Ministry of Justice

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Stocken
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Dear Chair,

HMP STOCKEN INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY 2025 – 30 APRIL 2026

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Stocken. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your continued commitment and diligence in carrying out your independent monitoring role. I was pleased to note that the Board increased its membership during the reporting year, strengthening its capacity to provide independent scrutiny and assurance.

I was saddened to learn that there were three deaths in custody during the reporting year, including one apparently self-inflicted death and one apparently linked to a drug overdose. My thoughts are with the families and friends of those who died, as well as all those affected within the prison community. I appreciate the Board's continued scrutiny of these cases and the attention it has given to the lessons arising from them. Recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman continue to play an important role in strengthening local practice, improving support for vulnerable prisoners and enhancing safety across the prison estate.

The Board is right to highlight the difficulties that arise when prisoners with severe mental illness are cared for within custodial settings while awaiting transfer to specialist treatment. The Mental Health Act 2025 introduces a statutory 28-day time limit for transfers from prison and other places of detention to hospital, with implementation planned by December 2027. This reform is intended to reduce delays in accessing appropriate treatment and improve outcomes for some of the most vulnerable people in custody. Alongside this, HMPPS continues to work closely with health and social care partners to ensure prisoners can access healthcare equivalent to that available in the community. At HMP Stocken, staff continue to work constructively with healthcare providers to support individuals with severe mental illness while seeking timely access to secure hospital placements when inpatient treatment is required. While challenges remain in securing specialist bedspace, efforts continue locally and regionally to ensure that those with the most acute needs receive appropriate treatment as quickly as possible.

Maintaining sufficient staffing levels remains fundamental to delivering safe and effective outcomes for prisoners. Staffing pressures have inevitably affected areas such as key work, interventions and access to support services at HMP Stocken. However, I was encouraged to learn that staff turnover has reduced compared with the previous year, helping to improve workforce stability and retain valuable experience within the establishment. Across HMPPS, work

continues to improve recruitment processes, increase efficiency and strengthen workforce resilience. Recruitment activity remains ongoing where there are current or anticipated need and action has been taken to improve recruitment levels while ensuring appropriate pre-employment checks continue to be undertaken. Alongside national recruitment activity, HMP Stocken continues to engage with local employment initiatives, careers events and job fairs to attract high-quality candidates and support the development of a sustainable workforce.

The Board raises an important concern regarding the increasing number of prisoners being released directly from HMP Stocken. While the prison's primary function remains that of a Category C training prison, it is not always possible or appropriate to transfer every prisoner to another establishment before release. Decisions regarding prisoner location must take account of security category, sentence length, individual needs, operational pressures and capacity across the wider estate. At HMP Stocken, significant work has already been undertaken to strengthen resettlement arrangements in recognition of the prison's release profile. This has included securing a full-time Department for Work and Pensions Work Coach, Prison Employment Lead, Identity and Banking Administrator and specialist advisors who provide one-to-one support and referrals into community services. A dedicated Resettlement Administrator has also been introduced, while further developments include the planned introduction of resettlement passports and the development of Stocken High Street and Departure Lounge initiatives. These measures are particularly important given the increasing number of prisoners released directly from the establishment and the significant proportion serving long or indeterminate sentences.

I note that your report has also raised a number of matters for the attention of His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. Responses to those issues are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I greatly value the important contribution made by members of Independent Monitoring Boards across the prison estate. Thank you again for your continued commitment on behalf of HMP Stocken.



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

HMP STOCKEN: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY 2025 – 30 APRIL 2026

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Vermin Control

AMEY continues to work proactively with specialist contractors to address vermin activity across the establishment. This work is supported by a range of measures designed to improve waste management arrangements and address environmental factors that may contribute to infestations. Together, these actions are intended to provide a coordinated and sustained approach to reducing the risk of vermin activity across the site.

Sewerage Infrastructure

A comprehensive site-wide survey of the prison's drainage infrastructure has been completed and work has already begun to mitigate some of the issues identified. The survey findings will provide a detailed assessment of underlying pressures across the system and help inform potential long-term solutions. While all requests for investment are considered, demand for maintenance funding across the prison estate exceeds available resources and investment must be prioritised according to risk, capacity and decency considerations. The survey will help inform the development of a sustainable programme of remedial works and future infrastructure improvements.

Prisoner Transfers

Cancelled or delayed prisoner transfers can have a significant impact on both prison operations and individual prisoners. However, transport cancellations can arise for a range of operational reasons, including changes in operational priorities, healthcare requirements, security considerations, prison readiness, bedspace availability, court-related demands and transport resource allocation. Transport providers seek to keep establishments informed where transfers are delayed, redirected or cancelled. HMP Stocken continues to escalate concerns regarding short-notice cancellations because of the operational disruption they can cause, including impacts on prison population management, planned activities and individual prisoners awaiting transfer. HMPPS and transport providers continue to work together to minimise disruption wherever possible.