



# Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Ford

**For reporting year  
1 November 2024 to 31 October 2025**

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## **Introductory sections 1 – 3**

### **1. Statutory role of the IMB**

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that States designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

## 2. Description of the establishment

2.1 HMP Ford is a category D open prison. The main aim of the prison is rehabilitation and resettlement. Subject to the requirements of their sentence plan, men are encouraged to take up courses in education and vocational training, as well as full-time work in the community. Prisoners at Ford are considered trustworthy in open conditions and include both men coming to the end of long sentences and those serving shorter sentences.

2.2 As at 31 October 2025, Ford had an operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) of 389<sup>1</sup> adult men, which was increased from 349 in March 2025, when 40 of the pods (small, separate, self-contained housing units) were brought back into operation. The further delayed expansion project at Ford, which would have taken the capacity up to 709 men, has yet to receive planning permission.

2.3 Ford was converted to an open prison in 1960 from a former Fleet Air Arm station and is situated in West Sussex, two miles from the coast and three miles south of Arundel. It covers an area of 110 acres, bisected by a busy class B public road. Ford railway station is a mile away.

2.4 The accommodation, all of which is single occupancy, is comprised of a brick-built block with 214 single rooms (A wing), two other brick-built accommodation units, with 55 rooms, and 120 pods. All the brick-built accommodation has shared washing and toilet facilities, while each pod has its own facilities. There are still no purpose-designed rooms for prisoners with disabilities, although C1 landing in A-wing and eight of the pods have modifications to assist prisoners with physical needs.

2.5 Prisoners have access to a well-equipped gymnasium and outdoor exercise equipment, which are adequate for the operational capacity of 389.

2.6 On-site academic education is provided by Milton Keynes College and, for part of the year only, vocational training was delivered by Chichester College. Both are supplemented by prison staff.

2.7 Ford offers a variety of practical qualifications and training to prepare prisoners for work both before and after release. The Chichester College Ford Campus School of Construction, which offered painting and decorating, dry lining, carpentry and bricklaying, was closed in March 2025. Other on-site opportunities for training include the engineering workshop, waste management, bicycle refurbishment and horticulture. Opportunities for paid work based on the prison site include the prison café, Serving Thyme, and the reduced-scope DHL warehouse, which distributes food packs for only two prisons now: Ford and Lewes. A new social enterprise workshop opened in October 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's position at the time of reporting but may be subject to change following further validation and therefore may not always tally with Official Statistics later published by the Ministry of Justice.

2.8 In addition to the significant number of members of the public contributing to the life of the prison in a wide range of voluntary roles, support was also offered to prisoners by external organisations, including the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), Samaritans, Changing Tunes, Stone Pillow, Shannon Trust, Change For Good, New Foundation, Prison Fellowship, Emmaus, Muslim Chaplaincy Association Sussex Pathways, the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA), and several other veterans' support organisations. The support received is across a range of different areas, specifically education, music and post-release community resettlement.

2.9 The prison infrastructure is maintained by Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL).

2.10 The principal health services are provided by Practice Plus Group.

2.11 Ford's stated objectives for the reporting year are:

- to reduce reoffending; and
- to protect the public and improve the safety and security of HMP Ford.

### 3. Key points

#### Background to the report

Ford has continued to be in a state of flux during the reporting year, as the wider prison reforms impact on the numbers and backgrounds of the prisoners housed there.

Due to the level of pressure in the closed estate, Ford is now required to accept prisoners who would historically have remained in closed prisons. In particular,

- the number of high risk\* prisoners has risen during the reporting year, from 109 to 180, representing over 47% of the prison population at Ford. This represents a 65% increase during the year; and
- an increase in the number of men having longer remaining sentences. In some cases, the earliest point of release is five years away.

*\*Risk is based on an assessment of the prisoner's risk to the public, other prisoners and staff.*

The level of movement in and out of Ford has also changed, reflecting the above factors – see the table below:

	Year ending 31 October 2025	Year ending 31 October 2024
Number of prisoners at start of the year	304	389
Number of prisoners transferred into Ford	476	367
Number of prisoners discharged	294	346
Number of prisoners returned to a closed prison	100	100
Number of prisoners who failed to return from release on temporary licence (ROTL):	3	4
The total numbers of absconds	1	2
Number of prisoners at the end of the year	382	304

The other relevant and significant factors to highlight are:

- the continuing failures in the prison infrastructure at Ford, which have noticeably worsened; and
- the significant cuts in the education budget, which are inconsistent with Ford being a rehabilitation and resettlement prison.

### **3.1 Main findings<sup>2</sup>**

#### **Safety**

- From its observations, the IMB believes that the prison is, generally, a safe environment. (See section 4)
- There has been a significantly greater churn (the rate at which people move into, through, and out of custody over a given period) in the prisoner population than has been in most years. This has been caused by the early release schemes (whereby low-risk prisoners serving determinate, or fixed-term, sentences can be released earlier than usual, subject to strict eligibility rules and continued supervision on licence) promoted by the government. Also, prisoners with up to five years to serve can now qualify for open conditions. These changes are altering the mix of prisoners at Ford and could increase the risk or problems within the prison population. The statistics gathered to date do not, so far, show such issues arising; however, this will continue to be monitored as the population mix settles down. (4.1 to 4.4)
- The proportion of the prison population who are returned to closed conditions has remained at the level seen last year. (4.3.5)

