



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Millsike

**For reporting year
1 April 2025 to 30 April 2026**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment¹

HMP Millsike is a category C prison (which houses those whose escape risk is considered low but who are not yet deemed ready for open conditions) for training, resettlement and rehabilitation, and is run by Mitie Care & Custody. They work in partnership with Forward Trust and People Plus, with a focus on sustainability and rehabilitation.

The Director and senior Mitie operational staff assumed responsibility for the prison from February 2025. The first prisoners arrived on 23 April 2025, and the prison was scheduled to reach the full capacity of 1,468 prisoners by April 2026.

The prison is newly built to the same design as HMP Fosse Way and HMP Five Wells. It is the first UK prison to run solely on electricity. It has six houseblocks. Originally, two were designated for prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSOs) and four for the general prison population; however this was revised to three houseblocks for each group. It has a care and separation unit (CASU), where prisoners are kept apart from the rest of the prison population, which has space for 17 prisoners.

At the end of the reporting period, four houseblocks were fully opened and houseblock C was being populated. The operational capacity (OpCap), the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime, is 1080. However, until more officers have been recruited and trained, the plans for the remaining landings on houseblock C and the opening of houseblock D are delayed.

There is a large visits hall with a children's play area and outside space. Facilities for closed visits (where there is a physical barrier between the prisoner and their visitor, preventing any direct physical contact), social video calls and legal visits are available. The visits reception is through the main entrance to the prison.

The Forward Trust charity is responsible for delivering services to prisoners, including dedicated houseblocks, for:

- A new desistance programme based on narrative therapy, co-designed with prisoners, helping individuals reshape their identities and futures.
- The incentivised substance free living (ISFL) community-led space, supporting recovery from substance use.
- The connections family and relationships unit, offering interventions such as M-PACT, parenting support, and Relationships Matter, tailored to support families affected by addiction and offending.
- The visitors centre, and all aspects of visits, including social video calls and visits booking.

People Plus is responsible for delivering education, vocational training and resettlement activities that prepare individuals for life after release.

Aramark are responsible for the kitchen and canteen provision.

¹ Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's position at the time of reporting but may be subject to change following further validation and therefore may not always tally with Official Statistics later published by the Ministry of Justice.

3. Key points

This has been a very challenging year for Mitie Care & Custody, the staff and prisoners at HMP Millsike and the IMB. The Board understands that the contract was awarded six months late due to procurement issues. The agreement between the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Mitie Care & Custody stated that there would be an 18-month mobilisation period, which was subsequently reduced to 12 months. The prison opened on time, receiving its first prisoner on 23 April, as scheduled. Unfortunately, these have all had a significant impact on the prison and prisoners. Following the handover from the Mitie Care & Custody mobilisation team to Mitie's senior operational leadership team in February 2025, the Board identified a number of outstanding issues that had not been fully resolved by the mobilisation team during the mobilisation phase. This was not surprising given the reduced timeframe available for mobilisation.

New staff were recruited and trained in late 2024, but HMPPS was unable to facilitate the training of new staff in their prisons because the POA (prisoner officers' association) was against it. Officers therefore had little opportunity to gain any experience in advance of the prison opening, which was shortened anyway. Processes for issuing keys were not in place and, despite meetings with the mobilisation team prior to handover, no arrangements were made for the IMB; indeed, the Board was told that this was 'not included in the contract'. While the Board was informed that the mobilisation team included subject matter experts, there was little evidence, in the Board's view, that the prison was operationally ready.

Unsurprisingly, the opening of the prison was, in the view of the Board, chaotic, with inexperienced staff not knowing what to do and how to work with prisoners. The basic processes were not in place, which clearly impacted on the safety, security and humane treatment of prisoners and also the safety of staff. The staff attrition rate was high throughout the year at all levels, including the newly appointed Deputy Director. The reasons provided were numerous but included officers not being paid and excessive unpredictable hours being worked.

The Board was also disappointed to see that design faults evident in previously constructed prisons of the same design (HMP Fosse Way and HMP Five Wells) had not resulted in any changes to the design at HMP Millsike. It was immediately evident to the Board that the layout of the reception area was poor and the provision of property stores on a separate level added to the difficulties associated with effective storage.

Numerous other issues were apparent to the Board, including no sports hall in the original plans, insufficient office space and no air conditioning in the workshops, houseblocks or the large open-plan offices. The car park was too small to accommodate staff and visitors, a requirement that should have been straightforward to estimate, particularly given the lack of public transport options. The design of the landings creates blind spots for officers. It is the Board's view that the numerous design faults should have been resolved during the design and construction phases rather than requiring Mitie Care & Custody to work through after the prison opened.

A further disappointment for the Board was the apparent acceptance by HMPPS of the inadequate treatment of prisoners during the opening of a new prison. The IMB Chair was surprised to be told by HMPPS that all new prisons typically take at least three

years to stabilise, and it appeared that no account has been taken of the significant impact this can have on prisoners.

In his response to the IMB Chair, the Prisons Minister stated: *‘Our experience from other prison openings is that it can take up to four years to meet its full potential, but during this period they should maintain stability and be making incremental improvements.’*

The Board ultimately decided to escalate the issues with the Prisons Minister, Lord Timpson, and a letter was sent to him and copied to the Justice Select Committee, in December 2025. Copies of the letter and responses are in Annex 2.

Possibly as a result of this correspondence, a new and highly experienced interim Director was appointed in February 2026 and made an immediate impact. He quickly identified a significant number of issues that had not previously been addressed. He took the prison ‘back to basics’ and paused the intake of new prisoners to allow this work to take place. Staff were trained again on security (including locking doors and prisoner counts), safety (including managing self-harm, the use of force and the completion of ACCT documents), and he has developed a culture within the prison where staff and prisoners feel supported. A new restricted interim regime was introduced in April which, although it provided limited time for work and other activities, was more sustainable and therefore offered greater predictability and stability for prisoners. It is planned to remain in place until the autumn. The Board is pleased to note a significant improvement in staff morale since the arrival of the new Director.

The Board remains concerned that the prison is still opening new houseblocks and wings, in line with the commercial agreement, even though there is still a shortage of trained staff and the new restricted regime remains in place. Additional prisoners will result in the need to further curtail regimes in order to keep the staff and prisoners safe, especially as the work on going back to basics is still being done. The negative impact of this on the prisoners is not acceptable.

By the end of the reporting year, the Board had seen some improvements. However, we are concerned that, as more prisoners are transferred to HMP Millsike, there remains a shortfall of officers, with staff recruitment made difficult by the prison’s rural location and lack of public transport links. The limited regime restricts prisoners’ access to work and education, and the Board is concerned that this restricted regime may need to remain in place given the recruitment challenges. There is also the risk, in the Board’s view, that HMPPS may place pressure on Mitie Care & Custody to extend the regime as included in the contract, potentially jeopardising the prison’s stability. The Board hopes that any future changes will be introduced carefully and managed effectively.

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- In the Board’s view, the prison was not a safe place for prisoners and staff as soon as it was opened. This was obviously caused by the reduction of the mobilisation timescale so Mitie Care & Custody (a new provider) were not as prepared as they should have been.
- The inexperience and lack of staff meant that the prison seemed to be being run by the prisoners. The new Director from February 2026 has made

improvements to staffing by going back to basics and this has had the effect of slowly improving safety. But it is not there yet.

- The level of self-harm is similar to other category C establishments. However, the number of open assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans (used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) was high for a number of months, again probably due to the inexperienced staff. The number and quality have now improved.
- The Board was surprised to see that a prisoner who was on constant watch for a number of weeks was still able to self-harm on a regular basis.
- The number of use of force incidents was generally in line with similar prisons. However, the number of occasions on which batons were drawn was double the average for similar establishments, although the actual use of batons was low.

Fair and humane treatment

- From our observations, the Board had significant concerns about the quality, quantity, distribution and serving of food. While the distribution and serving of meals appeared to improve during the reporting year, prisoners continued, at times, to express dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity. The need to use lifts to transport meals to wing serveries, which were not designed for such frequent use, further complicated the delivery of food across the prison.
- Staffing shortages and inexperience affected the fair treatment of prisoners, in the Board's view. Staff were unable to answer basic questions about regime, food, property, etc, as they did not seem to have the knowledge, so prisoners were often given misinformed answers or ignored. Requests for basic supplies of toiletries and clothing were not met, as staff were unfamiliar with the process for obtaining these items and, initially, the stores were unable to provide them.
- The Board initially felt that the management of the care and separation unit (CSU) was poor, which was probably due to the lack of experience of officers and managers. There were too many prisoners on open ACCTs, which seemed to be acceptable to officers. This has now improved, as has the management of the unit.
- The Board has been concerned that there were no Listeners at HMP Millsike throughout the reporting period, because there has been a delay of over a year with getting the service level agreement arranged with the Samaritans. This has since been agreed and training scheduled.
- The administration of the Incentives Policy Framework does not seem to be embedded, with a number of issues needing to be addressed.
- The complaints process has taken over a year to be in any way effective, with late, inadequate responses and a significant backlog of responses. It is another area that has been affected by a lack of staff and a lack of knowledge and experience.
- The handling of property within the prison has been one of the major challenges since it opened, particularly in relation to the volume of follow-on property, and the Board has received a number of complaints about this issue. This reflects a wider national problem, and it is hoped that the recent changes to the Prisoners Property Policy Framework, which place greater responsibility on the sending establishment, will lead to improvements.

