

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP The Mount
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8 September 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP THE MOUNT INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MARCH 2025 – 28 FEBRUARY 2026**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP The Mount. I want to express my sincere appreciation to you and your colleagues for the resilience shown in monitoring the prison and compiling such an insightful report, especially given that your membership reduced during the reporting period.

I was saddened to hear two prisoners died during the reporting year, one of which occurred whilst at hospital. I offer my heartfelt condolences to all their friends and family and would like to provide assurance that any recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman on conclusion of the inquests will be taken very seriously.

I understand your concerns about the increase in the prisoner population in recent years and particularly in relation to those with drug addiction or mental health issues. The Independent Sentencing Review found that decades of piecemeal changes to sentencing laws had led to sentence inflation and contributed to growing pressure on the prison capacity. However, the new Sentencing Act 2026 introduces measures to reduce reliance on short custodial sentences. It extends the powers to suspend custodial sentences of up to three years, increases the length of time a sentence can be deferred to 12 months and introduces new community requirements. It is recognised that crowding within prisons can make it harder to deliver safe and stable regimes, which is why we continually monitor prison conditions and take places on and offline depending on safety, stability, staffing levels and maintenance needs. A recent review at HMP The Mount has enabled 20 crowded spaces to be removed and with the introduction of new Rapid Deployment Cells, which are single occupancy, the proportion of crowding has reduced further. In addition, to make sure that there will always be sufficient prison places across the estate to keep the public safe the 10-Year Prison Capacity Strategy set out our commitment to deliver an additional 14,000 prison places by 2031 and we have already delivered around 3,100 places.

We know that some offenders could be managed more effectively in the community, with the right treatment and support to tackle the health-related causes of their offending behaviour, than on short custodial sentences. The Ministry of Justice is therefore working closely with the Department for Health and Social Care to improve the uptake, quality and impact of Community Sentence Treatment Requirements. To ensure those in custody continue to have access to an equivalent standard, range and quality of health care in prisons to that available in the community, the National Partnership Agreement on Health and Social Care in England has been extended until 2027. This sets out our shared priorities to

improve health and care outcomes for people in prison and on probation. In addition, across the East of England, NHS England is implementing an Enhanced Mental Health Pathway. This will work alongside prison mental health teams to support those in custody who need access to mental health hospital beds, ensuring more timely access, as well as support for those returning to custody when medically fit. In collaboration with the healthcare provider at HMP The Mount, NHS England has also supported increased funding to strengthen both the mental health and clinical substance pathway.

I share your concerns about drugs within our prisons and note you have raised similar concerns to HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) which I will also address. It is recognised that as the threats to prison security constantly evolves, to keep pace with this HMPPS must also shift and adapt, which is why it cannot publish all of its counter measures as this would undermine security. The Board can be assured the approach is multi-faceted and includes physical security countermeasures, exploring technological developments, exploiting intelligence, strengthening legislation and working across Government. In recent years, prisons have expanded the use of physical security measures and in June 2026 we committed to a further £35 million to install heavy duty grilles on windows at 17 of our most at-risk sites, which is in addition to over £40 million already invested in physical security measures. A project to install grilles site wide at HMP The Mount is expected to be delivered within this financial year and a separate project to replace the windows is progressing through the bid process. Designs have also recently been completed for a new site wide CCTV system to assist with a forthcoming bid for investment funding. I also welcome that you recognise within your report the efforts made by staff locally to tackle the smuggling of contraband. The prison responds promptly to the presence of drones and throw overs and staff have detained perpetrators outside of the prison until police attend. In addition, to support recovery or manage addiction, the prison has a dedicated Incentivised Substance Free Living wing and structured fellowship groups which it is noted have received praise from prisoners locally.

I recognise your concerns about the proposal to bring monitoring and inspection functions together within a single organisation but want to reassure you that the review is not a cost-saving exercise. Its purpose is to focus on improving the effectiveness of the scrutiny system. The aim is to create a more sustainable function of monitoring and inspection across the prisons, youth justice, immigration, and court custody estates which strengthens consistency and scrutiny, to provide stronger links between monitoring and inspection. The Ministry of Justice is in the early stages of working through what a potential model could look like, however the value of being able to escalate individual concerns to an independent organisation is acknowledged and consideration will be given to how this is reflected in the new model.

