



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Brixton
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MoJ ref: SUB122786

11 April 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP BRIXTON: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2023 – 31 AUGUST 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Brixton. It has only been a few weeks since I responded to the 2022-23 annual report and I am grateful once again to you and your colleagues for your hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations for the 2023-24 report. I noticed that there was an increase in Board members by the end of the reporting period. Whilst the addition of two members with experience from other IMBs would no doubt be welcome, I note the strain training and mentoring eighteen new members must have had over the past four years and I hope the position continues to improve with more stability.

I was saddened to hear about the deaths of four prisoners during the reporting year, one of which I believe was apparently self-inflicted. Every death in our care is a tragedy and I offer my heartfelt condolences to all their friends and family and would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

This Government recognises the pressure that HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) has been operating under for a considerable amount of time, including the effects on offender flow and the pre-release challenges faced by prisons. The priority remains on maximising capacity in reception prisons to enable them to serve the courts. Two prisons have re-rolled to increase reception capacity and, as you know, HMP Brixton will also re-roll to a reception and resettlement prison serving the local courts. Prisons continue to ensure that the rehabilitation needs of each prisoner are met and protected despite the impact of population pressures. Whilst I understand the Board's concerns, I can assure you that HMPPS strives to maintain transfers in accordance with Offender Flow rules in the face of continued population pressures across the entire adult male prison estate, and most 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.

Locally, the Board will be aware the Governor and staff at HMP Brixton have embraced the challenge and have taken measures to ensure resettlement needs are understood and facilitated. Pre-Release surgeries take place for all prisoners at approximately 12-14 weeks prior to release where they meet with key internal and external leads. Prisoners that are not at the prison at the 12-week point are scheduled to attend these surgeries closer to their release date. Additionally, a multi-disciplinary Pre-Release Information Sharing Meeting is held to monitor and manage the resettlement activity of all prison leavers twelve weeks prior to release. This meeting facilitates information sharing across prison departments that contribute to planning for release into the community, sharing of information with other relevant agencies, continuity of care in respect of follow-on interventions from custody to community and contributing to

multi-agency work. For those with less than 12 weeks till release, they are still scheduled for discussion and actions fast-tracked dependant on the time left.

Regarding Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL), I agree that much work has been done by the prison. However, following the various early release schemes implemented, resulting in many of those eligible for standard ROTL being progressed through to open conditions or released earlier, HMP Brixton has not held eligible prisoners who have applied for access. The Board may be aware that I am passionate about rehabilitation and we need to maximise the use of other initiatives in addition to ROTL. Keeping prisoners engaged to facilitate rehabilitation has always been a challenge, consequently HMP Brixton have implemented numerous measures including the G wing art club; having an activities orderly; and introducing neurodiversity representatives with clear processes of tracking skills development and progress. Other initiatives include weekly music therapy sessions and a joint collaboration between the physical education and teaching teams to deliver a blended fitness to maths course to incentivise the development of functional skills.

It is regrettable that the Board has been repeatedly raising similar concerns for the past twelve years. I recognise that this is frustrating and whilst I cannot comment on any predecessors' responses and actions, I can say that this Government is committed to finding solutions to long-standing issues. That is why we have taken decisive action with our 10-Year Prison Capacity Strategy announced in December 2024 that includes plans to build 14,000 new prison places by 2031. Work has already begun on the estates front and the Board will have seen my visit to HMP Highpoint for the ground-breaking event on 6 March for a 700-place expansion project that will eventually see the prison become the largest in the UK based on prisoner population. The capacity strategy is supported by the launch of the Sentencing Review in October 2024, exploring the greater use of punishment outside of prison as we cannot simply build our way out of this crisis, together with the Lord Chancellor's vision for the probation service set out in her speech in February 2025. None of these measures are quick fixes, but this demonstrates we are taking measures to address systemic issues.

