



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP/YOI Eastwood Park  
Eastwood Park  
Falfield  
Wotton-Under-Edge  
GL12 8DJ

MoJ ref: SUB133473

17 April 2026

Dear Chair,

### **HMP/YOI EASTWOOD PARK INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2024 – 31 OCTOBER 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report. I want to begin by acknowledging what has clearly been a challenging year for HMP/YOI Eastwood Park. I am grateful to every member of the Board for your dedication in monitoring these pressures and for providing independent oversight during such a demanding year.

I now address the specific issues you have raised for my attention.

You highlight the challenges HMP/YOI Eastwood Park faced throughout the year in officer recruitment and retention and the potential impact of the Right to Work legislation from July 2025. I recognise the seriousness of these concerns. The Home Office has granted a temporary exemption to certain Skilled Worker visa requirements for existing Prison Officers, enabling those already in post to continue in their roles and supporting overall staffing stability across the estate from December 2025. Officers not already in post will continue to be assessed under standard eligibility criteria. This measure is intended to support safe staffing levels while longer term workforce reforms continue.

The Board's concern about delays in vetting for prison, healthcare, maintenance and education staff, as well as IMB applicants, is fully understood. Security vetting is essential for safeguarding prisoners and maintaining the integrity of the estate. However, recruitment volumes rose by 30% in 2025 compared with 2024, significantly increasing vetting demand. Additional checks introduced to strengthen safeguarding, including social media reviews and enhanced financial scrutiny have further contributed to these pressures. Work is underway to expand vetting capacity, including overtime, flexible resourcing, improved forecasting of recruitment demand and investment to recruit additional vetting staff whose deployment began in late 2025 and will continue throughout 2026. Improvements should become progressively visible as new vetting personnel reach full caseload capacity.

You raise concerns about delays to essential projects such as bathroom refurbishments, fire ring main replacement, carpeting works and the video conferencing centre. Estates programmes are complex and several of the delays experienced at HMP/YOI Eastwood Park resulted from unforeseen issues including buried services asbestos and protected species constraints. Despite these challenges, the new fire ring main has now been commissioned, shower refurbishments on several residential units are nearing completion and the video conferencing centre remains part of HMPPS planning subject to confirmed

funding. The National Service Estates continues to refine planning and oversight to strengthen delivery of future projects.

The Board expresses understandable concern about older and disabled prisoners unable to access suitable approved premises places on release. The Approved Premises system is required to ensure appropriate provision for vulnerable residents. Currently, four accessible places exist across two sites in the South West and South Central region with three additional step free places in the North of England. Demand exceeds supply and expansion of capacity is being actively explored. A new centrally coordinated digital referral process is now in place to ensure more effective national use of available accommodation and improve matching for individuals with specific needs.

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. This coincides with our decision to sanction the biggest ever expansion in tagging and the use of restriction zones to better protect victims. Alongside this, the probation budget will be increased by up to £700 million over the next three years to bolster community justice, including the probation service's resource and ability to tag offenders. The government is also investing in new technology to reduce admin so staff can focus on work that reduces reoffending.

Your report also captures many areas where HMP/YOI Eastwood Park has made important progress. I was particularly encouraged to read about the improvements in educational outcomes. The high levels of achievement in Maths, English and essential digital skills, together with the availability of Open University and Prisoners' Education Trust courses, show an establishment working hard to ensure women can build confidence and skills that support rehabilitation. These achievements stand out as a credit to the teaching teams and the women who engaged so positively with the opportunities available. I also welcome the Board's recognition of positive practice across reception, key work, health partnerships, family engagement, vocational training, library provision and the gym. These findings reflect a staff group that remains committed to delivering decency and purpose despite significant operational pressure.

I note you have raised three 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 recognise the importance of Independent Monitoring Boards in helping to improve our prisons and we thank you for your continued dedication on behalf of HMP/YOI Eastwood Park.

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**

## HMP/YOI EASTWOOD PARK INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2024 – 31 OCTOBER 2025

### HMP/PS comments on matters raised in the report

#### **Replacement of Residential Unit 7**

Following the closure of Residential Unit 7 due to fire safety concerns, the question of constructing a new bespoke, gender-specific, trauma-informed open-conditions unit has been considered carefully. A replacement design for the Women's Estate is not yet approved and HMP/YOI Eastwood Park has therefore been de-scoped from the Rapid Deployment Cells programme. The project will be reconsidered for potential capital funding once strategic discussions on Women's Estate accommodation are concluded.

#### **Devolved Budgets for Maintenance and Minor Works**

Governors determine the majority of day-to-day works with their local facilities management providers, including emergency works. There are also regular opportunities to bid for capital works at regional and national level. Under OneHMPPS, Area Executive Directors now hold dedicated area-level funding pots to address key priorities across establishments. Funding must continue to be prioritised according to risk to life, operational capacity and decency but the arrangements in place already allow Governors meaningful influence over routine maintenance.

#### **Lack of a Segregation Unit and Impact on Regime**

HMP/YOI Eastwood Park's lack of a dedicated segregation unit is a recognised operational risk and remains under senior leadership review. Temporary separation continues to be managed through dynamic risk assessment and multidisciplinary oversight, ensuring decisions remain lawful, proportionate and attentive to the needs of women in custody. Work is underway with HMPPS Safety Group and the Ministry of Justice Evaluation and Prototyping Team to develop gender-responsive, trauma-informed segregation models that can be applied safely at HMP/YOI Eastwood Park and inform future national policy. Estates colleagues will continue to review requests for related works, subject to prioritisation criteria and available funding.