



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI New Hall
New Hall Way
Dial Wood
Flockton
Wakefield
WF4 4XX

4th December 2023

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI NEW HALL: 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 commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively, especially as you continued to operate with vacancies. I was saddened to hear there was one death in custody during the reporting year and a further death within 24 hours of release. 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 the effects of the rising cost of living on prisoner spends allowances. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has set out some changes to address the issue of increasing prices of canteen items and the impact on prisoners. Inflationary pressures affecting prisoners are under constant review and are being managed across several areas.

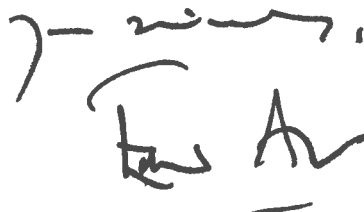
In September 2022, a national approach to the rising cost of living was agreed and a 10% uplift in private cash allowances (money that can be sent in by family and friends of prisoners) was introduced to help mitigate against price increases. The national Prisoners' Pay policy sets out the national minimum rate of pay for employed activity. Governors have the necessary freedoms to set local pay rates that reflect their prisoner population needs, the type of prison and regime in operation, and purposeful activity that is available. This includes jobs, educational and vocational training.

To further mitigate against the rising cost of living, in November 2022, several new value-brand product lines were made available through the Prison Retail service. This gives prisoners the choice to purchase less expensive non-premium branded items, similar to people in the community. Early trends indicate purchases of value brands are becoming increasingly popular.

It was encouraging to receive your comments about the successful implementation of the key worker scheme, and that relationships between staff and prisoners are very good as observed by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. I was reassured to note that the Insider initiative is working well together with an improved Listeners' service, and that HMP/YOI New Hall was selected as a pilot site to provide additional support for women during early days in custody to tackle self-harming, including the HOPE programme.

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 horizontal line underneath the name.

RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Trainee Officers and Detached Duty

At times, HMPPS has intentionally recruited above required staffing levels in certain prisons or regions as this gives greater system-wide resilience through the use of national detached duty whereby staff are deployed from one prison to another. Due to the improved national staffing position in recent months, this is not something HMPPS is continuing with at present. Consequently, the prison's staffing levels should soon start to return towards the target staffing figures.

New Recruit Vetting

The latest available figures for vetting directly employed staff, as a component of recruitment, indicatively takes on average 25 working days across HMPPS. Prison Officer vetting is averaging at 30 working days. These figures do not take account of the recruitment, sifting and selection, and medical assessment stages. The checks that HMPPS undertake are vital to assess individuals against a range of pre-employment legislative requirements together with security-related factors that are pertinent to working with HMPPS.

Vetting enhancements have been implemented to combat new and emerging potential threats and a review of the whole end-to-end recruitment procedure has been conducted with actions taken to address potential points for delay. These enhancements aim to support thorough and timely security vetting for anyone coming to work, or provide services, within HMPPS.