#### **Fair and humane treatment**

- Based on our observations, we consider that the past 12 months have been characterised by inefficiency and failings on the part of the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), with particular regard to their responsibilities for estate management. These shortcomings have led to financial waste and disruption to the most basic living conditions of the prisoners. (See section 5)
- It is commendable that Ford seeks to provide prisoners with a fair and humane environment, in which they can progress towards release, but it is achieved despite the constant battle against the failing infrastructure. In particular, the intermittent loss of hot water undermines prisoners' dignity and their ability to present themselves appropriately for work. Furthermore, the showers and lavatories in the wings housing incoming prisoners have remained in an unacceptable condition throughout the year, despite broken undertakings to upgrade them. (5.1.5)

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<sup>2</sup> The views expressed in this report, unless otherwise stated, are those of the IMB, based solely on the monitoring activities carried out through the year.



- By contrast, the Board has observed that the prison demonstrates impressive commitment in caring for and maintaining its open areas. In addition to providing playing areas for outdoor sports, the character and appearance of this work sets a standard to which prisoners can aspire. (5.1.7)



- The phone provision at Ford is inadequate for a resettlement prison. In HMPPS's response to last year's annual report, it was stated that 'there is a pilot in another open prison to look at the potential of pin locked mobile phones'. Despite this clear statement, the pilot had not yet started at the time of writing this report. (5.1.4)

### **Health and wellbeing**

- Through the Board's monitoring, the healthcare cover at Ford is seen as excellent. Practice Plus is proactive in developing health promotion and preventive measures, including vaccine initiatives and extra care for the

increasing number of prisoners coming to the prison with more complex health needs. (6)

- They continue to address the stubborn number of no-shows for appointments with health professionals and the dental team. (6.2.2)
- It was extremely disappointing that funding has been stopped for the transfer and discharge co-ordinator role, as this provided a valuable link in supporting prisoners' access to healthcare and drug treatment services on release. (6.6.2)

### **Progression and resettlement**

- The huge reduction in the education and training budget (20% of the core and 40% of the discretionary elements) has inevitably adversely affected the delivery of education services. The education team has redesigned its offering to prisoners, focusing on meeting their prime needs whilst staying within budget. However, the cuts mean that it is simply not possible for the team to deliver education of the quality and quantity provided in previous years, no matter how hard they try. (7.1)
- The early release schemes, together with the increased number of higher-risk prisoners arriving at Ford, have reduced prisoner engagement with education. (7.1.3 and 7.1.4)
- The number of men out at work has decreased in the year. This has been influenced by various factors, most significantly the delays in approving men for release on temporary licence (ROTL); an increasing number of high-risk prisoners; the churn of prisoners with short sentences; and the worsening attitude to work. (7.2.3)
- The budget cuts have been debilitating and have severely affected the prison's aim to provide meaningful progression in vocational training and employment outcomes. (7.2.6)
- The processing of many prisoners' applications for ROTL and final release have been severely delayed by the higher-risk profile of the men arriving at Ford. (7.3.2)

### **3.2 Main areas for development**

Some of the questions below are repeated from the previous year's report, because the issues remain unresolved and/or continue to have a significant impact on prisoner welfare and rehabilitation.

#### ***TO THE MINISTER***

- As we have reported for some years, the building infrastructure across Ford is failing, with each occurrence being addressed with short-term fixes, which, in the long run, cost the taxpayer more. Will the Minister commit to both undertaking a detailed survey and investigation of the existing fabric and services and to setting out a clear timetable for the development and delivery of a planned programme of maintenance and repair?
- Given the continuing pressures of prisoner population on the prison estate, combined with the largely positive HMIP report of 2023 and recent IMB reports that highlight the improving work of HMP Ford, will the Minister confirm whether plans to expand HMP Ford's capacity are to be expedited? If so, what

timescale does the Minister envisage for this expansion in support of the Government's objective of reducing reoffending

- A consequence of the early release schemes in 2024-2025 is a change in the risk profile of prisoners arriving at HMP Ford: at the end of the reporting year, 180 (109 in 2024) were classified as 'high risk'. These men require additional checks by the Probation Service in order for them to be approved for ROTL. Despite repeated assurances that Probation would be properly funded and resourced, the problems remain systemic, causing significant delays in men getting ROTL and putting additional pressure on the prison to provide purposeful activity in the meantime. When will the Minister ensure that the Probation Service is properly funded and resourced to meet this increased demand, and what concrete steps will be taken to address the delays in ROTL assessments?
- The cuts to the education budget have had a significant impact on Ford's ability to provide purposeful activity in support of reducing reoffending. Will the Minister commit to restoring the education budget at HMP Ford to a level that enables the prison to deliver meaningful education and skills provision?

### ***TO THE PRISON SERVICE***

- As we have reported for some years, the building infrastructure across Ford is failing, with each occurrence being addressed with short-term fixes, which, in the long run, cost the taxpayer more. Will HMPPS commit to undertaking a detailed survey and investigation of the existing fabric and services, and to setting out a clear timetable for the development and delivery of a planned programme of maintenance and repair?
- The cuts to the education budget have had a significant impact on Ford's ability to provide purposeful activity in support of the core reducing reoffending objective for Ford. Will HMPPS commit to restoring the education budget at HMP Ford to a level that enables the prison to deliver both meaningful education and skills provision?
- Most men arriving at HMP Ford transfer from prisons equipped with in-cell phones. When will HMPPS ensure that appropriate phone access is put in place at Ford to support family contact and effective preparation for release?

