



MoJ ref: SUB121886

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Bullingdon
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27 February 2025

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Bullingdon. I have read your report carefully and offer my thanks to you and your colleagues for your continued dedication and the hard work that has been put into providing your helpful observations. This is particularly appreciated given you have been operating with fewer board members than your recommended complement.

I was saddened to hear that two prisoners, whose names are yet to be made public by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), died during the reporting year shortly after release from HMP Bullingdon. These are tragic incidents, and I offer my condolences to all their friends and family. I would also like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the PPO are taken very seriously.

I appreciate the concerns you have raised about the impact of population pressures, which in turn affects our ability to effectively rehabilitate and resettle prisoners. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) continues to strive to maintain offender flows in the face of ongoing population pressures across the entire adult male prison estate and the ambition remains that every prison's regime offer should be underpinned by the fundamentals of rehabilitation.

I recognise the need to address the capacity crisis that this Government has inherited to be able to respond to the issues your report flags. 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. In the longer-term, in December 2024, the Lord Chancellor announced the 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 share your concerns about the impact of a lack of suitable and settled accommodation for prisoners on release. A settled place to live is key to reducing reoffending, cutting crime, and protecting the public. Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) have been extended to include remanded and unsentenced

people in prison. CRS providers have specialist knowledge to support prisoners' accommodation needs and work alongside prison teams and probation to prevent homelessness on release.

In addition, there are 49 prison based Strategic Housing Specialists (SHS) covering England and Wales, including one for HMP Bullingdon. Pre-release panels have begun to be established with all local authorities, and the SHS for HMP Bullingdon has been engaging with Buckinghamshire, Southampton and Portsmouth. More broadly the SHS identifies, develops, and delivers a range of solutions that remove barriers to accommodation, these include ensuring information is up to date, providing advice and assurance on accommodation pathways and delivering role appropriate accommodation training for staff and partners.

It was encouraging to receive your comments about the Here to Help (H2H) peer support pilot scheme which has a really positive impact in helping prisoners to resolve their practical issues as well as providing a voice for those less confident or able to speak up. It is pleasing to read that many of the skills gained by the prisoner representatives are transferable into the community which I hope will support them on release.

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 sincerely value the 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 Bullingdon.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'James', written in dark ink.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

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

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Staffing

HMPPS carefully monitors resourcing levels to ensure that it can manage current staffing levels and make accurate predications around future needs. Against a challenging labour market in recent years, the Prison Service has experienced recruitment and retention challenges but is now seeing positive indications of an improving national staffing picture. For prison officers and operational support grades, recruitment campaigns are open in all sites where there is a current or future need.

HMPPS and MoJ Resourcing have put in place a substantial number of initiatives to increase recruitment of prison officers and other roles at HMP Bullington. Prison officers have been recruited directly and through two national schemes that bring new officers in from around the country to help supplement local recruitment pipelines. Locally several initiatives to aid retention are also in place including a strengthened recognition and reward scheme, and staff are given the opportunity to provide feedback to managers to ensure that that concerns can be proactively addressed.

Safety

Reducing violence in prisons is a key priority, and HMPPS is working hard to make prisons as safe as possible. Whilst it is not possible to eliminate all risks of harm, efforts continue with a range of measures to address the levels of violence in prison. There are a range of physical security measures in place to counter the smuggling of contraband such as drugs, mobile phones and weapons – that drive prison violence and undermine safety. HMPPS is committed to removing wet shave razors, which can be used as weapons, from 31 priority prisons – including HMP Bullington. These prisons will be wet shave razor free by the end of March 2025.

HMP Bullington continue to ensure collaboration between Safety and Security teams to tackle the root causes of violence, whilst regular safety forums have been created alongside improved communication pathways to address concerns early, and to act proactively.

Inexperienced Staff

HMPPS continually review and improve our learning offer for staff within current operational delivery and are currently exploring how we can further improve our foundation training offer via The Enable Programme. Prior to his ministerial appointment, Lord Timpson conducted an independent review of prison officer foundation training. The findings from this review are being brought together with the Enable Programme, which is considering both the 'what' and 'how' prison officers learn from the start of their career and develop throughout it. The programme is a long-term strategy aimed at transforming how HMPPS trains, develops, leads, and supports prison staff.

Currently, all new Prison Officers begin with a two-week induction at their home establishment. During this period, they familiarise themselves with the environment and complete some independent learning. This is followed by seven weeks of face-to-face Foundation training. Via The Enable Programme, HMPPS are looking to re-define foundation training as a 12-month modular package.

Locally, HMP Bullington has implemented a number of initiatives to address this concern including:

- An additional Custodial Manager (CM) has been assigned to support the New Colleague Mentor (NCM) at Bullington.

- Supplementary training following the completion of prison officer training, prior to officers commencing duties on the wings.
- The Buddy System, which has been in place for some time, continues to function effectively.
- Additionally, HMP Bullingdon plans to designate another CM to support Operational Support Grade (OSG) staff, with a role like that of the NCM, tailored specifically for the OSG group. This initiative is scheduled to commence in January 2025.