



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Ford
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3 May 2023

HMP FORD: 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 Ford over the reporting period, especially as you had several vacancies.

I understand the Board's concerns about probation officer resources to support resettlement. The Probation Service is committed to increasing recruitment to fill probation officer vacancies, particularly in areas with significant local employment market challenges such as London and Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS). The recruitment of trainee probation officers has been accelerated to increase staffing levels with targets for 2020/21 and 2021/22 exceeded, recruiting 1007 and 1518 Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) trainees respectively, as well as recruiting a further 1500 trainees during 2022/23. A National Operational Stability Panel has been established to review and address strategic workforce planning issues along with longer-term system wide challenges. A unified model of operational resourcing has been trialled in six priority regions which included London and KSS to improve consistency, increase applications and reduce time to hire. An updated Recruitment and Retention Strategy will also be published in May 2023 which will profile the initiatives being delivered within the HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Probation Workforce Programme, as well as more widely across HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in support of increasing recruitment and improving retention.

Whilst the Board rightly recognise the efforts of probation staff locally at the prison, it is acknowledged that open prisons such as HMP Ford have not had a pre-release team. However, HMP Ford will be offered an in-reach pre-release model and are in the process of recruiting with support in the meantime provided from the Pre-Release Team at HMP Lewes. The Pre-Release Teams will liaise with the Community Probation Practitioner or Short Sentence Function and support pre-release planning activity throughout the sentence. This will include progressing referrals that have been made to the Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) suppliers and providing a point of contact for CRS suppliers.

Regarding the Board's concerns about police checks, the Metropolitan Police started undertaking mandated Police Intelligence checks on all those eligible for Home Detention Curfew from 11 August 2022 to identify any domestic abuse or child safeguarding concerns. Since then, these checks have been completed without any issue and there is currently no backlog with requests being addressed within 10 working days. The Metropolitan Police also undertake checks on Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) eligible prisoners and ensure responses are provided within 10 working days of the ROTL request. These checks take place in the following circumstances as set out in the ROTL Policy Framework. For applications for ROTL from Restricted ROTL and all Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements

(MAPPA) nominal prisoners, the Offender Manager must consult local police and victim liaison officers, where appointed, in all such cases. However, in standard non-MAPPA cases, the police need only be consulted where the offender manager considers the police may have specific information relevant to the application. The Board should therefore be aware that the Metropolitan Police will reject standard ROTL requests unless there is a clear rationale.

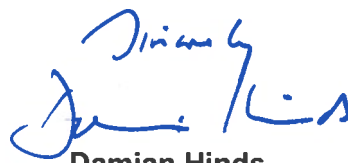
Turning to the Board's concerns about prisoners serving indeterminate sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) being inhumane. The Justice Select Committee (JSC) published their report into the IPP sentence on 28 September 2022 after a year-long inquiry which contains considered recommendations for change. The Government has published its formal response to the Committee's report, which can be accessed at <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1509/imprisonment-for-public-protection-ipp-sentences/publications/>. The JSC's main recommendation was to undertake a full resentencing exercise of all remaining IPP offenders who had not yet had their license terminated. Although the IPP sentence was abolished in 2012, it is the Government's long-held view that retrospectively changing the sentence which was lawfully passed would give rise to an unacceptable risk to public protection. As such, the Government has rejected this recommendation and has no current plans to conduct a resentencing exercise. It is also important to note that the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) did not find that the IPP sentence in itself was unlawful and the causal link to the imposition of the sentence by the court was not broken.

The Government has accepted the Committee's recommendation to review the IPP Action Plan and is committed to publishing the outcome of that review shortly. It is vital for public protection that those serving the IPP sentence in prison, whether not yet released or recalled following release, are released only where the Parole Board determines that they may be safely managed in the community. The IPP Action Plan, suitably updated, remains the best option by which these offenders can progress towards safe release. HMPPS remains committed to doing all it can to support their progression and has already begun work on the IPP action plan, specifically focusing on improved, clear work streams, with deadlines and a robust overarching governance structure. Locally at HMP Ford, IPP prisoners also have the same level of access to ROTL and resettlement activities as other prisoners, as well as an additional opportunity to apply to live on the Independent Living Unit. Additionally, the introduction of an IPP forum is being considered to address their specific needs and any gaps in the resettlement needs are being identified by the Offender Management Unit with signposting referrals being made.

It was reassuring to receive your comments that prisoners are treated fairly and humanely in a safe environment with good staff and prisoner relationships. I was encouraged to note the early progress of the Employment Advisory Board and the prison's efforts to engage with local employers to offer prisoners jobs. I was also pleased to read that Healthcare provided effective services and prisoners are encouraged to engage with the substance misuse team instead of automatically returning to a closed prison.