### ***TO THE GOVERNOR***

The Board commends the Governor on the following:

- Safer and more secure regime, evidenced by the 44% reduction in the number of 'finds' of illicit items, such as drugs and mobile phones, in the year.
- Successful management of the higher risk profile of the prisoner population at Ford.
- Continued focus on providing access to gym and outdoor sports.
- Ongoing drive to maintain cleanliness and improvements of the grounds.
- Commitment and dedication that GFSL shows in responding to the (too) many serious issues with the buildings and infrastructure.
- Continuing excellence of healthcare provision and the integrated substance misuse service (ISMS).
- Positive and proactive stance of the education department in responding to the cuts in the education budget.

However, the Board is looking for the Governor to confirm:

- What steps will be taken to deliver a consistent and reliable heating and water supply to the accommodation blocks?
- How and when will solutions to the lack of phone access for the men be introduced?
- When and what action will be taken to address the unacceptable condition of the showers/bathrooms in R and Q blocks?

### 3.3 Response to last year's report

The key points raised in the 2023-2024 (and previous annual reports), together with the responses received and subsequent progress, are as follows:

Issue raised in the 2023-2024 annual report	Response from MoJ/HMPPS in April 2025	Progress update through October 2025
<p><b>TO THE MINISTER</b></p> <p>Given the largely positive HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) report of 2023 and recent IMB reports highlighting the improving work of Ford, when – and how – will the Minister expedite the new build plans for HMP Ford to expand its capacity in support of the prison's 'reducing reoffending' objective?</p> <p>At present, there is no way for a resettlement prison to evaluate the success of all that they do, including know what percentage of prisoners reoffend. When will the Minister set up an effective system to monitor prisoners after release?</p> <p>As we have reported for some years, the building infrastructure across Ford is failing and the accommodation provided is unacceptable. Simply 'limping along' is not a viable option.</p>	<p>A planning application for the expansion plans has been submitted for seven new house blocks, delivering 420 additional places, along with supporting ancillaries (property storage, offender management unit, multi-faith unit and car parking spaces for 80 cars).</p> <p>The current commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) contracts are monitored by HMPPS to address any performance and/or service delivery concerns.</p> <p>HMP Ford's faults with fire doors will be addressed in all areas during the course of the year, and a full</p>	<p>The planning application was refused consent on 31 July 2025, due to the Ministry of Justice's failure to provide information that had been requested at an early stage in the process. An appeal was lodged six months later, on 2 February 2026.</p> <p>There is still no meaningful measurement of the value of the open prison estate and, therefore, no basis for making significant investment decisions.</p> <p>The fire doors on A wing were replaced during the year.</p> <p>The limited cosmetic work done (not a full</p>

<p>When will the Minister undertake an in-depth appraisal of the existing buildings and commit to undertaking a comprehensive refurbishment of that accommodation?</p> <p>Given that GFSL has registered 219 faults with the boilers in the accommodation blocks in the five years to 30 November 2024, when will the Minister commit to replacing Ford's boilers and hot water systems, which were deemed 'at risk' nine years ago?</p>	<p>refurbishment of A wing is now complete.</p> <p>A boiler replacement project for the gate house and visits block is currently in progress and due for completion before the end of April 2025.</p>	<p>refurbishment) was largely carried out by the internal prisoner-resourced team. Whilst this was welcome, significant issues remain, such as the unacceptable condition of the showers/bathrooms in R and Q blocks.</p> <p>The boiler replacement in the gate house and visits has been completed.</p> <p>The prison continues to experience systemic issues with the infrastructure, boilers, electrical and gas failures, and unacceptable drainage: e.g. showers/bathrooms in R and Q blocks.</p>
<p><b>TO THE PRISON SERVICE</b></p> <p>Given that GFSL has registered 219 faults with the boilers in the accommodation blocks in the five years to 30 November 2024, when will HMPPS commit to replacing Ford's boilers and hot water systems, which were deemed 'at risk' nine years ago?</p> <p>Most men arrive from prisons that have in-cell phones. When will HMPPS address the lack of phone access at Ford to enable the maintenance of family ties?</p>	<p>See above.</p> <p>There are no plans to install in-cell phones at HMP Ford. However, there is a pilot in another open prison to look at the potential on pin locked mobile phones. There is also currently a pilot on the use of prisoners' own mobile phones for those who have access to</p>	<p>See above.</p> <p>The pilot for the supervised use of mobile phones in the visits hall was stopped by a formal complaint lodged by the Prisoner Officers' Association. The Governor is looking at alternative solutions.</p>

	them for when they are on release on temporary licence.	
<p><b>TO THE GOVERNOR</b></p> <p>The Board looks forward to the following matters being addressed:</p> <p>The prison operating at full capacity again, which will allow the available resources to be properly utilised and prisoners to benefit from their time at Ford.</p> <p>A consistent, reliable heating and water supply to the accommodation blocks, as the situation is unacceptable.</p> <p>A more proactive approach to the monitoring and management of the provision of effective cooking, washing and laundry facilities in the prisoners' accommodation.</p> <p>Solutions implemented to address the lack of phone access for the men.</p>	<p>As of March 2025, the prison has been at full operational capacity.</p> <p>See above.</p> <p>Staff have taken a more proactive approach.</p> <p>See above.</p>	<p>Whilst at full capacity, the increased proportion of high-risk prisoners has contributed to delays with the OMU (offender management unit) and the Probation Service in approving men for ROTL. Together with cuts to the education budget, these pressures have reduced the availability of purposeful activity for prisoners.</p> <p>See above regarding persistent issues with the infrastructure.</p> <p>No further issues noted.</p> <p>See above.</p>

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

The prison has an established safer custody function and holds a multidisciplinary safer custody meeting once a month, involving healthcare, integrated substance misuse services, security and chaplaincy.

