



Ministry
of Justice

Victoria Atkins MP
Minister of State for Justice and
Minister for Afghan resettlement

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Usk and HMP/YOI Prescoed
47 Maryport Street
Usk
Monmouthshire
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MoJ ref: SUB 93245

20 December 2021

Dear Chair,

**HMP USK and HMP/YOI PRESCOED: 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 during a difficult period and, especially as you were short of Board members. I was saddened to hear there was a death at HMP Usk during the reporting year. My officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously. I am also deeply saddened to hear of those who died due to Covid-19.

I acknowledge the Board's comments about the vaccination programme priority list and was pleased to read HMP Usk and HMP/YOI Prescoed were the first prisons in the UK to successfully administer the Covid-19 vaccinations. As the Board will appreciate, since the beginning of the pandemic HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has worked very closely with the National Health Service (NHS) and the Department of Health and Social Care and long with the other UK nations has followed the advice of the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. The vaccine was prioritised based primarily on age given that this is the predominant risk factor for severe outcomes linked to mortality and morbidity. It remains the case, that no occupational group will be prioritised, because the evidence still shows that an age-based approach remains the most effective way of reducing deaths and hospitalisation from Covid-19.

I note the Board's concerns about educational provision funding and recognise that education should be at the heart of the prison system to enable people to unlock their potential and transform lives. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) provides the budgetary funding for learning and skills across the South Wales Public Sector Prisons following the transfer of responsibility for prisoner learning from the UK Government in April 2009. HMPPS is responsible for commissioning appropriate provision to support people in prison to achieve sustainable employment prospects. I hope to reassure the Board that HMPPS Wales and the Governor will work proactively in considering how this issue can be mitigated going forward and secure future funding.

Whilst ongoing discussions around appropriate funding continue, HMPPS Wales will conduct a recruitment exercise to fill vacant posts within the Learning and Skills department, and the Governor will explore with New Future Networks and contacts across the region to ensure that the education provision at HMP Usk and HMP/YOI Prescoed enhances rehabilitation and provides suitable qualification and life skills for men

to secure employment upon release. The new Head of Reducing Reoffending will be heavily involved in improving outcomes.

Turning to some positive comments captured in your report, it was encouraging to read that these are well run prisons and staff have worked hard and coped well with the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Board will be pleased to note the accommodation pods at HMP Prescoed will be utilised for the time being as these will provide a welcomed resource during the demolition of Lester Unit in early 2022. It is also encouraging to hear the prison team will be obtaining Covid-19 and pre-Covid-19 perceptions of specific groups in the prison population through an equalities survey and making informed decisions from the data collated.

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 Usk and HMP/YOI Prescoed.

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 USK and HMP/YOI PRESCOED: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2020 – 31 MARCH 2021

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Offender Assessment System (OASys) Records

HMPPS released an OASys Quality Assurance tool to prisons earlier this year to improve the quality of assessments completed by Prison Offender Managers (POMs). A new Head of Offender Management Delivery and Probation OM has been recruited to join HMP Usk in 2022 and improving performance continues, with significant changes already seen in the areas highlighted by the IMB.

Staff Retention

The MoJ Resourcing continues to tailor attraction and communications to address different employment markets, seeking to attract a more diverse candidate pool and obtain applications from candidates with relevant life skills. We have introduced a new assessment process based on current best practice which includes tests for strengths, behaviours and resilience and have improved our access to information about the role and expectations of applicants.

A new Custody and Detention Apprenticeship for all new prison officers joining HMPPS is now being rolled out in the North/Midlands and is due to be introduced in the South of England imminently. This training programme has been designed to provide prison officers with the confidence and competence to complete their role. The Apprentices will be supported by an Apprenticeship Coach and it is their role to oversee and support the learner, by ensuring all training components are completed to the standard required. The apprenticeship will help HM Prison Service grow talent and develop a motivated, skilled and qualified workforce.

A local assessment tool and supporting toolkit and Retention Strategy was launched in November 2021 to enable prisons to assess locally what their drivers of attrition are. There will be an escalation route through prison groups and to the national team to highlight issues that are at a regional level, external drivers such as immigration support recruitment campaigns, or nationally if what is being said is for example, around the recruitment messaging or other issues that prisons have no control over.

Locally, a lot of work has been done to address staff recognition and retention and this is beginning to pay dividends, as for instance HMP Usk is a national exemplar site model for staff working with men convicted of sexual offences.

Recording of Ligature Making

There have been no further changes to the policy regarding the recording of ligatures since the letter which the IMB refers to from Dame Anne Owers. Ligatures are still reported as self-harm incidents - noose making is not. These incidents represent a small proportion of reported incidents but as the definition change will have an impact on statistics, to ensure full transparency, HMPPS will publish a revised time series showing the effect of the change to the definition.