



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Woodhill
Tattenhoe Street
Milton Keynes
MK4 4DA

10 November 2022

Dear Chair,

**HMP WOODHILL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR
1 JUNE 2021 – 31 MAY 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 May 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 Woodhill over the reporting period, particularly as you have a number of vacancies.

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

I understand the Board's concerns about the recruitment and retention of prison staff and the request for cross government working to address this. Efforts to recruit prison officers is ongoing but remains challenging against a high turnover of staff at HMP Woodhill which currently has prison officers departing at a rate of over 25% each year. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Marketing and Communications team are working with the Metropolitan Police and Border Force, as the operational roles across these agencies tend to target the same candidate pool, but competition in the wider labour market is increasing due to salaries being offered, as well as the prison being situated in the Milton Keynes area which has a competitive labour market. The latest annual Prison Service Pay Review Board pay award for 2022/23 is delivering an increase in base pay of at least 4% for all HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) staff between Bands 2 to 11, alongside further targeted pay rises for the lowest paid staff of up to £3,000. In August 2022, HMPPS also launched the 'Looking After Our People' document which sets out the overall employment package. However, the MoJ and HMPPS recognise that it is not sustainable to recruit and lose staff at the current rate at HMP Woodhill, as recruitment is unable to keep up with those departing and it is unlikely that the labour market and pay factors are the sole reasons for this. HMPPS has therefore embedded an exit interview survey process and is carrying out analysis to ensure appropriate strategies and action plans are in place to respond. A Retention Oversight Process has also been established which focusses on the prisons, such as HMP Woodhill, that have the biggest attrition risks to enable local and national intervention support to take place. Support is being provided to HMP Woodhill via detached duty staff from other prisons and there is an overtime bonus scheme on offer to all staff at the prison. In addition, HMPPS has introduced initiatives to better invest in and support new colleagues, which includes Apprenticeship Coaches, a new mentoring scheme, and a peer-to-peer buddy scheme. A new bespoke leadership development approach has also been designed where attrition is most

challenging and the support of the HMPPS Standards Coaching Team on site at HMP Woodhill has been extended to continue developing and supporting operational frontline staff to build on their skills and confidence.

I recognise the Board's concerns about food provision for prisoners during the current rising cost of living. The food budgets for public sector prisons continue to be determined by governors locally and are kept under review as part of their budget allocation planning. As the Board noted in its report, in February 2022 the prison increased its food budget from £12 to £13 per head per week to allow for an increase in portion sizes. To support prisons to address the rising cost of food, work is also taking place with local catering managers within prisons to better understand the current issues being experienced and to share good practice ideas, as well as with food suppliers to better inform supply and sourcing options. The Board can be assured, as required by Prison Rules, that prisoners at HMP Woodhill are being provided with three meals a day that are varied and nutritious, and which meet their religious, cultural, and medical needs. HMPPS is also working with the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities to follow government guidelines on eating healthy meals and to provide enhanced advice to prisoners and staff on eating healthy.

Whilst recognising your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments that the national policy to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 virus was implemented effectively helping to protect the prisoner population and staff. Despite the challenges the prison has faced it was encouraging to read that prisoners are treated humanely, healthcare services have operated well and the prison IT system upgrade has improved productivity for both staff and Board members. I was also pleased to note the introduction of window bars, and the commitment of prison staff and the Dedicated Search Team have prevented many illicit items reaching prisoners creating a safer environment.

I note you have raised three 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 Woodhill.

Yours sincerely,



Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Staffing Review

It is recognised that HMP Woodhill is operating at around 75% of its target staff in post and as such there is a daily regime management plan meeting chaired by the Deputy Governor. This meeting ensures that the available resources within the prison are allocated appropriately considering the safety, security and decency of prisoners. As set out in the Minister's response, recruitment and retention of staff at HMP Woodhill remains a fundamental strategic priority with continued focus on recruiting staff into the prison both at a national and local level, as well as supporting existing staff to develop.

Prisoners' Property

A new *Prisoners' Property* Policy Framework was published on 1 August 2022 and was implemented on 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.