



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Woodhill
Tattenhoe Street
Milton Keynes
MK4 4DA

MoJ ref: SUB121098

6 February 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP WOODHILL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JUNE 2023 – 31 MAY 2024**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Woodhill. I am truly grateful for the huge amount of work put in to producing this report and capturing the key issues. This is particularly impressive given the Board's shortage of members.

I was really saddened to read that three prisoners died in custody during the reporting year and I offer my deepest condolences to their friends and family. It is important in these tragic circumstances that we act on the recommendations made by the PPO and I would like to reassure the loved ones of those who have passed away that deaths in custody are taken extremely seriously.

I fully understand the Board's concern regarding plans for recruitment and retention of prison staff. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) do already have a retention strategy in place which is linked to wider work on employee experience, employee lifecycle and staff engagement. Alongside the strategy is a retention toolkit which allows prisons to embed individual retention plans with a set of local, regional and national interventions and a Retention Oversight Process that targets priority sites. During June 2023 – 2024, which covers the Board's reporting period, there was a substantial improvement in staffing nationally within prisons with the number of Band 3-5 Prison Officers increasing by 1,254 full time equivalent. Nevertheless staffing challenges do remain at some sites and a targeted approach is taken to support these prisons with tailored recruitment and marketing. The full quota of Band 3 Prison Officers at HMP Woodhill have now been recruited following a substantial number of initiatives put in place to increase recruitment. The prison was also supported by the Strategic Enhanced Resource Support panel to ensure the detached duty support (staffing from other prisons) and other resourcing initiatives, were at the correct level to maintain stability at the prison whilst recruitment took place. In addition, to improve capability, a monthly staff training day, as well as the introduction of weekly staff supervision and the new staff are being supported by four colleague mentors.

I also sympathise with the Board's request to further consider how to address the mental health needs of prisoners. The Ministry of Justice has been working with the Department of Health and Social Care on a Mental Health Bill and I am pleased to say this was introduced to Parliament on 6 November 2024. It includes a range of reforms to support people suffering severe mental illness in the criminal justice system and aims to speed up access to specialist inpatient care to ensure they are able to access appropriate and timely support in the most appropriate setting. NHS England is working to support implementation planning of the proposed reforms and is undertaking a mental health pathway review across all areas of

the criminal justice system. The implementation plan will set out the operational changes which will be necessary to fulfil the commitment to commence the legislative reform 18-24 months following Royal Assent. Whilst all people in prison do have access to integrated mental health services commissioned by NHS England, these are being reviewed to refresh the national service specification for mental health care in prisons to ensure patients receive high-quality care. HMP Woodhill has also introduced weekly supervision and training to support its segregation staff in managing the challenging individuals in their care and there is increased support from the psychology team to improve understanding of prisoners within the Segregation Unit.

I can also provide assurance that the MoJ and HMPPS is committed to providing support for neurodivergent people, who are overrepresented within the criminal justice system, and Neurodiversity Support Managers (NSM) have therefore been introduced within prisons. They are working with prison health and social care teams to address the needs of neurodiverse prisoners and provide training and guidance to prison staff to identify and support neurodivergent prisoners, and ensure reasonable adjustments are implemented to make prison environments more supportive. The NSM at HMP Woodhill is also integrated into the safety strategy, offering individual support to prisoners identified in the weekly safety intervention meeting. HMPPS will continue to screen all people on entry to prison to help identify any additional needs that might impact their ability to engage with the regime or opportunities in the prison. However, the current screening tools are being improved in partnership with the Prison Education Service (PES) to procure a new digital, web-based screening tool which will identify Additional Learning Needs for prisoners and improve accessibility. This will be implemented as part of the new PES education contracts in Spring 2025 but will be offered all prisoners regardless of engagement with education.

Regarding the Board's concern about training and resettlement provision, the Education provision that is available for commission is reviewed nationally on an annual basis to ensure it meets prisoner needs and an [Employment of Release Policy Framework](#) was published in April 2024, providing best practice guidance to prisons to resource and operate employment initiatives to support prisoners in their resettlement journey. HMP Woodhill has sufficient Purposeful Activity spaces for the population and a review of the provision took place in anticipation of the re-population of the closed wings. The model provided is a hybrid of full and part-time education and work allowing opportunities for all prisoners. The prison has reviewed its local education curriculum to ensure it includes more work-ready and work-experience content, particularly digital related, to better prepare prisoners for release, with qualifications and accreditations built into this review for classroom and work purposeful activity.

HMP Woodhill also receives an in-reach resettlement provision delivered by a pre-release team that is managed by the local Probation Delivery Unit. The Pre-Release Probation Services Officer is working with the Offender Management Unit to ensure prisoners receive support from 12-weeks pre-release in order to assess resettlement needs and take the necessary actions to address these before release. This pre-release work is key in preparing all prisoners for release in a meaningful and focussed way to reintegrate them into the community, with the prison seeking to ensure that all prisoners being released have access to core services such as ID and Banking Leads, Department of Work and Pensions coaches and Prison Employment Leads support services to prepare people leaving prison to enter the employment market.

