Ministry of Justice

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Winchester
Romsey Road
Winchester
SO22 5DF

MoJ ref: SUB139520

2 November 2026

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for sharing your Board's annual report on HMP Winchester. I want to express my sincere appreciation for the work undertaken by you and your colleagues in producing such valuable insights. I'm sorry to hear that three members resigned during this period, leaving you significantly below your complement. I am grateful for the continued commitment of remaining members and I hope this situation improves in the coming year.

I was saddened to read that during the reporting period four deaths occurred in custody with a further death occurring shortly after release and I offer my sincere condolences to the families and friends. Whilst the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman investigations remain ongoing in some of these cases, I want to provide assurance that any recommendations made will be taken very seriously to ensure lessons are learnt.

I can fully understand the Board's frustrations about the aging prison estate and delayed capital projects. HMP Winchester continues to work with estates colleagues to prioritise the available investment to deliver improved safety, decency, regime delivery and a sustainable environment in an old Victorian prison. Delays did occur with the Care and Separation Unit (CSU) project when the contractor ISG entered administration, which affected many projects across the prison estate that took time to re-procure. Unfortunately this means that timescales do change to those previously advised as projects are still being developed or take longer to complete than expected. Construction for the approximately £13 million CSU project is now anticipated to begin in 2027, with completion expected in late 2028. Projects are monitored through established governance, with Area Executive Director oversight, where milestones and completion dates are reviewed and updated as projects progress. I note that the Board has highlighted some considerable improvements being delivered across the prison, such as roofing, windows and shower facilities. However, there is still further work needed and these projects are being developed. Where challenges remain or projects take longer than anticipated, mitigations will continue to be implemented to allow work to be prioritised in areas presenting the greatest risks.

I share your concerns where staffing shortages impact on the running of prisons. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is committed to ensure prisons are sufficiently resourced with recruitment efforts ongoing at all sites where vacancies exist or they are projected. Whilst

T +4420 3334 3555
F +44870 761 7753

https://contact-moj.service.justice.gov.uk/
www.gov.uk/moj

102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

HMPPS is operating in a challenging labour market that is more acute in certain areas of the country, targeted interventions have been applied to those prisons with the greatest operational need. Although staffing at HMP Winchester has been improving, careful monitoring of resourcing levels takes place across the estate to ensure prisons can manage with the current staffing and to make accurate predications around future requirements. Where there are regime curtailments that pose a risk to stability due to staffing levels, additional resource either as incentivised Payment Plus or National Detached Duty can be considered. Local workforce planning will remain a key priority at HMP Winchester and there is a greater focus on day-to-day deployment to ensure staffing is directed towards priority activities to provide safe operations.

I also acknowledge the concerns about crowding and the impact of prisoner churn. When this Government took office in 2024 swift and decisive action was taken to ensure prisons continued to have the capacity to serve the courts. A sustainable and long-term solution has since been established via the Sentencing Act, so that the public is never put at risk again from prisons running out of space. A 10-Year Prison Capacity Strategy has also been published committing to deliver 14,000 additional prison places by 2031. Around 3,300 of these places have already been delivered and £4.7 billion has been committed to introduce prison places between 2026-27 and 2029-30. While most single cells could physically hold two people and in times of severe pressures prisons will be expected to safely accommodate as many prisoners as they can, the maximum capacity of a prison remains a matter for operational managers to determine by considering the risks to safety and stability as set out in the *Certification of Prisoner Accommodation* policy framework. HMPPS also understands that crowding can make it harder to deliver safe, stable regimes and places additional pressure on staff. This is why prison conditions and capacity are continually monitored to mitigate adverse impacts wherever possible by allowing places to be taken on and offline depending on safety, stability, staffing levels and maintenance need.

Although there does remain challenges, it was reassuring to read that staff are committed to improving safety, decency and rehabilitation outcomes. I was encouraged by the efforts to improve allocation and attendance at purposeful activity and that soft skills are beginning to contribute to improved wellbeing. I welcome that healthcare staffing and service delivery has been strengthened, including improvements in the substance misuse recovery and transfers to secure mental health hospitals. It was also interesting to read that prisoners can undertake refurbishment work through the locally Improvement and Fixing Team as part of the broader efforts taking place to enhance cell standards and the prison environment overall.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor 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 recognise the important contribution that members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide across the estate and we extend our thanks for your continued dedication on behalf of HMP Winchester.



