



Ministry
of Justice

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

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP & YOI Doncaster
Off North Bridge Road
Marshgate,
Doncaster
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MoJ ref: SUB 93225

16 December 2021

Dear Chair,

**HMP & YOI DONCASTER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 OCTOBER 2019 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 September 2020. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, especially given the challenges the Board has faced with a shortage of members and Covid-19 impacting on your ability to monitor the prison fully during the reporting year. I was saddened to hear there were six deaths in custody during the reporting year, two of which were from natural causes. My officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously. It is reassuring that the prison has undertaken immediate and longer-term learning following these deaths with support from safer custody colleagues at other prisons.

I understand the Board's concerns about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on prisoners and their families and you request that lessons should be learnt for future planning. As you have made a similar request to HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) both are addressed as part of my response. When regime restrictions were introduced in prisons to control the spread of Covid-19 it was recognised that these could impact those in our care. Private prisons, such as HMP & YOI Doncaster received assistance and operational guidance from HMPPS Covid-19 Gold Command and has been adhering to the HMPPS plans for regime recovery set out in the [National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services](#). To address anxiety and boredom of prisoners, distraction packs, in-cell activities and a range of self-help materials were made available, created with input from mental health charity Mind. Staff were given resources to assist prisoners who might struggle, and wellbeing checks were introduced for vulnerable and priority groups of prisoners. The Board will also be aware that temporary regime mitigations were put in place to assist prisoners to maintain contact with their families, such as additional PIN-phone credit and access to secure video calls. The Board will be pleased to note that video calls will remain in place as an additional form of communication to social visits allowing prisoners the opportunity to maintain family ties.

Since restrictions were introduced HMPPS has been undertaking a project to understand the impact of Covid-19 on staff and prisoner safety. The project's aim has been to understand the emerging picture, identify the gaps in knowledge and the implications for next steps. HMPPS intends to draw on the positive factors that have benefitted the psychological wellbeing of our staff and prisoners during the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic HMPPS has also been capturing and sharing lessons learned, including feedback from scrutiny bodies, staff, those in our care and the voluntary sector. This learning continues to be fed into prison safety and wellbeing initiatives, regime redesign and planning which has allowed prisons to prioritise resources, adapt provision, reinforce fair and decent behaviours, and to show visible

leadership. In addition, an independent public enquiry into the Covid-19 pandemic will be completed next year and further details will be announced by the Government.

Despite your concern, it was pleasing to receive your comments recognising the essential roles of everyone who has been working at the prison during the pandemic and to maintain the safety of the prisoners in its care. I understand the Prison Director is proud of the staff and I too am grateful for their dedication and professionalism during this challenging time. I would like to thank the previous Prison Director who retired in April 2020 and it is encouraging to read about the positive changes being implemented by the new Prison Director. I was reassured to read that the actions in response to the previous IMB Annual Report from 2018/19 have been implemented by the prison and that the capacity and capability of the dog section was also enhanced during the year to aid security patrols. I was also encouraged to read about the improvements to the healthcare complaints process and the renewed focus on Discrimination Incident Reporting Forms as well as responding to these in an improved timescale.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Prison Director will continue to keep you aware of as work continues.

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 Doncaster.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

VICTORIA ATKINS MP