



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Stanford Hill

**For reporting year
1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026**

Published September 2026



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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.

The independence of Independent Monitoring Boards is sacrosanct. In the year under review the central IMB Secretariat tried to change the nature of boards and direct how they monitor. The only bodies legally authorised to monitor UK prisons are local IMBs and when the changes were rejected by local boards, despite efforts to impose them, these proposals were abandoned. Local Boards cannot be instructed how to monitor their prison, and this must be supported by the Ministry of Justice.

2. Description of the establishment¹

Standford Hill is one of a group of three prisons near Leysdown in Kent. Two prisons adjoin it: HMP Swaleside (a category B training prison) and HMP Elmley (a category B local prison). It is situated on 300 acres of farmland and was originally a Royal Air Force camp in the Second World War.

Standford Hill is an open prison and classified as a category D prison and Young Offender Institution. It provides accommodation for 464 male prisoners who have been categorised as suitable to be held in open conditions. Each prisoner has their own cell in one of three blocks. Block A usually accommodates new prisoners, while more established prisoners occupy Block B. Most of the occupants of Block C work outside the prison and return to sleep; their work hours are often flexible and they may work through the night.

Accommodation is provided across three units: A wing, B wing and C wing. A and B wings each accommodate up to 192 prisoners and are arranged over three landings, with four spurs on each landing. C wing consists of 80 individual residential pods, providing single-occupancy accommodation.

A and B wings each have their own servery. Where space permits, prisoners can either eat meals in their rooms or dine communally at tables provided on the ground floor. Several microwave ovens are also available in each wing, enabling prisoners to prepare and cook their own food. C wing also has a servery, with meals taken back to prisoners' individual pods.

The main priority of HMP/YOI Stanford Hill is the resettlement of prisoners and enabling them to avoid reoffending on release. This includes education, training, employment, and preparation for resettlement.

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.

3. Key points

Background to the report

From the Board's observations, Stanford Hill is a well-run prison with a committed, professional and well-lead senior management team. Despite this, the prison's potential and performance have been affected by factors beyond its control, in the Board's view. This is starting to affect the metrics on which the prison is assessed (see section 7.5), which presents an additional challenge for the management team.

Prison population

We wrote last year, and we will continue this year, to outline the impact of the response to the prison population crisis. This has impacted all areas of the prison and will be mentioned throughout this report, for which we make no apology.

In the short-term, internal changes were made to introduce the Temporary Presumptive Recategorisation Scheme (TPRS). Under this scheme, prisoners with limited time remaining on their sentence are automatically deemed suitable for transfer to category D 'open' prisons. In the Board's view, this has resulted in some prisoners being transferred to open conditions who are not always well suited to that environment.

These prisoners are often not ready for, or committed to, rehabilitation. This is very damaging for a prison such as Stanford Hill. In the Board's view, the extensive support offered and available is not used to its maximum and this is a waste of public money. For many prisoners, Stanford Hill appears to be a holding facility, which is not its role.

This has affected the atmosphere within the prison and is reflected in an increase in finds of illicit drugs, mobile phones and other unauthorised items. The Board believes that, as a result, the prison is less safe than it has been previously. During the reporting year, there was a minor incident involving staff and a prisoner, which is highly unusual at Stanford Hill.

In addition to this, the Government has introduced significant sentencing changes that have resulted in a great deal of work for the offender management unit (OMU) in reviewing sentences and release periods. Regular releases of large numbers of prisoners, due to this, appear to destabilise the prison and mean that the prison population has been at 90% or usually less for the whole of the reporting year. In the Board's view, this is a very inefficient use of the prison's rehabilitation facilities.

Many prisoners are now sent to Stanford Hill for very short periods of even a few weeks. This means that a specialist rehabilitation and resettlement prison is effectively being used as a short-term holding facility. In the Board's view, this undermines its ability to fulfil its intended role.

While the Board understand that these changes were a response to the prison population crisis, we believe that this has destabilised all category D prisons in general, and Stanford Hill in particular, for two years.

In the Board's view, it is essential that the prison has greater stability, with prisoners who can benefit for being there and make full use of the opportunities and facilities available.

Education

From the Board's observations, the education service within the prison has been very good over some years and has been recognised as one of the best performing prisons in the country.

In the reporting year, education provision at Standford Hill was reduced by over 40%. This has happened to varying degrees in every prison in the country. This appears to be a response to wider pressures on service provision.

From the Board's observations, the effect at Standford Hill has been dramatic and very damaging. Employees have been made redundant and the curriculum has been drastically curtailed to a focus on the basics, meaning that valuable areas such as art have been discontinued. In a prison focused on rehabilitation, this is very damaging, in the Board's view.

The response of the education department been commendable, in the Board's view, and they have worked valiantly to provide the best service possible. The prison has allocated discretionary resources to try to fund art, although this has been difficult, as the previous teacher had his contract terminated. The energy shown, despite the demotivating effect of the changes, appears exceptional.

It is completely reasonable to reduce public expenditure when required. However, when this issue was challenged by the IMB nationally, the Prison Service refused to accept that the changes were a budgetary exercise. This explanation has not been accepted by the local or national IMB.

Other issues

In the Board's view, telephony at the prison is inadequate. A trial of simple PIN phones has been successful, and we await its implementation at Standford Hill. We are concerned about post report date suggestions that a trial of another option is being considered. The service is inadequate and has been for a long time. The solution is available and should be implemented immediately.

We have mentioned on several occasions that release on temporary licence (ROTL) and work checks take an inordinate amount of time. There are simple mobile phone-based applications used by the Probation Service that are very cost effective.

In the Board's view, these applications should be considered for implementation.

The shop trialled at Standford Hill has been successful, despite teething problems. The Board believes that this should be extended nationwide, as long as appropriately trained staff are running the service.

Summary

Standford Hill is a very well run and effective prison. Reversion to a stable population, with prisoners suitable for it, is an urgent requirement.

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- From the Board's observations, the prison is generally safe, although it is not as safe as it had been previously. A more stable population would improve the situation.

Fair and humane treatment

- The prison regime appears fair, with all groups tending to be treated with respect.

Health and wellbeing

- Healthcare services have improved over recent years, and this has continued into the reporting year.

