



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Lewes
1 Brighton Road
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 1EA

MoJ ref: SUB126638

20 August 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI LEWES: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 FEBURUARY 2024 – 31 JANAURY 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Lewes. I have reviewed it thoroughly and would like to express my appreciation to you and your colleagues for the considerable effort involved in compiling your valuable insights, especially given your reduced membership during the reporting period.

I was deeply saddened to learn of the two deaths in custody during the reporting period, and my thoughts are with all those who knew and cared for them. Please be assured that the recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are treated with the utmost seriousness, and every effort is made to reflect and act upon them. In such difficult circumstances, the care shown makes a meaningful difference, and I would also like to acknowledge the compassionate and sensitive response from the prison staff. Such professionalism and humanity are truly commendable.

I acknowledge the Board's ongoing concerns regarding the provision of specialist secure mental health services for prisoners with serious mental health issues. Prisons and other places of detention are not appropriate environments for individuals with severe mental illness. I want to reassure the Board that this Government remains firmly committed to addressing this issue and ensuring timely, appropriate care for some of the most vulnerable individuals within the Criminal Justice System (CJS).

The proposed expansion of mental health services within custodial settings is primarily driven by the increasing number of individuals entering detention with complex mental health needs and comorbid conditions. In response, the Commissioning Team and the Health Provider are actively collaborating to identify key areas for enhancement. One confirmed improvement is the strengthening of support at the point of entry, specifically through the Early Days in Custody model. A business case outlining the proposed improvements is expected to be submitted to the Commissioning Team by the end of July 2025. Additionally, plans are underway to formally review the recommendations from the Mental Health Service Review conducted in May 2024 by the Centre for Mental Health Studies. This follow-up review will inform ongoing discussions with the Health Provider regarding necessary staffing increases. Both the Commissioner and the Health Provider remain committed to working collaboratively to define the final staffing model, with particular emphasis on bolstering support during the early stages of custody.

Clause 38 of the Mental Health Bill introduces a statutory time limit of 28 days for the transfer of individuals from prison and other places of detention to hospital. The transfer process is multidisciplinary, requiring input from numerous health and justice agencies. This clause places existing NHS England 'Best Practice' guidance on a statutory footing and, alongside operational improvements, aims to reduce delays and ensure swifter access to treatment. To support this reform, NHS England is implementing several measures to overcome barriers to timely transfers. These include enhancing data collection and monitoring, refining the referral process, and providing training to prison staff. Furthermore, the establishment of the Mental Health and Justice Strategic Advisory Group offers clinical leadership, advice, and oversight across the pathway. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) are working with partners to develop an implementation plan outlining the operational changes required to enact this reform. The plan is expected to be rolled out 18–24 months following Royal Assent.

I was pleased to read the Boards comments, highlighting several positive developments at HMP/YOI Lewes. The 16% drop in prisoner-on-prisoner violence, supported by the improved induction processes and better use of the Challenge Support and Intervention Plan (CSIP), was particularly welcome. However, the 15% rise in assaults on staff, especially the doubling of serious incidents, was concerning. It underscores the difficult environment staff face, and I welcome the Boards recognition of their conscientiousness and commitment in responding to these risks. It was also encouraging to see that refurbished accommodation and shared areas, now noticeably cleaner, contributed to the improved amber/green rating for living standards awarded by the Performance Assurance & Risk (PAR) Group, a significant improvement from the red rating in 2019. Additionally, the Lewes Assurance Multi-Skills (LAMS) team was a standout, saving over £350,000 by using prisoners' trade skills to enhance the prison environment. I commend all involved, the prisoners should be extremely proud of their impressive work and their contribution to bettering the prison.

I note that you have raised some local issues of concern in your report, which the Governor will continue to address and keep you informed about as work progresses. Comments from His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in response to the other matters raised are outlined in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I greatly value the important role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards across the estate, and we are sincerely grateful to you and your team for your continued dedication and hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Lewes.

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/YOI LEWES: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 FEBRUARY 2024 – 31 JANUARY 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Heating and Hot Water System Replacement

HMPPS assures the Board that we are actively exploring all viable options to enable the swiftest possible replacement of the prison's heating and hot water system. The MoJ has mandated a project to replace the failed district gas main, and a feasibility study is currently underway to determine the most effective solution, whether that be replacing the gas main or installing a centralised boiler plant, based on sustainability, efficiency, and speed of delivery. A bid for this project has now been received and is in the early stages of development. All requests from the establishment will be considered; however, it is important to note that maintenance demands significantly exceed the available funding. As such, HMPPS must carefully prioritise works to ensure the best use of resources, focusing on risks to life, capacity, and decency. In the interim, to improve reliability, Government Facilities Services Limited (GFSL) has recently upgraded the initial emergency installations with more efficient temporary boilers, ensuring a more consistent supply of heating and hot water at HMP/YOI Lewes.

Mental Health Services and Psychiatric Provision

The Board's concerns regarding the adequacy of psychiatric provision are acknowledged. The unexpected departure of the previous Consultant Psychiatrist resulted in a temporary gap in service provision. However, a substantive Consultant Psychiatrist was successfully appointed by the health provider, Practice Plus Group, and commenced work in October 2024 following a standard notice period. During the interim, cover was provided by a Consultant Psychiatrist from a neighbouring site, with urgent cases prioritised to ensure continuity of care. One of the initial actions taken by the newly appointed Consultant Psychiatrist was a comprehensive review of the waiting list, which had grown during the interim period. This review has led to a reduction in waiting times, with urgent cases now being seen within two working days. Service delivery is now meeting the standards outlined in the agreed service specification. Additionally, NHS commissioners are scheduled to undertake a health needs analysis to assess whether the current mental health provision aligns with the needs of the prison population at HMP/YOI Lewes.