors and holes filled with foam/wire wool. Waste management have also introduced additional food waste bins to serveries to prevent food being accessible to rodents in the wheelie bins situated outside residential wings which will also be changed to steel bins to prevent rodent entry. Prisoners can purchase plastic, sealable storage tubs for canteen food items, however the prison is taking steps to encourage prisoners to practice good food hygiene and cells are now regularly checked for food items to ensure the issue as a whole is being tackled effectively.