



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Five Wells
Doddington Road
Wellingborough
NN8 2NG

MoJ ref: SUB11648

3 December 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP FIVE WELLS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 APRIL 2023 – 31 MARCH 2024**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Five Wells, which I have read with care. It is clear that, as always, you and your colleagues have put in a huge amount of work to capture the key issues at the prison. This is especially commendable given that the Board has been operating with only forty to sixty per cent of the recommended complement. HMP Five Wells was one of the first prisons I visited following my appointment as Minister and I wanted to thank you for your time and making me feel welcome.

I understand your concerns regarding the difficulties in recruiting new board members, especially as you have faced particular challenges monitoring a large and complex prison with only six members in place at the end of the reporting year. I was pleased to hear that since March 2024 there have been further appointments to the Five Wells Board, that you now have a team of ten, and that you have recently been part of a further recruitment campaign obtaining two more applicants. Other initiatives to attract new applicants are in place, such as using local radio stations so that members can share their invaluable experience about the role more widely. I am aware that the process of appointing new board members can sometimes be a lengthy one, and that this can cause frustration. The IMB Staff Group (formerly the "Secretariat") continue to seek improvements to its recruitment processes, including exploring ways to fill vacancies more quickly.

There are no plans to make the IMB Staff Group a completely separate entity to the Ministry of Justice. I appreciate this may be disappointing to you, however IMB staff will continue to operate with full independence from the MoJ under the overall leadership of the IMB National Chair. The vital and important role that IMB members play in scrutinising places of detention is formally distinguished from other 'volunteer' roles by their status as *Ministerially-made* Public Appointments. It is of the upmost importance that these appointments are made using the appropriate selection processes to ensure that the most suitable candidates are placed in these roles and the high standards of qualitative monitoring and integrity can be maintained. I would again like to extend my gratitude to you and all the HMP Five Wells Board members for your continued exemplary work.

I was most pleased to read that under the leadership of a new permanent Director you have observed increased and more effective communication at all levels. I look forward to hearing about the impact of the

HMP Five Wells' improvement agenda, currently in the early stages of implementation, in your next annual report.

I am delighted to note the appointment of a neurodiversity support manager and that you report that this has resulted in a raised awareness of how the prison can be made more accessible and inclusive to prisoners with diverse needs. I was also pleased to hear that the experience of older prisoners has been enhanced by improved access to purposeful and social activities.

You will be aware that improving opportunities for prisoner employment and rehabilitation is an area of particular interest and importance to me. As such, although there is still more to be done, I was pleased to hear about the range of vocational training and work available at HMP Five Wells, including a prisoner led kitchen fitting workshop. In addition, engagement with employers by the prison employment lead has provided further job opportunities and six specific offers of work to prisoners on their release. Whilst only a small percentage of prisoners were reported to be in employment within six weeks of leaving prison, I was encouraged to read that almost half had acquired employment after six months.

You reported positively about the team of coaches from the Department of Work and Pensions who are supporting men prior to release to become 'job ready' and also arranging Universal Credit for those who need it on the day of release. I was also pleased to read your comments about the provision of valuable peer led support with issues such as debt management and obtaining a bank account. Thank you for also highlighting the valued introduction of another peer led initiative, the 'departure lounge', which is used to address any last-minute concerns and ensure all men leave the prison with a minimum of basic food supplies, clothing and toiletries. It was very encouraging to hear about these positive initiatives at HMP Five Wells, all of which should help in providing foundations to facilitate a successful rehabilitation.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Director will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. 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 to you and your team for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Five Wells.



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP FIVE WELLS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2023 – 31 MARCH 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoner's Property

HMPPS note the Board's continuing concerns about the handling of prisoners' property and are aware that the Board raised this as an issue in last year's annual report. This is an area to which HMPPS is currently giving further attention. Careful consideration will be given to the findings in the recently received IMB national thematic report on how property loss impacts on prisoners, as well as those due to be received from Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations following a thematic review of the property complaints they have received in the last five years.

As the Board identifies, a common area for problems is when excess prisoner property is forwarded on when a prisoner transfers. It is therefore key that prisoners comply with volumetric control limits, since anything within those limits will transfer with them. HMPPS is focusing on what more can be done to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Framework. HMPPS also note the Board's concerns about the lack of digital improvements on property handling. While it is recognised this will be disappointing, other pressures around digital changes mean that it is not anticipated that an electronic property card will be in place in the immediate future. At HMP Five Wells specifically, the complaints about property handling largely emanate from prisoners transferring into the prison. During the last 12 months there has been one complaint received regarding loss of property when a prisoner was transferring out of HMP Five Wells which was attributed to the escort contractor. This indicates that HMP Five Wells are complying with the transfer control limits when prisoners are moved.

Illicit items

The Managing Conveyance of Unauthorised and Illicit Items Policy Framework, published in July 2024, provides instructions and guidance for prisons. The policy is structured on five key areas of conveyance which includes, the gate, reception, visits, correspondence and perimeter. Governors must assess the risk of conveyance in these areas using an evidence informed risk assessment. Any risks highlighted via the evidence informed assessment must be mitigated against with local procedures and outlined in the prison's Local Security Strategy. The Director and Senior Leadership Team at HMP Five Wells are exploring additional methods to better prevent and detect the ingress of illicit items which will be supported by additional CCTV, which is due to be installed on the perimeter of the prison. Methods of reducing ingress by employing drone detection systems are also being considered.

Offender Management and Sentence Planning

Since opening in 2022 HMP Five Wells has had a high number of new receptions and for this cohort of prisoners it is not possible or expected that a Sentence Plan is in place on their arrival. For the majority of prisoners who are serving a determinate sentence of over ten months, the Prisoner Offender Manager (POM) should complete an initial OASys assessment (incorporating the sentence plan) within ten weeks of being sentenced. There is a strategy in place to maximise compliance to this timeframe but due to continued churn it is recognised that there remains an ongoing but reducing backlog; the number for the end of September 2024 was 71. The vast majority (95%) of the population have now had a start of custody OASys completed. Initiatives that have been introduced, such as having dedicated Prison Offender Managers focusing on OASys completions, are helping to keep the backlog low. As identified by the Board, the backlog has reduced and is being managed by appropriately giving priority to OASys completion for those men closest to release.