



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Belmarsh
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London
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MoJ ref: SUB121100

6 February 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP BELMARSH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2023 – 30 JUNE 2024**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Belmarsh, which I have read with care. It is clear that, as always, you and your colleagues have put a huge amount of work into capturing your helpful observations about the prison. This is particularly noteworthy given that the Board has continued to operate with several members short of the recommended complement.

I was deeply saddened to hear that four prisoners died during the reporting year. I offer my condolences to all their friends and family and would like to reassure the Board that any resulting recommendations made by the PPO will be taken very seriously.

I share your concerns about the reported issues at HMP Belmarsh with regard to prisoners' property. Ensuring effective and timely transfer of individual belongings when a prisoner is moved continues to present challenges for prisons across the country and is an issue to which HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is currently giving further attention. Governors will be reminded of the importance of compliance with the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, in particular the need to adhere to volumetric control limits. I am advised that most of the issues that occur relate to excess items that have to be sent on after the prisoner's departure. I acknowledge the Board's frustration that the paper-based recording systems are not the most conducive to the effective tracking of prisoners' belongings. Whilst not in a position to make digitalisation an immediate priority, HMPPS will be seeking to introduce digital systems when this becomes feasible and will continue to look at what further improvements can be made to the process. Careful consideration will be given to the findings in the recently published IMB national thematic report and those due to be received from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman into the impact of property loss on prisoners. It is important to me that these findings are used to inform an ongoing approach to handling of an individual's property across the prison estate.

I understand the Board's continued concerns about prisoners subject to Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP). The Lord Chancellor is continuing her collaborative work with a range of organisations to ensure the appropriate course of action is taken to support those impacted. You will be aware that the implementation of reforms in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, from 1 November 2024, means that anyone who was released on IPP licence five or more years ago and has spent at least the last two years of that period in the community without being recalled, will have their IPP licence terminated without the need for a review by the Parole Board.

The remaining reforms will be implemented on 1 February 2025, where a reduced qualifying period for consideration of licence termination will see around 600 additional referrals made to the Parole Board.

The Secretary of State also has two new 'Risk Assessed Recall Review' powers for recalled IPP prisoners and the power to disapply a recall. The first enables her to re-release people who have been recalled at any point without referring the case to the Parole Board, where safe to do so. The second enables her to not reset the two-year period after someone is re-released from a recall.

In addition, a newly published IPP Action Plan emphasises the importance of effective frontline delivery in our prisons and Probation Service to ensure that those serving IPP sentences are actively engaging with their sentence plans and are in the correct prison to access the right interventions and rehabilitative services. This will provide better opportunities to help them to reduce their risk and progress towards a safe and sustainable release. The Lord Chancellor and I remain committed to supporting all those still serving IPP sentences alongside our need to ensure that the protection of the public is not compromised.

Improving opportunities for rehabilitation is an area of particular interest and importance to me. As such, I was concerned to read that the Board considered education, skills and work provision at HMP Belmarsh to be inadequate. You commented that this is exacerbated by prison capacity pressures resulting in men being moved in and out of HMP Belmarsh primarily on the basis of available spaces rather than to the most appropriate regime to support their progression. This Government fully recognises the pressure that HMPPS is operating in and our current priority is to maximise capacity in our reception prisons to enable them to serve the courts. HMP Belmarsh, as the only reception prison in the high security estate, faces specific challenges. Nonetheless, prisons are expected to maintain a focus on the rehabilitation needs of each prisoner and I am informed that a high percentage of prisoners continue to be held in the right place at the right stage of their sentence to get the help they need to manage their risks. I have been advised that in May 2024 HMP Belmarsh introduced a new regime alongside the recruitment of Prison Employment Lead. I was pleased to hear that these changes mean that there are now education, training and workspaces within the establishment. A structured employment plan for the prison is also in development which includes an initiative piloting online vocational training through which the men at HMP Belmarsh can acquire certain industry workplace qualifications. Whilst there is still more to do, these are positive steps which I hope will provide the Board with some reassurance that opportunities for rehabilitation are being improved.

I gained a clear sense from your report, that despite the daily challenges facing them, you observed skilled and dedicated staff who demonstrated compassion, diligence and sensitivity in their care of prisoners. I was most encouraged to read that your members were impressed by the approach taken to keep the most vulnerable men safe. I thank you for drawing attention in your report to the overrepresentation of men with ADHD in the prison system; these are concerning statistics. The response by HMP Belmarsh in appointing a neurodiversity support manager alongside a team of specifically trained key workers to provide support to those prisoners with these diverse needs is to be commended.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern, which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HM Prison and Probation Service 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 Belmarsh.



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP BELMARSH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2023 – 30 JUNE 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners with challenging behaviour

HMP Belmarsh is one of the eight High Secure Prisons in the Long-Term High Security Estate and has a key function supporting the management of Category A prisoners who meet the criteria to be housed in the High Secure Unit. Those located in the unit are constantly reviewed and onward transfers are managed on the specific individual needs of the prisoner.

