



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Chelmsford
Chelmsford
Essex
CM2 6LQ

MoJ ref: SUB 94879

4 March 2022

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI CHELMSFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2020 – 31 AUGUST 2021**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 August 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 four deaths in custody during the reporting year. My officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

I understand the Board's continued concerns about overcrowding. Further to my predecessor's response the Government has committed to increase investment of £3.8 billion over the next three years to deliver 20,000 additional modern prison places, including 2,000 which are temporary by the mid-2020s. The first of the new prisons, HMP Five Wells in Northamptonshire opened in February 2022 providing 1,680 places. 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. However, 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. Whilst the average number of prisoners living in crowded conditions across the prison estate did fall during 2020/21, as a local prison there has been a need for HMP/YOI Chelmsford to continue to operate in excess of its Certified Normal Accommodation level. The prison continues to work closely with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Population Management Unit to balance maintaining sufficient capacity while enabling refurbishment projects to buildings and facilities to be completed. In addition to the refurbishment completed on A wing, the Board can be assured that HMP/YOI Chelmsford's current agreed operational capacity of 687, a reduction from 750, allows refurbishment to continue with cells on the first night in custody wing and once the installation of new cell windows on E wing are complete the operational capacity will return to 690.

Regarding other building and facilities improvements, a project is underway to refurbish four of the eight shower blocks on E and F wings, with additional funding received recently to enable two further shower blocks to be refurbished in due course. Following equipment repairs and replacements which were carried out during 2021 to ensure the kitchen remained fully operational, further funding is enabling projects to be planned to refurbish the kitchen including a full redecoration, replacement of the flooring and installation of Whiterock cladding on the main kitchen walls to give added protection. A sustained and determined campaign of increased pest control visits, waste management improvements and modifications to drainage ingress points has shown positive results in controlling the rodent population. A concerted effort has ensured that the prison is cleaner and a site wide fire safety improvement project is underway.

Turning to the Board's continued concern about foreign nationals, the Home Office remains committed to progressing cases as quickly as possible, ensuring detention paperwork is served at least 30 days prior to

conditional release dates as per the Service Level Agreement (SLA) and keeping foreign nationals informed of the reasons for ongoing detention. The SLA is being closely monitored for compliance with justification sought where a case misses the service date. For cases that fall outside of the SLA, such as those that receive short sentences, these are expedited so that a foreign national can be informed of a decision as soon as possible. Whilst it is recognised that delays can be frustrating, reviews are conducted every 28 days to ensure detention and the location of detention remains appropriate, justified and necessary. Where possible Foreign National Offender Returns Command Immigration Prison teams have had a presence in the prison estate throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, but it is recognised that restricted regimes to control the spread of the virus has resulted in limitations. The teams have utilised in-cell technology to conduct interviews via video conferencing where appropriate and operational hot lines have been available to allow Immigration Officers and Caseworkers to provide updates. The Immigration Prison Teams have also now begun to resume a normal level of service where levels of Covid-19 infection allow.

I acknowledge the Board's ongoing concern about homelessness which is why the Prisons Strategy White Paper published in December 2021 sets out a vision that no one subject to probation supervision is released from prison homeless. The White Paper commits to increase the number of Housing Specialists from 20 to 48 across England and Wales which will support prisons to be more strategic in their response to reducing homelessness, including working in partnership with probation services and Local Authorities. It also sets out plans to spend £200 million a year by 2024/25 to reduce reoffending, including improving prison leavers' access to accommodation such as expanding the temporary accommodation service across England and Wales. The temporary accommodation service was launched in July 2021 in five probation regions, including the East of England and provides up to 12 weeks of basic temporary accommodation for prison leavers subject to probation supervision that are at risk of homelessness on release. The commitment to increase Approved Premises spaces for high-risk offenders by 200 beds continues and is on track to be delivered by March 2024. In addition, the Bail Accommodation and Support Services provision continues to provide accommodation for low and medium risk offenders who do not have a suitable release address with new contracts coming into effect in October 2022 providing greater flexibility to respond to demand, more support and an improved service.

Despite your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments that most prisoners are safe with incidents of prisoner on prisoner violence declining and many examples of good interactions between staff and prisoners to provide the care and support they need. I was interested to read about the efforts to support the prisoner journey and provide resettlement information from the first night to encourage participation in the opportunities that are available and was encouraged by the significant increase in the number of prisoners released with an offer of accommodation.

I note you have raised five 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 the other two 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 Chelmsford.

Yours ever,



VICTORIA ATKINS MP

HMP/YOI CHELMSFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2020 – 31 AUGUST 2021

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Improvement Support

Due to the Urgent Notification process regular support meetings are being held with key stakeholders, chaired by the HMPPS Executive Director for Public Sector Prisons South. Quarterly Senior Board meetings are taking place with the HMPPS Chief Executive Officer and HMPPS Director General of Prisons to measure progress against the initial 28-day urgent notification action plan and the overall action plan to address HMI Prison's recommendations. HMP/YOI Chelmsford is also receiving support by an onsite HMPPS Prison Performance Support Programme (PPSP) team who are assisting with the collation of action plans, resource management and improving safety and rehabilitation. In addition, the HMPPS Standards Coaching Team is also on-site providing coaching, shadowing and mentoring to newer staff who may need development, as well as supporting the prisons efforts to improve the staffing culture.

HMP/YOI Chelmsford is making significant progress with the support received from PPSP and as a result of the Urgent Notification process. The local Safety team has increased dedicated resources to focus on reducing violence, self-harm, bullying and the drug culture. Key Work is focusing on the most vulnerable prisoners and reducing cross deployment of staff to provide consistent delivery. Robust local quality assurance processes are in place to improve Assessment, Care in Custody, Teamwork standards. The prison is also being more proactive in tackling drugs through a dedicated Drug Strategy Manager being appointed, consistent searching of staff and visitors through Enhanced Gate Security, and the use of body scanning technology to tackle illicit items being conveyed by prisoners.

Accommodation Capacity and Staffing

As set out in the Minister's response, the prison's operational capacity has been reduced to allow improvements to be made to the accommodation, with the prison benefitting from additional funding to improve decency as well as enhanced resources which will support staff in vital areas. The prison is currently operating with more Prison Officers and Operational Support Grades in post than its target requirement which is projected to continue until at least the middle of 2022 despite a high level of staff turnover. At the direction of the Hertfordshire, Essex and Suffolk Prison Group Director, Ministry of Justice Resourcing is continuing to recruit staff to the prison above the target and every effort is being made to maintain current recruitment levels.