



Ministry
of Justice

Sam Gyimah MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

Ms Camilla Poulton
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Pentonville
Caledonian Road
London
N7 8TT

30 August 2016

Dear Camilla

**HMP PENTONVILLE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 APRIL 2015 – 31 MARCH 2016**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 March 2016. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for all the hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations.

I was pleased to read about the work undertaken by the Governor to improve staff interactions with prisoners and that the prison has a clear focus on improved education provision, with new workshops offering qualifications and the prospect of partnership working with local employers. It was encouraging to receive your praise of staff working in the healthcare centre who remain dedicated to their role despite dealing with a high turnover of prisoners, many of whom have challenging needs and behaviour. I was also pleased to read about the work undertaken to review the criteria for prisoners located in the vulnerable prisoners unit and the efforts made to encourage more men onto normal location, wherever this is possible.

I note your concerns about staffing at the prison and wish to assure you that action is being taken to address the recruitment issues in London. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) has for London prisons, including HMP Pentonville, provided recruitment and retention premiums for new prison officers of £2,500 (£1,250 after the first year and £1,250 after the second) to ensure that the Service remains competitive in the labour market. The need and level of this allowance is reviewed regularly.

NOMS has also introduced a scheme whereby successful prison officer candidates, on waiting lists for vacancies in other parts of the country, are contacted to see if they would accept a two-year deployment to sites in more urgent need (primarily in London and the South East). This scheme has already provided a number of new starters for HMP Pentonville and other London prisons.

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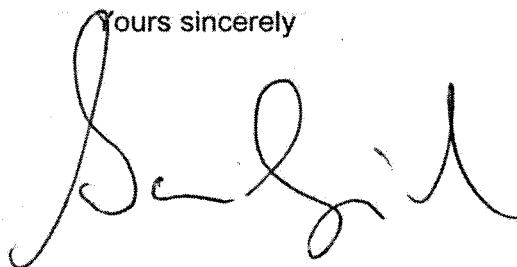
service delivery manager on site weekly to discuss performance and concerns with the contractor.

I am pleased to advise the Board that funding has been approved to address 84 high priority cell windows at HMP Pentonville during 2016/17. Further investment commencing in 2017/18 will be provided to address an estimated 65-70 cell windows during each subsequent financial year. As the Board is no doubt aware, the access problems to the visits hall have now been resolved and the lift has been fixed.

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. NOMS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Justice Secretary 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 Pentonville.

Yours sincerely

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

SAM GYIMAH MP

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FOR 1 APRIL 2015 – 31 MARCH 2016**

NOMS comments on matters raised in the report

Drugs Dogs

The provision of specialist search dogs is based on a number of factors including establishment need, balanced with the available resources, which in Greater London was a regional resource. It is, however, accepted that the stretched resources could be used more effectively.

Taking account of this and in response to the changes in region, particularly the amalgamation of London and Thames Valley prisons, NOMS is carrying out a review of the specialist search dogs within this newly formed region. The review will consider a number of issues, including current dog provision and deployment within the London and Thames Valley prisons.

Vulnerable Prisoners

The NOMS custodial estate has evolved over many years and currently there is a surplus of local places and a deficit of training places. This leads to sentenced offenders staying in local prisons, contrary to their function to serve the courts, and the absence of a regime to address offending behaviour.

The Prison Estate Transformation Programme aims to reconfigure the custodial estate during the current spending review, and create a demand led estate matching the risks and needs of the prison population. Work is already underway to make sure that estate capacity is rebalanced from 2016/2017 onwards to address this imbalance. NOMS is working closely with commissioners to ensure that appropriate accommodation for vulnerable prisoners, including those convicted of offences of a sexual nature, form part of those plans.

Young Adults

There are currently no plans to remove young adults from HMP Pentonville. Following a number of high profile incidents at Feltham when it was a remand centre, it was decided to convert Feltham into an establishment holding sentenced young offenders only. This has brought about greater stability and allowed young men to concentrate on delivering against their sentence plan. As a result of that decision, it was necessary for London local prisons to receive remand young offenders and, although this may present some challenges, NOMS is satisfied that this is better than concentrating them in one area. Once convicted and sentenced, young offenders should be moved to Aylesbury, Feltham or Isis.

Mr Gordon Cropper
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Pentonville
Caledonian Road
London
N7 8TT

28th October 2015

Dear Mr Cropper,

**HMP PENTONVILLE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 APRIL 2014 – 31 MARCH 2015**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending March 2015. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for all the hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations.

It was encouraging to receive your comments about staff continuing to provide a decent environment and appropriate support for the prisoners in their care, as evidenced by the significant decrease in incidents of self-harm. I do not underestimate the effort needed by staff in this area, dealing with suicide and self harm is difficult work. I was also pleased to read about the importance given to equality and diversity, with the prison holding separate equalities meetings, and providing workshops for prisoners with disabilities, travellers, the over-55s and young adults.

