

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP High Down
High Down Lane
Sutton
SM2 5PJ

MoJ ref: SUB117411

19 September 2024

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP High Down. I have read your report with care and I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations whilst remaining short of members. I do hope that the Board had the opportunity to meet HRH the Princess of Wales who visited the prison as Patron of The Forward Trust on 12 September 2023.

I was deeply saddened to hear four prisoners died during the reporting year, as well as another individual shortly after release. 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 for those prisoners held in segregated conditions who require transfer to a more appropriate setting. It is acknowledged that the Care, Separation and Reintegration Unit (CSRU) at HMP High Down is not the best place for prisoners with serious or ongoing mental health issues, however comprehensive support plans are in place for each prisoner. The CSRU benefits from the mental health team carrying out daily rounds, a consultant psychologist attending on a weekly basis, as well as dual trained adult and mental health nurses carrying out weekly reviews. The number of prisoners at HMP High Down that do not pass the initial segregation algorithm assessment is low and wherever possible the prison tries to reintegrate the prisoner back on to a Houseblock or into a more suitable environment. A healthcare transfer protocol has been developed by the London Prison Group, to be used when a transfer is required from a Category C prison to a Category B prison on healthcare grounds. To also support timely transfers to secure hospitals, the funding of a transfer coordinator is continuing, alongside weekly transfer calls and multi-disciplinary escalation meetings, which include NHS Commissioners, hospital providers and Healthcare providers. The rollout of a clinical template for mental health transfers from the adult secure estate is also allowing NHS England to gather further data to improve the mental health pathways across the South East.

Regarding your concerns about the suitability of some prisoners to comply with Category C prison regimes, effective security categorisation is fundamental to risk management and ensuring good order is maintained.

The security categorisation process provides for a holistic assessment of risk, taking account of a broad range of information including from criminal justice and law enforcement agencies where available. It supports the categorisation of individuals to the lowest security conditions necessary to manage their risk and regular reviews take place to ensure that individuals continue to be assigned to the security category most appropriate to manage their risk throughout their time in custody. The Board can also be assured that a core principle of the categorisation process is that an individual's security category must not be adjusted to achieve a better match with available spaces within the estate and that an individual will not be allocated to a prison of a lower security category than the security category assigned to them. Where a prisoners risk has changed, HMP High Down will complete recategorisation reviews and prisoners are transferred back to the Category B estate as soon as possible.

Turning to your concerns about probation staffing workloads, it is recognised that HMP High Down has a shortfall in Probation Prison Offender Managers (POM). Recruitment and retention remains a priority across the Probation Service and £155 million a year in extra funding has been provided to deliver more robust supervision, recruit thousands more staff and reduce caseloads to keep the public safer. Focused efforts on enhanced, centralised recruitment support in priority regions, including London are beginning to evidence results with staffing levels in London increasing by 6.6% over 12 months ending 30 June 2024. Staff moves under the Civil Service Detached Duty scheme have also been supported, for staff willing to move to London and other most in need areas to aid immediate short-term staffing challenges. Locally the prison continues to work creatively with probation colleagues to deploy support using the Offender Management in Custody Workload Case Management Strategy. Whilst Prison POMs are not permitted to hold responsibility for Probation POM cases, they can undertake agreed activity in the strategy. In addition, the national Offender Assessment System (OASys) Taskforce has been supporting the prison since June 2023 to complete OASys assessments and this provision has helped ease some of the issues.

Despite your concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments about the Safety Team's strategies to reduce self-harm and that there has been a reduction in serious assaults on staff. I note the challenges the prison has been facing with illicit items and it was positive to read that action has been taken to increase patrols of the prison perimeter. Whilst there is still more to do it was encouraging to read that there has been progress to address the concerns raised in your last report regarding transfers to secure hospital, canteen delivery and the incentives scheme.

The Governor and staff will continue to progress the work to transition into a high functioning Category C prison, including addressing the local issues of concern in your report and will of course keep you informed of progress as work continues. I look forward to the Board being able to report on these positive changes in the forthcoming reporting year. HM Prison and Probation Service (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 and dedication on behalf of HMP High Down.



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

The emphasis must remain on prisoners complying with volumetric control limits, since any property within these limits will be transferred with them, including items which are exempt such as legal papers. The digitally recorded Person Escort Record includes a property section to accurately record the number and type of sealed property owned by and transferred with the prisoner and this has assisted with the few investigations for property that is lost in transit with Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) suppliers. It is simply not possible to transfer with a prisoner all the excess property which they might have accrued above volumetric limits. Where the limit of items allowed in possession has been reached then responsibility for transfer of any remaining items remains with the sending prison and there has been a requirement since the introduction of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework for prisons to transfer any excess items within four weeks. Previously, there was no time limit in place. HMPPS is aware of the problems around property and continues to look at what further can be done. Locally HMP High Down has reviewed the cell clearance process implementing a new system and continues to work on improving compliance with the volumetric control limits to support the commitment to reduce property becoming lost.

Shower Refurbishment

The Board will be aware that a funding bid for the full refurbishment of showers at HMP High Down was submitted in January 2018 which was approved and added to the Capital Maintenance Project Pipeline. Refurbishment works to the following showers have since been completed on House Block 2 – A3, B3, C2 & C3 and House Block 4 – A2, B1, C1 & C2. It is acknowledged there have been some minor remedial work completed on House Block 3 – A1, C1, C2 & C3 which were temporary and still require a complete refurbishment. HMPPS will be working with Ministry of Justice Property Services to establish which showers remain unsatisfactory and commission a project to address these. However, it remains the case that demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding and work will therefore continue to be carefully prioritised to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency.

Illicit Items

Under the Physical & Special Security Design Guide, Standard No STD/Z/DG/068, there is no requirement to provide CCTV for Category C prisons, such as HMP High Down, nor is there a policy requirement for a Category C prison to be covered by CCTV or a Perimeter Intrusion Detection system. However, the Board's concerns about the role that CCTV coverage can play in tackling illicit items entering a prison are recognised. Over the last 2 years nearly £100k has been spent at HMP High Down on repairs and remedial work to the existing CCTV and investigations are being carried out by the service provider on the Perimeter CCTV. Business case bids have also been submitted for funding for CCTV coverage and lighting to improve the overall physical security of HMP High Down which will help to tackle illicit items being thrown over the perimeter.