



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Guys Marsh
Shaftsbury
Dorset
SP7 0AH

MoJ ref: SUB126145

29 July 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP GUYS MARSH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 DECEMBER 2023 – 30 NOVEMBER 2024**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Guys Marsh. I have read your report with care and would like to express my appreciation to you and your colleagues for your continued commitment to independent monitoring and for the valuable insights you provide.

I was saddened to learn that three men died whilst serving their sentences during the reporting year, and I offer my sincere condolences to their families and friends. The recommendations of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken seriously, and we remain committed to learning from such tragic events. I was reassured to read in your report about the Governor's prompt and compassionate response to the three deaths, including the personal visits made to the bereaved families to offer support and extend sympathy.

I recognise the Board's continued concerns regarding the assessment, selection, induction, and ongoing development of prison officers. The Ministry of Justice remains committed to building a skilled and resilient workforce for the demanding and complex roles within our prisons to ensure that staff are not only well-prepared at entry but are also supported throughout their careers with meaningful development opportunities. Enhanced vetting procedures have been introduced to uphold high standards, and a redesigned assessment process is being implemented on a phased basis. Nationally, leadership pathways such as the 'Spark Custodial' talent scheme are now becoming established. At HMP Guys Marsh the Governor reports on a strong staffing position, with all senior roles filled and a critical safety training plan in place, which includes competency and capability professional development training for all staff. In addition, HMP Guys Marsh is an early adopter of the 'Enable' programme, which offers weekly coaching and reflective practice for all uniformed staff, plus targeted support for first-line managers.

Delivering the Government's vision for HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is of course central to my role as Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending and something to which I am deeply committed. The vision for HMPPS is to create a safer society by effectively rehabilitating offenders, reducing reoffending, and protecting the public. This vision emphasises the importance of believing in people's capacity to change and working together as one agency to achieve excellence in rehabilitation and public protection. The recently published HMPPS Prisons Roadmap sets out how we will deliver the organisation's five core internal operational strategies in prisons, focusing on the strategic priorities for Rehabilitation, Public Protection, Estates and Infrastructure, People, and Youth Custody.

We continue to focus on reducing reoffending through rehabilitation including education, and employment, while ensuring everyone across HMPPS understands their role in supporting effective rehabilitation and public protection practices. This comprehensive approach involves collaboration across various departments and partners to improve the availability and quality of the services we provide.

I would like to thank you for acknowledging in your report the positive practice which you observed during the reporting period. I was pleased to read about the compassionate and professional approach of the induction staff, the improvements in mental health services, the introduction of evening association, and the strong pastoral care provided by the chaplaincy.

Improving access to employment for people leaving prison is, as you know, something I am passionate about. It was therefore most encouraging to read about the positive pre-release work being undertaken, resulting in individuals gaining employment with Veolia Ecological Transformation and Marston Inns.

All these examples of good practice are a credit to HMP Guys Marsh and reflect a commitment to decency and rehabilitation. They provide frontline evidence of the HMPPS vision being delivered by dedicated staff.

HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex and the Governor will continue to keep you updated, as work progresses, regarding the local issues of concern which you have raised.

The Lord Chancellor and I appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are grateful for your hard work on behalf of HMP Guys Marsh.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James', written in a cursive style.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP GUYS MARSH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 DECEMBER 2023 – 30 NOVEMBER 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Continuous Professional Development

HMPPS recognise that frontline prison staff are central to delivering safe, secure, and rehabilitative regimes, and that investing in their development is essential to maintaining morale and improving effectiveness across the service. In response, the Enable Programme has been launched as a workforce transformation initiative to enhance how HMPPS trains, develops, leads, and supports its staff. The programme is being implemented in a number of Early Adopter prisons, including HMP Guys Marsh. While still in the early stages, initial progress is promising.

The Enable Programme includes:

- Core capability training packages for prison officers 6-18 months into service, to build confidence, competence, and a sense of value following foundation training.
- A new Custodial Manager Portfolio to strengthen leadership skills among first-line managers, with a similar offer in development for Heads of Functions.
- Introduction of specialist mentoring roles to support officers' professional growth.
- Coaching and training for first-line managers through the Human Resources Performance Manager (HRPM), focused on improving performance management capability.

