



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Swaleside

**For reporting year
1 May 2024 to 30 April 2025**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

An audio summary of this report is being provided to prisoners' in-cell tablets.

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Swaleside is a category B training prison for men, on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent.

It was opened in August 1988 as part of a group with HMPs Standford Hill and Elmley. On 1 April 2017, it became part of the HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) long-term high-security estate (LTHSE), designed to hold prisoners who pose the greatest risk to public safety if they were to escape.

The certified normal accommodation, or CNA (which is the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being overcrowded) is 1,111¹ in single cells over seven wings (A wing remains closed). The CNA includes the care, separation and reintegration unit (CSRU) and the healthcare unit. The operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners deemed able to be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the prison) is 965.

At the end of April 2025, 86% were category B prisoners, while 13% were category C and less than 1% were category D.

¹ Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's position at the time of reporting but may be subject to change following further validation and therefore may not always tally with Official Statistics later published by the Ministry of Justice.

3. Key points

Background to the report

In recent times, HMP Swaleside has suffered from a chronic lack of staff, exacerbated by signing-on bonuses paid to Border Force staff, which made their jobs more attractive than working at the prison, drawing staff away. This year, the picture is dramatically different, with a huge influx of new staff, especially those from overseas who are on sponsored skilled worker visas.

While this is positive, the lack of staff experience has impacted on the fair and humane treatment of prisoners, in the Board's view. This is compounded by the number of black, Asian and minority ethnic officers dramatically increasing from four to 115, which can lead to communication challenges, due to cultural and/or language differences. Greater diversity is to be welcomed and better reflects the prison population in Swaleside, but the lack of phasing for recruitment seems to have caused friction and misunderstanding among prisoners and officers.

However, the agreed complement of 258 band 3 uniformed staff has not been a reality for most of the year. For example, 290 staff were employed in December, with a target of 252 'boots on the ground', but it resulted in an actual figure of 190, due to the impact of long-term sickness, absences and 21 suspensions.

Last year, the Board reported that 50% of uniformed staff had less than two years' experience. In September 2024, that had dropped close to 50% having less than one year's experience. It is completely unrealistic for any organisation to expect so many new recruits to understand the required role without guidance from more experienced officers. This has an impact on the running of the prison, conduct, safety and violence.

As expected, the regime for Core Day 5 (the fifth material change to the regime since Covid) was implemented in September 2024. This increased the amount of time prisoners spent out of their cells by 1.25 hours to 7.25 per week. While the increase is welcomed, it remains insufficient for fair and humane treatment.

In April 2025, the Board sent a survey out to prisoners on topics such as accommodation, food and safety, and the response rate was over 50%. The final question was 'free text' (which allows respondents to provide answers in their own words) on any issue prisoners wished to raise. While a negative bias would be anticipated, the comments reflect a consistent pattern of serious concerns about safety, corruption, and poor management at the prison. A recurring theme is the perception of widespread violence, including bullying by both prisoners and staff, as well as unchecked gang control - particularly by religious gangs - which many prisoners report feeling powerless and unsafe against. Numerous comments point to a lack of staff training, discipline and professionalism, with some prisoners alleging racism, abuse of power and deliberate provocation by officers. There is also strong criticism of leadership, described as absent, ineffective and dismissive of prisoner welfare, especially around mental health, neurodiversity needs, and rehabilitation. Drug use - especially the prevalence of spice - and the presence of weapons are highlighted as urgent, unaddressed issues contributing to a highly dangerous environment. Many prisoners express feelings of neglect, fear and hopelessness, with some saying that conditions are getting worse year by year, despite repeated

complaints and reports to higher authorities. The Board's monitoring will cover these concerns through this report.

Against such a difficult background, the Board commends the senior leadership team (SLT), officers and detached duty officers, service providers and administrative staff for their efforts.

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- Again, the Board has a concern about the gang culture in the prison. However, it notes the exemplary work being done in reception to ascertain non-associates.
- Based on the results of random drug testing of prisoners, it is estimated that over 50% are using illicit substances. Cannabis and a synthetic cannabinoid (spice) are the most used, with the latter much harder to detect. The trade in illegal substances has resulted in a high level of debt, which creates fear of violence and settling scores.
- Violence is a constant theme and the manufacturing of bladed weapons on site is ominous. A total of 620 adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules), for violent/threatening behaviour were recorded in the first four months of 2025.

Fair and humane treatment

- While there are maintenance issues with the showers, heating, hotplates and other parts of the estate, the prisoners benefit from all cells being sole occupancy.
- The easing of the regime during the year is a positive, but too often movement has been delayed or cancelled due to the shortage of staff and/or inexperience.
- Staff in the CSRU are to be commended for conducting a fair and safe regime under challenging circumstances. However, again, the Board is concerned about the appropriateness of these cells for prisoners with severe mental-health issues, for the extended length of time spent and for use as constant watch.
- Staff and prisoner relationships have been impacted by the low quantity and quality of key work sessions, due to the high number of new officers.

Health and wellbeing

- The new head of healthcare has had a noticeable impact on the running of the department and staff morale. However, the regional head needed to visit the prison to discuss healthcare workers' concerns about their personal safety.
- Prisoners' mental health continues to be a major concern. While the in-reach team do their best to manage, there are not enough staff to cope with the caseload.
- The time limits for assessing and transferring prisoners to secure or specialist mental health care units are not being met. The longest transfer for a prisoner was an astounding 721 days.
- The specialist addiction unit is having some success, with 20% of their prisoners becoming clean.

Progression and resettlement

- Close to 100% of prisoners who take education courses continue to completion.
- As a category B training prison, HMP Swaleside is not set up to cater for a large number of releases.
- The offender flow system continues to see prisoners sent to Swaleside, who should not be.
- The offender management unit (OMU) has continuing staff shortages, with two-thirds of capacity. This has had a detrimental impact on sentence progression. SDS40 (a scheme to ease capacity strains on prisons by allowing eligible prisoners to be released after 40% of their standard determinate sentence instead of the standard 50%) has increased the pressure, with a large amount of extra work.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The Board reiterates its concern about imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentences, which have no set release date. The Board notes the Minister's response last year, that resentencing could result in prisoners being released without licence supervision. However, not resentencing is punishing them for their behaviour, which has undoubtedly been impacted by the uncertainty of IPPs that were abolished in 2012, with the Government stating that they were 'not defensible'. When will the Minister review resentencing?
- Attempts to combat the incursion of drones nationally have not been successful. At HMP Swaleside, sightings are down but contraband is up, so it appears that drones are no longer being successfully detected. What specific, advanced technology, such as that used by the military, will the Minister deploy across the prison estate to help combat this problem?
- Despite SDS40, the population pressure persists. Again, as a category-B training prison, Swaleside does not have the ability to double as a resettlement prison. Also, the pressure on spaces means some prisoners are being inappropriately sent to Swaleside. How does the Minister propose to address these two issues?
- The inexperience of staff is compounded by the limited training they receive. This is not sufficient to commence employment. What steps will the Minister take to involve Governors in the recruitment process, and what is the rationale for the exclusion of Governors from the process?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- The Board shares the concerns expressed by the senior leadership team (SLT) that there have, again, been deaths in custody during the year, especially as only two were, apparently, due to natural causes. What specific,

actions are being taken to prevent further fatalities and improve prisoner safety?

