



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Aylesbury  
Bierton Road  
Aylesbury  
Buckinghamshire  
HP20 1EH

16<sup>th</sup> January 2024

*Dear Chair,*

**HMP AYLESBURY: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 APRIL 2022 – 31 MARCH 2023**

Thank you for providing your annual report on HMP Aylesbury. I have read your report with care. I commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively, particularly as you operated with several vacancies. I was deeply saddened to hear that one prisoner died during the reporting year and I would like to provide assurance that I take recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

I understand the Board's concerns about the number of people being sent to prison and the length of their sentences. The Government is serious about protecting the public and reducing crime which is why tough measures have been taken in the Criminal Justice Bill and Sentencing Bill to ensure that the most serious offenders are kept in prison for longer. However, delivering public protection is not just about custody. Evidence shows that sentences served in the community are more effective in reducing reoffending and rehabilitating people than short sentences of immediate custody. It is acknowledged that too many lower-level offenders who receive short prison sentences reoffend, becoming further entrenched in criminality and devastating communities resulting in more victims. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is making full use of the developments in electronic monitoring technology which is allowing the courts to issue more robust community sentences with tougher conditions designed to keep offenders out of trouble. This is why there is a presumption to suspend short sentences being introduced which will place a duty on the courts to suspend short sentences of 12 months in custody or less unless there is a breach of a court order or where there is a significant risk of harm to a person. In these cases, courts retain full discretion to impose a sentence of immediate custody. In addition, the courts may still impose a sentence of immediate custody where there are exceptional circumstances which justify not issuing a suspended sentence.

The Board's continued concerns about staffing levels are recognised as it has been particularly challenging to recruit and retain Prison Officers and Operational Support Grades in recent years. However, the MoJ Resourcing team have made substantial efforts to market and support recruitment at HMP Aylesbury which is now projected to exceed the required staffing numbers in the coming months. In addition, in September 2023 an improved national advertising campaign was launched with prisons which are challenging to recruit to, such as HMP Aylesbury, being targeted with the highest level of support. The campaign aims to increase awareness and interest in operational roles, whilst also building pride and confidence among staff to improve retention.

Turning to the Board's concerns about modernising the regime and work opportunities for prisoners to support their release. Prisoners are provided with a variety of work opportunities where they can learn

technical and transferable skills, but there are certain limitations to the prison environment and some work which is necessary for the functioning of the prison estate. There is ongoing support being offered to prisons to make the work opportunities as relevant as possible to that which is available in the community. Following a successful test phase across 17 prison sites last year, the Head of Education, Skills and Work (HoESW) role has now been implemented across the prison estate. HoESW are senior education specialists who will lead on the design and delivery of Education, Skills and Work functions in prisons to improve prisoner education and employment outcomes on release. The HoESW took up post at HMP Aylesbury at the beginning of September this year. The prison has engaged with national HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Prison Industries colleagues to assess the existing workshop facilities and options for work to support the transition from a Long Term and High Security site to Category C training prison and to improve the work offer. The prison also took part in a national pilot to seek opportunities in maximising the regime and purposeful activity for prisoners. This considered barriers to delivery and engagement and enabled action to be taken to overcome these to create credible and realistic plans to grow the provision.

The prison has now implemented a new regime that has improved the amount of time out of cell prisoners can receive and a plan has begun to increase the number of prisoners who are meaningfully employed and renovation several workshops to enable additional employment, such as the new laundry and outdoor activities. In addition, whilst the existing workshops do already have employment pathways helping prisoners develop their employability skills and these are promoted throughout the prison to build prisoner awareness and increase engagement. The Activity Hub has held wing workshops to talk to prisoners about these employment pathways and education courses. This has also included partner agencies such as the Forward Trust and the Department for Work and Pensions who have also been meeting prisoners on induction to discuss the opportunities that are available.

