



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Stoke Heath
Warrant Road
Stoke Heath
Market Drayton
Shropshire
TF9 2JL

14 December 2022

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI STOKE HEATH: 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 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 Stoke Heath over the reporting period.

I was saddened to hear there were two deaths in custody and one life-changing assault 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. I address below the specific points you have raised for my attention.

I appreciate the Board's concerns around funding for vocational training and qualifications and that they are high quality and industry-driven to help reduce reoffending. The prison, with the Governor acting as the commissioner, is able to decide what delivery best meets the needs of the establishment's population. During the reporting period, HMP/YOI Stoke Heath did not utilise all of its allocated education budget. Any increase in funding would have consequently increased the level of underspend for the establishment to the detriment of other establishments as this is where funds would have been reallocated from.

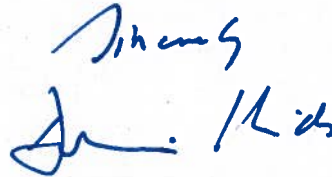
HMP/YOI Stoke Heath continues to provide Car Valeting, Industrial Cleaning and Barista skills. The prison has also introduced Traffic Management and will soon commence fibre optic-related qualifications. Through the newly set up Employment Board, the prison is also exploring the possibility of working with an external company to establish an academy within the grounds. Additionally, whilst service provider staff vacancies can affect delivery, these vacancy rates in the prison ranged from a low one to two vacancies during the reporting period.

It was encouraging to receive your comments that the Board continues to be satisfied that prisoners are treated fairly and humanely and that HMP/YOI Stoke Heath has maintained a safe, positive environment during this period, particularly as the prison transitioned from Covid restrictions back to full regime. It was further reassuring to note that the continued success of the health and wellbeing champions who have been critical to prisoners' wellbeing and the proactive response of the maintenance contractors in dealing with the temperamental hot water and heating system. I was pleased to hear that the well-maintained

gardens are appreciated by the prisoners and also supplements the catering menu with home-grown food.

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. HM Prison and Probation Service (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 Stoke Heath.

Handwritten signature of Damian Hinds in blue ink.

Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Literacy and Numeracy Qualifications

Governors have autonomy on what they commission from providers and HMPPS has published guidelines for establishments to follow which highlight the recommended stage where certain provision should be prioritised. The allocation of education funding is based on the type of establishment.

The West Midlands Prison Group Directorate has a focus to achieve basic educational assessments within their Reception prisons (a directorate business objective). Consequently, prisoners with sentences greater than twelve months are transferred to the category C estate within ten days of sentencing, as per the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model, where greater attention is applied to educational attainment and sentence progression. HMP/YOI Stoke Heath now has one of the strongest progress rates in English and Maths for a category C Training/Resettlement prison.

Offender Assessment System (OASys) Reports

The Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model moved the responsibility of the completion of Start of Custody Offender Assessment System (OASys) reports for long term custodial cases into the prison estate. Prisons received refreshed staffing profiles for Prison Offender Managers (POM) to reflect the change in responsibility and completion of the task. Prisons with training and resettlement functions such as HMP/YOI Stoke Heath are resourced to undertake OASys activity, therefore the establishment receives prisoners without an OASys report when they are allocated directly from reception prisons post-sentencing and ideally this should happen within ten working days. There are also instances where prisoners transfer from one Training/Resettlement prison to another without an OASys report, and this is largely due to resourcing pressures. This has created a national backlog of Start of Custody OASys assessments. The OASys Task Force is working with HMP Stoke Heath to reduce the current backlog and establish processes to ensure new cases do not enter backlog. The prison is undertaking a review of capability which includes how case administration resources can be used more effectively to support completion and gain a more proportionate balance between quality and quantity of assessments to optimise delivery.