Progression and resettlement

- Many prisoners make good progress towards resettlement, with exceptionally high levels of working outside the prison. A substantial minority do not, either because they are not fully committed to rehabilitation or they spend too little time at the prison to be able to benefit fully from the opportunities available.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The sentencing changes introduced are recognised as important in enabling the prison population to operate within capacity. However, in the Board's view, they have had a destabilising effect on category D prisons. Further changes that increase instability risk undermining the ability of these establishments to carry out their vital rehabilitative and resettlement functions. A return to greater stability within the prison population is therefore essential. What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of these changes on category D prisons, what steps are you taking to restore and maintain stability within the category D estate, and how will you ensure that future policy changes do not further compromise the ability of these prisons to prepare prisoners for release and reduce reoffending?
- Short placements and the Temporary Presumptive Recategorisation Scheme (TPRS) have had a detrimental impact on the effective functioning of the prison, and greater stability is urgently required. When will the Prison Service draw the impact of these measures to Ministers' attention, and what steps will be taken to restore stability and ensure that category D prisons can fulfil their rehabilitative and resettlement role?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- When will the Prison Service reconsider the reduction in education provision as a matter of urgency? This has led to a significant and unacceptable reduction in the range of educational opportunities and interventions available to prisoners, which is damaging the prison's rehabilitative function.
- Short placements and the Temporary Presumptive Recategorisation Scheme (TPRS) have had a detrimental impact on the effective functioning of the

prison, and greater stability is urgently required. When will the Prison Service draw the impact of these measures to Ministers' attention, and what steps will be taken to restore stability and ensure that category D prisons can fulfil their rehabilitative and resettlement role?

- Greater use should be made of electronic monitoring systems to improve efficiency and ensure the best use of public funds. Cost-effective solutions are already used successfully within community probation and could offer similar benefits in the prison setting. What assessment has the Prisoner Service made of the potential for wider use of electronic monitoring to support prison operations, and are there any plans to introduce such systems more broadly?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Following the successful trial of PIN mobile phones at HMP Leyhill, what plans does the Prison Service have to roll out this technology more widely across the prison estate, and when is implementation expected?
- Body-worn video cameras are still not worn routinely, and wing officers are too often observed in wing offices rather than on the wings. What steps will the Prison Service take to ensure the consistent use of body worn video cameras and increase staff visibility and engagement on the wings?

3.3 Progress since the last report

Issue raised	Progress
GFSL [Government Facility Services Limited] and the condition of buildings.	A general improvement and a new OMU building progressed.
Impact of changing population.	We have made it clear that the situation has worsened. This is a major issue that needs addressing so that the prison can return to stability and focus on its key role of rehabilitation.
Laundry	Repairs are done on a more regular basis and several new machines have been purchased. The service has improved significantly.
Scanning equipment	No additional equipment installed.
Mobile phones	Trial at HMP Leyhill completed and we anticipate that these phones will be available in 2026-2027.
Technology for monitoring prisoners on release on temporary licence (ROTL) and working outside the prison.	The Prison Service shows no interest in this despite the efficiency benefits it will bring. These will bring significant efficiency savings and should be implemented.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

We have commented in previous reports on the inadequate size of the reception area, particularly given the increase in arrivals and departures in recent years. Realistically, this will not be addressed until the prison expansion programme is completed. As it stands, the area remains insufficient for operational demands.

The limited storage provision is currently manageable because the prison has consistently operated below capacity. However, when it reaches full occupancy, storage space will be inadequate until the expansion project is completed.

The induction process appears to be very comprehensive. The screening carried out by healthcare staff is of a high standard and helps ensure that newly arrived prisoners have their health needs identified and appropriately. This is particularly important given the level of churn (frequent arrivals, transfers and releases) in the prison population (see 5.1).

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

In the period under review there were no deaths in custody.

We have previously noted the improvement in provision for mental health with the introduction a neurodiversity support manager (NSM). This role co-ordinates support for prisoners both on an individual and a group basis, helping to identify vulnerabilities at an early stage.

The weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM) identifies prisoners who may be at risk or in need of additional support. Appropriate interventions can then be put in place and monitored. Together, these arrangements contribute to the prison's efforts to support vulnerable prisoners and reduce the risk of self-harm and other serious incidents.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Plans to suppress violence are based on intelligence gathered and received, which is then analysed by the security department.

The prison's approach is to prevent violence and self-isolation through the effective use of intelligence. Information about disruptive prisoners is shared and action plans are put in place.

This is not always successful, and there have been cases of intimidation and 'cuckooing', where vulnerable prisoners are exploited to facilitate illegal activities within the prison.

Prisoners are given the opportunity to explain their actions if they engage in illegal activities, and some leniency may be shown. However, continued breaches result in a return to closed conditions. There has been a steady increase in such returns in recent years, reflecting changes in the prison population.

During the year under review, there was one violent incident. This is unprecedented and reflects the increasing number of prisoners who may not be suitable for category

D conditions due to population pressures across the prison estate. The Board believes that greater population stability is needed to ensure that only appropriate prisoners are allocated to the prison.

From the Board's observations, night supervision remains inadequate because of staffing levels. In the event of an emergency, additional staff would need to be called in.

4.4 Use of force

Use of force is limited. However, prisoners being returned to closed conditions may be held in a barred cell pending their transfer.

Use of body worn video cameras (BWVCs) is required during any potentially violent incident.

4.5 Preventing Illicit Items

Finds of illicit items are increasing. A range of drugs and mobile phones are discovered in regular, intelligence-led searches. This appears to be a direct consequence of the population changes resulting from recent policy and statutory developments.

In the Board's view, the lack of physical boundaries clearly does not help. Additional scanning equipment would help, but its impact is likely to be limited given the constant movement of prisoners in and out of the establishment. A return to a more stable population would improve the situation.

Drug use appears to be widespread in the outside community and continues within prisons. In the Board's view, the prison provides significant support for those experiencing substance misuse issues. However, for many prisoners, drug use is recreational and therefore much more difficult to address.

Mobile phone use remains widespread and, despite targeted and random searches, shows no sign of reducing. The Board believes that the introduction of PIN mobile phones would help but would not prevent the use of illicit phones for illegal purposes.

Prisoners found in possession of illicit items are returned to closed conditions. The prison follows a thorough, intelligence-led approach and has made multiple finds as a result. Despite the persistent nature of the problem, the prison remains focused on reducing the availability of illicit items.

During the reporting year, 123 prisoners were returned to closed conditions, compared with 94 in the previous year.

5 Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Background

C wing provides superior accommodation in self-contained pods, each with an integrated bathroom. This accommodation is more modern and attractive, and most prisoners housed there work outside the prison, many on night shifts.

The two main wings, A and B, are much older and comprise three-storey accommodation with individual cells for each prisoner. They do not have en-suite facilities.

None of the cells has in-cell telephony.

Accommodation

As noted above, the rooms do not contain washing or toilet facilities, nor is there any form of telephony within individual rooms. Many prisoners report that the conditions are less favourable than in the prisons from which they transferred.

Standford Hill is a prison that is showing its age. It celebrated its 75th anniversary this year, and several areas of the prison are no longer in good condition.

We regularly inspect the toilets and showers in the two older accommodation blocks. These are maintained in a reasonable condition but, inevitably in an older prison, the facilities would benefit from modernisation and improvement.

Some work to brighten the wings has been undertaken through the art class, which has improved the environment. The introduction of the pods has also been a positive step in the modernisation of the prison, replacing the ageing and cramped C Block, which was demolished several years ago.

The pods are often the most suitable accommodation for seriously ill prisoners. However, they are not wheelchair-accessible and are therefore not suitable for all disabled prisoners.