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

Annex

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

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Violence and Drugs

HMPPS is working hard to make prisons as safe as possible with reducing the level of violence a key priority. Whilst it is not possible to eliminate all risks, efforts continue across a range of measures including investing £300 million in prison and probation service maintenance during 2025-26 to improve conditions to help keep prisons safe and spending around £75 million by spring 2027 on physical security measures to tackle illicit items entering the prison estate. £15 million is also being invested in protective body armour equipment to help keep frontline staff safe. These measures are in addition to the efforts in recent years that introduced various initiatives to tackle conveyance into prisons, such as X-ray body scanners, airport-style Enhanced Gate Security including X-ray baggage scanners and drug trace detection equipment. Alongside this equipment, specialist staff and dedicated search teams continue to deter, detect and retrieve illicit items which can fuel violence and create instability. Violence reduction training has been made available to all staff to help them better understand the drivers of violence and how to mitigate and manage these risks. Where prisoners are caught smuggling contraband they can face additional time in prison, the loss of privileges and the most serious crimes are referred to the police. In addition, the HMPPS Counter Corruption Unit, which provides training, support and guidance to staff, as well as pursuing those who engage in this kind of criminality has also been expanded to tackle these types of threats.

The South Central Prison Group continues to support HMP Winchester in embedding sustainable improvements in safety outcomes while sharing effective practice across the wider region. HMP Winchester has strengthened its approach through targeted violence-reduction interventions, intelligence-led security processes to disrupt illicit substance supply and collaborative working across safety, security, healthcare and psychology teams. The prison has also been working to better understand the drivers of violence, placing a greater focus on vulnerable prisoners and managing those presenting the greatest risks, which is being supported by safety data analysis to monitoring the emerging threats and learning from incidents to inform local improvements.

Staffing

HMPPS recognises the impact that staffing levels can have on service delivery. Retaining experienced staff is fundamental to delivering quality outcomes and drivers of staff attrition are being tackled, as well as there being a wider Enable Programme within HMPPS to professionalise the workforce and better equip staff with confidence and capability. HMP Winchester has structured induction and mentoring arrangements in place to support new staff in their role and the South Central Prison Group continues to work with national colleagues to improve recruitment pipelines, retention and workforce stability. In addition, the Workforce Delivery Project has recently reviewed the underpinning staffing model for adult public sector prisons considering prisoner cohort, complexity, physical infrastructure and several other factors that impact the daily resourcing requirements of a prison. However, this work remains at an early stage and will be subject to affordability before any prison site-specific resource changes can be advised. Local staffing levels, operational pressures and performance information is being considered regularly at HMP Winchester to inform deployment decisions and work is ongoing to

improve the consistency in key worker delivery, complaints management and prisoner engagement. The prison also remains committed to improving staff and prisoner relationships by providing staff with the time to focus on activities that have the greatest impact and is reinforcing the importance that positive engagement provides to safety, wellbeing, reducing violence and improving rehabilitation outcomes.

Education, Work and Purposeful Activity

HMPPS recognises the challenges faced by the high-turnover of prisoners, which is why decisions about the education, work and purposeful activity on offer are informed by local needs analysis, population profiles and local labour market information. This allows prisons to prioritise provision that reflects the needs of their population and national contract management processes assure that this provision remains appropriate and effective. HMPPS remains committed to its ambition to provide the right services for rehabilitation, to the right people, at the right time and is developing a core offer to provide agency clarity on who benefits best from what offer. As rehabilitation services take many forms aimed at giving people skills to change their attitudes, thinking and behaviour, this work will be kept under constant review to ensure it is in line with the available evidence whilst meeting rehabilitative needs. At HMP Winchester regime stability to provide improved access to purposeful activity continues to be prioritised with steps being taken to strengthen employment and skills opportunities and improve attendance. A key part is the planned development of West Hill and The Hearn houseblocks as a dedicated Category C site with a stable regime to build stronger links with employers to expand skills development. The prison has been working with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure vocational training is aligned to local labour market needs and increased access to industry-recognised qualifications, in construction, traffic and warehousing will be supported to help prisoners obtain employment in sectors experiencing workforce shortages. Opportunities are also being explored to introduce commercially viable workshop activity to make best use of the capacity to provide prisoners with practical work experience and transferable skills. In addition, partnership working is being strengthened in resettlement to ensure prisoners are connected with accommodation and community support services at the earliest opportunity to help them prepare for successful reintegration into the community.