- Again, the length of time spent in the care, separation and reintegration unit (CSRU) by a number of prisoners remains too long and far exceeds regular recommendations. The Board notes the response last year about exit strategies, but there has been no improvement. What actions and strategies have been implemented to reduce the time prisoners spend in the CSRU, why have these failed and how does the Prison Service plan to ensure an improvement?
- While noting last year's response that contractors had entered administration, the continued reliance of HMP Stanford Hill on the kitchen at HMP Swaleside for the preparation of its food continues to cause major issues, as has been stated for years. What will the Prison Service do to address the ongoing issue?
- The Board notes the increase in trained mental-health staff, but the number of cases is combined with the inappropriate facilities to properly care for those with severe mental-health issues. When will the Prison Service increase secure units nationally?
- In our 2023-2024 annual report, we stated that the situation with body worn video cameras (BWVCs) needs to be rectified, so that all staff can be issued with cameras. The prison response was there are enough BWVCs for operational staff, but the Board believes non-operational staff need to have the opportunity when they come into contact with prisoners. Again, we ask when will the issue be rectified?
- Again, there is a lack of sufficient constant-watch cells during times of crisis. The Board noted the response last year that in-patient department cells were being considered, but no decision appears to have been made and G wing's cell has been intermittently out of action. When will a decision be made?
- The Board is concerned about the number of adjudications that are being adjourned and prisoners not attending. This undermines the effective running of the prison. What are the reasons for the high number of adjournments and non-attendances and what actions can be taken to address them?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- For the majority of the reporting year, violence was ranked as a 'serious risk' by the prison. Yet, up to 25% of prisoners are not placed on report, or BWVCs activated, as officers can feel intimidated about potential consequences. What support will staff be given?
- Staff and prisoner relationships have been damaged by the huge influx of inexperienced staff. Will the Governor reassure the Board that the recent recovery in key work sessions from a low base will be matched with quality assurance?
- Drugs, mobile phones and other illicit items being recorded at 'serious risk' is not acceptable for the safety of prisoners and staff. What steps is the Governor taking to ensure a safe prison environment?
- Too much time has been lost in movement to meaningful vocational work and/or education in the reporting year. How will the Governor address this issue?

- The Board remains concerned that prisoners are being released from Swaleside without proper support. How does the Governor plan to address this issue?
- The relentless theft of stock by prisoners from the DHL workshop has not been addressed. What will the Governor do to prevent the thefts?

3.3. Main areas for attention noted in the report 2023-2024

Issue raised	Progress since the last report
<i>To the Minister</i> 1. The Board reiterates the same point that it made last year. Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPPs) sentences were abolished in 2012, with the Government stating that they were 'not defensible'. However, the change did not apply to prisoners who were already serving IPP sentences, and this left them in limbo, with little hope of release. The Board is concerned that the Government has rejected the call from the Justice Select Committee to resentence IPP prisoners and reduce the licence period from 10 to five years. This is neither decent nor humane and the Board would urge the Minister to review the department's response to the Justice Select Committee's report. 2. The incursion of drones needs to be addressed on a national basis, with a	1. Limited progress 2. Drone sightings are down, but that likely reflects the increased sophistication of operators. Contraband continues to be a major issue.

viable solution found for the whole estate. 3. The population pressures across the estate need a solution. As a category B training prison, Swaleside has neither the budget nor the staffing to double as a resettlement prison, and yet is now expected to fulfil this function for 90-100 prisoners per annum. 4. The Board notes the excellent completion rate in the education unit.	3. The situation persists, despite SDS40 (a scheme to ease capacity strains on prisons by allowing eligible prisoners to be released after 40% of their standard determinate sentence instead of the standard 50%). 4. The completion rate continues to be close to 100%.
Issue raised	Progress since the last report
To the Prison Service 1. The Board shares the concerns expressed by the senior leadership team (SLT) that there have, again, been deaths in custody during the year. Though these all appear to have been from natural causes. 2. The length of time spent in the care, separation and rehabilitation unit (CSRU) by a number of prisoners remains far too long and far exceeds normal recommendations. An effective means of reducing this time should be sought as a matter of urgency.	1. Sadly, the current year includes deaths in custody, apparently from 'unnatural' causes. 2. This has deteriorated further during this reporting year, due to prison population pressures and the lack of spaces in mental health secure units.

3. The Board remains concerned about the impact of the offender flow and allocation system. Swaleside is a category B training prison in the long-term high-security estate (LTHSE), but it is now receiving younger prisoners with shorter sentences. This is detrimental to the stability of the prison and the wellbeing of older, longer-sentenced prisoners, and creates resettlement problems at release.	3. The situation continues, although Swaleside has implemented processes for young adults.
4. The continued reliance of HMP Stanford Hill on the kitchen at HMP Swaleside for the preparation of food continues to cause major issues, as has been stated for several years.	4. The situation remains unchanged.
5. The inequality of opportunity for prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSOs) and vulnerable prisoners still needs to be addressed, despite progress made in that direction.	5. The Board still holds this view.
6. The Board remains concerned about the mental health of prisoners who have suffered long-term lockdown. This is evidenced by the	6. The situation remains unchanged.

number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans, self-harm cases and violent incidents. The first indications from the recent improvement in regime are positive. However, the necessity for increased psychology and psychiatric services still needs to be assessed.	
7. The Board has concerns over the growing gang culture in the prison and its effect on the more vulnerable prisoners. It also affects the movement of prisoners, both internally and transfers.	7. The Board still holds this view but also understands the difficult logistics of having two different vulnerable units.
8. At present, the prison only has 180 body worn video cameras (BWVCs) available, which means there are insufficient to issue to all staff. This situation needs to be rectified, so that all staff can be issued with cameras.	8. This is still a concern.
9. The lack of sufficient constant watch cells during times of crisis.	9. This is still a concern.
10. The Board notes the backlog of adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken	10. There is a continued backlog.

prison rules) and the excellent efforts taken by staff to alleviate this.	
Issue raised	Progress since the last report
<i>To the Governor</i> 1. With the staffing ratio now up, due in part to the temporary closure of two wings, the Board now expects the low level of key work to be addressed. 2. As the regime gradually improves, with the roll-out of the Core Day programme, the Board would urge the Governor to ensure that more prisoners are provided with meaningful vocational work and/or education, in line with their sentence plans. 3. The Board remains very concerned about the situation of IPP prisoners. Courses and programmes should be made available to them so that they can have the opportunity to demonstrate that they are no longer a danger to the public. 4. New prisoners are not receiving adequate induction and the Board is very concerned that prisoners are being released from Swaleside without proper support.	1. The quantity of key work sessions only started to improve in 2025. 2. There has been little progress. 3. This is still a concern. 4. This is still a concern.

5. The issue of overflowing sewage from the drains must be addressed, as this is exposed to the movement of food trolleys to the residential areas, which is a health and safety issue. 6. The theft of stock from the DHL workshop must be addressed.	5. The situation has improved. 6. This is still a concern.
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Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Reception is the location where discharged and incoming prisoners are processed. Since it is the location of the prison's body scanner, it is also used to examine prisoners being transferred between wings when they are suspected of carrying concealed items.

Prisoners are typically transfers between prisons or are attending/returning from hospital. In general, the number of medical transfers significantly exceeds transfers between prisons.

The recanting of the prison started in the previous reporting year. By August 2024, 286 prisoners had been at the establishment for less than six months. Of those prisoners arriving around June, 49% were deemed violent compared with an HMP Swaleside average of around 20%. From the Board's observations, it is clear that prisons opted to transfer prisoners who posed the greatest risk of harm to others, which added to the pressure on establishing staff and prisoner relationships.

Similar to other prisons, Swaleside intends to use The Big Word language interpreting service for prisoners whose primary language is not English, which should help improve understanding with foreign national prisoners.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Regrettably, self-harm is ever present. In the main, it involves a small number of prisoners and is often related to prisoners' requests for vapes or changes in the regime. Unlike some CSRUs, Swaleside allows the use of vapes, which results in a disproportionate level of self-harm. While the number of self-harm incidents can vary from month to month and tends to be concentrated amongst certain prisoners, it was a positive trend to see April 2025 was the lowest number recorded since August 2024.

IPP prisoners appear regularly in the self-harm statistics. Even though IPP sentences were abolished in 2012, over 5% of HMP Swaleside's population are IPP prisoners. Way over tariff (which means the prisoner has served the minimum required period and is, therefore, eligible to apply for parole, although it does not guarantee release), the impact on their mental health has been incredibly negative. IPP prisoners are monitored by the psychology team, which focuses on the half who have never been granted parole. This compares to those who have been out on parole but are back inside on recall. For complex cases, there is no provision for treatment, so addressing risk reduction is challenging. The psychology team's focus is on behaviour to assist the prisoner's chance of success at a parole hearing. An IPP sheet is included in an assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plan and IPP prisoners are highlighted in daily reports. With no material change to legislation, such as, for example, resentencing, it is difficult for the Board to see how material progress can be made.

