



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Rochester
1 Fort Road
Rochester, Kent
ME1 3QS

10 November 2022

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI ROCHESTER: 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 was saddened to hear there were two deaths 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/YOI Rochester over the reporting period.

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

I am sorry to hear about the challenges experienced with discharging your statutory duties due to the board having several vacancies. I understand that the Board is now part of the joint recruitment campaign for Kent, Surrey and Sussex with the IMB Secretariat also looking at ways in which they can support recruitment for Board's within the region.

I understand the Board's continued concerns about accommodation provision for prison leavers. It is recognised that prison leavers without settled accommodation are almost 50% more likely to reoffend than those who have stable accommodation on release, which is why the Prisons Strategy White Paper set out a vision that no-one subject to probation supervision will be released from prison homeless. In the year to March 2022 87% of prison leavers were housed on the night following their release. To build on this further the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is investing an extra £200 million each year by 2024/25 to reduce reoffending by transforming the approach to rehabilitation and improving access to settled accommodation for all prison leavers. This includes, where someone is at risk of homelessness on release from prison, access to up to 12 weeks of transitional accommodation as well as support to move into settled housing. The Bail Accommodation Support Services, known as Community Accommodation Services Tier 2 (CAS2) since October 2022, will also be providing an additional 100 bed spaces with the supplier continuing to increase its presence in the Kent, Surrey and Sussex region. In addition, Homeless Prevention Teams (HPTs) are continuing to develop relationships with local authorities and other strategic partners to help find accommodation for prison leavers. Three Strategic Housing Specialists have recently been recruited for the Kent, Surrey and Sussex region, including one who will provide dedicated support to two prisons including HMP/YOI Rochester, which are due in post from October.

Despite your concern, it was reassuring to receive your comments that the prison continues to provide a stable and safe environment for prisoners. I note the Board recognises the considerable efforts of all staff during the pandemic to support prisoners as well as the Board and I too am grateful for everyone's hard work and professionalism during these challenging times. I was pleased to read that interactions between prisoners and staff are positive and that the prison has endeavoured to provide a purposeful regime. It was interesting to read about the new initiatives such as the roofing skills training, the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Beekeeping, as well as the introduction of secure video calls to improve family contact. I was also encouraged to note that access to healthcare appointments is in line with what is expected in the community and that mental healthcare provision and drug recovery arrangements are good.

I note you have raised two 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 Rochester.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds', is centered on the page.

Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prison Environment

Despite the significant increases achieved in the last two Spending Reviews, demands for maintenance remains greater than the available funding and projects are therefore being prioritised carefully to make best use of the funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity, decency and sustainability. It is recognised that the accommodation at HMP/YOI Rochester is challenging to maintain and the MoJ and HMPPS are working with the Facilities Management provider to maintain all accommodation in as decent a condition as is practically possible within the available funding. During the current financial year a total of £2.3 million is being invested to improve decency at HMP/YOI Rochester which includes refurbishments to the serveries on B, D, E, R, F and G wings, refurbishing the showers on B and E wings and replacing windows in B wing on a rolling programme. Designs and specifications will also be developed to improve the heating and hot water provision across the prison site, as well as replacement of the boilers in A and D wings. The funding will also enable deep cleaning to all of the cellular accommodation sanitary ware. Painting and decorating to improve the appearance of the prisons is also progressing with paint parties, and flooring replacements will be taking place with any raised as a health and safety concern being prioritised. In addition, the installation of rapid deployment accommodation pods have been commissioned which will ease the burden on the existing accommodation and will provide decent secure places.

To tackle vermin, as well as wing workers cleaning all areas, increased pest control visits have been introduced and prisoners are being offered the opportunity to purchase plastic boxes to reduce food being left out. Staff continue to challenge prisoners who throw rubbish out of the windows and as an interim measure the placement of grilles over windows are being explored. The planned replacement of damaged windows on B wing will also help reduce the amount of rubbish thrown out of windows.

Prisoners' Property

Further to the update provided to the Board last year, the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was published on 1 August 2022 with an implementation date of 5 September 2022. 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. In addition, whilst Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) receive few complaints for lost property overall, the introduction of digitally recorded Person Escort Records, including property tags, will assist with investigations for property that is lost in transit with PECS suppliers.

Category D Spaces

HMPPS recognises the Board's concerns with regard to the availability of spaces in open prisons and it is acknowledged that there remains a high demand for Category D places resulting in many adult men having to be held in closed conditions. As the Board has previously been made aware the availability of

Category D spaces was impacted by the requirement to close a number accommodation blocks in the open estate over the course of 2021 which no longer met statutory fire safety standards. This is being managed with temporary accommodation across the estate, which was already present at some sites as part of HMPPS Covid-19 contingencies measures, as well as new temporary accommodation being introduced. The Government has also committed to investing £3.8 billion to deliver 20,000 additional modern prison places across England and Wales by the mid-2020s. As part of this project HMPPS intends to deliver 1320 additional places through expansion of the Category D estate at a number of sites across the country.