Health and wellbeing

- From our observations, the healthcare service was also initially affected by staff shortages and delays in vetting. The impact on healthcare provision of an unpredictable regime, high levels of self-harm and the large number of ACCTs cannot be underestimated. There has been some improvement.
- Also initially, the lack of officers impacted the ability to send prisoners to every hospital appointment. This has improved over the last few months.
- The shortage and inexperience of the staff have significantly restricted the regime throughout the reporting year, with unpredictability causing major frustrations for prisoners.
- The Board is pleased that the new restricted regime appears to be providing greater certainty for both prisoners and staff. However, we are concerned that any plans to open additional accommodation or fully extend the regime take proper account of staffing levels and experience and, most importantly, the needs of the prisoners.

Progression and resettlement

- In the Board's view, good intentions, spacious facilities and positive plans for progression and resettlement were hampered by the lack of preparation prior to prisoners arriving.
- Processes for ordering and distributing essential items to the prison were not in place before it opened. This resulted in considerable difficulties for all organisations working in the prison and took a year after opening to resolve. The Board was surprised that these arrangements had not been established by the mobilisation team in advance.
- The library is a positive, inspirational and enthusiastic place, which has helped to improve the morale of prisoners and teaches lifetime skills.
- The introduction of the new Building Choices programme has resulted in a backlog of prisoners requiring the course who, understandably, are very frustrated. This is reflected across the prison estate.
- The Board is concerned that HMP Millsike is unable to deliver the Bridge programme because it is considered to overlap with other services.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The Board continues to be concerned that new prisons are being opened knowing that it will take two or three years for them to stabilise, with significant implications for the safety and humane treatment of prisoners during that period. This concern is further exacerbated when prisons are built in remote locations, where recruitment and retention challenges can be particularly acute. At what point will this be recognised as unacceptable, and what steps are being taken to ensure that more effective arrangements are put in place before new prisons open?
- The Board is concerned about delays in the vetting process, which are affecting the recruitment of IMB members, as well as staffing across all organisations working at HMP Millsike. What action is being taken to address these delays, and by when does the Minister expect vetting times to return to a level that no longer hinders recruitment and the effective operation of the prison?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Despite the fact that design faults had been highlighted following the builds at HMP Fosse Way and HMP Five Wells, no changes were made to the design at HMP Millsike. Whilst the Board was informed that a 'lessons learnt' exercise was taking place in 2025 (and provided some limited input), no details have been received of the outcome. Have any changes been made, or are any changes planned, to the design of future prison builds, including the next new prison being built by the Prison Service?
- Given the fact that it was clear to the Board very early on that the mobilisation team had not completed all the work required before the prison was opened, why wasn't the opening postponed? Whilst the Board was aware of the capacity problems in the prison estate at that time, opening the prison at that time resulted in prisoners being treated inhumanely, in our view.
- The Board is concerned about the impact of the continued use of improvement notices. In the Board's view, senior leaders and managers are focusing on meeting action plan requirements rather than embedding stable day-to-day operations, which is contributing to a number of the issues raised in this report. How will the Prison Service ensure that improvement requirements support, rather than hinder, the long-term stability and development of new prisons?
- How will the Prison Service ensure that HMP Millsike has sufficient time to recruit, retain and train staff, and establish effective resettlement services, before increasing capacity further, particularly given the implications for the Mitie Care & Custody contract?
- How is the Prison Service working with Mitie Care & Custody to balance commercial considerations with the safe ramp-up of the prison, and to ensure that prisoners are treated humanely throughout this process?
- The Board remains concerned about delays in the vetting process, which appear to be affecting both the recruitment of IMB members and staffing across organisations working at HMP Millsike. Could you the Prison Service provide an update on whether any steps are being taken to improve the situation, particularly given the Ministry of Justice's contractual six-week timeframe for the vetting of Millsike staff?
- The Board is concerned that the service level agreement between the Samaritans and HMPPS for the delivery of Listener training does not include private prisons. This has resulted in a significant delay in the deployment of Listeners at HMP Millsike, which the Board finds unacceptable. Why are private prisons excluded from these arrangements, and what action will be taken to ensure timely access to Listener training in future?
- When planning new prisons, how is consideration being given to the implementation of the Crime in Prison Referral Agreement, given concerns that the current process may present particular challenges for private prisons?

TO MITIE CARE & CUSTODY

- The Board considers that the mobilisation process was inadequate in several key areas, contributing to confusion and operational problems. In our view, weaknesses in mobilisation were a significant factor in many of the issues experienced at HMP Millsike. Has Mitie Care & Custody reviewed the successes and failures of the mobilisation process, and what changes have been made as a result?

TO THE DIRECTOR

- Provision of equipment and supplies was, and still is, disorganised, on the Board's view. What is the Director planning to do to ensure that orders and supplies are sent to the required departments with no delay?
- What action is being taken to resolve the issue with privacy keys on the wings and to ensure that all prisoners are issued with a key without further delay?
- When will Listeners be trained and deployed at the prison?
- What is planned to improve the processes required as part of the Incentives Policy Framework?
- How will the Director ensure that the recent improvements in complaint handling and response times are sustained?
- When will the backlog of property and residential complaints be cleared, and how will progress be sustained until then?
- As staffing levels improve, what steps will be taken to ensure that resettlement is given the priority expected of a resettlement prison?
- When will a full-time IMB clerk be put in place to carry out all aspects of the role set out in the MoU between HMPPS and the IMB, including raising staff awareness of the Board and its work?

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

It became obvious to the Board that, due to the lack of staff and their inexperience, the prison was not a safe place for prisoners and staff for nearly the whole of the first year of opening and, in fact, the Board decided to visit in pairs for their own safety. There were many occasions when members were on a wing with prisoners on association and no officers were in sight.

The interim Director ensured that there were always two officers on each wing and the Board has seen an improvement in safety for prisoners and staff.

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 The reception area has been built to the same design as HMP Fosse Way and HMP Five Wells, and the Board has identified a number of design shortcomings. The areas used to hold prisoners awaiting reception, release or transfer are too small and have insufficient seating. This is particularly problematic, given that the prison accommodates both PCoSOs and main population prisoners, making it impossible to keep the two groups separate. There is also limited privacy for searching prisoners and insufficient storage spaces for property. In addition, the reception area can become very hot, with a lack of fresh air. The Board is aware of an incident when a prisoner collapsed because of the heat.

4.1.2 The Board has observed an improvement in the reception process over the course of the year. It was initially very slow, and prisoners were often there for six hours or more. The processing of property, delays in healthcare screening due to a lack of healthcare staff and the issuing of individual computer tablets were the main cause. It appeared chaotic and extremely stressful for prisoners. It took more than 6 months to see any reduction.

4.1.3 There has been some improvement in the length of time spent in reception, but prisoners arriving late in the day (5pm) mean that it is not possible to do all the necessary tasks in reception and some have to be done the next day. There is also a delay caused by the healthcare screening which means that prisoners are regularly kept in reception for over two hours. This pressure being put on the prison to take prisoners late in the day affects prisoners and staff and is unacceptable.

4.1.4 The officers in reception regularly reported having to work through the day with no breaks and extra hours in the evening to process prisoners. The new Director is aware and appears to be addressing the situation.

4.1.5 Initially, induction was planned to take two weeks. The Board received numerous complaints when speaking to prisoners in their induction phase, as they had nothing to do and were bored. The prison has now shortened this to a week, which prisoners find is an improvement.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 It was obvious to the Board that the inexperienced staff were overly cautious initially with an extremely high number of open ACCTs which, of course, put more pressure on the officers. The standard of ACCT documents was also not acceptable, with observations being missed regularly. The number of open ACCTs now seems

comparable to other category prisons and the standard of completion has improved, in the Board's view.

4.2.2 After a year of operation, the level of self-harm is at a comparable level to that in similar prisons. While a small number of prisoners account for a disproportionate number of incidents, the number of open ACCTs has fallen over the reporting year.

4.2.3 There has been one death in custody, which is being investigated.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 The number of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults - 104 - has been high throughout the reporting period, which the Board believes could be attributed to the inexperience and lack of officers on the wings. There has also been a high number of prisoner-on-staff assaults - 85 - particularly during the period when the Board was becoming increasingly concerned about the stability of the prison (November and December 2025). The Board is pleased to note that number of prisoner-on-staff assaults dropped towards the end of the reporting year, although the level of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults remains high.

