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

Moj ref: SUB 90735

15 September 2021

Dear ██████████

**HMP OAKWOOD: 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 you were short of Board members during the reporting year. I was saddened to hear there were nine deaths in custody in 2020; every death is a tragedy and my officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

I understand the Board's frustration with the slow progress of publishing the new Prisoners' Property policy framework. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has now circulated the draft framework with internal and external stakeholders, including the IMB Secretariat and the IMB representatives previously consulted, and a large number of comments received are being considered. As a result, the framework is expected to be published early next year.

I hope to reassure the Board that the framework will provide greater direction and standardisation on a national basis and has been designed with procedural justice at its core. It strengthens guidance on known problem areas such as volumetric control and seeks to ensure prisoners' property is managed efficiently, effectively, consistently and with care and respect. Whilst it remains the responsibility of the sending prisons to forward on any excess property a person has accumulated to the receiving prison as soon as possible, HMPPS is continuing to take steps to ensure there is a consistent approach. Digital improvements to the property processes are being explored as part of these steps, but the nature of this work means that any digital changes are likely to be implemented longer-term and as such will not be part of the forementioned framework. Property identification numbers, however, will now be entered on the digital platform replacing handwritten entries on the paper Person Escort Record (PER). This should enable better tracking of property, should it be lost in transit.

As part of the planning for the new Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) contract, PECS engaged with policy leads to review property limits on transportation and it was agreed to increase capacity to 7.5 kg. PECS continues to monitor all aspects of performance and on occasions where it fails to meet the agreed levels this will be raised with the contractor for improvement. PECS suppliers have received no complaints of lost property involving HMP Oakwood in the last 12 months. As the Board are

aware, property concerns are dealt with via the request and complaints scheme and the sending establishment is contacted to follow up matters.

In response to the Board's concern that there was limited support for foreign nationals (FNs) during the Covid-19 lockdown period, to mitigate the spread of the virus, HMP Oakwood had to make a proactive decision to suspend face-to-face surgeries for FNs. These will resume when it is safe to do so. Home Office staff continue to regularly support FNs in completing inductions, asylum case interviews through the Cloud Video Platform (CVP) and, an interpreter present if needed. The responsible team receive daily queries from HMP Oakwood, which prisoners often communicate through the kiosk facility. This team has set up a dedicated inbox for these queries, which is monitored daily and responded to (a CVP is booked if required). The Immigration Prison Team are in daily contact with HMP Oakwood and prisoners and when requested are seen via CVP.

In terms of virtual adjudications, these hearings have delivered many benefits across the prison estate and the plan is to continue. One laptop has been commissioned per prison and these will enable video sharing across the platform. Plans for independent adjudicators to return to visiting prisons in person will be considered with the Chief Magistrate's Office as part of the recovery work.

Turning to some positive comments captured in your report, it was encouraging to receive your comments commending HMP Oakwood's management team and staff for their commitment and dedication during a challenging and unprecedented period, and for their support of the prisoner-led groups. I was pleased to hear that good standards of cleanliness were maintained, and the reception and induction processes were delivered effectively.

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 Oakwood.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucy Frazer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**RT HON LUCY FRAZER QC MP**

## HMP OAKWOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2020 – 31 MARCH 2021

### HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

#### **Education Provision**

Face-to-face teaching commenced, and scrutiny monitoring performance meetings were increased to bi-monthly for a limited period. HMP Oakwood has seen a significant improvement in delivery outcomes since the arrival of the new Educational Manager in April 2021. The prison is currently satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning, engagement of learners and performance of the provider. However, despite these noticeable improvements, the Improvement Notice will remain active and will be kept under review by HMPPS.

#### **Arrival of Vulnerable Prisoners**

##### *Access to Medication / Medical Records*

In line with the Prison Healthcare Service Specification, systems must be in place to ensure that prisoners arriving at the prison on medication are able to maintain access to their medication in line with the treatment plan. The healthcare service must also provide full and in-depth discharge planning for prisoners being released from the establishment and returning to the community, attending court or being transferred to another establishment. The healthcare provider will agree a system with the prison operator that enables them to be made aware of all planned releases or transfer dates in advance and will liaise with the prison operator in order to create efficient and effective arrangements.

The healthcare provider at HMP Oakwood has confirmed there are no concerns with transfers from HMP Dovegate. The concern regarding HMP Birmingham has been addressed. NHS England and NHS Improvement will continue to monitor the situation and offer support when and where required.

