



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Elmley
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Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI ELMLEY INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
1 NOVEMBER 2024 – 31 OCTOBER 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Elmley. I remain sincerely grateful to you and your colleagues for your resilience in monitoring the prison and for producing such insightful reflections. Although your membership increased by the end of the reporting period your continued commitment whilst operating with significant vacancies is appreciated. I hope the situation improves going forward.

I was saddened to hear four prisoners died in custody during the reporting year, with a further three deaths occurring shortly after their release from custody. I offer my sympathy and condolences to all the friends and family of those who have passed away, and I want to provide reassurance that any recommendations arising from Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) investigations are treated with the utmost seriousness.

I recognise the Board's further concerns about the investment required in the accommodation at HMP/YOI Elmley. As infrastructure continues to age and deteriorate it is acknowledged that issues can occur and cause considerable frustrations. HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) remains committed to delivering sustained improvement in living conditions across the prison estate to promote a safe and secure environment that facilitates genuine rehabilitation. The Board may be aware HM Inspectorate of Prisons recently undertook an Independent Review of Progress at HMP/YOI Elmley which was published on 30 March 2026. This found the Governor had been successful in improving living conditions since their last inspection and had implemented a long-term plan to improve and maintain the prison infrastructure. A project in the region of £900K to refurbish various shower areas in Houseblocks 1 to 4 is now nearing completion. Due to the ongoing issues with the hot water system on Houseblock 5, temporary boilers were put in place. In July 2026 the new Houseblock 7 will open which will significantly improve the prison's overall living-conditions and allow Houseblock 5, which also has fire safety mitigations in place, to be decommissioned which is also scheduled by July 2026. HMP/YOI Elmley will continue to work closely with Estates as further bids are actively in the pipeline awaiting compliance and affordability to undertake the work. This includes further shower refurbishments on the houseblocks and in the gym, replacement flooring and calorifiers on the houseblocks, the site-wide boiler replacement and fire-safety compartmentation improvements. These investment needs will continue to be reviewed alongside other requirements from across the estate to prioritise work carefully against future capital budgets.

Turning to your concerns regarding the current cell clearance process, a revised version of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was published on 17 November 2025 after your reporting period. This provides additional guidance on common areas of difficulty, including the correct completion of the cell clearance certificate. These changes are a result of careful consideration of the IMB national thematic report on the impact of property loss on prisoners, the thematic review by the PPO Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations of the property complaints and consultation with prison staff on the issues these thematic reports highlighted. Whilst the suggestion of using Body Worn Video Cameras (BWVC) in the process is noted, the BWVC Policy Framework does not provide for the recording of routine work practices. There are currently no anticipated plans to change the intended purpose of BWVCs and any amendment to this Framework would require an assessment of legality, resource, data protection and formal consultation. Their purpose 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 a BWVC must be justifiable, necessary, and proportionate to commence recording. However, it is acknowledged locally at the prison that there have been cases where property has been insufficiently recorded or gone missing. The prison has therefore reinforced staff instructions around cell-security procedures, strengthened supervision of cell-clearance practices, and the monitoring of compliance through local assurance processes.

Whilst there is further work to do, it was encouraging to receive your comments that prisoners consider they receive fair and humane treatment and that wing staff have a good understanding of those in their care. It was reassuring to read that the number of occasions where staff have had to use force to restrain prisoners has decreased and that the prison has an effective and well managed Care and Separation Unit to support the very challenging individuals. I was also pleased to note that waiting times for healthcare appointments have significantly reduced and that the number of qualified mental health nurses has increased to better support prisoners in need.

I also welcome the Board's acknowledgement of the new shift pattern for operational staff to maximise time out of cells and allow prisoners to access the many work opportunities that the prison provides. It was pleasing to hear about the positive experiences in education and that the provision has been good with improvements in the quality of teaching. In addition, the significant reforms of the Sentencing Act 2026, which received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026, will not only provide further options to the Courts to end the cycle of less serious offenders going in and out of prison but will also help HMPPS to inform the future requirements for the prison estate to keep protecting the public and reduce reoffending.