I note you have raised three 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 Ford.



Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoner Categorisation

Prisoners cannot move to open conditions without a thorough risk assessment having taken place and at the time of the Board's report there was no mechanism whereby a prisoner will receive a change to their categorisation by default. All prisoners regardless of their sentence type or length are required to have a completed risk assessment on the Digital Categorisation Service before their category can be changed on their offender record to allow them to be allocated and transferred to the open estate. However, HMPPS is striving to maintain offender flows in the face of unprecedented population pressures across the entire adult male prison estate and as result of this, occupancy of the open estate has recently come under more intense focus and a range of measures are underway to help expedite moves of category D male prisoners appropriately. As part of a package of measures to make full use of the available capacity, HMPPS is rolling out the Temporary Presumptive Recategorisation Scheme which will increase the range of male prisoners considered for transfer into the open estate who have up to twelve weeks' time left to serve. In cases where there are complex health, social care or security needs, it will remain a matter for the receiving prison to determine if they are able to accept the proposed transfer.

While HMP Ford would always prefer to have prisoners serving over six months to ensure that they have sufficient time to access the full range of services, the prison is a national resource and accepts prisoners meeting the national criteria. Regardless of the time prisoners have left to serve, the prison is focused on offering appropriate access to opportunities ahead of their release on licence. Robust procedures are also in place at HMP Ford to screen prisoners and to ensure that appropriately categorised prisoners are transferred to the prison. In addition, as HMPPS addresses the impact of these population pressures, a longer-term view of what prisons should deliver remains along with a commitment to ensuring that open prisons are fully supported to provide the best regime for prisoners with medium and longer sentences and those nearing release.

Accommodation Improvements

MoJ Property and HMP Ford continue to work with the maintenance provider to maintain the prison's existing heating infrastructure, carry out the planned preventative maintenance programme and to source a long-term solution to the heating issue. MoJ Property has embarked on a carbon neutral initiative to replace the ageing heating and hot water infrastructure with low carbon hybrid systems. This will include pipe work replacements and upgrading of valves and control systems and if systems fail, where necessary temporary plant and infrastructure will be made available. The engineering risk register is also being reviewed to develop future funding bids to improve the heating system. In addition, a major maintenance bid has already been submitted to refurbish the four remaining showers to improve the physical environment for prisoners.

Expansion Projects

As the Board will be aware work is underway to secure a contractor to take forward the expansion works at HMP Ford and this includes the works originally envisaged under Phase 1 that were unable to conclude due to the contractor going into administration. The current scheme an amalgamation of Phase 1 and Phase 2 scope is for a substantial expansion of seven houseblocks, a new build healthcare unit and other ancillary works. Tenders from contractors are in the process of being evaluated so that a single contractor can be appointed for all three of the open prison sites, HMPs Ford, Standford Hill and Leyhill. It is

anticipated that a tender will be award in July 2023 to allow enabling and main works to begin in November 2023 and July 2024 respectively. This timeline would allow completion by July 2025.

Procurement of Lockers

The procurement of lockers with mobile phone charging facilities for prisoners who undertake work whilst released on temporary licence are still going ahead. The delayed timescale is recognised as the purchase has now been subsumed as part of the contract for the houseblocks expansion works instead mentioned earlier. This approach has been taken as the cost from the original contractor was deemed to not offer value for money to HMPPS.

Prisoners' Property

The new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was published in August 2022 to replace Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 12/2011 – Prisoners' Property. The Framework is the result of extensive consultation including with the IMB. It was designed with procedural justice at its core and 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 prisons, 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.

Like Prison Service Instruction 12/2011, the new Framework is clear that in situations where a prisoner arrives with items which were permitted at the previous prison but not at the receiving prison, Governors are required to consider the items on a case-by-case basis to decide whether they should be allowed. Unless the item is considered a risk to good order, discipline, security, safety and/or exceeds volumetric control limits, the expectation is that the prisoner will be able to retain the item in possession. Locally HMP Ford continues to support prisoners and endeavours to resolve any property queries as and when they arise.

The Board's concern about the need for digital improvements to handling property is noted and this continues to be explored, but the nature of that work means that any such changes are longer-term and as a result it was not possible to include in the new Framework. However, the introduction of digitally recorded Prisoner Escort Records including property tags, which are under continuous development, do assist in the investigations of any property that is lost in transit with Prisoner Escort and Custody Services suppliers.