



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Stafford
54 Gaol Road
Stafford
ST16 3AW

MoJ ref: SUB 91720

1 December 2021

Dear Chair,

**HMP STAFFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2020 – 30 APRIL 2021**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 April 2021. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, especially as you continued to remain short of Board members during the reporting year and the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on your monitoring of the prison. I was saddened to hear there were six deaths in custody, three of which were Covid-19 related. Every death is a tragedy and my officials always take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

The safety of those in our care and under our supervision remains our top priority and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is doing all that it can to be flexible and to support those who are more vulnerable to Covid-19. HMPPS provides an essential public service and one of the first steps taken by the agency to support staff in helping them to keep running this essential service was to agree with the Government that all staff working in prisons were classified as key workers. HMPPS has ensured that Personal Protective Equipment has been made available to staff who come into close contact with offenders for their own safety and those in their care. In addition, the vaccination programme is managed by the NHS, and officers and offenders have been vaccinated in accordance with the priority list set out by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and in line with the national roll-out for the wider community.

I appreciate the Board's repeated concern about prisoners' pay. All prisoners employed in work, induction, education, training or offending behaviour programmes receive at least the minimum rate of 'employment' pay of £4 per week, as set out in Prison Service Order 4460 - Prisoners' Pay, although both Public Sector Prison Governors and Directors of contracted out prisons have discretion to pay higher rates. Public Sector Prison Governors and Directors of contracted prisons have the necessary freedoms to set local pay rates that reflect their prisoner population needs, the type of prison and regime in operation, and the jobs/educational/vocational training that is available. Under Prisoners' Pay policy, they are required to have a local pay structure which is reviewed annually as part of the business plan process to ensure that it remains compliant with policy. Whatever pay scheme an establishment operates, it is essential that it is reasoned and structured, the requirements of the scheme are clear to both prisoners and staff, and it is not applied in an arbitrary or discriminatory way.

In readiness for the next financial year 2022-23, HMP Stafford will review its prisoner pay policy including the feasibility of incentivised payments based on completion of sentence/progression plans. Due to the

high numbers of prisoners engaged in paid employment and/or education at HMP Stafford, pay is always likely to be different in comparison to the contracted estate and other public sector establishments.

During the pandemic, the IMB Secretariat setup its own 0800 telephone number that enabled prisoners to submit applications to their respective Board. The Governor and HMPPS are in support of this facility as it improves prisoner communication methods and potentially helps alleviate any possible prisoner frustration. The IMB management board has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of the 0800 applications line and evaluated options for its future. It was recognised that the service provides significant benefits for prisoners including accessibility and an improved facility for prisoners with poor literacy or for whom English is not a first language.

After considering all options, including withdrawal, the IMB management board has decided to develop and continue the service. Although it began as a Covid-19 response measure the service will now become part of the IMB's standard provision to prisoners nationally. This decision will be reviewed annually by the IMB management board as part of the standard annual budget review. The service remains in the ownership of IMBs, overseen by the management board and facilitated by the IMB Secretariat. Under the PINPhone contract, 0800 numbers are not chargeable, subject to approval by HMPPS security teams.

The reporting year has no doubt been a difficult and challenging period and it was therefore encouraging to receive your comments that overall prison staff attitudes, resilience, perseverance, flexibility and understanding have all been commendable, particularly when significant personnel changes also took place. I was also pleased to hear about the integral part of the prisoners painting party in delivering the Clean, Rehabilitative, Enabling and Decent programme, and the creation of the community hub named Unity 7 reflecting the prisons values.

HMP Stafford can take particular pride in the work of the tailoring workshop in helping the national situation by manufacturing hospital scrubs for the NHS and blankets/sheets for HMPPS. The provision of a laundry service to other establishments during the pandemic and the efforts of the industries staff are also great achievements.

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 Stafford.

Yours ever,



VICTORIA ATKINS MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Medicines Management

It is recognised that there have been long-standing issues with medication administration at HMP Stafford, compounded in recent months by the transition to a new pharmacy service and particularly the pharmacy IT system interface. The responsible NHS trust and its clinical team have been engaging with the healthcare provider to determine what actions are being taken to address these issues, and what additional steps could be taken.

Many of the issues relate to practical ways of working. New guidance and checks have either been recently implemented or agreed to support staff and highlight where problems remain. New measures implemented/agreed include:

- Weekly calls to review any issues raised the previous week
- Prescribers will be reminded of the time it takes between ordering and medication arriving on site (48 hours)
- New stock reconciliation process implemented and an assessment of effectiveness due this autumn
- Prioritisation of weekly stock checks by Pharmacy Technicians.
- New medicines competency document and supervision process to be implemented as soon as possible

Progress in delivering these actions will be reviewed through monthly quality data submissions and a twice monthly review that NHS England and Improvement has requested to assure that the processes outlined is working.

Prisoner Transfers

The suitability of inter-prison transfers is a matter between the sending and receiving establishments. It is the responsibility of the prisons involved to discuss and agree any move involving a prisoner who requires any specialist facilities, including mobility issues.

The Population Management Unit (PMU) at HMPPS Headquarters is not involved in this respect. The PMU's role is to allocate prisoners across the estate taking into account many factors and is heavily determined by population pressures. Where it is possible and appropriate, both HMP Stafford and the PMU try and mitigate concerns if raised. However, the suitability of transfers between prisons remains a matter for the establishments concerned.

Call Charges

The service provider has agreed to maintain the reduced call rate tariffs introduced due to Covid-19. HMPPS can confirm that call tariffs are the same for both in-cell and wing phones. In addition to the PIN phones, HMP Stafford also has eighteen handheld phones. It is currently being explored whether the handheld phones can remain in place at HMP Stafford beyond the pandemic.

At HMP Stafford, the Governor has ensured all prisoners have an opportunity throughout the day to access phones. Due to compartmentalisation and the need to create wing bubbles to safely manage Covid infection, it is accepted that not all prisoners may have accessed phones at a time that was suitable

to their individual need whilst the restricted regime was in place. This situation will naturally improve as regime restrictions ease.

Secure Video Calls

Social video calls were introduced as an emergency measure to help maintain family contact for those held in custody when social visits were suspended due to Covid-19. HMPPS is committed to continue to offer secure social video calling and these will operate alongside, not as a replacement for, face-to-face social visits. A re-procurement process was recently completed and a two-year contract has been awarded to a new company that is an established provider of secure video calls, to continue the service at the end of the contract with the current provider.

The current interim policy states that the number and times of available call slots is a decision for each establishment. However, establishments should take account of when families and children are available for calls and consideration should be given to offering social video calling in the evenings and at weekends. HMP Stafford is currently reviewing how it can expand usage into the evening and weekends.