



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Wealstun  
Church Causeway  
Thorp Arch, Wetherby  
West Yorkshire  
LS23 7AZ

**MoJ ref:** SUB 92684

30 November 2021

Dear Chair,

**HMP WEALSTUN: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 JUNE 2020 – 31 MAY 2021**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 May 2021. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, particularly as you remained short of Board members and Covid-19 impacted on your ability to gather information during the reporting year. I am also sorry to hear of the problems experienced recruiting new members, my team have forwarded your concerns to the IMB Secretariat who will be responding to you directly on this matter.

I understand the Board's concern about the need to provide prisoners nutritional food and the request to increase the food budget. However, there is no centrally agreed allowance and menus should be decided by prison catering departments. The last food budget set by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) was at £2.02 in 2012 and although this is used by some prisons as a budgetary figure, since 2017 responsibility for budgets have been devolved to Governors. This provides discretion as to how much is spent daily per prisoner on food based on the needs of the local population from the overall budget delegated to prison. I am pleased to read that the Board continues to be impressed by the kitchen team at HMP Wealstun and the variety and standard of food produced. The prison has no plans to increase their daily food allowance, as the current four weekly menu cycle provides six options to prisoners to choose from for the lunch time and evening meal which offer a variety of dietary options. The prison's catering department works closely with the Farms and Gardens department to grow its own fresh produce to enhance the food that is offered and produces its own bread and bakery products in-house to ensure these are fresh and to a good quality. A selection of fresh fruit is provided daily, along with salads and fresh soup, allowing prisoners to choose nutritionally balanced menu options. In addition, the prison is working with charities to offer plant based choices and have themed dishes to cater for its diverse population.

Turning to the Board's concern that employers should be encouraged to be more supporting to employing prisoner leavers, in recognition of the importance of the role employment plays in helping to reduce reoffending, the New Futures Network (NFN) was established in 2018. This is a specialist part of HMPPS responsible for brokering partnerships between prisons and employers to help businesses fill skills gaps and prisoners to find employment on release. NFN employs National Sector Leads who work with trade bodies and national employers covering a range of sectors, including those which are currently experiencing labour shortages. NFN also has a network of regional employment brokers across England and Wales who work with prisons and employers at a local level to support their prison leavers into

employment. Specifically, at HMP Wealstun the NFN lead and Department for Work and Pensions colleagues are assisting the prison to develop links with employers and a recent event was held with construction employers. In addition, two new employment projects have commenced with Recycling Lives and The Clink which includes employer engagement and support. More information about the work of the NFN and the business benefits are available at <https://newfuturesnetwork.gov.uk/>.

Despite your concerns, it was pleasing to receive your comments commending the Governor and staff for their handling of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions under challenging circumstances and whilst providing a settled prison where prisoners safety remained the priority. I too am grateful to everyone working at the prison for their continued hard work and professionalism during the pandemic. It was encouraged to read about the efforts to reduce drugs entering the prison which in turn led to lower levels of self-harm, violence and bullying. I was reassured to note that prisoners were treated fairly and with a consistent approach across the prison and that there was a continued focus given to inclusion, diversity, equality, access, leadership (IDEAL). The Board will also be pleased to note that the progress with opening up the regime at HMP Wealstun continues and plans have been submitted to begin implementing Stage 1 of the [National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services](#) recovery to offer greater regime opportunities.

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 the 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 Wealstun.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Victoria Atkins', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Victoria' and the surname 'Atkins' clearly legible.

**VICTORIA ATKINS MP**

## HMP WEALSTUN: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JUNE 2020 – 31 MAY 2021

### HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

#### **Pandemic Learned Lessons**

When regime restrictions were introduced in prisons to control the spread of Covid-19 it was recognised that these could exacerbate the mental health needs of those in our care. To address anxiety and boredom, distraction packs, in-cell activities and a range of self-help materials were made available, created with input from mental health charity Mind. Staff were given resources to assist prisoners who might struggle, and wellbeing checks were introduced for vulnerable and priority groups of prisoners. NHS England also adopted a range of alternative methods to meet the mental health needs of prisoners whilst face-to-face interventions were suspended or limited, including a Covid-19 mental health screen with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Throughout the pandemic HMPPS has been capturing and sharing lessons learned, including feedback from scrutiny bodies, staff, those in our care and the voluntary sector. This learning continues to be fed into prison safety and wellbeing initiatives, regime redesign and planning which has allowed prisons to prioritise resources, adapt provision, reinforce fair and decent behaviours, and to show visible leadership. In addition, HMPPS is building on learning from a programme of events during Spring 2021 which enabled operational staff to further share and reflect on learning from Covid-19, to inform practice, recovery and future reforms.

