



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Portland
104 Grove Road
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MoJ ref: SUB132054

27 February 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI PORTLAND: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Portland. I am very grateful for the considerable effort you and your colleagues have put into producing such an insightful report, particularly as you have continued to have a significant shortfall of members throughout the reporting period.

I was very saddened to read of the deaths in custody that occurred during the reporting year. I appreciate this would have been a challenging time for those impacted and welcome your update that Samaritan-trained Listeners have increased to support prisoners. If any recommendations are made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman following investigation of the deaths, please be assured that they will be treated with the upmost seriousness.

Your concerns about the challenges that illicit items can present in our prisons is recognised. Effective prison security is a prerequisite to provide the safe and stable regimes needed to promote a rehabilitative culture. This is why prisons have a range of physical security countermeasures to reduce the conveyance of illicit items. These measures include but are not limited to, x-ray body and baggage scanners, airport-style Enhanced Gate Security, detection dogs and drug trace detection equipment. However, we are making further investments of over £40 million in physical security measures this financial year within 34 prisons, including £10 million on anti-drone measures, such as window replacements, external window grilles and specialist netting across 15 priority prisons. HMP/YOI Portland is a site that has been identified for improved Enhanced Gate Security measures and consideration will be given to funding this in future financial years to implement these improvements. In addition, locally the prison is continuing to strengthen its intelligence gathering, supply reduction, and demand reduction through psychosocial interventions.

I also understand your concerns that prisons need to be supported in providing purposeful activity and the Government remains firmly committed, as set out in its manifesto, to improving this. Although some barriers limit prisons' ability to deliver purposeful activity, operational regime priorities for the 2025/26 financial year set out the expectation for prisons to improve both the availability and quality of purposeful activity. There is work underway to explore how we use metrics and targets to drive the right focus on both quantity and quality, to develop guidance for different functions of prisons on the content of their purposeful activity offer and to design a good practice model for regime delivery and purposeful activity. Through the Working Week Project, being piloted in five category C prisons, we are also exploring opportunities to enhance the skills and work provision in custody. I welcome that the Board recognise the significant increase in activity spaces at HMP/YOI Portland during the reporting year.

Although the new Prison Education Service contract launched in October 2025 has made changes to the education provision locally, the prison has responded innovatively by maximising activity opportunities elsewhere. Additional Dynamic Purchasing System funding, which enables prisons to provide bespoke services to meet specific and varied needs, has helped bridge this gap and sustain purposeful activity for prisoners through vocational training. To further support opportunities on release, the prison is currently planning a partnership with a major pub chain to design a hospitality and catering-focused initiative. This has the potential to evolve into a fully operational academy and aligns strongly with labour market need within the South West. The Regional Employment Broker is also currently in discussions with a major cleaning supply company and it is anticipated that additional work opportunities will become available for prisons in the South West. HMP/YOI Portland has also been identified as a priority site for a production contract expansion with the scope and nature of work available to prisons expected to become clear later in 2026.

I do acknowledge that, despite the successful recruitment at the prison during the reporting year, there is concern about the changes to the UK Immigration Rules. These changes were made to reduce net migration as numbers must fall further as we create a migration system that is controlled and fair. However, the Ministry of Justice were in active discussions with the Home Office on this issue as 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. As a result, I am pleased to say that on 19 December 2025, a time-limited exemption to Skilled Worker visa rules for prison officers up to 31 December 2026 was introduced, with a lower salary threshold of £33,400 (subject to updates) in place until 31 December 2027. I recognise this is a sensitive issue for those affected by the changes and might not benefit from the temporary exemption and staff are encouraged to seek independent legal advice to consider their visa options. We remain committed to ensuring prisons are sufficiently resourced and will provide targeted support for those prisons with staffing challenges.

Regarding your ongoing concerns for prisoners who need mental health support, I am pleased to say that the Mental Health Bill received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025. We are working with health partners to create a robust implementation plan setting out the operational changes necessary to fulfil our commitment to commencing these reforms. We also remain committed to ensuring people in prison have access to an equivalent standard of health care to that available in the wider community and this is reflected in the National Partnership Agreement on Health and Social Care in England. The complexity of mental health needs within the prison population is recognised and NHS England are working together with healthcare providers and HMPPS to ensure the services remain responsive and robust. Mental health data is monitored monthly, enabling NHS England to identify trends and adapt commissioning decisions and quality assurance visits are undertaken to monitor standards and ensure contractual compliance. The Board can be assured that Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, who provide health service at HMP/YOI Portland, already operate a flex and adapt model, allowing resources to be shifted to meet changing needs and maintain continuity of care. Staffing levels within mental health teams have improved and it is encouraging that the Board acknowledge transfers to secure hospitals have improved. The significant reforms contained in the Sentencing Act, which received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026, will provide the Courts with further options to end the cycle of less serious offenders going in and out of prison.

It was encouraging to receive your comments about the improvements in the regime, the prisoner views on how they are treated and the relationships that have been built with staff. I was pleased to read about the prison leadership team's efforts to listen to the Board's observations which has fostered a culture of support and collaboration right across the prison. It was reassuring to note that staff responded well to the national early release policy changes and that despite the increase in releases, improvements were made

in securing accommodation for prisoners. I was also pleased that the cleanliness, decency and appearance of the prison have been maintained and continues to be prioritised.

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. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I really value the oversight which members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide to our prisons and we are appreciative of your ongoing dedication on behalf of HMP/YOI Portland.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Offender Management Resource

During the financial year 2025/26 Offender Management Unit (OMU) staffing across 50 prisons, including HMP/YOI Portland, received a temporary increase to help address the additional pressures they faced. The prison received an uplift of 2.5 full time equivalent case administrators. Whilst work continues to review the resource requirements in offender management teams and the prison has experienced recruitment challenges to fill a Prison Offender Manager (POM) role, in the interim the Governor has appointed an additional unfunded POM to assist with service delivery.

Prisoner Transport

Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) monitor all aspects of the providers' performance and measure these through contract delivery indicators, with monthly and quarterly monitoring boards held with the provider. It is acknowledged that HMP/YOI Portland has experienced an increase in late receptions and cancellations of transfers to open conditions. Where the provider fails to meet the agreed levels, this is raised for improvement and contractual levers are applied enabling PECS to hold the provider to account. Regular reviews of vehicle utilisation along with staffing and recruitment are also part of the contract monitoring to gain the upmost value from the contract. In addition, enhanced reporting is now used to capture performance which is shared with all Governing Governors and Prison Group Director offices and HMP/YOI Portland has sought assurance that steps are being taken to improve the service provided. PECS regional contract delivery managers also engage regularly with prison OMUs and the provider to support performance, including discussing data in relation to prison transfers, prison arrival and turnaround times.

Beaufort Wing Ventilation

The Board can be assured that the previously submitted estates investment proposal mentioned last year to fund the replacement of the ventilation systems site wide is in the pipeline of works and will be considered for funding in future years. Due to demands for maintenance across the estate being much greater than the available funding, HMPPS is continuing to prioritise works very carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency. However, the Governor will include Beaufort Wing ventilation improvements in a bid for the 2026/27 financial year, which will be subject to consideration alongside other bids from across the area and the funding available.