



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Dovegate
Uttoxeter
Staffordshire
ST14 8XR

8 February 2023

Dear Chair,

**HMP DOVEGATE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 OCTOBER 2021 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 September 2022. I was saddened to hear there were three deaths in custody during the reporting year all due to natural causes. 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 Dovegate over the reporting period, especially with several vacancies. I address below the specific points you have raised for my attention.

I acknowledge the Board's comments about reviewing the sentences of imprisonment for public protection prisoners. The Justice Select Committee (JSC) published their report into the indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPP) on 28 September 2022 following a year-long inquiry. The Committee made several recommendations, both legislative and operational, to which the Government will be responding in the coming months.

The Committee's report provides an opportunity for HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to review the work they are currently doing to support progression, to the point where the Parole Board determines that they may be safely released. This commitment has so far been delivered by means of the bespoke IPP Action Plan, which includes such initiatives as case reviews of those who are struggling to progress, delivered by Psychology Services, to help identify the most appropriate pathway for each individual. It also includes a work stream that oversees the establishment and delivery of specialist progression regimes. There are a broad range of other work streams in the Action Plan, aimed at both the progression and the sustainability of release, following a positive parole outcome. Although HMPPS no longer expresses a view or makes a recommendation within their reports to the Parole Board on the suitability of prisoners for release or open conditions, the risk assessments they provide form an essential part of the Parole Board's decision-making process.

The Action Plan is being reviewed and refreshed in light of the JSC report, to ensure it is as robust, structured, clear, measurable and properly targeted as possible. Latest published figures show a substantial reduction in the number of IPP prisoners who have never been released. That number stood at 1,394 at the end of December 2022. This is reduced from 1,602 at the end of December 2021.

Locally at HMP Dovegate, it is recognised that IPP prisoners have a unique support requirement, the Director has devised the monthly multi-disciplinary review meeting to pay particular focus on the current IPP population and is regularly evaluating this cohort to ensure any outstanding treatment needs and risks are identified before their next parole review.

I appreciate the Board's comments about the number of remand prisoners held at HMP Dovegate. The pandemic and consequent increase in the outstanding caseload has resulted in the significant increase in the prison remand population. I hope to reassure the Board that to address this several actions are being taken forward, these are focusing on increasing capacity and managing demand and improving efficiency. We are investing a significant amount for the Criminal Justice System to help reduce the Crown Court backlog and improve waiting times for victims of crime. We are expanding with our plans for judicial recruitment to secure enough capacity for judges to sit at the required levels in this financial year and for the second consecutive year have removed the limit on sitting days in the Crown Court to allow courts to work at full capacity to reduce the backlog in the Crown Court. The listing of cases is a judicial responsibility and judges continue to work to prioritise cases that involve Custody Time Limits.

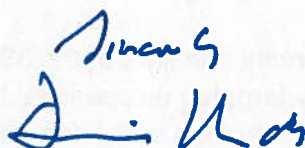
More broadly, the Judicial Review and Courts Act 2022 gives the Crown Court more flexibility to return cases to the magistrates, reducing demand in the Crown Court. In May 2022, we increased Magistrates' Courts sentencing powers to help reduce the backlog of criminal cases from its pandemic induced peak. This allows more cases to be retained in the magistrates' courts, allowing them to be heard more quickly and help reduce the backlog of outstanding cases.

I am sorry to hear you are disappointed with the prisoners' property review and understand your Board's frustration on the time taken to conclude. The aim of the review was to ensure consistency, fairness and enhance prisoners' satisfaction with processes and outcomes. Like with all policy reviews, it involved extensive consultation and was designed with procedural justice at its core. Given the nature of property, and the movement of prisoners between establishments, the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework looks to provide greater direction and standardisation nationally. 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. Digital improvements to handling property continue to be explored, the introduction of digitally recorded Person Escort Records including property tags will assist with investigations for property that is lost in transit with Prisoner Escort and Custody Services suppliers.

Despite your Board's concerns, it was encouraging to receive your praise to the prison staff and to hear about the many initiatives implemented such as the 'Shine Out, Shout Out' nominations and the re-established prison council. I am pleased to note improvements to the prison fabric, general cleanliness of the prison and the roll out of body worn video cameras and staff compliance.

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.

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 Dovegate.



Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation