



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Ford
Ford Road
Arundel
West Sussex
BN18 0BX

5th March 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP FORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2022 – 31 OCTOBER 2023**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Ford. I commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively, especially as you continued to operate with several vacancies.

I have read your report with care. I acknowledge the Board's comments about HMP Ford's resettlement function. I hope to assure the Board that recruitment and retention is a priority for the Probation Service. We have injected additional funding of more than £155 million a year to deliver more robust supervision, recruit over a thousand staff and reduce caseloads to keep the public safer. The Probation Service is currently recruiting a full-time probation services officer to be based at HMP Ford to improve the resettlement support. The Offender Management Unit (OMU) team at HMP Ford through collaborative work has ensured in the past eight months 100 % of prisoners being released to a secure accommodation.

Under the Resettlement model community probation practitioners have overall responsibility for release planning, to support them the Pre-Release Team can provide a link between the probation practitioner and specialist teams in the prison who provide resettlement services. From a Community Offender Manager (COM) perspective, London Probation has continued to prioritise recruitment activity to support pre-release planning and has made significant inroads with probation service officer grade and administrative support functions. As identified by the Board, London Probation is still experiencing significant challenges in terms of probation officer resource. However, there are over 200 probation learners in London who will, when qualified, reduce the deficit. London Probation continues to prioritise risk management and is working to improve resettlement activity.

More broadly, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) continues to focus their efforts on enhancing and centralising recruitment campaigns in priority regions, including London and Kent, Surrey and Sussex, alongside regional recruitment to help bolster the number of applications and improve the hiring time in to key operational roles. A brand-new campaign was recently launched to promote the different roles available and to highlight the nature of the work undertaken across HMPPS. The overall aim of this campaign is to improve recruitment and retention through increasing awareness and boosting consideration of these roles, particularly in challenging areas. In January 2024, the Probation Alumni Scheme was launched to encourage qualified probation officers and senior probation officers who have resigned within the last five years to return to the service, thus bringing back experience and significantly reducing the time it takes to hire. HMPPS has also implemented a Prioritisation Framework to support demand management in priority areas of delivery, where there are workload and staffing challenges. The Framework enables Probation regions to re-prioritise tasks for front line staff to ensure their workloads are

controlled as and when adjustments are required. HMPPS is beginning to see the results of their relentless focus on recruitment and retention.

Thank you for bringing to my attention the issues affecting some men's access to Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) particularly in the London area. My officials have advised that work is underway to streamline the workplace vetting processes and improve how information is cascaded between prisons and COMs, to help improve the response times to police background checks. London Probation in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police have provided resource to support the increasing number of police intelligence checks and this will continue into the next financial year. I hope to assure the Board that London Probation Senior Leaders hold a regular forum which provides an escalation route to monitor performance in this area and they have already seen an improvement in response waiting times because of the extra resource invested.

Turning to the Board's comments that imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentences are inhumane and should be removed from existing prisoners. I recognise the challenges raised within your report concerning those serving IPP sentences. However, I must emphasise that the enforcement of the IPP sentence is compatible with international human rights obligations. This Government has been clear that we want to drive down, safely, the number of people serving IPP sentences. The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice announced on 28 November 2023 changes being taken forward in the Victims and Prisoners Bill and reforming the licence termination 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>

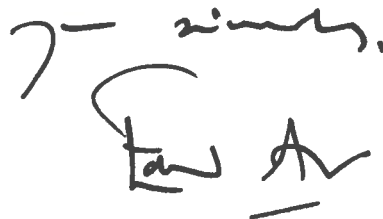
The amendments will restore greater proportionality to IPP sentences by providing a clear pathway to a definitive end to the licence and, therefore, the sentence. The Government also continues to focus on the rehabilitation of IPP prisoners through the refreshed Action Plan

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/39321/documents/192968/default/> published on 26 April 2023. Nationally, the number of prisoners serving the IPP sentence who have never been released stood at 1,227 as of December 2023, compared to 6,000 IPP prisoners in 2012. Locally at HMP Ford, they have introduced a favourable IPP specific forum (in addition to the monthly IPP forum) to address this cohorts needs.

Turning to some positive comments captured in your report, I am grateful to the Board for their recognition shown to the Governor and his team. I applaud the excellent work they have done to get the prison to stage it is at and this is evident by the impressive healthy prison test scores received in last year's HM Inspectorate of Prisons inspection. As Minister of State for Justice, it gives me a great sense of pride to hear about many positive things that are working well in prisons like HMP Ford. It was pleasing to note the healthcare provision is good at HMP Ford and improvements have been made to the early days in custody induction process.

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 the work you do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Argar', with a stylized flourish below it.

RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP

HMP FORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2022 – 31 OCTOBER 2023

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Expansion Project

The new build project experienced some hurdles due to the appointed constructor going in to administration in 2022. Since then, the project is progressing well. As with all expansion projects a full, independent review of existing facilities and an assessment of any additional ancillary requirements linked to the expansion was conducted (done by a new company), considering population changes at the time; this was used to inform a 'Site-Specific Brief' containing details of the required work. Following an assessment, the findings were subject to both an internal programme level review, which included an independent Prison Group Director on the panel to ensure operational considerations, and a further review by a HMPPS Operational Director.

HMP Ford was approved for several upgrades, including an expansion of the OMU, a new healthcare facility and a new multi-faith centre. The Governor's proposal for a new gym was considered but has been declined. At the present time there are no plans to increase workshop/activity buildings, physical education facilities, reception, or kitchen areas. To address the rise in operational capacity from the new build project, the Governor has currently identified 776 activity spaces and will continue to work to maximise this number.

All further requests will be considered, noting that demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding. Therefore, once a bid for a project is received, HMPPS must prioritise works very carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency.

