



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
Stuart Andrew MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Low Newton
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7 September 2022

Dear Chair

**HMP/YOI LOW NEWTON: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MARCH 2021 – 28 FEBRUARY 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 28 February 2022. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work, particularly as you continue to have a number of vacancies and due to the constraints Covid-19 had on your information gathering

I understand the Board's ongoing concerns about the number of women with acute mental health difficulties who enter the prison system. The Government published the draft Mental Health Bill in June 2022 which seeks to improve the support for people with acute mental health needs, including those who come into contact with the criminal justice system. The Bill includes the provision to introduce a statutory time limit of 28 days for transfers to hospital as proposed in the Reforming the Mental Health Act (MHA) White Paper published in January 2021. This time limit, together with operational improvements, will help reduce unnecessary delays and ensure women in the criminal justice system receive swift access to treatment. The Bill includes reforms to end the use of prison as a place of safety for defendants and convicted people requiring assessment and treatment under the MHA to ensure they receive the right support in the right setting. It also includes an amendment to the Bail Act (1976) to ensure vulnerable defendants can no longer be remanded to prison for their own protection where the court's sole concern is a defendant's mental health.

Where a court places a woman with complex mental health needs into prison, NHS England and their providers work proactively with the prison to expedite a transfer to a more appropriate secure hospital location as quickly as possible. It should be noted that throughout the Covid-19 pandemic there were closures within the secure hospital estate due to Covid-19 cases resulting in many patients experiencing admission delays. It remains the case that access to secure beds can be challenging and NHS England will continue to work with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and HM Courts and Tribunals Service to minimise such placements. NHS England and health partners are also fully committed to the 28 day timeframe and are focused on improving efficiency across the whole pathway, including ensuring appropriate lengths of stay, reducing transitions and improving throughput which will make better use of existing capacity across the whole system, such as the pathway to and from prison. The jointly commissioned review of health and social care across the women's estate to obtain a better understanding of the current provision and ensure equity is now expected to report in Autumn 2022.

Options for the future healthcare accommodation at HMP Low Newton, including the potential Wellbeing Unit, also remain under consideration.

Turning to the Board's concerns about the effectiveness of resettlement services, it is recognised that there has been a transition period in the delivery of resettlement services in some prisons following unification of the Probation Service. Regional Probation Directors are working to stabilise the pre-release teams and Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) provision to secure improved service delivery to all prisoners. The embedded pre-release teams will provide immediate resettlement needs and pre-release support for all women in prison including those unsentenced and from out of area. As a minimum, women in prison will be assessed under the Basic Custody Screening Tool 2 with specialist immediate needs and support services provided. The pre-release teams will liaise with the Community Offender Manager or Short Sentence Function and support pre-release planning activity throughout the sentence, which includes progressing referrals to CRS providers and providing a point of contact to enable CRS providers to engage with the women.

The Board can be assured that the North East Probation Region's Contract Management Team monitors the CRS Women's Services supplier's performance and any identified service delivery concerns are managed robustly via formal contract management procedures. In addition, the Prisons Strategy White Paper set out plans for supporting women with accommodation needs on release. This included the expansion of the temporary accommodation service across England and Wales, as well as Strategic Housing Specialists who will support prisons to reduce homelessness. HMP/YOI Low Newton has already received the funding to permanently recruit a Band 6 Strategic Housing Specialist who is developing relationships with key housing partners to ensure robust housing pathways and processes are in place.

Whilst recognising your concerns, it was pleasing to receive your comments commending the efforts of staff to provide a safe environment and supportive regime, where levels of self-harm and violence are low. I was reassured to read that the women are treated fairly and humanely and that there are good interactions with staff who have in depth knowledge of the women in their care. I was also encouraged by the prison's education success with 100% of learners remaining on their programme and completing the course.

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 Low Newton.



STUART ANDREW MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

CCTV

It is recognised that the CCTV system at HMP/YOI Low Newton does not cover the entire site and is in need of replacement as it is becoming obsolete. The prison has locally funded new individual systems in the Care and Separation Unit, as well as the visits complex which have been future-proofed to enable integration with a full prison wide CCTV upgrade in the future. However, the prison requires capital investment funding to replace the full system and bids in recent years have been unsuccessful. Despite the significant increases achieved in the last two Spending Reviews, demands for maintenance remain greater than the available funding and projects are therefore being prioritised carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on decency and sustainability. In the interim funding continues to be approved for small maintenance repairs to the CCTV system and the prison is updating its business case in preparation to submit a further investment bid request this financial year.

Body Worn Video Cameras (BWVC) are being worn and activated on a more consistent basis by staff, which is evidenced via the local Safety Intervention Meeting and the Use of Force Meeting. In addition, the prison is due to receive the next generation BWVC in October 2022, which will have a pre-record facility to constantly record and overwrite footage. This footage is saved once the recording function on the camera is activated and will help to capture the build-up of spontaneous incidents and to record evidence.