



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Bullingdon
PO Box 50
Bicester
Oxon
OX25 1WD

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23 January 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP BULLINGDON: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2024 – 30 JUNE 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Bullingdon. I value the effort that has gone into producing such an informative report and appreciate that your work in collating this has been made more challenging by having a lower number of members than recommended.

I was deeply saddened to learn that three men died in custody during the reporting year, with a further death occurring post release. Each death is a tragedy, and I extend my condolences to the families and friends affected. I note that two of the deaths remain under investigation by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman and I offer assurance that any subsequent recommendations made will be carefully considered.

I share the Board's concern about the high turnover of prisoners and the large remand population, which make it difficult to maintain stability and deliver meaningful rehabilitation. To address this, all closed prisons for men are resourced to provide one key work session per eligible prisoner each week with governors expected to aim for two sessions over four weeks and mandatory sessions within the first 14 days of custody and the 14 days before release. Performance against these commitments is monitored by Prison Group Directors and Executive Directors, and the introduction of a key work quality measure has improved delivery standards. A new audit process will further strengthen compliance and ensure that support is tailored to individual needs. National reviews of sentencing and estate configuration will consider further changes to reduce disruption and improve rehabilitation outcomes.

Locally, the prison has introduced a short-stay pathway for men in custody for 6 weeks or less, providing focused personal development and access to education and vocational opportunities. Incentives encourage early engagement and the vocational offer has been expanded to include bicycle maintenance, hospitality, barista training and music, alongside entrepreneurship courses for those who are self-employed or aspire to start a business. The prison also collaborates on a rail track programme that combines training in custody with continued learning and job interviews in the community. Digital systems also improve continuity of learning across the estate. Pre-release planning at HMP Bullingdon has been strengthened through enhanced support for men serving short sentences, including three-way meetings between the pre-release officer, the community offender manager and the prisoner with referrals coordinated through a regional referral hub to reduce duplication and support more meaningful engagement.

I appreciate that the Board is again raising concerns about overcrowding and cell sharing. As you outline in your report, work has been undertaken to improve conditions in cells with the deployment of decency teams to repair cell furniture and fixtures and a refurbishment programme to address dilapidation in wings is underway. Decisions on accommodation are governed by safety and decency and where cell sharing is necessary, it is subject to a formal certification process that considers risks to safety and stability. Unfortunately, such measures have been necessary to deal with prison capacity pressures, which this Government is continuing to address but there are no quick fixes. As well as delivering 14,000 new prison places, we are seeking to implement many of the recommendations in the Independent Sentencing Review through the Sentencing Bill. Reforms in the Bill to tackle the prison capacity crisis include a new progression model, introducing a presumption to suspend short custodial sentences of 12 months or less and reforming recall. The Bill is progressing through the legislative process, and we anticipate that it will receive Royal Assent in early 2026.

I acknowledge the importance of accommodation on release and I recognise the frustration that the Board is again raising this as a concern. Efforts continue to try to ensure accommodation on release, working closely with local authorities. At HMP Bullingdon, Prison Offender Managers and the Resettlement Team screen prisoners at induction and during sentence planning to identify those at risk of homelessness. The pre-release team reviews high-risk cases and works with strategic housing specialists and local authorities to explore options. The departure lounge provides practical support on release day, including access to community health services, housing advice, phone charging and basic essentials. The Commissioned Rehabilitative Services deliver specialist accommodation support for all people in custody, including those on remand and subject to early release, complementing mainstream public services and duty to refer activities. Future Commissioned Rehabilitative Services contracts, due to go live in 2027, will offer enhanced support for housing, finance and wider pre-release needs. The Community Accommodation Service Tier Three provides up to 204 bed spaces in the South-Central region and local authorities now have a presence in the prison to assist with assessments and support packages.

