



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Thameside
Griffin Manor Way
London
SE28 0FJ

MoJ ref: SUB121378

7 February 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP THAMESIDE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2023 – 30 JUNE 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Thameside. It is clear that you and your colleagues have, as ever, put in a huge amount of work in producing this report and capturing the key issues. I commend the Board for carrying out this vital statutory role effectively, particularly as you continued to operate with several vacancies.

I was saddened to hear of the deaths of three prisoners in this reporting year, two of which occurred post release. Any death in our justice system is a tragedy and I pass on my deepest condolences to their friends and family. I would like to offer reassurance that any recommendations made by the PPO are taken very seriously. It is important that in these tragic circumstances that we act on PPO recommendations.

I understand the Board's continued concerns about timely access to mental health facilities. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is committed to improving mental health outcomes for people in contact with the Criminal Justice System, to ensure that offenders and defendants with acute mental health needs receive timely support, in the most appropriate setting. It is recognised that vulnerable people in prison who meet the threshold for detention under the Mental Health Act and require a transfer to hospital continue to experience delays in accessing the specialist care and treatment they need. However, I am pleased to inform the board that the MoJ are working with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to finally introduce the Mental Health Bill in this Parliamentary session as announced in the King's Speech. The Bill includes several flagship reforms to improve access to mental health care for patients in the criminal justice system such as the introduction of a statutory 28-day time limit for transfers from prison to hospital. This time limit, together with operational improvements, aims to reduce unnecessary delays and deliver swifter access to treatment.

Between 2020/2021 and 2023/2024, over 4,500 trainee Probation Officers were onboarded nationally and HMPPS have committed to bringing in at least 1,000 more across the 2024/25 financial year. As of 30 September 2024, the Probation Service workforce position (including those working in Approved Premises) has seen an increase of 1.1% since 30 September 2023. This forms part of an overall increase of over 3,000 (18.5%) staff in the Probation Service since it was unified in June 2021. The London region has also seen an increase in overall staffing and continues to prioritise increasing the number of qualified staff. HMPPS continue to run national recruitment for trainee Probation Officers to ensure that there is a continuous pipeline of qualified Probation Officers.

As the Board will be aware, all reception/resettlement prisons, including HMP Thameside, have an embedded resettlement provision managed by or otherwise linked to a Probation Delivery Unit (PDU). Pre-release teams identify and address immediate resettlement needs and provide pre-release support for all people in prison, including those people on remand. Their role is to screen for resettlement needs and signpost to specialist services within the prison. They support sustaining community ties such as tenancies and supporting contact with community drugs services to ensure they are aware the person is in custody and not disengaged. This includes those individuals on remand who are released directly from court.

HMP Thameside does have in place a probation pre-release team who are managed by a Senior Probation Officer, as they support the probation function alongside delivering resettlement needs work. Additional funding has also been secured so that dedicated and locally embedded Bail Officers can be recruited and increase support to prisoners within HMP Thameside.

In relation to increasing the use of community sentences instead of custodial sentences, sentencing decisions are a matter for the independent judiciary. Nevertheless, the Government launched an independent review of sentencing on 22 October 2024, which is chaired by former Lord Chancellor, David Gauke. Core principles will include ensuring sentences encourage prisoners to turn away from crime, expanding the range of tough punishments outside of prison, and considering best use electronic monitoring and technological developments to safely manage offenders outside the prison walls. It will be up to the Chair to decide his areas of focus, but MoJ expect it will examine, among other areas: the use and impact of short custodial sentences; alternatives to prison; use of fines and the role of incentives in sentence management. The Review has published an eight-week Call for Evidence, from 14 November until 9 January 2025.

