



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Birmingham
Winson Green Road
Birmingham
B18 4AS

MoJ ref: SUB121380

7 February 2025

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Birmingham. Having read your report with care, I am very grateful to all the Board members for their hard work in capturing such helpful observations. This is especially impressive given the Board was only resourced at 50% of its recommended complement. Please do pass on my thanks to your colleagues.

I was deeply saddened to read of the deaths of four prisoners during the reporting year along with another two whereby the reports are yet to be published. I recognise the upset caused by such tragic events and I am grateful to the Board for its observation that the establishment has in place comprehensive support for both prisoners and staff where deaths in custody occur. I offer my heartfelt condolences to the friends and family of those who died and would like to reassure both them and the Board that any recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman will be taken extremely seriously.

Before I address the specific issues raised in your report, I would like to acknowledge the frustration you must have that many of the points raised previously have not been substantively addressed and that you are again raising the same concerns – I am keen to ensure that you can point to some progress over the next reporting year. As you will be aware, there have been unprecedented pressures on prison capacity which has meant cell-sharing to help manage this. I can provide assurances to the Board that cells are only shared where a Prison Group Director has assessed them to be of adequate size and condition in line with the standards in the HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Cell Certification Framework, which ensures that prisoners are accommodated safely even when held in crowded conditions.

This Government is committed to addressing the capacity crisis that it has inherited – in the short-term the Lord Chancellor announced in July 2024 plans to help reduce the pressure on prison places by temporarily reducing the time standard determinate sentenced prisoners serve in prison from 50% to 40% of their sentence, subject to certain exclusions. These measures will have a positive impact on lowering the proportion of crowding in the prison estate. In the longer-term, on 11 December, the Lord Chancellor announced the release of our 10-year Prison Capacity strategy. This strategy not only sets out plans to deliver 14,000 prison places, but to maintain the places in our estate to ensure we have sufficient accommodation and explore the acquisition of land should we need to build further prison places. We are keeping our plans under constant review so we can ensure we are responding to the demand in the system and providing value for money. Alongside this, we have also launched an Independent Sentencing Review, chaired by former Lord Chancellor, David Gauke. The Review's aim is to ensure we are never again left in a position where we have more prisoners than places available. I am pleased to inform the

Board that the refurbished accommodation at HMP Birmingham which is expected to start to be available in approximately 12 months will provide 301 single cells.

I appreciate your ongoing concerns around the time spent on remand and need for resettlement support. As the Board will be aware, the sentencing powers for Magistrates' Courts has been extended to ensure that those individuals who are on remand are tried and sentenced quicker. This will also help to address the Crown Court outstanding caseload by freeing up capacity for more serious and complex cases to be heard. I am encouraged that on 1st September, the Accommodation CRS contract was extended at HMP Birmingham to include all remand prisoners. This is met by way of a Custodial Support Appointment (CSA) for both Sentenced and Unsented men. This is a specific provision for those identified for immediate release (usually when sentenced and time served). All individuals at HMP Birmingham, whatever their status, will be interviewed by Probation Pre-Release Teams following initial induction. If accommodation is highlighted as a concern a CSA referral is completed by the interviewing officer and the individual will be seen by the charity Nacro.

If an immediate need is identified, a referral will be made by Pre-Release Teams for either an Urgent or a Standard Custodial Support Appointment to provide immediate, short and specific actions. This includes the option of being seen 'on the day' in Court for any immediate release. With the recent introduction of Bail Information Officers within the West Midlands Region, HMPPS are looking to develop a joined-up approach to the immediate needs individuals have in order to access appropriate services quicker, to aid bail where appropriate. Additionally, at HMP Birmingham, there is a Finance Benefit and Debt provision offered to remand prisoners, which includes supporting tenancy debt, claims for housing benefit and state benefits whilst on remand.

I recognise that the ageing infrastructure of much of our prison estate is a problem and can present particular challenges for elderly individuals with mobility issues. The new prison places that are being built are accessible by design and will significantly increase the number of cells adapted to the needs of those with mobility issues and physical disabilities. HMPPS is also considering the needs of older prisoners given the ageing population in its long-term estates work.

I was encouraged to receive your comments about the appointment of the Neurodiversity Manager and the positive impact that they have had on autistic and neurodivergent prisoners given that one third of the population has neurodiverse needs. I was also pleased to read about the smooth running of reception at HMP Birmingham, particularly given how busy it can be.

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 extremely grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Birmingham.



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Infrastructure

Work has commenced at HMP Birmingham to improve the living conditions and address the failing infrastructure. The refurbishment work on A, B and C wings at HMP Birmingham will improve the living conditions, which will be completed in 2025. These improvements will support individuals with mobility issues. Additionally, HMP Birmingham will be implementing a painting programme to further enhance living conditions as well as establishing links with civil service volunteers to create more green spaces. In respect of those prisoners with disabilities, HMP Birmingham assesses the needs of each individual and will ensure that any personal/bespoke equipment is provided where possible as well as providing the relevant adjustments for those with disabilities. HMP Birmingham will also be introducing a Regime Access Form, which aims to assess and implement individual plans to enable prisoners with mobility challenges to engage in all elements of the regime.

Retention of Staff

HMPPS have developed a retention strategy, which is linked to wider activities around employee experience, employee lifecycle and staff engagement at work. In 2021 a new exit interview process was introduced to undertake in-depth conversations to allow staff the opportunity to have their say regarding their reasons for leaving, enabling HMPPS to analyse data and address any emerging trends. Since the launch of the retention strategy and the exit interview process, HMP Birmingham has seen an improving picture and recorded the lowest resignation rate since January 2021.

HMPPS is also looking to launch a new staff programme that will place a renewed focus on training, induction and ongoing development and help drive improvements in recruitment and retention.