Wing Refurbishment

The Governor is continuing to focus his efforts on improving A wing's accommodation and communal areas. As the Board is aware, a Prisoner Projects Team, led by a Prison Instructor, has been introduced in the past year. Regular project meetings are held, and a plan developed to identify areas for refurbishment over the coming year. Projects completed to date include the refurbishment of the ROTL team room and a kitchen on F2 landing. This work is funded by the prison in recognition of the need to improve the environment for staff and prisoners.

Major maintenance requests have been put forward to enhance some of the areas mentioned in your report to improve the conditions, but a full refurbishment of all areas will have to be scheduled and managed accordingly due to population pressures and funding, making this type of project unfeasible unless done gradually. Costs have been sought to move a landing and get the cells and landing flooring changed.

Major maintenance bids will be submitted for the forthcoming year with a focus on refurbishment. Daily checks are completed by prison staff to ensure that damage to fire doors on residential units are repaired as quickly as possible. If prisoners are identified as causing this damage, they are subject to the adjudication process.

Illicit Items

Reducing the conveyance of illicit items into the prison estate is a key priority for HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Contraband detection systems play a vital role in reducing crime in our prisons and the community and providing a safe and secure environment to promote rehabilitation.

Prison security has unique challenges, due to multiple points of vulnerability and the constant evolution of methods of conveyance, this requires an innovative and ongoing approach to maintaining and improving infrastructure, technology, and resources. The selection criteria for the prisons receiving equipment as part of the security investment programme (which formally closed in 2022) were based on an assessment of conveyance risks and threats to an establishment. As part of this assessment, it was determined open prisons would not receive such technology. No further funding has been agreed for additional site roll out of such capability and the initial investment was guided by risk levels at the time of investment. As such there are no plans to provide additional security capabilities from a central programme perspective but this does not preclude local investment or that designed by the regional Prison Group Director or Area Executive Director dependent upon their assessment of risk in 2024.

As the Board is aware, intelligence-led searching is conducted on prisoners returning from ROTL and the prison staff at HMP Ford work collaboratively with the police and dedicated search teams to complete these searches. This will, however, need to be reviewed to ensure that sufficient searching can take place when the population increases.

Community Accommodation Services

It is recognised having a settled place to live is key to reducing reoffending, cutting crime, and protecting the public. HMPPS notes the Board's concern about availability of Approved Premises (AP) places, which is why we have recently expanded this provision. The AP expansion programme has delivered 169 additional spaces, including four Independent APs and the first purpose-built site. We are also developing a new digitalised approach to AP referrals, through a National Central Referral Unit that will oversee assessment for suitability and eligibility, match individuals to placements, whilst maximising occupancy and use of national capacity. This new approach will enable us to improve timeliness and allow greater consistency and responsiveness, underpinned by the department's demand analysis. It is currently being piloted in the North East and Yorkshire and Humber regions and a national roll-out it is anticipated to follow.

More generally, as the Board is aware, our 12-week transitional service, known as Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS 3), launched initially in five probation regions, is now operating in all probation regions and Wales, and new places continue to be added as the service develops. At the end of March 2023, CAS3 accommodated 5,796 prison leavers, and the service will support thousands more as it develops. We are also expanding CAS Tier 2, which provides suitable gender-specific accommodation for Bailees and prisoners eligible for home detention curfew, who might be remanded or not released due to lack of suitable accommodation.

The Governor continues to work with Probation colleagues to ensure that accommodation on release outcomes are accurately recorded on NDelius (the main Case Management System which holds all Probation information on Service Users).

Prisoners' Property Complaints

HMPPS notes the Board's concerns, despite implementation of the *Prisoners' Property Policy Framework* in September 2022. The Framework places an emphasis on ensuring compliance with volumetric control limits, since anything within these limits will be transferred with the prisoner. As part of the planning for the current Prisoner Escort Custody Services (PECS) contract, which commenced in August 2020, PECS engaged with MoJ Policy Leads to review property limits on transportation, and it was agreed that the new vehicle fleet to have increased capacity to facilitate an additional half bag of property for consumables to the limit of 7.5 kg. PECS provide transportation for prisoners and their property. The vehicle fleet is

designed to transfer the number of prisoners intended, together with their property in line with the volumetric limit. In addition, the PECS supplier shall transfer a reasonable volume of legal documentation.

Volumetric control limits apply to all prisons and the *Prisoners' Property Policy Framework* contains a leaflet to explain these limits to prisoners. The Framework also introduced a new requirement that prisons must transfer excess property within four weeks unless there are exceptional circumstances which make this impossible. In addition, emphasis has been placed on the accurate recording of items. The Framework is clear that Governors and Directors should ensure management checks are undertaken to have confidence that prisoners' property is being handled correctly and with care. HMPPS will monitor the impact of the new Framework going forward and is committed to looking at what further improvements can be made.

The introduction of the digitally recorded Person Escort Record (dPER) includes a property section that accurately records the number and type of sealed property 'owned' by and transferred with the prisoner and an accurate record of property handover. This is now embedded as business as usual. The digital recording process has assisted with investigations for property that is lost in transit with PECS supplier. However, PECS receive few complaints for lost property overall and often the issue is not attributed to the PECS supplier.

As identified by the Board, HMP Ford's local complaints processes are robust with appropriate escalation methods in place. There are currently no outstanding complaints relating to property. Further liaison with sending prisons will take place to ensure property transfer is improved.

IMB Clerk

Provision of eight hours of administrative support is available to the Board each week and can be requested from HMP Ford's Head of Business Assurance or via the Business Hub Manager. A minute taker is provided for all monthly IMB meetings and for the handling and processing of expense claims. The IMB National Chair is in the process of reviewing the Memorandum of Understanding between the Management Board of the Independent Monitoring Boards and HMPPS.