



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Deerbolt
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County Durham
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MoJ Ref:

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HMP DEARBOLT: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 OCTOBER 2022 – 31 SEPTEMBER 2023

Thank you for your Board's annual report on HMP Deerbolt. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work that has been put into capturing these helpful observations, particularly as you were short of members.

I understand the Board's concerns about ageing prisons and that investment is needed to ensure maintenance and upkeep. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is developing a Long-term Prison Estate Strategy beyond the current spending review period investment. The Strategy's proposals will be underpinned by condition surveys that are already underway to assess the fabric, cells, and critical assets at each prison. These will inform long-term forward maintenance registers, which can be prioritised against future capital budgets. The investment for the Cell Mesh & Render project that commenced in 2021 has incurred delays due to issues with dated assets, such as boilers which required replacing by the onsite facilities management team to allow the project to conclude. It is acknowledged this impacted the regime and staff locally implemented contingencies to provide showering facilities elsewhere within the prison whilst maintaining prisoner safety. Other additional work has been undertaken as part of the project, including work on the D wings showers, staff toilets and decoration of all communal areas which funding had previously been bid for. Alongside this project fire safety improvements upgrades also took place, as well as upgrades to the distribution board and low voltage electricity. Six wings have now had the refurbishments completed, with C and I Wing the last to be completed in May 2024. K wing is due to be reopened in September 2024 with E wing planned to be completed in October 2024. Regarding the replacement laundrette facility, this opened in June 2024. The funding for the replacement was awarded in early December 2023 and implementation began in January 2024. In the interim, due to issues with the laundry service from other sites, small domestic washing machines and dryers were provided via a laundry on F wing and were in place in by the middle of January 2024.

I recognise the Board's request for prisoners to be located close to their family. HMP Deerbolt, being a category C training prison, provides a national resource and therefore can receive prisoners from anywhere in England and Wales. However, there are wide-ranging considerations involved in transferring prisoners and allocation decisions must reflect both the specific needs and circumstances of the prisoner, including their security categorisation, as well as the operating environment and range of services at the receiving prison. Where practicable, prisoners are accommodated as close as possible to their resettlement communities home probation region to maintain family ties. Whilst this is a priority, it is not always possible due to a variety of factors including wider population pressures, security concerns or where prisoners have specific sentence planning needs which can only be met at certain prisons.

Regarding Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) prisoners, HMPPS continues to focus on their rehabilitation through an updated action plan in response to the Justice Select Committee's report. This can be accessed here - <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/39321/documents/192968/default/>. The action plan will ensure that those serving IPP sentences in prison have a sentence plan tailored to their individual needs and will be held in a prison which provides the programme or intervention specified in their sentence plan allowing them to demonstrate that they no longer pose a risk to the public. The actions already undertaken have been working with the number of prisoners serving an IPP sentence who have never been released standing at 1,180 as of March 2024, down from above 6000 in 2012. The Northeast Area Leadership Team also recognise IPP progression as an area priority and an area IPP progression plan is being completed to cover all prisons and probation units in the area to improve the support IPP prisoners receive up to and after their release. At HMP Deerbolt, there are six IPP prisoners, four of whom were recalled to prison and each prisoner's progression pathway is assessed depending on need. Prison Offender Managers are working to progress them to various Psychologically Informed & Planned Environment Units or alternative prisons where the programmes they need are offered. To provide support locally they are invited to attend lifer forums and are prioritised for key worker sessions.

Turning to your concerns about prisons being equipped to deliver their designated roles and prisoners receiving the services they require to support their release. The National Allocation Protocol and Offender Flows enable prisoners to be held in prisons providing an appropriate level of security, as well as the appropriate interventions to allow them to progress with their sentence plan. It is recognised that to support reception prisons, maximise available capacity and ensure prisoners are accessing the required offending behaviour courses, some prisoners in the resettlement cohort are having to remain in training prisons in the interim. However, the Probation Service provide commissioned rehabilitative services for sentenced prisoners wherever they are held and released. The overall rehabilitation of an offender is coordinated by Community Probation Practitioners and supported by prison-based Pre-Release Teams, who provide immediate resettlement and pre-release support for all people in prison, including for accommodation, employment, mental health and substance misuse treatments. This coordination continues once the individual has left prison whilst they remain under supervision.

