Ministry of Justice

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Thameside
Griffin Manor Way
London
SE28 0FJ

MoJ ref: SUB140267

24 November 2026

Dear Chair,

HMP THAMESIDE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2025 – 30 JUNE 2026

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Thameside. I am sincerely grateful to you and your colleagues for your continued resilience and commitment to monitoring the establishment. Your report provides a balanced assessment of the prison, recognising both the challenges associated with managing one of the busiest reception prisons in London and the progress that has been achieved across several important areas. I also recognise the continued pressure created by vacancies within the Board and appreciate the assurance and scrutiny you have continued to provide throughout the reporting year.

I was saddened to learn that eight prisoners died during the reporting year. My thoughts are with the families and friends of those who died and all others affected by these deaths. I appreciate the Board's ongoing diligence in following up on the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman recommendations to support the prison in ensuring that learning from deaths in custody is appropriately applied.

Significant delays in transferring prisoners with severe mental illness to secure hospital settings remain a concern and I appreciate the Board's continued focus on this issue. While the Mental Health Act 2026 raises expectations regarding delivery of the 28-day transfer target, NHS England and health partners are currently pursuing a system wide approach focused on improving inpatient flow, reducing delayed discharge, making better use of existing bed capacity and strengthening community alternatives to admission. A range of national measures are already underway, including work to reduce out-of-area placements, strengthen discharge planning and improve oversight of transfer times. These changes are intended to increase the availability of specialist placements and improve performance against the statutory target over time. Alongside this, established escalation processes remain in place to support timely referrals and transfers where inpatient care is clinically required.

The Board is right to highlight the pressures currently facing probation services and the importance of ensuring that sufficient support is available in the community, particularly as additional prisoners are released under recent sentencing reforms. The Government remains committed to ensuring the Probation Service has the capacity it needs to supervise people safely in the community and support rehabilitation. To support this, the Government is investing up to £700 million in probation and community services by the final year of the current Spending Review period. This investment will support additional probation capacity, accommodation provision and electronic monitoring. We have also committed to onboarding at least 1,300 trainee probation officers during 2026/27, building on the success of recent recruitment campaigns. Alongside additional recruitment, the Our Future Probation Service Programme continues to reduce administrative burdens, streamline processes and support practitioners to focus on public protection and reducing reoffending. Reforms introduced through the Sentencing Act 2026, together with a new operational approach focused on those presenting the greatest risk of harm, are intended to help ensure probation services remain resilient and capable of managing future demand.

I was particularly encouraged by the Board's recognition of the considerable progress achieved during the reporting year. I welcome the continued improvements in healthcare provision, strengthened safety governance, enhanced support for vulnerable prisoners and the more robust quality assurance and oversight arrangements now in place across the establishment. I was also pleased to read the positive comments regarding Families First, the Chaplaincy, the Library and the Shannon Trust, whose work continues to make an important contribution to prisoner wellbeing, rehabilitation and family support. These achievements demonstrate the commitment of staff and partner organisations to improving outcomes for those in their care.

I note you have raised several local issues of concern in your report which the Director 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 greatly value the work of the Independent Monitoring Board and extend our thanks to all members for their continued service and commitment to ensuring independent oversight at HMP Thameside.



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

Annex

HMP THAMESIDE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2025 – 30 JUNE 2026

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Scrutiny of Probation and Pre – Release Teams

The performance and delivery of the Probation and Pre-Release Teams are now subject to formal review through Resettlement Meetings, chaired by the Head of Reducing Reoffending. These meetings provide regular oversight of performance, delivery and operational priorities and have been introduced to strengthen accountability and scrutiny. Going forward, this process will also include monitoring response times to prisoner queries submitted through CMS, recognising the importance of timely communication and effective case management. Performance and delivery will continue to be reviewed through these governance arrangements.

Supporting prisoners in accessing distance learning

The Ministry of Justice remains committed to supporting access to education at all levels while in custody and continues to work with organisations such as the Prisoners' Education Trust and the Open University to widen educational opportunities. At HMP Thameside, work is underway with the education provider to ensure prisoners can continue existing distance learning programmes following transfer into the establishment. Discussions are also taking place with the Prisoners' Education Trust and Doing What Really Matters to improve awareness of available courses and funding opportunities. The prison is also expanding its range of accredited provision, including Level 3 qualifications, while the planned expansion of the Digital Education and Employment Platform is intended to improve access to educational opportunities through the Employment Hub. Local governance and quality assurance arrangements continue to monitor distance learning provision and support its development.

Vetting delays in the recruitment process

Vetting forms a critical part of HMPPS pre-employment checks and includes identity verification, right to work checks, criminal records checks, offender connection declarations and employment references. During 2025, processing times increased following an unexpected 30% increase in recruitment activity across HMPPS and its providers, together with changes to criminal records checking processes. HMPPS worked with Sopra Steria Limited and providers to improve recruitment forecasting, increase processing capacity and strengthen workforce planning arrangements. These measures are already delivering improvement, with recent performance data showing that cases are progressing more quickly through the pre-employment checking process. Further work is underway to automate elements of the process and enable checks to be completed in parallel, improving efficiency, reducing delays and strengthening resilience against future increases in recruitment demand. Locally, HMP Thameside accelerated recruitment activity to ensure future training courses could be filled at the earliest opportunity and to allow vetting processes to commence as early as possible.