



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Altcourse  
Brookfield Drive  
Fazakerley  
Liverpool  
L9 7LH

MoJ ref: SUB120682

17 January 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP ALT COURSE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 JULY 2023 – 30 JUNE 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Altcourse which I have read in detail. I am very grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations, especially as you continued to operate with several vacancies.

I was saddened to hear of the deaths of five prisoners during this reporting year. I can understand that self-inflicted deaths can have a particularly profound impact on staff, especially after attempts to save a prisoner's life. Any death is a tragedy, and I offer my condolences to all their friends and family, and to staff. Thank you for your helpful summary of existing themes from previous reports and I would like to reassure the Board that any recommendations that are made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman will continue to be taken very seriously.

I recognise that operational improvements are needed to ensure the safe and effective implementation of the statutory 28-day time limit for mental health transfers. The Mental Health Bill, which was introduced to Parliament on 6 November 2024, includes vital reforms to support people with severe mental illness in the criminal justice system. It aims to speed up access to specialist inpatient care, ensuring that offenders and defendants with severe mental health needs are able to access appropriate and timely support, in the most appropriate setting. The reforms include a new statutory time limit of 28-days for the transfer of patients with a mental disorder from prison and other places of detention to hospital. This time limit together with operational improvements, aims to reduce unnecessary delays and deliver swifter access to treatment.

An implementation plan is being created which sets out the operational changes which will be necessary to fulfil the commitment to commence this reform 18-24 months post Royal Assent. This is to ensure the necessary operational improvements have been made to enable safe implementation of the statutory time-limit, while delivering this Government's commitment to ensuring that people in contact with the criminal justice system can access appropriate and timely support to meet their mental health needs.

NHS England are taking steps to address some of the barriers to timely transfer of patients from prison and other places of detention to hospital which includes improving the way data is collected, monitored and reviewed, improving the referral process, and providing training to prison staff. They have also established the 'Mental Health and Justice Strategic Advisory Group' to provide clinical leadership, advice, and oversight across the pathway.

I note your concerns around the consequences of locating prisoners outside of their home area and the impact of this. The growth of the remand population to unprecedented levels is largely because of the courts backlog, which is impacting on the adult male estate. Where practicable, prisoners are accommodated as close as possible to their home probation region to maintain family ties, however the landscape remains extremely challenging due to a variety of factors including wider population pressures, security concerns and rehabilitation needs. I am however pleased to confirm that there is ongoing work to reconfigure the North West Courts which will impact positively on the number of redirections that HMP Altcourse currently receive.

Whilst I was disappointed to read that the vocational training unit closed during this reporting year, removing opportunities to gain qualifications in joinery, bricklaying and painting and decorating, it was encouraging to receive your comments that prisoners can still undertake work repairing old and damaged skips and that a number of prisoners have left HMP Altcourse after gaining employment with organisations linked to this work, both of which offer NVQ qualifications. I was also pleased to read the comments from the Board about the increase in the proportion of black and Asian staff working in the prison and the increase in number of female staff in management roles. This is a positive step in improving the diversity of the workplace at HMP Altcourse.

The Director is rightly proud that HMP Altcourse has achieved a period of relative stability despite the pressures faced by busy reception prisons, especially at a time of national population pressure. I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Director will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor 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 Altcourse.



**Lord Timpson**  
**Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending**

## **HMP ALT COURSE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2023 – 30 JUNE 2024**

### **HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report**

#### **Prisoners' food**

HMPPS note the Board's concerns around the food budget and the provider is working with suppliers in an effort to reduce costs and thereby maximise the quality of food offered. The provider has a bid commitment to achieve a 30% plant-based menu by 2025. This will be a cost-effective means by which to increase vitamins and minerals in the diet whilst reducing the carbon footprint and maintaining quality. A subject matter expert performed an inspection of behalf of the authority on in November 2024 and referred to the next visit concentrating on Menu Planning and Meal Provisions Assessment. The Director also has the ability to increase the budget if necessary to improve food provision.

#### **Kitchen Facilities**

HMPPS note your concerns around the kitchen facilities. There are no plans to expand the current kitchen facilities and the authority subject matter expert advises that the kitchen in its current form is suitable for the increased population and catering requirements. Nevertheless, the provider will continue to maintain a fully operational kitchen that remains suitable for the population. The pot wash area has been updated and consideration is being given to further improvements through replacing the kitchen flooring.