HMP Wealstun's Covid-19 recovery is at Stage 2 of the National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services which has enabled the prison to progress with reopening activity places and education, restart communal worship, increase time out cell and PE delivery, and permit family contact during social visits, as well as the continuation of offending behaviour programmes. As the gateway for progression to Stage 1 of the recovery is now open, HMP Wealstun has formulated its submission to the regions Prison Group Director for approval. This will allow the prison to begin implementing its Stage 1 Recovery and offer wider regime opportunities to prisoners.

#### **Regime Mitigation Withdrawal**

Throughout the pandemic prisons were aware that regime mitigations, such as supplementary food packs and additional pin phone credit, were only temporary measures and would be removed in line with regime progression through the National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services. Details on how the regime mitigations would be wound down and the timescales were shared with prison Governors in August 2021. Where required, there is a process for extending or re-introducing most of these regime mitigations, such as the PIN credit system which was nationally withdrawn at the end of September 2021 and Governors were able to put forward a business case to re-introduce these where local circumstances required it. The Board will also be pleased to note that secure video calling remains in place as an additional form of communication, as do the reduced PIN phone call charges. Locally, HMP Wealstun has continued to communicate changes to its prison community via the Prison Information Desk workers, local notices and the Way-out TV system.

#### **Refresher Training**

Further to last year's response which recognised the impact on staff training due to the Covid-19 pandemic, training has now recommenced and staff at HMP Wealstun will be expected to refresh their basic Use of Force training. The use of PAVA spray and new personal safety training (SPEAR) has commenced at HMP Wealstun and is considered a priority as part of the annual training plan. The content

of the refresher training is also being reviewed nationally in line with the new policy framework and both SPEAR and PAVA will be introduced to the Prison Officer Entry Level Training apprenticeship in due course with implementation currently being agreed with Learning and Development Group.

### **Body Scanners**

HMPPS is aware of reports of issues and inconsistencies around the interpretations of scans taken by prisons locally when using body scanners. Whilst there is comprehensive training in place for staff, as well as assurance visits, expert guidance and a dedicated mailbox for further support if staff are unsure, HMPPS is continuing to look at ways to improve its training. HMPPS is engaging with a Consultant Radiologist who is currently developing an improved training package which will allow this knowledge and expertise to be shared with prison staff.

All staff who currently use the body scanner at HMP Wealstun have been trained by nationally approved trainers. The trainers provide regular audit checks on the scans and relevant associated paperwork. The last national assurance visit was conducted at HMP Wealstun in July 2021 where it was found that the interpretation of positive body scans were correct and that staff had taken the appropriate action as a result. Any prisoner who is to be segregated as a result of a positive body scan has to be approved by the Duty Governor and the prisoner is re-scanned on a daily basis. As soon as they are shown to be clear they are returned to normal location. HMP Wealstun has also collaborated with HMP Leeds due to past issues where prisoners were being transferred who then showed secreted items upon arrival. Due to this collaboration the number of positive cases has drastically reduced. There is also an agreement in place between the two prisons to inform the Duty Governor if a prisoner has an item secreted so that a decision can be made whether to accept the transfer.

### **Learning Data**

The CURIOUS HMPPS management information system updates every morning between 6am and 7am, ensuring that reporting within the system is never more than 24 hours behind data entry. There have been no reports of data lag from any prison and HMP Wealstun has confirmed that the local issue experienced is not related to CURIOUS and has now been resolved. The Offender Management Unit is providing regular updates to the education team about transfers and releases which helps keep withdrawals from education low.

### **Category D Places**

Further to last year's response, the Government's announcement to commit over £4 billion capital funding will make significant progress in delivering 18,000 additional prison places across England and Wales by the mid-2020s. This includes a project to deliver 660 new Category D places by expanding six existing category D estate prisons through the addition of further houseblock units. Sites have been selected in consultation with HMPPS Prison Population Management and are based on highest demand, with site surveys establishing the operational feasibility of expansion. The six category D prisons identified are HMP/YOI Stanford Hill 160 places; HMP Springhill 120 places; HMP/YOI Hatfield 60 places; HMP Leyhill 120 places; HMP Ford 120 places; and HMP/YOI Sudbury 120 places. Whilst the safety of the public is the highest priority, to prevent future victims, the ability to test prisoners in open conditions as they approach the end of their sentence is a critical step in their reintegration into society. Providing these new Category D places will improve the options for the staged rehabilitation in supervised conditions and offering significant advantages in safe management and resettlement compared with direct release from a closed prison.

In the meantime, it is recognised that currently there is high demand for Category D places across the estate, not just at HMP Wealstun, with many Category D prisoners being held in closed conditions. HMP Wealstun has Category D prisoners waiting for transfer and whilst some have been accepted on to prison waiting lists or are waiting transport, HMP Wealstun continues to communicate with Category D prisoners

in an honest and transparent way about the process and possible delays due to capacity. The Offender Management Unit is committed to seeking moves to lower category conditions at the earliest opportunity to enable acceptance and transfer at the first opportunity available. As a region HMP Wealstun is also working closely with HMP/YOI Hatfield to keep prisoners within their resettlement area wherever possible.