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Minister of State for Justice and Minister for Afghan Resettlement

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

Moj ref: SUB 91519

15 October 2021

Dear

HMP/YOI PENTONVILLE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2020 – 31 MARCH 2021

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 March 2021. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations especially as the challenges of Covid-19 continued into the reporting year. I was saddened to hear there were seven deaths during the reporting year, four prisoners and three members of staff. Every death is a tragedy and my officials always take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

Further to last year's response regarding the population at HMP/YOI Pentonville, the national prison population has fallen since March 2020 and was primarily driven by a reduction in inflows from the courts during the lockdowns. This has meant there has been a reduction in the number of prisoners sharing cells and has enabled HM Prison and Probation Service's (HMPPS) Compartmentalisation Strategy to be implemented. Despite this, HMP/YOI Pentonville has continued to need to operate in excess of its certified normal accommodation level (i.e. its uncrowded capacity) because of regional capacity pressure. Latest population projections indicate HMPPS will have significant challenges in dealing with demand once the population returns to pre-Covid-19 levels and therefore it is likely that the prison will continue to be required to hold prisoners over its uncrowded capacity in the future. As such, there are no plans to reduce the population.

As the Board will appreciate, the wider problem of crowding in prisons is a longstanding issue that will not be easily addressed. The Government has recently announced to commit over £4 billion capital funding to make significant progress in delivering 18,000 additional prison places across England and Wales by the mid-2020s. This includes creating four new prisons over the next six years and expanding another four prisons over the next three years. These additional prison places will have a positive impact on lowering the proportion of crowding within the prison estate by providing accommodation that is safe, decent and uncrowded. However, the extent to which the proportion of prisoners held in crowded accommodation will reduce will always be dependent on levels of demand in the system.

The fabric of HMP/YOI Pentonville is being improved. Windows were replaced on A and J wings in the previous financial year and those on C, D and G wings will be replaced during the current financial year. The windows requiring the most urgent need for replacement have been prioritised. Other projects in the pipeline yet to be mandated include the replacement of heating pipework, smoke compartment work on G

wing and basement, A and J wing cellular accommodation mesh and render works and C and D Unit utility cupboard security protection. CCTV was installed on E and F wings plus increased coverage of A, J and G wings in the previous financial year. CCTV will also be installed in the reception and kitchen buildings during the current financial year.

Investments in technology made during the lockdowns will be sustained. The use of technology to support remote learning and facilitate a blended approach to learning will be further developed going forward. HMPPS is working with the Ministry of Justice In-Cell Technology Programme team, prison education suppliers, and Awarding Organisations to prepare the digital infrastructure across the prison estate to ensure readiness to deliver Essential Digital Skills in prisons as part of the Governments' commitment to improving the country's digital literacy skills. The Governor also has the ability to access a wide choice of differing delivery methods through the education provision and online education with the University of Westminster will continue.

The roll out of laptops, as part of the In-Cell Technology Programme, continues at pace and will continue to be deployed in more establishments over the coming months. Additionally a new two-year contract has been awarded to a new supplier to continue the Secure Social Video Calling service which will run alongside the return of face-to-face visits and HMPPS is also in the process of re-procuring prisoner self-service kiosks to ensure that more modern services are available to prisoners across the estate.

Although it has been another challenging reporting period, it was encouraging to receive your comments about the mutual appreciation between staff and prisoners despite the pressures of the pandemic, and the efforts of staff to keep prisoners healthy and occupied. I was also pleased to hear about the successful deployment of the body scanner, the continued use of the award-winning wellbeing centre, the successful association with Liberty Kitchen, and the Butler Trust awards for outstanding tutor and work with Time4Change. I also welcome the appointments of the equality advisor and equality officer to resume this important area of work.

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 ever

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Refurbishment

Planned decency-based projects were carried out in the last financial year including works on A, C, E, G and J wing showers. An increase in the showering facilities on E wing was also achieved via the conversion of a storage room. A further £600 thousand worth of decency works has been committed to for delivery during this financial year with an increase of showering facilities on G wing being explored plus the refurbishment of wings C and F, and the Care and Separation Unit.

Future Lockdown Planning

During the pandemic, restrictions were put in place which restricted the regime. Education delivery was in line with the Exceptional Delivery Models (EDM) process and as the establishment moves towards EDM Stage 1 education provision will increase in line with the easing of restrictions of the wider regime.

Throughout the pandemic HMPPS has been capturing and sharing lessons learned and we continue to gather and share a range of information, including feedback from scrutiny bodies, staff, those in our care and the voluntary sector. We are feeding learning into prison safety and wellbeing initiatives, regime redesign, and planning and ongoing mitigations for prisoners. Prisons are also using lessons learned from the pandemic to adapt provision, reinforce fair and decent behaviours, and to show visible leadership. HMPPS' Scrutiny and Intelligence Unit also routinely reviews external scrutiny and internal assurance reports to draw out good practice and themes which are communicated to prisons and more widely across HMPPS. They also identify where lessons could be learned or implemented more effectively.

Offending Behaviour Programmes

Further to last year's response, HMP/YOI Pentonville continues to primarily be a reception prison with the main purpose of serving the courts and then moving prisoners to a more suitable establishment post-sentencing. Consequently there are no plans to expand the Offending Behaviour Programme provision at the prison at this time. However, the prison will continue the work with the Time4Change programme for Young Adults and Sycamore Tree will also remain active.

Governor Devolved Powers

HMPPS continues to keep under review the balance of responsibilities across different areas and levels of the organisation.