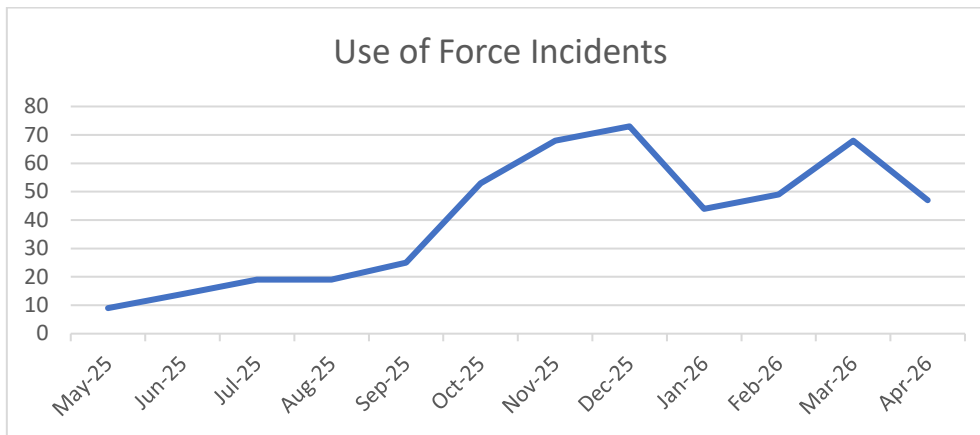
Month	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Prisoner on prisoner	-	-	5	4	6	11	19	4	7	18	9	12	9
Prisoner on staff	-	-	3	3	6	4	6	22	13	11	7	6	4
Total assaults	-	-	8	7	12	15	25	26	20	29	16	18	13
Assaults per 1000 prisoners	0	0	25.4	14.1	19	20.8	30.6	31.9	21.7	30.9	17	19.5	13.2
Population	48	194	315	498	633	720	816	815	923	937	941	922	988

4.3.2 The number of self-isolators has fluctuated throughout the year and is helped as more wings are opened and prisoners can be moved to different wings.

4.3.3 The Board has been concerned that the number of challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) referrals (used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence) has been low throughout the reporting year. This is an area that the new Director appears to be prioritising, which is good news.

4.4 Use of force

4.4.1 As expected, the use of force (UoF) has increased as the prison population has grown. There were a total of 488 incidences during the reporting year, 77.7% of which were unplanned and involved 227 prisoners. The graph below shows that UoF incidents peaked in October, November and December, which is one of the factors that led the Board to escalate its concerns to the Prisons Minister. The Board hopes that the recent downward trend will continue as the population increases and staff gain experience.



4.4.2 The Board was concerned that batons were drawn in 4.1% of use of force incidents (used on three occasions and drawn but not used 17 times) compared with a national average of 1.9%. Pava incapacitant spray was introduced in December 2025 and is carried by most officers. It has been drawn three times but not used, which the Board feels is acceptable. Body worn video cameras (BWVCs) were activated in 87.1% of UoF incidents.

4.4.3 The Board is pleased that following a considerable delay, weekly UoF scrutiny meetings have now been introduced and monthly UoF meetings are taking place and have observed a scrutiny meeting.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

4.5.1 Unfortunately, illicit items remain readily available at HMP Millsike and continue to present a significant challenge. This has a detrimental impact on prisoners' physical and mental wellbeing and contributes to increased levels of bullying, debt and violence. As the prison population has grown, the availability of drugs and the number of prisoners under their influence have increased, although levels have fluctuated throughout the year. Both the Board and the Director remain concerned about the scale of the problem. On a number of occasions, entire wings have had to be locked down because of the number of prisoners under the influence of drugs or 'hooch' (alcohol illicitly brewed on the wings).

4.5.2 All prisoners arriving at HMP Millsike are currently required to undergo X-ray body scanning to check for concealed items. Prisoners who refuse to undergo a scan, or whose scan produces a positive result, are segregated from the general population until a subsequent scan confirms they are clear. All property is scanned in reception before, if appropriate, it is given to prisoners. There have been reports of illicit items, including drugs, being found during these searches.

4.5.3 All visitors to the prison are searched before entering the visits hall. However, visits appeared to be one of the main routes by which illicit items were entering the prison. In response, staff received additional training on identifying and preventing the introduction of contraband during visits. The new Director also plans to increase staffing in the visits area when resources allow.

4.5.4 All staff and contractors searched are at the gate before entry to the prison. Personal belongings are scanned and people subject to a rub-down search.

4.5.5 However, the Board remains concerned that illicit items continue to be found in the prison and we will monitor this closely.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 The six houseblocks are cross-shaped, with four landings of around 60 cells on each. Each landing has three sections of cells with wide association areas containing tables, chairs and recreational facilities, such as pool tables, together with a large reception desk at the entrance opposite the servery. Access is via a corridor containing the office, a prisoners' small kitchen, an exercise room, a laundry, small meeting rooms and the servery entrance. Stairs and lifts provide access to each floor and facilitate disabled access, as well as for the movement of good and food trolleys.

5.1.2 There are a number of blind spots, despite the 1539 CCTV cameras monitored from the control room. More than once, the Board has observed prisoners returning to their landing, from gym, visits, etc, having to repeatedly bang on the locked landing door to gain entry to the wing because staff were unable to hear them. Not surprisingly, this sometimes led to frustration and resulted in damage to the doors.

5.1.3 In the Board's view, the cells are well designed, with the provision of a self-contained shower and toilet. Prisoners are supplied with a computer tablet to access menus, money and prison notices and to submit applications (prisoners' written representations to the Board), complaints and other requests. Some prisoners say that they appreciate the 'best prison facilities' they have ever experienced.

5.1.4 Prisoners continue to make unfavourable comments to members of the IMB about the order and management of the landings, even with the changes that have been introduced with two prison custody officers (PCO) on each landing and a prison custody manager (PCM) for each houseblock. Many inexperienced, new staff were, and still are, unaware of their responsibilities towards the prisoners. As prisoners asked questions about routines, clothing, food and fairness, they were often either misinformed or misled, thus causing significant frustration and anger, which could be justified in some cases, in the Board's view.

5.1.5 During the first weeks of opening, prisoners reported excellent meals from the kitchens. This was because the food was being prepared by staff, as prisoners had not yet been assigned to the kitchen. Staff also served the food. The kitchens are modern and safe, but it must be frustrating that the fire alarms are often triggered when food is being cooked.

5.1.6 As prisoners began to work in the kitchen and the number of prisoners increased, the Board received numerous complaints about the quality and portion size of the meals. The Board sometimes observed very small portions being served, such as three falafels and a small amount of pasta. Prisoners also appeared stressed about whether they would receive meal if they returned late from activities because of a disorganised line route.

5.1.7 The kitchen assured the Board that the correct quantities of food were being sent to the houseblocks. However, monitoring identified a number of issues: prisoners delivering food trolleys had sometimes helped themselves before service, serveries were not always adequately supervised, some officers did not fully appreciate the importance of overseeing food service and choice allocation, food servers were not always wearing appropriate protective clothing and gloves, and prisoners returning from activities often arrived too late to receive food that was still warm or in sufficient quantity.

5.1.8 Officers were, eventually, put in charge of collecting and delivering the trollies and signing for the correct quantity as they did so. By April 2026, arrangements had improved, with most landings using trusted prisoners to allocate meals in accordance with the relevant lists and an officer supervising each server. Even so, the Board received complaints from prisoners that special diet meals were not reaching their intended recipients, as they were allegedly being taken by other prisoners. The morale-sapping difficulties of fair food delivery has created much grumbling and anxiety and incidents of unrest when prisoners did not want to return to their cells. Hopefully, the changes made by the Director will improve the situation. The Board will continue to monitor closely.

5.1.9 The Board was surprised by the reported number of thefts of food by kitchen workers from the kitchen and the methods that were used. The prisoners are meant to be searched before leaving the wing and when returning from work, but it was evident that there was a problem. Staff are receiving additional training and instructions on the correct search procedures.

5.1.10 The prison allocates £2.88 a day for food for each prisoner and the Board is aware that it is due to increase to £3.20, which appears to be more in line with public prisons. Special diets mean more expensive individual meals. Each kosher meal, for example, costs £10 to provide. The new Food in Prisons Policy Framework includes changes to promote healthy eating, such as calorific quantities, increased fruit provision, revised menus and the introduction of brown bread and pasta. Whilst the Board understands that a healthy diet is important, prisoners cannot be compelled to make healthier choices and may supplement prison meals with items purchased through the canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries and other essentials using their allocated funds). Following the withdrawal of white bread, the Board noted piles of unused brown bread being discarded.

5.1.11 The Board has received numerous complaints from prisoners about the lack of basic toiletries, toilet rolls, cleaning supplies and clothing. Despite being informed that there was sufficient stock, poor staff communication, or lack of training, meant that staff did not know how to get them. The Board visited the stock warehouse - the facilities management building - to check on supplies they'd been told were ordered many weeks before. Staff appeared well intentioned and polite, but systems were chaotic, so that hundreds of parcels, white goods and miscellaneous articles were stacked up without a clear record of who had ordered them. This has not really improved over the reporting period, although the new Director appears to have prioritised this area. The Board will continue to monitor closely.

