



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Oakwood
Oaks Drive
Featherstone
Wolverhampton
WV10 7QD

MoJ ref: SUB099425

5 September 2022

Dear Chair,

**HMP OAKWOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 APRIL 2021 – 31 MARCH 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 March 2022. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work, especially as you had several vacancies. I was saddened to hear there were two deaths during the reporting year. As you are aware the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) carry out independent investigations into deaths in custody and I would like to assure the Board my officials take recommendations from the PPO very seriously.

In response to impending inquests, there is no statutory requirement or expectation that requires coroners to routinely notify Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs), or any bodies/individuals who have not been identified as interested persons of the arrangements for a specific inquest. Where this has occurred in local areas in the past, this has been a matter of local practice and is not an issue which the Chief Coroner would expect to issue national guidance. Notice of inquest hearings are published as per Chief Coroner Guidance No. 25 – Coroners and the media | Courts and Tribunals Judiciary. Given the strain that delays can put on family and staff involved, I hope that the inquests are concluded as soon as possible. Going forward, the Head of Safety at HMP Oakwood will update the IMB accordingly of any upcoming inquests.

I acknowledge your Board's long-standing concern about prisoners' property. I am pleased to inform you that the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was published on 1 August 2022 (implementation date 5 September 2022 and replaces Prison Service Instruction 12/2011). As the Board is aware, the Framework is the result of extensive consultation, including with the IMB. It has been designed with procedural justice at its core and aims to ensure consistency and fairness and enhance prisoners' satisfaction with processes and outcomes. Given the nature of property, and the movement of prisoners between establishments, the Framework looks to provide greater direction and standardisation on a national basis. It strengthens processes in relation to the main problem areas identified by IMBs and staff including the handling of valuable property, managing cell clearances, volumetric control compliance and forwarding excess property following a prisoner's transfer. Locally at HMP Oakwood, cell clearances are now captured on body worn video cameras and complaints are monitored weekly.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Director will continue to keep you aware of as work continues to improve outcomes. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

Turning to some of the positive comments captured in your report, it was encouraging to read that HMP Oakwood showed exemplary commitment in the care of prisoners, especially those suffering with mental

ill health and behavioural problems exacerbated by the constraints of the prolonged lockdown period. It was pleasing to note that the Director communicated effectively, good standards of cleanliness were maintained, and non-English speaking prisoners were supported.

The Justice Secretary and I appreciate the valuable role played by members of IMBs throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Oakwood.



STUART ANDREW MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Accommodation on Release

The embedded Pre-Release teams provide immediate resettlement needs and pre-release support for all people in prison including the unsentenced and people out of area. The minimum will be to assess under the Basic Custody Screening Tool 2, undertake specialist immediate needs and support services. The Pre-Release teams liaise with the Community Offender Manager or Short Sentence Function as allocated and support pre-release planning activity throughout the sentence, including progressing referrals that have been made to Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) suppliers and providing a point of contact for CRS suppliers seeking to engage with the individual. The Probation Contract Management Team (for the West Midlands region) is monitoring the CRS supplier's performance and through formal Governance procedures is managing identified service delivery concerns, such as accommodation.

Category D Prison Spaces

HMPPS recognises the specific concerns with regard to open prisons. The availability of category D spaces has been affected by the requirement to close a number accommodation blocks in the open estate over the course of 2021 which no longer meet the statutory fire safety standards. This has been managed through replacing some of these places, particularly in the South, with existing temporary accommodation which was on some sites as part of Covid-19 contingency measures and in other sites, with new temporary accommodation. £3.8 billion is being invested over the next three years to deliver 20,000 additional, modern prison places including 2,000 temporary prison places across England and Wales by the mid-2020s. This portfolio of work will deliver 660 additional places through expansion of the category D estate at a number of sites across the country.

Many prison sites have a higher number of category D men than are able to be moved, all must have a completed and signed off Offender Assessment System (OASys) report, completed EQUIP (the system that brings together the offender management processes used by prison and probation) and where needed an offender manager handover prior to transfer. In the North of the country there is a limit on the number of high-risk men that can be sent to sites due to a shortage of probation staff.

Regarding the waiting list, HMP Oakwood has had the most category D moves transferred out in recent months. However, there are some men not ready to move owing to the reasons outlined above.

Mental Health Transfers

NHS England Health and Justice (West Midlands) continues to maintain oversight of long waits for a secure mental health bed and escalates delays to both regional secure bed commissioners and nationally as this is a widespread issue. Reduced bed capacity and staffing issues within a secure setting were observed during the pandemic which affected bed availability and transfer times. Escalation processes are in place and regular multi-agency calls are held to try and expedite transfers. There is also a national data collection exercise underway to determine the scale of demand and waiting times for all patients and a national portal for data collection has been set up to facilitate this. Once this data collection exercise is complete further actions can be agreed going forward.

Education Provision

We acknowledge that the Board will be undertaking further work in relation to the education provided by Novus. In response to last year's Ofsted inspection Novus has developed a Quality Improvement Plan. This plan is rigorously monitored as part of the governance arrangements at HMP Oakwood, and progress so far has been positive. Novus has successfully appointed staff into a number a of vacancies which will expand the curriculum offer available for prisoners. Following a recent survey, 97% of responses indicated that prisoners were satisfied with the quality of learning received. Over 1000 education courses have been completed since April 2022 and with an average success rate of over 90%.