



Ministry
of Justice

Damian Hinds
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Ashfield
Shortwood Road
Pucklechurch
BS16 9QJ

MoJ ref: SUB102718

30 January 2023

Dear Chair,

HMP ASHFIELD: 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 two deaths in custody during the reporting year. I would like to assure the Board my officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman 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 Ashfield, especially as you had several vacancies. I note the support your members received from the IMB clerks over the reporting period was invaluable.

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

I acknowledge your Board's concerns about the last-minute securing of Approved Premises accommodation. The majority of referrals to Approved Premises are provided at least 30 days prior to the person arriving. However, I absolutely recognise the frustration and affects to the individual when this is not done according to the timescale. HM Prison and Probation (HMPPS) is developing a new digitalised approach to referrals, through a Central Referral Unit that will oversee assessment for suitability and eligibility, match individuals to placements, whilst maximising occupancy and use of national capacity. This new approach will enable HMPPS to improve timeliness and allow greater consistency and responsiveness, underpinned by the department's demand analysis. It will be piloted during February and March 2023 and is anticipated to be rolled out nationally from June 2023. As the Board is aware, since 2019 HMPPS has been working to expand the Approved Premises estate, delivering an extra 167 spaces across England and Wales to date, including within the South West region, and remains on track to meet its target of 200 spaces by March 2024.

Turning to your Board's concern about the staffing shortages within healthcare, you may be aware that over the last two years NHS England Health and Justice South West has been working on the re-commissioning of a new healthcare contract for HMP Ashfield, as well as the other 10 prisons in the South West. The new contract is with Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and commenced on 1 October 2022. Oxleas' organisational values support their mission to improve lives and have been developed through discussions with staff and the prison population about what their priorities should be. As an experienced prison healthcare provider, Oxleas is committed to investing in the recruitment and retention of staff and will use a variety of methods to attract staff into prison healthcare. This includes, for example, having stands at careers fairs, linking with local universities and colleges, advertising vacancies via social-media

and local networks, as well as linking with the national NHS England 'We are the NHS: Health & Justice' campaign. These methods have been successful in other geographical areas.

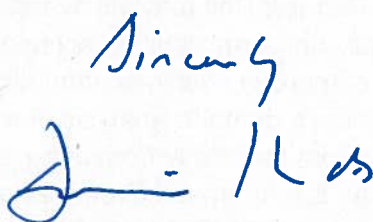
More broadly, Oxleas has retained the services of their established consultant to support staff wellbeing, reflective practice and provide bespoke services at each of the South West prisons, particularly focused on serious incidents and deaths in custody working with both healthcare and prison colleagues. Oxleas multi-disciplinary teams provide a wide range of trauma informed health and care services to the prison population. This includes, for example, primary health care services, dentistry, optometry, podiatry, substance misuse services, care for people with learning disabilities and mental health care, such as psychiatry, nursing and therapies. Specific support for people at risk of self-harm and suicide is provided by a team of skilled therapists and nurses who offer a range of interventions from one-to-one support through to group-work.

The new Director of HMP Ashfield will be meeting with Oxleas to discuss service delivery. To address the self-harm levels, he has increased peer support resource alongside a review of the local self-harm training packages. A Dedicated Safety, Decency and Respect Assistant Director has been appointed to drive the establishment forward in reducing self-harm. For the first-time post Covid-19, the Five-Minute Intervention refresher training for staff to use rehabilitative skills in everyday conversations is due to be rolled out. Prisoner forums have been re-introduced giving people the opportunity to have their say and release any anxiety.

Despite the issues raised in your report, it was encouraging to read there was a very strong focus on safer custody at HMP Ashfield and high standards of cleanliness and maintenance. I was pleased to note that, during the most restricted regimes, healthcare provided telephone triage services for both physical and mental health. Likewise, it was pleasing to hear positive feedback about the local management of prisoners' property.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Director will respond to and keep you aware of as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to the other issue raised in your report is 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 Ashfield.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

**HMP ASHFIELD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2021 – 30 JUNE 2022**

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Disruptions to Transfers

HMPPS is managing this through applying levers at the highest level in terms of rectification notice and improvement plans. The HMPPS Contract Delivery Manager (CDM) is monitoring the contractor's performance and is prioritising moves with the HMPPS Population Management Unit. CDMs are working with Offender Management Units to fill drafts, so resource is not wasted, and also with prison staff to indicate/notify them of cancellations to inter-prison transfers as early as possible so that resources can be redeployed elsewhere.