It is sad that the Board reports five deaths in custody during the reporting year, with two, apparently, due to natural causes.

All deaths in the previous reporting year were fully investigated by the Prison and Probation Ombudsman. It made recommendations, including about ACCT paperwork, which the Board commented on last year.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

For the majority of the reporting year, violence was ranked as a 'serious risk' by the prison. In the last three months of the reporting year, there were 107 assaults on staff, 70% of which were triggered by staff instructions, and half of those involved spitting or punching. This lack of respect, especially in regard to inexperienced staff, is a recurring theme with prisoners. Of great concern to the Board is that these assaults happen across all residential wings, making it a complicated issue to solve. It is likely that prisoners, or those instructing them, are seeking to condition staff to *not* carry out their duties. In response, up to 25% of prisoners are not placed on report, or BWVCs activated, as officers can feel intimidated about potential consequences.

Prisoner-on-prisoner violence incidents are lower than self-harm, but that does not include prisoners taking evasive action, such as, for example, self-isolating, paying off debts or holding illicit items on behalf of others. The presence of gangs, drugs and debt is behind many of the requests for wing moves, often accompanied by threats. Typically, around 30 prisoners are self-isolating.

4.4 Use of force (UoF)

A total of 53% of officers have been trained in control and restraint (C&R) techniques (which include the use of force) - marginally up from 43% in the previous reporting period. Spontaneous protection enabling accelerated response (SPEAR) training is now at 85% (up from 34%) and Pava incapacitant spray at 42% (down from 78%). These figures are reflective of the high numbers of new recruits awaiting training.

Quality issues are usually identified during the weekly C&R review meeting. These are typically addressed by a mix of verbal warnings to the relevant staff or advice to attend a refresher course.

There were 937 UoF interventions in the year to March 31 2025, of which 157 were planned and 780 were spontaneous. One recurring issue regarding planned interventions has been the failure to contact the IMB to request their attendance as observers. This issue, along with various other, quality issues, has been addressed by the publication of a formal checklist, which is to be used at the start of all planned interventions.

Although BWVCs are being deployed, the average use is erratic and dropped to 56% in March 2025 (from 79% in March 2024). The pre-record feature is also useful: it records 30 seconds of video before the camera is manually activated. When BWVCs are not activated, the police are reluctant to take matters further, as there will be a lack of potential evidence to be used in a prosecution.

Pava spray has proven to be a valuable tool in resolving situations in which more direct, physical confrontation might otherwise be required, such as the use of batons. Pava was drawn 14 times during March.

The application of UoF is in similar proportion to the ethnicity of the population at Swaleside, but not of the age demographic or religion, where the prison data shows

it is biased against the 22-29 age group and the Muslim population – this is a repeated theme.

Submission of F213 forms, concerning an injury to a prisoner, is poor and a better process and de-brief are necessary.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Drugs, mobile phones and other illicit items are all ranked as a ‘serious risk’ by the prison. For example, 168 drug-related and 80 illegal items were found in April 2025.

A random 5% of prisoners are regularly chosen for drug tests. Adding those who refused the test (as it is likely to be positive) to the positive results indicates that over 50% of the prison’s population is using drugs. Cannabis and synthetic cannabinoid (spice) are the most use, with the latter being much harder to detect. The trade in illegal substances brings a high level of indebtedness, which creates fear of violence and settling scores.

With this shocking level of usage, there are several likelihoods. Prisoners are not being challenged and/or searched enough by staff; cell searches are not being effectively carried out; communal areas, such as the gym, library, chapel, kitchen (especially kitchen trolleys) are not being monitored successfully and the data on drones are misleading. Organised crime groups are highly likely to be behind this activity and the 620 weapon finds during the reporting year, in the Board’s view. Some of the finds are bladed weapons.

Swaleside had been identified as one of the prisons in the LTHSE most at risk of drone incursion. It was in lockstep with the national data, showing a surge in activity and having success in retrieving packages early in the reporting year. Drone packages typically comprise a mixture of drugs, phones, SIM cards and weapons. At first glimpse, recent data looks healthy: in April 2025, sightings were down 50% year-on-year and none at all were recorded the following month. However, in the Board’s view, it is much more likely that the increasing technological sophistication of the drones and their operators is making detection considerably more difficult, in particular their flying altitude. Technology-sharing with the military, or reconsidering geo-fencing, should be under consideration, in the Board’s view.

An alternative method for illicit items entering the prison is via the main gate. The Board has tracked entry through the gate during the year. Scanning has been erratic, with body searching infrequent. When body searches are carried out, it is exemplary, although there is no requirement to remove shoes. The Board is concerned about searches at the gate when staff numbers are low, at the weekend and night.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Prisoners continue to benefit from single-occupancy cells and the works team is to be commended for sharply reducing the number of out-of-action cells this year, a challenge not helped by Swaleside having the second-highest arson incidents in the country.

In the winter, heating in the wings is adequate, but the high temperatures experienced in summer again led to widespread complaints of extreme and unbearable conditions in the cells. This situation is exacerbated by the restricted openings of the cell windows. A four-day lead time to increase/decrease the temperature does not help.

Alpha wing remains closed, due to its refurbishment in line with planned improvements. Bravo and Charlie wings were amongst the most troublesome at HMP Swaleside. Bravo wing consistently had the highest finds of drugs, tobacco, weapons, mobile phones, SIM cards, and 'hooch' (illicitly brewed alcohol). This may be connected to over 50% of the population being aged 20-29, the highest on any wing. Charlie wing has continually been the scene of the most violent attacks and the cleanliness on Charlie wing has left a lot to be desired, with cleaners regularly losing their jobs.

Both wings have been routinely understaffed or have newly, but not sufficiently, trained officers. In a few cases that the Board has observed, some of the officers under the prison officer entry level training scheme (POELTS) do not seem proficient in English, which appears to make them wary of the prisoners. Officers are frequently moved around the estate and often do not know the answers to many of the prisoners' questions. The hot-plates are usually broken and prisoners who work on the serveries do not wear whites, as the regulations state. An average of five cells are constantly out of action, causing accommodation problems.

The smell of drugs is invariably noticeable on visiting the wing. The Board has seen little evidence of staff challenging prisoners and confiscating the items. On a positive note, towards the end of the reporting year, a new custodial manager (CM) was appointed to Charlie wing, which may improve the situation.

Delta wing is the induction unit for arriving prisoners. Regrettably, the length of time prisoners spend on the wing has increased, which means there has been a rise in gang culture, drugs and debt, as prisoners have not been moved off induction as quickly as in the past. As Swaleside came out of special measures, prisoners arrived while on ACCTs but with no briefings being supplied by sending prisons. This showed a fundamental lack of care and put prisoners at risk. Often, prisoners on ACCTs were self-isolating.

The number of open ACCTs on Echo South wing has varied dramatically over the reporting year. There have been occasions when open ACCTs have been in double figures, but thanks to the work of staff and the Change, Grow, Live (CGL) unit, these have been reduced, at times, to two open ACCTs.

One prisoner found it hard to cope with the fact that he is not due for parole until he is 80 years old, and his mental health suffered as a result. Careful watch was kept on him due to suicidal thoughts. From the Board's observations, he received good

support from wing staff and dedicated agencies, including the psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE) unit and Swaleside outreach service (SOS).

For more details about Echo wing, see 6.5.

Foxtrot wing houses particularly challenging prisoners, with a view to aiding their progression; it is staffed accordingly. The wing has three custodial manager – two on the wing and one in SOS. There are four supervising officers (SOs) on the wing and one in SOS. There are 16-20 clinical staff and 34 officers. There is a five-year strategic commitment by NHS for funding until 2028.

