Ministry of Justice

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Styal
Styal Road
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MoJ ref: SUB138165

30 October 2026

Dear Chair,

HMP/YOI STYAL INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY 2025 – 30 APRIL 2026

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Styal. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for the commitment and professionalism you continue to demonstrate in carrying out your independent monitoring role. Your report provides a thoughtful assessment of the challenges facing the establishment, as well as the dedication shown by staff in supporting a population with increasingly complex needs.

I was saddened to read that there were three deaths in custody during the reporting year, two of which occurred following release and one after a long-standing illness. My thoughts are with the families and friends of those who died, as well as all those affected. Learning arising from deaths in custody, including investigations by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, continues to inform efforts to strengthen support for vulnerable women, improve continuity of care and enhance partnership working both in custody and after release.

I recognise the Board's repeated concerns regarding the availability of community provision for women serving shorter sentences. Short custodial sentences often have limited rehabilitative benefit and can disrupt housing, employment and family relationships. The presumption to suspend short custodial sentences, together with the increased use of suspended sentences, is expected to particularly benefit women, including pregnant women. Women released from custody continue to have access to a range of resettlement support, including assistance with accommodation, employment, finances and wellbeing. This is complemented by strategic housing specialists working within prisons, pre-release housing panels across the North West and Community Accommodation Service provision for those at risk of homelessness.

Improving living conditions across the prison estate remains a priority and investment decisions are informed by detailed condition surveys and assessed against risks relating to safety, capacity and decency. At HMP/YOI Styal, options are being developed regarding the future of the Victorian houses and a full refurbishment programme forms part of the planned Fire Safety Improvement project, currently scheduled to commence in Autumn 2027. In the nearer term, a project to introduce automated fire detection across the site is due to commence soon. I am also pleased that construction of the new healthcare facility is scheduled to begin in November 2026, representing a significant investment in the future of the establishment.

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The Board's concerns regarding the reporting and scrutiny arrangements for deaths occurring shortly after release from custody is fully acknowledged. Reviews of these cases are undertaken to improve understanding of vulnerability, risk factors and opportunities for learning, particularly in relation to release planning, continuity of care and engagement with community services. The purpose of these reviews is to identify themes and opportunities for improvement. Learning from these cases continues to inform regional priorities, strengthen partnership working and improve support for vulnerable individuals transitioning from custody into the community.

I share the Board's reiterated concern regarding the number of women arriving at HMP/YOI Styal with significant mental health needs and recognise the pressures this places on prisoners, staff and healthcare providers. Work with health partners continues to improve access to appropriate mental health support. NHS England commissioners are working with secure mental health providers to improve transfer times and have developed specialist arrangements to improve referrals, assessments, transfers and remissions. Encouraging progress is already being seen through partnership working with regional providers and I welcome the continued focus on ensuring women can access timely and appropriate care.

Turning to your concerns regarding the continued use of warrants of concern, The Women's Group Regional Safety Team in HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) maintains oversight of warrants of concern across the region, identifying common themes, vulnerabilities and emerging issues. This work supports ongoing learning, service improvement and stronger partnership working between prisons, healthcare providers and community agencies. The learning identified through these reviews continues to inform discussions around mental health, vulnerability, continuity of care and pathways into custody, helping to improve support for women entering the criminal justice system through this route.

Alongside the issues your report highlights, I was encouraged to read the Board's recognition of the prison's continued commitment to trauma informed practice and the positive contribution of the Women's Estate Psychology Services team in supporting both staff and prisoners. I was also pleased to note the improvements in healthcare provision, strengthened family support services, expanded wellbeing and library activities and the positive employment outcomes being achieved for women following release. The Board's recognition of the compassionate care provided to vulnerable women and the continued success of the Young Adult Hub are particularly welcome.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of 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 sincerely appreciate the important role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards and we extend our thanks for your ongoing commitment on behalf of HMP/YOI Styal.



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

Annex

HMP/YOI STYAL INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY 2025 – 30 APRIL 2026

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Staffing and Resourcing

As part of the Workforce Delivery Project, work has been completed to review the underpinning staffing model for adult public sector prisons including HMP/YOI Styal. This review has considered the impact of prisoner complexity, the physical layout of establishments and other operational factors on daily staffing requirements. The review is currently at the implementation planning stage and remains subject to affordability decisions. In the interim, HMP/YOI Styal has received immediate tactical support equivalent to eight prison officers.

Community Resettlement Support

Future Women's Community Support Services, which will replace the current Women's Commissioned Rehabilitative Services, are due to commence in Autumn 2028. These contracts include provision for meet at the gate support, enabling some women to be accompanied to accommodation and key appointments on the day of release.

Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) Opportunities

Work is progressing to establish replacement community based purposeful activity and ROTL opportunities following the closure of The Clink provision. Partnership arrangements are being developed with a new external organisation and associated governance and assurance processes are underway. Locally, HMP/YOI Styal is working with its Employment Advisory Board to establish a new community provision that will include a bookshop, cafe, beauty salon and community hub. These opportunities are expected to provide paid ROTL placements and support rehabilitation, skills development and community engagement.

Transition to the Adult Women's Estate

A national transition process is already in place through the Transition of Young People from the Children and Young People Secure Estate to Adult Custody Policy Framework, which requires planning to begin well in advance of transfer and promotes close collaboration between establishments, youth offending teams and other relevant agencies. The framework is currently under review to ensure it remains trauma informed, gender responsive and reflective of the specific needs of young women entering the adult estate. In addition, the Women's Estate Case Advice and Support Panel provides oversight of transition cases, supports information sharing and helps identify the most appropriate placement for each individual. The Young Adult pilots at HMP/YOI Styal and HMP/YOI Bronzefield have also been developed to provide enhanced support for young women entering adult custody with a focus on improving wellbeing, reducing self-harm and promoting positive progression. Learning from these pilots will continue to inform future approaches to supporting young women during this important period of transition.

In Cell Technology

HMPPS continues to expand the content available through Launchpad laptops. New developments include the introduction of the Learn About Nutrition and Health application, which is due to be introduced at HMP/YOI Styal. HMPPS has also developed an early proposal for a

secure word processing capability. Requirements, risks and safeguards have been identified, although any future solution remains subject to further technical, security and governance approvals.

Food Costs

HMPPS keeps prison funding requirements under regular review, including the impact of inflationary pressures on operating costs such as food. Funding allocations are considered as part of the wider budget setting process, taking account of a range of operational priorities and affordability considerations.

While there is no automatic mechanism to increase catering budgets in line with future food price rises, financial pressures across the prison estate are monitored and considered as part of periodic budget reviews. Governors are responsible for managing their establishment budgets locally and have discretion to determine how available resources are deployed to meet operational needs, including the provision of food services for prisoners.

The food budget increased in 2025-26 and is currently sufficient to meet the needs of the population.