

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Highpoint
Stradishall
Newmarket
Suffolk
CB8 9TG

9 September 2024

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Highpoint. I appreciate the Board's efforts in carrying out its statutory role effectively, especially as you continued to operate with several vacancies.

I was deeply saddened to hear two prisoners died during the reporting year. I would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

I understand the Board's continued concerns about prisoners' property being lost or delayed during transfers. The emphasis must remain on prisoners complying with volumetric control limits, since any property within these limits will be transferred with them. This includes items which are exempt from volumetric control, such as legal papers. It is not possible to transfer all excess property with a prisoner which they might have accrued above these limits. 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. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is aware of the problems around property and continues to look at what further can be done.

Locally at HMP Highpoint, the Governor has provided assurance that prisoners' property is being managed robustly with appropriate escalation routes in place. Liaison with sending prisons take place to ensure property transfer is improved. The prison recently introduced a system to further improve the handling of property in reception and now holds reception days, a two-week rolling system for prisoners to submit their queries and questions onto a database. The reception staff will then update the database with a response and where needed, they will arrange for the prisoner to attend reception on their allocated day to go through their property. This process seems to be working well.

Furthermore, when it has been agreed that a prisoner can be sent in a parcel from a loved one, the parcel will arrive at HMP Highpoint and will be subject to an x-ray and checking by the drug dog. The prisoner is invited to reception so that the parcel can be opened in their presence, and this is filmed on body-worn video camera and a full list of the contents then logged on the property card. Any items to remain in the possession of the prisoner will then be provided. Only

the Head of Operations can provide final authority for approving parcels being sent into the establishment to ensure the request is appropriate and necessary. The only exception to this is for indeterminate sentenced prisoners who are automatically approved for a parcel to be sent in during the month of their birthday.

Turning to some positives captured in your report, it was reassuring to read that the Board considers the bereavement support provided by the chaplaincy as exceptional. I was pleased to note the generally good communication between staff and prisoners, that the segregation unit continued to be well run and used effectively to support those in their care, and of the dedication of the diversity and inclusion lead in providing much valued support to prisoners. I was also encouraged to read about the improvements made to education, together with the provision of therapeutic courses in art, music, and creative writing.

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 Highpoint.



Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

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

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Facilities Management Performance

The national service provision is under review through the Property Transformation Programme with plans to implement outcomes by 2026. Currently there are no plans to appoint an alternative contractor. Government Facility Services Ltd.'s performance for planned maintenance is improving and a fortnightly action plan meeting is in place with the relevant stakeholders to drive actions forward. Work to improve reactive works performance remains ongoing and there are action plans in place locally to support this.

Security Netting

Funding has now been approved to replace the netting for all areas for units three, four, five and ten. The mitigation that was enacted at the time such as, but not limited to, increased external fence checks and internal compound checks remain in place. This has proved successful in intercepting throwovers and has on occasion resulted in arrest. The enabling works for the new-build accommodation alongside unit four have also meant that 'throw-overs' in the area of units three and four have decreased.