



Ministry
of Justice

Rt Hon Edward Argar MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Eastwood Park
Eastwood Park
Falfield
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2 April 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI EASTWOOD PARK: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2022 – 31 OCTOBER 2023**

Thank you for your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Eastwood Park. I commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively, especially as you had some vacancies. I was deeply saddened to hear there were two deaths during the reporting year, and 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. I am aware that my predecessor Damian Hinds MP was able to visit the prison in March 2023 during your reporting year and discussed some of the themes. I hope my visit during the week commencing 18 March 2024 was also helpful.

I appreciate the Board's concerns for women with complex needs. The Women's Estate Case Advice and Support Panel (WECASP) provides multidisciplinary support to prisons in managing a small number of complex individuals within the women's estate. There are currently six women at HMP/YOI Eastwood Park under WECSAP to help reduce their risk, as well as enabling them to progress and improve their wellbeing.

I hope to reassure the Board that NHS England will be working with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the healthcare provider(s) to address the provision of gender specific support for women's mental health, including neurodiversity, as part of their Action Plan in response to recommendation two of the published report '*A review of health and social care in women's prisons*'. The report can be accessed here <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/a-review-of-health-and-social-care-in-womens-prisons/>. Transfer times from prison to mental health inpatient units are already being monitored closely against the 28-day guidance, with planned actions to improve data reporting and the timeliness of the transfer process.

Turning to the Board's comments about improving probation services so that women are not sent to prison, the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan 2022 to 2025 which can be accessed here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy-delivery-plan-2022-to-2025> recognises the need to encourage alternatives to custody where it is in the interests of justice to do so. As set out in the draft Mental Health Act Reform Bill, this includes ending remand for own protection solely on the grounds of mental health. Whilst sentencing is a matter for the judiciary, the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan also includes a commitment to work with courts and increase understanding of the specific issues faced by women who offend. Judicial briefing materials have been designed to help raise awareness and of the available community-based sentencing options. A set of three short videos looking at women's distinct needs in the criminal justice system and implications for custody (including remand)

have been shared with the judiciary, sentencers, legal advisors and front-line court practitioners. Ongoing engagement will continue with sentencers and the judiciary to encourage the use of robust community penalties as an alternative to custody (as well as recommendations made in pre-sentence reports that are placed before the Courts).

In response to the Board's comments about supporting resettlement for women on remand, particularly with education and life skills, my officials within HMPPS have advised that the women's estate receives the highest funding per prisoner and is looking at increasing the use of additional Dynamic Purchasing System funding. Education is open to all prisoners whether sentenced or on remand, and the Governor can commission courses based on a needs analysis of the whole prison population. As part of HMPPS commitment to delivering a new Prisoner Education Service, new Heads of Education Skills and Work have been recruited to all prisons. These are qualified educational professionals who advise Governors on designing an appropriate curriculum for their population and drive forward a whole prison culture that values education and skills.

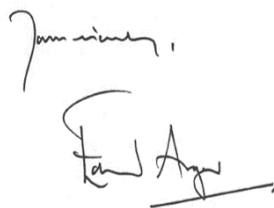
More broadly, the contracts for holistic rehabilitative services for women deliver bespoke and specialist support to sentenced women (including those who have served short sentences) after their release from prison. These services support women to meet their resettlement and rehabilitative needs, including help finding accommodation; help to find education, training or employment; support to meet finances, benefit and debt-related needs, help to address dependency issues, support to improve relationships with family or significant others; and support for their emotional wellbeing and social inclusion. These services are available post-release to all women who are subject to probation supervision.

HMPPS is currently working on extending the contracts for Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) Women's Services to unconvicted and unsentenced women in prison and is working towards a mobilisation date of Spring 2024. Probation Practitioners have overall responsibility for providing resettlement support, however, the delivery of short sentence support work for women with ten months or less to serve is done by Pre-Release Teams embedded within women's prisons who provide an important link between the women in prison, probation practitioner and the CRS provider in their home area.

