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

MoJ ref: SUB 91539

15 October 2021

Dear ██████████

**HMP/YOI ROCHESTER: 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. I was saddened to hear about the death that occurred in May 2021; officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

I support the Board's views about enabling better outcomes for people in prison and tackling drug misuse. The Government announced a £148 million investment package in January 2021 that takes a system-wide approach, and this represents the largest increase in drug treatment funding for 15 years. It provides extra resources to law enforcement to dismantle organised criminal gangs and tackle the supply of drugs. It also delivers increased funding for drug treatment and recovery to help cut drug-related crime, and the cycle of misuse and reoffending. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has made the best use of mobile phone blocking technology and wider distribution of portable blocking equipment to disrupt illicit communications.

HMPPS Security Investment Programme (SIP) team are currently investing £100 million in security measures to reduce the crime in prison that disrupts delivery of safe, decent and secure regimes and causes harm in the community. This includes installation of 75 x-ray body scanners in prison receptions across the entire adult male closed estate. The scanners have already made a positive impact with nearly 10,000 positive scans since June 2020, preventing illicit items including drugs entering prisons. In addition, enhanced gate security measures, replicating those used in airport screening, are currently being delivered in 42 prisons. This includes the provision of new staff and equipment to search, detect and deter the conveyance of unauthorised articles through the gate from staff and visitors, including large scale gate refurbishments, installation of archway metal detectors, handheld wands and additional passive drug dogs and dog handlers.

Furthermore, we have committed investment in mobile phone blocking technology to tackle illicit communications, and to work with partners to target those high-harm organised criminals responsible for illicit activity in prisons and to pursue staff corruption activity. This saw the launch of a new multi-agency team and expanding the Counter Corruption Unit, alongside a new policy framework and staff guidance to develop a strong culture of professionalism, which encourages positive behaviour and removes the stigma associated with whistleblowing. It has been heartening to see positive feedback from Governors where these measures have been implemented.

To support the trace detection equipment capability currently in place at HMP/YOI Rochester, the SIP team are currently working to develop a new national maintenance and training contract for all existing Rapiscan Trace Detection equipment in prisons. Additionally, a procurement exercise to source new trace detection equipment for prisons is currently live. The exercise will aim to deliver a robustly tested, suitable solution with an evidence base for reliability and accuracy to help staff identify and prevent illicit drugs entering prisons through impregnation on clothing or mail. Delivery of this equipment is forecasted to begin early 2022 and HMP/YOI Rochester will be considered in a priority exercise to decide which sites will receive the equipment.

In order to improve health outcomes and tackle the root causes of offending, it is essential that a whole system approach is taken to healthcare provision for people in the criminal justice system who are struggling with addiction. The Ministry of Justice is working closely with key departments across government as well as criminal justice partners, public health services and third sector organisations, to improve treatment and recovery of substance misuse in prison and in the community. £1.3 million is being invested in 86 prisons to help prisoners make early contact with treatment providers in the community, putting in place arrangements to continue the treatment they need to help them stay away from drugs and other crime after their release. An update in terms of what is being done locally is set out in the attached annex to this response.

Turning to the Board's continued concern about accommodation provision for prison leavers, who face significant barriers often linked to lack of access to necessary funds, availability of local authority housing supply and affordability/access to private rented sector. Overcoming these barriers requires collaborative work across all government departments to address this issue to ensure an effective contribution towards the Government's goal to eliminate rough sleeping by the end of the current Parliament. Building on the learning from the Covid-19 emergency scheme, a new Community Accommodation Service launched in July 2021 in five probation regions including Kent, Surrey, and Sussex will provide prison leavers at risk of homelessness with temporary accommodation for up to 12 weeks and support into settled accommodation. This will support around 3,000 people in its first year, with a view to having this rolled out nationally determined by future funding. For low and medium risk individuals who have been released on home detention curfew, the Bail Accommodation Support Services provides 605 beds across England and Wales to support those who do not have a suitable release address.

