



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Bristol
19 Cambridge Road
Bristol
BS7 8PS

MoJ ref: SUB130547

9 January 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP BRISTOL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 AUGUST 2024 – 31 JULY 2025**

Thank you for sharing your Board's annual report on HMP Bristol. I have reviewed it with close attention and would like to extend my sincere appreciation to you and your fellow Board members for the thoughtful insights and the evident care taken in compiling the report. This is especially commendable given that the year began and ended with the Board operating below full complement.

I was saddened to read of the three deaths in custody during the reporting year. One death was apparently self-inflicted and two involved prisoners with existing health conditions who died in local hospitals. Any death in custody is a tragedy, and my thoughts are with the families and friends of those who died. Each death is subject to independent investigation by the Prison and Probation Ombudsman and it is essential that lessons are identified and acted upon to reduce the risk of future harm.

Further to my progress update of 28 July 2025, which set out key developments under the Urgent Notification process, this response focuses on additional actions relating to the issues raised in your report.

In addition to the progress reported under the Urgent Notification process and July update efforts have been made in reducing remand pressures and improving timeliness. That is, Magistrates' court sentencing powers were increased from six to twelve months and additional Crown Court sitting days were funded to a record 110,000 this year to improve case throughput. The Bail Act amendments in the Sentencing Bill refine the "no real prospect" test, limiting custodial remand where an immediate custodial sentence is unlikely, including for defendants awaiting sentence. The Bail Information Service continues to provide factual reports for eligible defendants at first hearing and for subsequent applications, supporting judicial decision-making. These steps complement measures such as SDS40 and Fixed Term Recall of twenty-eight days for sentences under forty-eight months. The first part of Sir Brian Leveson's Independent Review of the Criminal Courts has been published, and the Government will set out its full response in due course.

The South West region has continued to roll out Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 emergency accommodation, which provides supported housing for up to 84 nights. Provision has increased by 25%, bringing the total to 236 beds across the region, with 46 dedicated to Bristol and South Gloucestershire. Nationally, probation staffing has grown by 22% since unification in 2021, and the service exceeded its

2024/25 trainee target by onboarding 1,057 trainees, with a further 1,300 planned for 2025/26. Commissioned Rehabilitative Services are being reprocured, with new contracts due to go live in Spring 2027. These services will provide in-prison engagement from reception, pre-release contact with community providers and meet at the gate support for vulnerable prisoners. Alongside this, the Our Future Probation Service Programme is reforming processes and introducing technology to reduce administrative burden and support sustainable workloads.

The Board raises concerns about the potential impact of changes to the visa system on prison officer recruitment. As you are aware, the Government has made changes to Immigration Rules to reduce net migration. We are clear net migration must fall further as we create a system that is controlled and fair. However, public safety is the first duty of any Government, and we must ensure that our prisons can continue to run safely with the right level of experienced staff. For that reason, we have given a specific, time-limited exemption to Skilled Worker visa rules for prison officers who are already in the country. It applies only to in-country applicants – no overseas recruitment will be permitted under this exemption. The change will remain in place up to 31 December 2026, with a lower salary threshold of £33,400 (subject to updates) in place until 31 December 2027.

Communications have been issued to senior prison leaders about the exemption, and about how eligible staff can go about seeking sponsorship. We must ensure that prisons can continue to run safely with the right level of experienced staff, and this exemption is vital given the pressure the prison estate has been under.

I want to acknowledge the areas of progress identified by the Board during the reporting year. Prisoners have provided positive feedback on education provision with fewer cancellations of classes and improved engagement. Initiatives such as the monthly “learner of the month” award, attended by prisoners’ families have been particularly well received. Since the Urgent Notification in 2023, the quality and quantity of education provision have improved, a development recognised by Ofsted. The Board also notes reductions in violence and self-harm, improved regime stability and the professionalism and commitment of staff, all of which have contributed to a safer and more purposeful environment, while recognising that this progress remains fragile.

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. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I appreciated 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 Bristol.

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

Timescale for in-cell sanitation on B Wing

The design for in-cell sanitation on B Wing has been finalised and submitted for funding. HMPPS is committed to improving decency standards across the prison estate, including the removal of night sanitation systems. At HMP Bristol, a project is underway to explore all available options in relation to B Wing, including the removal of night sanitation. This work remains at an early stage and all options are being assessed to ensure they are fit for purpose and represent value for money. Until funding is secured and the project moves into the delivery phase, it is not possible to confirm a timescale for completion. All requests for maintenance and capital investment are carefully considered in the context of significant demand across the estate and finite resources. Once a bid is received, HMPPS must prioritise works, with a focus on risk to life, risk to capacity and decency considerations. The proposal for B Wing remains within this assurance and funding consideration process.

Launchpad digital programme

HMP Bristol has been identified as one of the next sites for deployment. Work is underway to install the necessary digital infrastructure, including Wi-Fi, which is approximately 50% complete. However, funding for the rollout of Launchpad laptops has not yet been approved and implementation remains subject to future national allocations.

Length of contracts for prison food providers

Contract length is reviewed as part of each procurement exercise, considering factors such as the market landscape, the value and complexity of the contract, the criticality of the service and alignment with policy and strategic objectives. For high-value and complex contracts such as prison food provision, competitive procurement exercises require significant time and resource. The most recent re-procurement of the prison food contract began in 2023 and has resulted in a contract term of five years, with options to extend by a further two years and then one year. This contract is due to go live in 2026. The structure was chosen to balance the need for stability with flexibility to review performance, value for money and market conditions. Value for money is a fundamental requirement of public procurement. The preferred supplier was selected based on technical capability and cost and all products supplied must meet specifications aligned with HMPPS standards and Government Buying Standards. A new Food in Prison Policy is due to go live in early 2026 and refers to the use of local suppliers where it is possible to support quality and value for money. In parallel, the HMPPS Future Food Service Project is reviewing future contractual arrangements to ensure continuity of supply and the best possible value and quality.