



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Rochester
Rochester
ME1 3QS

Dear Chair,

06 September 2023

**HMP/YOI ROCHESTER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL
2022 – 31 MARCH 2023**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 March 2023. I was saddened to hear there was one death in custody during the reporting year. 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 was sorry to hear that the Board continues to operate with a reduced complement of members. I can confirm that the IMB Secretariat has been working with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the recruitment service to look at ways that we can continue to improve the vetting process and experience for existing and potential new members. I am grateful for the Board's comments about HMP/YOI Rochester facilitating your work and also very much aware of the amount of effort that goes into producing annual reports. Thank you for providing a comprehensive picture of HMP/YOI Rochester over the reporting period despite the challenges faced.

I note the Board's ongoing concerns about accommodation for released prisoners. As mentioned in last year's response, our Prisons Strategy White Paper set out our plans to reduce reoffending, including improving prison leavers' access to accommodation. Launched in July 2021, we are delivering the transitional accommodation service, known as Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS-3), in five probation regions (Kent, Surrey and Sussex, Great Manchester, Yorkshire and the Humber, East of England and North West). The service provides up to 84 nights of accommodation for prison leavers, subject to probation supervision, and at risk of homelessness. You will note that Kent, Surrey and Sussex, the probation region where HMP/YOI Rochester is located, is one of the initial CAS-3 regions.

The service was expanded to Wales in June 2022 and is now being mobilised across the remaining six English probation regions. By 16 February 2023, CAS-3 had accommodated 5,210 prison leavers and the service will support thousands more as it rolls out across England and Wales. Additionally, HMPPS is increasing the number of Strategic Housing Specialists to 48 full-time equivalent staff with 46 already recruited. They are working on different initiatives, to strengthen collaborative working with prisons, probation, local authorities, and remove barriers to accommodation, including Local Authority Pre-Release panels, thereby improving the likelihood prison leavers are housed upon release. Strategic Housing Specialists act as subject matter experts on housing and homelessness for prison senior leaders and regional prison structures.

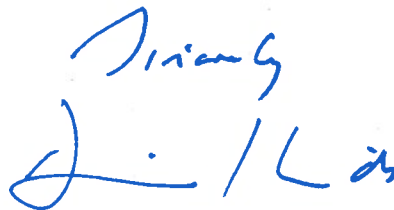
The Board will already be familiar with the Community Accommodation Services Tier 2 (CAS-2), which provides accommodation for those on bail and people released under Home Detention Curfew (HDC). It

continues to play a significant role in supporting the recently published new HDC processes, ensuring more people can be released on HDC to a suitable address. CAS-2 is currently expanding from 550 beds to 750 beds from 1 October. Confirmation of a further 100 bed expansion to 850 beds by 31 March 2024 is pending. The current Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) accommodation contract and the future specification for CRS Accommodation contracts are being reviewed by both the region and HMPPS functions. The decision on future design will be agreed with the regions this year. Internal management data from HMP/YOI Rochester shows that the percentage of men released from the establishment with accommodation has increased since January 2023 and was above 95% in March 2023.

I appreciate how difficult it was to collate the information in this year's report and it was therefore encouraging to receive your comments that HMP/YOI Rochester continues to provide a stable and safe environment for prisoners and that there is generally a positive atmosphere across the prison. I was also pleased to learn that the prison has continued to offer the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme for both prisoners and officers, that Prisoner Council meetings have resumed and are an example of good practice, and physical activity sessions are run by enthusiastic staff and are popular with prisoners.

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/YOI Rochester.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds', with a stylized flourish below it.

Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoner Accommodation

HMPPS acknowledges the prison is old and requires work, however, the accommodation is maintained and all concerns are addressed at the time of being reported. Some maintenance work does take a little longer than normal due to the process of utilising quotes and these are expedited where possible. There were a number of roofs awaiting repair and the maintenance provider had difficulties commissioning a roofing contractor. The roof on Alpha wing has now been repaired, however due to contract issues, we are still waiting for Echo wing and the old education and library roofs to be repaired. The provider has confirmed they are in the process of securing a new contractor. There has also been a concerted effort by the prison to improve cleanliness and decency on residential units. Each wing has a painting programme in place to improve cell conditions and work on the installation of privacy screens began in August 2023.

Although the redevelopment of the site was not given the go ahead this time, it is still possible for HMP/YOI Rochester to be considered should the opportunity present itself again for a site to be redeveloped. Separately, HMPPS is delivering 60 Rapid Deployment Cells that are due to be completed in October 2023. For longer-term investment, beyond the current spending review time period, HMPPS is developing a Long-term Prison Estate Strategy. Data to underpin the strategy's proposals will be provided by condition surveys that are currently underway to assess the fabric, cells and critical assets at each prison site. This data will inform long-term forward maintenance registers, which can be prioritised against future capital budgets. Formulation of the strategy is due to be completed by the end of 2023.

Prisoners' Property

HMPPS notes the Board's concerns that, despite implementation of the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, problems continue to occur when prisoners are transferred between establishments. The Framework introduced a new requirement that prisons must transfer excess property within four weeks unless there are exceptional circumstances which make this impossible. To avoid the problem of delays altogether, the Framework places an emphasis on ensuring compliance with volumetric control limits, since anything within these limits will be transferred with the prisoner. The Framework is clear that Governors should ensure management checks are undertaken to have confidence that prisoners' property is being handled correctly and with care. HMPPS will monitor the impact of the new Framework going forward and will continue to look at what further improvements can be made.

At HMP/YOI Rochester, new guidance has been sent to all staff regarding the process for cell clearances to ensure property is accurately recorded when removed from cells. Quality assurance processes will be introduced and a new local policy has been implemented to manage cells when prisoners are located in the Care and Separation Unit after adjudications to reduce the likelihood of property being mislaid. At the start of 2023, a new process for property was put in place to include set days for each wing to attend the property room. The introduction of the digitally recorded Prisoner Escort Record by Prisoner Escort Custody Services (PECS) including a property section that accurately records the number and type of sealed property 'owned' by and transferred with the prisoner and an accurate record of property handover between different stakeholders. This is now embedded as business as usual. This digital process has assisted with investigations for property that is lost in transit with PECS suppliers. PECS also review complaints during monthly formal meetings with its suppliers and the prison will continue to work with sending establishments to improve volumetric control processes prior to transfer, which will in turn reduce the issue of excess property being transferred to HMP/YOI Rochester.