I share the Board's concerns around homelessness on release which continues to remain a significant challenge. As the Board will be aware, HMPPS offers a three-tier structure of temporary accommodation known as Community Accommodation Service (CAS). CAS3, which provides up to 12 weeks basic accommodation for prison leavers at risk of homelessness, was launched in July 2021 and provides a critical stabilising environment for people on release from prison from which they can address other aspects linked to their risk of re-offending. The service went live in London in July 2023 and was operationally mobilised by April 2024. Furthermore, the number of Strategic Housing Specialists across England and Wales has increased. There are four Strategic Housing Specialists (SHSs) based in London and as you have noted in your report, HMP Thameside has a SHS provision. In addition, HMPPS have embedded Homelessness Prevention Teams within Probation regions to strengthen strategic relationships between prisons, probation and local authorities and build accommodation pathways.

The Community Rehabilitation Service (CRS) accommodation service in HMP Thameside has been providing accommodation support services to sentenced service users since June 2021. The CRS providers have specialist knowledge to support the service user in obtaining or maintaining existing accommodation/tenancies and work alongside Prison teams to prevent homelessness on release. The CRS Provider also supports with Duty to Refer referrals and liaises with homelessness prevention teams to support CAS3 eligible cases.

In addition to standard services provided to men sentenced in custody, the accommodation services were recently extended to all men held in custody on remand. This includes those un-convicted, convicted but unsentenced and those who are un-convicted, held on remand and then acquitted. This additional service will focus on providing urgent and timely accommodation support for those entering custody (maintaining tenancies) and urgent releases to address any immediate needs (preventing homelessness) presented by remanded service users in prison.

It was encouraging to receive your positive comments about the Offender Management Unit (OMU) and Catch 22 who were continuing to work hard in supporting prisoners throughout their sentence. Similarly, I too am pleased that action has been taken to ensure accuracy of release information and that timings of release support onward arrangements for accommodation and probation. I was also pleased to read about the work carried out by the neurodiversity support manager at HMP Thameside, in raising awareness of, and developing initiatives to meet the needs of, neurologically diverse prisoners.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Director will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to other issues raised in your report 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 Thameside.



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP THAMESIDE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2024 – 30 JUNE 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Remand Prisoners

The Crown Court outstanding caseload remains one of the biggest challenges facing the Criminal Justice System. The caseload has risen substantially over recent years because of the pandemic as well as an increase in the number of cases coming before the criminal courts. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) aim to make sure every victim has the swift access to justice they deserve and are committed to reducing the caseload and bringing waiting times down.

As part of our efforts to reducing the outstanding caseload, the MoJ is funding 106,500 working days at the Crown Court in the 2024/25 financial year, which will be much than previous financial years. Furthermore, to allow more cases to be heard, 18 “Nightingale” Courtrooms are being utilised across eight venues, as well investing in the recruitment of approximately 1,000 judges and tribunal members annually across all jurisdictions.

HMPPS has recently increased the number of remand prisoners residing at HMP Thameside. Serco and HMPPS are working collaboratively to ensure that resource can support this complex cohort of prisoners.

Delays in Releases

A review of Pre-Release Teams (PRTs) will commence soon. As outlined in the letter above, Pre-Release Teams are based in all prisons with a reception/resettlement function including in the private estate support preparation for release. They work with the remand cohort to sustain any community services and to plan for potential release dependent upon the outcome of Court proceedings, including those who may be released immediately from Court. As part of the review there are some lessons learnt from the recent releases under Standard Determinate Sentences (SDS40) aimed as supporting prison leavers into accommodation particularly around timeliness of referrals and the role of PRTs. The review will cover all aspects of PRTs including resourcing and responsibilities with an aim to develop a performance framework.

Probation Staffing

Recruitment and retention remain a priority across the Probation Service. HMPPS have launched various initiatives to deliver more robust supervision, recruit more staff and reduce caseloads. HMPPS 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 (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 March 2024, the Trainee Probation Officer (PQiP) campaign included the launch of a non-graduate pathway aimed at improving the diversity of our workforce and increasing application volumes. The most recent PQiP recruitment campaign was launched in August 2024. In January 2024, HMPPS launched a Probation Alumni Scheme to encourage qualified Probation Officers and Senior Probation Officers who left within the last 5 years to return, enabling us to significantly reduce time to hire, and streamline the process.