Adjusting to an open prison environment can be challenging for those who have been incarcerated for long periods. More recently, however, the main issue has been the number of prisoners transferred to the prison for relatively short periods. This reduces the prison's effectiveness in achieving its rehabilitative aims.

Most prisoners adapt well to the open environment, but some are returned to closed conditions because they are unable to do so.

We have referred in previous reports to the significant plans for the expansion of the prison and do not need to repeat them here. A new contractor has now been appointed, and we understand that the scheme is expected to commence shortly.

Several buildings on the site have been affected by subsidence, and work is underway to address the associated issues. Progress, however, has not been as timely or efficient as might have been hoped.

Laundry

In recent years, the provision of laundry facilities has been consistently inadequate. This issue has now been addressed, and the situation has improved significantly.

Population mix in the prison

Changes to the prison population have been significant in recent years. Following the change in government in 2024, substantial measures were introduced to address the population pressures facing the prison system.

In the Board's view, recent sentencing and population management changes have significantly destabilised open prisons. Prisoners who are not always suitable for category D conditions have been transferred to them, while too many others have been held there for only short periods, limiting the scope for meaningful rehabilitative work. This has been the case at Standford Hill.

As a result of these population changes, general behaviour appears to have deteriorated, while the availability of illicit items and substances has increased. Unless the situation improves, the effectiveness of the open prison model may be called into question.

Discussions with officers suggest an awareness of a more challenging atmosphere within the prison. However, aside from one violent incident, there have been no significant manifestations of violence or insubordination at Standford Hill.

The Board commends staff for the way they have adapted their management approach to accommodate the changing prisoner profile and the increased tensions within the prison.

The high level of prisoner churn meant that, during the year under review, around 1,200 different men passed through the prison, despite an average population of approximately 400 against a capacity of 464.

Food

Food is supplied by HMP Swaleside and will continue to be until the prison expansion is completed and a new, on-site kitchen is operational.

In the Board's view, the food provided is acceptable.

Prisoners have access to microwaves and air fryers to prepare food. This is complemented by the shop being trialled at the prison. The shop has generally been successful, and it is anticipated that this model will be rolled out more widely. If so, it will be important to ensure that staff have appropriate retail experience or training.

A few months ago, the Board suggested improvements to both the range of food available and the breakfast arrangements. These were trialled promptly and appear to have resulted in an improved breakfast offering.

Shop

The establishment of a shop next to the laundry has been a significant development, in the Board's view. An extensive range of items are stocked, including toiletries, food and confectionery. From our observations, the prisoners appreciate the facility and the choice it gives them.

The shop continues to evolve, with modifications being made to the premises alongside the introduction of new management systems and supervisory arrangements.

Prison management appears to have learned valuable lessons during the first 18 months of operation. The introduction of the shop has been a bold and worthwhile initiative and one that may well be replicated across other prisons.

5.2 Segregation

There is no segregation unit at Standford Hill. A cell with bars is used for those awaiting return to closed conditions.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

From our observations, there is generally a positive atmosphere in the prison and prison officers and Board members are treated with respect.

Despite the deterioration in behaviour by a minority of prisoners, the officers have managed this well and appear to have prevented wider issues arising.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The ethnic composition of the prison population is detailed in Annex B.

There is a clear structure in place to address equality and diversity, with defined responsibilities assigned to nominated senior managers.

The Board has seen no evidence of significant racial issues within the prison.

Staff consult regularly with prisoners on equality and diversity matters through monthly protected characteristics meetings and additional forums focusing on specific aspects of diversity where required.

At the time of writing the report, there are no transgender prisoners at Standford Hill. However, on previous occasions when transgender prisoners have formed part of the population, the Board believes that the prison has managed their integration smoothly and effectively.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

As in society more generally, Standford Hill has a multi-faith population. This is reflected in the appointment of a Muslim Managing Chaplain.

There is a broad range of provision for all major faith groups, as well as some smaller denominations. Indeed, until recently it was provision for Church of England (CoE) prisoners that had been inadequate.

We are pleased to report that all major Christian denominations now have access to dedicated and appropriately qualified support.

5.6 Incentives schemes

No issues have been raised with the Board in relation to this.

5.7 Complaints

There is a clear complaints procedure within the prison. Although some prisoners feel that complaints can take too long to resolve, this may reflect the fact that certain issues require time to investigate and address properly. In the Board's view, the process is managed appropriately.

Prisoners are made aware that they may speak to IMB members at any time. They can also submit formal applications to the IMB. We take all applications seriously and aim to respond promptly, while assisting prisoners in addressing any concerns they wish to raise with us.

5.8 Property

Problems relating to the transfer are property are perennial.

While the Board encourages prisoners to prioritise official channels to trace missing property, it is occasionally necessary to investigate more complex cases. Where appropriate, we assist prisoners in escalating their concerns and pursuing a resolution.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

In the Board's view, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of healthcare services at Stanford Hill in the last few years. We previously received regular applications (prisoners' written representations) concerning delays in accessing doctors and dentists, as well as concerns about treatment. Such complaints have become far less frequent over the last few years, indicating a marked improvement in the service provided.

The transfer of healthcare management to Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust in 2022 has been a catalyst for significant improvements in patient satisfaction and communication about healthcare services and challenges. The current healthcare management team appears to be open and transparent about the issues it faces and is committed to providing the best possible service, despite the pressures of prison life, separation from family and the ongoing challenge of securing adequate resources.

No modern prison can function effectively without a competent and committed healthcare service. At Stanford Hill, the range of healthcare provision has expanded steadily over recent years, bringing with it increased expectations and demand.

One area that has received significantly greater attention in recent years is neurodiversity. Neurodiverse conditions are now better recognised and understood. Behaviour that may previously have been viewed as disruptive or unco-operative is now more likely to be understood in the context of an individual's neurodiverse needs. Stanford Hill has a neurodiversity Support manager (NSM), whose role is to enhance support for neurodiverse prisoners and promote greater inclusivity across the prison.

The initial screening of new arrivals continues as one of the key tasks that the healthcare department delivers. In the Board's view, the thoroughness of this health induction has proved very valuable in discovering and tracking some hitherto undiagnosed health conditions.

The provision of healthcare in the prison is delivered primarily through nurse-led clinics, supplemented by specialist services to meet a range of primary healthcare needs. GP services are provided by Prisons in Kent GPs, ensuring continuity of care. There are three GP sessions each week, and the feedback from this year's prisoner survey suggests that prisoners are generally satisfied with the range of medical services and the timeliness of appointments.

There is also a GP pharmacist available once a week for medication reviews. Each month, the lead GP and GP pharmacist run a joint review for patients with complex health needs.

The NHS dental service operates two days each week, and an NHS optician service operates one day each month.

Other specialists are covered, including a psychologist and a counsellor, who are available one day each week. A psychiatrist attends on one day each month.

6.2 Physical healthcare

In last year's report, we noted the Quality Improvement Project, introduced in June 2024 as an incentive scheme to reduce the number of missed appointments. The head of healthcare has reported to the Board that it has been highly successful, with a marked improvement in attendance rates for healthcare appointments.

