

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Grendon
Grendon Underwood
Aylesbury
HP18 0TL

17 September 2024

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for your Board's annual report on HMP Grendon. 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 continued concerns about the timescale some prisoners are having to wait for a decision from the Secretary of State on whether a move to open conditions will be accepted or rejected following the Parole Board's recommendation. It is the responsibility of the Secretary of State to respond within 28 calendar days and the backlog of cases have been reduced by adding further resource focussed on Parole Board recommendations for open conditions to allow prisoners to be informed of the outcome of their parole as soon as possible. Officials with delegated responsibility can also make decisions on behalf of the Secretary of State to expediate the process and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) are currently considering further initiatives to ensure that where indeterminate sentenced prisoners are considered suitable for open conditions, these decisions are made swiftly and effectively.

Turning to your concerns about the capital funding needed to improve the prison environment, HMPPS is investing approximately £26.3 million into HMP Grendon between 2020-2025 to improve fire safety and night sanitation. A bid for a project to replace windows has also been submitted and will be considered for inclusion in future capital maintenance programmes. It is recognised that upgrades are needed due to the age of the wings, however, the prioritisation of the available funding does prevent some projects of this size and cost being able to progress. It remains the case that demands for maintenance are greater than the available funding. Therefore, HMPPS is having to prioritise bids very carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency. HMPPS is also 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.

Despite your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments recognising that most prisoners consider they are supported, treated as individuals and respected by staff. I understand the Governor has setup a people group to improve relationships which also incorporates staff wellbeing, reward and recognition. I was pleased to note that new wing health champions are promoting a healthier lifestyle which has reduced some pressure on the onsite healthcare professional. It was also encouraging to read about the soft skills initiatives such as the 25th anniversary of the Grendon Debate, as well as the artist in residence and art gallery to showcase the work of prisoners.

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 Grendon.



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

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

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners Out of Therapy

Further to last year's response, HMPPS has continued to manage significant population pressures with HMPPS Population Management Unit engaging with Grendon to prioritise transfers for prisoners who have spent the most time out of therapy. This must be balanced with the available spaces across the estate and the need to use available prison transport as efficiently as possible but to help reduce the pressure on prisons places on 12 July 2024 the Lord Chancellor announced temporary changes to standard determinate sentences. HMP Grendon also continues to coordinate with other prisons to enable transfers for prisoners who are out of therapy and a weekly meeting is held, chaired by the Deputy Governor, to proactively manage the population.

Fire Safety Project

It is acknowledged that the Fire Safety Improvement project at HMP Grendon is nearly two years over the initial projected end date. There are always risks of delay with site wide projects of this size and complexity, especially in the current commercial and construction landscape. Working in an operational prison environment also brings additional challenges and it's not unusual to discover additional unknown requirements once works commence, such as the presence of asbestos. HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice continue to work with the contractors to avoid further slippage wherever possible, however challenges have also been experienced in recruiting the large number of Operational Support Grade escorts required for all the projects currently active at HMP Grendon. The project is now projected to conclude in August 2025. Lessons have been learnt during the project and the remaining wings due for completion do have a reduced project completion time compared to previous wings.

Night Sanitation System

It is acknowledged that the only solution to provide all cells with running water and sanitation would be a refurbishment including structural changes or new replacement wings which would require significant capital funding. Whilst there is an annualised capital maintenance allocation agreed with HM Treasury this is being primarily being invested to make sure prison places remain in use and make other improvements wherever possible. As the Board will be aware from last year's response, as part of the Fire Safety Improvement project, all existing cell door locking switchgear and the associated IT are being replaced to mitigate issues occurring in future with the performance of the overall night sanitation system.

Prisoner Wages

Governors do continue to have the discretion to pay above the nationally set minimum rates of pay in Prison Service Order (PSO) 4460 Prisoners' Pay and are required to review their local pay policy annually. However, budgetary pressures for prisons do mean that there is little scope to significantly improve the prisoner pay budget. HMP Grendon did instigate a 50p per week pay rise in late 2023 and the prison holds regular forums to discuss canteen, clothing from family and

other benefits that can help supplement the low wages. The Board will be aware that in response to the rising cost of living, several measures were also introduced, a national 10% uplift in private cash allowances, this is money that can be sent in by family and friends of prisoners, was introduced in September 2022 to help mitigate against price increases. In November 2022, several new value brand product lines were made available through the Prison Retail service, giving prisoners the choice to purchase less expensive non-branded items just as people in the community are doing. Purchases of these value brands are becoming increasingly popular and work is underway to increase the number of these products across the range. In addition, the Prison Retail service undertakes a quarterly benchmarking review to make sure the canteen prices that prisoners are having to pay remain consistent with the wider economy.