



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Onley
Rugby
Warwickshire
CV23 8AP

MoJ ref: SUB126947

2 October 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP ONLEY: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MARCH 2024 – 28 FEBRUARY 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Onley. I am grateful to the Board for its continued scrutiny and for the time and commitment dedicated to monitoring conditions at HMP Onley throughout the reporting year, without a full complement of members. Your observations provide valuable insight and are appreciated as part of our collective efforts to support improvement and maintain standards across the prison estate.

I was saddened to hear that there were three deaths during the reporting year; one of which was sadly due to a drug overdose and the other two died in hospital of natural causes. I offer my condolences to all their friends and family. I was encouraged to read the Board's assessment that the establishment dealt with these incidents with care and consideration. I note that one of the deaths is currently subject to an investigation by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman and would like to reassure the Board that any subsequent recommendations will be taken very seriously.

I acknowledge the Board's continued concerns regarding the handling of prisoners' property and appreciate that this must be an ongoing frustration. Over the past year, this issue has received further focused attention across His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). In response to both the Independent Monitoring Board's national thematic report and a separate review by the Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations team, Governors and senior leaders have been re-engaged on the key responsibilities involved in managing property effectively. Progress has been made in reinforcing the importance of maintaining compliance with volumetric control limits, as this remains central to ensuring property is successfully transferred with prisoners between establishments. In addition, HMPPS is now actively consulting with prisons on operational themes raised in the recent reviews to support practical improvements and reduce recurrence of loss or delay.

I recognise that you are also raising a repeat concern in regard to the condition of the windows and frames and the risks to security this presents. I can confirm that the major capital project commissioned to replace the windows and doors in A to E, G and H wings is progressing and will be considered for funding to begin delivery in the 2026/27 financial year. As referred to in my response to last year's report, the provision of local funding has enabled progress to begin sooner on specific elements of this work. This includes the manufacturing and fitting of some new window grills on I Wing. Reactive repairs remain

ongoing, and the windows identified as vulnerable to pest access have been secured. I hope the Board is reassured that these matters are receiving the attention they warrant, both locally and nationally.

Regarding the delays in recruitment due to security vetting, I understand the operational pressures this can cause. However, I must stress that vetting is a critical safeguard for our institutions. Current data indicates that most pre-employment checks are completed in a timely manner with the majority of cases concluded within a matter of days once all required applicant information is provided. I appreciate that the local vetting process at HMP Onley does not permit for prioritisation, but I am reassured that the team monitors applications closely and engages regularly with vetting services to reduce avoidable delay wherever possible.

I was pleased to note the Board's recognition of HMP Onley's efforts to motivate prisoners to participate in the regime and engage with purposeful activity. The introduction of the incentives-led activities policy in February 2025, alongside the growing popularity of the library with membership reaching 73% of the population by year-end demonstrates a clear and positive shift toward rehabilitation through structured education, skills development and meaningful work.

The Board raised additional areas for development for the Governor's consideration and the Governor will continue to keep you informed as work progresses. HMPPS comments in response to the issues raised for its consideration are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Board once again for your continued dedication. Your independent oversight and recommendations are integral to ensuring the safe and decent operation of HMP Onley.

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

Drone Activity and Site Security

Drone incursions remain a complex and evolving threat, which are increasingly linked to organised criminal activity. At HMP Onley, targeted upgrades are underway to address this risk. Funding has been secured for a site-wide upgrade of the Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) system, which is expected to be complete by March 2026. In tandem, and as outlined in the Ministerial response above, a project to replace all the windows across the older wings is progressing and will be considered for funding to allow delivery to begin in the 2026/27 financial year. These upgrades will complement the prison's existing security arrangements.

Nationally, we are investing £40 million in enhanced physical security across multiple establishments, including the introduction of anti-drone measures such as grilles, reinforced windows and perimeter defences. Trials of anti-drone wire solutions are also underway, specifically tailored to high-security environments. While not all tactics can be publicly detailed, this is a high priority across the estate.

Mental Health Provision and Alternative Care Pathways

The challenges of managing prisoners with severe mental illness are acknowledged and recognised at every level. Within the Midlands, NHS England leads regular multi-agency meetings to review patient cases and to manage the prioritisation for secure hospital transfers. National work is also progressing to evaluate demand for mental health inpatient beds across the estate. Legislative change is being pursued to address delays in transfers. The Mental Health Bill, currently progressing through Parliament, includes a statutory 28-day transfer deadline for individuals requiring treatment under the Mental Health Act. This will bring best practice onto a legal footing and help drive operational reform. Alongside this, the Mental Health and Justice Strategic Advisory Group has been convened to oversee delivery, monitor timeliness and address persistent obstacles in the system.

Conditions of Living Areas

To uphold standards of decency, funding has been secured to deliver new flooring on L Wing with works due to begin in August 2025. These will be delivered outside of core hours over a 12-week period to reduce disruption. Elsewhere, a Clean, Rehabilitative, Enabling and Decent (CRED) painting programme will be improving the conditions on residential wings, supported by newly recruited decorators. Whilst shower facilities on A to E wings have already been modernised in recent years, J and K wings have been redecorated, and additional improvements will continue through the rolling maintenance schedule and reactive repair system until a full refurbishment can take place.

Laundry Infrastructure

The Board's concerns about the adequacy of the laundry equipment are noted. Where industrial machines were not viable due to infrastructure constraints, domestic machines were introduced. Some machines have also had to be replaced which the prison has funded with domestic machines installed. While there are no current plans to replace these with industrial machines, a national project bid has been submitted for future consideration. In the meantime, HMP Onley will continue to replace machines as needed and has reviewed its Clothing Exchange Stores processes to increase the frequency and reliability of the kit that is provided to the wings.