Despite your concerns and recognising that there is still more to be done, I was pleased to note that the prison environment is clean and decent with prisoners being treated fairly and humane. It was encouraging to read that the change in the prisons population has resulted in a decline in violence and that the Psychology team provide regular training to staff to help them support more complex prisoners. It was also reassuring to receive your comments that Key Work was reintroduced and there were some improvements in the workshop provision.

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 I 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 AYLESBURY: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2022 – 31 MARCH 2023**

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

#### **Housing New Prisoner Categories**

Further to last year's response, HMP Aylesbury had produced a robust Transition Plan to ensure the re-role of the prison to a Category C Trainer maximised the opportunities that this presented, ensured progress was timely and that risks and issues were mitigated. This was overseen by the Prison Group Director and the Executive Director Public Sector Prisons South to ensure staff were supported. Since the prisons transition, a needs analysis has been carried out using segmentation data to undertake planning for the current cohort of prisoners and the future population. The prisoner population has now stabilised, including a reduction in young adult population and the majority of prisoners who require resettlement support are being transferred. In addition, the Offender Assessment System backlog has reduced and Reducing Reoffending meetings are being held regularly with improvements being made in the oversight and quality assurance of prisoner's progress against their sentence plans.

#### **Offending Behaviour Programmes**

Offending Behaviour Programmes (OBP) continue to be offered at HMP Aylesbury which are appropriate and based on a Category C trainer population. The OBP that are run are the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP), Identity Matters (IM), Kaizen General Violence and Becoming New Me Plus (BNM+) General Violence. The needs within the prison are regularly reviewed and it is recognised that there is a high need for the general violence and Identity Matters programmes which has resulted in the offer being increased over the course of the year in response to the change in population. HMP Aylesbury are working within the two-year prioritisation timescales and have a list of prisoners who are not a priority but are motivated to engage in OBPs should spaces become available. The prison also has a good partnership arrangement with HMP Erlestoke to transfer prisoners between the two sites to allow prisoners to engage with the appropriate interventions that they need.

#### **Prisoner Location**

Where possible HMPPS is committed to ensuring that prisoners are accommodated as close as possible to their resettlement communities and families, however, there are a wide range of factors involved in transferring and locating prisoners which may not always make it possible. This includes wider population pressures across the prison estate and where prisoners have specific sentence planning needs which can only be met at certain prisons. The allocation decisions must reflect both the specific needs and circumstances of the prisoner, including their security assessment, as well as the operating environment and range of services at the receiving prison.

HMP Aylesbury have developed and implemented a family strategy to support prisoners in maintaining or rebuilding ties with families and friends, including relocating the video visits booths into the main visits hall to maximise attendance and use. The prison holds a family day every other month including during the school holidays to enable families with children to access them. Scoping work has also been planned to understand why some of the population at the prison have not accessed social visits in over a year, this will include a question and answer session to help to understand barriers and provide another opportunity to supporting these prisoners. Prisoners who don't receive visits currently also receive additional pin credit to help them to maintain contact with their family and friends.

**Resettlement**

With the prison's population changing, the number of releases from HMP Aylesbury has decreased supported by appropriate transfers to resettlement prisons, leaving only a small percentage of the population left which will be released from HMP Aylesbury. HMP Aylesbury have established a good relationship with HMP Winchester which will take those prisoners scheduled to be released in next 12 months and 36 prisoners have already moved to allow them to receive appropriate resettlement support. Over 48 prisoners have also transferred to appropriate Category D prisons. For those prisoners who are released from HMP Aylesbury there is a process in place to ensure there is a transfer of responsibility between the Prison Offender Manager and Community Offender Manager. HMP Aylesbury offers an in-reach pre-release model from the Community Offender Manager and further support will be provided from the Pre-Release Team at HMP Bullingdon once they are sufficiently staffed. Prisoners are also supported in opening bank accounts and accessing ID, as well as receiving a visit from the Department of Work and Pensions prior to release.