Support to find accommodation is provided, including the completion of accommodation and housing benefit applications, as well as support and guidance to ensure continuation of an existing tenancy. The prison based Strategic Housing Specialists across England and Wales are also working in partnership with probation teams and Local Authorities to improve the likelihood of prison leavers being housed upon release. To further improve coordination, Resettlement Passports are being introduced, which will bring together key information and services that an individual needs in one place to resettlement into the community, such as bank accounts, curriculum vitae and identity documents to prove the right to work and rent. In addition, Prison Employment Leads are working alongside Department for Work and Pensions Prison Work Coaches to provide a joined-up approach to prepare prisoners for employment. A new Prison Employment Initiatives Policy Framework was published on 30 April 2024 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-employment-initiatives-policy-framework> providing guidance on best practice regarding how to resource and operate employment initiatives to support prisoners on this part of their resettlement journey. HMP Deerbolt's own community engagement strategy will be developed in the coming year alongside reaching out into the community to source employers for prisoners on their release.

Despite your concerns, it was encouraging to receive your comments about the progress being made to expand the regime and provide more meaningful activity when prisoners are out of their cells which is improving morale among prisoners and staff. I was pleased to note the praise for prison staff when having to deal with prisoners challenging behaviours and do so in a committed and compassionate manner. It was reassuring to read about the efforts to maintain safety, such as the co-ordination of intelligence and

management of prisoners who should not associate with each other and it is welcoming to see self-harm incidents and prisoner-on-prisoner assaults have been reducing.

I note you have raised two 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.

The Lord Chancellor and I appreciated the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Deerbolt.

Lord James Timpson OBE
Minister of State for Prisons, Parole and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Detached Duty

The decision for a prison to supply staff to other locations, known as National Detached Duty, is considered following a review of staffing data. There is sufficient staff across the prison estate to support those sites with staffing shortfalls without depleting regimes significantly even with the additional resources required due to population pressures. The current threshold used to generate the initial supply data are prisons with 98% of target staffing, as it has been determined that this should not adversely impact regime delivery. The data takes into consideration non-effectives, such as staff not on duty due to maternity, being on loan or secondment or being temporarily promoted into other grades, as well as the number of Prison Officers undergoing training. The Prison Group Director and Area Executive Director also provide operational input before the data is considered at a validation panel which balances operational risk across the sending and receiving prisons. As at April 2024 HMP Deerbolt had a target Prison Officer staffing figure of 120 (currently reduced to 100 due to 186 spaces being out of use) and as the number of staff in post was 134, against the currently reduced target staffing, eight staff were requested for detached duty.

Recruitment and Retention

It is recognised that there have been shortfalls in prison officer numbers in many prisons over the past few years but there has been improved levels of retention and increased recruitment over the past 12 to 18 months. It is also acknowledged that recruitment in the locality of HMP Deerbolt is more challenging than other prisons within the geographic region, not least because there is not a substantial centre of population within easy travelling distance from the prison. However, enhanced levels of recruitment marketing are applied when necessary to increase the number of prospective applicants to ensure the demand for staff at the prison can be met. In addition, as the Board were made aware last year a retention oversight process was introduced in August 2022 to target prisons with the highest attrition rates and those that are a cause for concern due to increasing attrition. HMP Deerbolt was identified as one of the sites requiring support and a deep dive was undertaken by the Retention Research Team during December 2022 and January 2023. The Retention Research Team was led by an Occupational Psychologist who carried out research into the drivers of attrition to identify potential causes of resignations and support the subsequent design and implementation of interventions to address the issues. The research involved one-to-one interviews and focus groups with staff covering a range of roles and a feedback meeting has been held with the Governor, Prison Group Director and Head of HR to consider bespoke support that can be provided, as well as actions that can be taken forward locally to aid retention.