



Ministry
of Justice

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

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Bedford
St Loyes
Bedford
MK40 1HG

MoJ ref: SUB 93497

10 January 2022

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI BEDFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2020 – 30 JUNE 2021**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 June 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. I was saddened to hear there were two deaths in custody during the reporting year and can assure you that my officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

I note the Board's concerns about the non-prioritisation of prison officers to receive the Covid-19 vaccine. The Government takes the advice of the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) on vaccination eligibility and prioritisation. Their focus on age and medical vulnerability were determined as the optimal approach to maximise vaccination roll-out at pace. Their reasoning was that this would have the greatest positive impact on hospitalisations and reduce the pressure on the National Health Service, their priority at the time. Regrettably, this meant no prioritisation for prison staff and was a decision outside the control of prison senior leaders and Prison Ministers.

I am pleased to inform you that HMP/YOI Bedford engaged with the Associate Director of Vaccination Site Operations, the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Mass Vaccinations Programme and Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust. As a result, external outreach vaccination clinics for prison staff took place in October 2021.

Although this has been a challenging reporting period, it was encouraging to hear that there has been a steady decline in self-harm incidents, that the wings are clean and well managed and that efforts have been made to control the rodent/pest problem. I acknowledge the applaudable work of the healthcare team for their commitment to the health and safety of the people in prison and the unstinting efforts of the Governor in keeping both prisoners and officers safe during the Covid-19 pandemic. I am also pleased that prisoners are now benefiting from the installation of telephones to all cells.

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. HM Prison and Probation Service (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/YOI Bedford.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'V' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

VICTORIA ATKINS MP

HMP/YOI BEDFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2020 – 30 JUNE 2021

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

Following a pause in the development of the new Prisoners' Property policy framework due to Covid-19, a meeting with IMB representatives took place in August 2020. The feedback received from those members was 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 are being considered. As a result, the framework is expected to be published early this year.

The framework will provide greater direction and standardisation on a national basis and has been designed with procedural justice at its core. 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.

While digital improvements to property processes are being explored, the nature of that work means that any digital changes are likely to be longer-term and will not be part of the framework at this stage.

Accommodation on Release

A number of issues arose post reunification of the Community Rehabilitation Company and the National Probation Service (NPS) and the subsequent commissioning and allocation of the new Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) contracts in respect of accommodation on release. However, the gaps in provision have been resolved with the work being undertaken by the Community Probation Practitioners and the Probation Resettlement Staff.

The regional Contract Management Team is working closely with the supplier of Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) Accommodation services to HMP/YOI Bedford to ensure the quality and performance of service delivery and outcomes meets expected standards.

If a contractor fails to meet contracted service levels and their performance becomes a concern, there are remedies available within the contract that can be applied to drive up performance. These include improvement plans and rectification plans, which will be put in place if necessary and monitored by the Contract Management Team.

Although we are still in the early days of the new contracted provision, we are committed to ensuring that those within our care, including those in custody, receive the support they need to address their rehabilitative and resettlement needs via the pathways available through the CRS framework.

Prisoners on Release

On 26 June 2021 when the NPS and Community Rehabilitation Companies unified to become the Probation Service, responsibility for the delivery of resettlement services moved to the Regional Probation Directors (RPDs) with key interventions delivered by CRS providers (commissioned by RPDs). We are looking to commission services related to finance, benefit and debt and expect these services to be in place by mid-2022. In the meantime, the Pre-release Team at HMP/YOI Bedford will provide pre-release services not currently available via CRS including support for unconvicted people and finance, benefit and debt services and support services to the people in prison. Whilst we had hoped it would have been possible to commission these services more quickly following unification, it has taken some time for the new contracts and different structures to embed but we are working on procuring these as quickly as possible.

Resettlement

The Regional Probation Director continues to work with Governors across the region to ensure joint Prison-Probation working and any issues can be raised via the East of England Regional Resettlement Board or via the Senior Leaders Forum. In addition to this, East of England Probation Region have a Head of Resettlement who is working with the Governor and staff at HMP/YOI Bedford to provide a pre-release service. There were some issues with SEETEC, the CRS accommodation provider reaching its full staffing complement, but this was achieved by mid-October. This includes a dedicated resource for HMP/YOI Bedford, reporting through to a regional Accommodation Manager. CRS provision at HMP/YOI Bedford is supported by the probation Pre-release Team. This team has had some vacancies but active recruitment, including the use of agency staff resources, is ongoing. The team is led by a dedicated manager who is well regarded by the prison and who is managed by the regional Head of Resettlement.