6.3 Mental health

The main concern highlighted in our discussions with the head of healthcare was the difficulty in recruiting a dedicated mental health nurse. It is clear to the Board that the prison takes the management of prisoners' mental health very seriously, but the absence of a nurse with specialist mental health training limits its ability to provide the level of support it would wish.

At the time of compiling the report, the post had been vacant for several months and represented one of the most significant challenges facing the healthcare team. The inability to recruit a specialist mental health nurse inevitably impacts the delivery of this service. The extent to which support is ultimately provided depends on an individual's willingness to engage with mental health services. However, where there is a risk of self-harm or suicide, referral is mandatory.

In normal circumstances, a psychological assessment is undertaken during a prisoner's first few days in custody as part of the health-screening process.

In addition to the mental health assessment carried out on arrival in reception, prisoners undergo a broader health and wellbeing screening. This assesses their emotional wellbeing, any history of self-referral, observations made by prison staff, previous treatments received, and any relevant referral history.

Information sharing and joint management between departments appears to be used to manage care.

Safeguarding intervention meetings take place weekly and look at plans to support prisoners with issues. We have been able to observe these meetings and were impressed by the quality of the interaction and the depth of plans made to support vulnerable prisoners.

Additional support is provided by Listeners, prisoners trained by The Samaritans to offer confidential and emotional support to their peers.

There is also a 'managing stress and change' group, which meets once a week. This is a supportive, often peer-led environment that encourages openness and facilitates action plans to obtain support where necessary.

6.4 Social care

Please refer to section 7 of the report.

6.5 Exercise, regime

The prison has a good, well-equipped gym. However, like much of the rest of the prison estate, it is ageing and showing signs of wear and deterioration. There is a full-size grass football pitch near the gym, and the sports hall provides facilities for football, badminton and basketball. The extensive grounds also provide opportunities for walking, which supports both physical and mental wellbeing.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Please refer to section 7.4.

6.7 Soft skills

We have observed prison staff interacting well with prisoners and this helps to create a supportive environment. Regular support and interventions in the wing observation books are evident when we regularly review these.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

The main comment on education outcomes at Stanford Hill in 2025-2026 is that this was a year of unrealised potential. At the start of the year, the department was well placed to continue the very strong performance achieved previously. However, the impact of the Prison Service's decision to allocate 43% of the education budget to IT, leaving 57% for teaching provision, had a significant effect on the ability of the department to plan and deliver courses. These allocations varied across the prison estate, and Stanford Hill was particularly affected.

It was necessary to reduce the staff by four part-time teachers and one full-time manager. Consequently, fewer courses could be offered. Among those affected was the art programme, which had been very successful and had led to a number of Koestler Awards and helping several prisoners with their mental health.

In addition, the Independent Sentencing Review led to an increase in the number of prisoners arriving at Stanford Hill who did not meet the traditional profile for a category D prison. As a result, courses had to be adapted to meet a wider range of needs and often took longer to deliver, reducing the number that could be offered. Despite these challenges, the remaining teaching staff performed well, in the Board's view, and maintained a high standard of achievement. This was reflected in Milton Keynes College's assessment that Stanford Hill achieved the best results of any prison in its Kent, Sussex and Surrey group.

The reductions in education provision introduced during the year were made, in our opinion, without any thought to the consequences. Education is central to rehabilitation, and the service has been significantly degraded. This adversely affects the focus on rehabilitation within the prison.

7.2 Vocational training, work

We have written at length in previous reports about the success of the Working Out scheme (WOS). This facilitates training and outside work for prisoners. An employment report with relevant statistics is included in Annex B.

After clearance from the Risk Board, prisoners need to engage with WOS. Failure to do so will prevent prompt access to the release on temporary licence (ROTL) scheme, where prisoners are allowed to go home overnight for short periods during their sentence.

Due to the proactive actions of the WOS, a full range of opportunities to work outside are available. Despite a minor increase in the level of self-sourced work, the level of self-sourced work is disappointing. Many prisoners believe it is up to WOS to find them a job, but this will not be the situation when they are released into the wider job market. On release, prisoners will have to be proactive in finding work. Despite this, the fact that opportunities sourced by WOS are available means that those who want to work can do so.

The work of WOS has not been helped by the low roll numbers and turnover of prisoners during the year. This related to the revisions made to sentences by the government to deal with over-capacity within the prison system. These have clearly placed substantial extra pressures on open prisons.

Prisoners may now be transferred to open prisons under the temporary presumptive re-categorisation scheme (TPRS) once they reach a certain stage of their sentence. However, some are less committed to rehabilitation and are therefore less likely to engage actively with the Working Out Scheme.

Many prisoners are transferred to the prison for relatively short periods, limiting their opportunities to engage in meaningful rehabilitation. In addition, recategorization decisions can result in prisoners being released sooner than anticipated. This can be frustrating for employers who have invested time and effort in training them. It is hoped that a more stable prisoner population can be achieved in the future.

It is worth noting that, in the Board's view, some prisoners are now far more demanding of what the prison should provide and can display a greater sense of entitlement. Managing these expectations can be challenging for staff. Support services across the prison appear to work hard to help prisoners make the most of their time at Standford Hill, and prisoners should recognise the opportunities available to them. Successful engagement with the Working Out Scheme requires the same commitment and personal responsibility that will be needed to secure and sustain employment on release.

Despite all these issues, the WOS appears to have performed extremely well, significantly increasing the number of prisoners working out each day. Despite a dip in 2024-2025 to an average of 50, the figures have steadily increased this year and in March 2026 this reached 111 men. This is positive, given the issues we have referenced above.

During the reporting year, the proactive efforts of staff brought additional major employers into the Working Out Scheme, providing prisoners with valuable employment opportunities both during custody and after release. These include a national waste management company providing services to a number of local authorities. The scheme has also established a partnership with a major national supermarket chain. By the end of the reporting year, 13 prisoners were working for the company and, to date, three have secured employment with it following release. The Working Out Scheme continues to seek opportunities to engage new employers.

Substantial training opportunities are available, where qualifications can be obtained in skills, including:

- Bricklaying
- Plumbing
- Carpentry
- Electrics
- Railtrack, including CSCS (construction skills certification scheme card) cards (widely used in the UK construction industry to demonstrate that a worker has the appropriate training, qualifications and health and safety knowledge for working on construction sites).
- Tattooing

In the coming year, a job club is to start, in conjunction with the Department of Work and Pensions. The mission statement of this engagement is 'from unemployed to hired'. The overall provision appears to be extensive, both in training and employment, and it offers prisoners the opportunity to enhance their skills and obtain employment on release.

In previous years, we have recommended the adoption of available technological solutions to help ensure that prisoners are where they are expected to be when outside the prison. The Working Out Scheme is required to conduct 30 checks each month, a task that occupies the equivalent of one member of staff for approximately three days. Remote monitoring technology is available and could reduce this burden, but despite repeated recommendations, this option has not been adopted.