I look forward to having a longer tenure than my predecessors and to responding with more positive progress both at HMP Brixton and across the estate in the next report. In the meantime, I would like to acknowledge some notable positives captured in your report such as the reduction in assaults on staff. I was also encouraged to note the work of the prison council and The Clink Restaurant winning an Institute of Hospitality Best Education Award. The restaurant being almost always fully booked is a testament to the quality on offer and I hope awareness continues to spread to the wider public.

The Governor will continue to keep you aware of progress during your monthly meetings 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 appreciate the invaluable 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 Brixton.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James', written in a cursive style.

Lord Timpson

Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Overcrowding and Estates Investment

Overcrowding

Although there are estate-wide population pressures, HMPPS can assure the Board that the cell certification framework requires that cells are only shared where a Prison Group Director has assessed them to be of adequate size and condition. There are other standards set out in the framework, and this ensures that prisoners are accommodated safely even when held in crowded conditions. This policy was revised in Spring 2022, from which the useable operational capacity of the estate is derived. While most single cells could physically hold two people, determining the maximum crowded capacity of an establishment is an operational assessment which considers decency and risks to safety and stability. There are no current plans to change the operational capacity of HMP Brixton.

Facilities and Living Conditions

Access to bedding, clothing and equipment has been improved with a more agile approach to stock control and ordering. Wing laundry issues have had an improved response regarding any mechanical concerns, as there were some early implementation difficulties following the change in laundry equipment provider. The chapel has been decorated, damaged in-cell flooring and furniture has been replaced where possible, and a painting programme is continuing within all residential areas. Increased control measures have been put in place to tackle vermin together with additional weekly visits by specialist contractors and improved housekeeping. The maintenance provider has also been instructed to carry out a full pest control survey of the site and provide recommendations to control pest activity further.

Estate Investment

Bids have been submitted for replacement cell windows and a CCTV upgrade, both of which are awaiting a mandate. Various roofing repairs have been carried out and new windows have been installed in open and closed visits areas. Other proposed projects include fireproofing of the landing offices, a dedicated power supply for portable hydra mist units, installation of a smoke extraction system, replacement gas main, a new Segregation Unit, and the conversion of ten cells to make them more accessible for individuals with disabilities. The Gunnebo lane system project, which is essentially new turnstiles, was also completed earlier this year.

HMPPS is continually reviewing the investment required across the entire prison estate, for both the current and forthcoming Spending Review period. The proposals will be underpinned by the data collected in recent condition surveys which assessed the fabric, cells, and critical assets at each prison. These will inform long-term forward maintenance registers, which can be prioritised against future capital budgets. As demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding, HMPPS must prioritise works very carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency.

Regime and Prisoners' Property

Regime

HMP Brixton is aiming to improve time out of cell by consistently offering a minimum of three hours for unemployed prisoners. Management of prisoners isolating has improved with access to a regime being offered on a daily basis. There have been improvements in the timeliness of general applications to the

prison together with better understanding of delays that may be experienced in relation to prisoner communications with family and friends by altering processes where required.

Prisoners' Property

This is an area to which HMPPS is currently giving further attention. Careful consideration will be given to the findings in the IMB national thematic report on how property loss impacts prisoners, as well as those due to be published by Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations following a thematic review of the property complaints they have received in the last five years. As the Board identifies, a common area for problems is when excess prisoner property is forwarded on when a prisoner transfers establishments. It is therefore essential that prisoners comply with volumetric control limits, since anything within those limits will transfer with them. HMPPS is focusing on what more can be done to ensure compliance with the requirements of the prisoners' property framework.

The introduction of the digitally recorded Prisoner Escort Record (dPER) including a property section that accurately records the number and type of sealed property 'owned' by and transferred with the prisoner and an accurate record of property handover between different stakeholders. This is now embedded as business as usual. The digital process has assisted with investigations for property that is lost in transit with Prisoner Escorting and Custody Services (PECS) suppliers. PECS also review complaints during monthly formal meetings with the supplier.