



HM Prison &  
Probation Service

Charlie Taylor,  
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons  
3rd floor, 10 South Colonnade  
Canary Wharf  
London  
E14 4PU

**Neil Richards**  
**Executive Director, Custodial Contracts**  
HM Prison and Probation Service  
102 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9AJ  
neil.richards@justice.gov.uk

17 February 2023

Dear Charlie,

**HMIP report on an independent review of progress at HMP Forest Bank -  
9-11<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

Thank you for your Independent Review of Progress report at HMP Forest Bank, whereby you followed up 8 key recommendations and 4 Ofsted themes from your most recent inspection on 14th and 21–25 February 2022.

I am encouraged to note that you have seen good and reasonable progress being made across some of the recommendations and Ofsted themes, and note the following;

- **Children and Families**

The recognition that visits provision had significantly improved. There are advanced plans in place to further increase evening visits from two sessions a week to five.

- **Safety – Security and Supply Reduction**

The positive findings in relation to the substantial reduction in the availability of illicit items including drugs, weapons and mobile phones with effective measures in place to disrupt and repel the ingress of contraband, supported by responsive intelligence led searching and testing.

- **Purposeful Activity**

The recognition that there has been an improvement in time out of cell and purposeful activity which is now embedded. There is more work to do to ensure sufficient places for unallocated prisoners. The introduction of a new core day in late January has created the opportunity to make further progress in this area, increasing purposeful activity to a target of 18 hours.

In respect of the three key areas and four Ofsted themes where you found insufficient or no meaningful progress, I can confirm that all the IRP findings have been carefully considered and steps will be taken to address them as appropriate. This will include the following.

- **OFSTED**

A detailed action plan has been devised across all four Ofsted themes to address these concerns. The main points are outlined below:

Theme 1: Improvements and alterations to the quality assurance processes in teaching and learning within the education department and an oversight and evaluation of teaching, learning and training in vocational areas will be developed. This will ensure the quality of delivery in workshop areas.

Theme 2: The number of education, skills and work activities to meet the needs of the prison population will be closely monitored. The curriculum offer will be developed with subjects offered along with the recording of 'employability skills'. Opportunities for further accredited learning will be explored and implemented if appropriate to the population and needs of the prisoners.

Theme 3: Attendance in activity places will continue to be closely monitored. Education for vulnerable prisoners will be developed and those with additional learning needs will receive appropriate support following staff CPD and the development of the induction process.

Theme 4: The induction process will be developed and improved to encompass all aspects of education, skills and work. This will be done through 'lived experience' and oversight of the process from first entry into the prison. Following improvements to technology and systems, careers information, advice and guidance will continue to be fully utilised and the impact measured through destinations data.

- **Respect – Strategy, Clinical Governance and Partnerships**

The improvement in regime in the healthcare inpatient unit is welcome. The future of this unit, including its clinical oversight, is under review as part of the transfer of healthcare services at Forest Bank to the NHS from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

- **Staff and prisoner relationships**

The new core day and attendance pattern introduced in mid-January creates the framework to ensure greater consistency of staffing across the prison which helps cement better staff prisoner relationships. Retention continues to improve which is critical to developing a more experienced staff group and an enabler to further developing staff through mentoring, training and coaching.

- **Resettlement**

The reconfiguration of HMP Forest Bank was based on the role it was already playing in serving the courts and was subsequently designated as a reception and resettlement prison. We are aware of the issues following the transfer of the Manchester courts and robust steps were taken jointly with the prison to ensure it would be able to continue to perform its key reception role. Configuration has since conducted a further review and the Custodial Contracts Directorate have begun their annual Notice of Change review with Sodexo.

Presently the reception cohort at Forest Bank remains reasonably static in number compared with other prisons, largely due to ongoing measures such as redirections. The population fluctuations, as courts resume their capacity and process their backlog, are creating operational challenges across the entire estate. Forest Bank, however, continues to manage transfers appropriately and fills drafts in line with its clearly defined role. There is also ongoing operational support available so that the right men will be held at Forest Bank and training prisoners will be moved in good time.

The Director with the support of the Senior Contract Manager will continue to progress the full Action Plan covering all the original recommendations.

I remain committed to ensuring continued progress against HMP Forest Bank's agreed Action Plan and I can assure you that through my operational assurance functions and the support of OSAG we continue to closely monitor progress.

Whilst I acknowledge that there is still much work to be carried out at the prison I am encouraged that progress is being made and that our monitoring of the prison is in line with your findings.

**Neil Richards**

Executive Director, Custodial Contracts

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'NR', with a stylized flourish at the end.

CC: Phil Cople, Director General Prisons