



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Elmley
Church Road
East Church
Sheerness
Kent
ME12 4DZ

MoJ ref: SUB123585

15 May 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP ELMLEY: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2023 – 31 OCTOBER 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Elmley. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for the hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations. The dedication and commitment shown is very much appreciated, particularly as your membership remained below a third of your complement throughout the year with just three of you monitoring at one point.

I was saddened to hear six prisoners died during the reporting year, either in custody or shortly after release. I offer my condolences to all their friends and family and would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

I fully understand the Board's concerns about the investment required at HMP Elmley to improve the standard of accommodation. This is a challenge we face in many of our prisons, but the Board can be assured that we recognise that improvements are needed at the prison and there are bids for projects to replace the boilers site-wide to improve the heating, as well as a further shower refurbishment project to build on existing plans. There are also bids to improve safety and security, with improved CCTV, replacement security lighting posts, and the installation of a smoke extraction system in Healthcare. However, as the demands for maintenance across the prison estate are much greater than the available funding, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) will continue to prioritise works carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency.

Improvements have been taking place during the reporting period, with the refurbishment of some of the cells in the prisons Inpatients Department receiving new safety hatches and whitewood furniture. Work is planned to replace shower doors in House Block 5 and to improve the ventilation of the showers in House Block 6. There is also an ongoing flooring replacement programme and funding has been secured for two replacement lifts. Additionally, there are plans being considered to replace the boiler plant in House Block 5, along with plans to upgrade the fire compartmentation and undertake a shower refurbishment. Delivery of a new House Block 7 also remains on schedule to complete in March 2026 and will provide new accommodation for up to 247 prisoners. The local Facilities Management Team will also continue to carry out repair works as necessary to ensure heating and shower facilities remain available.

Turning to the Board's concerns about fire safety on House Block 5, risk assessments undertaken by Ministry of Justice Property and National Health, Safety and Fire, have resulted in mitigations being put in place to protect staff and prisoners from fire. Whilst there is not sufficient capacity in the prison estate to

decommission the House Block, its operational capacity has been reduced by half. Other mitigations include the fitting of domestic smoke detectors, which are in addition to the existing automatic fire alarm system which remains functional, additional staff patrols and a separate electrical supply for mobile misting units in the event of a fire. The Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate have also completed an inspection in January 2025 which found the risk reduction plan suitable and sufficient to mitigate the risks. However, work will not stop there and as noted earlier, further passive fire protection compartmentation works within the Houseblock 5 are in planning.

Whilst there is more to do, I was encouraged that there have been improvements in the quality of teaching and recruitment of qualified education staff. It was reassuring that you have seen staff and prisoners interact well overall and that those staff who work with the most challenging prisoners in the Care and Separation Unit do establish positive relationships. I welcome that prison leaders have also identified an avenue to reduce self-harm which has shown to be effective with the launch of a 'Just ask Why' campaign and training for Prison Officers.

It was also interesting to read about the 'Bus to Bed' work within Reception to alleviate the anxiety of new arrivals and the invaluable support 'insiders', prisoners that work in Reception, can provide. As many prisoners have mental health needs, I was really pleased to note the provision of mental health nurses has increased to provide the support they need.

I note you have raised six 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 two 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 immensely grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Elmley.

Yours sincerely,

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

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Purposeful Activities and Employment on Release

HMPPS continues to work to give prisoners the support they need to break through barriers to get into work on release and fill skills gaps. An *Employment on Release Policy Framework* was published in April 2024, providing guidance on best practice to resource and operate employment initiatives, to support prisoners on this part of their resettlement journey. A series of investments have also been made so that 93 prisons across England and Wales, including HMP Elmley now have an Employment Advisory Board, Employment Hub, a Prison Employment Lead and an Identification and Banking Administrator. The Employment Advisory Board is chaired by a business leader to provide support and challenge on the prisons employment strategy. Each Employment Hub provides prisoners with access to employment support similar to a job centre. This is run by a dedicated Prison Employment Lead who works with employers to match prisoners with available job opportunities and the Identification and Banking Administrator ensures that prisoners have the identification and bank account arrangements required to take up work.

The Board's concerns about vocational training are recognised, but due to the average length of stay of a prisoner at HMP Elmley being 16 weeks, prisoners are not at the prison long enough to complete some vocational qualifications, such as plastering, bricklaying, plumbing, which can take up to 12 months. Nevertheless, qualification delivery within the workshops is being developed further, with Band 4 Instructors due to complete the Level 3 Award in Education & Training during 2025 and HMP Elmley continues to focus on development of employability and soft skills within its industry workshops. A Clean, Rehabilitative, Enabling & Decent Team is being launched allowing two members of staff to supervise a work party of right prisoners who will work on a cell refurbishment program. The Construction Skills Certification Scheme and job ready work, as well as ID provision, help with accommodation and CV writing and assist prisoners to increase their employability on release. The prison will also continue to work on its connections with both local and national companies who do offer appropriate prison leavers employment and training opportunities on release.

Safer Shaving

HMPPS has conducted comprehensive pilots and studies on the impact of wet shave razor availability. It concluded that the main risk associated with razor blades was that of violence and potential weapon making. As such in May 2024, it was announced that wet shave razors would be removed from adult male closed prisons and replaced with a bespoke electric razor designed for HMPPS. The implementation has commenced in 31 sites in the adult male closed estate, with a longer-term plan for the remainder of the adult closed male estate subject to funding being available. The initial sites were selected based on the rates of all assaults between June 2023 to June 2024, excluding prisons which had already gone wet razor free. HMP Elmley is not included in the initial sites and the effect of this on self-harm will continue to be monitored as it is recognised locally that cutting with a razor blade is the most frequent form of self-harm. All prisoners at risk of self-harm will continue to be supported through Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork case management, taking an individualised approach via 'Just Ask Why' and Key Work.