



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP/YOI Chelmsford  
200 Springfield Road  
Chelmsford  
CM2 6LQ

MoJ Ref: SUB121088

30 January 2025

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Chelmsford. Having read your report with care, I am really grateful to each and every one of you for the huge amount of work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations. This is especially impressive as you continued to operate with a high number of vacancies throughout the reporting year. Please do pass on my thanks to your colleagues.

I was deeply saddened to read that four prisoners died during the reporting year, these are tragic events and I offer my condolences to their friends and families. I would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

I was concerned to read that the Board considers that previous issues raised have not been addressed effectively. This must be extremely frustrating. I am keen to reset our relationship with Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) so that we better address the important issues identified through your monitoring activity. It is becoming increasingly clear to me that matters raised by IMBs often reflect system wide issues across the prison estate, criminal justice system or wider Government services. These issues, and others, may not be straight forward to solve, requiring progressive and collaborative action over a period of time to make the necessary changes. Staff continue to deal with difficult challenges day to day and I am extremely grateful for this hard work. I agree that the Board's voice should be actively listened to and am working hard to arrange opportunities to engage further wherever possible, such as the Independent Monitoring Board event at HMP Berwyn on 11 November 2024 where I spoke and answered questions from a number of members from across the country.

I would like to reassure you that concerns raised by IMBs feed into the department's own performance monitoring and the development of key policies. IMB intelligence is shared with ministers, policy teams and operations on a weekly basis, and is frequently used in tackling key thematic issues.

At a local level, I am happy to report that HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is investing approximately £27 million into HMP/YOI Chelmsford in the next financial year. This includes the programme to improve fire safety across the site, and the work required to replace the gas mains. It is estimated that works on both projects will commence in April 2025. HMPPS has also committed to replacing boilers across the site and is currently awaiting quotes to progress this area of work.

Despite your frustrations, I was encouraged that you were able to report some improvements regarding reductions in the number of incidents of both self-harm and violence, albeit there is room for further improvements, and that you consider the prison to be a safe place for prisoners most of the time. I was particularly pleased to read that you consider the Launchpad initiative to be a success and thank you for singling out the hard work of the prison's Digital and Communications Manager in implementing this. This is an important initiative to enable prisoners to actively engage in prison life and equip them with digital skills that will aid their resettlement.

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 Lord Chancellor and I appreciated the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Chelmsford.



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

## **HMP/YOI CHELMSFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2023 – 31 AUGUST 2024**

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

#### **Capacity Issues**

Operational capacity at HMP/YOI Chelmsford has been reduced to account for cells that are uninhabitable due to damp and mould. As outlined in the Minister's response, HMPPS is investing approximately £27 million into HMP/YOI Chelmsford in the next financial year to improve the infrastructure.

The HMPPS 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, including adequate lighting, heating, ventilation, fittings, and access to water and sanitation. These standards ensure that prisoners are accommodated safely even when held in crowded conditions.

On 12 July 2024, the Lord Chancellor announced a package of measures aimed at addressing prison capacity and the 10-year prison capacity strategy was subsequently published in December 2024. This will allow the department to consider longer term reform of the system, including decency across the estate. We are committed to the construction of a further four new prisons, as well as the expansion and refurbishment of the existing estate, including through temporary accommodation. These new places will have a positive impact on lowering the proportion of crowding in the prison estate by providing accommodation that is safe, decent and uncrowded.

With headroom generated by SDS40, there is flexibility to deactivate the most operationally challenging crowding, at least for a period of time. This could enable targeted reductions of the least suitable prison places, but it is not possible to commit to numbers or locations until the overall capacity position has stabilised.