



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Five Wells
Doddington Road
Wellingborough
NN8 2NG

12 October 2023

Dear Chair,

**HMP FIVE WELLS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 FEBRUARY
2022 to 31 MARCH 2023**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 March 2023. I am very much aware of the amount of effort that goes into producing annual reports, particularly as this was the first year of operation, and thank you for providing a comprehensive picture of HMP Five Wells over the reporting period despite operating with several vacancies.

I was saddened to hear there were two deaths 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.

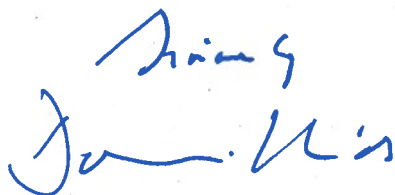
I appreciate the Board's concerns about future prison design and commissioning and thank you for drawing this to my attention. The service commencement date for HMP Five Wells was agreed and embedded in the contract at the point of awarding. The mobilisation of the contract and prison was overseen by HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) and agreed with G4S (the contractor) by the mobilisation team. All workshops were completed as per the contract as part of the main construction, however it was always for G4S to fit them out for practical completion which was approximately three months prior to the arrival of the first cohort of prisoners.

The commissioning of HMP Five Wells achieved the agreed practical completion and service commencement dates. Some post-completion construction works did take place, but this was written into the contract and these were fairly minor works and known and agreed by G4S as part of mobilisation.

I recognise there were many challenges following the opening of the prison. It was therefore encouraging to receive your comments that there has been a vast improvement in workshop provision during the year, that there is good support for families and particularly for men with children, and the prisoner led initiative of creating a friendship group for prisoners who have little or no contact with family or friends. It was also pleasing to learn of the attendance of high profile guests for diversity events such as Alfie Best for the traveller community and Frank Bruno for mental health.

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. 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 Five Wells.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds', is positioned above the printed name.

Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

HMP FIVE WELLS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 FEBRUARY 2022 to 31 MARCH 2023

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Opening Facilities and Provision

Staffing, equipment, and facilities were planned to be commensurate with the gradual ramping up of prisoner numbers. HMP Five Wells has the function of a Category C resettlement prison and the regime offer developed by G4S and accepted by HMPPS should have delivered the service level required for the initial cohort of prisoners. It is recognised there was a failure to achieve this and consequently the appropriate contractual action was taken. A lessons-learned process is in place which will consider whether provider bids offer realistic plans to achieve the outcomes in the timeframes set.

Regime and Key Workers

The vision for HMP Five Wells was to establish an exemplary rehabilitative culture and the strategy adopted to achieve this was via recruiting new staff with specific skills, qualities, and attributes particularly suited to creating this culture. It is acknowledged that this strategy resulted in an inexperienced staff group who are still developing the full range of jail-craft, custodial skills and confidence. To address this, G4S have approved the recruitment of eighteen additional First Line Manager posts that will provide an increased level of visibility, support and mentoring to less experienced Prison Custody Officers. It is planned that the additional managers will take up post between October and December 2023 which is subject to vetting and training. A higher salary point for those posts is being offered and is expected to attract applicants with significant custodial experience. The ongoing staffing issues are also subject to contractual action by HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice.

Prisoners' Property

HMP Five Wells has made a significant effort to improve processes involved in the management of prisoner property. The prison is also taking measures to ensure that the admissions department is resourced with sufficient regular staff to maintain and further improve their procedures to reduce issues relating to property.

Nationally, the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was implemented on 5 September 2022 and places an emphasis on ensuring compliance with volumetric control limits. Volumetric control limits apply to all prisons and the Framework contains a leaflet to explain these limits to prisoners. The Framework introduced a new requirement that prisons must transfer excess property within four weeks unless there are exceptional circumstances which make this impossible. 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. 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. HMPPS will monitor the impact of the Framework going forward and will continue to look at what further improvements can be made.

Additionally, the current Prisoner Escort Custody Services (PECS) contract has a vehicle fleet designed to transfer the number of prisoners intended together with their property in line with the volumetric limit set out in the new Framework. The introduction of the digitally recorded Prisoner Escort Record (dPER) includes 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. The digital process has assisted with

investigations for property that is lost in transit with PECS suppliers. The responsibility for transfer of any remaining items remains with the sending prison.