



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Downview
Sutton Lane
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MoJ ref: SUB 92151

10 November 2021

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI DOWNVIEW: 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 during a difficult period and, especially as you were short of Board members. I was saddened to hear that a valued chaplain died and offer my gratitude for his dedication to public service and condolences to his family.

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented a unique set of challenges. Although restrictions in the community have certainly eased, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is continuing with some preventative measures in prison and the youth estate as these environments are high-risk, infection can spread rapidly. I note the Board's concerns for the mental health of prisoners who have been locked in their cell, I can assure you that Governors now have greater freedom to tailor their recovery towards local priorities and deliver as much as possible. The opening of Stage 1 set out in the National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services has been approved (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-national-framework-for-prison-regimes-and-services>). While some Covid-19 controls remain in place, there is no requirement to socially distance, which will enable the delivery of more purposeful and consistent regimes. Prison sites are continuing to progress to Stage 1 (delivering a near normal regime) where it is safe to do so, based on public health advice and local conditions. A summary about recovery has been set out in the attached annex.

I acknowledge the Board's comments about the vaccination programme overseen by the NHS. Fundamentally, the Covid-19 vaccines have been at the centre of the Government's plan to enable life to return to normal. In line with the community, prisoners and staff have been vaccinated in order of priority based on the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI) advice. An age-based approach is the most effective way of reducing deaths and hospitalisation. Recognising the unique environment in prisons, HMPPS is conducting routine testing on staff and prisoners so they can identify and contain outbreaks of the virus by isolating people earlier who have been tested positive. Visits at HMP/YOI Downview have resumed and two adults from two different households are now able to visit together. In prisons at Stage 2 (which includes HMP/YOI Downview) visitors can have physical contact with the person they are visiting, and access to refreshment facilities providing their rapid test taken at home/prison reveals a negative result. For those aged over 11, who cannot provide a negative test result, social distancing measures will remain in place. HMPPS will continue to use the Secure Social Video Calling service to support family ties and is regularly reviewing restrictions in line with the latest public health advice.

Turning to the Board's comments about the programme of work to create additional 500 prison places for women, I would like to reassure you that this government remains wholly committed to delivering the Female Offender Strategy aims outlined by my predecessor in November 2020. The decision to expand the women's prison estate is not simply a question of numbers, though this is clearly important due to the projected rise in the prison population. Significantly, the new prison places will provide welcome investment enabling HMPPS to deliver the right type of accommodation and this is an important step in taking forward this last aim, which has at the forefront the review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system by Baroness Corston, who as you may be aware made a series of recommendations to bring about improvements.

It is envisaged that the new accommodation will improve the experience for women where custody is considered the only option, including improving closeness to home as an incentive for women to progress, strengthen family ties, will help to deliver better custody and in turn reduce self-harm rates. The design will be trauma-informed and gender-specific with improved outcomes for women and greater in-cell communication options informed by lessons learned from the pandemic and laptops that offer an entertainment platform and a transactional service, which enables prisoners to undertake day-to-day transactions such as ordering meals.

I would like to emphasise that we are not investing in all of this at the expense of women's community services. Work has begun on delivering the first of five residential women's centres, a key commitment. These will provide a robust community alternative for women who would otherwise receive a short custodial sentence, offering safe residential accommodation and holistic support to address the often-complex needs that underlie their offending behaviour. Prisons shouldn't be used as a place of safety for women, but for those women who do require custody, they must be held in appropriate, decent and safe accommodation which supports effective rehabilitation.

I appreciate the Board's comments about HMPPS not holding central data on the number of primary carers of dependent children. Information on a caring responsibilities and children living in the community is monitored locally by prison Governors/Directors to ensure appropriate support can be provided to individuals and their families. HMPPS is making changes to the Basic Custody Screening Tool (completed on entry to prison) by exploring more questions so that data to identify whether a person has primary caring responsibilities can be accessed centrally. However, it is important to note that the data collected is reliant on self-declaration and some individuals may be unwilling to disclose such information.

Turning to some positive comments captured in your report, it was encouraging to receive your comments that the Board considers HMP/YOI Downview to be a safe prison and recognition to the team for working extremely hard to keep prisoners and staff safe. I was also pleased to hear some positive prisoner feedback and the improvements made to the prison environment. 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/YOI Downview.

Yours ever,



VICTORIA ATKINS MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Recovery

As regimes reopen there will be increased opportunity for engagement in purposeful activity and rehabilitation programmes. The recognised trade unions are constructively engaged as part of the Covid-19 Recovery process and this is set out in an agreed memorandum of understanding between HMPPS and the unions.

