



Ministry
of Justice

Damian Hinds
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Leicester
Welford Road
Leicester
LE2 7AJ

Dear Chair,

13 July 2023

HMP LEICESTER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 FEBRUARY 2022 – 31 JANUARY 2023

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 January 2023. I am saddened to hear two prisoners died very shortly after being released from prison. As you are aware the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) carry out independent investigations into deaths 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 Leicester over the reporting period, especially as you had a few vacancies. I am pleased that following a recruitment campaign, four successful candidates were appointed.

I understand that Victoria Atkins MP visited HMP Leicester in March 2022, which I hope the prison team found helpful. I address below the specific points you have raised for my attention.

I note the Board remains concerned that some prisoners have experienced very long waits to access secure inpatient treatment in a mental health hospital. The pathway to accessing this provision is complex and the commissioning of secure mental health beds is now the responsibility of Provider Collaboratives (except for high secure hospitals, which remains the responsibility of NHS England Specialised Commissioning). Local integrated care systems are now responsible for assessing their individual capacity and demand for secure beds.

Reduced bed capacity and staffing issues observed during the pandemic affected the availability of hospital beds and the transfer waiting times. NHS England Health and Justice (Midlands region) continues to maintain oversight of the backlog and escalate delays, as this is a widespread issue. I hope to assure the Board that a national data exercise is underway to determine the scale of demand and waiting times for all patients and a data collection portal has been set up to facilitate this. Once completed, further delivery actions can then be agreed. NHS England Health and Justice Midlands and the healthcare provider continues to work with the prison team to monitor all referrals and expedite transfers. The healthcare provider also attends the fortnightly bed allocation board meeting held at the prison.

I acknowledge the Board is again concerned about the growing numbers of men being held on remand at HMP Leicester who are waiting for their case to be heard. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is striving to reduce the court backlog to 53,000 cases by March 2025 and has extended the use of the 24 Nightingale courtrooms over the course of this financial year, providing additional court capacity.

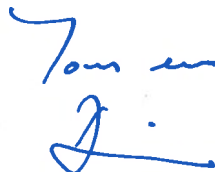
I share your continued concerns about accommodation on release, particularly as we know that prison leavers who have access to stable accommodation on release are almost 50% less likely to reoffend. The Prisons Strategy White Paper sets out our plans to reduce reoffending, including improving prison leavers' access to accommodation. The Board may be aware of the Community Accommodation Service (CAS) Tier 3, the temporary accommodation service launched in July 2021, initially in five probation regions, providing up to 12 weeks accommodation on release with support to move to settled accommodation. This service was expanded to Wales in June 2022. Between 1 July 2021 and 17 June 2022, over 2,300 individuals who would have otherwise been homeless, were placed in this service. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has begun to roll out CAS 3 to the remaining probation regions including the East Midlands (HMP Leicester's region), as part of a six-month period of mobilisation, during which the suppliers will increase the number of suitable bed spaces available.

More broadly, HMPPS is collaboratively working with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to align CAS 3 with the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders scheme. This supports prison leavers to better access private rented sector accommodation and build a pathway from prison to settled accommodation. Furthermore, HMPPS is progressing with their planned changes to accommodation commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) contracts to enable services to be available to people on remand and for those being released immediately following a time-served sentence or an acquittal. As these changes were on hold whilst budget priorities were agreed, HMPPS is yet to agree specific implementation plans / time scales for individual regions and prisons, but all services should be in place by the end of this year. Locally, at HMP Leicester, strategic housing specialists have been employed to work with local councils and third sector organisations to provide options for housing men on release. The housing specialist is also part of the Leicester Homelessness Charter and Prison Pathway Steering Group, which brings together all agencies and third-party providers.

It was encouraging to receive your positive comments specific to safety being a high priority in the establishment, good leadership and a fully staffed hardworking prison team. I was pleased to note the mental healthcare provision remained good during the reporting year and positive interactions have been developed between staff and prisoners. Likewise, the valuable support the Samaritans provided to prisoners during 2022 and the new prisoner council forum, are both worthy to note. HMP Leicester has increased the purposeful activity offer and to support family ties, evening visiting times are available and are well received.

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 Leicester.



Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

HMP LEICESTER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 FEBRUARY 2022 – 31 JANUARY 2023**HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report****Gym Refurbishment**

All work requests are considered, noting that demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding. Therefore, once a bid for a work project is received, HMPPS must prioritise works very carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency.

Amey's projects team have been addressing the gym roofing deficiencies. An independent inspection of the roof was carried out, which highlighted issues with the lead flashing which requires reinstating. Dates for when the work will be carried out have yet to be agreed. A bid has been submitted to replace the gym flooring. If funded, work will be completed during this financial year. The Governor will keep you updated on progress.

Finance, Benefit, and Debt (FBD) Services

Due to competing resource pressures, we have had to prioritise certain services. For those areas including Leicester where it has not yet been possible to award contracts, it is hoped the FBD Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) for people in prison will be in place before 2025. Universal finance, benefit and debt (FBD) services are available, such as prison banking and ID leads, Department Work and Pension support and access to national debt helplines. HMPPS will look to include additional specialist FBD services as part of the future recommissioning for CRS.

Cell Conditions

Due to population pressures at HMP Leicester it is not possible to fully refurbish at the present time, as such, the Clean Rehabilitative Enabling and Decent programme is on hold. If restarted, this programme will work across the worst affected areas of the prison.

In the face of exceptional capacity pressures, all small local projects and any revised work programme requests are being reviewed weekly and wherever possible accommodation is being brought back into use to mitigate these pressures. An Estates Investment Proposal bid to replace the windows across the main wing has been submitted for consideration. A painting programme will be devised to enhance the cells.