Ministry of Justice

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
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Dear Chair,

HMP/YOI STANDFORD HILL INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2025 – 31 MARCH 2026

Thank you for sharing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Standford Hill. I want to express my sincere appreciation for the work undertaken by you and your colleagues in producing such a detailed assessment of the prison. I am also incredibly grateful for the dedication, time and commitment that has continued to be shown by remaining members given your complement reduced during the reporting period and I hope this situation improves in the coming year.

I acknowledge the Board's concerns about the impact sentencing changes have had on open prisons as the role they play in preparing prisoners for release, supporting rehabilitation and reducing reoffending are important. The reforms introduced in the Sentencing Act were necessary to ensure that prisons could continue to operate safely within the available capacity and to help put the prison system on a sustainable footing. It is recognised that these sentencing changes, together with the wider population pressures, have increased movements across the estate and has created some operational challenges for prisons in delivering rehabilitative and resettlement activity. The Board can be assured that HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) continues to monitor the prisoner population closely through data and engagement with operational leaders to better understand and mitigate any adverse impacts wherever possible. However, as population pressures ease following the implementation of the sentencing reforms, HMPPS anticipates that there will be greater opportunities to support planned progression throughout the prison estate, enabling prisoners to better access the employment, education and development they need at the right time in their sentence.

Work also continues to align available accommodation with the needs of the population allowing prisoners who are assessed as suitable for open conditions to progress at the earliest opportunity. However, I do understand your further concerns about the challenges that the Temporary Presumptive Recategorisation Scheme (TPRS) and prisoners with only a short time left to serve can have on the open estate. I note you have raised a similar issue to HMPPS which I will also address. Whilst eligibility for TPRS is limited, alongside the changes to the Security Categorisation Policy Framework that allowed earlier access to open prisons these can provide the opportunity for a longer term and stable cohort in open prisons. The current challenges are recognised, but in times of population pressure, it is imperative that prisons can safely receive

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new arrivals from court and TPRS was introduced in exceptional circumstances to help maintain safe capacity across the estate.

HMPPS continues to keep the impact of TPRS and other population management measures under continual review. Ministers are regularly updated on prison capacity and the operational effects of these measures. Any future policy changes will be carefully assessed against operational factors such as the impact on prison capacity, offender management, rehabilitation and resettlement outcomes. Maintaining stability within the open estate remains an important objective to ensure prisons can focus on their core rehabilitative and resettlement functions, supporting successful reintegration into the community and reducing reoffending while maintaining public protection in a stable environment. HMPPS will continue to work with Governors and Prison Group Directors to manage population movements effectively whilst balancing the needs of individual prisons to maintain sufficient capacity to ensure the prison estate operates as safely as possible.

Despite these challenges, it was reassuring to receive your comments that HMP/YOI Standford Hill is a well-run and effective prison. I welcome that the Board commends prison staff for how they have adapted to the changing population and it is pleasing that staff have created a supportive environment that allows positive interactions with prisoners. It was interesting to read about the substantial provision that the prison offers to help prisoners to reintegrate into the community, and particularly the high levels of prisoners working outside the prison. The success this brings with the prison achieving targets for men being in paid employment six weeks and six months after their release is very encouraging. I was also pleased to read about the significant improvement in the quality of healthcare services over recent years and that attendance at appointments has improved during this reporting period.

I note you have raised two 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 the other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I recognise the important contribution that members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide in improving our prisons and we extend our thanks for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Standford Hill.



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

Annex

HMP/YOI STANDFORD HILL INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2025 – 31 MARCH 2026

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Education Provision

HMPPS recognises that education plays an important role in supporting rehabilitation and preparing prisoners for successful release. While there was no reduction in the overall national prison education budget for 2025-26, it is acknowledged that many prisons have seen changes in the volume of provision delivered through the new Core Education contracts that were introduced in October 2025. This is primarily due to the rising cost pressures across all education services in recent years, alongside a revised funding formula that HMPPS has applied to ensure fair distribution of the allocation based on prison population and regional cost differences. HMPPS has published transparency data of how each prison has been affected and HMP/YOI Standford Hill has seen a reduction in the volume of Core Education delivery hours of 45%. However, this reduction only applies to Core Education contracts with prisoners still able to access other education services such as libraries, careers advice, distance learning or vocational training delivered through industries and workshops. It remains important that prisons continue to plan their curriculum based on careful analysis of their population's needs and it is encouraging that the Board consider that teaching staff at HMP/YOI Standford Hill perform well and ensure prisoners maintain a high standard of achievement. The prison continues to offer a range of vocational training opportunities and to mitigate the increase in prisoners received via the TPRS scheme, the prison has increased the provision of unaccredited courses to help new receptions continue to develop the right behaviours and attitudes for open conditions.

A full evaluation of the new Prisoner Education Service is underway to assess the impact of the education provision on prisoner progress and rehabilitation outcomes, and to inform future policy and commissioning decisions. In the interim, the priority remains to protect the quality of the education provision nationally and these new core education contracts set clearer expectations for screening and assessment to support for learners needs. New digital systems will also expand access to secure online education content, reduce the need for repeat assessments, and improve recording achievements to track learners' progress as they move around the estate.

Monitoring Electronically

HMPPS remains committed to exploring technological solutions to support prisons where they can deliver clear operational benefits. The potential use of electronic monitoring whilst a prisoner is Released on Temporarily Licence (ROTL) has been considered previously through a pilot programme. While the pilot demonstrated operational feasibility, it did not provide evidence that electronic monitoring improved compliance or enhanced release suitability assessment decisions. ROTL compliance currently remains exceptionally high above 99% and HMPPS considers that robust risk assessment, supervision and the existing compliance arrangements continue to provide effective safeguards. It should be noted that monitoring a prisoner electronically during ROTL could create an artificial environment that does not represent how an individual may behave once they are fully released. Prisoners could also still commit further offences or fail to return to prison whilst being electronically monitored. Despite there currently being no plans to introduce electronic monitoring more widely, HMPPS remains open to

innovation and will continue to assess emerging evidence and opportunities, but these would need to demonstrate that they can safely support improved operational outcomes that are cost effective for public funds and are proportionate to the risks being managed. The existing digital capacity is currently focused on a wider programme to safely reduce reliance on NOMIS and the transformation to Digital Prison Services as the single platform to support prisoner management.