#### **4.1 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody**

4.1.1 There were no deaths in custody and one reported instance of self-harm during the year in review.

4.1.2 There were 11 ACCTs (assessment, care in custody and teamwork documents) opened during the reporting year. These are designed to support vulnerable prisoners. From our observations, they were all dealt with appropriately and closed promptly.

#### **4.2 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation**

4.2.1 There was one case of prisoner-on-prisoner violence. In addition, there was another such incident, which occurred in the restaurant, Serving Thyme. The restaurant is based on the prison estate but it is both open to the public and viewed as outside for the men who work there. The prisoners who perpetrated both assaults were returned to closed conditions.

#### **4.3 Use of force, failure to return/absconds/returned to closed conditions**

4.3.1 There were four instances of use of force. This compares with seven in the previous reporting year and 10 in the year to October 2023.

4.3.2 Three prisoners were recorded as failing to return while on release on temporary licence (ROTL), compared with four in 2024. Of these, two were subsequently recaptured.

4.3.3 During the second half of the reporting year, checks of prisoners on ROTL were carried out by phoning them to ensure they were in their approved locations. The results showed that only 12 of the 18 checked were in the correct place and responding. The remaining six were either not in the approved place or not responding to a call as required. It is hoped these checks will motivate prisoners to follow the rules in future and so will be repeated.

4.3.4 The prison had the first abscond for nearly two years. The prisoner absconded while moving from the residential area of the prison to his designated workplace across the public road, which runs through the prison. His absence was not noted for several hours. This was a high-profile abscond due to other events around the county at the time and it featured on Sky News. The process for registering arrival at work areas has been tightened.

4.3.5 A total of 100 men were returned to closed conditions (RTC) in the reporting year, the same figure as recorded in the previous year. Men were returned to closed conditions for a range of reasons, including issues arising from intelligence reports, a perceived risk of abscond, failure to pass mandatory drug testing (MDT), and matters following adjudication (when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules), such as the use of illicit substances or possession of an unauthorised mobile phone. As

reported in previous years, the Board remains concerned that such a large number of men are returned to closed conditions, and questions the assessment of their suitability for open conditions. However, this is one of the areas where no increase has been seen, despite the increased challenges.

4.3.6 Under the temporary presumptive re-categorisation scheme (TPRS), 130 prisoners were transferred to Ford, of which 15 (11%) were subsequently returned to closed (RTC) prisons. This compares favourably with the results from 2024, when five of the 27 TPRS arrivals were RTC (18%).

#### 4.4 Preventing illicit items

4.4.1 As an open prison, Ford operates facilities on both sides of a public road, and around a third of the prison population leave and return each day to attend external work, education and home visits. This creates a number of challenges in ensuring the safety of the men safe. Illicit items can be brought into the prison, which places men at risk of the impact of drugs, bullying and debt. There is no electronic security scanner equipment at Ford to search men returning to the prison, but CCTV and close monitoring mean that illicit items are rarely thrown over the fence.

4.4.2 The use of the dedicated search team (DST), which works across the prison estate, along with the training of Ford staff by the DST in searching techniques, continues to show benefits. As shown in the table below, the number of finds per quarter builds on the low levels seen at the end of 2024, with total finds for the reporting year amounting to just 56% of the previous year's figures.

	Q1 Nov to Jan	Q2 Feb to Apr	Q3 May to July	Q4 Aug to Oct	Total 2025	Total 2024
<b>Finds</b>						
Phone related	82	36	101	76	<b>295</b>	<b>484</b>
Drugs related	20	21	45	30	<b>116</b>	<b>192</b>
Alcohol	3	0	0	1	<b>4</b>	<b>23</b>
Weapons	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>
Tools	0	2	4	1	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>
Cash	0	4	4	2	<b>10</b>	<b>21</b>
Other/misc.	55	29	53	18	<b>155</b>	<b>314</b>
<b>Total</b>	160	92	208	128	<b>588</b>	<b>1057</b>

4.4.3 In the reporting year, 573 mandatory drugs tests (MDTs) were carried out, of which 46 (8%) returned positive results. This is comparable to the same period last year, when 548 MDTs were conducted and 44 (8%) were positive. These tests include both random testing and those carried out based on intelligence. The use of steroids has become an increasing concern, and the prison has plans to provide staff with specific training to address this issue, which the Board will monitor and report on in future.

## **5. Fair and humane treatment**

Based on observations, it is our view that the past 12 months have been characterised by inefficiency and failings on the part of the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS, with particular regard to their responsibilities for estate management. These shortcomings have led to financial waste and disruption to the most basic living conditions of the prisoners.

