



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Exeter
30 New North Road
Exeter,
Devon
EX4 4EX

MoJ Ref: SUB135301

25 June 2026

Dear Chair,

HMP EXETER INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JANUARY 2025 –31 DECEMBER 2025

Thank you for submitting the Independent Monitoring Board's Annual Report for HMP Exeter. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your continued dedication in providing independent oversight of a busy and complex reception prison. Your report provides a clear and detailed account of the significant operational challenges faced during the year.

I was very sorry to learn that there were four deaths in custody during the reporting year. Every death in custody is a tragedy, and my condolences are with the families, friends and all those affected. All deaths are subject to independent investigation by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, and any findings will be carefully considered.

I note the Board's concerns regarding the impact of delays to building and maintenance projects, including the continued closure of wings, on safety, security and the overall wellbeing of prisoners and staff. Delivering major infrastructure improvements within a live custodial environment is inherently complex. Projects must be carefully managed around operational requirements, safety considerations and wider pressures across the estate. At HMP Exeter, a number of significant projects are currently underway, including a sitewide fire safety improvement programme, upgrades to the cell call system, replacement windows and ventilation improvements. These works are being prioritised to address the most critical risks to safety and decency. Further projects, including improvements to CCTV coverage, repairs to the perimeter wall and wider infrastructure upgrades are progressing through assurance and governance processes with delivery prioritised according to risk and operational need. While I recognise the impact that extended timescales can have locally, this approach ensures that resources are directed to the highest-risk areas across the estate.

You highlight the impact of changes to education provision within the establishment, including concerns about staffing, class size and choice of provision. Education delivery continues to be monitored through national contract management arrangements, alongside a wider programme of evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the Prisoner Education Service and inform future commissioning decisions. While core education forms one part of the overall offer, establishments retain flexibility to shape provision in response to local need, including the balance between education, vocational training and work. At HMP Exeter, class sizes are monitored to ensure they remain appropriate for delivery with average group sizes remaining within expected ranges. Work continues with establishments and providers to maximise

attendance and participation, ensuring that available provision is used effectively to support prisoner progression and outcomes.

HMP Exeter continues to operate within a demanding local prison context, a significant remand population and increasing complexity of need. Your report highlights how these pressures intersect with estate limitations and regime delivery. However, it was pleasing to read about the areas of development. The sustained improvement in safety outcomes, including reductions in both violence and self-harm is particularly notable and reflects the impact of targeted safety interventions. Improvements in reception and first night processes, alongside stronger staff-prisoner relationships and effective key working, provide important foundations for stability. The continued contribution of specialist provision, including wellbeing and rehabilitative services, further supports this progress.

Issues raised in your report that fall within local operational responsibility will continue to be addressed by the Governor, who will keep the Board informed of progress. Responses to matters raised for HMPPS are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I continue to appreciate the value and scrutiny brought by members of Independent Monitoring Boards to improve the estate and we extend our thanks for your continued dedication on behalf of HMP Exeter.

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 EXETER INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 January 2025 –31 December 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Contract Management and Oversight of Maintenance Projects

Delivery of capital and maintenance projects at HMP Exeter is supported by structured governance and oversight arrangements. Weekly project meetings are held involving operational leads, contractors and project teams to monitor delivery, assess progress and address emerging risks. These are supported by wider escalation mechanisms, including tripartite meetings with MoJ Property and delivery partners where required. Where delays or risks to delivery are identified, these are escalated through appropriate governance routes to ensure visibility and resolution. Delivery timelines remain subject to operational constraints, including access to working areas, security requirements and regime considerations. Projects are prioritised based on risk with a focus on safety, compliance and operational continuity.

Canteen Pricing

Prices for goods on the national canteen list are set centrally through national procurement arrangements and aligned with, or below, Manufacturer's Recommended Retail Prices. This ensures that pricing remains broadly comparable to that in the community. Work continues with suppliers to maintain affordability, including the provision of lower-cost alternatives where possible. Locally, prisoner feedback is captured through canteen forums, allowing for ongoing review of product choice and affordability within the constraints of national arrangements.

Prisoner Property

A revised Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, introduced in November 2025, strengthened guidance on key areas including handling, transfer processes and completion of property documentation. At HMP Exeter, a number of local measures have been implemented to strengthen compliance. These include daily supervisory checks on property documentation, targeted quality assurance activity within reception, and regular review of complaint data to identify trends and areas for improvement. Where property is reported lost, investigations are undertaken through established processes, with learning used to improve practice and consistency. Additional local reviews are underway, including arrangements for parcel handling and clothing policies, to ensure alignment with national standards and improve delivery.

Retention of Skilled Prisoners in Reception Prisons

Reception prisons operate primarily to provide capacity for the courts which requires the timely movement of sentenced prisoners through the estate. While prisoners may be retained for short periods where there is a clear operational benefit, this must be balanced against the need to maintain capacity and support effective population flow. Decisions to retain individuals are therefore time-limited and subject to regular review to ensure they remain proportionate and do not impact on the establishment's core function.

Prisoners with Complex Health Needs Awaiting Transfer

Where prisoners present with health or social care needs that cannot be fully met within a custodial setting, multi-agency arrangements are in place to support appropriate placement. HMPPS works with healthcare providers, local authorities and receiving establishments to identify suitable placements, including alternative care settings where required. These decisions are supported through regional oversight and collaborative working across agencies, with the aim of ensuring that individuals are held in environments that meet their assessed needs.