

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Exeter
30 New North Road
Exeter, Devon
EX4 4EX

11 September 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP EXETER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JANUARY 2023 – 31 DECEMBER 2023**

Thank you for your Board's annual report on HMP Exeter which I have read with care. 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 was deeply saddened to hear that one prisoner died during the reporting year. I offer my condolences to all their friends and family and would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

I understand the Board's concerns about mental health support for prisoners and the timely transfer to secure hospital. All prisoners have access to integrated mental health services within prisons commissioned by NHS England. These continue to be improved to ensure prisoners have access to timely and effective care and this is reflected in the National Partnership Agreement on Health and Social Care in England which sets out a priority workplan. The healthcare provider at HMP Exeter has undergone a review of their service model to take into account the needs of the prisoner population. It is acknowledged that there have been vacancies within the wider healthcare team not filled by permanent staff and these peaked at 48% last year but have since reduced. The internal bank staff of nurses and healthcare assistants have also increased reducing the use of agency staff. It is also recognised that vulnerable prisoners, who meet the threshold for detention under the Mental Health Act and require a transfer to secure hospital, do experience delays in accessing the specialist care they need. The Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) are working with health and justice partners to introduce a non-statutory independent role designed to improve oversight and monitor delivery of the 28-day time limit set out in NHS England's good practice guidance. NHS England also continues to analyse mental health transfer data, which includes referral, assessment, and transfer timeframes to understand issues with support offered to providers where there are challenges being experienced. Where prisoners are held in segregation awaiting a transfer, a behavioural support plan is devised with the prisoner reviewed daily by the local clinical team.

Regarding your concerns about overcrowding, on 12 July 2024 the Lord Chancellor announced a measure to free up prison places by temporarily reducing the time those sentenced to standard determinate sentences (SDS) serve in prison from 50% to 40% of their sentence. This will not apply to prisoners sentenced for sex offences and certain domestic-abuse-connected offences. It will also exclude serious violent offences with a sentence of four years or more. In addition, HMPPS is delivering additional modern uncrowded prison places to provide the right conditions

and a total of 10,000 places will be built by the end of 2025. There is also investment being made in the existing prison estate, including changes to the physical environment, testing new technology and critical prison maintenance to ensure that as much capacity as possible is kept in use and fit for purpose. The Board will also be pleased to know that Band 3 Prison Officer recruitment and retention improved during the reporting period at HMP Exeter. The regime plan is maximising purposeful activity spaces and attendance in both Tier 1 and Tier 2 activity with a weekly regime management planning meeting in place to ensure staffing resources are allocated to meet critical delivery more consistency.

Turning to your concerns about support for prisoners to access accommodation on release, the Community Accommodation Services Tier 2 (CAS-2) already provides accommodation for bailees and people released under Bail and Home Detention Curfew (HDC). It has an important role in supporting the HDC process to allow prisoners to be released to a suitable address and the number of CAS2 bed spaces increased to 45 in the South West during 2023 as part of the CAS2 expansion to 850 bed spaces in total. A further 18 bed spaces are being provided in the South West during 2024. In May 2023 the Community Accommodation Service Tier 3, which provides up to emergency accommodation for prisoner leaver for up to 84 nights, began to be delivered in the South West. There are also 48 full time equivalent Strategic Housing Specialists, across England and Wales and HMP Exeter has an allocated Strategic Housing Specialist (SHS). These work with local authorities and Homelessness Prevention Teams to remove barriers to accommodation and improve access to housing for prison leavers. Commissioned Rehabilitation Service provision is also in place at HMP Exeter to support prison leavers with accommodation, with the provider meeting its contractual arrangements. In addition, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has secured an additional £26 million for their Accommodation for Ex-Offender scheme which is being allocated to 111 local authorities across 84 schemes during 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years. It will target areas identified as high need to assist an additional 5,000 ex-offenders into private rented sector tenancies by end of March 2025. Local Authorities close to HMP Exeter including Cornwall, North Devon and Plymouth have been allocated this funding.

Despite your concerns, it was encouraging to receive your comments about the proactive work to address the causes of violence and improve management oversight. I was reassured to read that incidents of self-harm have been reducing, as well as the number of open Assessment Care in Custody and Teamwork. It was pleasing to note the improved support and induction for new arrivals and that the delivery of Key Work is increasing. I was also interested to read about the new Visits Hall and the new video conference centre providing the potential to increase the number of family visits and the ability to support Court links.

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.

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



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

CCTV System

Initially there was a project to upgrade parts of the CCTV system at HMP Exeter, however the scope of the project was changed to a full replacement with the installation of a new digital system that will give full coverage of all areas within the prison. HMP Exeter was also to undergo other projects to the perimeter wall, the gas main and replacement of the kitchen dampers to make it fully fire compliant. All of these projects including the CCTV system have now been incorporated together. The changes have caused some delay but it will result in a reduction in costs as one contractor will be responsible for all of the work. It will also allow additional work to be undertaken which will be the relocation of the Communications Room. Whilst the project remains in development, the tender process is underway and will be considered for funding in the 2025/26 financial year.

Prisoner Transfers

HMPPS continues to strive to maintain offender flows despite the ongoing population pressures being experienced across the prison estate. The remand population has grown to unprecedented levels because of the courts backlog and this is impacting the training estate as HMPPS has to prioritise capacity in reception prisons to continue to serve the courts. Due to the population pressures, HMP Exeter is being allocated transfers in accordance with offender flows. However, it remains the responsibility of prisons to arrange individual transfers in consultation with relevant receiving prisons and Prison Group Directors (PGDs). In doing so they are encouraged to support offender flows and to ensure as much as possible that the rehabilitation needs of each prisoner are met. However, there will remain instances where transfers are outside of the offender flows particularly where staff need respite from challenging prisoners. Where individual moves are agreed between prisons, HMPPS Population Management Unit will arrange the necessary transport as quickly as possible. However, this must be balanced with the limited available spaces across the estate and the need to use available prison transport as efficiently as possible. Locally, HMP Exeter are also continuing to work alongside the health commissioners to ensure that prisoner health needs continue to be met, as well as reviewing the function of F-Wing to ensure that the correct prisoners are located on the unit according to their health needs.

Urgent Notification Funding

Following the Urgent Notification (UN) at HMP Exeter enhanced supervision remains in place to regularly review and discuss the immediate 28-day action plan and the subsequent action plan in response to the full inspection report. The discussions regarding the sustainability of the improvement at HMP Exeter take place at the highest levels via a UN Strategy and Action Group (SAG) including oversight by a Director General. This scrutiny allows for all funding decisions to be fully considered and the ongoing support for HMP Exeter to be maintained to allow improvements to become fully embedded prior to the removal of any interim or temporary roles. Funding from the Prison Performance Support Programme (PPSP) for the temporary posts introduced in response to the UN was scheduled to end at the end of August 2024. Following discussions with the Area Executive Director and Prison Group Director it has been agreed to maintain the funding until at least March 2025. These temporary posts are also being evaluated to evidence the effectiveness and identify what the impact would be of removing these posts. In addition, HMP Exeter remains a standard plus prison in terms of its complexity, however, as part of the annual review process a submission will be made again for HMP Exeter to be considered whether it is a complex prison.