

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Morton Hall
Swinderby
Lincoln
LN6 9PT

11 September 2024

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Morton Hall. I have read your report with care and I commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively, especially as you operated with several vacancies. The initiative to work collaboratively between the Boards of the three Foreign National Prisons is appreciated. I was deeply saddened to hear there was one death in custody during the reporting year 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 accelerating the casework process for foreign national prisoners eligible for the Early Removal Scheme (ERS). Since January 2023, Home Office casework resource has increased with the addition of 400 caseworkers. This has benefitted all removal mechanisms with a focus on ensuring decisions are made early in the process to drive up removals directly from prison. The increase in caseworkers has also allowed for a focus on reducing the numbers of Foreign National Offenders (FNOs) leaving prison on immigration bail. FNOs are referred to the Home Office for deportation immediately following sentencing. The timeliness of criminal court proceedings and extensive periods on remand means many prisoners will reach their ERS window immediately or very soon after they are sentenced. It is therefore not always possible for the Home Office to carry out all the case working and administrative processes as soon as an FNO becomes eligible for removal under ERS, even when they wish to return voluntarily.

Cases can be significant with complex challenges, and while legal challenges can frustrate immediate deportation, the Home Office remains resolute in its commitment to deport those who abuse our hospitality. HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) is working closely with the Home Office to ensure the ERS process runs as efficiently as possible focusing on operational improvements and more robust data. Increasing the window to eighteen months has already resulted in increased removals. Between January and March 2024, almost 400 FNOs were removed from the UK via this scheme, a 61% increase compared to the equivalent period a year earlier.

Population pressures across the estate have been well documented and HMP Morton Hall reached capacity during the first half of 2024 and continues to operate close to capacity following the transfer efforts of the Governor. The Observation, Categorisation, and Allocation (OCA) team at HMP Morton Hall is provided with a spreadsheet each week that details all FNOs in custody

throughout the prison estate. This spreadsheet aids the team to filter prisoners by sentence length, offence, age and other factors to identify FNOs that could potentially be transferred to HMP Morton Hall. Once all necessary processes have been completed, the move is scheduled up to two weeks in advance to allow the establishment to maintain the operating capacity and to account for scheduled removals from HMP Morton Hall to an Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) or potential releases.

I note that this is the second annual report since HMP Morton Hall was repurposed from an IRC to a prison and it was encouraging to receive your comments that officer-prisoner relationships continue to be good, that there is an emphasis on consultation with prisoners with speedy responses, and that there were more timely notifications of prisoners' immigration status from the Home Office. I was further encouraged to learn that a rehabilitative approach is being fostered at HMP Morton Hall and almost all prisoners are complimentary about officers and staff.

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 Morton Hall.



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

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

HMPPS notes the Board's concerns about inter-prison prisoners' property transfers. Prisoner Escort Custody Services (PECS) provide transportation for prisoners and their property. The vehicle fleet is designed to transfer the number of prisoners intended together with their property in line with the volumetric limit and the suppliers will additionally transfer a reasonable volume of legal documentation. The introduction of the digitally recorded Prisoner Escort Record (dPER) accurately records the number and type of sealed property 'owned' by and transferred with the prisoner and an accurate record of property handover between different Stakeholders. The digital process has assisted with investigations for property that is lost in transit with PECS suppliers.

The emphasis however must remain on prisoners complying with volumetric control limits, since any property within these limits will be transferred with them. It is simply 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. HMPPS is aware of the problems around prisoners' property and continues to look at what further can be done.

Food Budget

The daily food allowance for 2024 was increased from £2.72 per prisoner to £3.02. The prison does not have the ability to purchase food outside of the central contract and menus are planned around the Catering Operating Manual which stipulates how to ensure a balanced diet and is in line with guidance from the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The FSA advises that a third of a plate of food should be constituted with carbohydrates, and five menu choices are offered at lunch and tea giving prisoners options to choose a varied and balanced diet. Quarterly menu reviews are conducted at HMP Morton Hall whereby feedback from prisoners is considered. Regular feedback is provided to the central food supplier.

Prisoner wages at HMP Morton Hall also increased in April 2023. HMP Morton Hall secured a commercial contract and it is envisaged that the revenue from this contract will enable the prison to further increase prisoner wages later this year.

Prisoner Canteen

HMPPS' Operational Contract Management Team (OCMT) hold the canteen supplier (DHL) to account using a suite of key performance indicators and apply commercial levers to improve performance as required. Formal performance reviews take place monthly and cover operational issues, service issues, and risks to service delivery. The supplier strives to ensure agreed and advertised products are consistently available, including high quality fresh items. The availability of specific items is dependent on a number of factors and is often beyond the control of DHL/HMPPS.

The Board will be aware that the supplier is now represented at the monthly Prison Representative Group meeting to provide explanations and assurances directly to prisoners. DHL have recently given assurances that their quality assurance process will be improved. DHL

will also provide easy-read notices with clear updates of products not in stock which will include expected 'back in stock' dates for further clarity and to help reduce frustration. The Head of Residence at HMP Morton Hall is liaising with DHL staff to observe canteen delivery to review the on-site process from start to finish. The aim is to gain a better understanding of the process and identify ways to improve the service. Management have requested canteen delivery on a Friday to help with the quality of fresh produce.