



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI East Sutton Park
Sutton Valence
Maidstone
ME17 3DF

MoJ ref: SUB133472

17 April 2026

Dear Chair,

HMP/YOI EAST SUTTON PARK INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2023 - 31 OCTOBER 2025

Thank you for your Board's detailed and thoughtful report. Whilst I appreciate you have had membership issues, hence why this report spans 2 years, I am grateful for your perceptive and balanced monitoring, rooted in a sincere commitment to the wellbeing of the women based at HMP/YOI East Sutton Park. I am pleased that you now have a full complement of members and thank the Board for their dedication, particularly within the unique context of the open women's estate, where the encouragement of independence must be carefully balanced with assurance, support and safety.

The Government remains committed to reducing the number of women entering custody unnecessarily and increasing the support available in the community. The Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan set the direction for this work and the recently enacted Sentencing Act 2026 provides a generational shift in sentencing, with a presumption for courts to suspend short custodial sentences wherever appropriate. These reforms are intended to reduce the number of women receiving short terms of imprisonment and to strengthen the role of community-based supervision and support for those who can safely be managed without a custodial sentence.

I recognise the Board's concern that women should have sufficient time remaining in custody to benefit fully from the rehabilitative opportunities available in the open estate, including Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL). A well-established weekly progression meeting across the women's estate provides oversight of all women expected to progress to open conditions, ensuring barriers are identified early and transitions planned effectively. Governors retain discretion in balancing progression needs with operational pressures, but the overarching aim is clear; women who are suitable for the open estate should progress without unnecessary delay. In addition, promotional materials, lived-experience visits and strengthened communication between establishments further support women to make informed decisions about progressing to HMP/YOI East Sutton Park and other open sites.

The placement and management of transgender prisoners is an important and sensitive matter. Work is currently underway by the Transgender Policy Team following recent legal rulings, including the For Women Scotland judgment. Existing policies remain in effect while this review is carried out and further updates will be shared in due course.

You raised the case of a civil prisoner who was ineligible for the SDS40 scheme. The Sentencing Act 2026 establishes an “Earned Progression” model for criminal standard determinate sentences, setting clear release points based on behaviour. These provisions apply only to criminal sentences and do not extend to civil penalties, which remain governed by separate long-standing arrangements. I appreciate the concern raised in your report and I recognise the need to ensure that civil prisoners continue to be treated fairly and consistently when it comes to rehabilitative opportunities such as ROTL.

I recognise the frustrations highlighted by your Board regarding the loss of property during transfers across the estate. A revised Prisoners’ Property Policy Framework was introduced on 17 November 2025 to improve clarity and consistency, including strengthened guidance on excess property, laundry handling and the correct use of cell-clearance certificates. Senior leaders across HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) have been reminded of the importance of compliance with volumetric controls, which support the safe transfer of property between establishments. The Prison Performance Committee reviewed whether a central KPI should be reinstated and agreed that oversight is most effective when delivered through Prison Group Directors and Area Executive Directors, who are responsible for driving compliance locally. They continue to work with establishments to reinforce expectations and improve day-to-day practice.

I welcome the Board’s confirmation that HMP/YOI East Sutton Park had a safe reporting period, supported by strong teamwork across safer custody, healthcare, residential staff and Listeners. The use of Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) processes for women experiencing distress and the collaborative work between prison and healthcare teams, demonstrates a culture that prioritises wellbeing and early intervention. This is strengthened further by positive staff–prisoner relationships and the respectful atmosphere highlighted throughout your report.

Your observations of the prison’s rehabilitative strengths were especially encouraging. The excellent achievements in education, including a 99.3% pass rate for functional skills courses and high course completion rates, reflect committed partnership working and a culture where learning is valued. I was also heartened by the positive feedback from women leaving HMP/YOI East Sutton Park, who described significant improvements in their wellbeing, confidence and sense of stability during their time there. These outcomes speak to the dedication of staff across the establishment.

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

The Deputy Prime Minister and I very much appreciate the valuable role played by all members of the Independent Monitoring Boards operating throughout the prison estate and we are grateful for your ongoing commitment on behalf of HMP/YOI East Sutton Park.

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 EAST SUTTON PARK INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2023 - 31 OCTOBER 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Minimum Time Remaining on Arrival

Closed establishments are encouraged to maximise ROTL for women who would benefit from work, family contact and community reintegration. Early, clear consideration of open-estate suitability during sentence planning helps ensure women arrive at HMP/YOI East Sutton Park with sufficient time remaining to make meaningful use of opportunities available. Improving communication and addressing cultural barriers to transfer, also support progression and help manage capacity pressures across the women's estate.

Supporting Closed Establishments to Identify Women Suitable for Open Conditions

HMPPS is committed to enabling as many suitable women as possible to progress to open conditions. Work to support this includes visits by staff from closed prisons to open establishments, open-estate staff attending closed sites to increase confidence in suitability thresholds and regular discussions between offender management leads across the women's estate. Prison Offender Managers have also been supported to visit open prisons to increase understanding of expectations and risk-management arrangements. These combined efforts have contributed to improved identification and progression of suitable candidates.

Implementing an Effective Property System

As outlined in the Minister's response, a revised Prisoner's Property Policy Framework was introduced on 17 November 2025. This was developed following careful consideration of the Independent Monitoring Board's national thematic report and the Independent Prisoner Complaints Investigations review of property complaints. It provides clearer guidance on addressing common areas of difficulty raised by staff. Please see the Ministerial response for detail on why a KPI for this area has not been reintroduced.

ROTL Guidance for Civil Prisoners

The ROTL framework applies to civil prisoners under the same overarching principles as criminal prisoners. Proportionality remains central, recognising that civil prisoners often present lower levels of risk but still requiring appropriate checks relating to abscond risk, safeguarding and reputational considerations. At HMP/YOI East Sutton Park, a variation to national guidance allows fast-track consideration where a woman has previously been assessed for ROTL at another establishment. National recruitment of additional probation officers will help ease workload pressures within Offender Management Units, supporting timeliness and responsiveness in future cases.