



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Erlestoke
Devizes
Wiltshire
SN10 5TU

MoJ ref: SUB 92102

22 November 2021

Dear Chair,

**HMP ERLESTOKE: 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. I was saddened to hear there were two deaths in custody during the reporting year. My officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

I acknowledge the Board's comments about an individual located in the Care and Separation Unit (CSU) who was reluctant to move from there. Whilst I am unable to go into detail about the specific circumstances of this individual, I can confirm that the Governor invested his time with this person and has successfully secured a transfer to a prison that will support his needs.

More broadly, my officials are committed to providing a supportive environment. An independent Call for Evidence (CfE) report on Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System (CJS), commissioned by the former Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC was published on 15 July 2021 (<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cjji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/07/Neurodiversity-evidence-review-web-2021.pdf>). The CfE provides an overview of the current national provision to support adults with neurodivergent conditions in the CJS. It identifies that potentially half of the adult prison population has some form of neurodivergence and highlights current gaps in provision, areas of good practice and it provides recommendations as to how current provision might be improved.

Alongside this work, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is working closely with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to examine current provision for neurodivergent individuals, including encompassing the commitments made in the National Disability Strategy and the National Autism Strategy both published in July 2021. HMPPS is scoping the current screening process and data collection storage procedures with a view at standardising this across the prison estate. All HMPPS employees have access to an online e-learning platform called 'MyLearning' which has a variety of training available including 'Neurodiversity – Autism and ADHD'. HMPPS is looking at raising awareness and implementing specialist training for staff. As part of the apprenticeship course for all new prison officers, an autism-specific session will be incorporated. MoJ will also be developing a 'Neurodiversity Toolkit', which will be delivered nationally to frontline staff.

All policies reviewed and developed will have an equality analysis to ensure consideration of neurodivergent people. HMPPS is currently reviewing the safer custody training and the searching policy

in terms of awareness and interaction with neurodivergent individuals. The future prison build programme will be informed by available evidence (including the CfE) on design principles and specifications.

Significant investment has been made in educating and training healthcare staff on neurodevelopmental conditions in accordance with NHS England and NHS Improvement national guidance 'Meeting the healthcare needs of adults with a learning disability and autistic adults in prison' dated September 2021 (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/B0707-meeting-the-healthcare-needs-of-adults-with-a-learning-disability-and-autistic-adults-in-prison.pdf>). Healthcare Neurodevelopmental staff often support prisons to consider friendly environments and facilities to support the needs of these individuals. Locally at HMP Erlestoke, where any prisoner finds themselves in the CSU either for their own safety or other reasons, staff make every effort to continually encourage the person to engage with the regime and be part of the prison community.

Turning to the Board's concerns about prisoners serving indeterminate sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) who are now considerably over their tariff period. I would like to reassure you that HMPPS is committed to doing all it can to support progression. This commitment is delivered by means of a bespoke and regularly refreshed IPP action plan, which includes such initiatives as case reviews of those who are struggling to progress, delivered by Psychology Services to help identify the most appropriate pathway for each individual. It also includes a work stream that oversees the establishment and delivery of specialist progression regimes, which give prisoners a chance to develop and test their ability to manage their risks and lives in an environment of increasing freedoms and responsibilities. There are a broad range of work streams aimed at both the progression towards a safe release, and towards the sustainability of that release, following a positive parole outcome.

These efforts have, in recent years, delivered a substantial reduction in the number of IPP prisoners who have never been released. That number stood at 1,722 at the end of June 2021. This is reduced from 1,969 at the end of June 2020. This is very good progress considering that the population in 2012 was at it is highest, over 6,000. It is important to note that, as the number of IPP prisoners who have never been released continues to decrease, the proportion of those who remain in prison who committed more serious offences and whose cases are complex grows. As they are still assessed as posing a high risk of committing further violent or sexual offences. HMPPS continues to work with these individuals to reduce their identified risks. Locally at HMP Erlestoke, there has been some excellent Parole Board outcomes for several long over tariff IPPs directing release to open conditions / release into the community.

Despite the concerns raised in your report, it was encouraging the Board has acknowledged the Governor and his management team's efforts in the handling of the Covid-19 lockdown. I was pleased to read that gym sessions were maintained and the efforts to provide education and a library service.

HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report and on mental wellbeing are set out in the attached annex. I note you have raised some local issues of concern which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues.

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 Erlestoke.

Yours ever,



VICTORIA ATKINS MP

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

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Residential Units

Avebury wing has been demolished with a minor amount of site clearance to be done. This will be completed when the contractors return to demolish Kennet wing. The prison team is looking at replacement capacity being completed by the end of this financial year with the new accommodation planned to be opened by June 2022.

Repair to the Gym Roof

It is anticipated that the contractor(s) should complete the roof repair by the end of this year. However, this is subject to the completion of planned work in another prison.

Healthcare IT Capability

IT connectivity has been an issue due to the rural location of HMP Erlestoke and other issues, such as, the lack of full fibre broadband and system failures migrating over to the newer Health and Social Care Network (HSCN) cabling. The cabling connection to the healthcare screening room in reception has been reviewed and is in the process of being fitted.

HMPPS has approved specific devices, fourth and fifth generation technology (4/5G) enabled laptops for the use by healthcare practitioners in prisons. As part of the Digital Prison programme, Wi-Fi is being rolled out to allow the prison community to connect to several different services. A strategic decision has been made to deploy the Juniper Mist Wi-Fi solution, which supports 802.1x based access control which can be used to grant network access based on both user and device credentials. This will initially be deployed within the residential blocks of the nominated prisons, which includes healthcare units and segregation/close supervision units.

Wi-Fi is expected to be installed at HMP Erlestoke by the end of March 2022, which will provide in-cell technology. However, this will be done on a phased basis providing access to residential users first then Wi-Fi access to non-residential and third-party providers.

Mental Health Wellbeing

Maintaining the safety, mental health and wellbeing of people in prison continues to be a priority. HMPPS has tailored staff guidance for supporting specific groups of people in prison whose wellbeing may be more impacted by the Covid-19 measures put in place. Health and Justice partners have committed to provide a standard of health care in prisons equivalent to that available in the community. The National Partnership Agreement on Prison Healthcare in England and its associated workplan sets out a detailed programme of work to deliver safe, decent and effective healthcare for people in prison.

Following the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on the delivery of key work, staff in the closed prison estate will be supported in resuming regular key work sessions. As the Board are aware, the key worker role allows staff dedicated time to provide support to individual prisoners, utilising the knowledge gained from the revised and improved suicide and self-harm prevention training. In addition to this, HMPPS continues to work closely with the Samaritans and has renewed the Listener scheme grant for 2021-22.