



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Styal

**For reporting year
1 May 2025 to 30 April 2026**

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Contents

Introductory sections 1 – 3	Page
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the establishment	4
3. Key points	6
 Evidence sections 4 – 7	
4. Safety	11
5. Fair and humane treatment	13
6. Health and wellbeing	16
7. Progression and resettlement	18
 The work of the IMB	
Board statistics	21
Applications to the IMB	21

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release.
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has.
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill treatment. The IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

HMP/YOI Styal is the only women's prison in the northwest of England and has an operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) of 454¹ prisoners. All are aged 18 years and over and may be on remand (held in prison until the time of their trial or subsequent sentence hearing), immigration detention or serving sentences ranging from five days to life. As a local prison, it receives prisoners directly from court and has a large catchment area covering the northwest of England and north Wales.

The prison population continues to comprise a diverse and complex mix of prisoners, including individuals serving short sentences of less than 12 months, as well as long-term prisoners, including those serving life sentences. As the reporting period drew to a close, the data revealed that Styal held approximately 150 individuals who were on remand, with the remaining number being sentenced prisoners. Following legislation change regarding 14 and 28-day fixed term recalls, the prison also held a substantially increased number of recalled prisoners, including some who had been recalled several times. The prison is beginning to work under the new sentencing guidance including 56-day recalls. A significant proportion of these prisoners lead chaotic lives and often experience challenges related to substance misuse and poor mental health.

The prison consists of 17 standalone houses, 15 of which accommodate approximately 20 prisoners, including a community house (Bollinwood), situated outside the fence, for up to 25 prisoners categorised as suitable to live in open conditions, and an incentivised drug free living house, which was the first in the women's estate. The prison also has a young adult hub based in one of the houses and a standalone mother and baby unit (MBU), which accommodates up to nine prisoners and ten babies.

The prison has a cell block (Waite wing), which continues to be used for remand, detoxing and prisoners with more challenging needs. New prisoners are located in the induction centre (IC) on Waite wing. There is a ten-bed care and separation unit (CSU), which is used to segregate some prisoners who display challenging behaviour, as well as those subject to temporary cellular confinement, occasionally for their own protection. The Valentina unit (a time-out, short-stay facility) accommodates up to ten prisoners in single rooms.

As in the previous reporting year, Spectrum Community Health (Spectrum), a community interest company, provides primary healthcare, drug and alcohol recovery services (DARS) and social care. Spectrum also provides substance misuse treatment. Mental health care continues to be provided by the Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust (GMMH).

Novus continues to provide the prison education framework, while GeoAmey still holds the contract for works within the prison and for escort services.

Commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) are delivered by the Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance (which works with Ingeus accommodation), Lancashire Women, and Person Shaped Support (PSS) Turnaround, which operates across Merseyside, Cheshire and Wales.

¹ Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's position at the time of reporting but may be subject to change following further validation and therefore may not always tally with Official Statistics later published by the Ministry of Justice.

Since April 2022, the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) charity has held the family services contract and Action for Children has run the mother and baby unit.

The establishment has a number of workshops and opportunities on site to support training, rehabilitation and progression into employment in the community. These include laundry, hair and beauty, decorating, catering, prison radio and gardens. During the reporting year, three external agencies operated on site: Recycling Lives, Remade with Hope and The Clink restaurant. All provided prisoners with valuable work experience during their sentence and job opportunities on release. The latter two have now ceased to operate, although efforts are underway to find suitable replacements.

In the Board's view, the Governor has been in post since January 2024 and, along with the longer serving Deputy Governor, has provided some much-needed stability and continuity to the leadership of the prison.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- The Board continues to observe a committed, multidisciplinary and thoughtful approach to safety under new leadership. However, the Board has again recognised that the prison's approach to safety has been compromised throughout the year by the increased numbers of prisoners with very complex needs. Over 80% of new arrivals are admitted with addiction, behavioural or mental health issues.
- The Board has also noted the increased number of prisoners referred by the courts to Styal on 'warrants of concern', where prison is deemed to be a 'place of safety'. There were 43 such referrals during the year, largely due to the lack of appropriate alternative care provision in the community.
- During the reporting year, six prisoners have been sectioned on release. The Board has also noted the increased use of the care and separation unit (CSU) for such prisoners, including those who require constant supervision provision. The Board considers this to be inappropriate given their mental health issues. There are only two such cells in the prison, which the Board considers to be inadequate, given the complexity of the prison population.
- The majority of self-harm incidents continue to involve a very small number of individuals who self-harm frequently, many of whom have a longstanding history of repeated self-harm prior to their arrival at Styal.
- However, the Board recognises the very high levels of support given to the most vulnerable prisoners, who are well known to prison staff and treated with great care and compassion, despite the repetitive nature of their behaviour.
- The continued ingress of drugs into the prison remains a key concern for the Board, despite the provision of an X-ray scanner, which has yet to be installed. The Board has noted the increased use of search dogs over the year, which has helped to increase security.
- The Board continues to appreciate the effectiveness of the work of the women's estate psychology services (WEPS) team in the development of trauma-informed practice in the prison, supporting staff to maintain a high level of understanding of the challenging behaviour of prisoners through the Behind the Behaviours training, and the Hope and Early Days programmes. This work has also been instrumental in reducing the number of use of force incidents throughout the reporting year.

