Ministry of Justice

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Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Send. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your continued commitment and professionalism in carrying out your independent monitoring role. I was pleased to note that the Board has maintained its full complement of members throughout the reporting period, continuing to provide valuable scrutiny and assurance on behalf of the prison.

I was saddened to read that there were two deaths in custody during the reporting year. 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 importance it places on learning from them. I note that one death has already been investigated by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) and that recommendations have been made to strengthen healthcare oversight and monitoring arrangements.

The revised External Escorts Policy Framework, introduced in October 2025, strengthened the requirement for restraint decisions to be based on individual risk assessments and placed greater emphasis on prisoners' health needs when determining whether restraints are necessary. Decisions must take account of factors such as age, mobility and medical needs, ensuring that any use of restraints is proportionate and justified. In addition, extensive work has been undertaken to consider the specific needs of women in custody, including the development of a bespoke risk assessment for female prisoners and supporting guidance to improve staff awareness and decision-making.

It is of utmost importance that women with severe mental health needs must be able to access appropriate treatment in the most suitable setting. The Mental Health Act 2025 introduces a statutory 28-day time limit for transfers from prison and other places of detention to hospital and is intended to reduce delays in accessing specialist treatment. This reform is due to commence by December 2027 and significant work is already underway across health and justice partners to prepare for implementation. Alongside this, NHS England has completed work to strengthen clinical leadership throughout the pathway from prison to mental health hospital, supporting more effective referrals, assessments and transfers.

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The Board rightly highlights the importance of ensuring women continue to have access to functional skills and employability training. HMP Send has prioritised English and mathematics provision across a full range of levels to ensure that women can continue to access these essential qualifications. In addition to core education, the prison makes use of the Dynamic Purchasing System to commission employability-focused training linked to local labour market needs. Partnerships with organisations including Prison Opticians, Fine Cell Work, The Clink Horticulture, Boats Not Bars, Elite Rail and Wates Construction continue to provide industry relevant skills, vocational training and pathways into employment. More broadly, Governors retain flexibility to shape the curriculum to meet local needs, supported by vocational training, careers advice, higher education opportunities and library services.

The Government recognises the real difficulties experienced by people serving Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences, their families and the professionals supporting them. On 1 September, the Lord Chancellor announced that the Government intends to bring an end to the sentence for those who continue to serve it and will bring forward legislation before the end of this Parliament. Public safety remains paramount and any reform must be developed carefully, informed by a full assessment of the legal and operational implications. In the meantime, release decisions remain a matter for the independent Parole Board and work continues to support progression towards safe and sustainable release. Within the women's estate, the HMPPS IPP Delivery Plan continues to promote an individualised and relational approach, ensuring support is tailored to the specific needs, strengths and circumstances of each woman serving an IPP sentence.

I was encouraged to read about a number of positive developments across the prison. In particular, I welcomed the Board's recognition that staff and managers continue to make significant efforts to keep women safe and that relationships between staff and prisoners are generally respectful and compassionate. I was also pleased to note the decrease in healthcare complaints, the expansion of mental health provision, the positive recognition given by HM Inspectorate of Prisons to the prison's reading strategy, and the strong resettlement outcomes achieved, with most women leaving custody with accommodation in place.

I note that your report also raises a number of matters for the attention of HMPPS, 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 IMB across the prison estate. Thank you again for your continued commitment on behalf of HMP Send.



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

Annex

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

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Clinical Review Reports

The clinical review is commissioned to support and inform the PPO's investigation and does not constitute a standalone HMPPS report. Decisions regarding distribution of the clinical review therefore rest with the PPO. In 2023, the Ombudsman ceased routinely sharing clinical reviewer reports with Independent Monitoring Boards following legal advice concerning confidentiality obligations under the Access to Health Records Act 1990. However, recommendations arising from those reviews continue to be shared to support the Board's monitoring role. The Deputy Ombudsman for Fatal Incidents has also offered to meet with the Chair of the IMB at HMP Send to better understand the Board's concerns.

Dementia Support

The Ministry of Justice is currently developing an Older People's Strategy in partnership with HMPPS, health and social care providers and other stakeholders. The strategy will consider how prisons can better identify and support older prisoners, including those with dementia and other age-related needs. This work will examine staff awareness, accommodation, regime design, healthcare provision and continuity of support when individuals transfer between establishments or return to the community. NHS England is also undertaking a dementia scoping exercise across prisons in the South East to help develop a consistent, evidence-based approach to dementia care.

