



Ministry
of Justice

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Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
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23 October 2023

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI STOKE HEATH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY
2022 - 30 APRIL 2023**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 April 2023. Thank you for providing a comprehensive picture of HMP/YOI Stoke Heath, especially as you had several vacancies.

I was saddened to hear four prisoners died during the reporting year. I would like to assure the Board my officials and I take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

As you are aware, the Prison Service has experienced recruitment and retention challenges, particularly amongst prison officers and operational support grade staff. I recognise the impact this has had on the ability of some prisons to deliver a full regime. Recently, we have seen some signs of an improving national staffing picture, with an increase since December 2022 of 794 full time equivalent Band 3-5 prison officers and youth justice workers. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has recruitment and retention activity underway for all sites with a current or future need so that we can deliver the fullest possible regime across the estate. We are increasing recruitment levels through several initiatives including the 'Advance into Justice' scheme supporting Armed Forces service leavers, veterans, and their civil partners /spouses into prison officer roles; and the 'Alumni' scheme, which fast-tracks former prison officers back into the service. To help new staff on their early onboarding journey, over 150 New Colleague Mentors have been appointed across the prison estate to provide support. The Prison Service pay award 2023/24 delivered a 7% increase to the starting salary of an entry level prison officer on 39 hours, rising from £30,702 to £32,851 on the national pay scale. HMPPS will continue to closely monitor the impact of this significant investment.

As there is no central requirement governing the amount of time prisoners should spend out of their cells, Governors/Directors are instead afforded the flexibility to deliver balanced regimes that maintain an appropriate level of time out of cell for purposeful activity. Governors/Directors can commission a wide range of educational and vocational courses according to the needs of their population. Prisons are currently operating to individually agreed Regime Progression Plans (RPP), which are based on the resources available. RPPs will be superseded by a new plan for 2024/25 which will set new expectations for the delivery of key work. This is through a new National Regime Model for prisons to drive purposeful activity, to be formally launched in all prisons in January 2024. Governors/Directors will be required to complete a new annual regime planning cycle including producing a detailed plan of the regime they aspire to deliver (including new extra-curricular activities) following a nationally prescribed design process. A new quality measure of regime activities and for performance measures will be introduced.

An Operational Resourcing and Stability Panel sits weekly to provide support to prisons experiencing the most acute resourcing pressures affecting their ability to deliver full regimes and where it is impacting on the stability of the prison. Examples of strategic contingencies deployed include national detached duty (staff temporarily seconded from other prisons), operational stability payments and redeployment of headquarter staff. To actively engage prisoners in resettlement activities and better align the curriculum with the needs of the labour market, the Governor is working with Novus and with the Future Skills Programme and Academies to introduce new qualifications in catering, horticulture and textiles. A new wooden shed panelling workshop opened in September 2023 at HMP/YOI Stoke Heath, and the Governor will be exploring a variety of other new workshops to upskill prisoners.

Regarding the Board's comments about resettlement prisons, Regional Probation Directors (RPDs) are responsible for the delivery of resettlement services with key interventions delivered by Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) providers (commissioned by RPDs). All resettlement prisons (including reception) under the new resettlement approach have an embedded resettlement provision managed by, or otherwise linked to, a Probation Delivery Unit. The embedded Pre-Release Team at HMP/YOI Stoke Heath is responsible for identifying and addressing immediate resettlement needs (including the unconvicted and people out of area), involved in work to remove barriers to resettlement and reviewing the Basic Custody Screening Tool (BCST2) 12 weeks prior to release (signposting individuals to specialist services within the prison). The Contract Management Team for West Midlands Regional CRS monitor the CRS supplier's performance and issues are managed through formal governance procedures. In terms of measurable outcomes, HMPPS has helpfully set this out within the annex to this response.

