



Ministry  
of Justice

Lord Timpson  
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP/YOI Stoke Heath  
Warrant Road  
Stoke Heath  
Market Drayton  
Shropshire  
TF9 2JL

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27 February 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI STOKE HEATH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 MAY 2024 – 30 APRIL 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Stoke Heath. I am particularly grateful to you and your colleagues for the considerable work put into this insightful report given you have continued to operate with several vacancies and your membership reduced further during the year.

I was very saddened to learn that four deaths occurred during the reporting period, two in custody, one in hospital and another shortly after release. I offer my sincere condolences to all their friends and family and would like to provide assurance that any recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

Having read your report with care I recognise the Board's concerns about the prisoner population and challenges this creates providing training and resettlement support. Both the Sentencing Act 2026, which received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026, and the Independent Review of Criminal Courts will have an impact on the prison population and provides the Courts with options to end the revolving door of less serious offenders. The HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Estate Configuration Review are considering the implications of these and future requirements for the entire prison estate, including the function of prisons and Offender Flows. While recall remains an essential safeguard to protect the public when risk increases, the recall measure in the Sentencing Act aims to help address the high proportion of prisoners on recall, such as those seen at HMP/YOI Stoke Heath. It implements the Independent Sentencing Review's recommendations for recall, by replacing the current short-term recalls for most Standard Determinate Sentence offenders with a fixed-term recall of 56 days, except for those who are excluded. This will help support rehabilitation and reduce the need for future recalls, balancing managing offenders safely in the community whilst achieving a sustainable recall prison population. The fixed term recall period will also provide more time to undertake a thorough review of an offender's release plans and licence conditions, to ensure their needs and risk are managed.

It remains the case that pre-release teams will provide support for all people in prison with their resettlement, signposting to specialist services within the prison, such as Prison Banking Administrators, Healthcare and Rehabilitative Services. To specifically help prisoners at HMP/YOI Stoke Heath with employment, a Careers Information and Guidance provider began delivery in April 2025. This provides a consistent approach for regional and national co-ordination of career pathways, including prisoners who

may quickly transfer on to other prisons. HMPPS is also currently procuring a new Core Education contract within the Prisoner Education Service for the West Midlands, which is expected to launch in September 2026. This will include the teaching and delivery of a Governor commissioned curriculum to meet the needs of prisoners. It will also set clear consistent expectations for screening and assessment, as well as support for learners with additional learning needs. The Board can be assured that new digital systems are also being introduced which will expand access to secure online education content, reduce repeated assessments when prisoners are recalled or return to prison and will improve recording of previous achievements. Locally, despite staffing pressures impacting on the daily regime and support services, a new Head of Reducing Reoffending is now in post and staff resource and engagement are beginning to show signs of improvement. The percentage of prisoners released into accommodation remains positive and an initiative run by The Department for Work and Pensions now enables effective access to benefits on the day of release without having to attend a Jobcentre. In addition, there is a regional and local commitment to improve attendance rates in both education and manufacturing areas with the Prison Employment Lead also focused on opportunities to improve employment outcomes on release.

I also wanted to acknowledge the availability of drugs mentioned in your report and can confirm that the prison has in place a Drug Strategy with multiple workstreams across supply, demand and building Recovery. There is also a live action plan that is being reviewed regularly and is updated to provide direction on delivery to target appropriate areas, such as the recognition that the rate of positive mandatory drug testing remains too high.

Whilst it acknowledged there is more work to do, I was encouraged to receive your comments about the good practice and constructive engagement staff have with prisoners and particularly the benefits that more experienced staff provide to the prison. I'm aware that both safety and resettlement outcomes are key priorities for the Governor and the Prison Group and measures are being implemented to improve these. It was pleasing to read about the valuable charities providing services at the prison, such as the Forward Trust to help prisoners lead healthier lives without drugs and the Prison Advice and Care Trust support at themed family visit days. I was reassured that prisoners value the purposeful activity on offer and that employers continue to be attracted to provide prisoners with skills and potential employment on release.

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 as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I really value the oversight which members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide to our prisons and we are appreciative of your ongoing hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Stoke Heath.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

## HMP/YOI STOKE HEATH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY 2024 – 30 APRIL 2025

### HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

#### **Operational Capacity**

The Board can be assured that prison conditions are continually monitored with places taken on and offline depending on safety, stability, staffing levels and maintenance needs. While most single cells in the prison estate could physically hold two people, the maximum crowded capacity of a prison is a matter of operational judgement via the cell certification process. The standards in the *Certified Prisoner Accommodation Policy* Framework provides a formal assessment of the use of cells considering risk to safety, decency and stability, to ensure prisoners are accommodated safely even when held in crowded conditions. HMPPS will not take decisions that create unacceptable risks but has had to explore every measure to deal with the capacity pressures, as the public would expect, while continuing to deliver new prison places.