### **5.1 Accommodation, clothing and food**

5.1.1 As of 31 October 2025 (the end of the reporting year), HMP Ford had capacity for 389 prisoners, 214 of whom were housed in the permanent A wing; 55 in two separate annexes; and 120 in 'temporary' pods.

5.1.2 The proposed expansion of the prison appears to have taken a backwards step: the planning application for these works, which was current at the time of our previous annual report, was refused on 31 July 2025, due to the Ministry of Justice's failure to provide multiple pieces of 2 information that had been requested at an early stage of the application process. An appeal was lodged on 1 February 2026. Nonetheless, and despite the lack of tangible evidence, such as statutory consents or a detailed programme and plan of work, the prison Governor is in contact with the currently preferred contractors and seems confident that the project is moving forward.

5.1.3 There are still no purpose-designed rooms for prisoners with disabilities, although the C1 landing on A wing and eight of the pods have modifications to assist prisoners with physical needs.

5.1.4 As previously noted in the HMIP inspection report of April 2023, the phone provision for prisoners remains inadequate. There is just a single phone for each landing in the permanent accommodation and a small room containing five (far from private) phones in each group of the 'temporary' accommodation pods. Frequent communication between prisoners and their families or their support group is a critical component in progress towards rehabilitation and release, and such communication is compromised at HMP Ford.

This inadequate phone provision arguably gives rise to much of the illicit mobile phone use. In HMPPS's response to our previous annual report, it was stated that 'there is a pilot in another open prison to look at the potential of pin locked mobile phones.' In spite of this clear statement, the pilot has, in fact, yet to start.

5.1.5 It is commendable that Ford succeeds in providing prisoners with a fair and humane environment, in which they can progress towards release, but this success is achieved amidst a constant battle against failing infrastructure. Emergencies, such as the loss of the mains gas supply and the consequent hiring of a temporary kitchen and numerous generators, cost far more to deal with over the longer term than an efficiently managed programme of planned maintenance and repair.

5.1.6 As well as the financial cost of such emergencies, the intermittent loss of hot water undermines prisoners' dignity and their ability to present themselves appropriately for work. Furthermore, the showers and lavatories in the wings housing both incoming and established prisoners have remained in an unacceptable condition throughout the year, despite broken undertakings to upgrade them.

5.1.7 By contrast, the prison's own efforts to care for and maintain its open areas is impressive. In addition to providing playing areas for outdoor sports, the character and appearance of this work sets a standard to which prisoners can aspire.

5.1.8 The main kitchen, although working within a minimal budget, manages to provide nourishing and well-seasoned meals at lunchtime and in the evening. However, at the end of the reporting year, the scope of the kitchen output continued to be compromised by the failure of the prison's gas supply three months earlier.

5.1.9 An electricity sub-station to serve the accommodation pods was completed 18 months ago. It is still waiting to be connected and, in the meantime, electricity to the pods is being supplied by oil-fuelled emergency generators.

## **5.2 Segregation**

5.2.1 HMP Ford has no segregation block; instead, it has four accommodation cells where prisoners await the outcome of an adjudication or are detained ahead of a return to closed conditions.

## **5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships**

5.3.1 The overall culture in the prison appears to be one of support, respect, fairness and humanity.

5.3.2 The newly formed Ford consultative committee (FCC) has started to make a positive impact on life for prisoners. The focus is on improving communication between staff and the prisoners in several key areas.

## **5.4 Equality and diversity**

5.4.1 Although only nine discrimination report forms (DIRFS) were submitted during the year, it is noted that the prison continues to review its operations for any discrimination. No evidence of any such issues has been identified by the prison.

## **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

5.5.1 The chaplaincy team is soon due to have an additional chaplain. It is very concerning that the vetting for this new Catholic Chaplain is still incomplete, six months after the job offer was accepted in July 2025.

The team continues to provide much-needed support to prisoners of all faiths, especially in the event of family bereavement and other causes of distress.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

From the Board's observations, Practice Plus Group (PPG) continues to offer an excellent service, with feedback from prisoners being mostly very positive. PPG runs the healthcare service for 58 prisons. It is interesting to note that, at the end of October 2025, PPG's internal ranking system had the Ford healthcare as the No.1 team overall across all of the 58 prisons.

Over the reporting year, the prison has continued to receive an increasing number of men with complex health needs, all of whom have consistently been supported by the healthcare team.

### **6.1 General healthcare**

6.1.1 All new prisoners are seen by a healthcare professional within 24 hours of arrival for a full assessment of their needs, with a further screening within seven days. The healthcare unit closes at 6pm, which has led to difficulties when men arrive at Ford after this time, especially for those with special needs or medication requirements. On one occasion, a man was returned to the sending prison because Ford did not receive sufficient information about his medical condition. This was distressing for the individual and resulted in a seven-hour round trip. He subsequently returned to Ford when suitable arrangements were in place.

6.1.2 There is a multi-disciplinary approach co-ordinating healthcare, substance misuse and mental health, together with the prison's safer custody department. A weekly meeting is held to discuss complex cases.

6.1.3 The early release scheme has continued to present challenges for the healthcare unit, with large numbers of men arriving over short periods and many having only limited time to serve. The healthcare, mental health and substance misuse teams worked tirelessly to help these men and do what was possible in the time available.

