



Ministry
of Justice

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Millsike
Moor Lane
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MoJ ref: SUB138783

8 October 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP MILLSIKE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 APRIL 2025 – 30 APRIL 2026**

Thank you for submitting the Board's first annual report on HMP Millsike. I appreciate the commitment and perseverance shown by you and your fellow Board members during what has clearly been a challenging and demanding first year for the establishment. Your report provides a detailed account of the prison's development, highlighting both the difficulties experienced following opening and the improvements that have been achieved during the latter part of the reporting period.

I was saddened to learn that there was one death in custody during the reporting period. My thoughts are with the family and friends of the individual who died. I appreciate the Board's continued scrutiny of this matter and can assure you that any recommendations arising from the Prison and Probation Ombudsman's investigation will be carefully considered.

Opening a new prison is a complex undertaking and I appreciate the Board's concerns regarding the time it can take for a new establishment to reach operational maturity, particularly where recruitment and retention challenges are present. Experience from recent prison openings has shown that new prisons require time to develop as staff gain experience, systems become established and populations build gradually. However, that does not mean poor outcomes or lower standards are accepted during this period. I am clear that prisons must operate safely, securely and decently from the point they begin receiving prisoners. I am reassured that the population at HMP Millsike is being introduced in a phased way and that action has been taken to address early challenges through targeted recruitment activity, additional training provision, support from experienced operational colleagues and enhanced oversight. These measures reflect an active approach to managing risk rather than an acceptance of underperformance. I also welcome the lessons that continue to be drawn from HMP Millsike and other recent prison openings to strengthen future developments across the prison estate.

I also recognise the Board's concerns regarding the vetting process and the impact these have had on recruitment both at HMP Millsike and across partner organisations. Vetting is a critical first line of defence for personnel security. During 2025, processing times increased following a significant increase in recruitment activity across HMPPS and its providers, together with changes to criminal records checking arrangements. Given the importance of HMP Millsike's mobilisation, additional support was prioritised to help progress vetting activity and clearances.

The high level of staff turnover at HMP Millsike had an impact on demand. I am encouraged that action has since been taken to improve forecasting, increase capacity and make the process more efficient. Processing times have already begun to improve and further changes, including greater automation and the ability to complete some checks in parallel, are being introduced to help improve the time taken to complete vetting and support recruitment in the future.

Moving towards the positives, I was pleased to read about the progress made during the latter part of the reporting year. I welcome the Board's recognition of the positive impact of the interim Director's "back to basics" approach, the gradual improvements in safety and the growing confidence and experience of staff. I was also encouraged to read the Board's positive comments regarding the prison's faith provision, the library service and the commitment shown by People Plus staff. It was particularly pleasing to see recognition of the learning and skills outcomes already being achieved despite the challenges associated with opening a new establishment. These developments provide important foundations for HMP Millsike's continued progress.

I note you have raised several local issues of concern in your report which the Director 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 sincerely appreciate the important role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards and we extend our thanks for your ongoing commitment on behalf of HMP Millsike.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Catherine' in a cursive script.

Catherine McKinnell
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP MILLSIKE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2025 – 30 APRIL 2026

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prison Design and Lessons Learned

The New Prisons Programme continues to review and refine prison designs as each new establishment is developed. Operational learning from HMPs Five Wells, Fosse Way and Millsike is incorporated through a structured design review and change process. As the programme progresses through Welland Oaks and future developments at HMPs Garth and Grendon, reference designs continue to be updated to improve operational efficiency, safety, rehabilitative outcomes and long-term value. This approach ensures that future prison developments benefit from operational experience, evidence and best practice gained across the estate.

Mobilisation and Opening Arrangements

Extensive mobilisation activity took place before HMP Millsike began receiving prisoners, including recruitment, training, vetting, operational testing, external assurance activity and operational readiness reviews. External scrutiny concluded that mobilisation activity had been delivered to a high standard while recognising that some issues relating to operational delivery would only become apparent once the prison was operating with a live population. Some aspects of prison operation can only be fully tested in real operational conditions and for that reason, phased population growth, combined with the ability to slow or pause transfers where necessary, remains an important safeguard. Operational performance, staffing levels and prison stability continue to be monitored closely and population growth can be adjusted where necessary to maintain safety, security and decency.

