



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Low Newton
Finchale Avenue
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MoJ ref: SUB120130

20 December 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI LOW NEWTON: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MARCH 2023 – 29 FEBRUARY 2024**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Low Newton. I am very grateful for the huge amount of work that you and your colleagues have put into capturing these helpful observations about the prison. Please do pass on my thanks to your colleagues, as it is remarkable that you have done this whilst operating with several vacancies as well as illness and a resignation.

I was deeply saddened to read that a prisoner died in custody during the reporting year. Any death in our prisons is a tragedy and I offer my heartfelt condolences to their friends and family. Any recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman will be acted upon and taken extremely seriously and this is something that I discuss with Governors whenever I have the opportunity to visit prisons.

I fully understand the Board's concerns about women who are sent to prison presenting with severe mental ill health and personality disorders. Whilst it remains a matter for the judiciary who is sentenced to prison, Liaison and Diversion services, commissioned by NHS England, are able to provide a court report to support court officials to understand the health needs of an individual to better inform sentencing decisions and this service offer continues to be promoted to courts. There is also a role for the Government and we at the Ministry of Justice are working with the Department of Health and Social Care to introduce a Mental Health Bill as soon as possible. This will include a range of reforms to support people suffering severe mental illness in the criminal justice system, aiming to speed up access to specialist inpatient treatment so that those affected get the timely care they need.

For those already in custody, Healthcare staffing within HMP/YOI Low Newton has been improving thanks to the successful recruitment campaigns by the health service providers. The healthcare team has maintained a high-quality service through the staff pressures it has experienced and is continuing to develop the service offer available to women. It is working with NHS Commissioners and the prison to implement the recommendations of the National Review into the Health & Social Care in Women's Prisons which will provide a range of service developments in the prison over the next three years.

Despite this challenge, I welcome the work of the Safety Team with women with neurodiverse and mental health issues as well as helping staff to adopt a trauma informed approach. The introduction of the community and safety representatives in the early days of custody was really reassuring, particularly the positive feedback it has received and the impact on women who have not experienced custody before. It

was also encouraging that the accommodation is kept clean and is well looked after and I was really pleased that the prison provides a safe environment with staff that are knowledgeable about the women in their care.

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. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Secretary of State and I immensely appreciate the valuable contribution by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are hugely thankful to you and your team for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Low Newton.



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP/YOI LOW NEWTON: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MARCH 2023 – 29 FEBRUARY 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Body Scanner

The current X-Ray Body Scanner Policy Framework which governs use of the technology only applies to the adult males, therefore a bid for HMP/YOI Low Newton, being a women's prison, has not been submitted. However, there has been significant work undertaken already at a national level and advice has been submitted to Minister's to consider the introduction of x-ray body scanners into women's prisons which will allow for further policy work to be undertaken.

The prison is also regularly supported by the regional dedicated search team to conduct intelligence led searching, as well as receiving ad hoc support from the regional dog section to provide support in the prison's more vulnerable areas, such as visits and reception. This welcome additional support makes the current security provision adequate to ensure HMP/YOI Low Newton can provide a safe environment where drugs are the subject of supply cessation and recovery. Local security staff are trained to conduct searching and ongoing training and development is being delivered by security teams to all staff. Assurance checks have also been introduced to ensure the prison continues to develop a skilled workforce to meet broader security objectives and create a safe and decent prison.

Custodial Transport Services

There has been an overall improvement in the performance and a greater focus on women being returned to prisons within two hours of their court appearance by Prisoner Escort Custody Service (PECS) Escort Providers. As previously advised it remains the case that there may be occasions when late court sittings, longer travel distances, traffic conditions or adverse weather may impact on arrival times. The current PECS contract does allow for men and women to be transported on the same escort vehicle. This is achieved by a flexible fleet configuration which ensures physical separation on board using screens. Using these hybrid vehicles enables a more responsive service and helps to reduce the waiting times at courts where the travel distance or a late court sitting can impact on the potential arrival time at prison.

HMP/YOI Low Newton have been monitoring late arrivals and ensure that there is provision for any women who arrives late. It is unusual for women to arrive out of hours, but where this happens, prison staff ensure there is sufficient support to bridge the gap until a comprehensive induction period can begin. In addition, to receiving a full health screen upon arrival, a secondary screen is also offered to all women within the first seven days to provide another opportunity to identify any health needs which may not have been picked up when they initially arrived.