The wing has a PIPE unit. This is a specifically designed residential environment unit where staff have received additional training in psychological principles to create a safer, more supportive environment. PIPEs are part of the broader offender personality disorder (OPD) pathway, which aims to support high-risk prisoners.

The Swaleside PIPE is the only 'Provision PIPE' in UK and runs two therapy courses. PIPE applicants can self-refer. The wing is fully self-cook, with cookers, air fryers and toasters. Self-cooking areas are often messy.

The wing looks after the Swaleside 'farm', which keeps a variety of animals and has regular visits from a therapy dog. There is a security issue, however, as the area has no CCTV.

All activities are available to Foxtrot wing residents, except where there would be contact with vulnerable prisoners. Sports and games have been set up for prisoners, which are popular, with winners gaining rewards.

The new 'buddy' system for inexperienced staff has been operating for some weeks. There are mixed comments about the success of this. Violence levels on Foxtrot South wing are lower than in the West wing.

Golf West wing houses prisoners serving life sentences, while Golf South is for vulnerable prisoners (VPs). Prisoners on these two sections require very different treatment, but are managed by the same team of officers. For example, at one point in the year, 13 of the 15 ACCTs on Golf wing were on the South side and through the year there are repeated complaints about staff access. Some prisoners have been transferred from Hotel wing, with the wings also mixing in employment. The benefit is having alternative accommodation for prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSOs).

Hotel wing houses PCoSOs and has been unsettled for most of the year. At the start of the reporting period, a prisoner identified three ringleaders on Hotel wing and described harassment, assaults, manipulation of prisoners to steal to order at DHL and intimidation on the wing. This was confirmation of what has long been known and was reported last year.

Throughout the year there has been evidence of loud noise, racist comments, discrimination against Jewish prisoners, ageism (61% are aged over 40) and rival gangs, which is well known to the wing officers and the SLT. While prisoners are frequently transferred around wings, this is not an option for PCoSOs. The issue had not been sufficiently addressed, with a spike in Rule 53s (which outline procedures for disciplinary charges against a prisoner and the Governor's inquiry into the charges) in August 2024. Managing 25 well-known associates requires experienced

staff. Since then, the judicious transferring of a few perpetrators has restored some calmness to the wing.

As reported last year, the PCoSO wing has had a major issue regarding the drains, with bulky items being flushed, creating an unacceptable health and safety hazard. However, in early 2025, this has shown signs of being resolved.

At the start of the reporting year, due to concerns for personal safety, four prisoners on the PCoSO wing were transferred to HMP Isle of Wight. Around the same time, several prisoners lost their employment at DHL. Theft was suspected, and it seems that those who lost their jobs were potentially coercing other prisoners to steal to order, especially fish tins and chocolate. At the time only PCoSos worked at DHL, so it exacerbated destabilising a community suffering a change in population.

The communication between DHL, the PCoSO wing and the kitchen reported last year has improved but is not ideal. There have been some instances where prisoners' chosen food has been delivered to the wing, even though they are working at DHL. A new communication system has been installed whereby the wing staff provide the kitchen with prisoner details, their chosen menu and their location at mealtimes. This has resulted in fewer complaints of 'lost' meals in the system.

The kitchen at HMP Swaleside is fully staffed with trusted prisoners, and there is a waiting list for what is a responsible position. Prisoners are required to demonstrate commitment and a reasonable level of education to ensure that correct portions of food are delivered to their required destination.

The kitchen at HMP Swaleside also provides meals for the category D (open) prison nearby (Standford Hill). In the Board's view, this situation is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future and has resulted in significant pressures on the kitchen staff. Around 919 prisoners at HMP Swaleside receive three meals per day. This is rapidly approaching the maximum number of 964 that the kitchen can handle for Swaleside prisoners. A further 434 prisoners at HMP Stanford Hill are also provided for at Swaleside, which is also getting close to the maximum 464 allowed. Meals are provided at a budget cost of £3.12 per prisoner, per day.

In the previous reporting year, concerns by the Board were raised regarding an increase in items brought into the kitchen, particularly prisoners' water bottles, which were suspected of being filled up in the kitchen with liquids other than water. An increase in the searches of prisoners, both in and out of the kitchen, has resulted in a dramatic drop in this activity. Further, there has been action to prevent *any* bags being brought into the kitchen area, thus further reducing the ability of prisoners to bring in or take out illicit items.

The various religious festivals (e.g. Ramadan; Passover; Christmas; Easter, etc.) were well catered for by the kitchen and several prisoners have expressed their contentment with the quality and quantity of the food provided.

Last year, we reported on the poor condition of the serveries at HMP Swaleside and the probability that any visit by an environmental health officer (EHO) could have resulted in the closure of several serveries, with all the ramifications that this would have on the usual working life of the prison.

We are pleased to report that, as a direct result of these concerns, the senior kitchen staff have now instituted a monthly hazard analysis of critical control points

(HACCP). This compels wing staff, at SO or CM level, to monitor health and safety requirements such as food temperatures; the wearing of serverly whites; hardware issues; and reporting. This HACCP report is then sent to the No1 Governor and the Residential Governors, as well as to CMs and SOs on the wing so they can identify and correct any deficiencies. A monthly meeting is then arranged and any areas in need of improvement identified and managed appropriately.

The water-bath hot-plates under the serverly are being replaced on Golf and Hotel wings at the end of the reporting year, after reports that they were not functioning properly. We are pleased that a maintenance contract is now in place to ensure that these vital parts of the serveries on all wings are kept in good working order.

The Board is seriously concerned about the maintenance of kitchen equipment. Currently, *all* spare hot trolleys have had to be pressed into service, leaving the kitchen in a precarious position. This is likely due to trolleys being used for drug transfers between wings. We are also concerned about the fitting of new equipment. As an example, the kitchen has purchased over £20,000 of new equipment. These have remained in the corner of the kitchen since October 2024, waiting to be fitted. Repairs to ovens take far too long, leaving the kitchen short of vital equipment and thus lowering the choices available to prisoners.

There have been regular complaints over many years that macerators used for chopping up waste food before putting into the drain are not functioning. New legislation has been in place regarding the disposal of food waste. As a result, whilst macerators are in use on some wings, they will not be repaired when they inevitably break down. Waste food will go to a waste compactor on site, placed in dedicated bags and taken offsite for conversion to by-products.

Prisoners used to be able to claim specialist food under Rule 35 after consultation with the healthcare department. The number of prisoners who have specialist meals provided under Rule 35 has been eradicated. The healthcare department now informs the kitchen directly of any prisoner who needs to be given special food or dietary items. This is especially true of prisoners who may be pre- or post-surgery; have a need for 'soft' diets (in cases of jaw or mouth issues) or who have converted to a different religion. Any such changes clearly need to be date limited to ensure appropriate food is being supplied. However, we have been told by kitchen staff that officers pressure the kitchen to 'accommodate' prisoners, which is likely the reason for the increase to 82 in the number of special diets, a situation that is untenable.

There remains extreme pressure on the kitchen at HMP Swaleside, which will remain unless, and until, the nearby HMP Standford Hill ceases to rely on HMP Swaleside to provide its meals. Whilst there have been a number of attempts to build a suitable kitchen at HMP Standford Hill, it is unlikely that this will happen until 2027, at the earliest, although plans have been approved. The earliest date that the kitchen could be fully functional could be delayed until 2029. Two companies were approached to build the kitchen, but they have now collapsed. A third company is being approached to ascertain whether they can proceed with the original design at the same cost.

5.2 Segregation

As with the findings in our previous report, the care, separation and rehabilitation unit (CSRU), where prisoners are segregated, is usually staffed by a dedicated and experienced cohort of officers, who treat the prisoners with respect and

understanding and attempt to sort out problems quickly and efficiently. From the Board's observations, it is evident at GOoD (good order or discipline) reviews that officers do compassionately try to find the best course of action for prisoners. However, early in 2025, it operated with less than half of its permanent operational staff at times and supplemented with officers from other areas.. Also, a change in Governor for the unit this year did not happen smoothly for the prisoners and staff.