Fair and humane treatment

- As noted in our previous report, accommodation, particularly in the houses, remains a key concern. The Board continues to observe longstanding maintenance and repair delays, including a lack of a proactive programme of repairs to leaking roofs and gutters, poorly fitting windows and broken paving stones.
- The Board remains concerned about the lack of supervision on the houses, both during the day and at night. There are particular concerns about the safety of those living on Bollinwood, given its location and the lack of lighting and security surrounding it.
- Despite several years of planned changes and proposed revisions, the Board has yet to identify an incentives process that is sufficiently robust, fair and effective in

encouraging, and being seen to appropriately reward, positive behaviour within the establishment.

- The Board has also noted that opportunities for the voice of the prisoners to be heard are patchy. The community council meetings have not always been well advertised to the prisoners and are subject to frequent cancellations. Other forums have not routinely taken place. Smaller meetings and individual opportunities for some to give their views do exist, but these have been relatively limited.
- The Board continues to witness many positive encounters between staff and prisoners and numerous instances of kindness and compassion being shown to vulnerable women, sometimes in very challenging circumstances. This has especially been noted on the Valentina and care and separation units.
- In some instances, these units have felt more like a psychiatric facility than a prison. Board members and prisoners alike have commented that, generally, staff do an excellent job of delivering compassionate and trauma-informed care. However, the Board notes that some very poorly women would benefit from continual support by mental health specialists.

Health and wellbeing

- The Board has observed further improvements in the safe and timely administration of medicines since the last report.
- It is disappointing to report that work on building a modern, fit-for-purpose healthcare centre has still not started, and the delay seems to be ongoing.
- The Board has noted that the appointment of additional clinical staff has improved prisoner access to the available health services, including primary and mental health.
- The Board's regular monitoring continues to indicate that pregnant prisoners and mothers and babies are very well cared for by the appropriately staffed peri-natal team.
- The demand for social care has increased by 20%; however, the staff resource has remained the same despite prisoners having both physical and psychological care needs.
- During the reporting year, more than 700 prisoners entered Styal with serious and enduring mental health conditions. Together with the small number of young adult prisoners, they place a disproportionate demand on the healthcare team, particularly in relation to incidents of self-harm.

Progression and resettlement

- The Board has observed significant improvement in the library services, with a range of activities now available for prisoners and evening provision for those who work during the day. Access and attendance at the library continued to improve over the reporting year, with all prisoners time-tabled to attend at least once a week, and the majority accessing the minimum weekly 30-minute allocation.
- During the reporting year, the Board has noted significant efforts to ensure that prisoners held on remand received the rights and privileges to which they were entitled.
- Despite a reduction in provision, the prison continues to offer a good range of educational and vocational courses, many leading to Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications and recognised industry-standard awards. The prison has adapted to a changing employment landscape and prisoner preferences to maximise opportunities for employment post release.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

1. Given recent sentencing guidance, what further community provision does the Minister intend to put in place for women with shorter sentences in the northwest catchment area served by HMP Styal?
2. The accommodation at Styal still requires substantial investment and repair. The age and condition of the estate present ongoing challenges for safety, dignity, decency and maintenance. What specific action will the Minister take to address these significant accommodation issues, both in the short term and through longer-term estate investment in the prison estate?
3. Prisons remain subject to scrutiny and accountability for deaths occurring within 14 days of release, despite release decisions often being determined through wider statutory and judicial processes. When will the Minister review these arrangements to ensure that accountability is appropriately aligned with decision-making responsibilities, including by introducing exemptions in specific circumstances?
4. Does the Minister have any plans to provide specialist secure mental health provision within the grounds of HMP Styal, staffed by mental health professionals, to address the challenges highlighted in this report?
5. Will the Minister undertake a review of the continuing use of 'warrants of concern' to commit women to HMP Styal, given concerns that courts may still view the prison as a place of safety in the absence of suitable alternative provision?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

