



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Stafford
54 Gaol Road
Stafford
ST16 3AW

MoJ ref: SUB100667

1 November 2022

Dear Chair,

**HMP STAFFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2021 – 30 APRIL 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 April 2022. I was saddened to hear there were six deaths in custody during this period. 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 Stafford over the reporting year.

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

I understand the Board's concerns about medicine management at HMP Stafford and the previous responses from HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) on this matter. All health treatment in custody is the responsibility of NHS England and health and justice partners are committed to providing a standard of health care in prisons equivalent to that available in the community. Local Prison Health Delivery Boards bring together health and prison staff, which are best placed to consider and address local issues with an escalation route to Regional and National Health Delivery Boards. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is recognised through quality assurance and performance monitoring conducted by NHS England that issues with medicines management were identified at HMP Stafford and an action plan was agreed with the healthcare provider to address this. However, responding to Covid-19 resulted in routine data reporting being suspended in prisons, as was the case in acute and community settings, to free up resources to support outbreak management, testing and vaccinations. These impacted monitoring and Public Health guidance at that time also resulted in suspension of face-to-face meetings and attendance in prisons, limiting the ability for on-site verification.

It is reassuring that the Board consider that the healthcare provider is now delivering the service it was commissioned to provide which is comparable with the service expected in the community. The Board can be assured that NHS England has taken several actions to ensure the current standards of performance and quality are sustained and continually improve. On-site clinical quality visits have resumed, as well as all quality assurance and performance monitoring. A dedicated clinical Quality Review Meeting has been held with the healthcare provider to review medicine management with the next taking place in October

2022 and a Regional Improvement Plan is being monitored quarterly face to face. Any significant incidents, patient complaints and trends are also being raised with the healthcare provider immediately. Whilst it is recognised there is further work to do, throughout the reporting period the prison and healthcare provider were determined to enhance their relationships to improve the support given to prisoners which has been strengthened by the introduction of a trained prisoner Health Champion located on each wing since April 2022. For 2022/23 NHS England has also increased the resources available to the Regional Pharmacy Hub at HMP Oakwood, which supplies medicines to HMP Stafford. Resources have also increased into the pharmacy staffing at HMP Stafford to support local medicines management, as well as funding for new drugs cabinets to improve storage and the location of medication.

I acknowledge the Board's concern about the restrictions HMP Stafford has experienced and the request for the prison to return to the feel of a Category C prison. The Board will be aware that prisons were subject to regime restrictions throughout the reporting period due to Covid-19, as well as increased restrictions during periods of local outbreaks. In May 2022, HMPPS exited the *National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services* and ceased central Covid Gold command which moved regime delivery and local decision making wholly back to governors. Locally at HMP Stafford, the confidence and competence of managers and staff has been re-built to reinforce their ability to manage a more complex regime and large numbers of prisoners after a two-year period of strict control. The ratio of staff to prisoners experienced prior to Covid-19 have been reinstated and appropriate security procedures have also resumed, which may all account for some of the perceived excessive security measures. However, other than the introduction of a body scanner in the reception area, there are no additional physical security measures. It is recognised that the level of restrictions that prison regimes have experienced during the pandemic means there is a need to increase access to purposeful activity and the time prisoners are unlocked to support well-being, rehabilitation and sentence progression. HMPPS is committed to expanding prison regimes and HMP Stafford has increased both the available number of activity places and the diversity of these activities. As of July 2022, 87% of prisoners at HMP Stafford were allocated to an activity and further increases are taking place, such as the charity shop and coffee shop.

Turning to the Board's request for In-cell telephony, the importance of having this implemented across the closed prison estate is recognised as it allows for easier access to family, friends and support frameworks. Whilst, installing the infrastructure into the prison environment is complex, 80% of the public closed prison estate within England and Wales now has this installed and further installations are continuing. There remain 12 closed prisons within England and Wales, including HMP Stafford, that require funding for In-Cell Telephony and the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS are striving to obtain the funding to implement this crucial service. Implementation plans for HMP Stafford will be generated once funding has been obtained. It is also recognised that during the reporting period, an unacceptable number of PIN phones on wing landings at HMP Stafford were not working or promptly reported as defective. Once discovered, all defective telephones were repaired and wing managers now check the status of telephones daily. In May 2022, the Governor introduced a 10-minute automated call-barring which was endorsed by the Prisoner Council to curb certain prisoners from dominating the usage of PIN phones. Residential staff appropriately challenging prisoners and the return to employment as restrictions eased are further measures which are reducing prisoners from dominating access to the PIN phones.

Whilst recognising your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments that the prison continues to provide a safe environment where incidents of violence and use of force are low. I note the Board commend the prison staff for their efforts and resilience during the pandemic and I too am grateful to everyone for their continued hard work and professionalism during these challenging times. I was pleased to read that great effort has gone in to keeping the prison clean, tidy and looking fresh and was also encouraged to note that all prisoners released, except for one were found accommodation on their release.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern within your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. I'm aware that the Board also highlighted within its report a deportation issue around foreign nationals travel to and from Heathrow airport, my officials have raised your concerns with the Home Office Foreign National Offender Returns Command who are investigating this matter.

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 Stafford.

Tom J. Smith

J. Smith

Damian Hinds