



██████████
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Thameside
Griffin Manor Way
Thamesmead
London
SE28 0FJ

MoJ Ref: SUB 083789

8 December 2020

Dear ██████████,

**HMP THAMESIDE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2019 – 30 JUNE 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 June 2020. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, particularly as the Covid-19 pandemic and IT systems impacted on your ability to gather information.

I understand the Board's concern about the amount of time out of cell prisoners are receiving due to the Covid-19 pandemic. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) took the difficult decision to introduce restricted regimes to safeguard the wellbeing of prisoners and staff during this unprecedented time. A National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services is in place which sets out the strategy for recovery of how restrictions in prisons will be eased - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-national-framework-for-prison-regimes-and-services>. This allows senior leaders to make decisions based on their local circumstances, the advice of local health authorities and is responsive to national restrictions in England and Wales. To support prisons in their regime management planning Exceptional Delivery Models have been created to ensure each area of the regime is implemented safely and securely and HMP Thameside has implemented these. Further relaxation of the regime will be governed by HMPPS nationally and will be subject to infection rates in the local public population, as well as within HMP Thameside. It is also recognised that access to the current regime and time out of cell each prisoner receives at HMP Thameside is variable. Certain individuals may have to shield or, isolate pending Covid-19 test results or may be held on a Reverse Cohorting Unit having recently arrived at the prison to protect the rest of the population. Reception testing has now commenced and it is anticipated that this will reduce the amount of time spent on RCU from 14 to 7 days, subject to two negatives tests.

The End of Custody Temporary Release (ECTR) scheme was only one part of the overall Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and HMPPS strategy to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. To ensure public safety, the MoJ and HMPPS put in place important safeguards as part of the process to identify prisoners for release. These safeguards included checks at a local level with prisons and partner agencies about the suitability of the identified prisoners put forward for possible release. In total, the ECTR scheme enabled 262 prisoners to be released between April and August 2020.

I would like to reassure you that it is a priority for the MoJ to ensure that prisoners find somewhere safe and secure to live following their release from custody.

Whilst it remains a challenge to find suitable accommodation my officials are working closely across Government to access the elements that are not directly within our control. During the initial Covid-19 pandemic, the MoJ secured £8.5 million to support the provision of accommodation for individuals at risk of homelessness on their release from prison. This scheme ran between May and August 2020 providing up to 56 nights' accommodation to ensure individuals could be accommodated in to late October 2020. While it was designed as an emergency, temporary response, the learning gathered from this scheme will be utilised to help develop longer-term improvements as part of the wider reforms to probation services. To support the HMPPS Covid-19 response, seven regional Homelessness Prevention Taskforces (HPTs) were also set up to work with local authorities and other partners to source accommodation for prisoners on release. These HPTs are still active and following a recent agreement with HM Treasury to reinstate the emergency accommodation funding until January 2021, the HPTs will source accommodation with an increased focus on settled accommodation this time. HMPPS will also consider how the HPTs will feature in the future probation services to continue to build on the progress already made to engage effectively with delivery partners.

I acknowledge the Board's concern about the delays in transferring prisoners with mental ill health. The MoJ and HMPPS are determined to improve the transfer process, ensure delays are reduced and avoid prison being used inappropriately. The Secretary of State for Justice is committed to working with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and health partners to articulate a coherent picture of how healthcare is delivered throughout the criminal justice pathway. The Government is also committed to reforming the Mental Health Act and we are working closely with Department for Health and Social Care to respond to the recommendations of the independent review, chaired by Professor Simon Wessely which includes recommendations about improving the secure transfer process. A joint White Paper will be published in the coming months.

The 2011 Prison Transfer and Remission guidance has also been amended following a comprehensive consultation process and is waiting publication as the planned publication in March 2020 was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. In the meantime, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) continue to monitor the time taken from referral to transfer and provide support where needed. The Health and Justice team in the London region is currently working more closely with the Mental Health Trusts, the Provider Collaboratives and NHSE&I Specialised Commissioning team to ensure that the prison population remain a priority for transfer. Where there are any challenges delaying the transfer of care these are escalated within the Trusts and the Clinical Commissioning Groups on an individual basis.

It is recognised that prisoners with mental health needs are, on occasions, held in segregated conditions whilst awaiting transfer to a secure mental health unit. However, this is always as a last resort and only where the prisoner has been assessed as suitable for segregation by a healthcare professional. The Care and Separation Unit (CSU) at HMP Thameside has access to healthcare professionals seven days a week with daily visits from nurses, GPs, as well as psychology colleagues. The healthcare provider has also been proactive in managing those prisoners who require a transfer. The availability of mental health beds in secure hospitals has improved recently and HMP Thameside have not needed to hold a prisoner in the CSU who requires a secure mental health bed for several months now.

Despite your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments recognising the commitment of staff who have maintained safe and stable conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic. The improvements noted in healthcare are encouraging, as is their effective collaboration with prison managers to work through the challenges Covid-19 has presented. It is pleasing to read about the work of the Families First team, enabling prisoners to stay in touch with their families, and the support given to prisoners via in-cell activities during restricted regimes. I am grateful to the chaplaincy team for their dedicated work with daily wing visits and welcome the unique food boxes providing hot meals during Ramadan. I note the Board

also welcomes the change to the prison's senior leadership and operational direction and I look forward to further progress being reported in the coming year.

I also wish to recognise the tragic event of a staff member of the provider who passed away during the reporting year due to Covid-19. I appreciate the hard work and continuing professionalism of everyone at the prison whilst having to come to terms with the loss of a colleague and friend. I was also sorry to hear that there were three prisoner deaths in custody. Every death is a tragedy and my officials will be working with the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman and will take any recommendations they make seriously.

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. 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 Thameside.

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 THAMESIDE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2019 – 30 JUNE 2020

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Incidents of Violence and Self-harm

Despite the progress being made, HMPPS recognises that the level of violence in prisons remains too high and is continuing to provide prisons with the tools they need to help them reduce violence and self-harm. As well as safety data available on the Performance Hub, the Safety Diagnostic Tool (SDT) provides detailed information on safety issues, from prison to individual level. The Challenge, Support and Intervention Plan (CSIP) has also been developed to provide a consistent national case management model for managing those who pose a raised risk of being violent. CSIP is being used alongside the SDT to identify who may benefit from this proactive case management to prevent violence. HMPPS has also recently piloted changes to the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork case management system, improving the focus on individual needs and effective multi-disciplinary working, as well as revising documentation to make it more user friendly.

Cases of violence at HMP Thameside decreased during the early stages of lockdown, from a monthly high of 72 incidents in March 2020 down to between 30 and 43 incidents during April to June. Along with a decrease in self-harm, bullying and drug use this led to a greater feeling of safety amongst prisoners. It is recognised that incidents did begin to increase during the summer due to the frustrations being felt by some prisoners with the restricted regimes. However, as set out in the Minister's response the pace at which HMP Thameside is able to build its regime recovery, as is the case for all prisons, is guided by the National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services. HMP Thameside continues to work proactively with those prisoners identified as either being vulnerable, at heightened risk of self-harm or being involved in incidents of violence. To support prisoners locally the number of Key Work sessions have increased, and further increases are planned as and when the prison is as able to continue its recovery safely.

HMPPS contract management team recently conducted an investigation surrounding the reporting and investigation of allegations of assault and use of force by members of staff on prisoners. The contractor has been required to produce an action plan to address areas of concern that were identified and this will be monitored by the contact management team.