



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP/YOI Chelmsford  
200 Springfield Road  
Chelmsford  
CM2 6LQ

MoJ ref: SUB132632

13 March 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI CHELMSFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2024 – 31 AUGUST 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Chelmsford. I remain sincerely grateful to you and your colleagues for your continued dedication in producing your annual report despite operating with several vacancies. I noted that there was an increase in the number of Board members at the end of the reporting period and hope the position continues to improve.

I was saddened to hear three prisoners died during the reporting year. I offer my heartfelt condolences to the friends and family of all the deceased and would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are always taken very seriously.

I appreciate how overcrowding can be a factor in many issues at our prisons. The safety and decency of prisoners is paramount, and that is why HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) continually monitor prison conditions across the estate. Places are consequently taken offline, or recommissioned, depending on safety, stability, staffing levels and maintenance needs. The Board will be aware that the cell certification process ensures that use of cells is subject to a formal assessment of safety and decency. While most single cells in the prison system could physically hold two people, the determination of the maximum crowded capacity of a particular establishment is a matter of operational judgement, considering risks to safety and stability. These standards ensure that prisoners are accommodated safely even when held in crowded conditions.

The issue of crowding is not a quick fix and I would like to reassure you that the Government remains firmly committed to the 10-year prison capacity strategy. Whilst we continue with delivering new prison places, HMPPS will not take decisions that create unacceptable risks to prison safety but it is only right that the agency explores every measure available to deal with capacity pressures. The significant reforms contained in the Sentencing Act, which received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026 will provide the Courts with options to end the cycle of less serious offenders going in and out of prison. Whilst not part of the Act, this coincides with our decision to sanction the biggest ever expansion in tagging. Alongside this, the probation budget will be increased by up to £700 million over the next three years to bolster community justice. The Board can be assured that we are doing everything possible to tackle crowding and manage system capacity.

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. Shortfalls and regional variation in bedspaces across low, medium, and high-secure mental health services are acknowledged. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and NHS England are also working to increase capacity in secure hospital beds and specialist prison units for high-risk individuals. Although capacity is being increased across the system, building or commissioning additional secure beds requires significant capital investment and infrastructure planning and must follow robust data and commissioning cycles. Therefore, NHS England and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) have begun mapping transfer pathways and barrier points within prisons, prison mental health teams, and secure units.

In the interim it remains the case that the healthcare service at HMP Chelmsford will continue to identify and address the mental health needs of prisoners as would be the case in the community. Where these needs cannot be met in prison custody, referrals will be made to secure mental health hospitals. The Enhanced Care Unit at HMP Chelmsford, which houses men with acute mental health needs, is staffed by a dedicated team of prison officers supported by trained mental health nurses. This results in positive joined up working, including the transfer of prisoners to secure hospitals as part of their release plans.

I was encouraged to note the numerous positives cited in your report. Particularly of note is the continuing significant improvements since the invocation of Urgent Notification protocols. I was also pleased to note the improvement in living conditions such as the upgrade in laundry provision, the prompt action with rodents, utilisation of the excellent gym facilities, and the work around neurodiversity in the prison. The achievements of Abdul Bangura is very heartening and I hope his story continues to motivate and inspire prisoners and staff alike. I would also like to wish continued success to the football match initiative.

HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex. Issues raised for the attention of the Governor will be addressed locally who will continue to keep you aware of progress as work continues. Although the release in error of Hadush Kebatu did not take place during the reporting period, given its high-profile nature, I wanted to update on this regrettable incident. The Deputy Prime Minister has taken immediate and decisive action by introducing mandatory stronger checks overseen by the Deputy Governor. He has also commissioned an independent investigation into this case led by Dame Lynne Owens to unearth what happened and what further steps may be necessary to tackle releases in error. This will enable us to uphold this Government's primary duty to keep the public safe from harm.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I are deeply appreciative of the important contribution made by Independent Monitoring Boards across the prison estate, and we are sincerely grateful for your ongoing commitment on behalf of HMP/YOI Chelmsford.

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**

## HMP/YOI CHELMSFORD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2024 – 31 AUGUST 2025

### HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

#### **Launchpad**

HMPPS appreciates the Board's recognition and praise of the Launchpad platform. At present there are no plans to provide a feature to enable prisoners to book appointments on the system. There is work taking place to investigate the feasibility of providing a single system for prisoner applications which may include requests for medical appointments. This work is in early development and will only be implemented if an effective solution can be found.

#### **Body Worn Video Camera (BWVC) Audio**

The Body Worn Video Cameras (BWVC) Policy Framework does not provide for the recording of routine work practices. The policy intention for the use of BWVCs is in response to incidents or pre-emptively, where the member of staff is aware that the prisoner may become volatile or has a history of violence in certain circumstances. Activation of BWVC must be justifiable, necessary, and proportionate. It is for the user to determine when a situation is beginning to escalate and thereby commence recording.

The use of BWVCs during the conducting of full searches has the potential to impact upon privacy rights of the person being searched. Where a safety or security incident occurs during a full search, and there are overwhelming proportionality and necessity requirements for recording the incident which outweigh the impact on privacy of the individual, staff can activate their BWVC. As soon as the incident is resolved, if the full search is to recommence, the BWVC recording must be stopped. Any member of staff capturing footage of a search is required to justify their use of their BWVC. If it is assessed that the situation has the potential to deteriorate during a full search, staff should be encouraged to keep their BWVCs activated, but positioned so as to only capture audio, not footage of the search. Any amendment to the existing policy would require an assessment of legality, resource, data protection, and formal consultation with a range of stakeholders. There are currently no anticipated plans to change the intended purpose of BWVCs.

At HMP/YOI Chelmsford, there is an emphasis on preserving BWVC footage for any incident. Where BWVC, including accompanying audio footage is not available for review, the Prison ensures there are follow up management conversations with staff to remind of the responsibilities to activate BWVC when managing incidents. The Governor and the management team appreciate the Board's observations captured in the report about BWVCs, including acting on reports about staff conduct.