



Chair
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Onley
Rugby
Warwickshire
CV23 8AP

MoJ ref: SUB137612

11 September 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP ONLEY: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
1 MARCH 2025 –28 FEBRUARY 2026**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Onley. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your continued resilience and dedication in capturing your helpful observations despite ongoing vacancies and membership challenges. I hope the situation improves going forward.

I was saddened to hear two prisoners died during the reporting year and offer my condolences to all their friends and family. Although the outcomes of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reports remain outstanding, it was reassuring to note your comments that compassionate support was provided to the families of the deceased and staff alike. The Board can be assured that recommendations made by the PPO are always taken very seriously.

I understand the Board's continued concerns about the time taken to vet newly recruited staff. Security vetting is vital in HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) to ensure individuals can uphold the security and integrity standards expected of their role and ensure that prisons and probation remain safe for rehabilitation to take place. The checks undertaken are required to assess individuals against a range of legislative requirements and security related factors that are pertinent to anyone working within a HMPPS environment.

As HMPPS made pre-employment checks more robust, timescales for clearance have inevitably lengthened. The increase in timescales has been largely caused by in recruitment across HMPPS. Both the vetting contractor and HMPPS are employing flexible resource allocation and overtime to mitigate delays. Funding has also been given to resource vetting teams in line with the recruitment increase. December 2025 saw the first cohort of staff going live on cases, with further cohorts taking up post throughout the first half of 2026. We anticipate incremental improvement as these staff move to live casework and capacity increases. Separately, HMPPS is working with the vetting contractors to improve forecasting increased demand to ensure any spikes or increases can be managed appropriately.

I appreciate the impact that access to functioning laundry and catering equipment can have on the quality of prisoners' lives. There is an established contract in place which should be the primary route for replacing washing machines. There are also other purchase routes depending on the type and value of the item required. For example, purchases over £10,000 must go through the relevant HMPPS headquarters team. Purchases under £10,000 may be completed via a local Government Procurement Card or by acquiring three quotes and raising a purchase order.

My officials advise me that, from further investigation, the issue seems to be confusion around the best purchasing/replacing routes rather than the contracts themselves. With that in mind, HMPPS headquarters issued guidance to all Governors in June 2026 advising them of the most appropriate ordering procedures for washing machines and white goods, and the procurement bulletin was also re-issued. It is recognised that delays have a direct impact on prisoners and that the reliability of laundry services remains an important issue to be resolved. I hope that the renewed and refreshed information will reduce laundry and catering machine replacement times and in turn have a positive effect on the lives of the prisoners relying on them.

I note you have raised some issues for the attention of HMPPS and comments in response to these matters are set out in the attached annex. Issues raised for the attention of the Governor, together with other local matters, will be addressed by the local management team who will continue to keep you apprised of progress as work continues.

It was encouraging to receive your comments about all the good work done by the library and of the continued high rate of membership, along with the sustained success of the Greene King Academy. The withdrawal of the Shannon Trust is no doubt a loss, it was therefore pleasing to note the employment of a reading specialist together with reading champions on every wing to support the development of prisoners' reading skills. In light of the unfortunate increase in self-harming, I also echo the Board's sentiments around the introduction of two safety officers and more senior officers on the wings to provide support and guidance to staff.

The Lord Chancellor and I appreciate the important role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work and commitment on behalf of HMP Onley.

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

Windows and Doors Replacement

Projects to replace cell doors and windows on wings A-E along with G and H wings is progressing with anticipated start date of December 2026. However, timelines and proposals remain subject to funding and delivery constraints, particularly given the complexity of delivering large-scale projects in custodial settings where work must be carefully managed around security requirements, regime constraints, and operational pressures.

Prison Officer Recruitment and Retention

An increase in staffing numbers has been identified and modelled through the Workforce Delivery Programme to support the Small Secure Houseblock expansion. National recruitment through open and alumni schemes for Band 3 Officers and Band 2 Operational Support Grades commenced earlier this year and remains ongoing. Local recruitment activity has also begun and is being monitored through the establishment and mobilisation plans. HMP Onley was escalated to the Workforce Strategic Oversight Group in both January and April 2026 to ensure continued visibility of the recruitment challenges and to support ongoing oversight at a strategic level. As the programme progresses towards practical completion and the commencement of first prisoner intake, if staffing challenges persist, the Operational Resourcing Stability Panel will review and consider options to deploy tactical resources.

Drones

HMPPS would like to assure the Board that the organisation is working hard to deter, detect and disrupt the use of illegal drones across the estate. Our approach is multi-faceted and includes physical security countermeasures (such as specialist netting and grilles), legislation, and working across Government and with international partners on this global issue. We also conduct vulnerability assessments at prisons to understand the risk and develop and implement plans to mitigate the threat.

HMP Onley has taken a proactive and structured approach to addressing drone conveyance, working closely with the HMPPS headquarters' Counter-Drone Taskforce (CDT), the police, and other regional stakeholders. This partnership has strengthened intelligence-led activity and coordinated responses to mitigate the risk of illicit items entering the establishment. The Board may be aware of the recently conducted Operation Cornet at HMP Onley, a multi-agency counter-drone operation at the prison between 4 May and 28 June 2026. This resulted in generating over 85 intelligence reports and enhanced understanding of criminal networks linked to illicit prison activity. Enforcement activity resulted in the seizure of 25 illicit mobile phones together with the recovery or prevention of more than 6kg of contraband. The operation also supported four arrests, disrupted four key drone organisers, identified links to organised crime groups, and led to the arrest of a drone pilot.

CCTV

A project to reconfigure and replace CCTV site wide is currently progressing through the assurance and governance process. This includes technical assurance, cost scrutiny, and deliverability assessments. Once completed an agreed start date for the works will be confirmed, though the project will remain subject to assurance and governance processes before delivery can commence. Whilst all requests from the establishment are considered, the demand for maintenance across the estate exceeds available funding. As such, HMPPS must carefully prioritise investment to ensure best use of resources, focusing on risk to life, capacity, and decency.

Workshops and Activity Spaces

At HMP Onley, the current priority is to increase the amount of purposeful commercial work within the three existing contract workshops, which currently employ approximately 40 men in each workshop. There is also a strong focus on securing opportunities for the three new workshop spaces due to come online towards the end of the year. There are currently a number of positive discussions taking place with prospective employers some of which potentially could provide some capital investment, and it is hoped these will lead to additional vocational and commercially sustainable opportunities that provide engaging work, valuable skills, and improved employment outcomes for prisoners upon release.

Separately, Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) issues within the workshop roofs at HMP Onley is also affecting capacity. HMPPS is currently preparing to undertake remediation of the RAAC issues during the course of the current financial year. This is part of our programme of remediation across the prison estate. This is currently being reviewed for tender by the contractor.

Across the wider estate, earlier this year former Prisons Minister Lord Timpson initiated Project 72, reflecting the number of commercial opportunities currently available across the prison estate. Employment Advisory Board Chairs and Regional Brokers have been tasked with engaging employers that can provide commercial opportunities which offer meaningful vocational training and qualifications in custody, leading to sustainable employment on release.