



Ministry
of Justice

Damian Hinds
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Drake Hall
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20 April 2023

D. Hinds

**HMP/YOI DRAKE HALL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2021 – 31 OCTOBER 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 October 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 Drake Hall over the reporting period, especially as you had several vacancies.

I address here the specific point you have raised for my attention about the poor conditions on Richmond and Plymouth houseblocks. In March 2022, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) commissioned a feasibility study to assess the options for the replacement of the Richmond and Plymouth houseblocks at HMP/YOI Drake Hall. A report was submitted in August 2022, recommending the replacement of both houseblocks, at a cost of circa £46 million. Demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding and therefore, future decisions on investment will be taken in line with availability of funding and focusing on risk to life and risk to security, capacity, decency and sustainability.

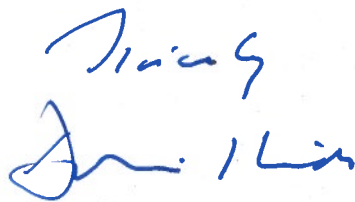
With regard to the cladding installed at ground level of the houseblocks, whilst it is encouraging that this has stood up well to the elements of winter and resulted in improvements to the ingress of rats, it is recognised that a long-term solution is still needed to resolve the damp issues. I am aware that the women located on the houseblocks have acknowledged that the remedial work undertaken has improved living conditions. In terms of other improvements to be made at HMP/YOI Drake Hall, HMPPS is taking forward plans to upgrade the showers across the prison.

Turning to some positive comments helpfully captured in your report, it is encouraging the Board has commended the staff for their commitment and flexibility shown during the pandemic. I was pleased to note that in comparison to other closed women prisons, HMP/YOI Drake Hall is a safe prison. Likewise, it was also pleasing to hear vulnerable women are well supported and healthcare needs were met.

I agree with the Board and other Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs), Chaplaincy and the Care Support/Separation Unit work is invaluable and fundamental in providing support to people in prison. Your comments about the revised use of force processes and aided by the new, high-quality, body-worn video cameras, were pleasing to note.

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 IMBs throughout the estate. On behalf of HMP/YOI Drake Hall we are very grateful to the Board and clerk for your continued hard work.

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/YOI DRAKE HALL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2021 – 31 OCTOBER 2022

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

Thank you for your feedback on the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework and summary of the applications received by your Board. It might be helpful to explain, the framework is the result of extensive consultation, including with the IMB and designed with procedural justice at its core. It aims to ensure consistency and fairness and enhance prisoners' satisfaction with processes and outcomes. Given the nature of property, and the movement of prisoners between establishments, the framework looks to provide greater direction and standardisation on a national basis. 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.

Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) has received no complaints from HMP/YOI Drake Hall in relation to property during 2021 and 2022. PECS will continue to monitor all aspects of the contractors' performance and where it fails to meet the agreed levels this will be raised with the contractor for improvement.

Two additional prison officers have been trained in reception procedures to help with the management of property. Daily staff briefings allow for prison officers to be assigned to reception to issue property parcels (when the resource is available). The Governor is looking at deploying more resource to reception to ensure parcels are issued to the women in a timely manner and following up property related matters with other establishments.

Prisoner Transfers

As identified by the Board, the transfer of women from local prisons to HMP/YOI Drake Hall in the lead up to their release dates is the result of population pressures within the female prison estate. The Female Offender Strategy (2018) and Female Offender Delivery Plan (2023) both seek to address the underlying causes of these challenges.

To reduce the number of women on remand:

- HMPPS currently offer a Bail Information Service (BIS) for women on remand from England and Wales. The BIS provides courts with factual and verified information about a woman's individual circumstances which enables courts to make fully informed decisions about bail or custodial remand.
- The draft Mental Health Bill, published on 27 June 2022, sets out reforms which will prevent courts from remanding a defendant for their own protection solely on mental health grounds.
- The whole system approach to female offenders brings together statutory and third sector organisations to address the needs of female offenders. The aim is to assess a woman's needs at first contact with the Criminal Justice System and, if appropriate, to divert her out of the system into support to address her underlying offending behaviour issues. Where a woman is progressing well, this may give sentencers the confidence to grant bail, rather than remanding into custody.

- In February 2023 the Ministry of Justice awarded grants of over £1 million over three years to four areas to improve local integration of women's services into whole system approaches, in order to better address the needs of female offenders and vulnerable women.

To reduce the number of women entering custody on short sentences:

- As set out in the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan, HMPPS remains committed to exploring options for increasing the residential provision that could be used as part of a robust community order as an alternative to a short custodial sentence, allowing a woman to stay closer to her family and community with support to address needs underlying her offending behaviour.
- As part of this commitment in September 2022 a grants competition was launched that allowed organisations to bid for grants for supported residential accommodation such as, a residential women's centre style alternative to custody for appropriate women. Forty women's community organisations will receive core costs funding to help to stabilise their financial position and fifteen will receive funding for new services and interventions, including residential alternatives to custody.
- An Aide Memoire has been developed to support practitioners completing pre-sentence reports (PSRs) on women, designed to improve the quality and consistency of PSRs. This highlights key areas for practitioners to consider when assessing the diverse needs of women in the context of offending (including health, relationships and caring responsibilities) in order to support a robust recommendation to consider a community sentence whenever appropriate.
- The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 has been legislated to enable the piloting of Problem-Solving Court (PSC) approaches for specific cohorts. One will be piloted in Birmingham Magistrates' Court which the PSC aims to provide women with the tools to positively change their behaviour through comprehensive orders in the community that are founded on partnership working, consistent judicial oversight and trauma responsive approaches.

Resettlement Services

The Pre-Release Team located within HMP/YOI Drake Hall will liaise with the Community Probation Practitioner /Community Offender Manager, or Short Sentence Function as allocated, and support pre-release planning activity throughout the sentence. This includes progressing referrals that have been made to the appropriate Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) provider for the woman and providing a point of contact for any CRS provider seeking to engage with women in HMP/YOI Drake Hall.