



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Wandsworth
Heathfield Road
Wandsworth
London
SW18 3HS

MoJ ref: SUB119724

5 December 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP WANDSWORTH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JUNE 2023 – 31 MAY 2024**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Wandsworth which I have read with great care. I am sincerely grateful to you and your colleagues for your considerable effort in capturing the current state of the prison in very difficult and challenging conditions.

I witnessed the challenges first hand during my visit with Lord Ponsonby to the prison on 2 September. It was great to meet you, Matt, and Lizzie to discuss firsthand the issues at the site. Our discussion and the insight into your thorough weekly reporting at the site were invaluable to me. I look forward to visiting the site again in the new year.

I was deeply saddened to hear ten prisoners died during the reporting year. Every death in our prisons is a tragedy, and whilst we await the coroner's reports, I was deeply troubled to read that six of the deaths may have been self-inflicted. I offer my heartfelt condolences to all their friends and family and would like to reassure the Board that all recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) issued an Urgent Notification in May after finding that HMP Wandsworth had alarmingly high rates of self-harm, dangerous levels of violence, and nearly 50 per cent of prisoners taking drugs. As the inspectorate recognised, the level of chaos at HMP Wandsworth was typical of a prison system crippled by the overcrowding crisis with over 80% of offenders at the prison sharing cells designed to hold one person. The report also revealed how crumbling infrastructure, inadequate security measures, and consistent staffing pressures had contributed to the prison's unacceptable rating.

I am pleased to advise that the Government is immediately addressing HMIP's concerns by deploying extra specialist staff to help turn the prison around and redirecting £100 million from across the Prison Service that will be spent over five years to deliver urgent improvements. This includes cell windows being repaired, shower refurbishments, and investment in fire safety measures. Other measures to bolster prison security and safety at HMP Wandsworth include the deployment of specialist security and drug staff and introduction of new leadership; regular drug searches from specialist drug detection teams; advanced violence reduction training sessions for staff; and improved access to rehabilitative services such as education and employment workshops which I am personally passionate about and hopeful they will prove successful.

The Board will be pleased to know that the Remand Project recommenced at the end of July and will continue until March 2025. As part of the Urgent Notification response, HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) will be investing approximately £180k to improve the offer of support for those on remand and better prepare for release by reintroducing a remand support lead, case worker, and administrator at the prison. Early signs indicate this is already having a positive impact with the life skills course having a 90% completion rate, and prisoners reporting that they had been helped with over 85% of queries raised. Other local initiatives to assist remand prisoners include a local tenancy sustainment service, and a new project focused on violence reduction which is being commissioned at HMP Pentonville and HMP Wandsworth in partnership with the London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime.

Regarding the provision of clothing and bedding, HMPPS is exploring a new inventory system that will facilitate better provision of supplies and kit for prisoners, starting with those new to custody and as part of the Early Days processes. Additionally, a small amount of funding has been secured to replenish current stock levels of prisoner clothing.

Notwithstanding the invocation of the Urgent Notification process, there is no doubt there are many issues to address at HMP Wandsworth and we are hopeful that the measures already taken and planned will improve the situation at the prison. Whilst we wait to see the improvements in full, it was encouraging to receive your comments that staff worked very hard to try to operate a full regime despite a high level of violence. I would also like to take this opportunity to echo the Board's recognition of the professionalism witnessed in use of force planning and execution. It was reassuring to note that security upgrades were proving successful, particularly following the escape in September 2023. Whilst there is a long way to go, I hope the efforts to tackle vermin continue to improve the situation around the site and landings.

I note you have raised a number of local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of progress as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Secretary of State and I greatly appreciate the invaluable role of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful to you and your team for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Wandsworth and I am hopeful that you will be able to report more positively next year.



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP WANDSWORTH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JUNE 2023 – 31 MAY 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Healthcare Centre

The new healthcare building has been handed over to the establishment. The outstanding project work required to deliver the required IT infrastructure and connectivity for both healthcare and prison staff is in progress. In order to open the building for full operational delivery, a scoping exercise is required on the logistical considerations necessary to enable prisoners to access healthcare services from the new setting. There will be some disruption to the current delivery of health services whilst this work is being completed but limited to no more than two weeks. This temporary reduction in service will not impact on emergency care, new reception screenings, or mental health services, and will be fully communicated to prisoners. The Board will be aware some of the causes for the delays were due to fire door issues, outstanding completion of telecommunications systems and cabling, and problems with the air conditioning unit within the new pharmacy facilities.

Prison Officer Recruitment

A centralised recruitment model ensures a consistent standard is applied in assessment, helping to combat unconscious bias, and reducing the opportunity for adverse impact. Centralised recruitment also supports the delivery of volume recruitment at pace and provides efficiencies due to the economies of scale achieved for large volumes of applicants. Although a centralised recruitment policy is in place, HMP Berwyn have been piloting a local delivery model of the recruitment process with the purpose of testing the hypothesis that increased engagement locally will deliver better results both in respect of the quality of candidates recruited and on retention. HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice will draw on lessons and strategies from the HMP Berwyn pilot to inform future strategies.

Whilst HMPPS currently operates a centralised recruitment process, it is recognised there is value that prisons can contribute to the recruitment journey and prisons are encouraged to take an active role in engaging with applicants locally, especially regarding the early onboarding process of new staff so that they are prepared for the prison they are entering. HMP Wandsworth is currently reviewing its staff induction processes to ensure that all staff are provided the information and tools they need to improve their experience of taking up employment at HMP Wandsworth. The prison is also making considerable efforts to ensure staff are sufficiently trained so that they are more confident in their jobs. The Standards Coaching Team have been deployed to HMP Wandsworth and the Prison Group Director is revamping the role of the London New Colleague Mentors to provide regional, targeted support.

Prisoner Courses and Training

The Governor has commissioned a review of all full-time activity spaces to introduce more part time opportunities. The prison will be converting some of their full-time industries spaces to part-time positions which will increase availability of spaces by approximately seventy. The prison has also received an increase in funding which supported the introduction of two new workshops that started in October 2024, creating twenty-four additional purposeful activity spaces in construction skills and barista engineering, both of which will lead to employment-based qualifications. New activity spaces will be added to the 2024 educational curriculum: 144 Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) and 312 Digital Skills per annum.