



# Ministry of Justice

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## **HMP THE MOUNT: 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 and for providing a comprehensive picture of HMP The Mount over the reporting period, especially as you had several vacancies.

I was saddened to hear there were nine 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, particularly those that are drug related. HMP The Mount continues to pay close attention to recommendations that are made, as well as early learning reviews and regular notices are provided to staff about code blue procedures which are displayed permanently on all wings now.

The cross-Government Drug Strategy and Prisons Strategy White Paper set out ambitious plans to tackle substance misuse in prisons with a zero-tolerance approach to drugs and all prisoners having access to treatment so they can turn their back on addiction. The Ministry of Justice has been investing in a wide range of interventions to tackle drugs and support prisoners into recovery. At HMP The Mount, this includes investment in Drug Trace Detection equipment to identify the latest drug threats and an Incentivised Substance Free Living Unit where prisoners receive regular drug testing and support. An X-ray body scanner was also installed as part of the national Security Investment Programme, alongside Enhanced Gate Security which includes baggage scanners to ensure prisoners, staff and visitor are thoroughly searched to reduce the conveyance of illicit items. Additional training and instructions on searching have also been provided to staff and new processes implemented including regional searching support to check items and visitors coming into the prison. To tackle drones conveying illicit items, windows and cell doors will be replaced as part of the fire safety improvement project, which is forecast to begin in the financial year 2024/25 capital maintenance programme.

Substance misuse is known to be a direct cause of prisoner debt at HMP The Mount and a debt strategy has been introduced to understand, prevent and respond to debt, including developing staff awareness and offering practical support to prisoners. Information has been displayed within the visitor's centre and the search area so that families are aware of how they can raise concerns. Mandatory Drugs Testing is now running reliably and consistently, providing an effective deterrent and intelligence is being used to enable support and interventions to be directed better to tackle the supply of drugs. HMP The Mount will introduce a shop within reception to ensure prisoners have access to the essentials they need prior to canteen day and the Safer Custody team are developing systems to monitor both the perpetrators and victims of debt. Assessment Care in Custody Teamwork refresher training has been provided focused particularly on risks, triggers and protective factors to increase awareness and encourage intervention at

the earliest opportunity and Challenge Support Intervention Plans are being used more proactively to ensure more individuals have multi-disciplinary support to achieve realistic and measured goals. Additional listeners have also been trained by the Samaritans to increase the available peer support to prisoners who may struggle with substance misuse and the impact it has on their mental health.

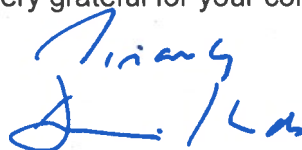
I understand the Board's concerns about the provision of education, employment and training for prisoners and thank you for bringing this to my attention. HMP The Mount has taken advantage of a range of national programmes and initiatives that are led by New Futures Network, the HMPPS dedicated employment team. The prison has attracted new employers to partner with them to develop training and work pathways and the dedicated Prison Employment Lead has been working with these and a range of other employers to increase the opportunities for work for serving prisoners, as well as employment for prison leavers. Embedding these and focussing on continued improvement will contribute towards increased opportunities and the Employment Advisory Board continues to provide the prison with a range of advice and support regarding their employment strategy. The work of the Employment Hub has brought together a range of statutory and non-statutory organisations to prepare candidates to take up work. This includes a new ID and Banking Administrator to help ensure prisoners have a bank account and suitable ID documentation for use after their release from prison.

In October 2022 a revised staffing profile was implemented at HMP The Mount to provide more hours into the core day, with later starts on the weekend, which has provided a more stable and consistent regime allowing prisoners to work for one session and have domestics and exercise in the other session. The prison recognises that there is more to do in improving education, training and employment and the Reducing Reoffending meeting regularly monitors regime delivery which shows an increase in prisoners in activity. The prison has a range of actions in place including seeking funding for new work opportunities as well as considering avenues to increase access to Release on Temporary Licence to attend employment, in addition to the visits café which is now open employing prisoners. In addition, a reading strategy was put in place in June 2022 with an action plan developed to improve the literary skills of prisoners in both education and workshops and I note the Board welcomed the Write to the North Pole project. Whilst there have been some additional tasks placed on Prison Offender Manager due to the increase in short term prisoners which has been a challenge to manage due to staffing levels in recent months, this has not an impact on Offender Assessment System and I am pleased to note the deadlines for re-categorisation reviews and for Parole Board hearings are consistently met.

Turning to some of the positives within your reports, it was encouraging to receive your comments that as Covid-19 restrictions eased the fair and humane treatment of prisoners improved. Despite the challenges I was reassured to note that there continues to be a high level of professionalism and respect between staff and prisoners. I was pleased to note the prison estate is kept clean and tidy and that the farms and gardens provides work opportunities and a significant amount of food for the prison.

I note you have raised two local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to the other issue raised in your report is 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 The Mount.



**Damian Hinds**  
**Minister for Prisons and Probation**

## **HMP THE MOUNT: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MARCH 2022 – 28 FEBRUARY 2023**

### **HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report**

#### **Staffing**

To address the levels of attrition across HMPPS, research into the reasons why staff left the prison service has led to the development of ten drivers of attrition which form the basis of the retention strategy. The strategy provides a toolkit to support Governors and HR to identify best practice that can be applied locally to improve retention. Exit interviews were also introduced in 2021 to enable HMPPS to gauge employee opinion and satisfaction in relation to their experience and establish reasons for leaving. These have helped to shape and determine interventions to improve retention, such as funding New Colleague Mentors at all sites, who support new joiners through onboarding, induction, and their early career journeys. All prisons are also able to use the data locally to create their own action log which outlines the activity they are undertaking to improve retention. As part of HMP The Mount's retention actions work is taking place to increase the understanding of the benefits package on offer, as well as considering the working arrangements and shift patterns that can be offered. There has been progress in staff non-effectiveness and addressing sickness absences allowing more prison officers to be deployed to facilitate improved regimes, as well as increased opportunities for training and development of the staff group. A new Governing Governor also arrived at HMP The Mount in December 2022 and since then there has been a renewed focus by the senior management team on retention, resulting in attrition and morale of staff improving.

It is recognised that there remain prison officer vacancies, but work continues to improve the attraction of potential candidates, as well as supporting career progression of the operational support grade (OSG) into prison officer roles. It is worth noting that the number prison officer currently in post and undergoing vetting exceeds the target staffing of 178 full time equivalent. An OSG mentor has been introduced into the Operations department delivering assurance checks and spending quality time with each new OSG to support their learning. OSGs are also provided with a six-week meeting with Operation Managers to support and learn from their starting experience and now have access to flexible work-life balance and part time opportunities. The prison is on track to reach its target staffing for its OSG group in the coming months which will make a significant improvement to deployment of prison officers who have been needed to cover shortfalls, in particular night duties and this will reduce the reliance on Payment Plus and overtime to cover duties. Changes to how the staffing detail is offered, such as nights, has also increased the availability of staff and created more availability for staff to get the time off they request. The prison will continue its commitment to support staff and develop the wellbeing offer to ensure all staff at HMP The Mount feel engaged and productive to build better relationships with colleagues and prisoners to improve safety, the regime and outcomes.