Purposeful activity and rehabilitation opportunities are built into the Governor's regime planning and as such has increased the purposeful activity provision exponentially. Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) opportunities are available upon successful assessment by the ROTL board(s). At HMP/YOI Downview currently, 126 prisoners are employed full time, 48 part time and 30 are waiting allocation. Planning is underway to transition to Stage 1, where activities such as family visiting sessions will be reopened. Less experienced operational staff will be supported during the recovery of prison life.

Quality Assurance

Third Party Provider(s)

HMPPS recognises the important role that many of the contracted providers and partners played during the pandemic alongside the agencies directly employed staff. Many were unable to provide their normal services during regime restrictions and sought to adapt to provide these remotely or in different ways to comply with the Government's work from home instructions and to follow important Public Health England guidelines in order to keep staff, prisoners and families safe. As regimes have opened in line with the National Framework, HMPPS have continued to see providers and partners respond and adapt their working models to changing needs as part of recovery and to support ambitions for reform. Work is continuing at a local level to ensure that the pre-covid level of service is re-established as soon as practicable. The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) invites you to discuss the family provision over the reporting period in more detail.

Healthcare Complaints

NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) is conducting an external review of the complaint system which is being led by the NHSE Health and Justice (South East - SE) quality team. This will provide standardisation across the SE women's estate for how complaints are differentiated from concerns, how they managed including how complaints are received and recorded, and provision of timely responses including a follow up with the complainant. Healthcare complaint data is shared with the Governor who will monitor the accuracy of the data and the response times.

Increasing the use of telemedicine is an important element in providing safe, effective healthcare. Many prisons have already started effectively using the Visionable Healthcare Platform (a multi-application video collaboration and communication platform) with their local hospitals. NHSE/I aim to roll this out between HMP/YOI Downview and local surrounding hospitals as soon as possible.

Psychological Interventions

There has been increased demand for psychology interventions nationally. NHSE/I and their providers have worked within the Government, HMPPS and Public Health England guidelines for delivering interventions, and for some of this time unfortunately group work has not been allowed. To make amends,

NHSE/I have worked creatively at HMP/YOI Downview using the advice and feedback to provide psychology interventions in alternative ways, for example one to one sessions, cell-based distraction packs and wellbeing checks. The waiting list for psychology provision is reflective of HMP/YOI Downview's population size.

With the easing of restrictions, therapeutic groups have restarted, and the waiting list is reducing. The vacancy for a Clinical Psychologist at HMP/YOI Downview has been filled and the candidate due to take up post imminently. The existing team consists of a Psychotherapist (Art therapist) who is responsible for a caseload, and two Senior Psychologists who provide a service two days a week.

Access to IT

Education Purposes

Prison education is a key element of regime recovery planning and the future digital strategy for education in prisons is a key component of the Prisoner Education Service programme. HMPPS is working with the Prison Education Framework suppliers and Awarding Organisations to establish how best to prepare, within current funding, the digital infrastructure across the prison estate to ensure readiness to deliver Essential Digital Skills in prisons as part of the Government's commitment to improving the country's digital literacy skills. A small number of prisons across the youth, male and female estate will have in-cell technology available for prisoners by the end of this financial year and work is in the pipeline to develop educational provision for these sites. However, whilst work on the estate's digital infrastructure has commenced, this opportunity for estate wide transformation cannot be realised without significant investment in digital infrastructure. HMPPS acknowledges a sizeable share of the estate will be unable to offer education outside the education blocks or workshops for a considerable amount of time.

Five Accelerator Prisons (which include Women's and Welsh estates) will see the trialling of selected digital innovations, to establish impact and strengthen, with evidence, any future strategies. The digital innovations to be trialled include reader pens to assist low level literacy or neurodiverse learners with reading, as well as in cell laptops, which will be able to utilise personalised content to enable the user to learn at their own pace in their own environment, thus encouraging those who may otherwise be hard-to-engage onto their learning journey. Likewise, HMPPS is working with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), In Cell Digitalisation of Prisons team to ensure a suitable solution that captures education as well as prisoners' other requirements can be met from one device.

IT Systems

The IT refresh for Weston College prison sites was expected to be completed by summer 2021, however, this should now be completed by the end of 2021/ early 2022. The team at Weston College is working with South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) who have agreed a secure solution to be installed across all their 19 sites. This will provide access to Virtual Campus 2 [VC2 - the secure web-based learning environment] and a new data collection system Curious to capture a range of operational delivery data including; assessment, enrolment, completion and achievement data, as well as additional links to the secure education model within VC2 and other learning resources.

A major upgrade of the IT systems and hardware in prisons is also underway which should greatly improve the service received and communication with HMPPS and MoJ.