



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Dovegate
Uttoxeter
Staffordshire
ST14 8XR

MoJ ref: SUB124489

3 June 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP DOVEGATE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 OCTOBER 2023 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Dovegate. I have read your report carefully and thank you and your colleagues for your continued dedication and the hard work that has been put into providing your helpful observations. This is particularly appreciated given you have been operating with fewer board members than your recommended complement.

I was saddened to read there were three deaths in custody during the reporting year, one of which was apparently self-inflicted. Every death in our care is a tragedy and I offer my heartfelt condolences to the friends and family of all of the deceased. I would also like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

I was concerned to read that transferring prisoners with severe mental health issues to specialist care continues to be an issue. The Mental Health Bill, introduced to Parliament on 6 November 2024, will provide 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. Cross-agency work to support the implementation of this has led to a greater understanding of the barriers to meeting the 28-day timeframe. It has revealed the systemic barriers and the scale of the challenges that include workforce, bed capacity and estates. We will be working with partners to create an implementation plan which sets out the operational changes which will be necessary to fulfil our commitment to commencing this reform 18-24 months post Royal Assent.

A national Rapid Review Framework is being established to drive forward actions to improve the timeliness of prison transfers to secure mental health hospitals. Regionally, a Midlands-wide monthly strategic working group has been established and a regional action plan developed to focus on key areas such as bed capacity, clinical prioritisation, data collection and scoping of new models of delivery (e.g. rapid assessment, treatment, and remission). A fortnightly clinically-led operational group meets to discuss patient-specific cases and actions required across all partners to ensure timely transfer. Whilst prisoners await a transfer at HMP Dovegate, I can assure the Board they are frequently assessed to ensure that their location and regime within the prison is the most appropriate based on risk to themselves as well as the safety of staff and other prisoners.

You will be aware that improving opportunities for prisoner employment and rehabilitation is an area of particular interest and importance to me. While there are currently no plans to introduce a corporate

responsibility initiative or subsidy, the New Futures Network (NFN) regularly works with employers to broker job opportunities in prison, on Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL), and working with over 300 employers on release. The NFN is also publishing updated employer guidance to support businesses to navigate working with prisons. This will cover employment on release, ROTL, apprenticeships and prison workshops. To supplement this work, the Chair of the business-led Employment Advisory Board at HMP Dovegate, which advises the prison on skills delivery, attends the newly formed Midlands Employment Council that brings together regional businesses with prisons, probation, and the Department for Work and Pensions.

To encourage more employers to work with offenders on release, HMP Dovegate successfully held an open day in September 2024 and secured new partnerships with the Right Course (catering), Star Foundation (charity service sector), PCE (cement mouldings modern construction) and Bakers (sustainability and recycling). The prison has fostered relationship with Cosy Direct who have increased their orders from the woodworking unit together with a commitment to employ prisoners on release. HMP Dovegate has also renewed the relationship with RMF to supply new work for the welding workshop related to the construction of new homes and three prisoners have been offered employment via this pathway on release since September 2024.

An agreement to write a monthly blog for the local parish council newsletter has brought forth a new partnership with Utiliqo in the utilities and energy sector, that has agreed to employ men from the prison on release provided they meet the necessary criteria and qualifications. The prison has also invested in "Inside Job" through the organisation Beating Time and the Director has secured a seat on the local Burton and District Chambers of Commerce Board with the aim of attracting further potential companies through positive engagement. Serco have also created an Industries Broker role with responsibility for three prisons including HMP Dovegate. The post-holder has both attended and hosted local job fairs within the community. HMP Dovegate also continues to work closely with Public Sector Prisons within the region that already have links with companies that provide employment on release.

It was pleasing to receive your comments that the prison is well maintained with attractive gardens, productive vegetable and flower growing areas, and the grounds have ponds and ducks which are cared for by prisoners. I was encouraged to read that the atmosphere is generally calm and settled with good staff and prisoner relationships. I noted some other positive developments such as constructive key work interactions, prisoners' increased time out of cell, and that the welding workshop has been well received.

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 Dovegate.

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

Prisoners' Property

Policy Framework and Digital Records

We recognise that this continues to be flagged by the Board and is an area to which HMPPS is currently giving further attention. Careful consideration will be given to the findings in the IMB national thematic report on how property loss impacts prisoners, as well as recent policy into practice publications produced by the PPO in relation to handling of prisoners' property and property complaints. As the Board identifies, a common area for problems is when excess prisoner property is forwarded on when a prisoner transfers establishments. It is therefore essential that prisoners comply with volumetric control limits, since anything within those limits will transfer with them. HMPPS is focusing on what more can be done to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Prisoners' Property Framework.

The introduction of the digitally recorded Prisoner Escort Record (dPER) including a property section that accurately records the number and type of sealed property 'owned' by and transferred with the prisoner and an accurate record of property handover between different stakeholders. This is now embedded as business as usual. The digital process has assisted with investigations for property that is lost in transit with Prisoner Escorting and Custody Services (PECS) suppliers. PECS also review complaints during monthly formal meetings with the supplier. Where there are several prisoners being transferred out to the same establishment, HMP Dovegate often provide transport to move property where the escort vehicles do not have the capacity to do so.

Permissible Items on Transfer

HMPPS is aware that there are inconsistencies across the estate with permissible items of property. The items in local facilities lists are chosen, in part, by governors/directors from the National Facilities List (NFL) in the Incentives Policy Framework (IPF). The NFL consists of two lists, Part 1 being items that must be permitted to all prisoners, where requested, and Part 2 being items that governors are able to include for prisoners above 'Basic' in their local incentives policy - it is not mandatory that items in Part 2 be available.

The freedom to select items is important as it allows Governors/Directors to tailor their local incentives policy in a way that better incentivises their prison population. All items of prisoners' property are subject to volumetric control limits. Notwithstanding the importance of providing Governors/Directors with the necessary discretion to include Part 2 items in their local facilities list. The IPF also states that if a prisoner arrived with items that are not on the local facilities list, the receiving Governor/Director must consider these items on a case-by-case basis. Unless the item(s) is considered a risk to good order, discipline, security, safety and/or exceed volumetric control limits, the prisoner should normally be allowed to retain it in-possession.

Remanding Prisoners via Electronic Monitoring

The Bail Act 1976 allows Electronic Monitoring (EM) to be imposed on suitable defendants aged 12 or over. For those aged 18 or over the court can only impose EM if the defendant would otherwise be remanded in custody. Electronically monitored bail is available as an alternative to remand and the Ministry of Justice is working to raise awareness of this. The decision to remand an individual in custody or to grant bail is solely a matter for the courts and independent judiciary acting in accordance with the

Bail Act 1976. Court bail orders remain the largest cohort of individuals fitted with an EM device accounting for 35% of the overall EM caseload. The number of individuals fitted with an electronic monitoring device under a court bail order increased by 16% from 6,367 as of 30 June 2023 to 7,411 as of 30 June 2024.