



Co-Vice Chairs, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Maidstone
36 County Road
Maidstone
ME14 1UZ

MoJ ref: SUB124589

5 June 2025

Dear Chairs,

**HMP MAIDSTONE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MARCH 2023 – 29 FEBRUARY 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Maidstone. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations, particularly as you continued to regularly monitor and make visits despite operating with a depleted Board and ending the reporting year with fewer members than at the start.

I was very saddened to hear two prisoners died during the reporting year, one of which has been confirmed as self-inflicted. I offer my sincere condolences to all their friends and family and would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

Advice and guidance for prisoners at HMP Maidstone is published by the Foreign National Offenders (FNOs) Information Hub. This includes factsheets that have been translated into the ten most common spoken languages in prisons. However, the Home Office provides deportation paperwork only in English. To assist FNOs, the Immigration Prison Team (IPT) Immigration Officers (IOs) use interpretation services provided through the Big Word service when needed. At HMP Maidstone, FNOs are scheduled for appointments with IPT staff for interviews, the serving of paperwork, and to raise any concerns. This service allows IOs to explain the paperwork with the help of interpreters to ensure it is fully understood.

I recognise that drugs and other illegal items seeps into our establishments and I would like to assure the Board we are doing everything possible to reduce the prevalence of all illicit items. There are specialist staff and equipment to stop the smuggling of illicit items and in recent years, establishments have expanded the use of physical security measures such as X-ray body and baggage scanners, and airport-style Enhanced Gate Security at 52 high-risk sites. HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) is also working hard to deter, detect, and disrupt the illegal use of drones using targeted countermeasures including improvements to windows, specialist netting, grilles, and the implementation of Restricted Fly Zones since January 2024.

The provision of purposeful activity is an aspect of rehabilitation I am passionate about. HMPPS' New Futures Network continues to do good work in this area across the estate, whilst Governors (and Directors in private prisons) are able to commission education provision that is line with their annual needs analysis. This ensures more prisoners can make progress in skills to engage with employment and thrive in their communities on release. HMP Maidstone now has a new Creative Woodwork shop producing items for a local charity and for the prison, and there is also a new site maintenance team

staffed by prisoners called Ragstone Renovations that provides skilled prisoners with further development and work experience with a view to employment on release.

HMPPS provides full resettlement services for prisoners released in the UK. For prisoners subject to removal or deportation, the Home Office Returns Reintegration Programme provides a diverse range of flexible services, including comprehensive and immediate assistance on arrival at the airport. This is alongside longer-term and sustainable packages of reintegration support to further enhance wider returns packages currently available for returnees. This coherent package of support seeks to ensure that the individuals being returned quickly resettle and become self-sufficient, enabling them to make any future migration decisions a choice and not solely out of necessity.

Turning to some positives captured in the report, I was encouraged to note your comments that the prison is a safe establishment and that prisoners appear to enjoy a good relationship with staff and each other. I was also pleased to learn of the changes to the weekend regime to allow increased time out of cells.

I note you have raised some 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 Lord Chancellor and I sincerely appreciate the invaluable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are extremely grateful for your continued hard work and dedication on behalf of HMP Maidstone.

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 MAIDSTONE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MARCH 2023 – 29 FEBRUARY 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prevalence of Drugs

From a demand and supply perspective, HMPPS' Drug and Alcohol Operational Framework (published in January 2025) offers ten objectives to support delivery against the HMPPS' priorities for managing drugs and alcohol use: enabling recovery, reducing demand, and restricting supply. Evidence suggests that establishing recovery-oriented systems to address drug and alcohol use across HMPPS can bring many benefits including improved health and wellbeing; reduced social and economic costs; reduction in substance use dependency relapse; public health benefits; enhanced community support; less demand for substance use; and increased accountability.

Locally, HMP Maidstone has intensified local intelligence-based searching. The prison has adapted its adjudications process to focus more on rehabilitative outcomes to facilitate a reduction in demand. The prison has also increased therapeutic activity through partners, including the use of virtual reality headsets and talking groups.

Purposeful Activity

In addition to the strategic position detailed in the Minister's letter above, work is ongoing to create reading areas in residential units that will provide a suitable environment for prisoner-led activities. Further ideas for a bicycle repair shop and a call centre are also ongoing but in the early stages. Functional Skills places for English and mathematics will expand from April 2025 to accommodate the increased demand due to population changes and this is being achieved without compromising the ESOL provision, which is essential in a foreign national prison. Plans are at an advanced stage to introduce new IT equipment into the printshop to start digital design services to cater across HMPPS and other government organisations, with accredited qualification options being discussed with the provider. Discussions are underway to introduce additional server work to accommodate the end of the centralised catering contract for drinks and breakfast items. Other options for completing this work are available and is being explored to find the optimal solution.

Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL)

Further to last years' response, the Governor was unable to trial a pilot scheme as planned but remains committed to exploring options when capacity allows. There are no policy restrictions that are preventing such prisoners from accessing ROTL as the primary objective is to provide rehabilitative benefits to prisoners through purposeful activity. Under the ROTL framework, prisons must obtain information about the immigration status of Foreign National Offenders (FNOs) who are liable to be removed from the United Kingdom from Home Office Immigration Enforcement (HOIE) before making any ROTL decision. This information ensures that the nature and duration of any ROTL for FNOs are appropriate, given their immigration status.

CCTV and Gatehouse Security

Bids for various security-related projects across the site have been submitted. These projects encompass the upgrade and expansion of the CCTV system, replacement of cell windows, repair of the perimeter and boundary walls, and installation of window mesh throughout the site. Funding for the CCTV project has been approved but HMPPS is unable to provide a date for completion at this time. There are still no plans to introduce Enhanced Gate Security at HMP Maidstone and the prison was not selected for consideration for this project. This decision was based on the current National Risk Assessment of Establishments.

However, HMP Maidstone has been provided with an X-ray body scanner to offer additional support. As the Board will be aware, demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding. Therefore, once a bid for a project is received, HMPPS must prioritise works very carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency.

Access to Translation Services

Immigration Prison Team (IPT) Immigration Officers (IOs) use interpretation services provided through the Big Word when needed. This service allows IOs to explain the paperwork with the help of interpreters, to ensure it is understood. Currently, trials are underway to explore additional digital translation services. Foreign National Offenders (FNOs) are scheduled for appointments with IPT staff for interviews, the serving of paperwork, and to raise any concerns. The appointment system ensures that FNOs are aware of who they will meet and the purpose of the meeting, making it easier to arrange telephone interpreters or Big Word services in advance. There are no strict time constraints, allowing FNOs to fully express their concerns and receive comprehensive answers from the team. This system also provides opportunities for FNOs to discuss any paperwork received from caseworkers or solicitors if they need further clarification. Additionally, Facilitated Removal Scheme leaflets are available in 13 languages. IPT have also created an FNO leaflet, translated into the top ten languages, this is currently undergoing translation and printing.