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Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Preston
2 Ribbleson Lane
Preston
Lancashire
PR1 5AB

Moj ref: SUB 091541

15 October 2021

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HMP/YOI PRESTON: 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, particularly as you continued to be short of Board members during the reporting year and the Covid-19 pandemic affected your ability to gather information with your monitoring taking place remotely.

I understand the Board's concerns about the delays in transferring prisoners suffering with severe mental ill health to secure hospital. I can assure the Board that the Government is determined to improve the transfer process, ensure delays are reduced and avoid prison being used inappropriately. Mental health is taken very seriously and it is recognised that providing the right interventions at the right time is vital to improve outcomes for people with mental health needs. The Government is committed to introducing the new statutory time limit of 28 days for transfers to mental health hospitals from custody that was proposed in the White Paper and this will be commenced once the new NHSE&I good practice guidance is fully embedded. This new guidance was published on 10 June 2021 and promotes the timely access to appropriate treatment and reduces unnecessary delays -

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/guidance-for-the-transfer-and-remission-of-adult-prisoners-and-immigration-removal-centre-detainees-under-the-mental-health-act-1983> A new independent role to oversee the transfer process has also been committed which will further help to reduce unnecessary delays.

NHSE&I North West acknowledge that there have been considerable delays with transferring prisoners from HMP/YOI Preston to secure hospital during the Board's reporting period. This was due to a lack of suitable beds on medium secure unit admission wards and the unprecedented demand experienced across all communities and custody. The Covid-19 pandemic also contributed to these delays in admission which NHSE&I are continuing to address as part of the Restoration and Recovery of services across the healthcare sector. As the relevant mental health providers are now recovering to routine levels of service, assurance has been provided to NHSE&I Health and Justice North West that providers will endeavour to transfer prisoners from HMP/YOI Preston in a more timely manner. HMP/YOI Preston continues to raise the issue of transfer delays at the Regional Health and Justice meetings as the complex needs and behaviour of some prisoners waiting for transfers have been challenging, with prison and health staff on occasions assaulted. NHS commissioners are continuing to support mental health

services and prison colleagues when there are difficulties in achieving transfers in a timely way and will continue to monitor performance against the standards.

Turning to the Board's request to review the current priority order of the vaccination programme guidelines. The roll out by the NHS has been rapid and is at the centre of the Government's plan to enable life to return to normal as soon as possible. The Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI) advised that vaccinations for those under 50 should continue with an age-based approach to allow the roll-out to continue at pace. This means that no occupation has been prioritised other than health and social care workers within the first phase, because the evidence shows that an age-based approach remains the most effective way of reducing deaths and hospitalisation from Covid-19. Prisoners have also been vaccinated no faster or further than the general public in the community and in order of priority based on the JCVI advice. All adult prisoners have now been offered the vaccine and HMPPS continues to support healthcare colleagues to vaccinate prisoners and to encourage prisoners to accept the offer of the vaccine. HMPPS are also working with NHS Health and Justice partners and the Welsh Government to make arrangements for the vaccination of 16 and 17 year olds. In addition, NHSE& Health and Justice healthcare teams are now prioritising influenza vaccination clinics in prisons and have been encouraged to complete these as early as possible.

I was pleased to receive your comments that prisoners have complimented staff on their good relationships and communications during the Covid-19 pandemic despite two outbreaks at the prison. It was reassuring to read about the food preparation contingencies and that the wellbeing of prisoners has remained important through the pandemic. The additional support to allow prisoners to maintain contact with their families was encouraging to read and the ongoing installation of in-cell phones will improve this further.

It was also reassuring to read that the prison continues to compare well on safety with similar prisons and that body scanners have now been introduced to tackle illicit items being concealed. I was also pleased to read that equality data continues to be monitored and any concerns are addressed at bimonthly meetings. I am grateful to everyone working at the prison for their continued hard work and professionalism throughout the pandemic.

I note you have raised some local requests in your report for the use of technology to continue and for an increase in Key Workers which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as the prison continues its recovery to a full regime. HMPPS comments in response to the other two issues raised in your report about expanding the perimeter and the faulty telephone lines 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 Preston.

Yours ever,



VICTORIA ATKINS MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prison Perimeter

Further to last year's response, the Estates Investment Proposal bid has now been submitted which covers the redevelopment of the reception area and has included the adjacent county museum building should this be possible. The proposal will provide HMP/YOI Preston with much needed additional space inside its perimeter, however, it should be noted that it is high value with delivery over several years. Should the funding be approved a major part of the development will be the reception area which is recognised as being cramped and dated compared to modern standards. In the meantime, whilst it is recognised that Lancashire County Council (LCC) wish to retain ownership of the museum building, discussions are taking place between MoJ Property and LCC regarding the possibility of leasing the building to support the proposal.

Telephone Lines

MoJ Digital and Technology have robust support systems in place for IT faults to be reported and to ensure specialist engineers visit sites as soon as possible. However, it is acknowledged that the telephone lines within the Offender Management Unit building at HMP/YOI Preston experienced faults for a significant period of time before the cause was identified and necessary ducting work could be completed to enable new telephony cabling to be installed to solve the issue. Unfortunately, some of the delay was related to how the ducting work was to be funded and to resolve the matter without further delay the Governor funded this from the prisons budget. Throughout the period, mobile phones were used as a contingency arrangement by the prison to ensure services continued but these have now been withdrawn as all telephones are now fully operational within the OMU building.