1. The design and layout of the prison create significant operational challenges and require higher staffing levels than may be needed in more modern establishments. Staffing resources do not always enable the level of supervision and support that the Board considers necessary. What steps are being taken to ensure staffing levels and resourcing are sufficient to meet the needs of the establishment and maintain safety?
2. The contracts for the commissioned rehabilitative services do not include funding for resources to cover pre-release or gate pick-ups from the prison, which all facilitate the women reaching their accommodation (if available) and day one appointments. When will funding be made available to address this issue?
3. What progress has been made in relation to the replacement of The Clink release on temporary licence work opportunities (in addition to the Marstons Academy)?
4. Has any consideration been given to a national transition process to support young adults on their move into an adult prison, given the data shows their disproportionate involvement in self-harm and use of force incidents?
5. We have seen many benefits from the introduction of laptops in the prison, but what progress has been made to enable more content on them, particularly the provision of word processing facilities?
6. Are there any plans to increase the daily food monetary allowance (currently £3.12 per prisoner) to reflect increased food prices?

TO THE GOVERNOR

1. Could the Governor confirm if the revised employment policy referenced in the HMPPS response to the last annual report has been successful in relation to improved participation and outcomes particularly for women with complex needs?
2. What progress has been made to enable an effective incentives process to be established in the prison and communicated to the prisoners?

3. What further opportunities will be developed over the next 12 months to strengthen prisoner voice and ensure a larger number of individuals are able to contribute ideas, provide feedback and influence decisions that affect their daily lives and progression towards greater independence?
4. Will the Governor commit to provide curtains, blinds or other suitable window coverings in all relevant living environments within the next 12 months, in order to enhance privacy, dignity and decency for prisoners?

3.3 Response to the last report

To the Minister:

Question	Response	Progress
Increase the number of secure mental health placements in the community.	28-day limit imposed for transfers from prison to hospitals, etc, Mental Health Bill.	Unaware of any increases.
Support and technology to address the ingress of drugs.	X-ray scanner approved; infrastructure to be approved; £40 million on security upgrades across 34 prisons.	Not installed because of lack of space in the reception area.
Community provision as an alternative to prison.	New sentencing guidelines to reduce short sentences.	Minimum 12 month sentences from 31 March 2026.
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) use of national criteria rather than local.	No change indicated.	No change noted.
Replacement of the existing prison with a new build.	£13 million agreed for new healthcare building.	No progress; healthcare building delayed further.

To HMPPS:

Expand the New Futures network.	Change to The Clink premises; new employment policy.	New partners on board; Marstons Academy in the bistro.
Additional resource to support the complexity of the prisoners.	Complexity funding due for review in 2025-2026; eight additional officers for tactical support.	No change noted.
Increased staffing resource for escorts.	Governor working with Prison Group Director to identify options.	No change noted.
Reduction in paperwork and increased use of technology.	No digitisation proposed.	No change noted.
Additional resource for fire safety issues.	Mini fire safety improvements completed at beginning of 2025; 22 cells now equipped with fire detectors; trial of 'door screecher'.	Still concerns about fire safety on houses at night; schedule of fire drills identified.

To the Governor:

Security for Bollinwood.	Review of resourcing levels.	Still a concern given recent ingress by protesters and no keys for residents.
Staff presence and supervision on houses.	Review of resourcing levels.	No change noted.
Confidential spaces on the wings.	A number of confidential office spaces have been identified.	Are they made available and to whom? DARS staff still interviewing on social areas on Waite wing.
Progress with the incentives scheme.	Scheme has been reviewed to be piloted in Sept 2025, including new quality assurance procedures.	New policy drafted but not launched and the process is still unclear for many prisoners.
Prisoner voice.	Monthly community council meetings; minutes on laptops; Governor report.	Council meetings still not regular – some smaller forums but not always inclusive or well advertised.
Regime on the Valentina unit.	All regime changes scrutinised and authorised by the Duty Governor.	Some improvement with regard to the regime; dedicated staffing effective.
In-possession medication lockers on houses.	Lockers in place in Bollinwood; none for wing or Valentina considered; additional funding sought.	NHS funding for lockers on houses obtained but not all in place yet.
Equalities monitoring.	Additional resource allocated to the safety team.	Monitoring data improved significantly; still a lack of consistency regarding meetings; no foreign national prisoner group or tailored support.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

The Board has continued to observe a multi-disciplinary and responsive approach to safety. The development of a trauma-informed environment, the timely provision of accurate data and analysis, and the increased focus on psychological support for prisoners has continued to promote positive early interventions and provide staff with more appropriate de-escalation techniques. As noted on our previous report, the Board has observed greater provision of training to help officers understand the behaviours of prisoners in their care and the availability of supervision sessions aimed to promote confidence and competence within this staff group.