Improvement Notices and Long-Term Stability

HMPPS has provided extensive support to Mitie Care & Custody throughout the prison's development and population build-up and will continue to do so. Where contractual requirements are not being met, the Contract Management Team works closely with the provider to rectify issues and support improvement. Where poor performance persists, proportionate contractual action may be taken to secure the required standards. These arrangements are intended to support sustainable operational performance and long-term stability while ensuring contractual expectations continue to be met.

Recruitment, Training and Future Capacity

Population growth at HMP Millsike continues to be managed carefully to ensure services remain aligned with operational requirements. Decisions regarding future increases in population are informed by staffing levels, operational performance and the prison's ability to deliver safe, effective and rehabilitative services. This approach supports the recruitment, training and development of staff alongside the continued expansion of the prison population and associated services.

Balancing Commercial Considerations with Safe Population Growth

HMP Millsike remains subject to Stability Assessment Meetings until operational capacity is reached. These meetings review a range of operational indicators, including regime provision, staffing levels, security performance, safety outcomes and self-harm data before making a risk-

based decision on whether population growth should continue. Decisions regarding further population growth are therefore informed by operational evidence and risk.

Vetting

The Capacity Vetting Team has worked closely with Sopra Steria Limited, HMP Millsike managers, the Human Resources Business Partner and Cataphract to support the timely progression of cases. Given the operational importance of establishing a new prison, Millsike cases were prioritised throughout mobilisation and continue to receive attention where operationally necessary. A particular challenge has been the volume of vetting activity generated by staff attrition, which has resulted in significantly more vetting cases per post than has been experienced at some other establishments. Improvements to forecasting, additional capacity and process efficiencies are helping to reduce delays and recent performance data indicates that processing times are improving.

Listener Provision

Contractors operating privately managed prisons are not mandated to use the Samaritans' Listener scheme specifically. However, providers are expected to ensure that appropriate support arrangements are available for prisoners in crisis and are responsible for sourcing suitable services. The Contract Management Team continues to work with the Director to ensure appropriate support arrangements are in place and that effective support is available to prisoners who require it.

Crime in Prison Referral Agreement

The Crime in Prison Referral Agreement (CiPRA) is a national agreement between HMPPS, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the Crown Prosecution Service and applies to all prisons in England and Wales, including privately managed prisons. The Crime in Prison national team provides advice and support tailored to the needs of individual establishments. Since February 2026, targeted support has been provided to HMP Millsike, including the establishment of a regular Crime Clinic with local police, guidance on CiPRA and Independent Adjudication processes, support with complex cases, assistance with crime referral tracking arrangements and support in developing local police relationships. This work is intended to build long-term capability and support effective crime management within the establishment.

Mitie Care & Custody comments

Mobilisation processes

Following the opening of HMP Millsike, Mitie Care & Custody undertook a comprehensive internal review of the mobilisation programme to identify lessons learned and support continuous improvement in mobilisation planning, systems, processes and delivery. While challenges emerged during the mobilisation and early operational period, Mitie notes that the prison was mobilised within 12 months rather than the 18 months originally envisaged and has continued to work closely with HMPPS to address issues identified following opening. An independent Gateway Review undertaken by the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority during the mobilisation period identified a number of strengths within the programme. The review concluded that the prison was delivered to time and scope and rated the programme Amber, consistent with comparable complex custodial mobilisations. The review also highlighted the collaborative approach between Mitie, the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS, together with a strong focus on knowledge management and the application of lessons learned throughout the mobilisation process.

Learning from the mobilisation of HMP Millsike, as well as previous custodial mobilisations, continues to inform the development of Mitie's Mobilisation, Transition and Transformation function. Lessons identified have been used to strengthen future mobilisation planning and delivery arrangements, supporting a more effective and consistent approach for future projects.