



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Altcourse
Higher Lane
Fazakerley
Liverpool
L9 7LH

/ 9 January 2023

Dear Chair,

HMP ALT COURSE: 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 were eight deaths in custody during the reporting 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. Where there are repeated deaths it is important that HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) also does everything it can to understand the circumstances and to identify any learning. In October 2021 a more formal approach was introduced, where clusters of self-inflicted deaths occur, to offer additional support to prisons without imposing unnecessary burdens or intervening and further details about the support offered to HMP Altcourse is set out in the annex to this response.

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 Altcourse over the reporting period, especially as you had several vacancies. I am sorry to hear some experienced members have left and there have been difficulties recruiting new members, my team have forwarded your concerns to the IMB Secretariat who will be responding to you directly on this matter as they are constantly looking at how to improve the recruitment process.

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

I understand the Board's ongoing concerns for people in prison with severe mental ill health who require transfer to a secure hospital. The Board will be aware from last year's response of the White Paper commitment to introduce a 28-day statutory time limit for transfers. The Government has since published the draft Mental Health Bill in June 2022 which includes the commitment to introduce a 28-day statutory time limit for transfers from prison to hospital for patients requiring in-patient mental health treatment under the Mental Health Act. This time limit mirrors that introduced in NHS England's good practice guidance, published in June 2021, with the starting point at the initial referral and ending at the point of the patient's admission to hospital. In order to make the time-limit statutory the Bill introduces a statutory notice process to create a clear starting point for the 28-day period. A Transfer Time Limit Working Group has brought together health and justice partners (Department of Health and Social Care, HMPPS, Ministry of Justice and NHS England) to deliver a clear plan to safely embed this change and develop a robust way of monitoring performance against the new statutory time-limit. The draft Bill also includes reforms to

both Section 47 and Section 48 to introduce the 28-day statutory time limit in order to prevent significant delays and ensure swifter access to treatment.

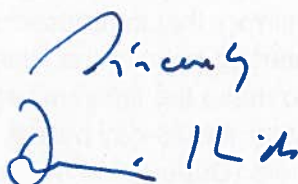
At a local level, prison and health colleagues work together to expediate transfers and influence positive outcomes for patients wherever possible and continue to care for these individuals despite the difficult circumstances and I note the Board credit staff for their efforts. In addition, healthcare services at HMP Altcourse are currently being transitioned out of the custodial contract HMPPS has with the prison provider, G4S, placing the commissioning of healthcare services with NHS England. The awarding of the new Healthcare contract comes into effect from 1 April 2023 and should provide improvements within the prison with all services due to be under one provider.

I acknowledge the Board's concerns about access to Offender Behaviour Programmes (OBP) and thank you for drawing this to my attention. It is recognised that during the Covid-19 pandemic there was limited access to accredited courses for prisoners. HMPPS has been building back delivery capacity since the Covid-19 pandemic and accredited programme provision is reviewed annually, looking at the population needs to find the appropriate OBP delivery as part of the broader HMPPS OBP strategy. Only those individuals who are assessed as medium or higher risk of reoffending are eligible to access accredited programmes. However, not all identified by risk will be ready, motivated or have sufficient time to engage as set out by the OBP eligibility criteria. As a reception prison it is not the role of HMP Altcourse to offer offence related courses for men convicted of sexual offences (MCoSOs), but where they meet the criteria and are prepared to engage they are transferred to an appropriate specialist programme delivery site, of which there are a number of prison locations in the North. HMP Altcourse have arranged regular transfers of security Category B and C MCoSOs to resettlement or training prisons where they can do offence focussed work and the prison will continue to identify and transfer men as appropriate. In addition, HMP Altcourse has the opportunity to engage in quarterly OBP delivery meetings with the HMPPS Controllers to review performance and raise issues about demand for accredited programmes.

Whilst recognising your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments that the prison provides a safe environment where levels of violence and self-harm continues to fall. It is pleasing to note that prisoners are treated fairly and humanely with good communication and relationships between staff and prisoners. I was interested to read about the introduction of the in-house bakery providing prisoners with the opportunity to gain national qualifications and the development of the 'resettlement hub' offering services to families and prisoners on release. I was also encouraged to read about the refurbishment improvements to the Healthcare Inpatient Unit and the prisons prompt response to address the Board's concerns about the lack of purposeful activity on the unit.

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. 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 Altcourse.



Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

HMP ALT COURSE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2021 – 30 JUNE 2022

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Food Budget

To support prisons to address the rising cost of food, HMPPS are working closely with catering managers to understand the issues experienced and share good practice ideas. HMPPS is also working closely with the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities, following government guidelines, to provide enhanced advice to prisoners on eating healthy meals. However, food budgets are determined locally by the Prison Director in privately managed prisons such as HMP Altcourse or the Governor in Public Sector Prisons. The daily food allowance at HMP Altcourse was increased in January 2022 and will be reviewed again in line with the Contract Indexation in 2023. The Board will be aware that Prison Rules require prisoners to be provided with three meals a day that are varied and nutritious and that meet the religious, cultural, and medical needs of all. It is encouraging that the Board have acknowledged within its report the changes and improvements that have begun to be made to the meal provision and the Board can be assured that the quantity of food portions at HMP Altcourse meets the recommended daily calorie intake for men.

Cluster Death Sites

Due to the number of deaths that have occurred at HMP Altcourse it is recognised that this has been a difficult reporting period for the staff, the Prison Director, prisoners and their families. HMPPS welcomes the progress made by the prison with their initiatives around suicide and self-harm prevention, such as the Wellbeing Officer, which the Board recognised in its report.

To ensure there is national oversight when a cluster of deaths occur and to offer additional support to prisons without imposing unnecessary burdens or intervening, a three-stage cluster death process was introduced in October 2021. HMP Altcourse was identified as a cluster site in the early stage of this new process, with a Stage 1 meeting taking place on 11 October 2021, following a death occurring at the prison on 7 October 2021. This meeting was chaired by the HMPPS Deputy Director of Prison Safety, with the Prison Director and the Head of Safety from HMP Altcourse present, as well as other members of the national HMPPS Safety Team. The meeting reviewed the circumstances around the self-inflicted deaths, considered the risks identified within the Early Learning Reviews (ELRs) and agreed actions and support. Whilst it is the Board's view that no support was forthcoming, it was agreed that the national HMPPS Safety Team would provide the prison with the following support;

- conduct an overview report of the ELRs and to share this with the Director,
- share the Safety Self-Assessment Tool,
- support the Group Safety Lead in joint delivery of ongoing support to the site.

These actions were all completed and as a result of this, HMP Altcourse exited the Clusters process with agreement from the Prison Director as no further risks were identified.