4.1 Reception and induction

Again, as noted in our last report, the Board has noted the continuing improvement in the reception area, which provides a secure and welcoming environment for newly arrived prisoners. However, the Board has again noted that the prison has continued to receive prisoners late in the evening, and having been in police custody or on prison transport for several hours before their transfer to the prison. This is especially problematic for first-time prisoners and those with substance dependencies. From our observations, induction processes are timely and helpful to prisoners.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

The Board remains concerned about the continuing high rates of self-harm. The majority of self-harm incidents continue to be carried out by a very small number of prolific self-harmers, almost always with a history of frequent self-harm before entry. In March 2026, there were 393 incidents of self-harm by 26 individuals, with seven individuals responsible for 358 of the incidents (91%). The analysis and tracking of this data is now excellent, with locations, motives and causes of self-harm being regularly highlighted in monthly meetings, leading to a range of interventions.

The Board has, again, noted a growing proportion of self-harm incidents among prisoners aged 18-24. One young adult was responsible for 496 incidents during a two-month period in custody in 2025 and, of the 393 incidents recorded in March 2026, 294 were attributed to young adults, four of whom were prolific self-harmers. The young adult hub, established in response to this issue, provides additional support through a range of activities and therapeutic interventions, although its effectiveness has yet to be evaluated by the Board.

The Board has monitored those prisoners who are mentally unwell or are a significant risk to themselves, to the point of likely needing a secure mental health placement to address their support needs. The Board's thematic monitoring of the most vulnerable women during a defined period revealed a deep knowledge and understanding of individual prisoner needs by many staff, across different departments, who work well together to try to identify positive interventions and outcomes.

The Board remains seriously concerned that HMP/YOI Styal is still being used as a place of last resort for acutely mentally unwell prisoners. These prisoners have frequently required special accommodation, constant interventions and repeated visits from healthcare staff as a result of prolific self-harm, refusal to take medications and non-compliance. In December 2025, there were six 'code blue' instances (when a prisoner isn't breathing) and two 'code reds' (when a prisoner is bleeding) attributed to two such individuals, and 17 use of force (UoF) incidents from those on warrants of concern. The

impact on resources, staff and other prisoners has been hugely disproportionate, and has drained attention and time from others in need of care.

The Board has also noted the increased use of the care and separation unit (CSU) for such prisoners, including those who require constant supervision provision, when appropriate mental health facilities in the community are not available. It seems to have been incredibly difficult securing the appropriate placements needed for these individuals. Whilst the Board observed high levels of commitment and dedication from staff, prisons are not equipped, nor were they ever intended, to provide specialist mental healthcare. This was highlighted by the fact that six prisoners this year were sectioned on release at the gate and 36 referred to an outside mental health hospital.

The Board recognises the increasing effectiveness of ADAPT (a joint project between NHS and HMPPS), which runs the Offender Personality Disorder programme, a mix of community, prison and hospital care. The programme takes up to 18 of the most vulnerable prisoners and works with them over a long period of time, through building relationships and activities, plus clinical and therapeutic interventions.

The number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans opened to support prisoners at risk of self-harm or suicide has reduced over the year from 39 in May 2025 to 23 in April 2026. This is largely due to the overview and analysis of ACCTs by the Safety Team. However, the Board has again noted that the amount of paperwork for the ACCT process is excessive and occupies a great deal of officer time that we believe could be better spent on positive interactions with prisoners.

The Board notes with sadness that there were three deaths in custody during the reporting year, two of which occurred after release from prison, and one after a longstanding illness in hospital.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The data available to the Board showed that prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased during the reporting year. In April 2026, 52% of new admissions had been convicted of, or charged with, a violent offence, and prison staff believed this had affected behaviour. As with incidents of self-harm, the Board noted that the majority of assaults on staff were committed by a very small number of repeat perpetrators, often following refusal to return to their cells.