Turning to some positive comments helpfully captured in your report, it was encouraging to read the Board has observed some excellent examples of prison officers handling challenging, unpredictable, and violent prisoners in difficult situations with patience, humanity and compassion; and to further note several officers were complimented in your survey. I was pleased to note equality and diversity has been a focus for the prison, and the Chaplaincy Team has extended their service with new Sikh, Buddhist and Pagan chaplains. Your comments about the prospects of the Busy Bean café, the Stretch group forum, and the charities supporting the women are noted and appreciated.

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 would like to pass my appreciation on to the Board and the Independent Monitoring Boards across the country who provide a valuable contribution, and I am grateful for the work you do day in and day out.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Argar', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP

HMP/YOI EASTWOOD PARK: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2022 – 31 OCTOBER 2023

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Staffing Levels

To help stem attrition, 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 a retention toolkit has been introduced which identifies Local, Regional and National interventions against the drivers of attrition, which are utilised by establishments to ensure that they are embedding individual Retention Plans.

A new exit interview process was introduced in 2021 as an opportunity to undertake in-depth conversations with staff to explore their reasons for leaving. The questions used in the exit interviews are based around the 10 drivers of attrition as contained in the retention strategy and toolkit. This enables us to gauge employee opinion and satisfaction in relation to their experience of these factors. Feedback from the exit interviews helps to shape and determine interventions.

Alongside the data gathered from exit interviews, the Retention Research Team led by an Occupational Psychologist carry out research into the drivers of attrition with the aim of identifying potential causes of resignations and support the subsequent design and implementation of interventions to address the issues. The research will involve one-to-one interviews and focus groups with staff covering a range of roles. Staff are asked a series of structured questions about their experience of working at the prison and the factors that they think might be contributing to attrition.

Since the launch of the retention strategy, toolkit, and exit interview process in 2021, a new retention oversight process was introduced in August 2022 to target priority sites. These include establishments with the highest attrition rates and those that are a cause for concern due to increasing attrition. Other factors contribute to decisions on which establishments are prioritised and includes attendance and rates of assaults on staff. All establishments are reviewed monthly and put in scope of this process based on need. HMP/YOI Eastwood Park has not come into scope of the retention oversight process but are being monitored in line with the monthly reviews.

In terms of investing time in staff, we recognise the staffing pressures and the importance of healthy staff and prisoner relationships, to motivate women in prison, help them realise their potential and reduce reoffending. As such, we are focused on staff learning and capability and improving our employment offer as pivotal to that. January 2024 saw the launch of the Emerging Leaders Programme available to Band 4 and 5 staff to shape the leaders of the future. With support from the HR Performance Manager, we have held events so that staff are aware of the career opportunities available at HMP/YOI Eastwood Park and wider within the organisation. We have made significant improvements to our staff induction programme and introduced a new role, a Learning and Capability Manager, who builds fantastic relationships with new staff at HMP/YOI Eastwood Park, and we continue to revise our induction offer based on feedback.

We have held full staff briefings, consultation events and invested the Care Team from other prisons so that all staff, including those who relentlessly care for others, can access the support they may need. We have changed communication styles to help improve staff morale, including the introduction of a 'breakfast club' briefing where staff are fully briefed on matters before they go on duty and can have an open discussion (they are offered a hot drink and morning snack). We continue to recognise the fantastic staff

at HMP/YOI Eastwood Park by recognising their hard work under the local reward and recognition scheme.

Expansion Project

We have made good progress developing designs for open and closed Gender Specific Trauma Informed accommodation for the women's estate. We have secured planning approval for two of the five sites and work continues to secure approval for the remaining three which includes HMP/YOI Eastwood Park. The Governor will keep you updated on any progress.

Use of Force (UoF)

The UoF Policy Framework <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-force-policy-framework> clearly defines the UoF criteria. HMPPS is rolling out an updated UoF training package. It reiterates the importance of relationship building and using communication methods to prevent the UoF. HMPPS has improved governance and reviewed processes, with bespoke guidance for committees in the women's estate, that supports learning which is fed back to officers.