

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Oakwood
Featherstone
Wolverhampton
WV10 7QD

MoJ ref: SUB137499

25 September 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP OAKWOOD INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
1 APRIL 2025 – 31 MARCH 2026**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Oakwood. I am grateful to you and your fellow Board members for your continued commitment and diligence in carrying out your independent monitoring role. Your report provides a balanced assessment of the prison, recognising both the challenges faced by the establishment and the dedication shown by staff in supporting a large and complex population.

I was saddened to read that there were six deaths in custody during the reporting period, including one self-inflicted death, the first recorded at the prison since 2016. My thoughts are with the families and friends of those who died and with all those affected by these losses. I can assure you that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman following deaths in custody continue to be taken seriously in order to strengthen practice and improve outcomes across the prison estate.

I recognise the Board's concerns regarding the high proportion of recalled prisoners serving Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences and the need to support their progression. The Government remains committed to the rehabilitation and progression of those serving these sentences through the latest IPP Action Plan, published in July 2026. The Plan includes continued investment in specialist support, including the IPP approved premises pilot and a new advocate role designed to provide more personalised support. HMPPS has also strengthened recall decision making, introduced improvements to staff training and guidance and continues to make use of the Risk Assessed Recall Review power to support the re-release of suitable recalled prisoners. In addition, recent legislative reforms have significantly reduced the period many released IPP prisoners may spend on licence before their sentence comes to an end, provided they comply safely with their licence conditions.

I note the Board's concerns regarding the scale of neurodivergent need at HMP Oakwood and the challenges this can present within a large prison population. While there are currently no plans to increase the number of Neurodiversity Support Managers in larger establishments, the role is intended to provide strategic leadership across the prison by helping to embed support, reasonable adjustments and inclusive practice throughout the establishment. This work is supported by neurodiversity champions, peer mentors and the updated Neurodiversity Support Manager Framework. HMPPS is also continuing to strengthen support nationally through the introduction of the Additional Learning Needs screener within the Prisoner

Education Service, helping identify strengths and support needs at an earlier stage and enabling more personalised support through digital learning and work plans.

Finally, turning to the issues raised regarding the future of education provision and the importance of education within a training prison. I fully recognise the important role education plays in supporting rehabilitation, personal development and reducing reoffending. HMP Oakwood is currently undertaking its curriculum planning process as part of the introduction of the new education contract from September 2026. As this work remains ongoing, the final curriculum offer and volume of provision have not yet been determined and it would therefore be premature to conclude that education provision will reduce by 5%. The Director will continue to determine the curriculum offer based on the needs of the prison population and local labour market requirements, ensuring that education and skills provision continue to support learners and the wider rehabilitative aims of the establishment.

I was encouraged to read about several positive achievements highlighted by the Board. I was particularly pleased to see recognition of the prison's exceptional family work, including Family Days, Family Cooking sessions and the continued development of innovative initiatives that help maintain family relationships. I also welcome the success of the Barbering Academy, which won a National Barber Training Award during the reporting year and the continued expansion of Farms and Gardens and the Cherry Blossom training academy, all of which provide valuable opportunities for prisoners to develop skills and prepare for employment on release.

Local issues of concern will be addressed by the Director who will continue to keep you aware of progress as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I appreciate the important role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Oakwood.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine'.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

HMP OAKWOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2025 – 31 MARCH 2026

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Drone Activity

HMPPS continues to work hard to deter, detect and disrupt the illegal use of drones around prisons in England and Wales. Our approach is multi-faceted and includes introducing physical security countermeasures, exploring technological developments, exploiting intelligence, strengthening legislation and working across Government and with international partners on this global issue. An additional £35 million is being invested this financial year to improve counter-drone security, including new heavy-duty window grilles. Up to 13,000 cell windows across 17 prisons will be upgraded by 2027, building on more than £40 million already invested in strengthening prison security. HMPPS also works closely with law enforcement partners to tackle the supply of contraband into prisons and recent joint operations have resulted in arrests and the disruption of organised criminal networks. Alongside this, HMPPS continues to invest in research and development to identify and trial new counter-drone technologies.

Prisoner's Property

The management of prisoner's property remains an important area of focus across the prison estate. HMPPS has carefully considered both the IMB's national thematic report on the impact of property loss on prisoners and the Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations review of property complaints received over the last five years. A revised Prisoner's Property Policy Framework was published in November 2025 and includes strengthened guidance on areas that commonly generate complaints, including the management of excess property, prisoner's laundry and the completion of cell clearance documentation. Compliance with volumetric controls also remains important in supporting the effective transfer of property between establishments. HMPPS remains committed to improving the management of prisoner's property and continues to consider opportunities for further improvement across the estate.

Mental Health Transfers

Ensuring timely access to secure mental health treatment remains a priority for health and justice partners. NHS England's Mental Health and Justice Strategic Advisory Group is focused on supporting delivery of the requirements contained within the Mental Health Act reforms, including the introduction of a statutory 28-day transfer timescale from prison to secure hospital settings. Both Provider Collaboratives in the Midlands have developed strategic and operational action plans designed to improve transfer times through changes to bed capacity, care pathways and additional provision. Progress is reviewed through established governance arrangements at both regional and national level. In the meantime, commissioners and providers continue to meet regularly to support the timely assessment and transfer of prisoners, although the availability of suitable beds remains a significant challenge. The introduction of the statutory 28-day timescale is expected to support further improvements when implemented.

Food in Prisons

The Food in Prisons Policy Framework was introduced to improve the nutritional quality of food provided across the prison estate and was not intended to increase food costs. The framework makes clear that prisons are expected to deliver the required nutritional standards within existing resources. National guidance continues to be provided to both public sector and privately operated prisons to support implementation of the policy, including menu planning and practical advice on meeting nutritional requirements. HMPPS will continue to support establishments in delivering the framework while maintaining the required standards across the estate.