5.1.12 Aramark manages the canteen system and prisoners place their orders on their tablets each week. Additional items were added as prisoners asked for them. The PCoSO workforce appears to be reliable and the processes for making up orders are clear. The Board received complaints that some were more expensive than in other prisons and undertook a comparison, which indicated that some were, indeed, more expensive. Fresh items were considerably more expensive, by, on average, 36%. As Aramark is new to this area of work, sourcing requested items was difficult, as they had to find reliable and cheapest options. They do not have the same opportunities as public prisons do. Prisoners often complained that the many weekend lockdowns meant that fresh goods could not be cooked and were inedible.

5.1.13 An example of the challenges associated with inexperienced staff was the initial practice of allowing prisoners to distribute canteen orders. Unsurprisingly, this led to

numerous discrepancies until a more structured process was introduced and officers took responsibility for distribution. Although it took several months to resolve, complaints have since reduced.

5.1.14 Privacy keys are issued to prisoners for their cells. However, many keys went missing during the reporting year, and the Board received reports of prisoners stealing property from one another. This was not only unacceptable but also increased the time officers spent unlocking and locking cells during association periods. Efforts to improve the situation were hampered by the fact that many keys lacked identification numbers or tags. The Board will continue to monitor this issue closely.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 The care and separation unit (CASU) has 17 cells and is located beyond the houseblocks, furthest from the prison entrance. The office has a window overlooking the landing. There are meeting rooms for adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules), Rule 45 boards (reviews of prisoners removed from association for reasons of good order, discipline or their own protection) and ACCT reviews. In May 2025, the Board understood that, of the seven officers working in the unit, only one had previous prison experience. By July, the Board was informed that three officers lacked the experience needed to manage the complexities of working with some of the more challenging prisoners.

5.2.2 The number of prisoners held in the CASU fluctuates but, in the Board's view, the unit is consistently busy, with more than 60% of cells occupied at any given time. Reintegration was initially challenging, as there were limited opportunities to relocate prisoners to different houseblocks. One of the Board's main concerns was the high number of prisoners on open ACCTs in the CSU. In February, 10 of the 14 prisoners in the unit were subject to an open ACCT. This placed significant demands on staff and many of the prisoners appeared visibly distressed. The Board was informed that required observations were sometimes missed, with one explanation being that prisoners were exacerbating each other's behaviour. When asked about the high number of prisoners on open ACCTs, a senior manager replied that this was not unusual. Although the number has since reduced, the Board remains concerned that it is still relatively high.

5.2.3 The Board was concerned about the management of the CASU. Prisoners had no books available and the Board had to ask for them to be provided. Prisoners often told us that they did not have clean clothes, bedding or toiletries, even though, on investigation, items were available in the CASU. Due to a lack of staff, prisoners often complained that they had had no exercise over the weekend and were locked up for the whole time.

5.2.4 In March, the Board was disappointed to see food being served by the orderly without whites, even though he was wearing gloves. The orderly said the 'whites were in the wash but the standard of food was more important'. It did not look appetising and seemed to be different to that seen later being served on a houseblock landing. A week or two later, standards had improved. A Governor was watching the process of serving lunch with whites being worn.

5.2.5 It has been difficult to arrange to observe the Rule 45 boards, as there was no organisation in place. However, this has now been rectified and reviews take place three times a week. That said, the Board is still not being informed when they are

taking place due to problems with the Mitie email system and IMB email system. Those reviews we have been able to observe have been fair.

5.2.6 The Board's observations of adjudications indicated that the process was being followed and prisoners were treated respectfully.

5.2.7 The Board has been informed that the independent adjudicator (a District Judge who, if the prisoner is found guilty, can award extra days in custody to prisoners sentences) has only recently been appointed. The new Director has also implemented the crime in prison referral agreement (CiPRA), and a fortnightly crime clinic with Humberside Police is now in place. The Board is concerned that these arrangements were not established earlier and is surprised they had not been put in place before the prison opened as part of the mobilisation process.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 The Board had the opportunity before the prison opened to speak to staff and it was evident that the majority had no experience of prison work. An air of confidence among them betrayed little knowledge of the behaviour of experienced prisoners. Staff were convinced of their role in the rehabilitative possibilities of a well-resourced and comfortable prison. We understand the recruitment included promised transport to work, staff facilities, comprehensive training and development, predictable scheduling and work-life balance. It became obvious that this was not the case.

5.3.2 There was no staff canteen until February 2026 or transport provision, which, given the remote location, was a particular challenge. It also became evident that the car park was too small for the number of staff, which must have been predictable during the design of the prison. Shift patterns were complex and often lacked predictability. Officers regularly worked additional hours and were not always paid overtime. Without established routines or experienced colleagues to support them, officers sometimes struggled to answer prisoners' questions. Prisoners frequently commented on the inexperience of staff and the impact this had on their day-to-day lives. It was also evident that staffing levels on the wings were often low, leading the Board to have concerns about the safety of staff, prisoners and Board members.

5.3.3 The attrition of staff throughout the year was very high, with some finding prison work was unsuitable and others saying that the working conditions were unacceptable. Several times the Board was told that officers had not had a lunch break, as they had to help serve food on another landing which also resulted in no officers on the wings. Complaints were received about cell bells not being answered for hours, if at all, which the prison denied, noting that there was a facility to check for unanswered cell bells. Although this was correct, no one knew how to use it. This has now been rectified by the new Director.

5.3.4 At the start of 2026, the Board understood that some members of staff returning from absence were not being paid, due to poor administration. With huge amounts of overtime (sometimes unpaid) being necessary, the unpredictable shift patterns, parking difficulties and pay issues, it was unsurprising that poor morale passed through officers to prisoners. The new interim Director quickly rectified this problem and attendance management processes have been improved,

5.3.5 There have, however, been examples of excellent work by officers, with prisoners highlighting particular staff who are helpful, knowledgeable and willing to

assist. It was also encouraging to see one officer progress rapidly through the ranks to take charge of a houseblock, despite having no previous prison experience.

5.3.6 As expected due to the shortage of officers, the number of key work sessions was low. The prisoner is informed of their key worker as part of induction. However, a number of prisoners told the Board that they did not know who their key worker was. The prison's contract with Mitie Care & Custody specifies a figure for the number of key work sessions that need to take place.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 Due to the limited number of Board members and the significant problems at the prison, no monitoring of this area took place and the Board is unaware of what is in place for equality and diversity. However, the Board hopes that with additional members and a more stable environment, monitoring will take place.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 The chaplaincy area is pleasant and provides plenty of space for prayers and worship. Full-time chaplains for Islam, Church of England, Free Church and Roman Catholics are in place. Their work is supplemented by part-time Muslim, Church of England, Sikh and Pagan chaplains. Jehovah's Witness volunteers visit. All prisoners are welcome at acts of worship and none are refused. A prison outreach support group also visits.

5.5.2 The Board has received a small number of applications relating to faith and pastoral support, including concerns from a prisoner who was unable to worship in his cell because of the presence of a toilet. (The presence of a toilet in the same space can be viewed as compromising the sanctity of the area used for prayer or meditation.)

5.5.3 The Board is concerned that, at the end of the reporting period, there were no Listeners in place. We have been told that an SLA (service level agreement) prevented the introduction of Samaritans who train Listeners. The SLA has since been agreed and training is expected to start shortly. However, the Board is concerned that a different SLA is needed for private prisons and that work on this very important role was not taken forward as part of mobilisation, resulting in a delay of over 12 months.. The Board will monitor this closely.

5.5.4 During a monitoring visit, the Board was impressed by the response of a chaplain during an ACCT review, who immediately showed eagerness to help a man who wanted his PIN changing to enable him to contact his family. After overhearing the comment about him, the chaplain promised to add him to his list to be sorted out.

5.6 Incentives schemes

5.6.1 There is an incentives scheme in place at HMP Millsike but the view of the Board is that has not been correctly and consistently applied. Even as staff become more experienced, there is little evidence of any improvement. One of the obvious observations by the Board is the considerable percentage of prisoners who are on the enhanced (top) level of the scheme. A quick comparison was done with similar prisons and it was clear that the Millsike ratios were considerably different. Given the problems throughout the year with much unrest, it is surprising that enhanced prisoners continue to stay at the same level.

5.6.2 It is evident that the criteria are not being applied consistently, and it is likely to be demotivating for prisoners to see so many individuals on the enhanced level whose behaviour does not appear to meet the required standard.