It was pleasing to read your comments that the prison is well-maintained, clean and wings have improved further with a redecoration programme. I was encouraged by the improved prison atmosphere due to increased interactions between staff and prisoner. I welcome the recognition given for the innovative progressive regime and its positive contribution to improved prisoner behaviour while reducing self-harm and violence. It also was reassuring to read that prisoners receive good support on the lead up to release and that there have been improvements in education achievement and investment in the workshops to increase training opportunities.

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

The Lord Chancellor and I recognise the important contribution that members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide and we are grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP The Mount.

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

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP THE MOUNT INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MARCH 2025 – 28 FEBRUARY 2026

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Offender Management Unit

Recruitment remains a high priority for the Probation Service to ensure we have a sufficient workforce to safely supervise and manage people in the community, which starts in prisons. However, it is recognised that Probation Officer staffing at HMP The Mount is currently below the target staffing level and this reduced further in early 2026 following staff moving to community roles. Recruitment on a substantive basis has been a significant challenge as despite campaigns, vacancies remain unfilled. Although consideration of London Weighting has been escalated this is not currently available, therefore a detached duty scheme has been implemented, which has secured support for HMP The Mount during this challenging period. To further mitigate the impact, support continues to be provided from across the East of England region to reduce operational pressures, address backlogs and improve prisoner access to probation services. An OASys Assessor has been funded to reduce the backlog of Probation-owned OASys assessments and remote Probation Officer support has been deployed to assist with case management tasks. Work is also underway to identify and allocate additional specialist tasks, including Parole, Re-categorisation and Oral Hearing work to reduce workload pressures further. This immediate action has ensured there is additional resource to provide oversight and management of all probation-owned cases with weekly oversight and escalation routes. Our Future Probation Service Programme is also working nationally to rebalance demand and capacity by implementing measures that will change how we work to reduce workloads and to make processes more efficient through technology by April 2027.

Prisoners' Property

The Board's ongoing frustrations with property are recognised and HMPPS remains committed to strengthening its management to ensure belongings are handled with care and respect. Having carefully considered the IMB national thematic report on the impact of property loss on prisoners, and as the Board specifically asks, the thematic review of property complaints (Learning lessons bulletin) by the Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations (part of the Prisons & Probation Ombudsman), an update to the Prisoners' Property Framework was introduced during the reporting period on 17 November 2025. This work included consultation with prison staff to strength the Framework in areas commonly identified as causing challenges. While the Board requests sanctions for non-compliance this has not been introduced, but the Framework does already ensure that appropriate compensation is provided to prisoners where property is lost or damaged. It also remains the case that compliance with volumetric control continues to be important and should be adhered too, since property within those limits will be moved with prisoners when they transfer to another prison via the Prisoner Escort and Custody Service supplier. HMPPS also acknowledges that the current digital property card functionality within NOMIS is not fit for purpose and is not used consistently across the estate. Whilst a digital property tracking solution has been explored, it is not currently a priority for delivery. Existing digital capacity is focused on higher-risk and safety-critical programmes, such as the exit from NOMIS and transformation to Digital Prison Services as the single platform for prisoner management.

Although it is clear further progress needs to be made across the estate, it is encouraging that the number of applications to the Board about property overall at HMP The Mount reduced during 2025/26 compared with 2024/5 and particularly the applications concerning property during transfer or in another prison. The concerns about the handling of property by private prison providers are noted and HMPPS Prisons Contract Group always seek to ensure that private providers discharge their responsibilities with prisoner

property and details have now been shared with the local Board to allow specific issues to be raised immediately. It is also acknowledged that the high turnover of prisoners at HMP The Mount as a large Category C site can present property issues on transfer. However, where missing items are identified on reception, robust processes are in place to engage with the sending prison to ensure the matter is rectified as quickly as possible.

Procurement

To clarify, there is no central contract for semi-commercial equipment such as laundry equipment. HMP The Mount had sought to secure their own long-term contract for the supply and maintenance of laundry facilities for each residential unit. HMPPS Commercial are now currently working on a framework for semi-commercial laundry equipment, but to ensure local contracts provide value for public money, prisons are advised to seek three quotes and HMPPS Commercial would approve the cheapest agreement unless there are valid reasons. For example, prisons are advised not to use a supplier with no experience. Alternatively, HMPPS Commercial can obtain quotes on a prison's behalf and in those cases, suppliers that are on an existing Framework and have been through a qualification process would be approached. It is recognised that the tendering process took longer than the HMP The Mount would have liked, however a contract is now in place and the local laundries are operating effectively on all wings.