



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Drake Hall
Stafford
ST21 6LQ

MoJ ref: SUB126649

22 September 2025

Dear Chair,

HMP/YOI DRAKE HALL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2023 – 31 OCTOBER 2024

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Drake Hall. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations, especially as you were short of members at the start of the reporting period. However, I am pleased that you made it to full complement by the end of the reporting period.

I am very sorry to hear that one woman died during the reporting year, shortly after release from custody and I offer my heartfelt condolences to all their friends and family.

I have read your report with care and I acknowledge the Board's ongoing concerns about the condition of Richmond and Plymouth Houses at HMP/YOI Drake Hall. Funding bids do continue to be submitted to manage, upgrade and replace both Houses along with the rest of the estate, as irrespective of the age or condition the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) recognises it is responsible for maintaining the existing infrastructure. It is acknowledged that prolonging the life of these houses will come at an increased cost and challenge, however, projects to replace accommodation are also costly, lengthy, and may require taking many prison places offline, so need to be considered carefully against similar needs in the estate. Following a feasibility study in 2024 and a bid to replace both houses, alternative options that will provide value for money and be fit for purpose are being considered. In the meantime, whilst this does not address the underlying issues, recent works have been carried out to stabilise the external façade of both Richmond and Plymouth houses, spending £84k in 2024 on render works to stall further degradation. Improvements to the environment have also taken place via refurbishing the showers in both Houses. I also welcome the Board's recognition of the local efforts to maintain decent conditions, which was reflected in a recent Clean and Decent Audit awarding a Green rating, the highest possible, to the prison which included an assessment of Richmond and Plymouth houses.

I do sympathise with the Board's concern regarding the use of segregation to manage prisoners experiencing a mental health crisis. Segregation at HMP/YOI Drake Hall is only used in cases where the prisoner cannot be managed on normal location due to their risks to others or themselves. It is noted that this normal accommodation is not cellular which would ordinarily provide more control over interactions, therefore where segregation is used individual and multidisciplinary care plans are put in place to support the prisoner and every effort is made to return them to the main accommodation. The health needs of women in custody are also important and to understand and address the disproportionately higher levels of health and social care needs for women, a joint NHS England and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Women's Health and Social Care Review was published in November 2023. The review

identified eight strategic findings with supporting recommendations which have been accepted, with one focusing upon mental health support and access to treatment. The close collaborative work taking place with NHS England to implement these recommendations is critical to improving the health and wellbeing of women in custody. A rapid needs analysis was also completed in August 2024 to respond to increasing pressures at HMP/YOI Drake Hall and impacts on the healthcare services. As a result, additional hours were agreed until 31 March 2026 for the following roles GP, Advanced Clinical Practitioner, Pharmacy Assistant, Staff Nurse, Non-medical Prescriber, and Psychiatrist. As the last full needs analysis was completed in December 2021 a new full analysis is expected in the coming year as these are usually commissioned every three to four years.

For those in custody with more severe mental health issues, across the NHS England Midlands Region, senior leaders from Health and Justice Commissioning, Specialised Commissioning and Provider Collaboratives are looking strategically at what changes can be made to improve access to secure mental health beds. There is also a role for Government in this and I am pleased to say that the Mental Health Bill was introduced to Parliament on 6 November 2024. It will introduce a new statutory time limit of 28-days for the transfer of patients with a mental disorder from prison and other places of detention to hospital, aiming to reduce unnecessary delays and deliver swifter access to treatment. Additionally, we are also working to reduce the long-term demand on the women's prison estate and the creation of a Women's Justice Board (WJB) of independent experts is helping to set the vision and direction to reform. The Board is committed to diverting women away from custody and providing community-based solutions that support women while still providing suitable punishment and I can advise that the Women's Intensive Supervision Court pilot taking place in Birmingham is already diverting women with complex needs from short custodial sentences into community-based support.

I can also provide assurance to the Board that since your reporting period there has been a downward trend in violence and self-harm. HMP/YOI Drake Hall strives to foster a comprehensive, whole-prison approach to addressing safety concerns and I am pleased that the Board commended the proactive and coordinated approach by staff locally. To further understand the drivers of violence and self-harm, a Safety Summit was conducted in March 2025 and the actions being taken since are being monitored.