5.6.3 There is evidence that this area did not receive sufficient training at the outset. Staff appeared to have a limited understanding of the process and were often unable to enter the required information correctly. This issue has been raised with the Director and is now being treated as a priority, reflecting the need to address some fundamental processes. The Board will continue to monitor the situation closely.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 It was immediately apparent to the Board that the prison was ill-equipped to deal with prisoner complaints. Although complaints could be submitted via in-cell tablets, many prisoners preferred to use the paper-based system; however, there were no complaint boxes on the wings and limited access to complaint forms. There was little organisation or structure in place for handling complaints, staffing was insufficient, and those responsible had limited experience in this area. Complaints referred to departments for a response were often not dealt with promptly, staff were sometimes unclear about how to respond, and timescales were frequently missed.

5.7.2 There was a significant time before the Board saw any improvement, probably eight or nine months, and even then, there was a large backlog of complaints regarding property and residential areas. Whilst some priority was given to these, there remains a backlog of over 100 complaints about property, some of which go back to December 2025. The Board is aware of cases where prisoners had still not received their property when they were transferred in May 2025.

5.7.3 The Board regularly raised concerns with the Director about the quality of responses, many of which were poorly written and failed to address the issues. Prisoners were often told that there was a backlog of property and that they would have to wait. These replies were frequently treated as final responses rather than interim updates.

5.7.4 Although there has been a slight improvement, the Board hopes that this will continue as extra resources are being put in place and responses to complaints being scrutinised. The Board will continue to monitor this closely, as late or no responses are often the subject of applications to the Board.

5.8 Property

5.8.1 This has been a major issue since the prison opened. Initially, difficulties arose from the prison's design, with property being removed from prison transport and left outside until prisoners had been formally received into the establishment. There was also limited storage for excess property, alongside significant problems with follow-on property. The prison initially declined to accept follow-on property, although this policy was later reversed, a change welcomed by the Board, given the significant impact that delays in receiving property can have on prisoners.

5.8.2 The PECS (prisoners escort and custody services) contract allows for only three bags of property to be transported for each prisoner. Any excess property has to follow on. However, when the Board raised this issue, we were informed that the sending prisons should ensure that excess property is either handed out during social visits or transferred to the national storage facility. While this may be the intended

process, it had not occurred in these cases. In practice, prisoners were unable to pass property out during social visits because the items remained at the sending prison, while the national storage facility was already full.

5.8.3 The problem then was that there was no process for accepting the excess property and numerous complaints were received from prisoners who had to wait weeks for property to be found. There were instances where property could not be found and compensation had to be paid.

5.8.4 Additionally, there was no effective process in place for managing parcels sent to prisoners, resulting in items being misplaced and significant delays in prisoners receiving them.

5.8.5 Overall, in the Board's view, the management of property since the prison opened has not been acceptable and has been one of main frustrations to prisoners. The Board would have expected the mobilisation team to have put arrangements in place before the prison opened.

5.8.6 The Board welcomes the additional resources that have been allocated to this area and considers that, together with the recent changes to the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, under which responsibility for property remains with the sending prison until it is accepted by the receiving prison, the situation should continue to improve. However, the Board remains aware that the management of prisoners' property continues to be a significant issue across the prison estate.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

6.1.1 Primary care and substance misuse services are provided by Practice Plus Group (PPG), while mental health services are delivered by Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV), and dental services are provided by Time for Teeth. Healthcare services are not available on a 24-hour basis.

6.1.2 The Board requested details of how healthcare services operated in the prison in July and was surprised by the apparent lack of understanding. Some staff, including the Director, believed that Practice Plus Group (PPG) was the lead provider, with Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) acting as a subcontractor; however, following discussions with TEWV, this was not the case.

6.1.3 The shortage of officers caused problems, as there were a lack of escorts to take prisoners to healthcare appointments. Additionally, the fact that the regime was unpredictable, with lockdowns resulting from incorrect roll calls, often meant that prisoners could not be escorted to healthcare services.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 PPG nurses carry out the health screening in reception and the Board has been told that there have been delays, as staff were not available. It was also reported that, in August, there were only three members of staff in pharmacy when there should have been ten. This appeared to be caused by delays in the vetting process, which affected recruitment across the prison.

6.2.2 Although emergency appointments with the GP were available, there was a waiting time of 3-4 weeks for routine appointments. All requests were triaged by a nurse.

6.2.3 The high number of prisoners found under the influence of prohibited substances, together with the level of self-harm across the prison, placed considerable pressure on healthcare staff, who were frequently called on to respond to these incidents.

6.2.4 On one occasion, the Board observed the dispensing of medication when all the prisoners had to be locked up because of staff shortages. Prisoners on the houseblock therefore had to be unlocked individually and escorted to the medication hatch. Not surprisingly, the process, which would usually be completed by 9.30am, did not finish until after 11.30am. Prisoners were understandably upset, as they had to wait for essential medication such as methadone. There were also concerns that medications requiring a set interval between doses could subsequently be administered in the afternoon, with a gap of only around five hours. This situation has since improved, as the new interim regime ensures that sufficient officers are available to support the timely dispensing of medication.

6.3 Mental health

6.3.1 Mental health services are delivered by Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV), which is experienced in working in prisons as it has other, similar contracts. The Board is aware that, initially, there was an extreme shortage of staff due, we understand, to delays in vetting, which led to a number of complaints

about the waiting time for initial assessments. There appeared to be a nine-week backlog at one point, but this has been seen to be reducing.

6.3.2 The mental health team has identified that the lack of staff, the inexperience of staff and the regime has had significant impact on prisoners mental health.

6.3.3 The main pressure on the mental health team was the number of open ACCTs, with 50 opened in a single month. These cases often took priority over routine assessments, as each new ACCT triggered the requirement for a secondary mental health assessment to be completed within 24 hours, creating a significant additional demand on the team's capacity.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1 The Board is pleased with the provision of cells for use by disabled prisoners. They were spacious and had all the necessary handrails, but there was no privacy screen for the shower/toilet. This was being rectified.

6.4.2 In July, prisoners complained to the Board about the lack of wheelchairs. Board members spoke to one prisoner, who said that he had been waiting a considerable amount of time for a replacement wheelchair, as his existing one was too small. The Board was informed by the Director that the delay was caused by a dispute between the safer custody team and the healthcare unit over responsibility for funding the wheelchairs. Although the issue was eventually resolved, it took until January 2026 to do so.

6.4.3 Initially, there appeared to be some inconsistency regarding whether disabled prisoners had personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) in place. The Board was informed that PEEPs had been completed; however, prisoners themselves did not seem to be aware of them. While details were held in wing offices, the Board was concerned that the lack of experienced staff meant some officers were unaware of their existence. This issue now appears to have been addressed.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

6.5.1 The regime set out in the contract with Mitie Care & Custody is based on extended days, with evening enrichment activities and social visits, as well as longer working sessions, thereby allowing prisoners more freedom than is typically available in other prisons. This, however, relied on having the required number of staff and staff with experience.

6.5.2 It quickly became evident to the Board, as the prisoner population increased, that this approach was not sustainable. One of the main challenges was the considerable time required to reconcile roll checks. Inaccuracies often necessitated repeated checks, resulting in the regime being paused and preventing prisoners from attending appointments and visits. Meals were also served late. Unsurprisingly, this caused significant frustration among prisoners, as there was little predictability in their daily routine. The 'back to basics' approach introduced by the new Director has significantly improved the time taken to complete and reconcile roll checks.

6.5.3 Due to all the problems with the stability of the prison and limited staffing, a restricted regime was introduced in November 2025. This limited access to work, education and gym allocation, with prisoners spending extended time in their cells. This new regime was introduced at very short notice, which caused difficulties for staff as timetables for prisoners had to be revised. Throughout the restricted regime, prisoners

would spend up to 72 hours confined to their cells, with a steep decline in their mental health due to the increased restrictions. The Board observed prisoners struggling under the regime, with alarming incidents of self-harm and suicidal inclinations throughout this troubling time. Even with a new published regime, the prison was unable to keep to it, so adding to prisoners' frustration.

6.5.4 The regime was opened up again but the problems continued as staffing was still an issue and prisoners did not know what was happening each day.

6.5.5 The arrival of the new interim Director in February has led to significant improvements in both the regime and the overall stability of the prison. Staff and prisoners alike have frequently told the Board about the positive changes and their satisfaction with the new leadership. In particular, prisoners have responded favourably to the restricted regime introduced in April 2026, highlighting the importance of a consistent and predictable routine. However, some prisoners have expressed concerns about whether the stability will be maintained when the permanent Director takes up post later in 2026, and hope that the positive progress achieved to date will continue under the new leadership.

6.5.6 Although there have been substantial improvements, staff shortages still mean that regime curtailments are necessary, especially at weekends. However, these are communicated to the prisoners beforehand.

6.5.7 Despite there being no sports hall included in the original build, HMP Millsike now boasts two well-equipped gyms, which are used by both staff and prisoners. The provision of two separate facilities allows for dedicated spaces for mains and PCOs. There are also well-designed exercise yards for each houseblock, as well as exercise rooms on every landing. In addition, staff are working to make gym sessions more accessible for neurodivergent prisoners by adapting lighting and sound levels, helping to increase participation among disabled prisoners.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The drug and alcohol rehabilitation is the responsibility of the Forward Trust charity. The Board is aware that some work is taking place but we have not had the opportunity to monitor in depth.