4.4 Use of force

There has, however, been a steady reduction in the use of force (UoF), from 68 incidents in April 2025 by 27 individuals, to 59 incidents in April 2026 by 15 individuals. Leaders work with the WEPS team to identify incidents where good de-escalation techniques had avoided the need to use physical force and this learning is shared with all staff.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

The main routes by which illicit items entered the prison appeared to be through mail (including legal correspondence), recalled prisoners and social visits. There is now much more regular involvement of search dogs, particularly during visits, which has led to an increase in finds from visitors. The new X-ray scanner has yet to be installed because of the lack of space in the reception area and the need for additional funding to pay for installation. On average, there have been 25 mandatory drug tests (MDT) per month over the reporting year.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The Board has been monitoring the activities of Amey and noted long delays with important items, including constant supervision doors (on order for over two years), replacement fridge freezers, and effective repair of the emergency pull cords in the accessible rooms in one house. Broken or damaged shower doors on Waite wing regularly take months to repair. There are also high levels of vandalism and complex fire safety issues.

The Board again notes that the limited number of toilets and bathrooms continues to impact on decency standards. The restrictions and huge costs of repairing Victorian buildings appear to limit progress. The Board notes that there has been some improvement in the refurbishment of the houses with regard to furniture and furnishings, but these are still not consistently provided to a decent standard.

A 'living conditions' forum was held in April 2026 to gather prisoners' views on their own accommodation and identify concerns before they developed into serious problems. The feedback highlighted that many areas of Styal remain in a poor state of repair and are costly to maintain.

There have been some improvements, including on the wings, which have helped to brighten the environment. However, routine vandalism and the need for complex repairs continue to be costly and time-consuming, and progress remains slow. Examples of longstanding disrepair include the flooring in the Valentina unit, which is damaged, patched with tape and may present a safety risk, and gutters and roofs across the estate, many of which are clogged with weeds, cracked and leaking.

Both the care and separation unit (CSU) and the Valentina unit accommodate prisoners with severe mental health needs. The maintenance and decoration of these units require significant attention. While the artwork helps to soften and bring some warmth to these otherwise austere environments, it does not address the wider issues with the fabric of the buildings. The Valentina garden is a particularly important space, providing vulnerable women with access to fresh air. However, it has been neglected for many years and remains in poor condition, despite some early and welcome efforts to encourage women to grow vegetables.

The Board has received only one application (prisoners' written representations to the Board) about food during the reporting period, with prisoners generally commenting that it is satisfactory. Changes were made during the year to introduce healthier options, with mixed reviews. A recent and very thorough prison survey revealed a range of views, largely confirming what the Board has observed, which is that food is varied and plentiful and special diets are generally well catered for. This is despite operating on a very small budget of £3.12 per prisoner, per day.

A Board focus on bio-cleans of cells during the year found that not all prisoners had received recent training and that, in some cases, they were not provided with the appropriate equipment, cleaning products or protective clothing needed to carry out the task safely. However, much of this has now been addressed, and prisoners report feeling more confident and secure in undertaking this role.

5.2 Segregation

The CSU has continued to be monitored as a core area by the Board on a weekly basis. The Board notes that the unit has accommodated a high number of individuals with complex needs throughout the year, including those awaiting transfer to alternative accommodation outside of the prison. Some of these individuals were sectioned under the Mental Health Act on release.

The Board has observed positive interactions between staff and prisoners and compassionate and trauma-informed care, often in very challenging circumstances. Staffing levels on the unit, particularly over the weekends, remain a concern, as several individuals require unlocking by multiple officers, which can have an impact on the overall regime.

Adjudications and reviews observed by the Board have been conducted fairly and appropriately. The Board checks the progression plans for prisoners on the CSU; these show a pro-active approach to moving individuals off the unit as soon as it is safe to do so. The defensible decision log is also checked by Board members when it has been necessary to use the unit to house a prisoner for health reasons.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key work

The Board has observed that, for the majority of prisoners and staff, relationships were mutually respectful and appropriately friendly. Changes to the wing regime have been generally well received, as reported to Board members, with many prisoners joining in new activities during the evenings and weekends.

The meetings at which prisoners' views are sought (community council, equality meetings and the incentives scheme forum, for example) have been sporadic or non-existent. There have been several smaller opportunities for prisoner voice – contributions to canteen, education and workplace options, some of the protected characteristic meetings (notably race), but the Board believes that more consistency and creativity is needed to provide opportunities for the prisoners to feel listened to.