CSRU is almost always at full capacity. Attempts to keep two cells available for cellular confinement (CC) have proved unsuccessful so far. This has the knock-on effect of prisoners refusing to attend adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules), as there is no sanction. Issues include prisoners not wanting to relocate to wings, emergency transfers from wings after incidents and prisoners perceiving CSRU as a stepping stone to a transfer to another prison. The shortage of capacity was compounded during the summer of 2024, as an influx of prisoners, transferred to Swaleside from other prisons, were typically some of the more violent prisoners in the LTHSE estate.

The Board is extremely concerned about CSRU cells being used for constant watch again in 2024-2025. The cells are standard, so a clear view cannot be seen through the observation panel. This is especially true when officers have been observed by the IMB sitting on chairs too low to have good sight. Another issue arises when a prisoner throws faeces through the observation panel, which is then closed. This denies a clear view. Swaleside has two constant-watch cells, although as many as six prisoners who have been on constant watch at one time. In the Board's view, the lack of capacity across the southeast needs addressing by the HMPPS.

The impact of being in the CSRU on the mental health of prisoners is regrettably an ever-present theme. At the start of the reporting year, three prisoners were transferred to secure units in quick succession. Staff across healthcare, the in-reach team and the CSRU are to be commended by the Board for acting to their utmost ability to manage the situation and communicate with each other. The national IMB thematic review on segregation, published in January 2024, noted: 'For men who were already struggling with their mental health, their wellbeing and behaviour often deteriorated further while being segregated for prolonged periods.' Repeated self-harm, staff assaults, loud noises, defecation and banging of heads against the wall are illustrative of how Swaleside CSRU is not an appropriate facility. Unbelievably, the longest stay in CSRU for a prisoner at HMP Swaleside with mental-health issues this year was 484 days, before transferring to a secure unit.

Privileges remain better than at other segregation units in the LTHSE and most prisoners are typically on the standard (middle), rather than the basic, the lowest level of the incentives scheme. Vapes continue to be the source of many issues and incidents. Swaleside is an outlier in LTHSE, allowing vapes to be used in the CSRU, and detached staff comment on how 'comfortable' the CSRU is compared with other prisons. Additionally, the Board is concerned that prisoners see the CSRU as 'desirable', with extra food, daily governor visits, no canteen theft and a 'personalised service', relative to life on the wings.

As referenced in previous reports, the CSRU runs and coordinates adjudications for the whole establishment. Of the 1,645 adjudications in the first four months of 2025, 37% have been proved and 17% passed on to the police. However, nearly 600 cases have been dismissed, adjourned, or not proceeded with. Last year, the Board

noted a concern amongst wing officers that adjudications would not be dealt with swiftly and fairly. With the lack of CC in the prison, around 200 prisoners are refusing to even attend adjudications, as there is no fear of sanctions. Inevitably, this is having a knock-on effect on prisoners' behaviour and staff and prisoner relationships. The offences for which adjudications are held:

- Violent/threatening behaviour: 620
- Disobeys a Lawful order: 204
- Under the influence (of drugs and/or alcohol): 68
- Unauthorised article: 496
- Damage to property: 170
- Absents himself: 41

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Two key work sessions are supposed to be delivered over the course of four weeks. Due to inexperienced staff and the regime, this fell to as low as a third of the prison population having key work sessions in the first quarter of 2025. While this percentage doubled in the second quarter, there was no quality assurance locally. Again, the huge influx of new officers has resulted in a breakdown in staff and prisoner relationships, which has destabilised the prison.

In October 2023, UK visa rules were changed to add prison officers to those eligible for sponsorship. This led to a surge in the number of overseas applications: 29% of UK officer applicants in England and Wales were from Africa. The Prison Officers' Association has highlighted that some of these new recruits anticipated accommodation. The Prison Governors' Association noted that 'this has led to some issues about language and communication in some jails'.

5.4 Equality and diversity

From the Board's observations, we find little overall evidence of inequality, and the prison management appears committed to ensuring that any reports of discriminatory action or activity are addressed immediately. To assist with this, there is a regular community forum and a wing forum, where prisoners can air their views and, importantly, be listened to.

However, the Board is concerned that the equality lead has been a lone post with a large workload, which has resulted in a backlog in processing diversity incident reporting forms (DIRFs). This situation has alleviated somewhat with more direct support to the role.

The table below shows prisoners by broad ethnic minority groups (as of May 2025):

Asian/Asian British: any other background	26
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	21
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	1
Asian/Asian British: Indian	15
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	25
Black/Black British: African	66
Black/Black British: any other background	38
Black/Black British: Caribbean	92
Code missing	5
Mixed: any other background	18
Mixed: White and Asian	4
Mixed: White and Black African	4
Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	36
Other: any other background	17
Other: Arab	7
Prefer not to say	1
White: any other background	67
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	446
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	26
White: Irish	7
Total	922

Of note:

- Submitted DIRFs have shown a marked decline in the first quarter of 2025.
- Figures compare favourably with the LTHSE comparator group.
- Response times for DIRFs have improved and targets are adhered to
- March 2025 figures:
 - DIRFs received: 2
 - DIRFs upheld: 0
 - Not upheld: 1
 - Partly upheld: 1
 - Outstanding: 0
- All DIRF responses are now independently quality assured.
- 319 (36%) of Swaleside prisoners have a declared disability.
- The largest proportion of prisoners (300) is in the 30-39 age range, followed by the 20-29 group.
- There are 131 foreign national prisoners.
- After British, the next largest national cohort is Polish, at 15.
- Swaleside is now accommodating 20 prisoners who are over 70 years of age. In-cell work has been arranged for those retirees who are interested.

During the reporting year, the IMB received 28 applications (prisoners' written representations) under the heading of 'equality'. This is down, from 85 last year.

There is a disproportionately high level of Muslim prisoners (32%) relative to the Muslim population in the community. These are spread fairly equally between Black, white and Asian ethnic groupings. A further 16% of prisoners are recorded as 'no religion'.

Swaleside has five transgender prisoners being supported. There is still the issue of the custodial management system (CMS) system either only recognising the birth name, or the first name, registered for each of these prisoners. This means that the system only reflects male and not the chosen female names, which the Board suggests needs addressing. All transgender prisoners carry two ID cards to highlight any allowed changes in appearance.

There are a number of military veterans (19 declared, but it is believed to be more), who did not have a separate platform to express their views. This has been partly addressed, with the introduction of regular informal coffee mornings.

There have been several minor issues that have been recognised and have been or are being tackled:

- Laptops are inappropriate for visually impaired prisoners.
- No Pagan or Rastafarian chaplain.

Positive areas to highlight:

- Access to work allocation is balanced, but less varied for vulnerable prisoners.

- A tawl for staff to take up a British Sign Language course to aid deaf prisoners received an encouraging response, with 13 staff showing an interest.
- All wings have taken part in equality forums to air their views. These are held quarterly
- Many - and various - celebrations have been recognized, and activities have been organised so that staff and prisoners can participate. A diversity and inclusion calendar has been published, with over 30 events annually. Celebrations include:
 - LGBTQI+ History Month
 - Traveller Month
 - Pride Month
 - Parkinson's Awareness Month
 - Autism Acceptance Month
 - Disability Awareness Month
 - Black History Month
- Complaints on equality are proportionate to the demographic.
- Muslim staff are proportionate to the external community.
- Adjudication statistics are broadly reflective of the demographic in terms of ethnicity, but biased against the young adult (YA) and the 20-29 age range groups.
- There appear to be no disparities in the regime based on religion, ethnicity or nationality.
- There is a disproportionate number of the 20-29 age range on the basic (bottom) level of the prison's incentives scheme.
- Neurodiversity information has been distributed to all staff covering topics such as: learning disability, developmental language disorder (DLD), autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia and ADHD
- SLT leads have been appointed for each of the protected characteristics, and there will be forum held for each on a regular basis.
- TV refurbishment is planning to employ a prisoner at Swaleside who has a hearing impairment.
- The number of black officers increased from four last year to 115, redressing an imbalance.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The posts of Rastafarian and Pagan chaplains have still to be filled. The prison had a Hindu chaplain during the reporting year. A Free Church chaplain attends the prison one day per week.

