

Chair
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall
Lichfield
Staffordshire
WS14 9QS

MoJ ref: SUB138169

21 September 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI SWINFEN HALL: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2025 – 30 APRIL 2026**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall. I am very grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work and dedication in capturing your helpful observations. I recognise the effort made in preparing the report as you ended the reporting period with a severely depleted complement of just four members. I hope this pressure eases over the course of the current year.

Turning to the concerns you have raised, security vetting is vital in HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) to ensure individuals can uphold the security and integrity standards expected of their role and that prisons remain safe environments. Timescales for clearance have inevitably lengthened, as pre-employment checks have been made more robust and agency-wide recruitment increases. Both the vetting contractor and HMPPS are employing flexible resource allocation and overtime to mitigate delays. In the longer term, funding has been given to resource vetting teams in line with the recruitment increase. This recruitment drive for vetting staff began last summer with the first cohort going live on cases from December 2025. With further cohorts taking up post throughout the first half of 2026, we anticipate an incremental improvement as these staff move to live casework. HMPPS is also working with the vetting contractor in forecasting demand to ensure any spikes or increases in vetting requests can be managed appropriately.

I understand your concerns about young people from Secure Children's Homes (SCHs) transitioning to the adult estate at age 18. All decisions regarding transition from the youth secure estate are made on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with the Transitions Policy Framework. All youth estate sites are required to, and do, meet the receiving adult site and hand over all information relating to the young person to enable effective planning to take place, usually with three months' notice. On rare occasions, transfer dates may need to change due to dynamic risks and needs assessments. However, the transition date is always a collaborative decision.

Although Secure Children's Homes (SCHs) provide comprehensive information about young people transferring, the challenge comes from differing IT systems which means information cannot be easily exported into the Digital Prison Services (DPS). Going forward, the YCS will

look to address any learning like the matters raised by the Board, including considering whether the information could be provided in a way that makes it easier to export/upload to DPS so that it is more easily accessible by all staff at the receiving establishment. Additionally, the Transition of Young People from the Children and Young People Secure Estate to Adult Custody Policy Framework is currently being refreshed to improve the experience of young people transferring to the adult estate. It is due to be published by March 2027 and implemented by June 2027. In parallel, HMPPS is developing a Managing Young Adults in Custody Policy Framework which is also expected to cover the designation of young adult settings and support they provide.

We recognise the importance of care leaver support provided by local authorities. Although HMPPS is not responsible for the delivery of statutory support duties, it has an important role in ensuring that eligible care leavers in custody are identified, connected with their responsible local authorities, and supported to maintain contact with their Personal Advisers. Expectations relating to these areas are set out in the recently published HMPPS 'Supporting Prisoners with Care Experience' policy framework (implementation date of 30 September 2026). HMPPS will monitor implementation through established governance arrangements and continue to work with local authority partners to address barriers to the provision of support.

I appreciate there are young adults subject to life sentences that have restrictions on their access to higher education. I would like to assure the Board that the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS are committed to enabling prisoners to access education at all levels while in custody and are working with partners such as the Prisoners' Education Trust and the Open University to widen access to higher education opportunities. The Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education will also continue to consider access to student finance for prisoners. In the meantime, prisoners serving longer sentences are able to access a broad range of education, skills and work opportunities throughout their sentence, with provision tailored to meet the population's learning needs, abilities and aspirations, and designed to support progression towards their educational and employment goals.

I note you have raised a number of issues for the attention of HMPPS and comments in response to these matters are set out in the attached annex. Local issues of concern raised will be addressed by the Governor who will continue to keep you aware of progress as work continues.

Whilst there are numerous issues to address at HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall, it was encouraging to receive your comments about the leadership at the prison together with the collaborative work with Aston Villa Football Club, Barrow Cadbury Trust, and Zahid Mubarek Trust. I noted that there were also improvements in staff-prisoner interactions and this should be further strengthened with the appointment of at least 30 new officers.

The Lord Chancellor and I appreciate the invaluable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards to improve the estate and we are very grateful for your ongoing commitment and hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall.



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Education Provision

Whilst there has been no reduction in the overall national prison education budget, the cost of delivering high quality education has increased. HMPPS recognises funding has not kept pace with these rising costs, and acknowledge this has affected the proportion of funding available for delivery through Core Education contracts.

HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall is currently undertaking its curriculum planning process. The Governor will determine the curriculum offer based on the establishment's needs analysis and local labour market information. As the establishment's Delivery Plan has not yet been finalised, the level and mix of provision has not been determined and, as such, it would be premature to conclude that education provision will reduce by 30%. The final curriculum offer will be developed through the established planning process and will be designed to meet the needs of learners and support the rehabilitative aims of the establishment.

Maintenance and Infrastructure

A number of improvement projects are being progressed at HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall this financial year. These include the replacement of boilers serving F and G Wings that are forecast to be completed this autumn alongside a project to install fencing to separate the exercise yard for the Care and Separation Unit (CSU), the total cost of both being approximately £300,000.

Ongoing investment in the prison estate is underpinned by condition survey data, which assesses the fabric, cells, and critical assets at each prison and informs forward maintenance registers. Demand for maintenance across the estate exceeds available funding and as such, HMPPS must then carefully prioritise investment to ensure best use of resources, focusing on risk to life, capacity, and decency.

Access to Programmes

Prisonisation guidelines for access to offending behaviour and accredited programmes state that prisoners with two years and under left to serve should be prioritised and is determined by release dates. HMPPS recognises this can present challenges where individuals have significant rehabilitative needs but also have longer custodial elements of their sentence remaining. However, this does not mean those with more than two years left to serve are completely excluded. HMPPS can confirm, as per the prioritisation guidance:

“There are no restrictions regarding maximum time left to serve but prioritisation of spaces must be in line with the principles, prioritising by risk and relevant release date; while also considering access to programmes in line with HMPPS Rehabilitation Strategy: ‘Right Person, Right Approach, Right Time’. Sites will have different waiting lists and capacity, therefore some sites will be able to reach back further into their population (to those with longer to serve), than others.”