Key work has regularly been cancelled, often due to staff being called to undertake other, unforeseen duties, and it hasn't been possible for the Board to monitor its quality or effectiveness.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Since the appointment of a data analyst, the Board has been provided with extensive data relating to equality, even though the equality meetings have been rare during the year. The data shows that 23% of prisoners disclose a disability at reception and around 18% are from the minority ethnic group. Disabled prisoners are over-represented at adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules) and 73% of damage to property is carried out by prisoners identifying as disabled. Potential reasons for this are being explored by the prison. Although young prisoners (18-25 years old) make up less than 5% of the population, they account for a disproportionate number of self-harm, use of force and adjudication incidents. A total of 48% of adjudications for this age group are linked to violence, assaults and fighting. The Board has witnessed how the young adult hub provides a supportive environment for younger prisoners and is highly valued by them.

Foreign national prisoners make up almost 10% of the population. They have a dedicated officer and a peer mentor, but no support group. The prisoners can independently access information and entertainment on their laptops. Some laptop information is available in multiple languages, but as ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) classes have been cut, there are concerns about how individuals without English fluency engage. However, the Board has seen staff making significant efforts to communicate effectively and to provide care and support wherever possible.

Several prisoners have refused food during the year, sometimes as a protest but more usually due to an eating disorder and/or complex mental health issues. Generally, the Board has found food refusal logs to be completed appropriately and noted understanding and support for the prisoners' wellbeing shown by staff.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The work of the chaplaincy team has been generally observed by the Board to be effective and thoughtful. A bereavement course targeted at prisoners with any faith or none appeared to be widely appreciated by prisoners.

5.6 Incentives schemes

An updated incentives policy has still not been communicated, despite proposals and changes being explored over several years. Prisoners have suggested to the Board that incentives could be more creative and that the system for being positively rewarded is inconsistent. This is recognised by the Board, as is the attempt in the draft policy to address these issues.

5.7 Complaints

Access to complaint forms has been problematic for parts of the year on Waite wing. Board monitoring, which samples 10% of the monthly responses, shows that all complaints seem to be handled very well, in line with principles of natural justice. The responses read by the Board were in plain English, compassionate, fair and individualised. The main cause for complaint has been property, particularly on transfer to and from other establishments, when property most frequently goes missing. This is a source of deep distress for prisoners.

There has been a year-on-year rise of 23.4% in the number of complaints. A total of 458 individuals submitted Comp1 forms (ordinary complaints). However, 125 of these were submitted by seven individuals, including 34 from one prisoner alone. The number of complaints about staff continues to rise: in 2025, there were 251 complaints against staff, of which 18 were fully upheld and 54 were partially upheld. From April to December 2025, there were four complaints about the use of force, two of which were upheld.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The continuing delay in the new healthcare centre build still negatively impacts on the range and quality of healthcare provided. Both staff and prisoners are affected by the existing poor physical environment, particularly with regard to the pharmacy and storage of medicines.

Getting to and from appointments can still be adversely affected by staff shortages and the lack of escorts. However, the Board has observed prisoners benefitting from continuing closer working between the prison and healthcare providers, resulting in fewer missed appointments, despite frequent internal management changes. The management of escorts has improved, but unplanned visits to outside hospitals still present a challenge.

The Board has observed that the prison and Spectrum have worked more closely to ensure that all prisoners eligible to have 'in-possession' medication can receive it. The major impediment to achieving this appears to have been the slow installation of secure lockers by AMEY. The recently installed dental X-ray scanner has benefited prisoners, as the time taken to make an image of the full jaw has fallen from 30 minutes to three seconds.

6.2 Physical healthcare

The waiting times for prisoners to access health services, including clinicians, doctors, opticians and dentists, have improved, although there has been no podiatry provision for most of the year. The percentage of prisoners not attending appointments has also fallen, with 13.5% not attending GP appointments, 10% not attending dental appointments and approximately 9% not attending nurse-led clinics. There are several reasons for non-attendance; however, improved management and closer working between the prison and the healthcare teams have improved access to appointments.

Preventative health programmes have improved, with a range of screening taking place, including breast and cervical screening. The Board notes that the amount of public health information on prisoners' laptops is good and noticeboards in the healthcare building display useful, well-presented information.

From our observations, we believe that prisoners with serious, life-limiting and long-term conditions are well cared for. NHS best practice appears to be followed. For example, the care of a prisoner with a complex, long-term neurological condition is being managed by the social care co-ordinator as part of the relevant NHS care pathway, and planning for their future care, including a specialist placement where appropriate, has already started.