Whilst I appreciate you will be frustrated at raising many of your previous concerns, I was encouraged by some of the positives highlighted in your report. The introduction of the Launchpad digital platform has streamlined and improved processes such as visit booking, complaints and menu selection. The refurbished gym has enhanced opportunities for physical activity and the Here to Help peer support scheme continues to provide practical assistance and transferable skills that support reintegration.

I note that your report has also raised some local concerns. The Governor will continue to keep you informed of any developments regarding these matters. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I very much appreciate the valuable role played by all members of the Independent Monitoring Boards operating throughout the prison estate and we are grateful for your ongoing dedication on behalf of HMP Bullingdon.

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

Staffing shortages and turnover

Recruitment and retention remain a priority for HMPPS and for HMP Bullingdon. The prison's staffing position has improved over the past year, rising from ninety-two percent of target in September 2024 to ninety-five percent in September 2025. Tactical resourcing measures are available through the Operational Resourcing and Stability Panel, which can deploy additional support when required. Nationally, the Enable Programme has progressed and is transforming workforce capability through a redesigned twelve month experiential foundation training model that combines classroom learning with practical experience. This includes extended induction, structured mentoring and on-the-job learning throughout the first year, supported by performance tracking and feedback loops. Core capability packages provide targeted development for staff with six to twenty-four months of service, covering sixteen essential skills to reinforce confidence and competence. Locally, HMP Bullingdon operates a New Colleague Mentor scheme, a buddy system pairing experienced staff with new recruits and additional training days to reinforce key skills.

Retention is supported by a comprehensive strategy and oversight process, including deep dive reviews at high attrition sites, structured exit interviews and a retention toolkit informed by research into attrition drivers. HMP Bullingdon has completed a retention deep dive and is implementing targeted actions based on its findings. Recruitment campaigns continue nationally and regionally, including targeted job board activity and a forthcoming multi-channel campaign, aimed at career switchers and candidates aged thirty and above. Schemes such as the Prison Officer Alumni Network and the Advance into Justice pathway for armed forces veterans and their spouses further strengthen candidate attraction. These measures are designed to ensure prisons are sufficiently resourced and that staff are supported to build experience and deliver quality outcomes.

Violence, safety and security

Reducing violence and improving safety remain key priorities for HMPPS. HMP Bullingdon has bespoke contingency arrangements for serious incidents and concerted indiscipline, including immediate deployment of trained local staff supported by regional resources and specialist units such as the National Tactical Response Group and Tornado teams. All substantive operational heads of function are Silver Command trained and national protocols ensure effective escalation to Gold Command for the most serious incidents.

Significant investment has been made in physical security across the estate with forty million pounds allocated this year, including ten million pounds for anti-drone measures such as secure netting and window upgrades at fifteen priority prisons. Restricted Fly Zones introduced in January 2024 around all closed prisons and young offender institutions strengthen enforcement against illegal drone use. HMP Bullingdon completed a vulnerability assessment in June 2025 to identify local risks and implement mitigations. The refurbishment programme includes installing closed-circuit television on wings currently without coverage and security teams work closely with safety colleagues to analyse incident data and implement intelligence-led interventions. Mobile phone detection technology, targeted searches and local partnerships with police disrupt contraband and organised violence. Weekly safety intervention meetings review intelligence and violent incident trends to ensure timely action plans for hotspots.

Health provision

Improving access to healthcare is a shared priority for the prison, the provider and commissioners. HMP Bullingdon holds regular operational meetings with Practice Plus Group to review performance, address staffing shortages and agree improvement plans. NHS England commissioning strengthens oversight through regular data reviews, contract meetings and partnership boards, supported by audits and user feedback. Workforce governance is reinforced through quarterly staffing reviews to ensure safe care delivery. A systemic review of pharmacy operations is being planned, covering medication delivery, workforce, hatch monitoring and prescribing, with recommendations feeding into a consolidated action plan that will be monitored monthly. Subcontractor performance is reviewed quarterly and incorporated into ongoing improvement plans. Providers have introduced an integrated pathway model that coordinates physical, mental and social care, enhancing collaboration, reducing duplication and improving continuity of care.