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. Where not already addressed in my reply, HMPPS has commented in the attached annex on the other issues raised in your report and the recommendations you make at the end of your report.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I would like to express our appreciation for the important contribution that members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide to improve the prison estate and wish to thank you for your continued dedication on behalf of HMP/YOI Elmley.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Timpson

Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP/YOI ELMLEY INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 1 NOVEMBER 2024 – 31 OCTOBER 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Education Budget

Assurance can be provided that there have been no cuts to the national prison education budget, but it is recognised that this budget has not been able to keep pace with the significant rise in the cost of delivering high-quality education in recent years. As a result, since the new Prisoner Education Service contracts started in October 2025 some delivery reductions have been necessary. HMPPS have [published](#) transparency data on the level of Core Education commissioning under the previous and current Core Education contracts within prisons and HMP/YOI Elmley saw a volume reduction of 29%. However, staff on site have planned carefully to ensure that prisoners have access to a broad and deep curriculum that meets their needs, including English, mathematics, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Screening & Assessment, Projects, Life Skills, Peer Mentoring and an Inclusion Practitioner. These continue to support readiness for employment on release, alongside the work-based vocational courses funded through Dynamic Purchasing System. Further to last year's response, HMPPS Instructional Officers are completing the Level 3 Award in Education and Training, which will provide them with the knowledge and skills to train prisoners and deliver accredited qualifications. These include Industrial Cleaning and Guild of Cleaners & Launderers qualifications which will supplement the existing provision which delivered 132 Industrial Cleaning qualifications between the 2025–26 financial year. Recycling qualifications will also be implemented in 2026–27 and additional vocational qualifications will be considered for the new Houseblock 7 workshops once the Instructional Officers are suitably qualified.

Contaminated Waste

It is acknowledged that contaminated waste can build up, due to the necessity of bulk removal by the facilities management provider in-line with the scope of the contract. NHS England will continue to work with the prison to ensure that any gaps in provision, delays, or risks relating to the disposal of clinical waste are identified and communicated promptly. Where issues may compromise safety or capacity, the prison continues to escalate these promptly to maintain safety. However, the Board can be assured that Ministry of Justice Property colleagues will be working with the facilities management provider and the prison to ensure contaminated waste is being segregated safely prior to removal from the site.

CCTV Equipment

The importance of effective CCTV coverage and body-worn camera capability is acknowledged. The Board will be aware that bids for upgraded CCTV and security lighting were confirmed in last year's ministerial response and remain part of national prioritisation. All bid proposals are underpinned by the data collected in recent condition surveys which assessed the fabric, cells, and critical assets at each prison. These are being used to inform long-term forward maintenance registers, which can be prioritised against future capital budgets as available funding is being prioritised carefully. Body-worn camera compliance locally at HMP/YOI Elmley continues to improve following replacement of older devices and strengthening of the local audit process.

Illicit Items

To mitigate the smuggling of contraband into prisons, such as drugs, weapons and mobile phones, HMPPS has specialist staff and equipment which in recent years has expanded to include X-ray body scanners, airport-style Enhanced Gate Security, and X-ray baggage scanners. More recently, it is

acknowledged that drone activity presents a growing threat across the closed estate and there has been investment of over £40 million into new physical security measures to clamp down on the contraband that fuels violence behind bars. £10 million of this funding has specifically been spent on counter-drone measures such as window replacements, external window grilles and specialist netting. HMPPS is also working closely with law enforcement in this area, and the Director General of the National Crime Agency has directed police chiefs to work with HMPPS to jointly tackle the threat drones pose. A large-scale joint operation between the police and HMPPS has already resulted in over 200 arrests linked to drones smuggling contraband into prisons. Locally HMP/YOI Elmley will continue to work with national intelligence, the police, and regional security units to prevent and disrupt drone activity. During the recent HM Inspectorate of Prisons Independent Review of Progress published on 30 March 2026 this found that the prison had made notable progress in disrupting the supply of illicit drugs. The prison has strengthened its response by acting swiftly on intelligence, improving physical security measures such as window-grille upgrades, deepening operational partnership with local police, and increasing support for those struggling with substance misuse.

Secure Hospital Transfers

It is recognised that prison is not the right environment for people with severe mental illness and delays continue to be experienced for those who may require treatment in hospital under the Mental Health Act. The Mental Health Act 2025 now introduces a statutory time limit of 28 days for transfers from prison to hospital. This reform is due to commence within 18-24 months post Royal Assent and health and justice partners are committed to making this reform within the published timeframe with an NHSE-led National Mental Health & Justice Strategic Advisory Group (MHJSAG) established to oversee and monitor the transfer process. NHS England are actively engaged in national and regional programmes of work to strengthen pathways, reduce delays, and support consistent progress toward achieving the expected 28-day transfer time limit. Data performance indicators are being used to improve integrated processes both regionally and nationally and to compliment this work a draft escalation process is being developed for those individuals who require transfer but are at risk of immediate release due to their legal status. In the meantime, HMP/YOI Elmley continues to liaise with the local healthcare provider and regular case reviews are being undertaken for those individuals awaiting transfer to escalate these cases.