



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Wormwood Scrubs
Du Cane Road
London
W12 0AE

MoJ ref: SUB131425

13 February 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP WORMWOOD SCRUBS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JUNE 2024 – 31 MAY 2025**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Wormwood Scrubs. I have read your report with care. I am very grateful to you and your colleagues for the considerable work that has gone into preparing it and capturing a detailed and honest account of the prison's current state with the aim of improving practices. This is particularly appreciated given your Board members decreased over the reporting period.

I was saddened to hear that there were four deaths in custody during the reporting period, all of which were of apparent natural causes. I offer my condolences to all their friends and family and was heartened to read about staff's efforts to ensure that release on compassionate grounds was granted to one of the men ahead of his death. If any subsequent recommendations are made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman further to these deaths, please be assured that they will be treated with the upmost importance.

I recognise the scale of the challenge created by aging infrastructure at HMP Wormwood Scrubs. Work is already underway to address this, including the replacement of cell call bell systems across the site, critical fire safety upgrades and the continued replacement of windows, with these projects forming part of a wider programme representing an estimated investment of £68.5 million. I also note further bids for additional work, including improved lighting, closed-circuit television enhancements and mesh and rendering works to cell areas, all of which will be considered through a risk-based national prioritisation process. Locally, I welcome the ongoing refurbishment of showers and the planned completion of the A Wing lift replacement in early 2026.

I share the Board's concern about delays facing men who require transfer for specialist mental health treatment. The new Mental Health Act 2025 states that prisons cannot be used as a place of safety and introduces a statutory 28 day transfer time limit. Cross government work is underway to ensure that the structures, reporting arrangements and operational capacity required to meet this standard are fully in place. National Health Service England (NHSE) is supporting this through its strengthened emphasis on improving patient flow, including reductions in average length of stay in acute mental health wards. This national effort is backed by substantial investment, including £1.6 billion pounds through the Better Care Fund and £42 million of recurrent funding from 2024–2025 for Integrated Care Boards to expand inpatient

care capacity. Locally, I welcome the efforts of practitioners who conduct timely assessments, escalate complex cases when needed and work to stabilise men during what can be a very distressing period.

Your report makes clear that pressure on secure hospital beds continues to affect timely transfers. There were 62 transfers this year with an average referral to transfer time of 59.9 days. Although performance on urgent referrals improved significantly by year end, consistency remains a challenge. To address this, NHSE has placed renewed focus on reducing inpatient lengths of stay, strengthening oversight of clinical prioritisation and enhancing data reporting and escalation processes. Regionally, work is underway to support the prison and healthcare partners to escalate delayed cases at senior level and track progress more reliably. I expect these arrangements to translate into more consistent compliance with the new statutory time limit.

I appreciate you will be frustrated at again having to raise many of the same concerns as last year and hope that progress can be made over the next year. I was encouraged by the Board's findings of the quality and impact of education delivered at HMP Wormwood Scrubs. Your report highlights stronger teaching practice, improved monitoring of learning and a marked rise in the number of men achieving functional English and mathematics qualifications. I was particularly pleased to read about the effectiveness of the prison's reading strategy, supported by dedicated peer mentors trained through the Shannon Trust, which continues to help many men develop essential literacy skills. These improvements represent meaningful progress and demonstrate what focused partnership between staff and external providers can achieve.

Although outside of the reporting period, it was a pleasure to take part in the launch of the Chef's Unlocked initiative during November 2025 where I was also pleased to learn there had been a reduction in mandatory drug testing rates. Chefs Unlocked is part of wider Government efforts to get prisoners into work, connecting businesses with prisons to match training to real jobs. I am passionate about rehabilitation and wish all such initiatives great success.

I note that your report has also raised some local concerns. The Governor will continue to keep you informed of any developments regarding these matters. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I value the important role of Independent Monitoring Boards, and we thank you and your members for your ongoing dedication on behalf of HMP Wormwood Scrubs.

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 WORMWOOD SCRUBS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JUNE 2024 – 31 MAY 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Improvements to infrastructure

Please see the Ministerial response above.

Reliability and cost of in-cell telephones

The in-cell telephone service is delivered through a national contract that has in place a service level agreement that repairs or replacements are provided within 5 days. Call charges were reduced earlier this year and remain under review with further efforts underway to lower costs, particularly for calls to mobile telephones.

Property lost or delayed in transit between establishments

The revised Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, issued on 17 November 2025, provides clearer guidance on areas historically prone to error, including sending excess property, handling laundry and completing cell clearance certificates. Senior leaders across the estate have been reminded of the need for compliance, particularly in relation to volumetric control, which ensures that property within limits travels with the individual.

The escort provider transports property in line with the volumetric limits using digital person escort records to document property ownership and handover accurately. Between June 2024 and the end of the reporting period, 29 complaints relating to HMP Wormwood Scrubs were recorded concerning delays or losses in transit. Complaints are reviewed on a monthly basis with the escort provider. Locally, the prison has introduced a barcode labelling system for parcels sent in by families, which has led to a reduction in complaints about incoming property.