



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP The Verne
Portland
Dorset
DT5 1EQ

MoJ ref: SUB133601

23 April 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP THE VERNE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 AUGUST 2024 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2025**

Thank you for sharing your Board's annual report on HMP The Verne. I appreciate you and your colleagues' considerable efforts in producing such informative reflections on the current state of the prison, while continuing to operate with several vacancies. I'm sorry to hear that your membership had reduced further by the end of this reporting period and I hope this improves in the coming year.

I was saddened to read that seven prisoners died during the reporting year. Whilst early indications are that six of the deaths were from natural causes or illness, this does not diminish the effect on those who knew them and I offer my sincere sympathies to their friends and family. Prison and Probation Ombudsman investigations provide an important role to allow lessons to be learned following a death and I can provide you with assurance that any recommendations made will be given careful consideration.

I appreciate your concerns about the changes to UK Visa requirements and recognise this is a sensitive issue for those that are affected. The Board will be aware that on 22 July 2025 the Government introduced changes to the UK Immigration Rules to reduce net migration, as numbers must fall further as we create a migration system that is controlled and fair. Since these were implemented, the Ministry of Justice has worked in close collaboration with the Home Office and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to assess the operational impact. This resulted in a temporary exemption being agreed for the prison officer role after your reporting period on 19 December 2025. The exemption is a short-term measure to maintain safe staffing in our prisons while the longer-term recruitment and retention plans for all the vital roles across the justice system are delivered. The exemption will remain in place up to 31 December 2026, with a lower salary threshold until 31 December 2027. After these dates any applications by prison officers to extend their stay would need to meet the full UK Immigration Rules in place at the time. Despite this being a temporary measure, the Board can be assured that we remain committed to ensure prisons are sufficiently resourced and will provide targeted support for those prisons with staffing challenges.

I was reassured by your assessment that the prison continues to provide a safe, clean, fair and humane environment with conscientious staff that have good relationships with the prisoners in their care. I welcome the opening of the Fleet Unit, which I understand received positive feedback and provides much needed modern accommodation in an ageing prison. It was pleasing to read about the full programme of activities to occupy prisoners and the quality and quantity of the education provision on offer. The national

recognition awarded to the gardens and industries, as well as the 28 Koestler Arts awards, which prisoners and staff should be proud of, highlight the range of opportunities available to prisoners to improve their prospects on release. I also welcome the introduction of the Building Choices intervention, reducing the need for transfers and enabling prisoners to address their risk of reoffending. In addition, the significant reforms of the Sentencing Act 2026, which received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026, will provide further options to the Courts to end the cycle of less serious offenders going in and out of prison. It will also help to inform the future requirements for the prison estate at a strategic level to keep protecting the public and reduce reoffending.

Despite your concern about the clinical healthcare cover which HMPPS has responded to in the attached annex, I was encouraged that Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust has been recognised for continuing to provide effective healthcare to a high standard despite experiencing some estate challenges. I note you also have raised one local issue of concern in your report about laundry facilities and I have received assurance that new washers and dryers have been installed which has addressed this matter.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I recognise the important contribution that members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide across the estate and we extend our thanks for your continued dedication on behalf of HMP The Verne.

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

24-Hour Healthcare Provision

It is uncommon for a Category C Training prison to have 24 hour on-site clinical cover. The commissioned nursing model at HMP The Verne is aligned with community equivalence, which provides in-hours clinical provision supported by out of hours NHS 111 and established emergency response pathways. This approach is consistent with the national prison healthcare commissioning specifications and reflects a proportionate, needs-based model of care. However, in recognising both the additional needs of an ageing and complex population at HMP The Verne and the benefits associated with providing an on-site Social Care Unit, such as reduced hospital conveyance and improved continuity of care, the Local Authority and NHS England jointly commission 24-hour social care provision at HMP The Verne. The Unit provides two Social Care Support Workers on duty and as the Board recognises in its report it can provide care to prisoners in a similar manner as a care home would in the community.