



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Rochester
Rochester
ME1 3QS

MoJ ref: SUB119461

26 November 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI ROCHESTER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 APRIL 2023 – 31 MARCH 2024**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Rochester. I have read your report with care and I am really grateful to you and your colleagues for carrying out your statutory role effectively and for the huge amount of work that has gone in to preparing this report about the current state of the prison. It is all the more remarkable that you have done this whilst continuing to operate with several vacancies.

I was truly saddened to hear about the death of a prisoner at HMP/YOI Rochester during the reporting year. I offer my profound condolences to their friends and family. As the Board will know, it is important in these tragic circumstances that we act on recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman and we will take these extremely seriously.

I fully understand the Board repeating its concerns surrounding the limitation of suitable bail accommodation in the South East. The Board will be aware that the HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Community Accommodation Service Tier 2 (CAS-2) provides accommodation for those applying for bail or home detention curfew (HDC) who don't have other suitable accommodation. CAS-2 is currently in the process of expanding its provision further to 1,350 bed spaces by December 2025, which will include accessible bed spaces. As part of the expansion there will be a further 15 bed spaces expansion in Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) region, to keep it in proportion to overall demand and HDC levels against the national share. I am aware that the KSS Probation Service region is fully engaging with key stakeholders to minimise the risk and increase the possibility of housing all prisoners and prison leavers identified as likely homeless and will continue to do so going forward. Whilst there is more to do it is worth noting that in total, more than 85% of homeless releases last year in the KSS region were subsequently housed and it is predicted that this will increase to above 90% in the coming year.

I also sympathise with the Board's concern about probation staffing but can provide assurance that recruitment and retention remains a priority across the Probation Service. Probation staffing at HMP/YOI Rochester remains challenging and HMPPS has launched various initiatives to deliver more robust supervision, recruit more staff as well as reduce caseloads. Between 20 June 2021 – 31 March 2024, overall staffing numbers increased by 17% across the entire Probation Service. In addition to this, HMPPS remains committed to recruiting 1,000 new trainee Probation Officers by March 2025 and probation vacancies at HMP/YOI Rochester continue to be advertised, as well as temporary probation support being deployed to the prison. One of the Chief Probation Officer's key priorities is to strengthen the Senior Probation Officer (SPO) role and an initiative has already been launched to achieve this.

HMPPS will be exploring ways to build capacity within the SPO grade, to ensure that SPOs have the right tools to deliver their role, develop their collaboration, capabilities and skills, and enable them to focus on essential quality practice. HMPPS has also implemented the Prioritisation Framework to support demand management on priority areas of delivery where there are workload and staffing challenges. This framework is enabling Probation regions to re-prioritise tasks for front line staff to ensure staff workloads are controlled.

Despite these challenges, I welcome the opportunity that the employment fair provides to prisoners and was very encouraged that plans are in place to hold similar ones going forward. It was really interesting to read about the unique Stonemasonry workshop offering, which allows prisoners to gain a specific skill set from a master stonemason. I was also very pleased to see that a neurodiversity support manager has been appointed and has made a substantial impact on awareness of neurodiversity across all areas of the prison, alongside plans for H Wing to become a dedicated neurodiversity wing and an incentivised substance free living area.

You will be aware of the recent invocation of an Urgent Notification by HM Inspectorate of Prisons on 2 September 2024 following an inspection in August. The immediate 28-day action plan was published on 30 September and the subsequent action plan in response to the full inspection report will be issued shortly. Enhanced supervision is in place to regularly review progress against the immediate action plan and the full action plan once published, and discussions regarding the sustainability and impact of the improvement at HMP/YOI Rochester takes place via a UN Strategy and Action Group (SAG) with oversight by the Director General Operations.

I note you have raised two local issues of concern in your report, which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues and HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Secretary of State and I hugely appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful to you and your team for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Rochester.



Lord Timpson
Minister 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 ongoing concerns about the amount of property prisoners are allowed to accrue. Volumetric control applies to all prisons in England & Wales and the Framework contains a leaflet to explain these limits to prisoners. HMP/YOI Rochester is always actively encouraging prisoners to comply with the volumetric control measures with regards to their property. When prisoners first arrive in Reception, property is processed and, for those with excess property, they are given the opportunity to select items up to the volumetric control limits and other items are sent out to family or stored. HMPPS is aware of the problems around property and continues to explore further options to alleviate the concerns.

Estate Infrastructure

HMPPS is continuously reviewing the investment that is required across the prison estate, including at HMP/YOI Rochester, in this and for the next Spending Review period. The proposals will be underpinned by the data collected in recent condition surveys which assessed the fabric, cells, and critical assets at each prison, including HMP/YOI Rochester. These will inform long-term forward maintenance registers, which can be prioritised against future capital budgets. At the same time the Ministry of Justice Property Directorate continue to work closely with the facilities management provider to ensure that HMP/YOI Rochester can continue to provide safe, secure, and decent living conditions. Roof repairs were undertaken earlier in the year to the Library, A Wing and Education and a specialist company has been identified to review the extraction system on A wing relating to the mould as it is recognised there is ongoing issues on a landing.