



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Belmarsh  
Western Way  
Thamesmead  
London  
SE28 OEB

21 November 2022

Dear Chair,

**HMP BELMARSH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 JULY 2021 – 30 JUNE 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 June 2022. I was saddened to hear there was a death in custody 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.

I am very much aware of the amount of effort that goes into producing annual reports and thank you for providing a comprehensive picture of HMP Belmarsh over the reporting period.

I address below the specific points you have raised for my attention:

I recognise the Board's ongoing concern for people in prison with severe mental ill health. 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 men in the criminal justice system receive swift access to treatment.

Ensuring safe and timely flow for patients requiring a transfer under the MHA is a matter of the highest priority. In April 2022 a new London Prison Operational Mental Health Transfer Template was implemented to track, in real time, individual patient progress aligned with Key Performance Indicators and the National Guidance. A Mental Health Improvement Programme for the London region Health and Justice is being developed and a specific strand of work focused on improving patient flow from prison into secure hospitals was implemented in November 2022 to support improved outcomes.

The challenges experienced at HMP Belmarsh are fully understood and are reflected in the clinical and operational actions locally, with a weekly review of all referrals taking place. This focuses on patients that have been waiting longer than 56 days for a transfer to ensure clinical risk is being prioritised and cases are escalated to enable the Inpatient Unit to have the capacity to respond to varying needs. HMP Belmarsh does have unique demands as a large proportion of patients require assessment via a medium secure unit for consideration to a high secure unit which takes longer than those transfers to a medium secure unit or psychiatric intensive care unit. It is important that comprehensive assessments take place to formulate the on-going treatment plan and improving clinical outcomes. In addition, as some of these

patients are category A prisoners as well as some being high risk, category A transport is necessary to support the transfers which is not readily accessible.

Regarding the Board's request to speed up the courts process, the Government is committed to supporting the recovery of the courts. Over the next three financial years, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is investing an extra £477 million for the Criminal Justice System to help improve waiting times for victims of crime and address the Crown Court backlog. To increase capacity, the limit on sitting days in the Crown Court have been removed for the second year in a row, the use of 30 Nightingale courtrooms have been extended and new super courtrooms have opened in Manchester and Loughborough. The sentencing powers of the Magistrates' Courts have also been extended from six to twelve months for a single Triable Either Way offence to allow more cases to be heard in the Magistrates' Court and free up capacity in the Crown Court. In addition, across all jurisdictions, more judges are being recruited to enable courts to sit at the maximum possible level over the coming years.

It is also worth noting that the Bail Act 1976 has a presumption in favour of bail. Only those who are deemed by the court to be a risk to public safety, are likely to reoffend, abscond or obstruct the course of justice are likely to be held in prison on remand. To maximise the opportunities for bail, plans are being finalised for Bail Information Officers to be deployed in a small number of remand courts to provide reports at the first bail hearings enabling on the day referrals to the new Community Accommodation Service Tier 2 (CAS-2) provision, formerly known as Bail Accommodation Support Services. This is in addition to Bail Information Reports already being provided for defendants who have been remanded into custody. For individuals who are high risk or who require a greater level of supervision, Approved Premises can provide a secure temporary accommodation placement and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is on track to deliver the commitment to increase capacity by 200 bed spaces by March 2024 having delivered over 130 bed spaces already.

I understand the Board's ongoing concerns about accommodation support and 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. The London Regional Probation Director is working to stabilise the Pre-Release Team and Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) provision in the region to improve service delivery to all people in London prisons. At HMP Belmarsh, four Pre-Release Team staff are in post with a target staffing figure of 5.5 full time equivalent. The Pre-Release Team continues to provide pre-release resettlement support for all people in prison, including the unsentenced and people out of area, as well as providing immediate resettlement needs and sustaining accommodation where possible. As part of the changes made for the unification of Probation in June 2021, contracts were let in each Probation Region to providers of accommodation services for sentenced prisoners. HMPPS is now working on extending these contracts to provide accommodation support to all people in prison including those unsentenced who have accommodation needs and hope to have the extended service in place by the end of 2022.