I acknowledge the Board's comments about prisoner wages, inflationary pressures affecting prisoners are under constant review and are being managed across several areas. In September 2022, a national approach to the rising cost of living was agreed and a 10% uplift in private cash allowances (money that can be sent in by family and friends of prisoners) was introduced to help mitigate against price increases. In addition, in November 2022, several new value brand product lines were made available through the Prison Retail service which give prisoners the choice to purchase less expensive, non-premium branded items just as people in the community are doing. The national *Prisoners' Pay* policy sets out the national minimum rate of pay for employed activity, however, Governors have the discretion to set pay to reflect their population needs, the type of prison and the jobs and educational/vocational training available. HMPPS recognises that access to work can limit prisoners' ability to earn wages to support their living costs in prisons, which is why they are working to build stronger links with employers and offer more prisoners the chance to work in prison.

It was encouraging to note the positive comments in your report, particularly the new employment hub, the disability learning work, the embedded specialist support for neurodivergent prisoners and older prisoners. I was pleased to note the library is a valued asset and the Twinning Literacy project with Stoke City Football Club, a good initiative to unlock potential. 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 Stoke Heath.



Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

HMP/YOI STOKE HEATH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY 2022 - 30 APRIL 2023

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

HMPPS notes the Board's concerns about the transfer of prisoners' property, despite implementation of the new *Prisoners' Property Policy Framework* on 5 September 2022. The Framework places an emphasis on ensuring compliance with volumetric control limits, since anything within these limits will be transferred with the prisoner. 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. HMPPS will monitor the impact of the new Framework going forward and will continue to look at what further improvements can be made.

The introduction of the digitally recorded Person Escort Record 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. The digital process has assisted with investigations for property that is lost in transit with the Prisoner Escort Custody Services (PECS) supplier. However, PECS receive few complaints for lost property overall and often the issue is not attributed to the PECS supplier and during the last 12 months there has been no complaints received from HMP/YOI Stoke Heath in relation to the loss of property. For property delay, in-line with the HMPPS Prisoner Property Framework if the limit of items allowed in possession has been reached, and if there is no space on the escort vehicle to transport items safely and securely, then responsibility for transfer of any remaining items remains with the sending prison.

The Governor acknowledges the high number of property related complaints relating to local and national processes and will commission a review of the establishment's property policy to ensure that there are suitable resources to manage property at HMP/YOI Stoke Heath.

Accommodation on Release

The Prisons Strategy White Paper sets out the Government's plans to improve prison leavers' access to accommodation. It is recognised that prison leavers who have access to stable accommodation on release are almost 50% less likely to reoffend than people released homeless.

We are delivering our transitional Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) which was launched in July 2021, in five probation regions (Kent, Surrey and Sussex, Greater Manchester, Yorkshire and the Humber, East of England and North West). This service provides up to 84 nights of accommodation for prison leavers, subject to probation supervision, and at risk of homelessness. We expanded the service to Wales in June 2022 and are now mobilising this across the remaining six English probation regions, including the West Midlands. By 31 March 2023, CAS3 accommodated 5,796 prison leavers and the service will support thousands more as it rolls out across England and Wales.

As you indicate in your report, Strategic Housing Specialists are working on initiatives to strengthen collaborative working with prisons, probation, Local Authorities and remove barriers to accessing

accommodation, including Local Authority Pre-Release panels, thereby improving the likelihood prison leavers are housed upon release. Strategic Housing Specialists are subject matter experts on housing and homelessness for prison senior leaders and regional prison structures. The current 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 by the end of 2023.

Resettlement Outcomes

Further to the Minister's letter above, in terms of measurable outcomes, the existing targets are outlined below:

- 100% of BCST2s are completed on reception.
- 90% of individuals are housed on release from prison.
- 80% of those released from prison are in settled accommodation three months post release.
- 19% of those released from prison are in employment six weeks post release.
- 37% of those released from prison are in employment six months post release.

With regards to additional measures, the Pre-Release Team at HMP/YOI Stoke Heath can commit to:

- A target of 100% completion of BCST2 12-week reviews.
- 100% of those prisoners with identified housing needs are referred to CRS Accommodation providers and a Duty to Refer is completed.

As the additional work completed by the Pre-Release Team is so wide and varied, further specified measures are difficult to identify. If required, the Pre-Release Team can provide the Board with some examples of good work they have undertaken with HMP/YOI Stoke Heath's prisoners.