



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP & YOI Chelmsford  
200 Springfield Road  
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Essex  
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27 February 2023

*Den Choi.*

**HMP & YOI CHELMSFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2021 – 31 AUGUST 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 August 2022. My predecessor Robert Butler MP and the former Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Brandon Lewis CBE met the Governor, Garry Newnes, and staff at their visit to HMP & YOI Chelmsford in October 2022 and was able to discuss some of these themes in more detail.

I am very much aware of the amount of effort that goes into producing annual reports and thank you for providing a comprehensive picture of HMP & YOI Chelmsford over the reporting period, especially as you had several vacancies. I am sorry to hear of the problems experienced recruiting new members and thank you for drawing this issue to my attention. I can assure the Board that the IMB Secretariat has recently improved the guidance issued to candidates to explain what is expected of them and are currently exploring several areas to improve the general recruitment process.

I address below the other specific points you have raised for my attention:

In response to your comments about improving the prison's buildings and facilities, I am pleased to hear the shower refurbishment work in wings E1 and F1 was completed in September 2022 and a £400,000 project to replace the steam generators is projected to conclude by early 2023/24. In addition, £18 million is being invested site-wide for a fire safety improvement programme scheduled to commence in February 2024 for a duration of 19 months. A project to replace the gas main pipework will run in tandem and once the design specification to address the issue is approved, the work will start towards the middle or end of 2023. A project is underway for design and refurbishment of the video conferencing centre.

Any further work improvement requests from the prison team will be considered, however, demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding. As such the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Property Directorate must prioritise work very carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life, risk to security, capacity, decency and sustainability. As funding opportunities become available the MoJ Property Directorate work alongside the establishment to utilise as best as possible to improve the estate.

The MoJ Property Directorate are undertaking a survey report for non-residential buildings, including the visits hall and security department, which is scheduled to conclude by the end of March 2023 and will identify any further improvement requirements.

Turning to your Board's comments about securing accommodation on release, we recognise a stable base improves prisoner leavers opportunities for employment and turning their lives around. That is why

the Government remains committed to the plans set out in the Prisons Strategy White Paper to reduce re-offending, including by improving prison leavers' access to accommodation. Since my predecessor wrote to you last year our temporary accommodation service currently operating in five regions, including East of England, has expanded to Wales and our aim is to continue to roll this out to other parts of the country, to support those who would otherwise leave prison homeless. As you know, the recently created Strategic Housing Specialist (SHS) role will identify and work within the prison to identify and overcome barriers to settled accommodation. The high turnover of remand and short-term prisoners in HMP & YOI Chelmsford has been identified as a key priority for the SHS.

More broadly, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) remains committed to working with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to align our transitional accommodation service with its Accommodation for Ex-Offenders scheme. This supports prison leavers to better access private rented sector accommodation and build a pathway from prison to settled accommodation.

Although it was a challenging reporting period, it was encouraging to read that the number of violent incidents declined from the previous year, along with reduced self-harm rates and no self-inflicted deaths. I welcome the initiatives used to identify drug supply and was pleased to note that the prison staff worked hard to provide access to the gym and decency checks became more frequent and effective, leading to a noticeably better environment including the eradication of rats reported on site last year.

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 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 & YOI Chelmsford.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds', is positioned above a stylized signature that includes the letters 'J' and 'L'.

**Damian Hinds**  
**Minister for Prisons and Probation**

## HMP & YOI CHELMSFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2021 – 31 AUGUST 2022

### HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

#### **Improvement Support**

Although HMP & YOI Chelmsford continues to be supported by HMPPS Prison Performance Support Programme team, sufficient progress has been made in a number of important areas to merit removal from the programme, this will occur gradually over a three-month period. The recent Urgent Notification board also concluded that the outcome of the independent review of progress at HMP & YOI Chelmsford by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) on 15 - 17 August 2022 provided a level of independent scrutiny to further evidence the progress reported. The Governor with the support of the Prison Group Director will continue to progress the full Action Plan covering all the original HMIP recommendations.

#### **Operational Capacity/ Overcrowding and Additional Staffing**

##### *Operational Capacity / Overcrowding*

HMPPS published a revised policy framework for the certification of prisoner accommodation in April 2022, from which the useable operational capacity of the estate is derived. While most single cells in the prison system could physically hold two people, the determination of the maximum crowded capacity of a particular establishment is a matter of operational judgement, considering risks to safety and stability.

Since the completion of refurbishment work, HMP & YOI Chelmsford's operational capacity increased from 695 at the end of August 2022, to 725 in January 2023. This figure should be 750 but 25 spaces have been taken out due to ongoing damp issues and the operational capacity of a prison will only ever be set at level deemed to be safe and decent. The Prison Group Director has no plans to reduce this figure further given the national population pressures outlined below.

HMPPS acknowledges the ongoing concerns relating to crowding. Accommodating two prisoners in a cell designed for one is never desirable but this continues to be necessary across the prison estate in order to accommodate all those committed to custody by the courts. If in the future population growth is slower than projected and there is sufficient headroom in the estate, it will enable targeted reductions of the least suitable prison places (including crowded places). However, it is not possible to commit to this based on the latest projected population. It is also difficult to predict how these national trends will play out at a local level and the proportion of prisoners held in crowded cells at HMP & YOI Chelmsford will ultimately depend on regional population levels and demand.

##### *Additional Staffing*

HMP & YOI Chelmsford has been overstaffed to support detached duty commitments to support other prisons. From a national perspective, the current resourcing position is considered a healthy one with the target staffing figure for Band 3 prison officers at over 90%. The number of key worker sessions and facilitating healthcare escorts have since improved. There is recruitment campaign underway to fill other vacancies and ongoing non-effectives such as sick absences are being managed robustly.

## **Prisoners' Property**

The new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework is the result of extensive consultation, and it has been designed with procedural justice at its core. The framework aims to ensure consistency and fairness and enhance prisoners' satisfaction with processes and outcomes. Given the nature of property, and the movement of prisoners between establishments, the framework looks to provide greater direction and standardisation on a national basis. It strengthens processes in relation to the main problem areas identified by IMBs and staff including the handling of valuable property, managing cell clearances, compliance with volumetric control and forwarding on excess property following a prisoner's transfer.