Despite your concerns, it was reassuring to receive the Board's comments that the prison provides a safe environment. It was encouraging to note that prisoners are treated fairly by staff with professionalism and compassion even when faced with challenging circumstances and that vulnerable women are well supported. I was also interested to read about the Hamlet Project, the first of its type in the women's estate, offering additional support to women who face challenges in engaging with available support.

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 appreciated the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Drake Hall.

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

HMP/YOI DRAKE HALL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2023 – 31 OCTOBER 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

The further concerns about the handling of prisoners' property are noted and this is an area to which HMPPS is currently giving further attention. Careful consideration is being given to the findings in the IMB national thematic report on how property loss impacts on prisoners, as well as those received from Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations following a thematic review of the property complaints they have received in the last five years. As the Board identifies, a frequent problem is when excess property is forwarded on when a prisoner transfers. We also know that when Prisoner Escort Custody Service (PECS) suppliers transfer property within the volumetric control limits of the Prisoners Property Framework there are few complaints for lost property overall. During the last 12 months there has been one complaint received from HMP/YOI Drake Hall but none in relation to the loss of property attributed to PECS. Ensuring compliance with volumetric control limits is therefore key, since anything within those limits will transfer with them.

Locally at the prison processes have been improved with targeted training given to reception officers, including immediate contact with the sending prison where property is identified as missing. The Operations Custodial Manager is now the Single Point of Contact for any Reception queries and escalates matters where there are concerns relating to a particular sending prison. Additionally, women specific clothing and other clothes donated are available to all new receptions where a prisoner may have insufficient clothing.

Release Preparation

Whilst sentencing is a matter for the Judiciary, the MoJ and HMPPS continue to share information to raise awareness of the specific issues faced by women who offend. This is to increase understanding of the possible implications and opportunities of sentencing, both through the completion of pre-sentence reports and the wider roll out of briefing materials to court staff. The Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan covered the period between 2022-25 and the WJB will now develop a new set of deliverables to reduce the number of women in custody with more managed in the community. The Independent Sentencing Review, chaired by former Lord Chancellor, David Gauke, was also asked to consider the specific needs of vulnerable cohorts, including women, and how these should be reflected in sentencing. The Review's recommendations have been published and The Lord Chancellor has accepted in principle the majority of the Sentencing Review's recommendations. A Sentencing Bill will be introduced to take forward several of the review recommendations which will make significant changes to the sentencing framework and aims to put the prison system on a sustainable footing.

The primary function of seven of the twelve women's prison's is a Reception function to serve the courts, which does result in transfers routinely taking place to enable there to be the space to meet the requirements of the courts. However, all women's prisons are deemed resettlement prisons and have resettlement services in place to meet these needs irrespective of sentence length. HMP/YOI Drake Hall's embedded Pre-release team is linked to the local Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) and is focused on identifying and addressing resettlement needs. This includes accommodation, financial management and income, education, training and employability, relationships and health and well-being. A national review of pre-release, focusing on current roles and responsibilities of pre-release teams are being conducted to better define and clarify the involvement in a person's sentence. For women released into the West Midlands, Pre-Release Team staff are also being embedded into PDUs to enhance continuity of care and improve women's understanding of the support available. It is recognised that a large proportion of women only spend a short period of time in prison. HMP/YOI Drake Hall is also aware from a needs analysis that the average time spent at the prison was nine months in 2024, however for the first three months of 2025, 50% of the population were released within six months of their reception, primarily due to

the impact of SDS 40. Steps are taken to identify resettlement needs on arrival and while HMP/YOI Drake Hall does not currently have a full staff complement of probation officers, two Probation Services Officers are embedded within the Pre-Release Team to support sentence and resettlement planning. Work is ongoing to strengthen links between custody and community teams, including exploring additional mechanisms to support community practitioners working with women approaching release. In addition, an Interventions Directory has been compiled to highlight all available interventions to assist with reducing reoffending and release planning. A Pre-Release Meeting is also held monthly to discuss cases of concern to ensure smooth transition and all relevant high-risk releases are discussed at Interdepartmental Risk Management Meeting to enable concerns to be escalated to community practitioners where necessary.