Community-based probation uses an inexpensive mobile phone application for this purpose and the Board believes this should be implemented within the prison.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The offender management unit (OMU) is an integral part of the effective management of any prison. Its role is particularly important in an open prison, where prisoners may spend periods outside the establishment on licence and therefore require careful oversight and risk management.

The key role of the OMU is to ensure that the correct sentence is served. This is an important task that, in general, is performed well, in our view. However, factors outside the control of the OMU have made that task more difficult in recent years. The population crisis within the prison system has resulted in significant short- and long-term changes to sentences being implemented. Each time these changes are implemented results in a re-calculation exercise that must be carried out by the OMU, in addition to their other, ongoing responsibilities. We have noted elsewhere that stability is desperately needed in the prison population, but we believe this constant change prevents the OMU from having the time necessary to focus on its key role

Within an open prison, the OMU also undertakes the work necessary to enable prisoners to be released on temporary licence, whether for home leave or participation in the Working Out Scheme. It is essential that all relevant stakeholders are involved to ensure that prisoners are released only when it is safe and appropriate to do so. Delays within the external probation service can add to what is already a complex process. While issues affecting community probation services fall outside the scope of this report, they have clear implications for the work of the OMU within the prison

Although the Board receives complaints from prisoners about the OMU, this is invariably about a lack of understanding of the issues faced by the unit in coming to decisions on when prisoners can be released into the community for work or family contact. We do feel that expectations of many prisoners on release for family contact are not correct. They often expect this to happen immediately: this has never been the case, and prisoners cannot be released until all checks are completed. As we have stated, this can be time-consuming.

During the reporting year, the previously unsatisfactory working conditions were improved through the addition of new temporary buildings. However, in the Board's view, this improvement took too long to deliver, and a number of connectivity issues still had to be resolved following installation. This is consistent with the concerns we have previously raised regarding the management of the prison estate

7.4 Family contact

Reintegration into family life is a key objective of Category D prisons. This is primarily supported through the granting of temporary release licences, which allow eligible prisoners to leave the prison for approved periods to spend time with their families and maintain important family relationships.

This is not an entitlement; it is a privilege granted to prisoners who demonstrate compliance with prison rules and engagement in purposeful activities. Before any licence is approved, extensive risk assessments and background checks are undertaken to ensure that the prisoner can safely return to the community and spend time with their family.

Licences are issued under the Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) scheme. Initially, these are granted for day visits, with regular overnight stays, usually at weekends, authorised as prisoners progress. Visits may be subject to random checks, and ROTL can be suspended if prisoners breach licence conditions, such as returning late or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

In the Board's view, the provision of telephony for maintaining family contact is inadequate, and we have raised this issue with the Governor on several occasions. We are pleased that HMP Leyhill has trialled the use of PIN mobile phones with pre-programmed numbers. We understand that the trial was successful and that the phones are to be rolled out across the open estate over the summer. This is long overdue and very welcome.

Regular family visits take place and there is generally sufficient availability to help support ongoing contact between prisoners and their families.

We understand that, on rare occasions, however, visits are misused and inappropriate behaviour occurs. When this happens, prisoners may face restrictions, including the possibility of being returned to closed conditions.

Family visits are supplemented by regular family days, where a range of events are provided for prisoners and their families. These activities help create a structured and relaxed environment and help family bonding.

It is also worth highlighting the work done within the prison to address substance abuse and support recovery from addiction. Together with the excellent neurodiversity programme, this ensures that prisoners have access to the help they need to address issues that can affect family life on release.

In the Board's view, the overall provision for family reunion and rehabilitation is very good.

7.5 Resettlement planning

From our observations, prisoners receive substantial support to help ensure that they are ready to reintegrate into the community and that they have the tools to do so. This support can be summarised under the headings of accommodation, documentation, finance, and assistance with getting into work.

Most fundamentally, prisoners need suitable accommodation on release. While many return to live with family members, the prison works to secure accommodation for those unable to do so. The two key types of accommodation are:

- CAS3: paid by the Ministry of justice (MoJ), this provides up to 84 days in approved premises.
- CAS2: provides accommodation for prisoners released on home detention curfew (HDC) for the duration of their curfew period, up to one year.

This provision gives prisoners the opportunity to obtain longer-term accommodation.

The process is driven by the Probation Service, but staff at the prison follow this up to ensure that accommodation is obtained. In the Board's view, this service is excellent and in the year under review we understand that no prisoners left the prison without accommodation.

It is easy to take for granted the documentation needed for everyday life, but this is not always available to prisoners on release. The prison provides support to those who lack these essential documents, helping them to obtain items such as birth certificates, driving licences and bank accounts.

Opening a bank account can be particularly challenging for individuals convicted of fraud-related offences. Nevertheless, during the period under review, all prisoners were released with a bank account in place.

Although considerable effort is devoted to training and employment opportunities, many prisoners also require access to the benefits and financial support available on release. To assist with this, a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) employee is seconded to the prison, helping to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place before release. This support covers benefit claims, pensions and personal independence payments (PIP). It also includes comprehensive screening to identify individual needs and any employment restrictions that may apply, including safeguarding considerations and risks associated with particular types of work.

Appointments are booked for the day after release to get an advance payment, and this can be anywhere in the country. If prisoners are deemed vulnerable, they can get an advance directly from the prison. These advances are recovered over two years. This provision helps ensure that prisoners have essential financial facilities on release.

In addition to all the work-related activity under the WOS, substantial personal support appears to be given to ensure that prisoners have the skills to help them prosper in the world of work.

At the most basic level, many prisoners have literacy issues. This addressed by the Shannon Trust charity, which is involved at induction into the prison and provides structured, ongoing support to improve reading and writing skills.

SEETEC helps prisoners to plan for their release. All new prisoners should be met within ten days of arrival and a clear plan of action to obtain work prepared. Ongoing support is then provided subsequent through the Labour Board process, with prisoners offered training in various areas in addition to being required to attend mandatory maths and education courses.

Courses are available in woodwork, railway work, recycling, bike refurbishment and NEEBOSH (a health and safety qualification).

Regular reviews take place to help ensure that plans are being adhered to.

Substantial support is available in helping prisoners get into work by CFO Evolution, previously called Creating Future Opportunities. Their focus is on 'through the gate', which aims to address barriers to work. This is supplemented post release by support given from regional hubs, plus staff working out of probation offices nationwide.

Tailored support is given by CFO to address access to employment, such as finances or tax. A Coming Home course is provided to help prisoners adapt to the realities of life after prison. They aim to identify and plan for any barriers to employment.

From our observations, the prison provides substantial and targeted support to prisoners facing the often-daunting prospect of release. As in other areas of the prison, the high level of prisoner turnover, due to sentencing changes, affects the efficiency of the services provided. We can only reiterate that, in our view, a return to a more stable population is urgently required.

A key measure of the prison's success is the proportion of prisoners who are in employment six months after release from custody. The target is for 50% of those released each year to be in employment at this point.

