

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Huntercombe
Nuffield
Henley-on-Thames
RG9 5SB

MoJ ref: SUB136788

2 September 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP HUNTERCOMBE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Huntercombe. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for the considerable effort in producing such informative reflections on the current state of the prison. Despite you continuing to operate with several vacancies, I note that there was an increase in the number of Board members by the end of the reporting period and hope this position continues to improve. I trust that the visit to the prison by my predecessor Lord Timpson during the reporting year on 21 July 2025 was helpful.

I can understand the Board's continued concerns about the heating and hot water system and fully recognise the frustration caused by the length of time these issues have remained unresolved. Unfortunately, demand for maintenance across the estate continues to exceed the available funding and this is resulting in investment having to be carefully prioritised to ensure best use of resources, focusing on risk to life, capacity, and decency. The project to replace the heating and hot water system at HMP Huntercombe, which my predecessor informed you about in last year's response, is continuing to make progress with surveying work having commenced to allow delivery in the financial year 2027/28 capital maintenance programme should funding be approved. Timelines and proposals do remain subject to funding and delivery constraints, particularly given the complexity of undertaking projects in custodial settings, where work must be carefully managed around security requirements, regime constraints, and operational pressures.

Despite the above concern, I was reassured to read that the prison is providing a safe environment for prisoners to be rehabilitated in with incidents of violence falling slightly on the previous reporting year and assaults on staff decreasing significantly. I was particularly interested by your comments commending the Stoic programme and how this has helped a former prisoner to build emotional resilience and reflect on past behaviour. It was pleasing to hear that prisoners are being treated fairly and humanely by staff who have strengthened their engagement through a range of initiatives, such as the relationship workshops which have been positively received by the staff and prisoners that have been involved.

I was encouraged to read about the feedback from prisoners regarding the library providing one of the most welcoming and relaxed spaces. I also welcome the prison's efforts to increase social video calling by nearly 10% to help maintain family contact given visits in person can be much more difficult for foreign national prisoners.

I note you have raised two local issues of concern in your report to the Governor about the astroturf pitch and activity spaces. I understand funding is now in place for the refurbishment of the astroturf which will be completed in due course. The prison has also increased the number of activity places through the opening of a new bike workshop and the Governor will of course continue to keep you updated locally as progress is made. HM Prison and Probation Service (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 that members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide across the estate, and we extend our thanks for your ongoing commitment in supporting HMP Huntercombe.

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

Adherence to Policy Frameworks

HMPPS keeps the performance framework under review to ensure it provides sufficient information on how the Service is performing, while seeking to minimise the burden on the front line. First line assurance remains the responsibility of the frontline operational functions which focuses on operational day-to-day assurance and risk management. However, to ensure a national and consistent approach to quality and operational assurance, the Board can be assured that a second line assurance within HMPPS Headquarters supports and enhances this first line with tools and training to drive effectiveness in local assurance. The HMPPS Prison Performance Committee has previously discussed central oversight and assurance, particularly regarding prisoner property. The Committee agreed that the assurance of delivery, and compliance with policy frameworks would have the greatest impact through management and oversight within the operational reporting line of Prison Group Directors and Area Executive Directors. Leaders continue to make progress within their teams reflecting on current practice and reinforcing the importance of compliance with policy frameworks to drive improvement. HMPPS has also reiterated to Governors and other senior leaders key points about handling property, such as the significance of complying with volumetric limits, since property within those limits will be moved with the prisoner when they are transferred.

Prisoners' Property

The importance of prisoners' property is recognised and HMPPS remains committed to improving the management of prisoners' property and considers possible areas for improvement on an ongoing basis to ensure it is managed with care and respect. An update to the Prisoners' Property Framework was introduced during your reporting period on 17 November 2025. This implemented the work that took place to carefully consider the IMB national thematic report on the impact of property loss, as well as the thematic review by Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations of the property complaints they had received over the last five years. This work included consultation with prison staff to enable the Framework to be strengthened in areas commonly identified as challenging, such as the sending of excess property, the management of prisoners' laundry, and the accurate completion of cell clearance certificates. It remains the case that complying with volumetric control is important, particularly as the Prisoner Escort and Custody Service (PECS) receive few complaints overall for property lost by the PECS supplier during transfers. PECS review complaints during monthly formal meetings and during the Board's reporting period there were no complaints received from HMP Huntercombe in relation to the loss of property by the PECS supplier.