



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Hewell
Hewell Lane
Redditch
Worcestershire
B97 6QS

21st January 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP HEWELL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 OCTOBER 2022 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2023**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Hewell. I commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively, particularly as you continued to operate with several vacancies. I was deeply saddened to hear there were two self-inflicted deaths during the reporting year. 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 share your concerns about the Crown Court outstanding caseload. The Covid-19 pandemic and the barristers' disruptive action significantly reduced the ability of the courts to hear and dispose of cases at the Crown Court. The number of cases brought before the Crown Court increased throughout 2023, with demand higher than expected. As a result, at the end of November 2023, the outstanding caseload stood at 65,100. I would like to assure the Board that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) remains committed to tackling the backlog and has introduced a raft of measures to achieve this aim. This includes funding for over 100,000 sitting days during the last financial year and is planning to deliver the same again this financial year, alongside recruiting up to 1,000 judges across all jurisdictions. In August 2023, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice announced that he will be investing £220 million for essential modernisation and court building repair work over the next two financial years, up to March 2025.

I acknowledge the Board is concerned about the lack of appropriate services for prisoners with complex mental health needs. This Government remains firmly committed to delivering improvements to mental health care and treatment for vulnerable offenders and defendants through non-legislative means and close and ongoing collaboration with partners. Some of this work includes driving forward a non-statutory independent role designed to improve oversight and monitor delivery of the 28-day time limit as set out in NHS England's Good Practice Guidance. In terms of the Mental Health Bill, this will be brought forward when Parliamentary time allows.

Thank you for bringing rigid bar handcuffs and PAVA spray tools to my attention. I am advised that when HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) introduced these tools they implemented a range of assurance and scrutiny measures. This included a national panel to monitor PAVA usage and analyse trends, and a policy mandating prisons to review and scrutinise every use of PAVA through their local Use

of Force committee. Although the roll-out programme is almost complete, HMPPS remains committed to ensuring there are safeguards in place that promote a culture of effective relationships between staff and prisoners. Further detail is set out within the attached annex to this letter under the subheading Insights and Assurance.

Turning to the Board's comments about the neurodiverse needs of the prison population. HMPPS is making good progress delivering their commitment to a new Prisoner Education Service, focused on giving prisoners the literacy, numeracy, and skills they need to move into employment or further training on release. Adult literacy remains a priority in the prison estate. A national Reading Action Group has been set up by utilising expertise from further education, third sector and prison service educational specialists. There is reading strategy in place for all prisons and Governors are held to account for ensuring the strategies are accessible and that inform the wider prison strategy. An Action Plan in response to HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Ofsted joint thematic report on the review of reading education in prisons: one year on, is in place and being actioned. I can assure the Board that significant progress has been made to increase support for neurodivergent people in prison through the Cross-Government Neurodiversity Action Plan. The MoJ will be publishing a final 18-month update in Spring 2024.

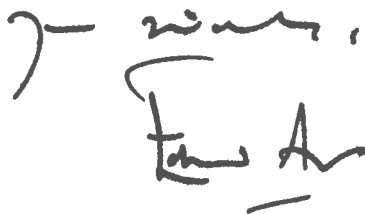
More broadly, HMPPS is in the process of reviewing the current neurodiversity screening tool with plans to procure a new digital, web-based screening tool to identify neurodiverse needs of prisoners. The new tool's specification has been developed with psychological and specialist educational input to ensure it covers a wide range of neurodivergent and other additional needs. It will be implemented as part of the new education contracts in Spring 2025. HMPPS is rolling out new Neurodiversity Support Managers across every prison by March 2024. I am pleased to note this new role has already made a positive difference at HMP Hewell.

I note the Board's concerns about prisoners' imprisonment for public protection (IPP). The Government's current view is that retrospectively changing the IPP sentence, which was lawfully passed, would give rise to unacceptable risks to public protection. It would inevitably result in the release of many serious sexual or violent offenders, where the Parole Board has not assessed them as safe to be released. It does, however, remain a priority that all those serving the IPP sentence receive the support they need to progress towards a safe release from custody or, where they are being supervised on licence in the community, towards having their licence terminated altogether. In that respect, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice announced on 28 November 2023, that this Government is taking these changes forward in the Victims and Prisoners Bill and will reform the termination of the licence for IPP offenders by making amendments to section 31 A of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997. The new measures will reduce the qualifying period which triggers the duty of the Secretary of State to refer an IPP licence to the Parole Board for termination from ten years to three years and further detail can be accessed here <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/proposals-for-review-of-ipp-licence-termination-criteria>. The amendments will restore greater proportionality to IPP sentences by providing a clear pathway to a definitive end to the licence and, therefore, the sentence. The Government also continues to focus on the rehabilitation of IPP prisoners through the refreshed Action Plan published on 26 April 2023. This Action Plan provides a renewed focus on supporting those serving IPP sentences in custody.

