



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Bristol  
19 Cambridge Road  
Bristol  
BS7 8PS

*Dear Chair,*

13<sup>th</sup> December 2023

**HMP BRISTOL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 AUGUST 2022 – 31 JULY 2023**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Bristol. I commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively. I was deeply saddened to hear that nine prisoners died during the reporting year and I would like to reassure you that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

I appreciate the Board's concerns about overcrowding. Accommodating two prisoners in a cell designed for one is never desirable but continues to be necessary across the estate in order to accommodate all those committed to custody by the courts. The prison estate is facing population pressures as is well documented and on 16 October 2023 the Lord Chancellor gave a statement to the House of Commons on criminal justice in which he outlined the steps being taken. To manage overcrowding, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) published a revised framework in Spring 2022 for the certification of prisoner accommodation. This framework is where the useable operational capacity of the estate is derived from. The operational capacity at each prison predominantly relates to manageability of the risks involved. Under HMPPS policy, the total number of prisoners that an establishment can hold, including the maximum level of crowding, is set by the Prison Group Director (PGD). In making this assessment, the PGD is required to take into account control, security and the proper operation of the planned regime, using their operational judgement and experience. Given that several of the factors that affect maximum crowding levels are dynamic, this decision is regularly reviewed, and no prison will ever be expected to exceed its operational capacity.

For the longer term, we are delivering 20,000 additional modern uncrowded prison places, the largest prison build programme since the Victorian era, ensuring the right conditions are in place to rehabilitate prisoners, helping to cut crime and protect the public. We have already delivered approximately 5,600 places, including through the brand-new prisons HMP Fosse Way and HMP Five Wells.

The recruitment and retention of officers at HMP Bristol is challenging as the prison operates in a buoyant and competitive labour market. The location of the prison, with limited parking and public transport, places the establishment at some disadvantage compared to other employers. The Ministry of Justice Resourcing team has made substantial efforts to support recruitment which is projected to exceed the required numbers over the coming months. Additional resourcing support has been made available to HMP Bristol through Detached Duty and Incentivised Payment Plus. A second New Colleague Mentor has been deployed to continue induction and mentoring work for new staff over the next two years which will ensure the prison has a skilled workforce that feel confident in their role and aid retention. A re-profiling

exercise has also commenced (concluding early next year) that will result in the re-allocation of resources to match regime needs and reduce the reliance on overtime. Further details on measures taken to improve the regime can be found in the attached annex.

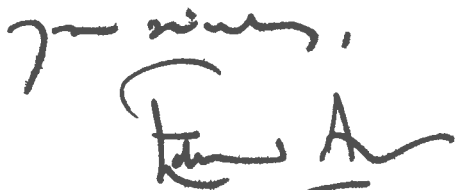
Government Facility Services Limited (GFSL) completed 7,749 jobs at HMP Bristol in 2022 and over 7,100 tasks in 2023 to date, making the prison one of the busiest sites in the South West Region. I share your concerns regarding issues with heating and hot water boilers for the second year in a row; the heating system is old and requires specialist parts for maintenance, some of which are no longer made. GFSL implemented a temporary heating solution and purchased some of the last remaining components in the country that should last several years. The heating is on for this winter and temperatures are being maintained with no concerns. Monthly pest control visits have now become weekly and action is being taken on areas with high rodent activity. This will be ongoing until the contractors resolve the current situation before returning to the ongoing maintenance and monitoring programme. Monthly meetings are held with GFSL to drive forward maintenance issues. Disabled access to the Healthcare department is being resolved with a project to install a motorised stair lift on the external staircase.

The mental healthcare provider, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, is committed to ensuring swift and appropriate access to mental health services. The newly commissioned service model is being implemented which ensures that staff are available at times that maximises contact with prisoners. Whilst there are currently a few mental health vacancies, these posts are being filled by temporary staff to ensure timely access to services until permanent recruitment is completed.

As you outline in your report, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons raised an Urgent Notification in July 2023. His notification letter echoes some of the themes you have identified, such as access to healthcare and mental health service provision. These are being addressed as part of the Secretary of State for Justice's response. It is important that this complex set of actions leads to clear and measurable outcomes and your board members will continue to play a crucial role in providing independent scrutiny of sustained improvements. Although I recognise that HMP Bristol has been described as one of the most unsafe prisons in the country, I was reassured to note that the Board did not have concerns about their personal safety. I was also encouraged to note the Board's comments that the prison often looks clean and tidy, and that prisoners painted wings during the year giving the site a fresh appearance. It was pleasing to hear that the Harmony Garden beehives and vegetable gardens have been productive, with both staff and prisoners receiving beekeeping training.

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.

I appreciate the valuable contribution from members of Independent Monitoring Boards and am grateful for your work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Argar', with a stylized flourish underneath.

**RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP**

## HMP BRISTOL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 AUGUST 2022 – 31 JULY 2023

### HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

#### **Prison Roll and Safer Custody**

The current operational capacity of HMP Bristol is 580, which is higher than the figure following the first Urgent Notification process, but is lower than the prison has previously operated at following a permanent reduction of 35 places in 2020. The option to once again reduce the operational capacity of the prison following this year's inspection was not available.

The estate-wide prison population is at historically high levels as mentioned in the Minister's letter with limited capacity across the estate. The current population pressures have required HMPPS to recommission previously offline capacity and, where it has been assessed as safe and sustainable, to increase overcrowding in some prisons to cope with the pressures of new receptions from court and across the estate, though this has not occurred at HMP Bristol.

There are a range of actions in place to support the prison to address the levels of violence, self-harm and self-inflicted deaths, including:

- Build knowledge, confidence and capability and improve practice in the investigation of violence and use of Challenge Support and Intervention Plan (CSIP) and Assessment Care in Custody Teamwork (ACCT).
- Appointed two additional temporary Band 4 staff to act as CSIP and ACCT floorwalkers.
- Coaching and upskilling for ACCT case co-ordinators in the identification of risks and triggers for self-harm.

#### **Regime**

HMP Bristol is currently in receipt of Tactical Resourcing support with sixteen National Detached Duty Deployed staff and ten more via the Incentive Payment Plus scheme to help facilitate a fuller regime. In January 2024 the National Regime Model will be formally launched, embedding the yearly cycle of regime planning designed to drive regime standards, safety and delivery into business as usual. Regime planning will also include an element for prisons to set delivery commitments against Purposeful Activity measures. A new Quarterly Review Cycle will allow prisons to compare actual delivery of regime against the prison's planned delivery outlined in plans at the start of that year. PGDs and Area Executive Directors will provide scrutiny and assurance over the completion of both the initial plan and quarterly review points. The Regime Plans should include key work.

For contracted services staffing such as education, HMPPS is able to exert contractual pressure on providers to ensure that commissioned courses are covered/staffed appropriately. Financial penalties are in place should the provider fail to deliver commissioned courses or cancel courses due to staff vacancies. HMP Bristol has also successfully secured additional Dynamic Purchase Scheme funding which will allow the establishment to deliver more accredited activities for the prisoners.