I do appreciate it has been a challenging time for the prison, which is reflected in the report, however it was really reassuring to read some of the progress highlighted, such as the improved time out of cell and access to education, library services and workshops. I was encouraged by the improved level and quality of Key Work and that prisoners welcomed the issuing of laptops, implementation of the Launchpad system and that art and music continued to be popular education choices as they helped with mental health.

You will also be aware of the invocation of an Urgent Notification by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) on 30 August 2023 which the Secretary of State responded to on 29 September 2023 with the immediate 28-day action plan. The subsequent action plan in response to the full inspection report was issued on 14 December 2023. The prison has since undergone enhanced supervision to regularly review progress against both the immediate and the full action plan, with oversight by the HMPPS Director General Operations. HMIP undertook an Independent Review of Progress between 29-31 July 2024 with the report published on 16 September 2024 and it is pleasing the report found a prison now fully staffed, with reduced violence overall and reasonable progress in most areas with respect to safety. I hope as the Board continues to monitor the prison in the coming year it sees further progress being made.

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 are set out in the attached annex.

The Secretary of State and I hugely 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 Woodhill.



Lord James Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

HMP WOODHILL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JUNE 2023 – 31 MAY 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Operational Capacity

Since the Board's report, the decision was taken to reopen the two wings at HMP Woodhill due to the national population pressure which HMPPS was experiencing. A plan was agreed with the prison which included the number of reception days and the number of arrivals that could safely be accommodated on the day. A profile of each prisoner being transferred was sent in advance and agreed by the prison with prisoners specifically chosen with the general safety and stability of the prison in mind. Weekly meetings between the Governor and Prison Group Director monitored stability of the prison and weekly meetings took place with Population Management Unit to address any issues relating to the re-population. This partnership working has enabled the re-population of the prison to focus as much as possible on maintaining improvements made, including in relation to safety, decency and culture.

Food Costs

HMPPS is aware of the impact that the cost of living is having and is actively looking at ways to respond to this within the confines of HMPPS' budget allocation, which has recently been increased per prisoner. To clarify HMP Woodhill's food budget is allocated based on the same method as all other prisons, but the Governor can use their overall budget flexibly to respond to prisoner needs. As an update to last year's response, the prison has now completed its works with the charity 'Food Behind Bars' to review the food menu which resulted in a number of menu choices being altered. Tasting events have been held locally and feedback from the prisoner council and wing forums has been positive about the changes that have been made.

Canteen and Pay

Where circumstances allow, prices may be set lower than the Manufacturer's Recommended Retail Price (MRRP) but will not be set higher. Prisoners are being offered more cost-effective choices through a number of value brand items, which are cheaper than premium branded items. Analysis indicates that prisoners are regularly purchasing these items, and work is underway to increase the number of these products across the range. There has also been support introduced previously, including a 10% uplift in private cash allowances (money that can be sent in by family and friends of prisoners) and with the introduction of in-cell phones and the increased use by prisoners, this allowed the cost of calls to be reduced from 6.33p to 3.10p per minute to a landline on weekdays during the Covid-19 pandemic and these have remained at this reduced rate.

The minimum rates of pay for prisoners and the Prison Service Order 4460 *Prisoners' Pay* are kept under constant review to determine whether any published updates are required. Although this national policy sets out the minimum rates for prisoners, HMP Woodhill does have the discretion to pay above these rates and are required to review their local pay policy annually.

Capital Investment and infrastructure

HMPPS is continually reviewing the investment that is required across the prison estate. The current state of prisons has been identified in recent condition surveys which assessed the fabric, cells, and critical assets at each prison, and these will be used to inform long-term forward maintenance registers, allowing these to be prioritised against future capital budgets. The 10-year Prison Capacity Strategy published on 11 December 2024 addresses the need for essential maintenance, including up to £300 million in 2025 to

2026 to keep prisons safe and secure. All project requests from prisons will continue to be considered and prioritised very carefully to make best use of that funding focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency. This includes a site-wide project to refurbish all of the showers at HMP Woodhill, which is in design and development, and will be considered for funding to deliver in the 2025/26 financial year.

There has also been other significant investment at the prison over the last twelve months, including refurbishment of all prisoner kitchenettes, staff kitchens and toilets on all residential areas, the creation of constant watch cells, anti-climb barriers, flooring replacement, minor shower repairs, replacement of TV equipment and additional freezer equipment for the kitchen. Since the announced urgent notification, painting and a deep clean of all communal areas have also been undertaken.

Prisoners' Property

HMPPS notes that the Board considers there have been improvements in the storage and recording of property, but as the Board identifies, a common area for problems is the excess prisoner property being forwarded on when a prisoner transfers. It is therefore key that an emphasis must remain on prisoners complying with volumetric control limits, since any property within these limits will be transferred with them, as it is not possible to transfer with a prisoner all the excess property which they might have accrued above these limits. HMPPS is focusing on what more can be done to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Framework and careful consideration is being given to the findings in the published IMB national thematic report on how property loss impacts on prisoners. Locally HMP Woodhill is also continuing to work closely with sending prisons to ensure property complaints are responded to and it is positive the Board recognise the efforts that staff made to reunite prisoners with their property quickly at the receiving prison as part of the decant of two wings at HMP Woodhill. As part of local improvements each wing has now been allocated specific days to issue property and the prison will be implementing the outcomes of the property review across the wider Long Term and High Secure prisons estate once complete.