6.7 Soft skills

6.7.1 There were a number of plans for evening and Saturday morning enrichment activities for prisoners, including board game nights, craft sessions and chess clubs. Prisoners particularly enjoyed playing Dungeons & Dragons in the library during the evenings, although this has since ceased under the new regime. However, many of the planned activities were never fully introduced, as staffing levels were insufficient to deliver anything beyond the core regime. It is hoped that, as the prison becomes more stable over the coming years, these activities can be implemented.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 It is the Board's view that People Plus is working hard on meeting their part of the contract, despite the impact of the lack of officers on the regime and the need to be always reactive to what is happening. It is clear to the Board that the team leaders are enthusiastic, positive and experienced.

7.1.2 It was encouraging that, at the official opening of HMP Millsike, visitors were shown an inspiring library space. The Board was slightly disappointed that, when prisoners first arrived, there was no furniture in the library, as the borrowed furniture had been returned. However, shelves, books and other furnishings were gradually put in place. The library has been both ambitious and successful. Some prisoners have even said that they preferred it to the gym. Book clubs, evening and weekend activities, writing groups through the Millsike Writers' Guild, and a monthly newspaper have all been established. The newspaper, PLUS, is published on prisoners' tablets each month and is also available in an audio format. In September, the author Lee Child visited the prison to inspire prisoners. During 2026, podcasts covering subjects such as distance learning, trivia and question-and-answer sessions with the Director and Aramark were also introduced.

7.1.3 The curtailment and changes to the regime impacted the weekend and evening sessions. There were also complaints from prisoners that 'no one collected me' for the library, which is unacceptable. The unpredictability of regimes and staffing problems meant escorting prisoners to library was often not a priority.

7.1.4 Unfortunately, there has been a high turnover of staff in education, but during a visit in April 2026, a teacher told the Board that the new restricted regime was an improvement. Attendance in the afternoon was lower than the morning, which could be because prisoners are worried about getting their meal afterwards. However, there has been some improvement, as the prison is focusing on getting prisoners to work and education as part of the recent improvements.

7.1.5 The Board was pleased that prisoners did not want to be disturbed during a pre-release course when an IMB member opened the classroom door. There was excellent attention.

7.1.6 Board members were told by prisoners that they had difficulty obtaining information from other prisons about courses they have successfully completed, as there are various systems used across the prison estate. It was reported that a staff member went to HMP Doncaster in their own time to collect one prisoner's certificate.

7.1.7 It is apparent to the Board that allocation for activities has been hampered by the unsettled regime. Staff had to alter allocations with less than a day's notice when a different split regime was brought in at short notice. The need to record information on several systems appeared to create many problems for newly appointed staff.

7.1.8 The Board is pleased that, despite the instability experienced over the past year, more than 100 courses had been successfully completed within the education unit by May 2026. In addition, more than 340 vocational courses had been completed, with a further 131 awaiting results, some of which remain subject to external audit.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 People Plus is also responsible for vocational training and work. There is an impressive industries building, with workshops located along a long corridor across two levels. These include horticulture, canteen, barbering, barista, Haven (artwork for older prisoners), Reborn Beds, textiles, recycle your bicycle, metals recycling, print services, a gym, waste management, tea packing, plumbing, cleaning, painting decorating and tiling and warehousing.

7.2.2 The Board is pleased that the number of work and education places have increased over the year. There have been problems with allocating prisoners to work, as the offender management unit (OMU) and security had to sign off risk assessments which they seemed reluctant to do. The Board frequently received complaints about the length of time it took for prisoners to obtain a job, in some cases six weeks or more. The Board hopes that the new Director will help to reduce these delays.

7.2.3 There was a delay of a few months for some of the workshops to start working, as there was a lack of equipment. This resulted in no purposeful activity for prisoners in workshops, who were seen reading, colouring or chatting. Eventually, after numerous discussions on why equipment was not available especially parts for cycles and plants for horticulture, the Board visited the facilities management building. It was clear to the Board that there was considerable chaos in the building. There was no ordering, storage or distribution system in place, which was compounded by the number of organisations working on site. Therefore, expensive items, including fridges, mushroom compost, clothing and other supplies, accumulated and required a more organised approach to storage and distribution. Plants for the grounds, prayer mats and bicycle parts were among items that had been on order for a considerable time and, in some cases, were not delivered until nine months later. The new Director has made significant improvements in this area through the introduction of new management arrangements. The Board was surprised that an effective logistics system had not been established during the mobilisation phase.

7.2.4 One of the challenges for the prison was the need to escort PCoSOs and mains prisoners at different times, despite the workshops being located alongside one another. Difficulties with roll counts, officer shortages and organisational issues meant that the Board frequently observed prisoners waiting in frustration to be released from their place of work. Many were concerned that there would be little food left by the time they reached the dining area, or that it would be cold as a result of the delays described in section 5.1.

7.2.5 The inconsistency and frequent changes to the regime, together with the shift in the prison population from two-thirds mains prisoners to an even split between mains and PCoSOs, made work allocation challenging for the relatively inexperienced allocations team.

7.2.6 Prisoners have completed courses ranging between enterprise, peer mentoring, horticulture, cleaning and sport. In April, more than a hundred were waiting for results of their courses in plumbing, digital graphics, art and construction skills. An external audit from awarding bodies is awaited.

7.2.7 Prisoners in the waste management workshop complained to the Board that they were unable to complete qualifications. The manager was awaiting the necessary paperwork to become a WAMITAB assessor. There were 35 places available for prisoners, which may have been more than required, as the Board observed some

prisoners with little to do. More committed prisoners were working hard, separating food waste for the digester, where it is converted into fertiliser. They pointed out less engaged colleagues but appeared to harbour no resentment towards them.

7.2.8 The excessive temperature in the Reborn Beds workshop was because the area had no air conditioning. In fact, the only buildings with air conditioning are the office blocks. This is unacceptable.

7.2.9 Prisoners complained to the Board that they were required to work longer hours than in previous prisons for lower rates of pay. A comparison undertaken by the Board indicated that there was some basis for these concerns, as the contract provided for a seven-hour working day. Under the current restricted regime, however, prisoners are working only four hours a day. A new pay policy has recently been approved by the Director.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 There have been a number of written and verbal complaints about the OMU, mainly relating to poor communication, difficulties contacting their prison offender managers (POMs), and the provision of inaccurate information, leading to frustration among many prisoners. These issues were largely attributable to the fact that many staff had no previous prison experience and the department experienced a high rate of staff turnover. By March 2026, all posts had been filled, and additional support and training had been put in place.

7.3.2 Prisoners have complained to Board that careless use of drop-down headings on online prison system has incorrectly attributed sexual or different violent charges to their records. It is difficult for the IMB to understand how the prisoners knew but suggests inexperienced staff were mentioning such. The OMU stated they have told officers on numerous occasions not to have conversations with them or open computers in front of prisoners. It seems that this lesson has not always been taken on board.

7.3.3 The Board visited the OMU on several occasions to investigate apparent misunderstandings. Staff often stated that prisoners had already been informed; however, further enquiries revealed that the information had been communicated via tablet messages and had not been discussed with prisoners in person.

7.3.4 Prisoners have complained to the Board that they are unable to access the Building Choices course, which replaces other offending behaviour courses on 10 November 2025 at HMP Millsike. This new scheme is accredited and recognised throughout all prisons as a replacement for previous training. The implementation of the scheme was gradual. There is a long waiting list and the course can only take eight prisoners at a time. Courses are intensive and tailored to different categories of need, with the timing of participation needs to be carefully planned. The difficulty appears to be that prisoners do not always understand the process, despite two notices having been issued explaining the criteria.

7.3.5 The Forward Trust charity was originally commissioned to deliver the Bridge programme. Unfortunately, concerns were raised by PPG and NHS commissioners regarding a potential overlap in service provision. The Board has been informed that staff at Millsike have been unable to identify any overlap between the services and have therefore referred the matter back to the authority for further

clarification and challenge. Although discussions are ongoing, the Board is concerned about the delay in a potentially beneficial service being delivered at Millsike.

7.3.6 There were 30 foreign national prisoners at HMP Millsike in February 2026 with numbers set to fall to 28 due to two individuals being deported. Officers and staff were observed treating the prisoners with respect, although emotional responses differed due to individual circumstances.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 Forward Trust manage all aspects of visits, including legal and social video calls. The visitor's reception is a large, airy room that appears welcoming. Visitors are then searched and there are also three operational dogs in place. The visits hall is large with 50 sets of tables and chairs and a children's play area, an outside play area and a kitchen area. The kitchen area still needs to be properly fitted out. From the Board's observations, there appear to be enough rooms for legal visits and social video calls. There were problems when the prison decided that visitors could not enter the staff carpark to park in the disabled spaces near the prison, but this was resolved quickly.