As you identify in your report, the physical condition of the accommodation and standard of facilities available is impacting upon the prison's ability to provide a decent environment. Further to my response to the Board last year, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Estates Directorate remains committed to working with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to produce an affordable and deliverable programme of investment to enable HMP Pentonville to provide safe, decent and legal facilities. MoJ Estates has developed a proposal to replace the windows at the prison and will submit a business case for funding shortly. The window replacement will improve the environment, reduce rubbish in the grounds and help to prevent contraband being thrown over. Furthermore, an additional funding of £300K has been secured to refurbish the showers.

I would like to reassure that Board that HMP Pentonville is now working to a clear improvement plan which prioritises cleanliness of the site, sufficient access to activity, reducing violence and implementation of the Through the Gate (TTG) initiative. Progress to date has seen the number of prisoners engaged in activities increase since the introduction of the current regime and there are plans to increase this number further, improve the rate of attendance and increase use of the Library.

I note your concerns about officer shortages that occurred at HMP Pentonville during the reporting period, and I am very grateful for the continued dedication of your Board and the staff at the prison during this challenging period. NOMS has been returning to large scale recruitment to tackle shortfalls caused by the unexpected rise in the prison population and a higher turnover of staff. Over 2,230 new Band 3 officers

have been recruited in the 12 months to 30 June 2015 and there are plans to recruit at a similar rate in 2015-16 to address any outstanding vacancies and turnover.

The agreed Benchmark resourcing levels for HMP Pentonville are yet to be reached, which as you identify within your report, is largely to do with recruitment and retention issues. Evidence demonstrates that these issues are not always pay driven but location, due to high cost of living or working in a remote location. Recruitment and retention of staff, especially in London and the South East, is being monitored to ensure any potential issues that may arise are identified and addressed. However, from data used in the annual submission to the Prison Service Pay Review Body, it would demonstrate that the Inner London rate of pay is market facing and competitive with both Whitehall and private sector employers.

In the interim, HMP Pentonville has successfully used detached duty staff and Payment Plus to provide a predictable, if reduced regime in a safe environment. A regime management plan is in place with the aim to reach the target staffing level in the coming year through the recruitment of an additional 19 officers, and allow a full regime to be run.

I am grateful for your comments on the holding of sentence-expired immigration detainees at HMP Pentonville. The Home Office only detains with a view to deport/ remove and have no wish to detain people for any longer than necessary. Whilst we aim to deport foreign national offenders at the earliest opportunity, some detainees will repeatedly refuse to comply with the deportation process, deliberately seek to flout the system to disrupt our efforts to deport them or attempt to lodge multiple appeals. Factors such as these, along with a history of absconding or a risk of harm to the public, can lead to detention being prolonged.

Foreign national offenders may continue to be detained in prison for reasons of security or control and where it is assessed that those concerned are not suitable for the more informal environment provided in immigration removal centres. The prison may also accommodate detainees who have been assessed as suitable for transfer to the immigration removal estate but are awaiting transfer. Every effort is made to ensure that prisoners are aware of the decision to maintain detention at the end of their sentence. Any foreign national offender liable to enforcement action will have been advised of potential removal action from the date of their conviction.

NOMS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Justice Secretary 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 Pentonville.

Yours sincerely
Andrew Selous

ANDREW SELOUS

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NOMS comments on matters raised in the report

Healthcare Centre Phone System

The fault with the healthcare PIN phones has now been rectified. The complexity of necessary repairs led to the amount of time the Healthcare PIN phones were out of use. The process to reinstate the phones was lengthy and the establishment will be more aware of how to progress such a problem in the future.

Vulnerable Prisoners' Unit

The number of vulnerable prisoners has risen nationally. The Deputy Director of Custody's office is in the process of increasing the availability of places in the Greater London area by providing an additional 40 places in HMP High Down, which when in use should alleviate the pressure on HMP Pentonville.

Young Adults

The number of young adults has peaked at around 140, far higher than was anticipated when HMYOI Feltham was re-roled. Efforts are made to prioritise a young adult's allocation as soon as they are sentenced. The education and activity profiles have been amended to deliver appropriate work for this group of prisoners and initiatives such as peer mentoring have been introduced to directly meet their needs.

The prison has been successful in reducing the level of violence within the young adult group. The most effective tool in this has been to engage the young adults in activities and this continues to be the main focus. The prison has also introduced body worn cameras on all wings which has had a positive effect. In the coming year, the prison is rolling out training packages for officers to help improve interaction with all prisoners but particularly young adults.

Library

A new timetable has been introduced which has increased the amount of scheduled time each wing has in the library. In addition, a new process of movement to and supervision in the library is being produced that will increase library usage this year.

Visits

Improvements to the visits booking system have been made during the reporting year. The backlog of visits requests has been cleared and the team is now at their full complement. Telephone lines have been an issue; the old line was a standard phone line which was not designed for the volume of use. To address this, an upgraded line with waiting messages and a queue system, has been installed. Furthermore, a member of staff is now always on duty and operates the phone lines during normal working hours.

Problems with the website have been reported for attention, although 94% of visits take place with no identification issues. Prisoners are able to get a visit within their first ten days but the prison will ensure that the process to book them is better communicated to prisoners on Reception.