Interviews for a third Imam have been held, but no appointment. No applications have been received for the Anglican chaplain position. As well as the permanent chaplains, there are sessional visits by Buddhist, H Sikh, Jewish, and Baptist ministers. There are also Jehovah's Witness and Baptist volunteers. The chaplaincy team has daily duties in the CSRU and the in-patient department as well as with ACCT reviews and administering to new prisoners. The team has stopped attending

segregation GOoD reviews. Annual carol services were held for the general population and the PCoSO wing, which were a great success.

The table below gives a breakdown of the population by religion:

Religion	Number of Prisoners
	21/04/2025
Adventist	1
Agnostic	2
Atheist	4
Baptist	3
Buddhist	25
Christian	83
Church of England (Anglican)	112
Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints	3
Eastern Orthodox	2
Hindu	11
Jehovah's Witness	2
Jewish	20
Methodist	1
Muslim	282
No Religion	153
Pagan	14
Pentecostal	2
Quaker	1
Rastafarian	15
Roman Catholic	137
Russian Orthodox	2
Seventh Day Adventist	1
Sikh	8
Spiritualist	1

A major issue during the year was the late movement of prisoners. This seriously affected services. The Sycamore Tree initiative (a restorative justice course) was closed nationally by the prison service.

5.6 Complaints

The total number of complaints received by the clerk for the reporting year (excluding those concerning the healthcare unit and DIRFs) was 4079. Whilst this appears, at first glance, to be a huge increase on last year's figure of 1378, it is due to several reporting factors and the backlog from the lockdown of the prison in previous years. The level of complaints has occurred and, indeed, has been exceeded in many previous years. Most of the complaints concerned property issues, which have increased significantly over the reporting period. The property complaints are split between 'in-house' and losses during transfers from other prisons.

The prison data supplied show complaints were responded to within targeted timeframes 95% of the time. The complaints department at Swaleside continues to provide a first-class service for prisoners, with few complaints to the IMB regarding delays to answering COMP 1 (ordinary) and COMP 2 (confidential) complaints.

5.7 Property

Missing personal property is a source of frustration, leading to anger, for many prisoners. It also gives rise to additional work, and cost, to prison staff. Moving prisoners within the prison frequently leads to claims of missing property. It is important that the processing of prisoners' property is accurately recorded and signed for by the prisoner. When prisoners are moved without prior warning, this is always going to be a problem. In the Board's view, more could be done to address this issue.

Missing property is a significant and frequent problem when prisoners are transferred from one prison to another. Prisoners are limited to the amount of personal baggage they can take with them on prison transport. The rest of their property follows at a later date. Very often, that delay is unreasonably long and, occasionally, property is lost in transit. This gives rise to stress for prisoners and prison staff alike. Some prisoners have lost everything, including photos, which cannot be replaced, and this has a traumatising effect. This is a national problem which needs to be addressed by the Prison Service.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Primary healthcare

The healthcare department is run by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and is a very busy unit under pressure. Staffing levels have improved throughout the year, especially at weekends, with the use of agency staff on most days. A lack of space to expand clinics is a major issue, as well as a lack of office space for staff. The footfall to healthcare has increased to 50-60 a day. Many prisoners do not attend clinics. The biggest rise is in the number of prisoners seeing the GP and psychiatry appointments. A quality improvement team is looking into this.

The phone consultation service to the GP has been moved to the GP room. A 'smart' ward is operational, with referrals to Medway Maritime Hospital. A digital health information board has been installed in the out-patient unit and offers valuable information to prisoners.

A company called Healthshare carries out X-rays and ultrasounds in the healthcare department, bringing their own equipment. X-rays are carried out every two weeks and ultrasounds monthly.

The number of prisoners found under the influence drains the resources of the duty healthcare staff member. The new system for dispensing medication in cabinets, at a cost of over £100,000 is now in storage. No resources were in place to make this work, as two staff were required for each cabinet. The head of healthcare stated that medication is her biggest challenge: in March 2025, 500 prisoners were in possession of medicated drugs, with a further 267 not in possession, a total that approaches 80% of the entire population of HMP Swaleside.

Life limiting, operational health and safeguarding meetings are held monthly, with good communication and attendance, in the Board's view. There has been a shortage of taxis in the past, which has led to delays and/or cancellations of appointments to outside hospitals. The prison now leases three cars, with in-house drivers, and appointments to outside hospitals have improved.

The condition, and long-standing problem with the lifts continues, and they are often out of use, making access to healthcare difficult for some prisoners and impossible for others. With an older and ageing population in the prison, there are inadequate facilities and a shortage of disabled cells.

The in-patient unit is clean, bright and well-run although, at times, mentally unwell prisoners have been waiting for transfer to special or secure units, similar to the situation in the CSRU. This can be lengthy and put a strain on the unit. There are 17 cells, including one constant watch cell. Swaleside has applied for two further constant-watch cells. One cell has been out of use for over a year.

There is always an officer on site to support nursing staff and interact with prisoners, though the Board's view is at least two are necessary. There is an outside garden area where prisoners can go when they are out of their cells.

The dentist room has been out of use for several months during the year, due to an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease. However, it has reopened using a filtered water system to carry out treatments. Investigations continue to find the source.

The optical services run well.

The main kitchen in the gym has been partly accessible for the past year, due to sewage, and will continue until major works are carried out. Approximately 45% of the prison population go to the gym for two-and-a-half hours per week. Park Runs continue to take place. Families of the men can follow their progress on the Park Run website, as the men register under aliases. Up to 50 men take part. An accredited course is run by Millwall Football Club. However, during 2025, attendance has declined at both the gym and for football. Prisoners are increasingly worried for their personal safety when they mix. Gym staff note that, previously, it was easy to get 22 prisoners to sign up for football, with the next 22 added to the reserve list for the next time. Now it is a struggle to get enough players for five-a-side. This is an indictment of the prevalence of drugs and the consequent debt in Swaleside, in the Board's view.

6.2 Mental health

Mental health services continue to suffer from staff shortages. However, over the last year, time out of cell for prisoners has improved. Timeframes placed on assessments and transfers to secure or specialist units out of the area are often exceeded, but approximately 19 prisoners transferred during the year. The shortest wait for transfer was two days, with the longest 721 days. A total of 13 were not accepted. There were approximately 200 referrals a month from within the prison, who were treated by prison doctors, with only 30% transferred for further mental health assessment. The mean wait was 137 days.

A specialist nurse carries out an assessment of prisoners who are neurodivergent and offers them relevant treatment.

6.3 Social care

Blossoms is a service that supports prisoners who have been assessed by Kent County Council (KCC) and need personal care. The Board has acknowledged a very good working relationship between community care staff and the prison staff. With an average number of 10-20 prisoners a day requiring care for their personal and special needs, Blossoms staff work hard and are a very valued service in the prison. There is ongoing concern about the shortage of cells to facilitate wheelchair users within the prison, with bigger concerns about the appropriateness of the prison for prisoners with ongoing social care needs and, being a long-term security prison, an ageing population.

6.4 Time out of cell, regime

The impact of inexperienced staff and the regime has been highlighted throughout this report as a concern. However, the regime moved to Core Day 5 on 29 September 2024. Time out of cell follows:

	Average hours per day
Time in Open Air (Monday-Friday)	0.9
Time in Open Air (Saturday-Sunday)	1
Time out of cell	7.25

This may be increased by prisoners engaging in purposeful activity, i.e. education, work, structured on wing activities (SOWA) and religious observance. A plan proposed by the Governor to move activities to a four-day work week, which would have resulted in more time out, was rejected by the prison authorities.

