



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Exeter
30 New North Road
Exeter, Devon
EX4 4EX

MoJ ref: SUB126654

25 September 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP EXETER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JANUARY 2024 TO 31 DECEMBER 2024**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Exeter. I have read your report with care and would like to express my appreciation to you and your colleagues for your continued commitment to independent monitoring and for the valuable insights you provide.

I was most saddened to learn that, during the reporting year, six men died whilst serving their sentences and another man died shortly after release. I offer my sincere condolences to their families and friends. The recommendations of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) are taken seriously. We remain committed to learning from such tragic events, and we will respond as required following receipt of the PPO reports into these deaths.

I fully recognise how vital it is to ensure that individuals in custody with serious mental health needs are transferred to hospital as swiftly as possible and that delays in transfers can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable people in our care.

To strengthen oversight and drive improvements, the Ministry of Justice worked with partners to develop the non-statutory independent role mentioned in last year's response. A cross-agency group found the Mental Health and Justice Strategic Advisory Group well placed to take on this role. The group unites key health and justice partners to tackle barriers to timely transfers and will be chaired by NHS England's National Medical Director for Mental Health and Neurodiversity. The Chair will lead a joint work plan to support the 28-day transfer time limit, hold partners accountable, and report quarterly to Ministers, with the first update due in Autumn 2025.

The Mental Health Bill has now completed its Committee stage in the House of Commons. In preparation for implementation, we are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England, the Welsh Government, the Home Office, and the Youth Custody Service to develop a comprehensive plan outlining the operational improvements required to support the reforms. These changes are expected to take effect 18–24 months following Royal Assent. The Government has also committed to publishing annual reports on the Bill's implementation, including updates on transfer timeliness and relevant data as it becomes available. I remain firmly committed to improving the experiences and outcomes of prisoners with serious mental health needs, and I am confident that this collaborative approach will deliver meaningful and lasting change.

I share your concerns about the acute pressures facing local prisons, particularly those arising from overcrowding, high turnover, and a growing remand population. These are complex challenges which we are addressing through a combination of immediate national measures and targeted local responses in order to support local prisons, like HMP Exeter, to operate safely and effectively under sustained pressure.

Nationally, emergency measures such as the End of Custody Supervised Licence (ECSL), SDS40, and expanded Home Detention Curfews (HDC) have already helped to ease capacity pressures across the estate. These have been supported by reforms to fixed-term recalls, the removal of over 3,500 Foreign National Offenders and targeted operations designed to improve system flow. His Majesty's Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS) is also implementing estate-wide changes through the Estate Configuration Review and is actively monitoring remand levels in reception prisons. The Sentencing Bill, due for implementation in Spring 2026, is expected to bring a fundamental shift in the prison population by reducing reliance on short custodial sentences and strengthening community-based alternatives. In addition, the recently completed Leveson Review of the Criminal Courts has examined how to improve the efficiency and timeliness of court processes. Its findings will inform changes to reduce unnecessary remand and improve the flow of cases through the system. Locally, HMP Exeter is responding to the changing population profile through a range of initiatives such as ensuring induction processes are improved to deliver the right interventions at the right time for a predominantly remand population.

I recognise the continued distress and frustration that property loss causes for prisoners and understand how this can have a disproportionate impact on wellbeing, particularly for those already facing the challenges of custody. I take this matter very seriously. HMPPS is giving renewed attention to this issue in response to the concerns raised both within the IMB's national thematic report, *How Property Loss Impacts Prisoners* and the findings from the Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations Service following their own thematic review of property-related complaints. Governors and senior leaders across the estate have been reminded of the key principles of effective property handling, including the importance of compliance with volumetric control limits. This is a critical aspect of ensuring that prisoners' property can be transferred reliably between establishments, reducing the risk of loss during movement. At a local level, HMP Exeter is taking active steps to improve property processes. The reception Custodial Manager is actively reviewing property-related complaints and working closely with staff and external partners to strengthen procedures. In addition, regular prisoner forums are held and a monthly review of kiosk and complaints data supports the tracking of improvements and the identification of any emerging concerns.