Despite your Board's concerns, it was encouraging to read the Governor and staff at HMP Hewell strived to deliver a safe, fair and humane regime and their commitment to improving equality and respecting diversity. It was also encouraging to note the Board witnessed committed staff who often worked late to support their colleagues and to maintain the safety and wellbeing of the prisoners.

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 annex.

I appreciate the valuable contribution from members of Independent Monitoring Boards and 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

HMP HEWELL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 OCTOBER 2022 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2023

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

IT Access

In-cell technology is provided to prisoners through the Launchpad programme, which provides:

- The digital infrastructure in prisons to support in-cell technology. This includes a securely managed Wi-Fi capability across the whole prison site, with separate prisoner and staff networks.
- Laptops for use in-cell with transactional services and a Content Hub. The transactional services include the ability for prisoners to top up their phone credit, choose meal options and send digital requests to different parts of the prison. They can also receive and reply to emails from family and friends. The Content Hub gives prisoners access to a range of local and national educational and supportive material.
- Kiosks on residential units that enable access to transactional services on a self-service basis. These are used by a small number of prisoners as a back-up to the laptops.

Launchpad currently provides laptops to approximately 10,000 prisoners in fifteen public sector prisons (PSP). We will be delivering Launchpad to a further four prisons by March 2025. Our ambition is to roll-out Launchpad across closed PSP estate. Further expansion of Launchpad is subject to funding availability, as such we will be seeking funding in the next spending review.

Release and Resettlement

We are currently reviewing and re-writing the key work training material, linking in with the Enable Project in relation to the full review and revising of the prison officer training.

Community Probation Practitioners have overall responsibility for release planning. However, the Pre-Release Team based in HMP Hewell is the link between the Probation Practitioner and specialist teams in the prison who provide resettlement services. The Pre-Release Team is committed to ensuring that everything is in place for when a prisoner is ready to leave prison, including progressing referrals that have been made to Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) suppliers and providing a point of contact for CRS (who are commissioned by Regional Probation Directors) seeking to engage with the prisoner.

Departments within the prison play a key role in contributing to risk management plans, ensuring decisions made are proportionate, defensible, and evidence based. The Interdepartmental Risk Management Meetings (IRMM) facilitates discussion in planning for release into the community, sharing of information with other relevant agencies, and contributing to multi-agency work. Those attending must have sufficient authority (delegated if needed) to be able to make decisions or commit resources for individual cases. The IRMM complements the Offender Assessment System Risk Management Plan. The formalised release plan arising from the handover process identifies activity / actions in line with the individuals' specific needs associated to accommodation and employment.

Training for New Prison Officers

We recognise that prison officers carry out an extraordinary job that has a positive impact on society where they support and listen to individuals and signpost them to appropriate interventions, and work with a wide range of stakeholders, including drug and alcohol agencies, volunteers, healthcare professionals, solicitors, police, and members of the public.

Some of the skills a prison officer develops during their foundation training include developing interpersonal skills and verbal communication to benefit all their relationships, including peers and

prisoners. These good communication skills are vital to encourage positive engagement with those in our care and is linked to identifying individuals who may be vulnerable whilst in a custodial or detention environment.

Those communication and relationship skills are built upon as new officers learn how to undertake incident management skills, and the steps they can use to defuse potential conflict situations, in line with approved protocols. This includes utilising de-escalation techniques when dealing with inappropriate behaviours and encouraging prisoners to engage in positive relationships and the regime. They also learn the skill of maintaining and updating documentation, reports, records and supporting systems in-line with local, national and organisational requirements. In addition, they leave their foundation training with the skills to follow and understand security procedures, including implementing searching techniques, management and use of keys, and dynamic security.

Within the two-year business strategy there is a clear commitment that the 'Enable' programme will transform capability and the support offer to prison staff, reviewing prison officer training by June 2024 and helping them to better motivate, support, and challenge people in prison. This work focuses on relational practice, an approach which gives priority to relationships that motivate, support and challenge prisoners. It is a type of Psychologically Informed Practice that has been successful in other sectors that work with individuals with complex behaviours and evidence suggests that it could have transformational impacts if applied to the justice system.

A full review of prison officer training is being commissioned by the MoJ's Permanent Secretary and is supported by an external review.

Insights and Assurance

In October 2023 HMPPS created a new function Insights and Assurance within the Operational Resilience and Response Unit. This team consists of the evidence resource previously associated with the PAVA roll-out, combined with Assurance and Practice Development leads. The aims of the team are to:

- Use an evidence-based approach, consisting of data, intelligence, and previous learning, to identify sites with the greatest need.
- Offer a blended approach of assurance and practice development tailored to the needs of the establishment.
- Identify thematic areas to prioritise and use the Use of Force programme board as the governance structure for this process.
- Share findings widely, both internally and externally where possible, and be transparent with current aims and longer-term objectives.

This work complements the launch of the new policy and curriculum, which places greater emphasis on communication and building good relationships to minimise and avoid the need to use force. This team works closely with those who were involved in reviewing the key worker scheme and strives to incorporate the latest evidence around promoting good relationships into assurance visits and the guidance they provide to prison officers.