



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Littlehey
Perry
Huntingdon
Cambridgeshire
PE28 0SR

MoJ ref: Sub 92756

30 November 2021

Dear Chair,

**HMP LITTLEHEY: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 FEBRUARY 2020 – 31 JANUARY 2021**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 January 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 and ended this period with half the recommended complement.

I was saddened to hear there were 17 deaths in custody, 16 of which were from natural causes due to chronic illness or age-related illness. My officials always take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously. I am aware that these deaths had a significant impact on both the staff and prisoners at HMP Littlehey, and I am grateful to the staff for the support they provided to families and other prisoners during these difficult times.

I appreciate the Board's concerns about accommodation design. The replacement of G wing will be carried out as part of the Rapid Cell Deployment Project (RCDP), which will deliver 1000 temporary accommodation units across the prison estate. At present, all of the additional cells that will be installed are designed for single occupancy with en-suite facilities. I can further confirm that the RCDP is not committed exclusively to double or single cell occupancy design.

The RCDP team responsible for deployment at HMP Littlehey met with the Governing Governor and Deputy Governor to discuss accommodation requirements, including a discussion around the needs of older prisoners and those with disabilities. A consultation meeting was subsequently held with the prisoners and staff and the feedback from this was provided to the RCDP team earlier this year. The requirements set out to the RCDP team is expected to be considered in the G wing replacement project.

Turning to the Board's concerns around continued cell-sharing, as per my predecessors' letters, the wider problem of crowding in prisons is a longstanding issue that will not be easily addressed. Since March 2021 there has been a fall in the national prison population, primarily driven by a reduction in inflows from the courts during lockdown. This has meant there has been a reduction in the number of prisoners sharing cells and has enabled HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) compartmentalisation strategy to be implemented. However, despite this, HMP Littlehey has continued to need to operate in excess of its certified normal accommodation level (i.e. its uncrowded capacity) during this period because of regional capacity pressure. Whilst the number of prisoners held in crowded conditions at HMP Littlehey has fallen during 20/21 (6.1%) compared to 19/20 (10.8%), I recognise the Board's ongoing concerns. While these

places meet HMPPS standards for crowded accommodation, holding two men in a cell designed for one prisoner in order to accommodate national population pressures is not desirable.

The Government's commitment to spend over £4 billion in capital funding will however allow for significant progress in delivering additional prison places across England and Wales by the mid-2020s and thereby easing crowding pressures. This includes creating four new prisons over the next six years and expanding another four prisons over the next three years. These additional prison places will have a positive impact on lowering the proportion of crowding within the prison estate by providing accommodation that is safe, decent and uncrowded. As the Board will appreciate, the extent to which the proportion of prisoners held in crowded accommodation will reduce will always be dependent on levels of demand in the system.

It was no doubt a difficult and unprecedented reporting period and it was therefore encouraging to receive your comments that overall HMP Littlehey continues to be a safe and secure prison. I also noted the increased focus on diversity and inclusion, including the continued data monitoring improvement in this area, and despite the regime restrictions required throughout much of the reporting year, the prison continued to encourage a range of cultural events celebrating diversity. I would like to acknowledge and commend the staff and prisoners for their voluntary efforts to produce small bottles of hand gel for distribution to staff across the prison estate in the early days of lockdown when there was a national shortage, and for the prizes won at the Koestler Trust Awards scheme for prisoners' paintings, drawings, sculptures, portraits and fiction.

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 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 Littlehey.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Victoria Atkins', written in a cursive style.

VICTORIA ATKINS MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

There was a pause in the development of the new Prisoners' Property policy framework due to Covid-19. Following a meeting with IMB representatives in August 2020, feedback was received from those members and 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 is being considered. As a result, the framework is expected to be published early next year. The framework will provide greater direction and standardisation on a national basis, 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.

Regarding complaints that relate to another prison or property lost in transit, this continues to be an area of frustration for HMP Littlehey. The Governor has taken steps to improve the speed and accuracy of complaints such as chasing and then escalating through either the Business Hub managers or the Head of Business Assurance at each site to gain a timely response. It is hoped this will improve over time. The revised Prisoner Complaints Policy Framework specifically addresses complaints that relate to another prison or property lost in transit at 5.3 and 5.4 of the framework.