I would like to thank you for acknowledging the many examples of positive practice observed at HMP Exeter during the reporting year. I was particularly pleased to read about the improvements in reception and first-night processes, including the greater use of 'Insiders' and the reduction in processing times, which help to create a more supportive and reassuring experience for new arrivals. You also highlight a continuing downward trend in both assaults and incidents of self-harm, which is a testament to the commitment of staff at HMP Exeter and the impact of additional safety-focused roles introduced under the Urgent Notification arrangements. The removal from Urgent Notification in April 2025 confirms that the prison has become a safer environment for prisoners and staff and that concerns are being addressed. I was encouraged to read about the positive relationships observed between staff and prisoners, particularly in the Care and Separation Unit and the gym, and the significant improvement in the delivery of key worker sessions. This work is central to creating a safer and more rehabilitative environment for the people in our care.

I was heartened to read your positive reports on education and library services, including the range of wellbeing-related courses and the creative literacy initiatives led by the library team. These contributions

play a vital role in supporting prisoners' personal development and rehabilitation, which as you are aware, is something I am particularly passionate about.

HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex and the Governor will continue to keep you updated, as work progresses, in regard to the local issues of concern which have been raised.

The Lord Chancellor and I appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Exeter.

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 EXETER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JANUARY 2024 TO 31 DECEMBER 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Care and Separation Unit (CSU)

We can confirm that the refurbished Care and Separation Unit on A wing includes a suitable room for adjudication and reviews.

Refurbishment of D wing

A project is currently underway at HMP Exeter focused on site wide fire safety improvements, which includes the replacement of the existing ventilation system on D Wing. These works are scheduled for completion by the end of the 2026/27 financial year. As you will understand, projects of this scale are complex, costly, lengthy and require taking many places offline. These factors must be carefully considered against similar needs in the estate. All requests from the establishment are looked at within this context of demands for maintenance being much greater than the available funding. Therefore, once a bid for a project is received, HMPPS has to prioritise works to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency.

Urgent Notification Funding

Additional roles for the Band 7 Deputy Head of Safety, and two Band 4 Assessment Care in Custody and Team Floor walkers have been funded as part of the Urgent Notification (UN) process for a defined period of time to facilitate stability whilst other targeted support is developed and implemented. The prison has maintained, through local funding, a Keyworker/Decency Custodial Manager and First Night Induction Custodial Manager post, to continue the work undertaken in response to the UN. The Activities Custodial Manager is continuing the work of the previous regime driver Custodial Manager. While the continuation of these resources cannot be guaranteed indefinitely, the current approach reflects a strong commitment to sustaining improvements in safer custody, key working, and the coordination of activities and education. The targeted support model being developed aims to embed these improvements and ensure they are maintained through ongoing regional oversight and prioritisation.

Mental Health Training

All Foundation Learners undertake an introductory module on mental health, designed to enhance their ability to identify and support individuals experiencing mental health challenges within custody. This learning explores the concept of mental health, highlighting common symptoms and behaviours that may indicate poor mental wellbeing in a custodial setting. It also examines potential risk factors and underlying causes, alongside the influence of different prison populations on the prevalence and nature of mental health conditions. Learners are encouraged to adopt a proactive approach to mental health by fostering a rehabilitative culture, promoting diversity and inclusion, enhancing prison safety, and effectively applying brief, targeted interventions such as 5-minute interventions. The training also covers appropriate pathways for signposting individuals to relevant services for continued support and treatment.

Additionally, the module places emphasis on the importance of staff wellbeing, offering guidance on how officers can maintain and protect their own mental health. Operational work force training also includes the Introduction to Mental Health Awareness Work and Suicide and Self Harm delivered at HMP Exeter during bi-monthly shut down training days by an Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust Psychological Therapist and the prison Neuro Diversity Lead. Care and Separation Unit staff receive supervision from a psychological therapist to improve awareness of mental health. Additional awareness sessions for all staff are provided on an ongoing basis including sessions on supporting survivors of child sexual abuse, completing mental health referrals, cognitive behaviour therapy and trauma informed care.