6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Echo West wing is an incentivised substance free living unit (ISFL), which is paid for from prison funds. Most prisoners on this wing have enhanced status (the top level of the prison's incentives scheme) and are, or have been, free of drugs. Echo wing contains the Change, Grow, Live (CGL) unit, which deals exclusively with prisoners who have drug and/or alcohol addiction issues. Some prisoners inevitably relapse but can be referred to the Phoenix unit for another attempt to become clean of drugs. This can either happen by self-referral or by staff raising concerns if the prisoner is found to be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.

Success appears to be variable on the Phoenix unit, but staff estimate that for every ten prisoners, two might become clear of drugs, either temporarily or permanently.

Transfers from other wings are monitored very carefully, as there have been several occasions when known drug dealers have asked to be transferred to the Echo wing. This way, they go to the market rather than the market coming to them!

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education and library

Milton Keynes College (MK), as course provider, continues to provide a first-class programme of both accredited and non-accredited courses, in the Board's view. There is a financial incentive to attend educational courses, at both basic and advanced levels. To be able to work within the prison, all residents should have Level 1 Maths and English before being considered for employment, but there are occasions when this requirement is not strictly enforced.

Changes in the way that statistics are collated and reported has resulted in it being difficult to make comparisons with previous years. From April 2024 to April 2025, some 672 prisoners started courses compared with 706 the previous year. This small fall in numbers appears to be due to apathy amongst the prisoners, rather than failings by the education unit. This attitude to education is now being focused on incentivising attendance at classes.

Around 10% of prisoners decided to withdraw from courses. This compares with up to a 30% withdrawal rate in recent years with previous education providers. Of these 672 starts, 562 prisoners completed their courses, with 546 achieving their goals. The pass rate of 97% is a slight increase on the previous year.

MK offers both accredited and non-accredited courses, covering such subjects as catering, music, IT and art. This year, several more practical courses have been added to help prisoners improve job prospects on release. These include warehousing, peer mentoring, and multi-skills, giving more opportunities to access careers outside of prison, e.g. in the construction industry. However, the education budget is under review and some courses may not be available in the future.

Prisoners with disabilities are also catered for, with two dedicated specialists and practitioners to accommodate the needs of those with various impairments, either physical or mental health. HMP Swaleside is at the top of prisons in the LTHSE with regard to their educational achievements. Also, Swaleside has a high number of Open University candidates, which is exceptional for a LTHSE prison.

The national target for prisoners undertaking courses is 85% of an establishment's population. At the time of writing, May, the figure at HMP Swaleside is 80%. Whilst this is below the target, it is improving and is a considerable increase on all previous years at the prison, including last year.

The provision of the charity, the Shannon Trust, since August 2021, for non-readers has been very successful, with prisoners able to join mainstream education.

The wide availability, plus the quality, of in-cell packs has ensured that vulnerable prisoners and those on the PCoSO wings have benefited from the same level of education as others in the prison and there has been a high level of take-up from these wings.

Additionally, in our previous report, we referenced a pilot scheme to allow PCoSOs access to educational classrooms for at least one session per week. This pilot proved successful, and these prisoners are now receiving three sessions per week.

This success of HMP Swaleside's education department is due, in no small part, to the dedication of the staff on the unit, and the wholehearted support of the prison staff, which the IMB commends.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Last year's report spoke of optimism, which was not misplaced, in the Board's view. This year has seen further progress, despite some issues.

Industries

The workshops continue to be affected by attendance issues and have been unable to discipline the men who are absent on a regular basis. It is common for a workshop attendance to be around 50% of its allocated workforce. The reasons for this are varied, with prisoners' apathy and lack of officers to escort, but mean that workshop allocation figures are not reflective of the number of men working. The second engineering shop reluctantly had to close after a failure to recruit qualified staff to run the workshop, and it was sad to see a once thriving shop, full of expensive equipment, standing silent. However, with the return of a previous instructor and the employment of another, the shop has re-opened, has a full order book and now provides employment, with the promise of portable qualifications for up to 10 men. Unfortunately, there has been recent evidence of bladed weapons being manufactured in this shop, which is under investigation.

In food packing, there has been a vast improvement, with the team of men able to easily fulfil their contractual obligation, as well as up their game when necessary. No doubt, this has benefited from a doubling in pay rates.

Even where attendance has been acceptable, there is still the problem across the workshops of very short shifts. It is not uncommon for the morning shift to last only 1½ hours and for the afternoon shift to be only one hour. Indeed, one session in the multi-skills workshop lasted only seven minutes!

Workshop	Allocated Per Session	Attended Per Session
DHL	91	52
Bike Repair	9	1
Food Pack	34	16
Food Labelling	29	0
WMU	33	17
In-Cell Punnetts	17	0
Ind. Clean	28	22
Engineering	9	6
Woodwork	25	12
Headphones	28	5
TV Repair	4	1
Gardens	8	5
Cred Team	4	3
GFSL Cred	2	2
GFSL Paints	8	8
	328	148

The figures, above, represent a sessional average of men employed, taken from a week near the end of the reporting period. This was a nine-session week for all of the shops, apart from DHL, which can have ten sessions. Sessions are half days. These figures are disappointing for a category B training prison.

There are other bright spots.

The multi-skills workshop, managed by the education unit, is providing Level 2 City & Guilds approved courses for PCoSOs, as well as the general population.

Cycle Repair is going well, despite some logistical problems. Bikes are sold off to staff, as well as into the local community, to raise money for charity. The issue here is that men allocated from the unemployed list do not turn up for work and are not being disciplined or removed from the allocation, which means that the shop cannot re-offer the positions.

The woodworking shop continues its improvement trend, although there have been some cutter issues with the main CNC machine, manufacturing cell furniture, planters, coat hangers, and benches for the prison estate. It now has a second machine and may also be getting a third. It has taken over the old engineering No. 2 shop, as a finishing and packing shop, and has plenty of orders. It no longer has a contract for fire doors. The income target for 2025-2026 is three times the previous year's target. Two instructors have qualified as NVQ assessors and started to put a first cohort through their exams. A target has been set to appoint up to six instructors to make the most of the space.

Industrial cleaning continues to be successful, ensuring that the men work towards portable qualifications. This shop utilises peer workers to train staff as well as prisoners. Latterly, there has been an issue with recruiting instructors.

TV refurbishment has become part of the award-winning national contract, along with three other prisons. It is planning to employ a prisoner with a hearing impairment. Staff are still removing TVs from this shop. It suffers from having only one instructor, which means that when they are on leave or away for any reason, the shop has to close.

DHL

PCoSOs (prisoners convicted of sexual offences) can apply to be employed at the on-site DHL facility, which packages supplies for a number of prisons. On arriving and leaving at DHL, prisoners should be properly searched, as well as monitored during the day, as the canteen items are open to theft and consumption.

Pay rates have been an issue over the year. DHL workers were told in May that their pay is dropping to £20 a week, from £25, with a £5 attendance bonus. This change was introduced with no consultation, so caused substantial ill will and a go-slow. This was amended in July to a base of £17.55, with a further £10, based on productivity and a lack of theft. However, rates for food packaging have been significantly increased to levels even above DHL. This has caused tension, especially as DHL workers are subject to bonuses. Hence, the rates were further increased for DHL in February, to a potential £32.95.

PCoSOs are not integrated with other wings, so it was a courageous move for vulnerable prisoners (VPs) from Golf South wing to start at DHL. In November, these VPs took the available roll to 95. On a typical day, without education, around 70 prisoners had been attending DHL. For a time, this influx of workers meant the 600 weekly units have been completed by Thursday afternoons, leaving Fridays free for stock taking. By January, this pool had slipped to 75, and further down to the 50s towards the end of the reporting year. Attendance continues to be heavily dented by attendance at education on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. For example, 35 attended DHL on several days in March. By the end of the reporting year, the DHL facility had slipped to the lowest attendance rate nationally, at 58%. This is a particular concern, as it is the largest prison facility in England.