The Board has seen evidence of very good safeguarding procedures in the mother and baby unit (MBU) and of excellent support provided by staff to new mothers and their babies. When a pregnancy results in other outcomes, this team ensures the mother receives all the support she needs.

The number of formal complaints to healthcare has reduced since the introduction of the concerns clinic. This is a face-to-face monthly clinic where prisoners can discuss their concerns.

6.3 Mental health

There continues to be considerable demand for mental health support, with approximately 50% of prisoners being assessed as needing some form of intervention. All prisoners arriving at HMP Styal complete the standard NHS screening in reception, which is used to refer appropriate individuals to the mental health team. Prisoners can access the service at any point in their sentence by completing a self-referral request or by referral from a member of staff.

The Board notes that there is a multi-disciplinary approach to the care of the most seriously mentally ill prisoners, leading to a detailed care plan. Styal does not have a dedicated therapeutic space for these very ill prisoners, so they are sometimes housed on the segregation unit or on one of the wings, both of which can be very noisy and confusing places.

The mental health team supports prisoners in a number of ways, from triage, care after self-harm, psychiatric reviews and one-to-one support. A range of therapeutic approaches is available to meet an individual's needs. However the Board notes that the limited and poor accommodation restricts their offer. Prisoners have told the Board they benefit from the support provided and some have spoken very positively about individuals in the team who have helped them through challenging periods.

6.4 Social care

The number of women requiring support with their personal needs has increased, but the appointment of a healthcare assistant has still yet to be made. The one social care co-ordinator provides this support, which can include assistance with showering, mobility, eating and maintaining personal living spaces. The showers on both sides of Waite wing are difficult for a disabled prisoner to use because of a step and the lack of a handrail. The co-ordinator also ensures that funding is correct and liaises with social services and external healthcare providers as part of prisoners' overall care plans. Prisoners have spoken very positively to the Board about the support they receive.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

Wellbeing in prison is supported by improved access to the gym and library, the use of therapy dogs, and an increase in both the number and range of group activities available. Gym staff, in particular, appear to be highly proactive, with many programmes, especially evening and weekend sessions, oversubscribed. Bespoke activities are also offered to specific groups, including prisoners with mental health needs and those participating in DARs (Drug and Alcohol Recovery Services) programmes. In addition, Port Vale Football Club has been delivering Level 1 coaching courses, which have been well received by prisoners.

Prisoners spoke very enthusiastically about the introduction of a range of activities offered on Waite wing during the evening and at weekend association time. Peer mentors play an important part in planning and delivering the activities. However, there is a small number of prisoners residing on the Valentina unit who do not have access to activities off their unit.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

The Board has observed a reduction in education provision during the year, resulting in a narrower range of opportunities being available to prisoners. While efforts have been made to adapt delivery, the impact has been a reduction in the educational offer available across the prison. The provision has also adapted to reflect Ofsted inspection feedback. The loss of ESOL direct tuition has been addressed through the use of peer mentors. A significant expansion of activities has been noted in the library, which now offers a valuable quiet space for neurodivergent prisoners, with activities including crafts, jigsaws, and puzzle books. It is especially pleasing to see that all prisoners have the opportunity to access beyond the minimum defined time allocation.

7.2 Vocational training, work

The Board has observed that the prison's training provision, although reduced in scope during the year, has successfully maintained a diverse range of activities that align with prisoner preferences, local labour market insights and potential job opportunities on release. A new AQA-recognised (Assessment & Qualifications Alliance) recycling qualification has been introduced to complement existing industry-standard awards from the building and construction workshop, the hair and beauty salon and the new Marstons Academy.

Additionally, the prison provides work opportunities in the laundry, gardens and kitchens, as well as in maintenance, cleaning and orderly duties, although these roles offer fewer qualification opportunities. Despite its best efforts, the prison is still unable to offer full-time work and education to all prisoners.

The Board has also noted that the prison continues to maintain a positive and productive relationship with Starbucks. Representatives from Starbucks attend the prison several times each year to deliver engagement events and return between these sessions to interview suitable candidates for employment opportunities. Previous events have included former participants returning to speak with women in custody about their own employment journeys and successful transition into work following release.

Employment outcomes for women leaving the prison continue to perform strongly and remain above target. Current figures show that 19% of women enter employment within six weeks of release, while 38% are in employment within six months. This places the prison third across the women's estate for employment outcomes, with only two open prisons achieving higher results. (These figures exclude recalls or individuals medically unable to work.)