Support for Victims of Domestic Abuse

HMPPS provides a range of therapeutic services for women who have experienced trauma, including support delivered through the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway, Mental Health Services, Women's Estate Psychology Services and counselling provision. These services are designed to address a wide range of traumatic experiences, including domestic abuse, and access is determined by individual need. Regional commissioners also continue to explore opportunities to strengthen and expand provision where appropriate.

Staffing Resilience and Vetting

As part of the Workforce Delivery Project, HMPPS has completed a review of the underpinning staffing model for adult public sector prisons, including HMP Send. This work considered a range of factors affecting daily resource requirements, including prisoner complexity, the physical layout of establishments and unplanned operational demands such as hospital escorts and bedwatches. The review is currently at the implementation planning stage, although any future changes remain subject to affordability decisions.

Vetting remains a vital component of HMPPS pre-employment checks and includes identity verification, right to work checks, criminal records checks, employment references and broader integrity assessments. During 2025, processing times increased following an unexpected 30% increase in recruitment activity across HMPPS and its providers, alongside changes to criminal records checking processes. In response, HMPPS worked with its provider, Sopra Steria Limited,

to improve recruitment forecasting, increase capacity through additional overtime resource and strengthen workforce planning arrangements. Recent performance data indicates that processing times are improving, and further work is underway to automate parts of the process and enable more checks to be completed in parallel. These measures are intended to improve efficiency, reduce delays and provide greater resilience against future increases in recruitment demand.

Physical Education Staffing
HMP Send has now filled its Physical Education (PE) Instructor vacancy and the successful candidate is undertaking the required training before taking up the role. More broadly, HMPPS continues to address recruitment challenges within PE departments across the women's estate through a combination of workforce development, internal recruitment and career awareness initiatives.

Existing Prison Officers are being supported to develop the skills and qualifications required to move into PE roles, creating a sustainable pipeline of future instructors. Band 3 Prison Officers are also encouraged to apply for vacancies through internal expression of interest processes, providing clear pathways into PE careers. In addition, the National Training Centre at Lilleshall delivers PE Awareness Courses to introduce staff to the role and support informed career progression decisions. National campaigns, staff communications and other promotional activity are also being used to raise awareness of the profession and encourage applications. Together, these measures are intended to strengthen recruitment and retention within PE teams across the women's estate.

Digital Technology
HMPPS recognises the value of prisoner-facing technology in supporting access to information, education and prison services. Expanding digital capability forms an important part of the longer-term strategy to improve efficiency and support rehabilitation across the prison estate.
While there is a continued commitment to developing prisoner-facing digital services, wider financial pressures currently limit the pace at which new technology can be introduced and expanded. As a result, it is not currently possible to extend provision to all establishments. Future deployment decisions will continue to balance operational need, affordability and wider strategic priorities. HMPPS remains committed to increasing access to information and services through secure digital tools where resources allow, but it would not be appropriate at this stage to commit to specific implementation timescales or locations.

Employment Focused Training
Employment remains one of the most important factors in supporting successful resettlement and reducing reoffending. HMP Send continues to prioritise training opportunities that develop employability skills and support progression into work following release. The Rail Track programme provides industry-specific training and employability skills linked to opportunities within the rail sector, and employment outcome data indicates that it supports participants in moving into work after release. While no further funding is available for the programme during the current financial year, Elite Rail has donated a further Rail Track course, which is scheduled to be delivered in November 2026, ensuring that women can continue to access this opportunity. More broadly, Governors retain flexibility to shape education and training provision based on local needs analysis and labour market requirements. The Prison Education Dynamic Purchasing System remains available to commission specialist and employment-focused provision where

appropriate, supported by the wider range of education, skills, work and rehabilitative opportunities available across the establishment.

Prisoner Pay

Prisoners pay arrangements are governed by Prison Service Order 4460, which establishes the national framework within which prisons operate. Within that framework, Governors are able to determine local pay structures that reflect operational requirements, available resources and local priorities. This flexibility is intended to support engagement in purposeful activity while ensuring local schemes remain fair, transparent and affordable. HMPPS continues to expect establishments to use prisoner pay arrangements in a way that supports participation in education, training and work opportunities that contribute to rehabilitation and progression.