



Ministry  
of Justice

**Lord Timpson**  
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Usk and HMP/YOI Prescoed  
47 Maryport Street  
Usk  
Monmouthshire  
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3 January 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP USK AND HMP/YOI PRESCOED: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 APRIL 2023 – 31 MARCH 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Usk and HMP/YOI Prescoed. I have read your report with care. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing the helpful observations contained in the report. This is especially appreciated given that you continued to operate with several vacancies.

I was deeply saddened to read that two prisoners died during the reporting year. I offer my condolences to their friends and family. I welcome that the Board reports support was offered to both prisoners and officers following these incidents and that the PPO investigation into one of the deaths found that that the patient had received a high standard of care.

I appreciate the Board's concerns around the recategorisation of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) prisoners. On 17 July 2023, the Secretary of State directed a change to the criteria by which indeterminate sentenced prisoners (ISPs), including IPPs, are assessed for suitability for open conditions. Where a prisoner is awaiting a decision from the Secretary of State on whether a Parole Board recommendation for a move to open conditions will be accepted or rejected, this will be considered under the new criteria, and it is the aim of the Secretary of State to inform them of the decision within 28 calendar days. As part of this, further resource has been focused on Parole Board recommendations for open conditions to ensure that decisions are made as soon as possible. Ministers are not the singular authority taking decisions, officials with delegated responsibility can also make decisions on behalf of the Secretary of State therefore expediting the process. HMPPS Officials are currently looking at further initiatives to develop the process for considering open conditions for Indeterminate Sentenced Prisoners to ensure that where considered suitable for open conditions, these decisions are made swiftly and effectively.

The Government is keen to continue to focus on the rehabilitation of IPP prisoners through a refreshed and updated Action Plan that was published on 15 November 2024. The refreshed Action Plan puts a greater emphasis on effective frontline delivery and gives clearer guidance on how HM Prison and Probation Service's (HMPPS) systems and processes can effectively support those serving an IPP sentence to maximise the chances of a sustainable release and eventual termination of their licence conditions. Whilst it is right that IPP sentences were abolished, I hope that you will understand that we cannot take any steps that would put the public at risk. I can assure you the Government is committed to

working with organisations and campaign groups to ensure the appropriate course of action is taken to support those still serving IPP sentences.

I acknowledge your concerns around Parole Boards. Whilst responsibility for listing of Parole Board hearings sits with the independent Parole Board, HMPPS have taken a number of steps to reduce the pressure on the listings queue. This has resulted in it decreasing by almost 40% since March 2023.

Turning to the Board's concerns around accessing support for personal social care, the prison is working closely with those providers responsible for health and social care delivery and there has been successful joint working with Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board for provision of care for those with mobility issues and the older population. In April 2023, MCC took the decision to increase staff working in the Secure Estate, to include 0.6 of a whole time equivalent Senior Carer, to support the cohort of Buddies in HMP Usk and to provide limited access to personal care and support for the population with eligible needs. Where a need for additional care and support is identified, then a request is required to the wider Local Authority 'Care at Home' team operating in the Usk area. HMP Usk and HMP/YOI Prescoed monitor the social care referrals from the prison to the Local Authority and people in prison also have the right to self-refer for an assessment.

I acknowledge the concerns raised around healthcare staffing and I am pleased to note that within the last 12 months all vacancies have been filled and the health provider is now at full complement within the current staffing budget. A scoping exercise was completed in 2022 and the outcome determined no additional increase of staffing was required at that time, however staffing remains under continuous review. Any expansion of the team would require further funding and allocation of appropriate accommodation. I would like to reassure the Board that a further scoping exercise will take place prior to the planned increase in prisoners in 2025.

Whilst I acknowledge the challenges noted in the report around providing work placements, I was pleased to read your comments that HMP/YOI Prescoed continues to maximise work opportunities and be successful in providing work placements and positive employment outcomes for prisoners. It was heartening to read that the hard work of the prison employment lead in this space has been recognised with the national Unlocking Summit Award 2023 for outstanding achievement.

I note you have raised four issues for HMPPS's consideration, responses to which are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I appreciate 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 Usk and HMP/YOI Prescoed.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Yvonne James'.

**Lord Timpson**  
**Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending**

## **HMP USK AND HMP/YOI PRESCOED: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2023 – 31 MARCH 2024**

### **HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report**

#### **Probation Officers**

We appreciate that there is an ongoing issue with the availability of Probation Officers and therefore recruitment and retention remain a priority across the Probation Service. We have launched various initiatives to deliver more robust supervision, recruit more staff and reduce caseloads. The PS will continue focusing on recruiting through our centralised campaigns to achieve our commitment to recruit at least 1,000 new trainee probation officers by March 2025.

Between 30 June 2023 and 30 June 2024, the Probation Service saw an increase of 467 full time equivalent (FTE) (2.3%). Over the same period, there was an increase across most Probation Service grades, including Probation Officers (11.5%) and Other Bands 4-6 (16.1%). In the same 12-month period ending 30 June 2024, the Probation Service have seen an increase of 19% in Band 4 Probation Officers in Wales.

The staffing levels for Probation Officers in Wales are much improved, the Probation Service have recruited additional trainee Probation Officers enabling our staffing levels across prisons and the community to improve. HMP Usk has been one Probation Officer short of their target for several months but became fully staffed at the end of August. Similarly, in HMP/YOI Prescoed they have been 1.2 FTE under target but were fully staffed by the end of September. Positively, the Prison Offender Manager position is strong in both prisons with further recruitment planned by the prison in HMP/YOI Prescoed. In HMP Usk the prison over-recruited Prison Offender Managers to support the deficit in Probation Officers.

#### **Prisoner's Property**

HMPPS notes the Board's concerns about property when a prisoner transfers establishments. The emphasis must remain on prisoners complying with volumetric control limits, since any property within these limits should be transferred with them. This includes items which are exempt from volumetric control, such as legal papers. It is simply not possible to transfer with a prisoner all excess property which they might have accrued above these limits. There has been a requirement since the introduction of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework for prisons to transfer any excess items within four weeks. Previously, there was no time limit in place. HMPPS is aware of the problems in the practical application of the Property Policy Framework and continues to look at what further can be done locally to improve this.

In relation to the concerns that you have raised around the Prisoner Escort Custody Services (PECS) contract, PECS regularly review complaints during monthly formal meetings with the PECS supplier. During the last 12 months there have been no complaints received from HMP Usk and HMP/YOI Prescoed in relation to the loss of property attributed to the PECS contract.

#### **Staffing for hospital escorts**

HMP Usk and HMP/YOI Prescoed recognise that there has been an increase in the amount of short notice hospital escorts. These are in response to urgent medical need, which do have an impact on regime delivery and key working. However, the prisons continue to work to a Regime Management Plan relating to their agreed staffing compliment to help mitigate the effects.

### **Release on Temporary Licence**

HMPPS welcome that the Board are supportive of HMP Usk's proposal on escorted absences, and how this might be applied in a risk assessed way is being considered. We are committed to ensuring that prisoners have the opportunity to progress safely and appropriately through the prison system. Initiatives like this can play a valuable role in supporting those goals and we are exploring options to support safe prisoner progression.

The Board is right to highlight the issue of frequent delays of access to Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL). Whilst HMPPS is always seeking to improve access, public safety remains our foremost priority. ROTL is subject to comprehensive risk assessment, which evaluates both the individual and the place where they will be working. This involves consulting relevant agencies such as the police and Serious and Organised Crime Unit as required. We are actively working to streamline the vetting process for workplaces and enhance information sharing between prisons and community offender managers to ensure the process runs as efficiently as possible.