#### **Refurbishment**

It is recognised that 53 capital projects across 33 prisons including HMP/YOI Stoke Heath have been delayed following the primary contractor ISG going into administration in September 2024. However, the Ministry of Justice activated contingency plans for affected projects in line with practice across Government to ensure a new contractor could be appointed as promptly as possible. Replacement contractors have now been appointed to take over various projects and work is underway to enable delivery to recommence. This includes the boiler replacement project at HMP/YOI Stoke Heath, with the contractor working through the complex process to safely take over the site and review previous plans. Following this a confirmed programme will be agreed, ahead of design or construction work re-starting. To make further improvements to safety and decency, bids have been submitted for consideration. These include refurbishments to the showers on multiple wings and in the kitchen, replacements to the cell call system, CCTV and permitter detection system, building management system, and air and smoke detection units, as well as wing roof and flooring repairs and the replacement of external walls and windows in education. Although these bids are currently unfunded HMPPS will prioritise these works very carefully with the other projects across the estate to make best use of the maintenance funding available, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency.

#### **Food Budget**

It remains the case that the Governor in public prisons and the Director in private prisons have the flexibility to manage their overall budget and determine their food expenditure according to the specific needs of their population as part of normal non-pay budget planning. This allows prisons to provide the expected minimum four weekly menu cycle based on five meal options for both lunch and dinner to provide choice. Prisons may also supplement food provision if needed. Funding allocated to prisons for prisoner food has increased incrementally in recent years, rising from £2.18 per prisoner per day in 2022–2023 to £3.01 in 2024–2025. The funding for 2025–2026 has also been increased in line with inflation funding HMPPS received. It is recognised that food inflation on the local budget at HMP/YOI Stoke Heath has had an impact, however, having the menu cycle ensures prisoners order their meal in advance which assists with planning. The prison is also in the process of implementing the new *Food in Prisons Policy* Framework which will result in significant changes to healthier menus with a reduction in red meat and ultra-processed foods and an increase in vegetable-based protein and fresh fruit and vegetables. Prisoners are being encouraged to consume more vegetables with their main meal which will increase portion sizes and reduce wastage.

## **Prisoners' Property**

HMPPS has now considered carefully the IMB national thematic report on the impact of property loss on prisoners, and the thematic review by the Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations of the property complaints they have received over the last five years. In considering the reports, consultation with prison staff took place and a revised version of the *Prisoners' Property Policy* Framework was published on 17 November 2025. This includes additional guidance on sending excess property, the handling of prisoners' laundry and the correct completion of the cell clearance certificate, as these were identified as common areas of difficulty. In addition, HMPPS has reminded Governors and other senior leaders of key points around handling property, including the importance of prisoners complying with volumetric limits. Compliance with volumetric control remains of key importance, since property within those limits will be moved with the prisoner when they are transferred by the Prisoner Escort and Custody Service supplier. Locally HMP/YOI Stoke Heath recognises vacancies within the Reception Team has had an impact and have been working to strengthen the team and protect the existing staff resource, particularly at weekends, when there is higher demand and have taken steps to improve oversight of processing property and timeliness. HMPPS remains committed to improving the management of prisoners' property and considers possible areas for improvement on an ongoing basis.

## **Self-Harm**

The safety of prisoners remains paramount and every prison provides individualised support through a case management process for people assessed as at risk of suicide and self-harm irrespective of where a prisoner is located. This approach places a strong emphasis on identifying individual risks, triggers and protective factors as well as establishing meaningful support to deliver action aimed at mitigating areas of risk. A mandatory quality assurance tool is also in place to help prisons understand how effectively they are using the case management process to support those at risk of self-harm or suicide and identify areas of learning and good practice. Staff who undertake key roles relating to risk assessment and case management receive specific training and all new members of staff with prisoner contact receive training on suicide and self-harm prevention. Locally keyworker delivery is being prioritised to complex prisoners who are in the greatest need of support guaranteeing at least one session monthly. A Safety Summit also took place in September 2025 highlighting the need for improved staff-prisoner relationships and new initiatives in response to this are being implemented to improve communication and consultation. In addition, Safer Custody prison officer resource is now ringfenced, helping the prison to better understand the issues, make more informed judgements and offer greater support to those in need. All Supervising Officers, Custody Managers and Prison Offender Managers are also now invited to the weekly Safety Intervention Meeting to improve understanding of prisoners' needs, as well aid interaction with prisoners to address their complex needs.