7.4.2 Officers have reported that the seating arrangement, whilst comfortable and welcoming, can complicate security measures, particularly regarding detection of contraband. Children present additional challenges, as monitoring their movements is difficult despite substantial CCTV coverage, raising concerns about the potential misuse of children to smuggle items into the prison.

7.4.3 Initially, mains and PCoSOs attended visitation together, without separation or physical barriers, but the two categories of prisoner now have separate visitation. All prisoners prefer the new arrangement for visits, mitigating any potential concerns between the prison population in the visiting hall.

7.4.4 Staff shortages and inexperience have caused a number of issues for visits, as prisoners were not being picked up by escorts on time, occasionally being missed completely. Late cancellations were also happening, according to prisoners. Also, the limited staff at weekends meant that the children's outdoor play area could not be used. The Board was made aware that a visit by a prisoner's family did not take place, as no one picked him up.

7.4.5 The Board will continue to monitor this area closely, as problems with social visits can result in considerable frustrations for prisoners and their families.

7.4.6 Prisoners are allowed one 'free' letter per week (without having to pay for postage), which is processed as official post. Letters are checked, read and scanned before posting to ensure proper communication and security. Over the past year, the Board has received a number of complaints from prisoners about lost post or it taking a long time to get to them from the post room.

7.4.7 All cells are equipped with a phone. Prisoners reported experiencing considerable delays in the allocation of PIN numbers, which particularly affected those with pre-existing mental health conditions. This issue was especially apparent during periods of heightened restrictions, when prisoners spent extended periods confined to their cells without the opportunity to maintain regular contact with family and friends. The delays were attributed to inexperienced staff and a growing backlog of applications. The situation now appears to have improved.

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 This seems to be an area that has been seriously affected by the shortage of officers and staff. There has been a significant number of prisoner complaints to the Board about the lack of resettlement support, but the Board has had insufficient resources this year to monitor in any depth.

7.5.2 Prisoners complained to the Board about a lack of communication regarding resettlement and it was often too close to their release date. One prisoner due for release did not have their first resettlement meeting until three weeks before their release date, and this covered only basic issues such as bank accounts and GP registration. The Board also spoke to several prisoners who were concerned that they might not be released as expected and were anxious about the lack of support and guidance in the period leading up to their release.

7.5.3 There is a clear demand for guidance and assistance in securing housing and meeting resettlement needs, but this support is insufficient, in the Board's view. Prisoners emphasised the need for timely responses to complaints, as well as practical support with release documentation and employment opportunities.

7.5.4 Fixed Term Recall 56 commenced on 31 March 2026, with 46 prisoners being released by April 2026. It means that some prisoners who are recalled to custody for breaching their licence conditions are returned to prison for a fixed period of 56 days, after which they are automatically re-released, provided they meet the eligibility criteria. Before this change, fixed-term recalls were typically 14 or 28 days. This seemed to have been managed well. A working group was established, with all relevant partners in attendance. The resettlement team continued to work to ensure a smooth process, including preparing property and valuables, issuing travel warrants, arranging taxis on release and providing release packs containing clothing and toiletries. However, staff reported that IT system issues were making the process even more difficult.

7.5.5 This is an area that the Director is aware needs to be improved and the Boards intend to monitor this closely, if resources allow.

8. The work of the IMB

The Board was initially made up of five experienced members from nearby prisons, who were dual boarding, and two new members. It has been a very challenging year for the Board, as there was nothing in place to support the IMB initially and it took an enormous amount of the Chairs' time to move forward with Mitie Care & Custody. Additional vetting was required for dual boarders, which was time-consuming. It was not until June 2025 that all Board members were able to collect their own keys. Clerk availability was limited and, at the end of the reporting period, no one was carrying out the full clerking duties required under the Memorandum of Understanding between HMPPS and the IMB.

One of the major challenges was the Board's inability to communicate securely with Mitie Care & Custody through the criminal justice secure mail (CJSM) system. Although the IMB staff team requested that this facility be put in place with the mobilisation team in November 2024, the issue was not progressed. Responsibility was transferred to Mitie local operational staff in June 2025, and the facility was finally enabled in January 2026. This lengthy delay was clearly unacceptable and hindered the Board's ability to carry out its statutory duties effectively.

Other problems included getting an office set up for the Board and significantly, an inability to find out when the regular meetings were taking place (such as, for example safety intervention meetings and Rule 45 boards). It was extremely frustrating that providing the basic requirements for IMB boxes on each landing, including labels, forms and appropriate privacy, proved to be a significant challenge, with the prison giving the matter little priority. It took eight months for the issue to be resolved.

It is hoped that the communication and clerking problems will continue to improve now that the new interim Director is in place.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	17
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7 (including 5 dual boarders)
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6 (including 3 dual boarders)
Total number of visits to the establishment	182

Despite numerous requests, IMB application boxes, labels and forms were not in place on all wings until August 2025. Even then, applications were collected only intermittently, and it was difficult to establish the status of prison complaints, as the clerk was unable to provide the necessary information. For a six-week period over October and November 2025, no applications were collected and, despite reminders, no alternative arrangements were put in place. This issue has since been resolved and the process is now operating much more smoothly.

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	6
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	5
C	Equality	1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	7
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	21
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	6
F	Food and kitchens	7
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	9
H1	Property within the establishment	32
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	27
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	2
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	21
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	27
K	Transfers	5
L	Miscellaneous	50
	Total number of applications	226

Annex A

Service providers

- Practice Plus Group (PPG): primary care services and substance misuse services.
- Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV): mental health services.
- Time for Teeth: dental care services.

Annex B



Millsike IMB
Independent Monitoring Boards
3rd Floor
10 South Colonnade
London
E14 4PU

Lord Timpson OBE
Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending
Sent via e-mail: PS.JamesTimpson@justice.gov.uk

15 December 2025

Dear Minister

Serious concerns regarding the impact of opening and early operation of HMP Millsike

I am writing to you on behalf of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) at HMP Millsike to formally escalate our serious and ongoing concerns regarding the impact of the prison's opening and early operational phase on the safety, wellbeing and humane treatment of prisoners.

The Board recognises and wishes to record that staff on site are working extremely hard in challenging circumstances. Our concerns are not directed at the efforts of individual staff. Rather, they relate to systemic issues inherent in the current approach to opening new prisons, which, in our assessment, is having a significant and unjustifiable negative impact on prisoners at Millsike.

Lack of strategic recognition of the impact of new prison openings

The Board is concerned that there appears to be insufficient recognition at senior levels of the profound destabilising effect that opening a new prison has on prisoners. One of the major prompts of this letter, aside from the serious concerns we must raise, is that the Board have been informed that it is accepted within the MoJ that new prisons may take three to four years to stabilise. From our perspective, this is deeply troubling. Prisoners should not be expected to bear the consequences of prolonged operational immaturity, particularly where this results in restricted regimes, compromised safety and inconsistent access to basic services.

Whilst the creation of new prison places is positive in principle, it must be matched by a realistic and sustainable staffing model. The transfer of experienced staff from other establishments risks destabilising those prisons, whilst newly recruited staff inevitably require considerable time to gain the confidence, skills and experience necessary to work safely and effectively in a custodial environment. For instance, staff reported surprise when in early months they asked prisoners to help distribute canteen orders, only to later receive complaints at items going missing.

At Millsike, the cumulative impact of this inexperience is being felt across almost every aspect of prison life, and we set out some detail within this letter, although we cannot list all our concerns in such a document.

Regime instability and operational failures

HMP Millsike currently has four houseblocks open (out of six), accommodating approximately 850 prisoners across two main location houseblocks and two PCOSO houseblocks and we do receive positive feedback regarding the physical standards of the accommodation and facilities.

Whilst the initial regime upon opening did provide for a good duration of time out of cell, particularly in the evenings for association, a new restricted regime has meant major curtailment. The Board consistently observes an inability to maintain even the restricted regime reliably and consistently, with some prisoners spending up to 23 hours per day in their cell, especially at weekends. The inability to adhere to a regime has been a source of significant frustration for prisoners since opening, as they do not know if, or when, they may be unlocked.

Roll checks have, at times, taken between four and five hours to complete. The consequences are severe: prisoners are locked in their cells for extended periods, meals are served late, and prisoners regularly miss healthcare appointments, work, education and visits. Staff are also adversely affected, as officers are unable to take breaks until roll checks are completed, further compounding fatigue and stress.

Safety and security concerns

The Board has serious concerns about safety and security. Members are still observing, some eight months after opening, doors and gates being left open, inconsistent gate security and we currently only visit in pairs due to feeling unsafe on the wings, sentiments which are also felt by some healthcare staff. These issues pose obvious risks to the public, prisoners, staff and visitors alike.

