



Ministry
of Justice

Damian Hinds
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Onley
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25 September 2023

HMP ONLEY: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MARCH 2022 – 28 FEBRUARY 2023

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 28 February 2023. 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 Onley over the reporting period, especially as you had several vacancies.

I address below the specific points you have raised for my attention:

I understand the Board's continued concerns about recruitment and it is recognised that the operational staffing position at HMP Onley is one of the most challenging. Whilst it remains the case that HMP Onley does not currently benefit from a market facing supplement, there have been noticeable improvements following concerted efforts to recruit more prison officers and operational support grades (OSG) and improve retention of staff. The first-time officer scheme, which provides new staff the opportunity to spend their first two years at HMP Onley and then return to their home area or stay at the prison permanently, has exceeded the initial target and will be extended. A business case been approved to allow prison officers to level transfer to HMP Onley and the prison's current vacancies continue to be supported with Payment Plus schemes and Detached Duty, which is a significant benefit to HMP Onley's staffing complement. OSG recruitment has also improved with this staffing group expected to be fully staffed this reporting year. The prison is attending various recruitment fairs to advertise the careers available in HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and has recently developed a new relationship with a local university.

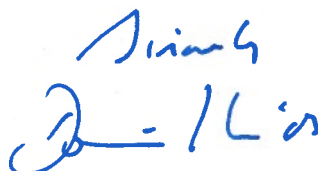
In addition, there has been a significant focus on staff support and development including the Prison Officer Personal Development Programme, as well as regular staff engagement and wellbeing events. The monthly resignation rates of Bands 3 - 5 prison officer has improved, with the average reducing to 1.5 full time equivalent during April to June 2023. The average was previously 2.54 during the same period in 2022. The attractiveness of the prison as an employer has also been improved by its selection as a pilot for digital rostering applications which will offer staff greater control over how their attendance is rostered.

Despite your concern about staffing, it was pleasing to receive your comments that the health and wellbeing needs of prisoners are still being met and that staff have built positive relationships with prisoners. I was reassured to read that the quick response of staff to an incident in October 2022 prevented a prisoner from committing suicide and I am grateful to staff for their continued efforts and professionalism.

It was also encouraging to note that improvements have been made in the transfer of prisoners to Category D prisons which is now taking place promptly and the number of prisoners having to wait has significantly reduced since this was raised as a concern last year.

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 Onley.

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

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Window Replacement

It is recognised that the full window replacement project at HMP Onley has not yet been allocated a budget or programmed in for work during the 2023-24 financial year. The estates investment proposal has been approved, however, there are competing pressures such as fire safety and lifesaving projects which are being prioritised first. In the meantime, the original windows will continue to be maintained until such time a budget allocation is made available. In addition, in response to the risks presented by illicit items being conveyed into the prison by drones, HMP Onley has sourced and funded locally some replacement windows for I wing which will be installed in identified areas based on intelligence.

Food Budget

To support prisons to address the rising cost of food, HMPPS is working closely with catering managers to understand the issues experienced and share good practice ideas. HMPPS is also working with the Department of Health and Social Care, Office of Health Improvement and Disparities, following government guidelines, to provide enhanced advice to prisoners on eating healthy meals. However, food budgets are determined locally by the Governor in all public sector prisons, but the Board can be assured that Prison Rules require prisoners to be provided with three meals a day that are varied and nutritious and that meet the religious, cultural and medical needs of all.

Workshops

HMP Onley recognises the importance of having workshops staffed to provide purposeful activity places for prisoners to learn skills and improve their opportunities to gain employment once released. Whilst the number of vacancies has reduced since the Board's reporting period, the prison continues to advertise and recruit instructional officers to fill the remaining vacancies.

Key Work

It is recognised that some prisons are currently unable to achieve the original Offender Management in Custody Key Work model, which in closed male prisons is one session per week for every prisoner. All prisons are aiming to deliver this original model on a weekly or fortnightly basis, however, some prisons are operating to individually agreed Regime Progression Plans (RPP) which will detail what they plan to deliver and to who, based on the available resources. The RPPs are a temporary measure in recognition that some prisons are struggling to deliver Key Work due to operational pressures and a new plan for the 2024/25 financial year will set out the expectations for the delivery of Key Work.

Key Work does continue to be one of HMP Onley's priorities. However, delivery of this and other important elements of the regime are only being enabled due to the use of Detached Duty staff and Payment Plus, with the allocation of Prison Officer resource closed managed. To ensure that the Key Work contacts that are taking place are to a high standard, there is regular quality assurance undertaken by Custodial Managers as well as reviews by the Heads of Function.

Prisoners' Property

The Board's concerns are noted that despite implementation of the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework excess property is still not being sent quickly enough when a prisoner transfers. 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. HMP Onley has also set a target locally that property will be delivered to prisoners within four weeks of its arrival. This has been communicated to the Prisoner Council and is considered realistic given the significant increase in internal and external moves of prisoners through reception and staffing resources. HMPPS is monitoring the impact of the new Framework going forward and will continue to look at what further improvements can be made.

In addition, the introduction of the digitally recorded Person Escort Record included a property section that accurately records the number and type of sealed property owned and being transferred with the prisoner by the Prisoner Escort Custody Services (PECS). This ensures that there is an accurate record of property being handed over. Although PECS receives few complaints about lost property, with one complaint received between 2020 to 2023 from HMP Onley, this digital process now assists with investigations for property that is lost in transit with PECS supplier.