



Ministry
of Justice

Damian Hinds MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Whitemoor
Longhill Road
March, Cambridgeshire
PE15 0PR

30 November 2022

Dear Chair,

**HMP WHITEMOOR: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JUNE 2021
TO 31 MAY 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 May 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 Whitemoor over the reporting period, especially as you operated with several vacancies and at great personal risk during the pandemic. My team have forwarded your Board recruitment concerns to the IMB Secretariat who are aware of your situation.

I was saddened to hear there were two 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.

I recognise there are staffing issues within our prisons. To enhance career opportunities at HMP Whitemoor, HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the Ministry of Justice are working together to establish a local training unit that helps staff access opportunities more readily without the inconvenience and expense of travelling elsewhere. Bespoke coaching, mentoring and development has been introduced to support newer staff as well as more experienced staff experiencing fatigue or anxiety linked to the reintroduction of non-Covid regimes. Prison Officer recruitment is supported by a number of initiatives, particularly for prisons that face recruitment challenges. These include Advance into Justice, a fast-track scheme to support armed forces staff and veterans to become prison officers. Further details of work being undertaken to support staff are enclosed in the HMPPS annex.

Attrition data is closely scrutinised to support understanding and improve retention. Analysis of staff exit interviews tells us that nationally the main driver for of attrition for staff with less than two years is Ways of Working with themes around inability to access flexible working and also the role of the prison officer not being what they expected. This is being improved with an outreach strategy to ensure all candidates are engaged with prior to joining the service, that they have the opportunity to visit the prison, and ask any questions that they may have around the role and HR issues. HMPPS HR and MoJ Resourcing are exploring further flexible working offers which aims to recruit a more diverse workforce and make the role more attractive.

The recently announced pay award reflects a significant investment to uplift and reform the prison pay structure. The 2022/23 pay award has delivered an increase in base pay of at least 4% for all staff between bands 2 to 11, alongside further targeted pay rises for our lowest paid staff of up to £3,000. The increase in base pay will support local marketing and attraction. This is expected to impact positively on both recruitment and retention.

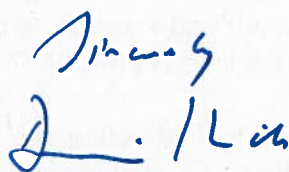
I appreciate the Board's concerns around secure hospital places and would like to assure you that NHS England works closely with the Governor and the team at HMP Whitemoor to understand each case where men have been assessed for transfer to specialist facilities. As a Category A prison, any transfers are to a very limited range of secure hospitals. The time taken to arrange the transfer is subject to clear guidance and there is continuous monitoring and audit of all cases. The healthcare provider reports quarterly on a range of quality measures including the vacancy rate, and any issues arising are explored with the provider.

Holding men in care and separation units is not ideal and is governed by HMPPS guidelines which were updated in May 2022 and describes the process by which decisions to segregate prisoners is determined. Segregation is only used for men whose risk to or from others means it is the only option available. A safety algorithm is used to identify any reasons that would make segregation unsafe for the individual, including an assessment by a healthcare professional. All men are seen daily by a nurse and regularly by a doctor, where emerging health needs can be responded to. Mental Health staff attend all segregation reviews, and a dedicated, trained psychologist works within the segregation unit supporting staff in meeting the needs of men held there.

Whilst it was another challenging reporting period for the prison and Board alike, it was encouraging to receive your comments about prison's continuing commitment to the Rehabilitation Culture Council together with the positive culture of communication and openness between prisoners, governors and staff at HMP Whitemoor. I was also impressed to hear that the prison significantly outperformed the other high security prisons in the delivery of key worker sessions in the year April 2021 to March 2022, and that HMP Whitemoor was selected to become the pilot site for a digital version of the Storybook Dads initiative.

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. 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 Whitemoor.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds', with a stylized flourish below it.

Damian Hinds MP
Minister for Prisons and Probation

HMP WHITEMOOR: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JUNE 2021 TO 31 MAY 2022

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prison Officer Training and Support

HMP Whitemoor has introduced a Band 5 Learning and Capability Manager and a Band 4 New Staff Mentor to support new starters. The prison has also developed a formal coaching, mentoring and development project in which a range of talented colleagues are upskilled in providing peer-led coaching and development, empowering staff to develop their own confidence as prison officers. Monthly training events are prioritised, creating important opportunities for staff to role-play and respond to emerging capability/confidence concerns.

Across the prison service, HMPPS has implemented a 'supporting each other' initiative. As mentioned above, this includes New Colleague Mentor and Buddy Schemes which are being introduced across all prison regions throughout 2022/23. The package of initiatives is specifically designed to create a supportive and helpful environment for staff and to ensure that they feel capable and confident in their role.

Food Provision

Food Budgets

Food budgets for public sector prisons are determined locally and kept under review as part of normal budget allocation planning. Prison Rules require that prisoners are provided with three meals a day that are varied and nutritious and that meet the religious, cultural, and medical needs of all. The food menu is kept under regular review and subject to scrutiny by visiting catering specialists. It is acknowledged that a lack of trained catering staff affected food quality during the reporting period, and the prison has implemented an action plan supported by experts across HMPPS in improving the experience of the catering function as a whole.

To support prison establishments address the rising cost of food, HMPPS is working closely with catering managers to understand issues and share good practice ideas with food suppliers to look at supply and sourcing options. HMPPS is also working closely with the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities, following government guidelines, to provide enhanced advice to prisoners and staff on eating healthy meals.

Canteen

The Prison Retail policy on item pricing is to sell 'canteen' items at the Manufacturer's Recommended Retail Price (MRRP). Pricing increases are as a result of increases by the wholesaler and are mirrored in the community. During the pandemic, many self-cook establishments closed the cooking facilities on the wings, due to social distancing and contamination concerns. As a result frozen/chilled supply was reduced and at times on hold. Reduced supply is only considered as a last resort and was during a time when prison regimes were also affected. At this point, self-cook establishments were informed that they could purchase off contract for any frozen/chilled products required that could not be supplied.

HMPPS understands that the logistics fleet had been re-routed when Covid restrictions first closed self-cook kitchens and took longer than anticipated to be made available again. It is recognised that food cost increases have affected prisoners in much the same way as those in wider society.

Facilities and Maintenance

A commissioned project to replace wall cladding in the kitchen suffered delays and disruptions whilst issues with the contractor were being addressed. A new contractor was subsequently employed and the project was completed to the commissioned specification. The materials used met the requirements of the contract, and the issues raised by the Board are due to the composite fabric used which is not as durable as stainless steel. HMPPS can confirm that the work undertaken met the requirements of the contract specification.

Pest control is a routine part of maintenance, and with large programs of work going on within the prison, opportunities for mice etc to have been more challenging to prevent. Consequently, deep clean schedules and pest control (Rentokil) attendance has been increased together with the deployment of daily traps. Indications from the daily activity log suggests that the problem is being well managed with reduced numbers of sightings and captures reported.