

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Bullingdon
PO Box 50
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Oxon
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11 January 2024

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Bullingdon and I commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively. I have read your report with care. I was very saddened to hear that there were seven deaths in custody during the reporting year. I would like to reassure you that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

I share the Board's continued concerns about overcrowding and note that this issue has been raised in several consecutive reports. 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. As is well documented, the prison estate is facing population pressures 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, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) published a revised framework in Spring 2022 for the certification of prisoner accommodation from which the useable operational capacity of the estate is derived. 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. HMP Bullingdon regularly reviews the prisoner needs analysis and the prison has recently made changes to the education curriculum and work-place risk assessments to reflect the higher number of remand and short-stay prisoners. These prisoners can now generally access all activities and services, with the exception of offending behaviour programmes.

I appreciate the Board's recognition of the various initiatives taken by HMPPS to improve staff retention and training for those with limited experience. HMP Bullingdon's use of detached duty staff is expected to continue for the short term, however, this will reduce as staffing levels improve. The prison has worked hard to improve staff retention and data indicates that this is having a positive effect. Local and national

recruitment efforts have led to an increasingly healthy pipeline of new officers and operational support grades and we are optimistic that staffing levels will improve in the coming months.

Nationally, HMPPS has created a retention strategy which is linked to wider activities around employee experience, employee lifecycle, and staff engagement at work. Alongside the strategy, the retention toolkit continues to help identify local, regional, and national interventions against the drivers of attrition. This is utilised by establishments and Probation Delivery Units to ensure that they are embedding localised Retention Plans. Since the launch of the retention strategy, toolkit, and exit interview process in 2021, a new retention oversight process was introduced across prisons and probation in August 2022. The retention oversight process targets priority sites, both prison establishments and Probation Delivery Units, with the highest attrition rates and those that are a cause for concern.

Line managers at HMP Bullingdon meet with all staff on probation each month to review progress and identify any additional training or support needed together with performance monitoring. The prison has a robust training plan in place which includes a bespoke package designed to help staff manage boundaries and relationships with prisoners. HMP Bullingdon is currently running the Confidence and Capability toolkit, a HMPPS headquarters-designed series of briefings to frontline staff to upskill them in key tasks. Line managers are also being given additional training and support to improve their own capability and confidence. Feedback from the local annual staff survey informs HMP Bullingdon's People Plan which sets out what action is being taken to address concerns and develop the workforce.

Although the issues raised are repeated concerns, I was encouraged to note the significant reduction in the number of outstanding Offender Assessment System (OASys) plans from the previous two years, that there is a better curriculum for short-stay prisoners, and that there has been increased provision of communal worship for the major faiths.

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 the work you do.

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

RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Illicit Substances

Enhanced Gate Security (EGS) was introduced as part of the Security Investment Programme (SIP) in forty-two (42) high-risk prisons, which included HMP Bullington. The SIP package comprised new measures to tackle trafficking and the presence of contraband in prisons, including drugs and mobile phones. EGS was specifically designed to enhance local capabilities at the gate area and improve prison security entry systems, thereby reducing the conveyance of illicit items.

EGS replicates the measures used in airport screening and has introduced routine searching arrangements for staff and visitors on entry. It included investment in staff, drugs dogs, and the implementation of a range of security equipment such as fixed archway metal detection scanners, x-ray baggage scanners, and hand-held metal detection wands.

Recent evidence and intelligence indicates that the availability of drugs reduced over the last four months of 2023. The number of incidents where prisoners are believed to be 'Under the Influence' has reduced in frequency and severity, with fewer finds of psychoactive substances within the establishment. In addition to the EGS measures and x-ray body scanner, HMP Bullington's use of regional search teams for intelligence led searching together with a dog team to check all incoming mail is also proving successful in reducing supply. The use of drones by external organised crime groups is a growing concern and not exclusive to HMP Bullington. Reporting and evidence handling processes are in place in the event of a drone being intercepted or found.