



Ministry  
of Justice

Rt Hon Edward Argar MP  
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Channings Wood  
Denbury  
Newton Abbott  
Devon  
TQ12 6DW

18<sup>th</sup> March 2024

*Dear Chair,*

## **HMP CHANNINGS WOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2022 – 31 AUGUST 2023**

Thank you for providing your annual report on HMP Channings Wood. I commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively, particularly as you operated with several vacancies.

I understand the Board's concerns about the increasing older prisoner population and the provision of care that they will need. It deeply saddens me that with this increase, more prisoner deaths are occurring in hospital or a local hospice due to natural causes which happened on three of the six occasions prisoners died during the reporting year. However, I would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) plans to publish the ageing population strategy later this calendar year which will set out how the provision for older prisoners will be reformed including the physical estate, the prison regime, health and care services, and their preparation for release and resettlement. In the interim, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) continues to review the provision of adequate care nationally for an increasing ageing population and the HMPPS Diversity and Inclusion Team is working with the Regional Equality Leads to ensure prisons meet the Public Sector Equality Duty for those in its care. Each prison is now expected to nominate an Age Lead on their Senior Management Team, who is responsible for the provision of adequate support that older prisoners require. NHS England have introduced a 16-bed social care wing at HMP The Verne which opened in December 2023 providing 24-hour care. It provides care for prisoners from across the region and has accepted prisoners from HMP Channings Wood since its opening. In addition, the healthcare provider Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust has an Older Persons Nurse Practitioner covering the Devon prisons providing specialist support and advice for older prisoners, particularly those with Dementia. I also note the Board compliments the work of prisoner buddies at the prison, who assist with some daily tasks for those prisoners with mobility issues. This is welcomed and encouraging that these prisoners receive appropriate training by Recoop to provide this assistance and complement social care arrangements.

I am also aware that the Devon and North Dorset Prison Group Director replied to you on the 2 May 2023 regarding your concerns about the care of a prisoner with dementia which is referenced in your report. When the Social and Palliative Care Unit at HMP Exeter had to close for major fire improvement works and refurbishment, the social care wing at HMP The Verne had not yet opened. I am informed appropriate arrangements were put in place via the Local Council, healthcare provider and the prison to enable the prisoner's care to be managed at HMP Channings Wood, including a prison buddy. Care was overseen

by a dedicated Social Care needs member of staff who completed training with Devon County Council and the prisoner has since transferred to the social care wing at HMP The Verne following its opening.

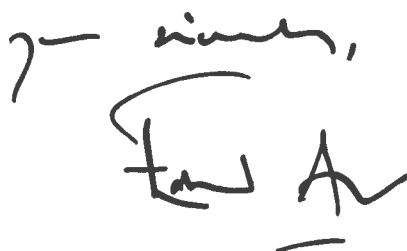
The Board can also be assured that the expansion of HMP Channings Wood and the ability to maintain the existing accommodation are distinctly separate. The expansion project is being delivered by the Accelerated Houseblock Development team with separate funding and a member of the prison's senior management team having local oversight. The expansion will provide an additional 494 prison places across two houseblocks. Each houseblock will contain four accessible cells on the ground floor, as well as 12 cells for those with lower mobility. To ensure the needs of an increased population can be met, the expansion will also provide a new kitchen, new staff facilities, extra carparking spaces, an expansion of the medical facilities, as well as places for the prisoners to work, exercise, practice their faith and go to classes. For the needs of an ageing population, there will also be accessible toilet facilities, workshops and classrooms.

It is recognised that repairs to the existing accommodation and delays have impacted regime time for prisoners and have caused frustrations for staff in their day to day work. MoJ Property Services is committed to ensuring that the existing accommodation is the best it can be whilst working within budgetary constraints. The facilities management site team is working on a programme of reducing their backlog of reactive works to ensure it meets their Key Performance Indicators. I understand the Board has been invited to attend the regular meetings between the Governor, MoJ Property Services and the facilities management provider which agrees the required improvements the site team needs to make. Issues of decency are a priority across all prison sites and there is an ongoing programme of shower refurbishment at HMP Channings Wood with many of the shower areas already completed. The tender for the next shower project, subject to funding, will be awarded for work to begin in the 2024/25 financial year. The site team also continues to explore options with contractors to make good the leaking roofs until a full repair can be completed by MoJ Property Services. The previous contract to complete the roof repairs was terminated due to unsatisfactory performance, however, a roof survey has been carried out and a new tender plans to be awarded for works to be carried out in the 2024/25 financial year.

Despite your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments that time out of cell to engage in purposeful activity is good and there is regular access to the gym and library being provided. It was encouraging to note that prisoners have good experiences with reception and induction and those with substance misuse are assessed by a recovery worker. I was pleased to read that Outside the Box personality disorder unit continues to be recognised for its support to some very challenging prisoners. It was also encouraging to read about the various initiatives to help prisoners develop their soft skills and in particular 'Inside Out' who provide support during the early days of release.

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 your work.

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

**RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP**

## **HMP CHANNINGS WOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2022 – 31 AUGUST 2023**

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

#### **Prisoners' Property**

It is recognised that most of the complaints HMP Channings Wood receives relating to property concern where it has not been transferred with the prisoner. Staff locally make every effort to contact the sending prison at the earliest opportunity to rectify these issues, however, when they are not able to be resolved, prisoners are encouraged to submit complaints in order that the issue is formally recorded and the correct process for addressing the issue can be followed.

The introduction of the digitally recorded Person Escort Record included a property section that accurately records the number and type of sealed property being transferred with the prisoner and an accurate record of property handover. This digital process has assisted with investigations in the few complaints overall about property that is lost in transit with Prisoner Escort and Custody Services providers and during the last 12 months there have been no complaints received from HMP Channings Wood in relation to the loss of property. In-line with the HMPPS *Prisoners' Property* Policy Framework if the volumetric control limit of items allowed in possession has been reached and there is no space on the escort vehicle to transport items safely and securely, then responsibility for transfer of any remaining items will rest with the sending prison. The Framework has 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 that management checks are undertaken to have confidence that prisoners' property is being handled correctly and with care. The Framework also places an emphasis on ensuring compliance with volumetric control limits which applies to all prisons and the Framework contains a leaflet to explain these limits to prisoners. However, the Board's concerns about the Framework are noted. HMPPS will be monitoring the impact of the new Framework and will continue to look at what further improvements can be made.