



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Bedford
St Loyes Street
Bedford
MK40 1HG

MoJ ref: SUB13142

30 January 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI BEDFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2024 – 31 JUNE 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Bedford. I very much appreciate you and your colleagues for your efforts in putting together an informative report, especially as you have remained short of members and this reduced further during your reporting period.

I was saddened to read a prisoner died during the reporting year whilst at hospital in the community and I extend my heartfelt condolences to the family and friends. Whilst the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman investigation remains ongoing, I can provide reassurance that should any recommendations be made these will be taken very seriously to learn lessons.

Having read your report with care I do understand the Board's concerns about the changes to the UK Immigration Rules. The Ministry of Justice were in active discussions with the Home Office on this issue and I am pleased to say that on 19 December, a temporary exemption came into effect to certain aspects of the immigration rules for prison officers already in the country. The change will remain in place up to the 31 December 2026 with a lower salary threshold being set for prison officers until 31 December 2027. This temporary exemption ensures that prisons can run safely with the right level of experienced staff. As indicated in your report, HMP/YOI Bedford has seen a reduction in staff resignations which has improved stability and experience levels locally.

While it is acknowledged that the prison still has more to do, I am pleased that the Board has highlighted the many positive steps being made at HMP/YOI Bedford, such as the reduction in violence against staff and prisoners and the use of force to de-escalate an incident. I welcome the progress in the cleanliness and decency across the site and in particular the relocation of the Care and Separation Unit (CASU), given the Board's previous concerns about this unit. It was encouraging to read about the WINGS project initiatives, the improved attendance and engagement in education and increase in key work sessions which all help to support prisoners in their rehabilitation.

I am aware that you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will keep you updated on as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I recognise the important role which members of Independent Monitoring Boards undertake within our prisons and we therefore very much appreciate your ongoing dedication on behalf of HMP/YOI Bedford.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James".

Lord Timpson

Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Healthcare

NHS England is responsible for all health treatment in custody in prisons in England. However, HMPPS is committed to working in partnership with the health and social care partners, so that people in prison can access the equivalent standard and range of health services as they would receive in the community. The Board can be assured that NHS England have always taken direct action to ensure that the healthcare contract is properly managed via structured contract review meetings. NHS England Commissioner support has also been constructive to allow the healthcare provider to address the issues raised by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) warning notice issued on 1 May 2025. The healthcare provider promptly created a comprehensive action plan and took significant steps to address the concerns raised by the CQC. A Medicine Optimisation Service quality assurance visit was commissioned by NHS England which made further recommendations for improvements and continued support was provided to the healthcare provider, including assistance from the NHS England Regional Quality Lead and Health and Justice Commissioning Manager.

In August 2025 the CQC visited to follow-up on the warning notice which was positive, resulting in the warning notice being lifted and several staff were highlighted for good practice. However, NHS England assurance and oversight continues to ensure that improvements are progressing and are being maintained in the context of a challenged and pressured prison environment. Delays in staff vetting have also been escalated to support the provider in bringing up health delivery. A new interim manager has been appointed to manage the healthcare department at HMP/YOI Bedford and the prison will continue to work closely with its healthcare partners to ensure the best possible care is provided.

Window Replacement

A project is under development to replace approximately 62–80 windows. This will focus on the higher risk areas within the prison, which are most vulnerable to both the weather and influx of illicit items. Whilst the specification for the new window design has been signed off, the project requires funding streams to be established and approved. In addition, HMPPS is commissioning a site-wide window survey to assess condition and inform a future bid for a more comprehensive replacement across the site. However, as demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding, HMPPS will be prioritising works very carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency. In the interim, the prison is focussing on internal cell window repairs using Perspex for the remedial work to improve cell decency during periods of colder weather.

Cell Observation Panels

As a contingency arrangement for fire safety, all cell doors have an observation panel enabling staff to see the extent and size of the fire, to judge the effectiveness of the fire hose inundation port and to communicate with the prisoner. If the inundation port is obstructed, it should be possible to break or remove the observation panel to insert a fire hose. In areas where observation panels are subject to high attack rates, such as Segregation Units, a new Type 2 observation panel was introduced in October 2023 following research and live prison trials. This specification is a removable cassette-style observation panel with toughened glazing, paired with a bayonet-style inundation port. It addresses the issue of panels being easily broken but continues to provide a contingency arrangement in the event of a fire. This Type 2 specification is available to any cell doors in any category establishment, however, they must be introduced to a whole operational section of a prison, such as a Segregation Unit, a whole houseblock, or

wing. Both the Type 1 specification (breakable glass) and Type 2 are available to prisons as a compliant standard. To date, only three prisons have implemented this Type 2 solution within their Segregation Units. However, due to repeat breakages of the observation panels in the Care and Separation Unit at HMP/YOI Bedford, discussions have taken place to install the more robust option and the prison is in the process of sourcing funding for this project.

Digital Launchpad System

The Board can be assured that the installation of Launchpad is underway. The Wi-Fi installation and supporting infrastructure work is scheduled to complete within the current financial year 2025/26 and the scheduled go live is in quarter one of 2026/27 financial year. The first of three application services anticipated to be fulfilled from the end of April 2026 will give prisoners digital access and allow HMP/YOI Bedford to start to transition away from paper-based systems and towards improved interaction and services.

Subject Visits Policy

Visitor guidance is currently governed by '*Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 16/2011 - Providing Visits and Services to Visitors*'. However, as part of the work being undertaken by HMPPS Family Services nationally this policy is under review and the Board's concerns will be considered. Where necessary the policy will be updated as part of the wider consultation. Locally, HMP/YOI Bedford has clear clothing guidance which is consistent with other prisons and is available on its government website. This guidance is also displayed in the visitors' centre, which all visitors pass through prior to entering the prison. The amount of money allowed into HMP/YOI Bedford for use during visits is reviewed locally and currently is £20 per adult and £10 per child. This is currently considered to be more than sufficient to make purchases during visits but will be reviewed in line with any rising costs and in response to visitor feedback locally.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

To clarify HMPPS has in place an 'Advancing Equality for Offenders and Children in Custody Policy Framework' which sets out how best to manage offenders and children in custody in line with the Equality Act 2010. The framework ensures that our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty are met, as public sector organisations, such as HMPPS, must ensure that services are accessible to people with a disability or impairment, such as those that are deaf or hard of hearing, and all staff should be aware that people with additional support needs must not be discriminated against, either directly or indirectly. HMPPS also has a disability action plan in place for 2025/26 which is designed to improve how we identify and address the needs of disabled prisoners and people on probation, to enable a more inclusive environment for effective rehabilitation.

HMP/YOI Bedford operates its local equality policy and provides clear processes to support prisoners who are deaf or have hearing impairments and these are regularly reviewed to ensure they remain effective. On reception, any prisoner declaring a disability, including hearing loss, is assessed by reception staff and healthcare to identify reasonable adjustments and determine whether a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) is required. Staff are trained to follow the PEEP process and to work with partners to identify and implement suitable communication aids, equipment and safety measures where needed from the outset. NHS England also continues to work with healthcare providers to understand the needs of people who are deaf in the context of health delivery and will support the development of a pathway as clinically appropriate.