- April 2024-March 2025: 62.36%
- April 2025-March 2026: 57.62%

In the Board's view, this continues to represent a strong performance by the prison. While there has been a slight decline in outcomes, this is considered to reflect changes in the prison population that have been noted throughout this report, rather than any reduction in the prison's efforts or commitment to supporting resettlement.

Another key measure is the reoffending rate, which tracks the proportion of prisoners who return to custody following their release from Standford Hill. The figures for previous years are shown below:

- January-December 2020: 328 discharged, with 33 returned to prison = 10.06%
- January-December 2021: 256 discharged, with 43 returned to prison = 16.80%
- January-December 2022: 271 discharged, with 28 returned to prison = 10.33%
- January-December 2023: 262 discharged, with 15 returned to prison = 5.72%
- January-December 2024: 458 discharged, with 37 returned to prison = 8.08%
- January-December 2025: 415 discharged, with 34 returned to prison = 8.19%

Therefore, the reoffending rate is:

- Over six years: 9.54%
- Over three years: 8.07% (down 0.57%)

Given all the pressures on the prison, the Board considers this to be a positive outcome. We do not have access to national comparative data against which to benchmark this performance; in the Board's view, such analysis should be made available.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	10
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	4
Total number of visits to the establishment	202

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	0	1
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	1	2
C	Equality	0	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	1	0
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	0	2
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	1	5
F	Food and kitchens	0	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	2	1
H1	Property within this establishment	2	0
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	13	14
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	0	0
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew (HDC), release on temporary licence (ROTL), parole, release dates, recategorisation	9	16
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	0	1
K	Transfers	3	1
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	3	5
	Total number of applications	35	50

Annex A

Service providers

- PEF: Milton Keynes College
- DPS: Rocketeer
- Interventions Alliance
- Extra provision - East Kent College
- Library: KSS Libraries
- CGL (Change, Grow Live): substance misuse
- Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust: mental Health; dentist, physiotherapist, optometrists; and EPIC
- Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL)
- Combat for Care: veterans
- Irish Roman Catholic chaplain
- Romani Slovak Czech community
- Pact/CG03 – (Prison Advice and Care Trust): family work
- Alpha Course: chaplaincy
- New Build – MACE and Bovis: awaiting official announcement
- Kent Autism Trust
- Kent Youth Justice Team

Annex B

Overview of the Working Out Scheme (WOS) prepared by the prison

The Working Out Scheme at HMP/YOI Stanford Hill provides a supportive but appropriately challenging regime, enabling prisoners to demonstrate that they are ready and safe to return to the community. This is achieved through participation in unpaid restorative community placements, external vocational and academic training and/or full-time paid employment.

The scheme uses release on temporary licence (ROTL) to help prisoners progress into secure, sustainable and risk-assessed employment before their release from custody. It is designed to support successful reintegration into the community, and, ultimately, reduce the risk of reoffending.

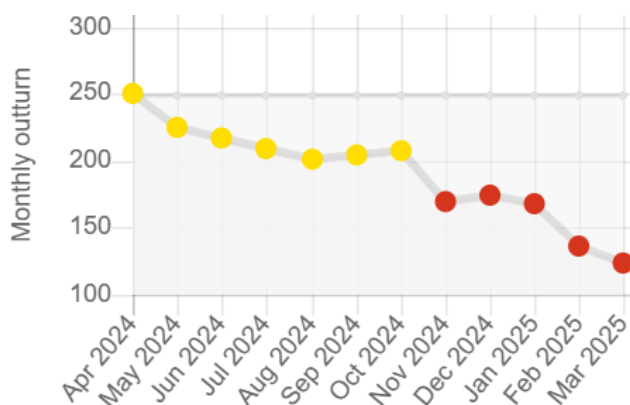
HMPPS performance hub

The key measure is the number of prisoners released on temporary licence (ROTL) to undertake paid work, expressed as a rate per 1,000 prisoners.

The figures reported on the performance hub reflect those recorded locally. Since mid-2024, there has been a decline in ROTL for paid work, which, in the Board's view, is likely linked to the impact of the early release schemes and TPRS. Increased population churn, together with a greater proportion of prisoners serving shorter sentences and having limited time left in custody, has impacted the prison's ability to improve performance in this area.

From October 2024 to mid-March 2025, the population at HMP Stanford Hill remained below 300 prisoners, against an operational capacity of 464.

With the implementation of HDC-24 in May/June 2025, the Board would expect this performance measure to decline further. The Working Out scheme is working closely with the OMU to identify and support all eligible prisoners to engage with the scheme.



Annex C

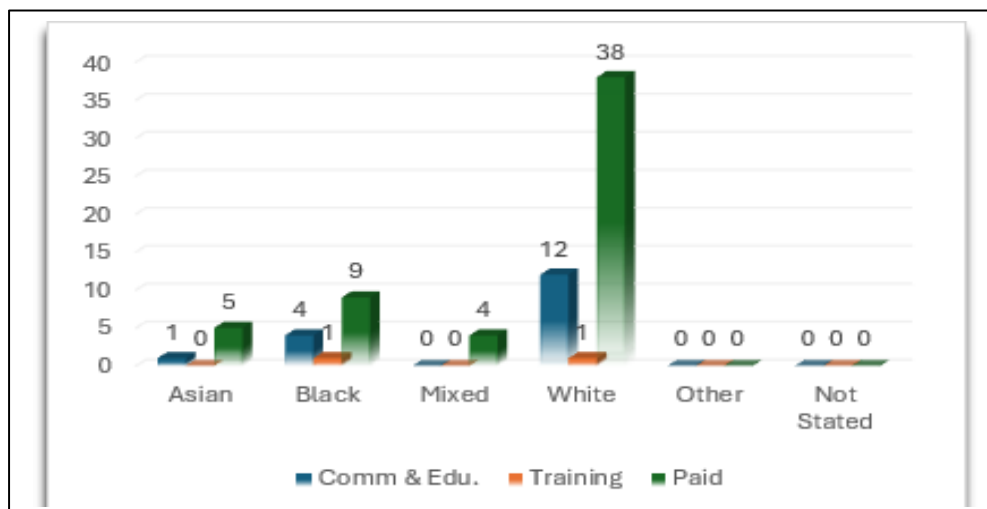
WOS ethnicity mix

The following statistics for the scheme are taken from March 2025.

Population: 457. Of these, 55% (251 prisoners) have not been risk assessed and are therefore not eligible for ROTL. The prison is working with 75 prisoners through the scheme, representing 16% of the total population and 36% of those who have been risk assessed.