6.1.4 Dental cover was taken over by Time for Teeth at the end of the previous reporting year. Equipment has been upgraded or replaced and the dentist attends two days a week. At the end of October, 48 patients were awaiting initial appointments (maximum wait: 10 weeks), and 67 patients were awaiting treatment (maximum wait: 20 weeks). Waiting times were marginally elevated due to an influx of prisoners at Ford.

### **6.2 Physical healthcare**

6.2.1 Healthcare is staffed seven days a week. In order to provide a 24-hour service, NHS 111 is used and/or prisoners are sent to A&E. The appointments system seems to work well, with the Board not being concerned about waiting times for prisoners to get an appointment with a healthcare professional.

6.2.2 A big push has been made to reduce those failing to attend appointments (FTA) for all healthcare departments but, sadly, rates remain stubbornly high. However, in the last two months of the reporting year, many more prisoners have been persuaded to cancel unwanted appointments, allowing them to be used for others.

	Healthcare		GP	
	Appts	% FTA	Appts	% FTA
Nov-Jan	4,327	12.26%	251	11.90%
Feb-Apr	3,783	12.50%	308	13.76%
May-Jul	4,350	13.76%	381	15.13%
Aug-Oct	4,147	12.33%	309	8.36%

6.2.3 PPG is extremely proactive. Last year's push, together with The Hepatitis C Trust, has resulted in the 'micro-elimination' of hepatitis C at Ford. Healthcare continues to push to update all vaccinations for prisoners, including those missed in childhood, and a bowel screening programme has been introduced.

6.2.4 PPG has trained a large number of prison staff in the 'code blue' emergency response procedures (the agreed protocol for responding to life-threatening medical emergencies).

### 6.3 Mental health

6.3.1 There has been some disruption to mental health and drug rehabilitation services during the reporting year, due to staff change over and sickness absence, with some courses and interventions having to be cancelled. This was being resolved after the end of the reporting year.

The mental health team runs numerous interventions, including Making Sense of Sleep, Making Sense of my Worries and Stop Smoking and Vaping. There is an informal daily half-hour drop-in at lunchtime for men with mental health and substance misuse issues. Therapy dogs attend once a month and are very popular.

### 6.4 Social care

There is no longer an occupational therapist based at Ford, but services are brought in from the community when needed, which seems to work well.

### 6.5 Time out of cell, regime

6.5.1 Ford has had a full regime (where the prison is able to deliver its planned daily activities and services for the prisoners). The Governor continues to prioritise sport and activities. The gym is fully staffed, with four full-time physical education instructor (PEIs), and men are able to access four gym sessions a week. There were 32,408 gym session during the reporting year, reflecting the significant increase in use seen towards the end of the previous year.

6.5.2 There is tennis, volleyball, basketball and combined staff and prisoner football matches, cricket and unsupervised football in the evenings and at weekends. There is a snooker and a pool table in the dining hall and the number of men socialising and eating in the dining hall continues to increase.

### 6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

6.6.1 All men are screened on arrival at Ford (6.1.1), which includes any history of drug or alcohol use. They can also attend the daily drop-in sessions or have one-to-

one appointments, as needed. The self-management and recovery programme (SMART) runs for four and a half weeks.

At the end of the reporting year, 11 men were subject to chemical interventions. Arrangements were in place to support their engagement with community-based services on release.

6.6.2 It was extremely disappointing that funding for the transfer and discharge co-ordinator role has been removed from all prisons. They did a valuable job of supporting prisoners with physical, mental health or substance misuse issues needs as they transitioned back into the community.

6.6.3 Alcoholics Anonymous, a peer-led support group for people seeking to stop drinking alcohol, visits Ford, while Narcotics Anonymous, which supports people recovering from drug dependence, offers online sessions only.

## 7. Progression and resettlement

The ambition of the education, skills and work (ESW) teams at Ford is for 'every man to have the opportunity to develop and progress'. Consistent with the ethos of an open prison, each prisoner is strongly encouraged to own their individual future.

### 7.1 Education and library

7.1.1 The huge reduction in the training and education budget (20% of the core budget and 40% of the discretionary budget) has, inevitably, adversely affected the delivery of education services. The education team seems to have responded positively and, rather than making across-the-board cuts, they have thoroughly reviewed and redesigned the education offer to meet the needs of a changing prison population – including both long- and short-term prisoners - in the available budget.

The effect of the education budget cuts has been minimised, where possible, during the reporting year; however, further budget reductions will affect provision from April 2026, when Maths and English teaching hours are due to be reduced by 20%.

7.1.2 Under the revised offer, the focus on Maths, English and digital skills courses continues, whilst other courses have been discontinued.

Core courses being maintained:

- English
- Maths
- Essential digital skills for life
- Essential digital skills for employment
- Adult education training
- Peer mentoring

As a result of the reduced budget, many courses are no longer available, including:

- Social media marketing
- Self-employment
- Money matters
- Art

These courses had provided important life skills to many prisoners. Future prisoners will lose out because these courses are no longer available.

7.1.3 Although the records for the period, April 2025 to September 2025 show that 70 prisoners attended functional skill courses in English and Maths, this is significantly lower than the figure of 93 for the same period in 2024. This reduction probably reflects the lower uptake of courses arising from the increased turnover of prisoners following the introduction of the early release schemes. These schemes saw an increased number of prisoners arriving and then departing within a short time. This resulted in a lower proportion of prisoners engaging with education, due to there being insufficient time left to serve or because the shortened release date meant that prisoners did not consider education worth doing.