Additional initiatives being implemented at HMP Guys Marsh include new manager pathways, Civil Service Learning packages, targeted development sessions based on the Confidence and Competence (C&C) Toolkit and HR leadership sessions for both first-line managers and senior leaders. This multi-layered approach reflects a strong commitment to professional development and leadership at all levels and provides a framework for testing and scaling relational approaches across diverse custodial settings.

Mobile Phones

There have been recent reductions in call charges which have brought the cost of calls made from prisons to a level significantly lower than comparable charges for non-prison calls in the general public. There have been discussions around the potential introduction of more modernised payment models, such as call plans or monthly schemes, similar to those available in the community. However, these remain exploratory at this stage and have not yet been formally adopted or guaranteed. HMPPS continues to review and assess options to improve fairness and affordability in prisoner communications, while balancing the operational, security, and contractual considerations involved.

Ingress of illicit items

HMPPS remains committed to making prisons safer and continues to take robust, multi-layered action to detect, deter, and disrupt the ingress of illicit items. At HMP Guys Marsh, a comprehensive strategy is addressing the growing threats of drone activity, substance misuse, and site vulnerabilities that impact the safety and wellbeing of staff and prisoners. As referred to in your report, a key development is the installation of new Mark-8 windows across all main residential units designed to significantly reduce the risk of contraband being delivered via drones and other advanced methods. As of mid-2025, the project is approximately 50% complete, with full completion expected in due course. An additional £1.3 million is being invested in second-floor window replacements, due for completion in October 2025. To further support these efforts, 400-metre Drone Restricted Fly Zones have been established around all closed prisons and YOIs in England and Wales, making unauthorised drone use a criminal offence. As

you note, a Clear Bag Policy has also been introduced at HMP Guys Marsh to reduce other forms of illicit conveyance.

Operationally, the Head of Security works closely with the police to ensure intelligence sharing. HMPPS is also collaborating with other government departments to deploy the most effective interventions. A strengthened Drug Strategy is in development aligned with the National Drug and Alcohol Operational Framework and supported by a newly appointed Drug Strategy Analyst to identify emerging trends. Supply reduction measures are reviewed regularly through Local Threat Assessment and Security meetings, alongside continued engagement with statutory services and health partners.

Living Conditions

HMPPS recognise the importance of maintaining safe, decent, and humane living conditions across the prison estate and is actively investing in improvements at HMP Guys Marsh, particularly in the older residential wings. A range of infrastructure projects are underway or in development to address site conditions:

- **Heating Ring Main:** A major upgrade has been commissioned, with the contract awarded and work scheduled to commence before 2026.
- **Cell Call Systems:** £300,000 has been allocated for replacement in four accommodation house blocks to enhance prisoner safety.
- **Electrical Infrastructure:** £100,000 is being invested in replacing aged distribution panels in Dorset Wing to ensure compliance with modern safety standards.

Window Replacement: The second-floor window replacement project, valued at approximately £1.3 million, began in January 2025 and is progressing well, with completion expected by October 2025. The second phase (first-floor windows) is also underway, following the successful completion of the ground floor. The resulting improvements to natural light, ventilation, and security, have already contributed to a reduction in waste being thrown from cells and items being passed through window

Bids have also been submitted for further improvements.

New cleaning schedules and maintenance routines are supporting day-to-day decency across all residential units. MOJ Property Services and its Service Providers remain committed to delivering high standards of maintenance, with performance monitored through KPIs. Despite generally strong performance, HMP Guys Marsh experiences one of the highest rates of vandalism in the South West, which is being closely monitored and managed. HMPPS keep investment needs across the estate under review as part of the current and future Spending Review periods with decisions informed by condition surveys assessing the fabric, cells, and critical assets of each prison to guide long-term maintenance planning and prioritisation.

Self-harm

HMPPS is committed to reducing self-harm and improving safety across the prison estate. A key step in this effort has been the phased removal of wet shave razors from the adult male closed estate. HMP Guys Marsh was among the first 31 priority sites to implement this change and is now fully wet shave razor-free. While the primary aim of this initiative is to reduce the risk of serious violence from improvised weapons, it also brings potential benefits in reducing razor-related self-harm. Electric razors will be rolled out across the remaining prisons in the adult male closed estate in Autumn 2025, with full implementation expected by the end of the year.

