

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Ashfield  
Shortwood Road  
Pucklechurch  
BS16 9QJ

8 January 2023

Dear Chair,

**HMP ASHFIELD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 JULY 2022 – 30 JUNE 2023**

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

I have read your report with care and acknowledge your concerns about the delays in considering prisoners for open conditions and thank you for drawing this to my attention. As you may be aware, on 17 July 2023, the Secretary of State directed a change to simplify the criteria by which indeterminate sentenced prisoner (ISP) are assessed for suitability for open conditions. In order for an ISP to be judged suitable for a move the following criteria must be met: 1.) the prisoner has made sufficient progress during the sentence in addressing and reducing risk to a level consistent with protecting the public from harm (in circumstances where the prisoner in open conditions may be in the community, unsupervised under licenced temporary release); 2.) the prisoner is assessed as low risk of abscond; and 3.) there is a wholly persuasive case for transferring the ISP from closed to open conditions. The Parole Board, since 1 August 2023, has applied the new test to all hearings.

Where a prisoner is awaiting a decision from the Secretary of State (including imprisonment for public protection prisoners convicted of sexual offences) on whether a move to open conditions will be accepted or rejected, this will be considered under the new criteria and they will be notified accordingly, within 28 calendar days. I can assure the Board that HM Prison and Probation Service is currently exploring further initiatives to develop the process for considering open conditions for ISPs to ensure decisions are made swiftly and effectively. Ministers are not the singular authority, officials with delegated responsibility can also make decisions on behalf of the Secretary of State to expedite the process.

Despite the concerns raised in your report, it was reassuring to note your findings that HMP Ashfield is a very safe prison, with adequate staffing levels, good quality Keywork delivery and an exceptional family contact provision. The Director has reported that the newly appointed Head of Education Work and Skills Manager, Neurodiversity Support Manager, and Librarian have brought a wide range of educational experience and expertise to help support prisoners through their journey in prison and equip them for release in to the community.

Thank you highlighting some other excellent work and initiatives, in particular, the support for a terminally ill prisoner who needed palliative care and the prisoner with dementia. Like the Board, I applaud HMP Ashfield and healthcare for the level of care provided to these prisoners in difficult circumstances. I hope to reassure the Board that in response to the demographic change in the prison population, houseblocks in the new prison design will have medical and accessible cells with lift access and finishes to aid way-finding and orientation for people with reduced cognition or visual impairments (noting the new builds already delivered under the prison place programme have such features). I also applaud the valuable work undertaken by Chaplains during the reporting year and, as the Board describe, Chaplaincy remains at the heart of the prison, and rightly so.

HMPPS update on the Ageing Population Strategy and response to the other issue raised in your report are set out in the attached annex. I note you have raised some local issues of concern which the Director will continue to keep you aware of as work continues.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Argar', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

**RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP**

## **HMP ASHFIELD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2022 – 30 JUNE 2023**

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

#### **Prisoners' Property**

We appreciate the Board's feedback. The *Prisoners' Property* Policy Framework was designed with procedural justice at its core and to ensure consistency and fairness and enhance prisoners' satisfaction with processes and outcomes. Given the nature of property, and the movement of prisoners between establishments, it's focus was to provide greater direction and standardisation on a national basis. The Framework strengthens processes in relation to the main problem areas identified by IMBs including the handling of valuable property, managing cell clearances, volumetric control compliance and excess property following a prisoner's transfer.

The Framework clearly outlines that Governors and Directors should ensure management checks are undertaken to have confidence that prisoners' property is being handled correctly and with care (e.g., that property cards are being completed accurately and that the volume of property held by prisoners is checked regularly and does not become excessive). HMPPS will continue to monitor the impact of the new Framework going forward and will continue to look at what further improvements can be made.

#### **Ageing Population Strategy**

The Ministry of Justice and HMPPS are currently developing an ageing population strategy, which will include management of those with dementia and those in need of end-of-life care. As part of this, we will be considering the use of specialist units for prisoners with significant health or social care needs. The strategy will be published in 2024 and will set out our vision.

As recognised by the Board, HMP Ashfield has taken positive steps to ensure cells are warmer for older prisoners, including the additional purchasing of cell heaters and extra duvets, where needed. The Director will continue to support the older population and will regularly review processes for any improvements to be made.