7.1.4 In addition, the early release schemes resulted in the arrival of an increased proportion of prisoners less suited to an open prison. Generally, these prisoners do not see the value of education and either do not enrol for courses or simply do not engage properly with the courses they attend.

7.1.5 Under the revised plans, the prison focuses on 10 progression pathways to help prisoners gain both educational and training skills. One is the education pathway, designed to help prisoners obtain sufficient skill to qualify for external education courses, including the Open University. The prison works with the Shannon Trust charity to help prisoners with very low-level skills in Maths and English.

7.1.6 During the reporting year, the previous investment in digital resources has increased the resources available to prisoners. The new wi-fi system has made it possible to extend the delivery of digital skills via the new digital education hub, with more computers linked to it, providing supervised IT access to prisoners. In addition, the virtual campus has been improved and made available to all prisoners to assist with education generally and enable men to undertake work related to external courses.

7.1.7 At the end of the reporting year, 23 prisoners were attending external courses (nine educational and 14 vocational), as follows:

- Short courses 2
- College courses 6
- Chichester College 8
- University 7

Important funding for many of these courses was obtained by the prison working closely with prisoner charities.

7.1.8 At its 2023 HMIP inspection, the prison achieved a Level 4 rating - the highest possible - or its work in rehabilitating prisoners. The reduced funding is likely to make it more challenging to sustain this level of performance at the next inspection.

7.1.9 The library remains a well-run, well-resourced and valued part of the prison's education service.

## 7.2 Vocational training, work

HMP Ford's reducing reoffending strategy aims to:

***'Enable prisoners to enhance and evidence learning and skills and gain nationally recognised qualifications and skills that will promote and enable personal development and improve their employability prospects.'***

7.2.1 One of the most important contributors to reducing reoffending is enabling prisoners to enhance and develop their transferable skills to get paid work outside the prison. The experience and skills developed are invaluable for their successful reintroduction to life outside of prison, and the intention is that prisoners finish their sentence with a renewed sense of purpose and achievement.

7.2.2 The prison employment lead (PEL) and the business and community engagement manager (BACE) work together to deliver regular employment fairs and on-site employment drop-in events, bringing in local and national employers to

engage directly with the prisoners. These events have been well attended and Ford has links with around 40 active local and regional employers offering a range of job opportunities to the prisoners.

7.2.3 Successful engagement with employers depends on Ford being able to provide workers who have a fair length of time left to serve on their sentence and who are suitable and motivated for outside work. During the reporting year, an average of 90 prisoners worked outside the prison each day, which is around 23% of the prison population. This is below Ford's ideal level of 38%.

It was noticeable that the number of prisoners in outside employment fell from the average level of 120 in the previous year, despite the prison being at optimum capacity. This decline appears to have been influenced by a number of factors, most notably the delays in 'boarding'; an increasing number of prisoners assessed as high risk; the increased turnover among prisoners serving short sentences; and a general deterioration in attitudes towards work.

7.2.4 The reducing reoffending team works carefully with prisoners to address their shortcomings in education, life skills and work ethic, and all prisoners are engaged in purposeful activity, be it inside or outside the prison. However, with the reduced numbers approved for external work, the prison is struggling to find purposeful activity places for the prisoners within the establishment. During the reporting year, the number:

- of residential cleaners increased from 18 to 50;
- of men working in the kitchens doubled from 25 to 50; and
- on occasions, the numbers in land based activities (LBA) increased significantly.

While it could be said that 100% of the prisoners at Ford are engaged in some form of purposeful activity, the areas referred to above are heavily overmanned, and this has not resulted in improved prisoner engagement or motivation to work.

7.2.5 Some men seeking employment opportunities not available through HMP Ford are able to source work independently; however, the number of self-sourced applications fell to its lowest level in the past three years, with 15 applications in 2025, compared with 26 in 2024 and 19 in 2023.

7.2.6 The Board commends the staff at HMP Ford for their efforts in engaging with the prisoners to assess and target the employment needs of the prison population. However, we note that they have been severely hampered by national funding cuts that have slashed training budgets – see 7.1.1.

7.2.7 The reduced funding resulted in the closure of the Chichester School of Construction. This facility was highly praised by Ofsted in the HMIP inspection of the prison in 2023 as **'a particularly well-conceived initiative, whereby prisoners gained valuable industry skills and achieved qualifications in bricklaying, dry lining, painting and decorating, and carpentry, which stood them in good stead for gaining employment on release'**. Its closure leaves a gaping void in the vocational training opportunities available for the prisoners.

The social enterprise workshop was then designed to offer woodworking skills, with the aim of collaborating with the engineering and bike workshops to provide products for sale in the farm shop. Whilst the farm shop is open to the public, the social

enterprise workshop only opened in October 2025, with one prisoner on roll against an intended capacity of 12, and with no qualifications on offer. The bicycle workshop has also lost its qualification provision.

7.2.8 The remaining on-site workshops are well managed and continue to offer training and qualifications in engineering, catering and hospitality, cleaning and waste management, transport and logistics and ground maintenance.

The budget cuts have been debilitating and have severely affected the prison's aim to provide evidenced progression in vocational training and employment outcomes. Too many training opportunities are low skilled, oversubscribed and provide little in the way of nationally recognised qualifications. Heavy reliance is being placed on outside agencies and charitable organisations to plug the funding gaps.