Finally, a new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was published on 1 August 2022 with an implementation date of 5 September. 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, compliance with volumetric control and forwarding on excess property following a prisoner's transfer. While digital improvements to property processes are being explored, the nature of that work means that any changes are longer-term and it was not possible to include in the new Framework. HMP Belmarsh has now embedded processes to receive and issue property resulting in significant improvements.

Despite these challenges, I was reassured to receive your comments that prison leaders have a shared vision and ambition to raise standards and I note healthcare provision and the wellbeing of prisoners has improved, as well triple occupancy of cells no longer being used. It is pleasing that the Board is now able to undertake regular visits in person following lockdown, as your independence is welcomed by prisons to allow them to reflect on the care prisoners receive in custody. It was encouraging to receive your comments about the significant developments in the area of equality, diversity and inclusion and the considerable efforts of staff to help a prisoner who could not speak or read English to understand routine prison processes. I was also pleased to read that prisoners working in the recycling centre have again saved the prison over £3000.

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 Belmarsh

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds'.

**Damian Hinds**  
**Minister for Prisons and Probation**

## HMP BELMARSH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2021 – 30 JUNE 2022

### HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

#### **Kitchen and Shower Repairs**

MoJ Property has been working with the facilities management provider to obtain a quote to address the damaged flooring within the main kitchen at HMP Belmarsh but this has been delayed due to the availability of approved contractors to complete the work. The facilities management provider has now approached other companies recommended by their supply chain team to try to resolve the matter as swiftly as possible. Whilst there has been no bid to refurbish the kitchen at HMP Belmarsh, demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding, even with the significant increases achieved in the last two Spending Reviews. Should a bid be submitted the project would be subject to a careful prioritisation process that is used to make the best use of the available funding, which focuses on risk to life and risk to capacity, decency and sustainability.

The delays experienced with the catering equipment repairs is linked to warranty issues and the prison's funding for new equipment which does not fall under the scope of the current facilities management provider contract. However, the facilities management provider is liaising with the prison to resolve this and going forward the funding of new equipment will be held by MoJ Property to speed up the replacement process.

To improve the showers, £7.8 million has been invested in a site-wide programme of refurbishment which commenced in February 2021 and is scheduled to complete by May 2023 and it is encouraging that the Board consider the completed work so far is to a high standard. The design for the High Secure Unit (HSU) has been agreed and costs are currently being determined for inclusion in the programme. A project to install new calorifiers in the HSU has been funded for this financial year and is in the process of being mobilised which will regulate and stabilise the temperature. Work is also taking place with the pest control contractors to ensure that the HSU visits area is to the standards required to allow visits to take place.

#### **High Secure Unit Telephony**

Prisoners located within the HSU must have their telephone calls live monitored, listened to and recorded, which is set out in the HSU Operating Standard and Local Security Strategy. Live monitoring of calls would be unachievable if all prisoners on the unit had access to in cell telephony at the same time. To enable adherence to the Operating Standard, HMP Belmarsh has a Control Room Officer live monitoring the calls which are made on the spur telephone booth.

#### **Visits Booking**

The online service to book a social visit was turned off in March 2020 as visits to prisons were suspended due to Covid-19. When visits were able to resume, these were at a reduced rate so the online service continued to be unavailable with visitors directed to book via telephone. The online service was turned back on in June 2022 following security updates and testing and is available to HMP Belmarsh. However, the online service cannot support the prisons current processes of keeping prisoners from each houseblock separated. To support visitors to make bookings, in addition to the telephone service and in person counter bookings following a visit, HMP Belmarsh has an email request inbox which is monitored and replied to daily. The prison has also introduced a new application process which can be submitted on the day of a visit. The prison is also continuing to liaise with Digital team to resolve issues with the

telephone service recorded messaging enabling prospective visitors to be informed where they are in the queue. In addition, whilst the online service was unavailable MoJ Justice Digital has been working on a replacement online service which will work better for prison staff and visitors by reducing the volume of calls needed to telephone lines and a new service is being piloted in a small number of prisons and will be available in 2023.