



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI DEERBOLT
Bowes Road
Barnard Castle
County Durham
D12 9BG

MoJ ref: SUB126636

18 August 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI DEERBOLT: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 October 2023 – 31 September 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Deerbolt. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Board for its dedicated monitoring and the comprehensive insight provided into the prison's performance over the reporting period while short of members.

I acknowledge the Board's concerns regarding healthcare provision and staffing levels. While NHS England retains responsibility for commissioning healthcare services in custody, I understand that HMP/YOI Deerbolt has worked constructively with local healthcare partners to improve service continuity and patient access. In response to the changes in the prison's population, NHS England committed additional funding to meet rising demand, including support for long-term conditions and pharmacy services. Recent prisoner surveys indicate that over 67% can access physical healthcare and more than 70% can access mental health support; a positive foundation on which to build.

To address workforce shortages, please be assured that targeted recruitment campaigns have been launched, with some positions already filled. In the interim, agency staff continue to support daily operations. The Local Delivery Board has been strengthened to enhance inter-agency communication and resolve emerging issues. The introduction of in-cell medication lockers and a free-flow regime will improve access to care and wider activity. Further to your request, I intend to add a visit to HMP/YOI Deerbolt to my list of prison visits. Whilst, given the logistics involved, I am unable to confirm a date immediately, please be assured that this is being actioned by my office.

Regarding the re-role of HMP/YOI Deerbolt to a Category C establishment, I understand this transition formed part of a wider strategy to alleviate capacity pressures across the estate. HMP/YOI Deerbolt had been historically operating below capacity, and this prompted a phased lifting of its age cap to maximise use of available space and improve resettlement options in the North East. The integration of adult Category C prisoners is now firmly established and has assisted training opportunities whilst continuing to support young people at the start of their custodial journey. Whilst there is recognition that there is further work to do to ensure support mechanisms are tailored for specific groups within the diverse cohort, the overall outcomes for both staff and prisoners have been largely positive.

It was encouraging to receive your observations on several positive developments at HMP/YOI Deerbolt over the past year. The Segregation Unit was commended for its organisation and thoughtful management of those with challenging behaviours. I was pleased to read of the successful revitalisation of the launderette facilities, addressing one of the Board's longstanding concerns. I was also encouraged that, despite the challenges that you have flagged, the management team was praised for its sensitive and forward-thinking approach to the evolving population mix and for fostering innovation in prisoner engagement and rehabilitation.

I note that your report raises several issues for His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and responses to these are set out in the attached annex. Regarding the local matters of concern, the Governor will continue to keep you informed as work progresses.

The Lord Chancellor and I remain grateful for the vital role Independent Monitoring Boards play across the estate. We extend our thanks to you and your members for your continued dedication on behalf of HMP/YOI Deerbolt.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James', written in a cursive style.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Staffing Experience and Operational Craft

While staff retention has improved, operational experience remains a priority. In response to this, HMPPS has established the Enable Programme, which will deliver a series of workforce and regime changes that will aim to improve how prison staff are trained, developed, led and supported.

Locally, the prison has restructured staffing profiles and implemented a revised core day to strengthen supervision. The deployment of Band 4 and 5 officers has improved support for frontline staff and operational oversight.

Detached Duty and Staffing Allocation

Detached Duty is managed nationally to support those establishments with staffing shortfalls and a range of factors are taken into account to inform its use. Risk-based thresholds, which consider any adverse impacts of detached duty, are utilised in decision-making. The relevant Prison Group Director and Area Executive Director also provide operational input before data is considered at a validation panel which balances operational risk across the sending and receiving prisons.

HMP/YOI Deerbolt has not provided staff for Detached Duty since September 2023 and has received reinforcements from December 2024 onward. The Tactical Resource Team ensures assistance aligns with local regime priorities and is committed to ensuring that local staffing needs are considered before any future allocations.

Recruitment Challenges

HMP/YOI Deerbolt's rural location poses recruitment challenges and as such, it is receiving targeted marketing support to increase visibility and drive awareness of career opportunities at the establishment. In a small number of prisons with acute recruitment and retention challenges, non-consolidated payments (market supplements') for Band 3 prison officers have also been used. All public sector prisons, including HMP/YOI Deerbolt, will be considered for eligibility of market supplements as part of an annual assessment this Autumn.

Local measures have also been taken, including the introduction of additional financial incentives. More broadly, significant efforts are underway to enhance staff wellbeing and invest in professional development, both of which are known to contribute to healthier staff retention.

Purposeful Activity and Regime Delivery

The National Regime Model, launched in January 2024, mandates prisons to provide an annual plan of their proposed regime delivery. This includes how they will ensure they meet the minimum expectations of 2 hours' time out of cell per day and 1 hour time in open air per day per prisoner. Further, each regime plan will set out all the planned purposeful activity which is a key conduit to facilitating more time out of cell. However, we recognise the challenges that our prisons are facing in their delivery of purposeful activity, and we are actively exploring the best approaches to improve access to purposeful activity, in line with the Government's manifesto.

Employment Opportunities

In response to concerns about employment opportunities for prisoners on release, Employment Advisory Boards (EABs) were launched to advise, support and challenge prisons on their training and employment offer to prisoners and prison leavers. Their goal is to see more people leave prisons and enter sustainable employment.

There is an EAB at HMP/YOI Deerbolt chaired by Equans. Equans has also delivered a 6-week employability programme, encouraging the development of links with local construction industry specialists and business owners. 13 prisoners have participated and graduated from this programme.

HMP/YOI Deerbolt continues to develop local partnerships including the A66 Academy developed with Balfour Beatty. As part of this, 15 prisoners identified as being interested in working in the construction industry were selected to complete 3 employer events with Balfour and their subcontractors in traffic management, plant operating and construction. Such initiatives have resulted in prisoners either securing employment or increasing their employability skills upon release.