At the end of the reporting year, there is a growing feeling of dissatisfaction and apathy among the prisoners, with poor work attendance becoming a growing problem.

### **7.3 Offender management, progression**

7.3.1 The primary purpose of the offender management unit (OMU) at Ford is to ensure that men are progressed to ROTL as soon as it is appropriate and practical. Our monitoring clearly demonstrated the OMU's strong commitment to this aim through both its practice and outcomes.

7.3.2 The OMU has been under significantly increased pressure during the reporting year, as Ford has taken in more and more high-risk prisoners to fill the vacancies left after various early release schemes. As at 31 October 2025, there were 180 prisoners assessed as high risk, compared with 109 at the end of the previous year, an increase of 65%. These men typically take longer to progress to ROTL and require the intervention of more qualified probation-trained members of the OMU team, who were already under pressure.

An example of why this process takes longer is that the number of men at Ford who are designated as 'persons posing a risk to children' has doubled in the reporting period.

The situation is made worse by:

- the sending prisons not delivering any formal or informal preparation of the men being transferred to Ford;
- a decrease in the quality and quantity of risk assessments being carried out by the closed estate; and
- specific operational resourcing issues in the OMU.

7.3.3 We note that one prisoner was wrongly released before the correct date during the reporting year. This was due to a procedural error in communication between the prison and parole board.

7.3.4 As reported in previous reports, there are problems in obtaining timely responses from external probation officers (such as community offender managers, or COMs) and from some police forces regarding background and other necessary checks prior to being given ROTL. There is little evidence that these delays have reduced during the reporting year; in fact, the opposite is the case with some

agencies, notably the Met Police. These delays in the responses from COMs remain a major source of frustration for both prisoners and staff.

7.3.5 The OMU holds weekly drop-in sessions where men can see their prison offender managers (POMs) without an appointment. Whilst these are very popular, they have not prevented an increase in complaints to the prison or applications (prisoners' written representations) to the IMB since June 2025, mainly relating to delays in ROTL being granted. Many of these issues are addressed through improved communication with prisoners about the reasons for delays; however, frustration is increasing among men regarding the length of time it is taking for ROTL opportunities to be approved.

7.3.6 The prison has had both IPP (indeterminate for public protection) and men serving life sentences throughout the year. Together with IMBs throughout the country, we continue to stress that IPP sentences are inhumane and should be removed from existing prisoners.

7.3.7 The Prisoner Earning Act deduction of 40% of earnings (levy) is seen by some men as a disincentive to take external work. It was previously understood that the levy was under national review, so we are disappointed by the lack of any progress.

#### **7.4 Resettlement planning, including family contact**

7.4.1 It is a generally accepted view that the three key priorities for a successful prisoner release are:

- accommodation (7.4.2)
- job/employment (7.4.3)
- family/friends support network (7.4.4)

7.4.2 The Board saw the significant efforts made by prison staff to ensure that prisoners have accommodation on release. For the second year running, all prisoners released had accommodation on leaving Ford - see the table below for the breakdown of this for the 294 releases in the reporting year.

	<b>Number of releases in year ended 31 October 2025</b>
Approved premises	24
CAS2/BASS* accommodation 13 weeks +	31
CAS3**	23
Friends/family (settled)	149
Friends/family (transient)	16
Householder (owner - freehold or leasehold)	4
Rental accommodation - private rental	21
Rental accommodation - social rental (LA/other)	18
Supported housing	4
Transient/short- term accommodation	4
<b>Total releases in the period</b>	<b>294</b>

\*CAS2 is commissioned accommodation service - Tier 2. It is designed to provide an immediate release or ROTL address for prisoners who would otherwise be homeless. This is the name for what was previously called BASS, or bail accommodation and support service.

\*\*CAS3 is commissioned accommodation service - Tier 3. It is designed to provide short-term transitional accommodation to help prison leavers stabilise and move on to settled housing.

The above positive result was achieved in spite of:

- an increased number of prisoners released on home detention curfew (HDC), which requires more pre-release checks by under-resourced external probation teams.
- the increase in the number of high-risk prisoners who are subject to more checking before release, again involving external agencies such as the Probation Service, social care and the police.

We noted that, following the end of the reporting year, one prisoner was at risk of being released without accommodation; however, this was quickly resolved through the intervention of an external charity prior to his release.

7.4.3 The number of men leaving the prison with a job to go to and who remain in employment six months post release was estimated to be 59%, as at 31 October 2025. This figure increased over the course of the reporting year. The IMB notes that staff at Ford go above and beyond expected responsibilities to continue supporting prisoners to secure and sustain employment in the immediate post-release period.

7.4.4 The prison's normal social visits' system runs smoothly when they have been observed by the Board. In addition, family days (which bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings) are held at key dates in the year. These are well attended and received.

7.4.5 The Board remains concerned about the adequacy of telephone provision at an open prison such as Ford. Further detail on this issue is set out in section **5.1.4**.

## 8. The work of the IMB

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	234

### Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	2	1
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	0	3
C	Equality	1	1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	0	1
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	1	0
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	0	1
F	Food and kitchens	0	0
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	2	1
H1	Property within the establishment	0	1
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	6	13
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	0	2
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	1	8
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	1	3
K	Transfers	1	0
L	Miscellaneous	1	4
	<b>Total number of applications</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>39</b>



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