Ministry of Justice

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Woodhill
Tattenhoe Street
Milton Keynes
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MoJ ref: SUB138164

16 November 2026

Dear Chair,

HMP WOODHILL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JUNE 2025 – 31 MAY 2026

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Woodhill. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your dedication and commitment in carrying out your independent monitoring role, particularly while continuing to operate with significantly fewer members than your recommended complement. Your report provides a candid assessment of the challenges faced by the prison during a period of considerable change and scrutiny.

I was saddened to learn that there were two deaths in custody during the reporting year. My thoughts are with the families and friends of those who died, as well as all those affected within the prison community. The findings and recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) following deaths in custody continue to play an important role in strengthening local practice. I note your concerns around prisoners blocking observation panels, echoing PPO concerns. I am pleased that you have observed some progress in tackling non-compliance here but recognise the need for further improvements.

Delivering the improvements identified through the Urgent Notification requires sustained focus, leadership and investment. Since the inspection, HMP Woodhill has been supported by the Prison Group Director and her regional team and the Long Term and High Security Taskforce as part of a wider programme of improvement activity.

Recruitment continues where staffing needs exist, while action is being taken across HMPPS to improve recruitment processes, retain experience and strengthen the workforce. Alongside this, five additional instructors are being recruited to broaden the activity offer and increase access to qualifications, while new contracts have been sourced to provide additional purposeful activity, including for high-risk prisoners and those newly admitted to the prison. Additional support is also being introduced through the recruitment of a Prison Work Coach and two Probation Service Officers to strengthen sentence management, release planning and employability support. Together, these measures are intended to support the prison in delivering sustainable long-term improvement.

Education and purposeful activity play a central role in rehabilitation and reducing reoffending. While changes to the volume of Core Education delivery were introduced during 2025, these

changes do not affect the wider education, skills and work offer available to prisoners. At HMP Woodhill, work is already underway to improve access to education, training and purposeful activity in response to concerns raised by both the Board and HM Inspectorate of Prisons. Current efforts are focused on improving allocations, attendance and access to activities, while making better use of existing opportunities. Additional workshop and classroom space is being developed and investment continues in digital tools, learner assessment and support for prisoners with additional needs. Governors also retain the flexibility to commission additional provision through the Prison Education Dynamic Purchasing System where local needs require it.

The Board's report makes clear the scale of the challenges facing HMP Woodhill during the reporting year, culminating in the Urgent Notification issued following the March 2026 inspection. While much remains to be done, I was encouraged to read that progress is beginning to emerge in several areas. I particularly welcomed the Board's positive observations regarding reception and induction, the work of the chaplaincy team, improvements in equality processes, developments within education and skills provision and the support provided to some of the prison's most vulnerable prisoners. I was also pleased to note the Board's recognition of the commitment shown by staff during a demanding period and the positive impact of new leadership following the appointment of a substantive Governor and Deputy Governor.

I note that your report has also raised a few matters for the attention of HMPPS. Responses to those issues are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I greatly value the important contribution made by members of Independent Monitoring Boards across the prison estate. Thank you again for your continued commitment on behalf of HMP Woodhill.



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Quality Work Contracts

HMPPS continues to work to ensure that prison work provides meaningful activity, develops employability skills and supports progression towards employment. This sits within a wider approach to curriculum and activity planning that brings together education, vocational training, industries and work activities so that prisoners can progressively develop skills and understand how those activities support future employment opportunities. At HMP Woodhill, work is ongoing with education providers to improve access to education and work opportunities following the March 2026 inspection. Learning and Work Progress Plans are also being used to support allocation decisions and progression, helping ensure activity is aligned to individual needs and future opportunities. Alongside this, new contract work has been introduced, including commercial woodwork and assembly activities, with additional opportunities being developed to improve the range and quality of purposeful activity available.

Higher Quality Contract Workshops

New Futures Network Regional Employment Brokers continue to work with employers to identify opportunities that support workshop capacity and provide more meaningful and purposeful work for prisoners. This activity is intended to improve the quality of employment-focused opportunities available within prisons and strengthen progression towards work on release.

Prisoner Property

HMPPS recognises the importance of prisoners' property and remains committed to improving how it is managed across the estate. Following national reviews by the Independent Monitoring Board and Independent Prisoner Complaints Investigations, a revised Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was published in November 2025. This introduced additional guidance relating to excess property, laundry arrangements and the completion of cell clearance documentation, all of which had been identified as common areas of concern. HMPPS continues to review opportunities for further improvement while strengthening consistency and accountability in the management of prisoners' property.

The Prisoner Escort and Custody Services contract also incorporates a digitally recorded Prisoner Escort Record, providing improved recording and tracking of property transferred with prisoners and supporting investigations where property is reported missing. Additional vehicle capacity introduced at the start of the current contract has also increased the amount of property that can travel with prisoners during transfers.

Digitisation of Property Records

There are currently no plans to replace handwritten property cards with a digital service. HMPPS' immediate priority is the replacement of NOMIS, including the remaining property functionality within that system, as part of the wider programme to modernise core prison processes and reduce reliance on legacy systems.

While there are no current plans to digitise handwritten property cards, work is underway to develop a digital service to track property containers. A pilot is expected to be introduced in a

small number of prisons during 2027. This will allow HMPPS to test the service before determining whether further digital property functionality should be developed in future. Progress on this pilot, together with wider system modernisation work and available delivery capacity, will inform any future decisions regarding additional digital property services.