Breakdown of WOS ROTL Figures

Ethnicity	Comm & Edu.	Training	Paid
Asian	1	0	5
Black	4	1	9
Mixed	0	0	4
White	12	1	38
Other	0	0	0
Not Stated	0	0	0

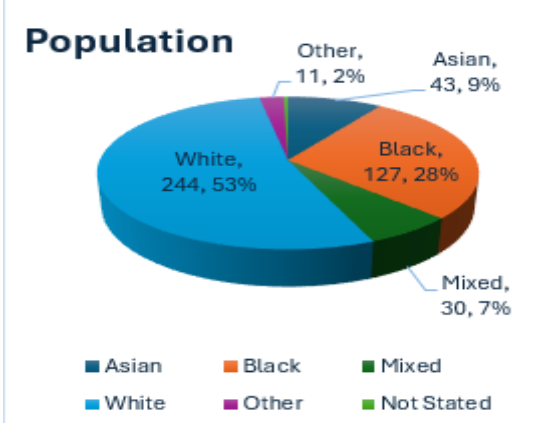
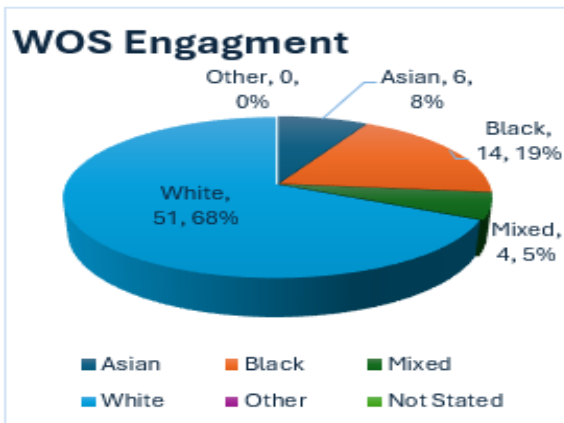


Ethnicity Breakdown v Engagement

Ethnicity	WOS Eng.	%	Pop	
Asian	8	8.00%	43	9.41%
Black	40	18.67%	127	27.79%
Mixed	4	5.33%	30	6.56%
White	51	68.00%	244	53.39%
Other	0	0.00%	11	2.41%
Not Stated	0	0.00%	2	0.44%

Total	75
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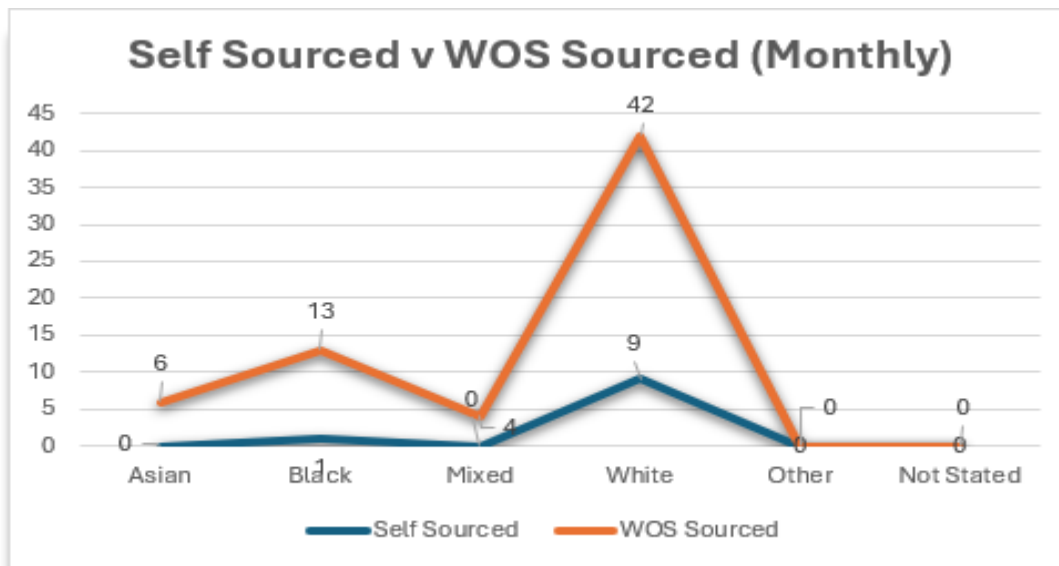
457	100.00%
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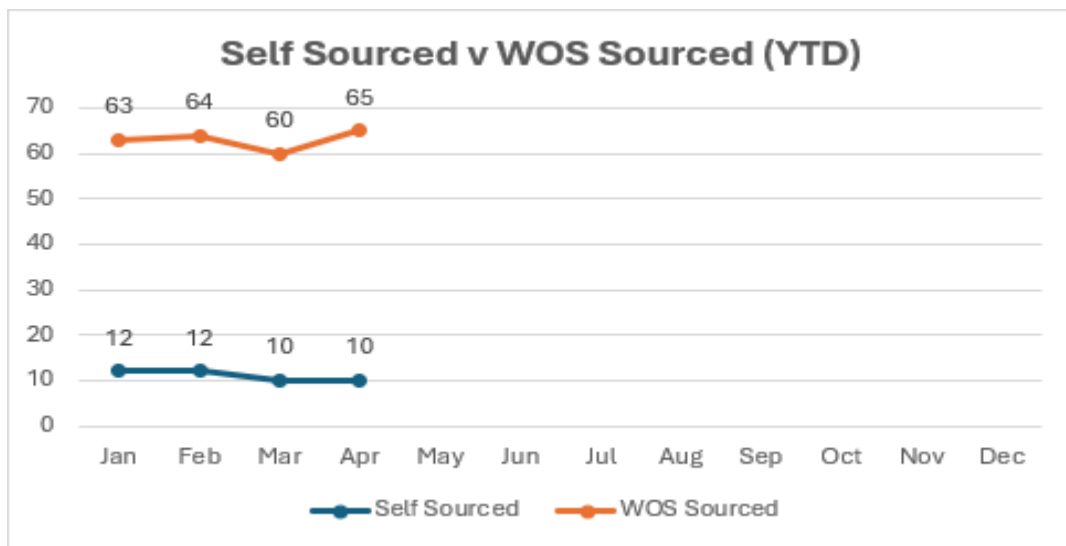
Annex D

Analysis of self-sourced work on WOS

Self-Sourced v WOS Sourced (Monthly)					
Ethnicity	WOS Eng	Self-Sourced	%	WOS Sourced	%
Asian	6	0	0.00%	6	100.00%
Black	14	1	7.14%	13	92.86%
Mixed	4	0	0.00%	4	100.00%
White	51	9	17.65%	42	82.35%
Other	0	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Not Stated	0	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Total	75	10		65	



Annual statistics



Annex E

Reoffending rates

Reoffending rate January 2020-December 2024

- January-December 2020: 328 discharged, with 33 returned to prison = 10.06%
- January-December 2021: 256 discharged, with 43 returned to prison = 16.8%
- January-December 2022: 271 discharged, with 28 returned to prison = 10.33%
- January-December 2023: 262 discharged, with 15 returned to prison = 5.72%
- **January-December 2024: 458 discharged, with 37 returned to prison = 8.08%**

