



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Drake Hall
Eccleshall
Stafford
ST21 6LQ

MoJ ref: SUB135068

19 June 2026

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for your Board's annual report and for the diligence shown by members throughout the reporting year. I appreciate the clarity of your observations and the constructive approach you continue to take in your engagement with the staff at HMP/YOI Drake Hall.

I was saddened to read of the death that occurred during the reporting period. Every death in custody is a tragedy and I offer my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the woman who died. I thank you for your observations that it was handled in a professional and compassionate manner given the impact felt by staff and other women. It is also reassuring that where recommendations have been made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), action has been taken. Please be assured that any learning from the PPO following the conclusion of its latest investigation will be treated with the upmost importance.

You once again ask what the current plan is for Richmond and Plymouth houses and whether the intention is continued maintenance, replacement, or closure. I recognise the Board's longstanding concern and frustration about these buildings and accept that, despite effective local management, their age and design present ongoing challenges. Work continues to develop a suitable long-term solution for Plymouth and Richmond. In the interim, risk-management measures remain in place and targeted, small-scale refurbishments are being undertaken to maintain safety and decency while options are considered within the context of broader women's estate capacity pressures and a longer-term estate strategy. Locally, the condition of Plymouth and Richmond is closely monitored through monthly AMEY contract meetings and health and safety oversight, including specific mitigations relating to fire risk. Regular decency checks ensure that wear and tear is identified and addressed through business-as-usual maintenance. I welcome the Board's recognition of the significant effort made by the prison to maintain standards within these constraints.

You again raise concerns about increasing numbers of women experiencing severe mental illness and delays in accessing specialist hospital treatment. I recognise the seriousness of this issue and the challenge it presents within an establishment that has limited cellular accommodation. NHS England advises that the majority of women access secure mental health treatment within expected timeframes. However, I acknowledge that delays occur in a small number of highly complex cases, particularly where women require specialist national level provision or do not meet the threshold for secure placement. Female specific work is underway, including a review of the female secure service specification, refreshed pathways guidance and regional bed modelling. This work has identified additional capacity requirements planned for delivery in 2026–27. The Mental Health Act introduces a statutory 28-day transfer time limit

for prisoners requiring inpatient treatment and reforms the use of prison as a place of safety. Health and justice partners are currently developing a joint implementation plan to support delivery of these changes safely. At HMP/YOI Drake Hall, multidisciplinary forums are used to identify and support women with the highest levels of risk, with senior leadership oversight of the most complex cases. Where women cannot be managed safely on normal location, the Care and Support Unit (CSU) is used as the least harmful option while transfer arrangements are pursued.

You express concern that the prison has no cellular accommodation outside the CSU and that this creates challenges given the profile of women being received. I understand the operational risks associated with this limitation. Decisions on further cellular accommodation must be prioritised against competing estate demands with investment focused on risk to life, safety and operational capacity. Funding constraints unfortunately continue to limit the pace of structural change. The Governor reports that population churn has increased markedly, with more frequent receptions, shorter sentences and earlier transfers from reception prisons. This has reduced population stability and increased operational pressure in an environment without conventional cellular accommodation. These factors are being considered as part of longer-term strategic planning for the women's estate.

The significant reforms introduced through the Sentencing Act, which received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026, will support the Government's wider ambition to reduce the unnecessary use of custody, particularly for women serving short sentences. By giving the courts greater flexibility, including the expanded use of restriction zones to protect victims, these reforms are intended to help break the cycle of repeated short custodial sentences that disproportionately affect women with complex needs. Alongside this, the probation budget will increase by up to £700 million over the next three years to strengthen community-based provision, improve supervision and expand the use of electronic monitoring. Investment in new technology will also reduce administrative burdens, enabling probation and prison staff to focus more effectively on work that supports rehabilitation and reduces reoffending.

I appreciate that you must be frustrated that you are raising repeated concerns and your report describes a prison operating under increasing strain as population complexity has intensified. You highlight the challenges of managing trauma, serious mental illness and substance misuse within an establishment that lacks the structural features of most closed prisons. Against this backdrop, it was encouraging to see the Board's recognition of strong staff-prisoner relationships and the professionalism with which staff manage daily pressures. Over the year, there has been a reducing trend in self-harm and assaults on staff, alongside improved attendance in purposeful activity, reflecting sustained multidisciplinary effort to support women in a demanding operational environment.

HMPPS responses to the issues you raised for its attention are set out in the attached annex. The Governor will also continue to update you on the local concerns raised in your report.

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 ongoing dedication on behalf of HMP/YOI Drake Hall.

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

Staffing Establishment and Resourcing

HMPPS acknowledges that HMP/YOI Drake Hall's staffing establishment was designed for a different operating model and does not fully reflect the demands of managing a closed women's prison with an increasingly complex and transient population. Workforce modelling undertaken as part of the Workforce Modernisation programme has identified this gap. HMP/YOI Drake Hall has been identified as a priority site within the Women's Group for an additional staffing uplift. In the interim, detached duty staffing has been used to support core regime delivery and essential medical escorts. From April 2026, additional staffing is scheduled to be introduced with further onboarding expected over the following 6 to 12 months, subject to recruitment and affordability. This investment is intended to strengthen supervision, improve the delivery of key work and stabilise the regime.

Prisoners' Property and Digital Solutions

HMPPS recognises that prisoners' property remains a systemic issue, particularly at points of transfer. Operationally, the digitally recorded Prisoner Escort Record (dPER), which includes a dedicated property section is now embedded as business as usual and provides a clearer audit trail of property movements between establishments. At HMP/YOI Drake Hall, there have been no complaints in the past 12 months relating to property lost or delayed in transit by Prisoner Escort Custody Service providers. Property related concerns raised locally most often relate to sending establishments, which is particularly relevant given the increase in receptions and faster population turnover.

Further operational support has been provided through the revised Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, published in November 2025, which strengthens guidance on volumetric limits, cell clearance processes and the handling of excess property. While there are no confirmed plans for estate wide digital property cards, existing digital processes are improving accountability and supporting earlier resolution where issues arise.