##### *Late Arrivals*

The PECS escort contractors are tasked with the collection and delivery of Inter Prison Transfers (IPT) in and out of HMP Oakwood as required through the HMPPS Population Management booking system. All IPT bookings are made between Population Management Unit and the establishment. The contractor is fully aware of the risks posed by late arrivals and every effort is made to ensure vehicles arrive within the latest reception time. However, there are occasions where the contractor encounters issues en route, which as the Board are aware has an impact on arrival times (i.e. traffic / adverse weather conditions). When late arrivals do occur, the escorts are required to ensure that the receiving establishment is notified of the delay and agreement is sought in advance for the safe receipt of any late arrivals. The PECS Contract Delivery Manager (CDM) also conducts monthly reviews of arrival times and those received very late are raised by the CDM with the contractor as official complaints.

The PECS court escort contractors are required to manage the movement of prisoners via the PER. The PECS escort contractors are reliant on accurate information within the PER from external agencies, to enable them to manage risk both appropriately and instinctively. The PER records risk-based information as well as a history of events. When receiving any prisoner from a stakeholder, the escort staff should expect all identified risks to be clearly documented on the PER and a verbal brief of these risks. Any documentation provided by the prison will also be transported with the prisoner (although the court escort contractor has no contractual responsibility to ensure additional documentation is presented). All

documentation, including medical in confidence material (prescriptions) should be contained within sealed bags, these bags are annotated on the PER by the despatching police / HMP establishment to facilitate an efficient transfer of documentation with the prisoner. PECS or the court escort contractors have no authority to challenge the availability of medical prescriptions or medication.

HMP Oakwood ensures that all prisoners are housed safely, and the healthcare provider deals with any concerns relating to medication.

### **Contact with Family and Friends**

The secure social video calling service will continue to be available alongside face-to-face visits. HMPPS recently completed a re-procurement process and has identified a suitable provider.

As the Board are aware, secure social video calling was installed at HMP Oakwood in October 2020. Nine terminals were initially installed, and due to demand, this increased to eleven. It is worth mentioning that there have been over 7,300 calls since October 2020, with an average rating from callers of 4.1 out of 5. This is slightly above the average rating for the whole service, which sits at 3.95 out of 5 for callers. Since the connectivity and network issues were resolved, there have been no further issues identified with the service at HMP Oakwood.

### **Ligature Inflicted Incidents**

HMPPS is sorry for the way in which this has been communicated to the IMB. To clarify, HMPPS changed its position on the recording of noose making (a loop at the end of a rope), not ligatures incidents. Ligatures are still reported as self-harm incidents. This change was introduced because a loop of material has several uses and is not necessarily a ligature. The requirement to report noose-making was inconsistent with HMPPS approach to other methods of self-harm: where a blade has been removed from a razor, or medication has been stockpiled, that is not automatically considered to be a self-harm incident. However, where it can be linked to an identified risk or intention to self-harm, it can and should be. In the case of loops, where a prisoner has placed one round their neck or tied it to a ligature point, or where there are signs of having weight placed on it, it will be treated as a ligature and reported accordingly. Governors / Directors have been instructed to notify staff that this change does not mean noose-making should be treated any less seriously, as few of the alternative uses are legitimate.

### **Testing for Covid-19**

Currently there are over 100 prisons undertaking pre-transfer testing. All testing is voluntary and refusal to test does not prevent a transfer from going ahead. Uptake is generally very good, for example in the week commencing 9 August 2021 82% of those being transferred agreed to be tested, this amounted to 533 tests. Where prisoners do not agree to be tested before transfer this is recorded in their transfer documentation so that the receiving prison is aware. On reception at the new prison a transferred prisoner who has not been tested is treated as if they were new to the prison estate and allocated to the reverse cohorting unit (RCU) for the relevant isolation period (in accordance with HMPPS Compartmentalisation Strategy). Prisoners are offered further opportunities to test whilst in the RCU which, if tested negative, this could reduce the time spent there before they can be moved into the general population. HMP Oakwood prisoners are routinely tested for Covid-19 on arrival on the first and fifth day.

### **Offending Behaviour Programmes (OBPs)**

In August 2020, HMPPS, Interventions Services developed an 'Alternative Delivery Format' for the delivery of accredited programmes. This allowed for smaller group sizes and individual delivery to take place where not possible. It also allowed for some remote delivery of OBPs. Prisons began to reinstate programme delivery from September 2020 onwards; individual circumstances dictated what could be done both in terms of safe systems of work, but also the availability and experience of the programme facilitator pool to deliver effectively in the new format.

Hence a remote delivery model was developed, although this could not be relied upon in every circumstance, nor with every prisoner and this was considered on a case by case basis.