Theft has been an ongoing issue, as reported last year. After falling when G wing joined, theft has increased again. For over a year, the lack of proper searching has been a problem, in the Board's view. The suspicion after the first prisoner sackings was that prisoners were being coerced into 'stealing to order'. In April, a prisoner was found with 15 tins of tuna. He stated that 'he was being forced to do this but refused to give names for 'fear of retribution' (according to a daily prison report). Evidence of theft is found on a mostly daily basis with empty wrappers. The bi-annual full stock took place in September: £800 of stock went missing in a week. In the same week, two prisoners were found with a total of 42 cans of mackerel. The one with 30 cans was hardly being subtle! The available pool of H wing prisoners is limited, after taking account of retired and/or disabled prisoners. So, if a prisoner loses his job for theft, he is likely to return 14 days later (reduced from 28 days, except for violence), which is a limited deterrent. Only in June 2024 has the number of prisoners being searched been anywhere close to 50%.

Despite the rise in the available work roll to 95, there is no increase in staffing. One officer is expected to monitor all the prisoners and perform all searches. This is not feasible; an example is when lunch is split into two shifts. One officer cannot patrol those eating lunch and those outside. On occasion, prisoners have been locked in

the lunch area with no officer present; worse, the area was not covered by CCTV, due to cladding, which was only removed in December. The IMB remains perplexed by the lack of management response to the criminal activity.

7.3 Offender management, progression

Again, the offender management progression work continues to be greatly affected by staff shortages in this reporting year. Although there are the equivalent of 14.6 prisoner offender managers (POMs), which is 3.1 higher than last year's figure of 11.5, the budget allocated allows for 20.5. This shortage has led to instances of prisoners' frustration, as they are unable to discuss any issues they may have and progress with their sentence plans.

Observation classification and allocation (OCA) supports transfers to other prisons, averaging 150 per annum, is markedly affected, as some prisoners are unable to be transferred. This could be due to many reasons: for example, it could be gang related or concern a prisoner's behaviour when last in the requested establishment. Even prisoner requests on compassionate grounds for a transfer nearer to their family's home cannot be facilitated.

A further concern for staff is the number of prisoners who arrive at Swaleside with no initial offender assessment system (OASys) assessment (which evaluates a prisoner's risks and needs). At the end of the reporting period, 26 were overdue.

The prison has struggled with releasing support and the increasing numbers of home detention curfews (HDCs). The Government's SDS40 release plan created an enormous workload, as every prisoner's case had to be reviewed. The staff are to be commended for sacrificing their spare time to complete the task on time. Overall, staff seem to be unhappy, as they cannot provide the best outcome for the men, due to staff shortages, and the job is stressful.

7.4 Family contact

It is reasonable to expect that the visit process be well managed, sympathetic and secure. On far too many occasions this has not been the case at Swaleside.

The reception facility and visits hall for families and visitors at HMP Swaleside are of a good standard. However, due to its location, Swaleside is difficult to access by public transport, which means timeliness of social visits is important, particularly for families travelling long distances. From the Board's observations, visits rarely start at 2pm, as scheduled. This is invariably a consequence of exceptional events calling on staff time earlier in the day, or of staff shortages, which give rise to often considerable delays to prisoners being escorted to the visits hall. To their credit, prison staff usually allow closing times to reflect delayed start times. This can, however, be highly disruptive for travel arrangements off the island.

With social visit time limited, a significant amount of visitors' time can often be spent queuing at the refreshment facility.

It is important that families and visitors feel safe during their visit. Security was exposed as a weakness by a prisoner-on-prisoner assault during the past year. This has now been addressed with higher staffing levels during social visit times, and the situation has considerably improved.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Swaleside is expected to perform as a resettlement prison and, despite the falling roll, due to a lowering of the operational capacity and the transfer out of many category C prisoners, it is due to release far more prisoners than was originally intended. The overall number for 2024 was around 80. Based on the fact that 20 prisoners were released in January alone, this figure is likely to rise to around 200 for the whole of 2025. While Swaleside is being forced to accommodate shorter-term residents, this number will continue to grow, but without the facilities to be able to cope with it. Again, the Board stresses that there is no budget for resettlement.

The OMU and the employability hub provide what services they can, but with staff shortages, both internally and externally, it is little wonder that there are problems, in the Board's view. Many hub appointment bookings are still not attended, for various reasons.

The employability hub has been recognised as the best facility of its kind, but it is under-utilised. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is present one day per week, while the hub continues to run Kent Adult Education courses, as well as in-house education and PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust) courses. It also supports the forklift truck and CSCS (construction skills certification scheme) courses, which are needed to work on a construction site.

A new initiative is the 'sequencing' approach. It is proposed that prisoners with two years left to serve are targeted with the required services on a sequential basis so that their release has every necessary requirement covered to ensure a smooth release and with no issues when it comes to them walking through the gate. This may mean, for example, that places in workshops and education should be reserved for these men. A pilot group has been highlighted to get this off the ground. These have to be small steps, as there are around 175 prisoners in Swaleside who have fewer than two years to serve.

An employment advisory board was launched by two former high sheriffs of Kent on in January 2024 and is active in targeting employment opportunities for released prisoners. This is part of a national strategy.

One issue that needs to be overcome is that the probation service uses a database, called nDelius, which is not compatible with Nomis (national offender management information system, used to manage and hold information on prisoners). This means that they should maintain an update to Nomis so that the two systems have common information. This is rarely the case, as the system is not updated, presumably due to lack of staff. This means that the prison is not receiving vital information needed within six weeks of release.

8. The work of the IMB

The Board would like to thank our clerk and her colleagues and to highlight the invaluable support she provides. Without her hard work on our behalf and her cheerful help, our role would be infinitely more difficult.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	316
Total number of segregation reviews attended	401

Applications (prisoners' written representations) to the IMB

CMS, a messaging service prisoners can use to communicate via their personal in-cell tablets, was introduced in October 2022. Initially, prisoners could choose a category, similar to the IMB categories. Many prisoners used a different category to respond to the same application, hence the ballooning of applications. Since October 2023, there has only been a general category, so application numbers have almost halved, as predicted last year.

In common with the national picture, the three property categories are the most common, accounting for over 10% of applications. However, this is much lower than last year and may reflect the lack of movement nationally within the prison estate. The health category has shown a welcome reduction, which could be due to the new head of healthcare's management. Staff/prisoner concerns have barely dropped, due to staff inexperience, referenced earlier.

Code	Subject	Previous year	Current Year	Current Year	Total
			Paper Apps	CMS Apps	
A	Accommodation, including	88	8	36	44
	laundry, clothing, ablutions				
B	Discipline, including				
	adjudications, incentives				
	scheme sanctions	29	3	48	51
C	Equality	45	4	24	28
D	Purposeful activity including				
	education, work training,				

	time out of cell	140	9	12	21
E1	Letters, visits, phones,				
	public protection, restrictions	109	7	60	67
E2	Finance, including pay, private				
	money, spends	104	10	72	82
F	Kitchen and food	158	13	120	133
G	Health, including physical,				
	mental, social care	239	14	84	98
H1	Property within				
	the establishment	213	1	120	121
H2	Property during				
	transfer	54	11	60	71
H3	Canteen, facility list,				
	catalogues	231	11	36	47
1	Sentence management,				
	including HDC, ROTL,				

	parole dates, release dates,				
	recategorisation	143	13	36	49
J	Staff/prisoner concerns,				
	including bullying	183	33	120	153
K	Transfers	201	6	24	30
L	Miscellaneous	359	18	276	294
	Total	2296	161	1128	1289

Annex A

Service providers

- Healthcare services: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Mental health services: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust (in-reach)
- GP services: the Medical Centre Group
- Optical services: the Prison Optician Trust
- Education: Milton Keynes College
- Maintenance services: Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL)
- Support for families at social visits: PACT
- Treatment for drug and alcohol addiction: Change, Grow, Live (CGL)



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