Any urgent referrals are typically seen on a same-day and referrals out to hospital for those needing inpatient treatment are also typically completed on an immediate, same-day basis as well. The health team has to make challenging decisions as to how any vacant in-patient unit (IPU) beds are allocated to those on the waiting list and prioritise those who are most unwell and with the most to gain from the IPU environment. Whilst this has meant that some men who are also unwell have had to remain on the houseblock, they have continued to have support from an in-reach team. The multidisciplinary team endeavours to offer the most therapeutic environment possible to patients awaiting transfer onto the IPU, however it is acknowledged that this is not a replacement for hospital-based care.

Property

A response has also been provided in regard to property in the minister's letter above. The review of complaints to the Prisoner Escort Custody Services (PECS) shows that during the last 12 months there have been no complaints received from HMP Belmarsh in relation to the loss of property attributed to PECS. For property in excess of the limit of items allowed in possession, responsibility for transfer of any remaining items remains with the sending prison. HMP Belmarsh currently has a system in place for returning property to other establishments and delivers all property that is unable to be accepted by contracted escort providers directly to the new prison. This ensures prisoners are reunited with their property within four weeks of transfer in accordance with timescales stipulated within the HMPPS Prisoner Property Framework.

Vulnerable prisoners

As a reception prison, it is not possible to forecast peaks in people placed on remand at HMP Belmarsh on sexual offence charges therefore, once the limited capacity of available cells on the Vulnerable Prisoners' Unit (VPU) are filled, alternative accommodation has to be sought. Whilst located in an alternative location, those VPs receive the full protection of Rule 45 and following sentence, when their sentence plans have been formulated, efforts are made to transfer VP prisoners to appropriate training sites at the earliest opportunity. HMPPS recognises the increase in the number of people convicted of sexual offences (PCoSOs) and other vulnerable prisoners (VP) at HMP Belmarsh. Work has been taking place to expand the number of places offered for this group of prisoners and, since March (2024), approximately 1000 additional Category C PCoSO/VP places have been brought online through a combination of new accommodation and by reconfiguring main accommodation for VPs. Further projects to reconfigure another 900 places are currently underway and a strategy to deliver more places in the medium to longer term is in the process of being drawn up.

Regime and resettlement

A response to some of the issues raised by the Board in regard to rehabilitation have also been provided in the minister's letter above. The offer to prisoners now ensures that there is sufficient education, training and workspaces for all prisoners within the establishment. For the High Secure Unit, the education

provider has introduced a cross-curricular approach to encourage healthy debate, reading, mathematics and literacy through thematic/project-based work. Through the establishments employment advisory board there has been an increase in engagement with business and employers with the view to offer support and guidance for employment and training on release. Across the prison estate efforts are made to locate prisoners to the correct establishment for onward progression. HMP Belmarsh ensure that prisoners are meeting stringent entry criteria; meaning that onward establishments can successfully manage individuals and encourage development/progression during their remaining time in custody. Recent increases to allocations has resulted in improvements to the movements of Category B Prisoners. As the population pressures level off and a broader range of allocations are offered to HMP Belmarsh, moves will be facilitated to establishments that will be able to provide longer term support.

Young offenders

HMPPS recognises young adults (YAs) have distinct needs and have produced a Young Adults Custodial Strategy and guidance for prison leaders and staff to enable a greater understanding of this cohort and support staff working with them. HMP Belmarsh has been designated to hold YAs on remand whilst waiting trials in nearby calendar courts, including the Old Bailey which is used extensively to try murder cases for this cohort, a number of which meet the criteria for Category A status. Category A prisoners of any age can only be held in a high security prison, therefore their allocation to Belmarsh is appropriate. YAs make up over 25% of our total prison population (the largest in the LTHSE).

Belmarsh's Safer Prisons team are directly involved with our YA cohort. These prisoners are met with regularly through YA forums on the residential units, giving them an opportunity to voice concerns specific to them. The monthly YA Committee, made up of a cross section of functions and prisoner representatives, work collaboratively to address the needs of this cohort, to ensure that they are provided with an active regime, which include enrichment activity. YA Keyworkers are trained in the Choices for Change resource toolkit to help support and positively influence those YAs who are assessed as having low maturity.

The Directorate of Security (DoS) Young Adult strategy applies to the whole 18-25year old age group. A key part of the strategy is the need for transitions and early days handover and support at time of arrival and in the key early days that follow this. In discussions with the Head of Safety who is the Young Adult SPoC for Belmarsh, it was recently agreed that the Early Days Centre will be prioritised for a focus on the local Young Adult work. This will involve dedicated staff training, a plan of work to consider how to offer support to YAs in the First Night Centre, e.g. peer support and mediation offer, as well as ensure the whole reception and induction experience is age and maturity relevant.