Turning to some positive comments captured in your report, it was encouraging to read that HMP/YOI Rochester remained stable and safe during the Covid-19 lockdown and that staff handled what could have been an extremely difficult situation with skill and commitment. I am pleased to hear about the positive interactions between staff and prisoners, and that the Key Worker system continued throughout the pandemic period and is working well. I welcome the efforts that were made to utilise the old Medway Secure Training Centre building temporarily to house Category D prisoners. Likewise, the commendable swift action by prison officers which helped save lives of those who attempted to self-harm. 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 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 ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

VICTORIA ATKINS MP

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

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

Following the pause in the development of the new Prisoners' Property policy framework due to Covid-19, the meeting with IMB representatives took place in August 2020. The feedback received from those members was considered alongside the comments received from other stakeholders, and comments from subsequent operational engagement. HMPPS has now circulated the draft framework with internal and external stakeholders, including the IMB Secretariat and the IMB representatives previously consulted, and the large number of comments received are being considered. As a result, the framework is expected to be published early next year.

The forementioned 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.

HMPPS continues to consider what more can be done to encourage prisoners to send out or dispose of excess items to reduce their property amount that cannot transfer with them. Prisoner Escort and Custody Service continues to monitor all aspects of the contractors' performance and on occasions where it fails to meet the agreed levels will be raised with the contractor for improvement.

It is accepted that those who share cells at HMP/YOI Rochester and then removed spontaneously to the care and separation unit do not always have their property cleared immediately. Prison staff will continue to monitor this issue and endeavour to improve the timeliness of these clearances.

Category D Spaces

In recent months a number of units have been taken out of use that no longer meet current fire safety standards. This has inevitably had an impact on the availability of category D open places in London and the South East. In the short term, these reductions in places are being offset by installation of good-quality temporary units at several critical sites, while HMPPS plans for their replacement permanently.

More than £4 billion has been committed to make significant progress to deliver 18,000 additional prison places across England and Wales by the mid-2020s, and expansion of the category D estate is included in this.

Open prisons are classified as a national resource, meaning that some prisoners, as the Board have highlighted, are held in open conditions outside of their immediate home region. However, open prisons have a successful track record of supporting prisoners realise their release plans despite the geographical distance from home. All open prisons have established links with local employers to provide access to job opportunities through Release on Temporary Licence. Through collaboration with New Futures Network there is also a national network of organisations that facilitate employment in custody and after release. In all cases, open prisons work to ensure that, where possible, the job can be retained on release. Alternatively, individuals may be released with transferrable skills that are to a recognised industry standard that would enable them to be employed in their home area.

HMPPS recognises that closeness to home is important for maintaining family ties, however given restraints in existing geography and infrastructure, this is not always possible while having access to the right services or opportunities. The Model for Operational Delivery for Resettlement prisons covers resettlement for both category C and D prisoners to ensure there is equality in service delivery regardless of where they are located within the estate. HMP/YOI Rochester like other closed prisons can provide prisoners with a range of opportunities for rehabilitation and resettlement while they are waiting for an open prison place.

Drugs

The investment in Enhanced Gate Security, including the provision of an x-ray body scanner, has further enabled the Governor and his team to focus effectively on maintaining the security of the prison and the detection of illicit items and illegal activity. Metal detector equipment is expected to be received in due course. HMP/YOI Rochester works closely with police and partner agencies to pursue prosecutions and disciplinary action where appropriate.

As staffing numbers improve at HMP/YOI Rochester, the capability to deliver proactive security work will improve. Alongside this, efforts are being made to replace windows with better secured ones which should prevent illicit items being concealed.

In terms of interventions for drug misuse, the substance misuse service team at HMP/YOI Rochester works closely with HMPPS as prisoners are prepared for release including access to community drug programmes and support to maintain abstinence from drugs and alcohol once released. NHS England and NHS Improvement Health and Justice (South East) is working closely with HMPPS on the prison expansion programme to ensure healthcare needs will continue to be met. A new integrated healthcare service to Kent and Medway prisons which includes HMP/YOI Rochester is being procured which has built-in flexibility to adjust to any changes in the prisoner cohort.