



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Erlestoke
Erlestoke
Devizes
SN10 5TU

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21 September 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP ERLESTOKE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 APRIL 2025 – 31 MARCH 2026**

Thank you for sharing your Board's annual report on HMP Erlestoke. I am very grateful for the considerable efforts you and your colleagues have put into producing this report despite having a reduced membership by the end of the reporting period. I do hope this situation improves going forward.

I was saddened to hear a death occurred shortly after release from custody. Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) investigations provide an important role to allow any lessons to be learned following a death and any recommendations made will be treated with the upmost importance. It was also reassuring that the Board confirms that action plans are addressing the PPO reports which established the cause of deaths in previous years.

I share your concerns where staffing shortages and delays in security vetting impact on the running of prisons. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is committed to ensuring prisons are sufficiently resourced but acknowledges that it is operating in a challenging labour market that is more acute in certain areas of the country. This is why targeted interventions have been applied to those prisons with the greatest operational need. As vetting is vital for the security of prisons, the increase in vetting timescales has been driven by sustained high levels of recruitment across HMPPS and its provider organisations. To address this, more staff have been recruited into the Personnel Security Vetting function, as well as the Shared Services provider and HMPPS utilising flexible resourcing to help manage workloads and reduce delays. Together these measures are delivering clear and sustained improvements in performance and capacity is becoming increasingly aligned to demand. To mitigate the delays at HMP Erlestoke, an incentivised overtime scheme has been approved centrally which is providing 10 full-time equivalent Band 3 Prison Officers and more recently a National Detached Duty Scheme has agreed to supply a further 10 full-time equivalent Prison Officers. The local Regime Management Plan and prisoner movements have also been reviewed to ensure that staffing is targeted effectively to prioritise attendance to purposeful activity and a dedicated induction staffing group has been introduced to improve prisoner's experience when they arrive. In addition, the prison has a focus on the wellbeing of existing staff and a dedicated New Colleague Mentor is providing support to all new starters.

I understand your concerns about the budget for education as it plays a critical role in providing purposeful activity and reducing reoffending. While there has been no reduction in the overall national prison education budget, increasing delivery costs have affected the proportion of the funding available through the Core Education contracts introduced in October 2025. HMPPS has [published](#) transparency data of how each prison has been affected, including HMP Erlestoke, who experienced a reduction of approximately 34% in delivery hours. However, prisoners continue to have access to a wider offer, including vocational training, library services, careers information, and further or higher education. Wherever possible, HMP Erlestoke has attempted to offset the core education changes with alternative provision. Despite the loss of the textiles class, an instructor in the Textiles Workshop has been trained to deliver vocational qualifications. Horticulture impacts have been mitigated by the introduction of the Clink Gardens and the recruitment of an Amenities and Conservation instructor. The prison is also undertaking a review of the pay policy to incentivise attainment of functional skills in conjunction with a review of the allocations process to ensure access to activities is sequenced effectively. This supports the continued focus across the prison estate to maximise attendance, value for money and quality outcomes from the provision. In addition, HMPPS is undertaking a full evaluation to assess the impact of the education provision on prisoner progress and rehabilitation outcomes to inform future policy and commissioning decisions.

I also appreciate your ongoing concerns about the needs of the ageing prison population. The Ministry of Justice is developing an Older People's Strategy in response to the recommendations from the Independent Sentencing Review and the Chief Medical Officer for England's report. This will have a focus on the suitability of the prison estate and consideration is being given to how a prison environment can better support older people in custody, such as those with social care needs. This includes exploring immediate opportunities to improve outcomes, alongside longer-term considerations for how the prison system can adapt to meet their needs. Future provision for the growing older cohort is also being actively considered across the South West Prison Group, with partners working together to ensure appropriate care, support and accommodation arrangements are available. The prison has improved relations with the Local Authority to support those with social care needs and prisoners are also being supported by unit-based buddies. The healthcare provider is working with the prison to address the current limitations in the healthcare provision for the growing older population and a business case to NHS England is being developed to ensure healthcare staffing is sufficient to support the increasing operational capacity. In addition, as part of the expansion project, which is expected to be completed in early 2028, two accessible cells will be included in each houseblock to increase the overall accessible accommodation.

Despite the challenges the prison faces, it was reassuring to note that the Board continues to see positive staff and prisoner relationships. I was pleased to read about the increased resource in the safety team, the reduction in self-harm incidents and the improvement in healthcare attendance at Assessment Care in Custody and Teamwork reviews. I was encouraged by the increase in vocational qualifications with clearly defined employment pathways, as well as the significant contribution peer mentors and orderlies provide to the prison. I also welcome the recognition given for the efforts to tackle illicit substances, which has led to increased finds and a reduction in positive mandatory drug testing during the reporting year.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I recognise the important contribution of Independent Monitoring Board members and we are appreciative of your continued commitment to HMP Erlestoke.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine'.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Education Wheelchair Access

Accessibility to the education building is a recognised issue and in an attempt to address this, Prison Industries had recently manufactured an access ramp. Due to the elevation of the Education building, the space needed to install the ramp was not reasonably practical and hydraulic ramp options are now being actively investigated which would require capital funding. However, as part of the expansion project, HMP Erlestoke will be getting an additional combined workshop and classroom block that will be fully accessible for wheelchair users. In the interim, education colleagues continue to engage with relevant stakeholders to ensure education provision is delivered effectively and minimises any impact on learners where possible. For the eight wheelchair users currently at the prison, educational needs are supported via an offer of in-cell packs and Outreach support in English and Maths. For those who are Level 2 and above, there is Distance Learning and Open University support alongside the prison library providing a delivery service for those who cannot access the library in person.

Courtesy Keys

The concern regarding the lack of courtesy keys and the impact this can have on prisoners' confidence in the safekeeping of their property is acknowledged. HMP Erlestoke has commenced a rolling programme for the affected residential units and is working with the onsite facilities management provider to ensure new courtesy keys are ordered, replaced and issued to prisoners.

On-site Pharmacy

The proposal to introduce an on-site pharmacy has previously been carefully considered and determined that it is not currently a proportionate or viable solution. The anticipated increase in the prison population would not, in isolation, generate sufficient medicine activity to justify the additional staffing, infrastructure and equipment which would require significant investment and the rural location of the prison would present challenges with recruitment and retention. HMP Erlestoke is already served via HMP Bristol's pharmacy and a separate pharmacy service could also duplicate existing arrangements without necessarily addressing the underlying causes of the medicine supply issues. Instead, the immediate priority has been to strengthen this existing supply model by enhanced stock planning and monitoring, ensuring that there are clear escalation processes for managing shortages and improving communication between the prison, healthcare provider, dispensing pharmacy, and prescribers. Increased deliveries from twice to three times a week has also been introduced to minimise the risk of delays with medication being issued and these changes are satisfactorily meeting the need of prisoners at HMP Erlestoke. Whilst there are currently no plans to introduce an on-site pharmacy, this will be reviewed if there are substantial changes in the prison population, medicine workload, operational requirements, or robust evidence that demonstrates an alternative model would deliver safer and more reliable services.