



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Lewes
1 Brighton Road
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MoJ ref: SUB137795

8 September 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI LEWES INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
1 FEBRUARY 2025 – 31 JANUARY 2026**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Lewes. I am most grateful to you and your colleagues for the work undertaken to monitor the prison and compile such detailed findings on the prison's current state.

I was very saddened to hear three prisoners died in custody during the reporting year, with a further death occurring shortly after release from custody. I offer my sincere condolences to all their friends and family and want to provide reassurance that any recommendations arising from Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) investigations will be treated with the utmost seriousness so lessons are learnt.

I share your concerns about drugs within our prisons and the risks that these present to safety and rehabilitation are acknowledged. Whilst we cannot publish all our counter measures, as making these public would undermine our security, the Board can be assured that we have specialist staff and dedicated equipment in our prisons to tackle the smuggling of contraband. In recent years, prisons have expanded the use of physical security measures, such as X-ray body scanners which are available in all adult male closed prisons, as well as airport-style Enhanced Gate Security which is in place at 58 sites. There is also drug trace detection equipment within all public sector prisons to prevent the smuggling of drugs such as psychoactive substances through the prison mail. However, as the threats to prison security constantly evolves and criminals seek novel ways to destabilise prisons, we also constantly shift and adapt our security measures to ensure we keep pace with the changing threats. More recently drone activity has been a growing threat and there has been investment of over £40 million into new physical security barriers. To build on this, I'm pleased to say that in June 2026 we announced a further investment of £35 million to improve security within 17 of our most at-risk prisons. UK Research and Innovation has also announced an additional £6.5 million to help accelerate counter-drone research and development which will help with investment in next-generation technologies to prevent drones delivering contraband.

Locally HMP/YOI Lewes continues to focus on reducing the supply and demand of illicit drugs and has strengthened its intelligence-led security response to intercept and disrupt illicit items. Working in partnership with the police, regional teams and external agencies this has resulted in a number of targeted disruptions and enforcement outcomes during the reporting period. In addition, the Incentivised Substance-Free Living Unit introduced in February 2025 is providing a structured environment to allow prisoners to focus on sustained behaviour change, alongside an improved multidisciplinary approach to

support prisoners that misuse substances, such as increased psychosocial provision and recovery workers.

I can also sympathise with your concerns about timely access to accommodation on release as it is fully recognised that prison leavers who have a stable home are almost 50% less likely to reoffend than people released homeless. The Government has therefore made a commitment to halve the proportion of people who become homeless on their first night out of prison and are subject to probation supervision. To do this, the Board is right to highlight that reducing homelessness is a shared responsibility across Government. The Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) continue to work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and other Government Departments to build a strong foundation from which we can collectively get back on track to end homelessness. This was set out in A National Plan to End Homelessness published in December 2025. HMPPS in its role will continue investing in the Community Accommodation Service models for prison leavers at risk of homelessness, as well as integrating digital community accommodation services to make it easier to identify and match individuals to the right housing support and accommodation.

The recruitment of a Strategic Housing Specialist at the prison has improved engagement with local authorities allowing pre-release panels to be established across Kent Surrey and Sussex to strengthen the accommodation referral pathways. To further support this the prison continues to take actions to identify and escalate at the earliest opportunity those at the highest risk of homelessness and is ensuring that release planning commences at induction and is reinforced through key work. Enhanced multi-agency working is taking place in resettlement planning, such as healthcare, to better identify and prioritise individuals with additional needs. The prison is developing partnerships with employers that can offer accommodation alongside employment, supporting more sustainable release outcomes and providing a better chance of integrating back into society. In addition, the significant reforms contained in the Sentencing Act, which received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026 will provide the Courts with options to end the cycle of less serious offenders going in and out of prison. The changes will also help shape the strategic requirements of the prison estate to support resettlement into the community.

Despite these challenges, it was encouraging to read about the improved time out of cell and staff retention which have contributed to a more positive atmosphere and better relationships between staff and prisoners. I was pleased to hear about the efforts to enhance living conditions through diligent cleanliness, as well refurbishing and redecorating much of the prison to improve the environment overall. It was reassuring to note levels of violence have been stable, but in particular I echo the Board welcoming the reduction in staff needing to use force to de-escalate incidents. The reduction in the number of incidents of self-harm by around a third is also reassuring and the prison is making further progress through targeted wing-level improvement plans and electronic quality assurance to provide real-time feedback and oversight. I do note you have raised an issue in your report about the Assessment Care in Custody and Teamwork processes locally which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work progresses. HMPPS comments in response to the other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I recognise the significant contribution that members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide across the estate and we extend our thanks for your continued dedication on behalf of HMP/YOI Lewes.



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

HMP/YOI LEWES INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 1 FEBRUARY 2025 – 31 JANUARY 2026

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Late Arrivals

It is recognised that a range of factors may affect the movement of prisoners to and from court, as well as transfers between establishments. An enhanced reporting framework is now in place to capture Prisoner Escort and Custody Service (PECS) performance data. This information is shared with all Governors and Prison Group Director offices and has improved clarity and consistency to support effective performance monitoring. The framework has also enabled HMPPS and PECS to better identify, address and respond to emerging issues, and has been positively received across the prison estate in helping to drive improvements. To ensure capacity in prisons remains in the right places, such as reception prisons to continue to serve the courts, PECS and the escort provider continue to support the redirection of prisoners and this is discussed daily with HMPPS Capacity Management to complete these movements with the least late arrivals as possible. The Board can be assured that HMP/YOI Lewes do not accept prisoners outside the agreed reception time unless formally escalated and risk-assessed through the appropriate processes. Ongoing engagement also takes place with the prison to monitor late arrivals allowing these to be escalated where necessary. In addition, an inter-prison transfer efficiency review has been completed, with implementation now progressing collaboratively across the relevant HMPPS national teams involved in the transfer process. Locally HMP/YOI Lewes has also strengthened its arrangements to manage prisoners safely during their first night in custody. This includes the deployment of an additional night staff member to receive, locate and manage any late arrival in line with assessed risk. There is also support from peer mentors on the Early Days in Custody Unit to aid transition into custody.