7.3 Offender management, progression

Remand prisoners constitute approximately one-third of the Styal prison population and share accommodation with sentenced prisoners. All remand prisoners appear to be offered work and educational opportunities. During the reporting year, efforts appear to have been made to help ensure that those on remand received the rights and privileges to which they were entitled.

A successful 'remand roadshow' was delivered in December 2025 to help improve awareness of support services for women on remand, with around 40 prisoners attending and a wide range of partner agencies involved. Prison officers were also invited to help ensure they were better informed about the entitlements and support available to women in custody.

The prison is adapting to the new 56-day recall policy, viewing it as a positive development to enable the prison to manage education and work offerings and preparations for release. However, some recalls are still shorter due to limitations in holding prisoners beyond their sentencing dates.

Recall levels remain high, with 768 prisoners recalled during the year, although this figure includes repeat recalls. The reasons for recall are complex, but the Board understands that this is principally due to non-compliance with post-release conditions. An external academic project evaluating the effectiveness of a recall co-ordinator role has provided support for expanding the role more widely in the future. Partnership working has continued to strengthen through the hosting of the Lancashire Justice Board, bringing professionals and prisoners from Styal together to discuss issues affecting women in custody and the community.

7.4 Family contact

The Board has noted a significant and positive expansion of activities under the RRO's (reducing reoffending team) engagement with the PACT charity and the management of the Action for Children nursery. As of March 2026, PACT is supporting 50 prisoners. Between January and February 2026, Storybook Mums sessions (which enables mothers to record themselves reading stories for their children) were attended by 15 participants. During this period, PACT facilitated support for 733 adults and 123 children attending prison social visits and managed 256 prison-related queries. A total of 328 social video calls were also conducted. Family engagement activities included children's visits and 'family connect' sessions held in January and March 2026.

New support initiatives have also been introduced, including the 'still a mum' group for prisoners who have experienced permanent child removal from their care, alongside ongoing monthly community links visits that continue to support isolated prisoners and strengthen social connections. Attendance at these monthly visits has improved, with an average of around 15 prisoners attending each session..

A family forum was held in February, along with two 'coming home sessions, one 'building stronger relationships' session, and two safeguarding courses for staff during the reporting period. Free food bags have been introduced for children attending visits during school holidays.

The prison also secured £60,000 of violence reduction funding from Lancashire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester to help strengthen support around families, safeguarding, neurodiversity and resettlement. Planned developments include a new social video suite and improved family facilities in the visits hall.

7.5 Resettlement planning

The Board has observed the weekly multi-disciplinary pre-release boards, which support and prepare women for release by continuing to assist them with all key requirements, including Department for Work and Pension applications, accommodation, employment, DARS, and Reconnect services for women who do not have a GP.

Reconnect supports prisoners with identified health needs as they transition back into the community. The service works with individuals prior to release to ensure continuity of care and referral into appropriate community health services. Assessments and referrals are completed in custody, with community Reconnect teams making contact following release to provide ongoing support. However reduced staff capacity within Reconnect Cheshire support at the prison, due to a second worker awaiting approval and training,

impacted service delivery. As of March 2026, there were 20 active Reconnect cases in Styal.

The loss of the accommodation specialist in March 2026 led to some challenges, although a replacement is due to be in post at the beginning of June 2026. The figures for sustainable accommodation on 'day 1' post-release have also been impacted by some women not taking up the accommodation arranged for them, and further work is clearly needed to address this.

The average year-to-date proportion of prisoners housed on their first night after release is 86%, against a target of 90%. The number of prisoners leaving with no fixed abode has stabilised over the reporting year. However, concerns remain about the availability of appropriate support for vulnerable women on release, particularly for those travelling via Manchester, where there is a risk of disengagement from community support services and a return to previous harmful behaviours.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting year	12
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting year	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	338

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year	% change
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	12	6	-50%
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	4	3	-25%
C	Equality	1	3	200%
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	8	2	-75%
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	4	13	225%
E2	Finance, including pay, private money	2	5	150%
F	Food and kitchens	20	1	-95%
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	7	10	43%
H1	Property within the establishment	2	9	350%
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	11	1	-91%

H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	5	2	-60%
I	Sentence management, including parole, release, recategorisation	1	10	900%
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	6	12	100%
K	Transfers	12	0	-100%
L	Miscellaneous	4	14	250%
	Total number of applications	99	91	-8%



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