Reception, induction and property

The reception area is inadequate for the volume of prisoners being processed, with insufficient seating and lengthy waiting times. Prisoners typically spend an average of four and a half hours in reception, with some remaining there for up to eight hours. Those arriving mid-afternoon or later may not reach a wing until late evening. The induction process has been widely criticised by prisoners as involving long periods of inactivity.

Prisoners have waited weeks for property to arrive from previous establishments, followed by further delays due to insufficient staff in Millsike to process it. The lack of storage for excess property has resulted in property being returned to previous establishments, preventing prisoners from accessing items or passing them to family at visits. We have recently written to the Head of Prison Contracts Group regarding this matter.

Suicide, self-harm and ACCT management

The level of self-harm at Millsike is high, with a significant number of open ACCTs and the Board is particularly concerned about inconsistent ACCT management.

ACCT observations are not always carried out, and ACCT documents themselves are at times going missing. Cell bells have reportedly gone unanswered for over an hour at times due to staff shortages.

Of grave concern is that prisoners on constant watch have still been able to self-harm and make ligatures. Some prisoners on constant watch have stated that they do not feel safe and have complained about their treatment.

Use of force, violence and illicit items

Levels of use of force are high, with frequent reports of batons being drawn. The Board has concerns about the proposed rollout of PAVA given the inexperience of staff. Numerous use of force reports remain outstanding, and worryingly healthcare staff are not always informed of incidents.

Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults are reported to be high, and PCOSO prisoners frequently raise concerns about the behaviour of main location prisoners towards them, even from a distance.

Drugs are easily available within Millsike, and the instances of prisoners found under the influence are numerous. Indeed, prisoners are reporting they are easily making illicit items from items supplied by the prison, such as floor cleaner.

Food and canteen

The Board continues to receive numerous complaints about the quality, quantity and timeliness of food. Portions are reported to be small, meals are often served late, sometimes as late as 8pm, with the food frequently having been left standing for many hours on end, raising concerns about temperature and safety, which are further compounded by unclean food trollies.

Initially, prisoners were not provided with prison clothing or basic hygiene and cleaning materials, requiring them to rely on canteen purchases. Which when combined with the higher canteen costs for fresh produce, compared to public sector prisons, placed a significant burden on prisoner finance. Although some of these issues have been resolved, their persistence for many months following opening is concerning.

Segregation

Prisoners in the segregation unit, which is often full, have reported regime failings to the Board, such as not receiving any exercise for four days due to staff shortages.

This is troubling, especially given the high number of prisoners in the segregation unit on an open ACCT, for whom outdoor access and exercise may be particularly beneficial.

Healthcare, mental health and social care

Prisoners regularly report being unable to attend healthcare, mental health and substance misuse appointments due to unlock failures. There are severe delays in medication distribution, which raise significant concerns for time-critical medication, and hospital appointments are routinely being missed. Mental health waiting lists of up to six weeks have been reported, largely due to a shortage of mental health nurses.

Disabled prisoners have raised concerns about the availability of wheelchairs and evacuation arrangements to support them in an emergency. Indeed, officers are sometimes unclear about the support some prisoners require. This could be viewed as only a matter of time until something tragic occurs.

Staff-prisoner relationships and complaints

Many prisoners do not know who their key worker is, and report having had no contact with them. The Board has received repeated reports, and observed directly via body cam footage, instances of unacceptable staff language and behaviour. Prisoners frequently express a lack of confidence in staff, who are often unable to answer basic queries.

Despite the use of in-cell tablets, there are significant delays in responding to complaints, with some taking over two months. Where complaints relate to previous establishments, there is often no follow-up, leaving prisoners in prolonged uncertainty.

Vocational training and family contact

Initially there were significant problems with the supply of essential items for workshops, resulting in very limited vocational places. Whilst these issues are largely resolved, ongoing regime instability and staffing shortages mean that prisoners are frequently unable to benefit fully from vocational work. Prisoners report, for example, arriving at workshops up to 70 minutes late and being collected early, substantially reducing productive activity. This does not support rehabilitation or reflect the expectations of a normal working day and also risks undermining contractual arrangements with external providers. Prisoners further report that wages are routinely paid late.

The Board has also received numerous complaints regarding family contact. Visits are frequently shortened due to delays in escorting prisoners from the wings, and in some cases cancelled altogether. In one instance, a prisoner's family had travelled from London for a visit that did not take place. Prisoners have also raised concerns about main location and PCOSO prisoners attending visits at the same time.

Conclusion and request for additional oversight

Taken together, these issues paint a deeply concerning picture of the early operation of HMP Millsike and the human cost of current new prison opening models. The Board does not consider it acceptable that prisoners should endure prolonged

periods of instability, restricted regimes and compromised safety as an implicit and accepted consequence of expanding the prison estate.

We therefore request additional oversight of the operational model for new prisons, including HMP Millsike, and would welcome clarity on what additional support, scrutiny and resources will be put in place to ensure that prisoners are treated safely, fairly and humanely during the critical early years of operation.

We are not reporting these matters to you lightly and would ask that at your earliest convenience, accepting the many demands on your time, that you visit HMP Millsike to meet with us and discuss these matters in more depth.

Yours Sincerely,

Rebecca Major
IMB Millsike Chair

Copied to:

Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice,
Justice Select Committee,
Director HMP Millsike,
Controller HMP Millsike,
Head of Prison Contracts Group,
IMB National Chair,
IMB Chief Executive Officer,
IMB Policy team

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Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Rebecca Major
IMB Millsike Chair
Independent Monitoring Boards
3rd Floor
10 South Colonnade
London
E14 4PU

MoJ ref: ADR130558

14 January 2026

Dear Rebecca,

HMP MILLSIKE

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 December highlighting your concerns about the operation of HMP Millsike since its opening.

I am extremely grateful to you and your members for the valuable role you play as representatives of the IMB, and I thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention. I want to start by reassuring you that we are aware through the HMPPS onsite contract management team of a number of the concerns you have raised and are working with Mitie to support them to improve the situation at the prison.

We take the safety and wellbeing of all those under our care and those working in our prisons very seriously and I share your concerns about the number of operational incidents in recent weeks that have disrupted the regime provided at the prison. I am assured that disruptions are kept to a minimum, but I recognise that occasionally these can impact prisoners for longer periods of time. To improve predictability for those at the prison, a restricted but more predictable regime was introduced for a short period of time; this has remained under review by Mitie and HMPPS to ensure it is in place for the shortest period possible.

Opening any new prison, whether in the public or private sector, is a significant undertaking and challenges will be encountered along the way. I do not seek to minimise the gravity of your concerns; operators take a controlled approach to opening any new prison, ramping up capacity and regime over a period of time and only when it is assessed as safe to do so, where there is suitable staffing capacity and capability. Our experience from other prison openings is that it can take up to four years to meet its full potential, but during this period they should maintain stability and be making incremental improvements.

As you know, at Millsike the on-site HMPPS Controller and his team are continually assessing the capability of the operator, including monitoring staff and prisoner welfare and the prison's operational resilience. The team also provide assurance that the prison provides safe, decent and secure services in accordance with the contract. We will not hesitate to take appropriate action should we deem it necessary. As such, commercial action has been taken in response to the more serious issues, including ACCT processes, security, regime and safety. Ramp up at the prison and the regime will continue to be strictly monitored, and will be adjusted or paused should safety or stability require it.

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A number of actions have also been taken to support the prison, with specialist HMPPS staff seconded to provide on site support and advice in relation to Counter Corruption and Custodial Management. Mitie have also drawn on support from their staff who work at Immigration Removal Centres as well as from Serco, who have provided managerial staff to provide experience and support.

I understand that you meet with the Controller and the Director regularly, and they and their teams will look into the detailed issues you have raised and address them with you locally. It is important that you are informed of progress and where necessary, what steps are being taken by HMPPS and Mitie.

I am grateful to you for raising your concerns with me and for your continuing role in challenging and supporting HMPPS and Mitie.

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

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2



Justice Committee

Elisabeth Davies,
National Chair, Independent Monitoring Boards
By email only

19 December 2025

HMP Millsike and the opening of new prisons

Dear Elisabeth,

I am writing to you following the urgent letter sent to the Prisons Minister on 15 December 2025 from the IMB Millsike Chair regarding the serious concerns at HMP Millsike.

We are deeply concerned that the issues relate to "systemic issues inherent in the current approach to opening new prisons," which is having a significant and unjustifiable negative impact on prisoners. The Board's detailed account of operational failures, including the inability to maintain a regime reliably, resulting in some prisoners spending up to 23 hours per day in their cell, along with severe safety concerns, high levels of self-harm and inconsistent ACCT management, paints a deeply worrying picture of the human and operational cost associated with the current approach for opening new prisons.

The Committee takes note of your request for additional oversight of the operational model for new prisons, including HMP Millsike. We are taking an interest in this issue and believe rigorous scrutiny is necessary to ensure prisoners are treated safely, fairly and humanely during the critical early years of operation.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Slaughter MP
Chair, Justice Committee

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