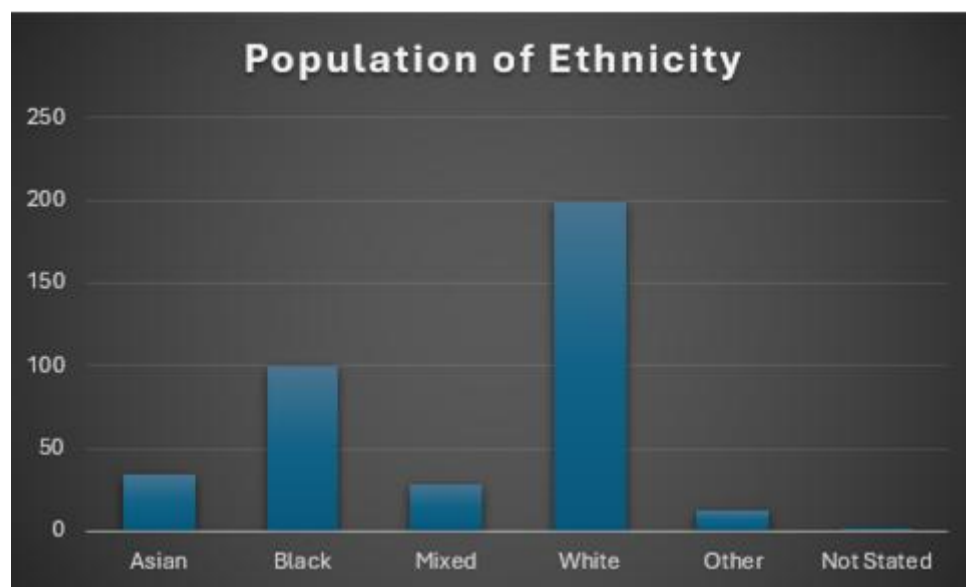
Therefore, the prison's multi-year reoffending rates are:

- Over 2 years: 8.06% to 7.22% **(an improvement of 0.84%)**
- Over 3 years: 10.65% to 8.07% **(an improvement of 2.58%)**

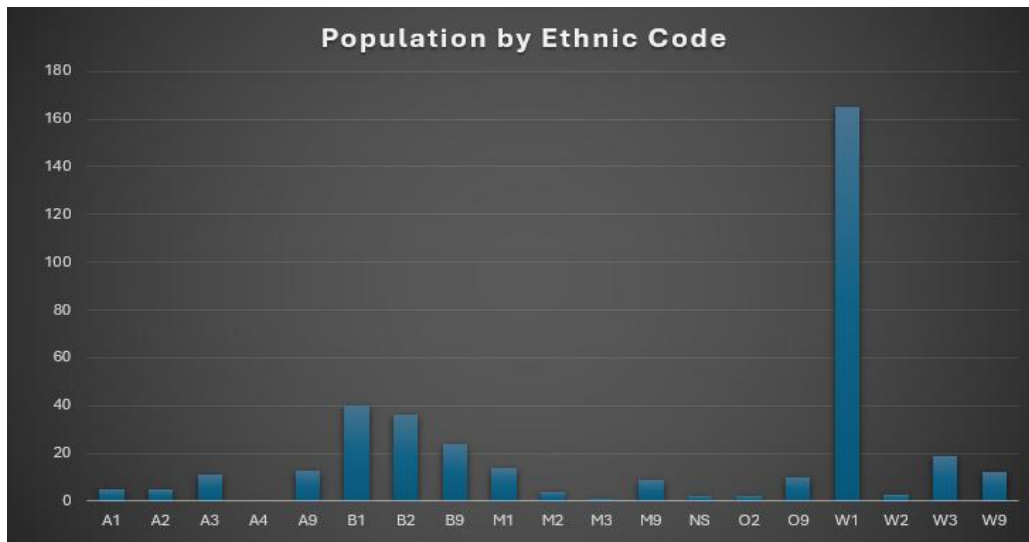
Annex F

Prison ethnicity analysis

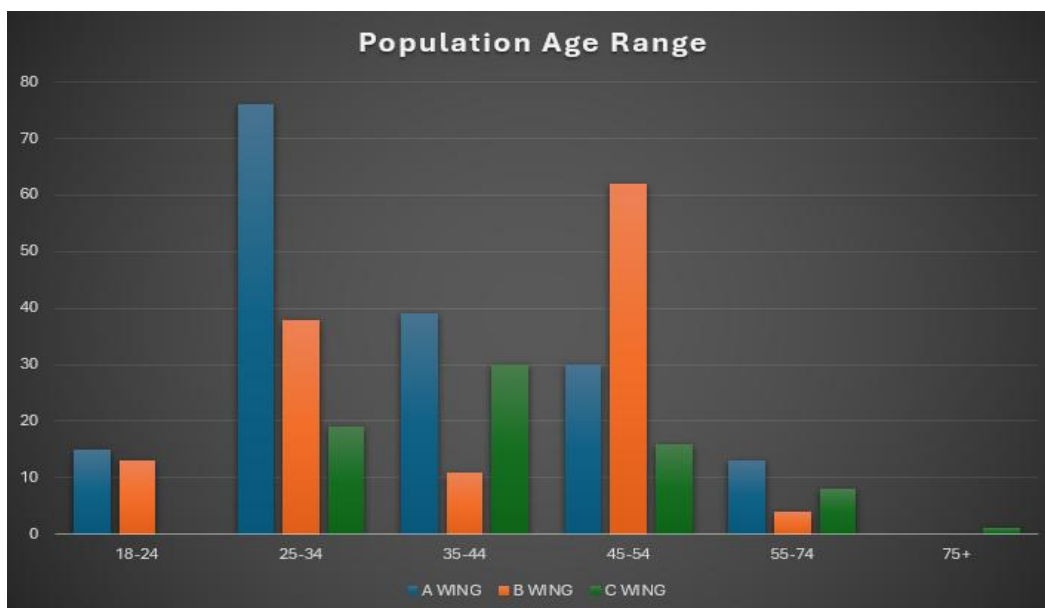
Ethnicity	Total number of Prisoners	Total number in Percentage
Asian	34	9.07%
Black	100	26.67%
Mixed	28	7.47%
White	199	53.07%
Other	12	3.20%
Not Stated	2	0.53%
	375	



Ethnicity	A-WING	Percentage	B-WING	Percentage 2	C-WING	Percentage 3
ASIAN	16	9.25%	13	10.16%	5	6.76%
BLACK	51	29.48%	38	29.69%	11	14.86%
MIXED	15	8.67%	11	8.59%	2	2.70%
WHITE	81	46.82%	62	48.44%	56	75.68%
OTHERS	8	4.62%	4	3.13%	0	0.00%
NOT STATED	2	1.16%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	173		128		74	



AGE	A WING	Percentage	B WING	Percentage 2	C WING	Percentage 3
18-24	15	8.67%	4	3.12%	0	0.00%
25-34	76	43.93%	54	42.18%	19	25.67%
35-44	39	22.54%	45	35.15%	30	40.54%
45-54	30	17.34%	17	13.28%	16	21.62%
55-74	13	7.51%	8	6.25%	8	10.81%
75+	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	1.35%
	173		128		74	





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