At HMP Guys Marsh, a range of measures are in place to support individuals at risk of suicide and self-harm:

- Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) case management is used to identify individual risks, triggers, and protective factors, and to develop tailored support plans.

- All ACCT case managers are receiving upskill training through the national training provider to strengthen the quality and consistency of support.
- The ACCT quality assurance process is being expanded using the national model. Residential Custodial Managers, supported by the Safety Team, are undertaking reviews, with findings discussed at the Safer Custody Meeting to identify trends and set appropriate actions.
- Group Safety Leads continue to provide regular support visits to HMP Guys Marsh, offering assurance on ACCT quality and direct feedback to case coordinators. Ongoing improvement remains a focus.
- Safety Intervention Meetings (SIMs) are held for individuals with complex self-harming behaviours, ensuring multi-disciplinary support. Attendance at these meetings remains strong.
- Staff training: All new staff with prisoner contact receive training in suicide and self-harm prevention, with additional specialist training for those in key roles.
- Item removal protocols: Staff are authorised to remove items from at-risk individuals where there is an immediate need to preserve life or prevent serious harm.
- A quality assurance tool has been developed to help establishments assess the effectiveness of their case management processes and identify areas for improvement and good practice.

Since the restricted regime was lifted in September 2024, HMP Guys Marsh has seen a reduction in self-harm incidents, alongside a broader downward trend in violence and self-harm following the introduction of a new and expanded regime offer.

Staff Assessment, Selection and Training

HMPPS takes seriously the rise in assaults on staff and concerns regarding the treatment of prisoners. A wide range of national and local measures are in place to strengthen the assessment, training, and ongoing development of prison officers, while also addressing the underlying causes of violence and unprofessional behaviour. All new officers are trained to nationally approved standards, and there is no evidence to suggest that the rise in assaults is directly attributable to shortcomings in the selection or training process. Inexperience can however have an impact on operational effectiveness, and as such, HMPPS is expediting coaching and development through targeted interventions and training events.

At HMP Guys Marsh, targeted action is being taken to address violence and improve staff-prisoner interactions:

- The prison has been actively involved in the National Safety Team's (NST) assault reduction initiative. The NST identified the illicit economy as a key driver of violence and is working with cross-agency partners to deliver a tailored support package.
- A dedicated Violence Reduction Custodial Manager has been appointed to lead local efforts.
- The prison has transitioned to the Digital Prison Service (DPS) platform for managing Challenge, Support and Intervention Plans (CSIPs), supported by upskilling and mentoring from Group Safety Leads.

POM Caseloads

HMPPS recognises the pressures placed on Prison Offender Managers (POMs) and the impact that increasing caseloads can have on the quality of support provided to prisoners. To address this immediate and longer-term steps are being taken nationally and locally.

Nationally, recruitment and retention remain priorities for the Probation Service, with a strong focus on staff wellbeing and workforce sustainability. Initiatives to strengthen supervision, reduce caseloads, and increase staffing capacity include:

- Exceeding the 2024/25 trainee target, onboarding 1,057 trainee Probation Officers; a further 1,300 trainees are expected in 2025/26.

- Onboarding 4,582 trainee Probation Officers between 2020/21 and 2023/24, many of whom are now qualified and managing caseloads.
- A workforce increase of 467 full-time equivalents (FTE) between June 2023 and June 2024, including an 11.5% increase in Probation Officers and a 16.1% increase in staff across Bands 4–6.

Locally, HMP Guys Marsh has made progress in stabilising POM staffing:

- The prison has reached its target staffing figure (TSF) of 6 FTE for prison POMs.
- Probation POM staffing is slightly below target due to a temporary promotion within the team but as of June 2025, the site is only 0.5 FTE below TSF for both probation POMs and the Head of Offender Management Delivery (HOMD).
- A business case has been submitted to convert the 0.5 HOMD vacancy into a probation officer post, which would increase the TSF to 5 FTE.

The HOMD continues to provide regular supervision to POMs, enhancing oversight and support. To address the OASys backlog, a dedicated taskforce has been approved to deliver 18.5 hours per week for three months. As part of succession planning, prison placements are being promoted to trainee probation officers to build future capacity and deepen understanding of the POM role within custodial settings.