



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Downview
Sutton Lane
Sutton
Surrey
SM2 5PD

MoJ ref: SUB128339

27 October 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI DOWNVIEW: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2024 – 30 APRIL 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Downview. I am grateful to the Board for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, including the efforts of the former Chair. I appreciate there has been some upheaval in the membership of the Board recently. I hope these issues are resolved swiftly and I look forward to continuation of your invaluable monitoring together with your immensely appreciated annual reports.

I was saddened to hear two prisoners died during the reporting year. Whilst every death in our care is tragedy, I was heartened and reassured to learn of the support provided by the prison's family liaison officers together with the roll and welfare checks training provided to staff. I offer my condolences to the friends and family of both of the deceased and would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

It is regrettable that mentally unwell prisoners continue to arrive at HMP/YOI Downview and across our prisons, and then often face delays in transfer to suitable secure units. This Government is committed to ensuring that people in contact with the criminal justice system can access appropriate and timely support. The Mental Health Bill has recently completed Committee Stage in the House of Commons. The Bill's reforms include introducing a new statutory time limit of 28-days for the transfer of patients with a mental disorder from prison and other places of detention to hospital. This time limit, together with operational improvements, aims to reduce unnecessary delays and deliver swifter access to treatment.

NHS England's national team have now completed the initial scoping work to ensure there is clinical leadership throughout the pathway to and from prison and secure hospital. The recently launched Mental Health and Justice Strategic Advisory Group will assure the 28-day transfer process. The group is chaired by NHS England's National Medical Director for Mental Health and Neurodiversity, who will report regularly to Ministers and be responsible for agreeing a joint workplan to support implementation of the statutory time limit, identifying solutions to common barriers to timely transfers and holding relevant parties to account.

Prioritising progression and positive outcomes for women and all prisoners is essential, and I therefore fully understand the Board's continued concerns about access to Release on Temporary License (ROTL). HMP/YOI Downview, as a closed training establishment, plays a vital role in supporting the operation of

the wider prison estate so there is sufficient capacity to meet court demand. While it continues to provide valuable opportunities for women to access paid employment through Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL), this must be balanced against the operational need to manage population flow through the system. Women assessed as suitable for open conditions are encouraged to transfer to open prisons, which offer stronger ROTL and employment pathways and better outcomes for women on release. This supports the effective use of closed estate capacity and enables reception prisons to fulfil their core function. Prioritising recategorisation is essential to unlock these opportunities, support ROTL activity, and enable appropriate progression to open conditions.

I note your concerns about the amount of time it took to inform a transgender individual of a Ministerial exemption decision. The Complex Case Board (CCB) and the staff at HMP/YOI Downview took steps to keep the individual updated and provided close support whilst the exemption process was ongoing. CCBs will continue to do all they can to ensure that their actions are completed at the earliest opportunity within this process and they inform individuals of Ministers' final decisions in the quickest time possible once that information is available. Whilst a decision is awaited, a range of evidence-based support and services is available to mitigate against anxiety and uncertainty including the Women's Estate Psychology Service team which provides forensic psychologists within HMP/YOI Downview.

I recognise the Board's concerns about the effects of population pressures on prisoners' outcomes. That is why the Women's Justice Board (WJB), chaired by myself, is setting the vision and direction for improving the Criminal Justice System's response to women. The Board has a clear goal of advising on how to reduce the number of women in prison. The WJB is supported by the Women's Justice Partnership Delivery Group, which has cross-government and delivery partner representation, and also external subject experts. We also welcome the recent Independent Sentencing Review's consideration of the particular needs of women, and the recommendations that will help address these. The reforms to suspended and short sentences will support our goal to reduce the number of women in custody.

I appreciate the concerns raised at HMP/YOI Downview. I was therefore encouraged to note the significant reduction in self-harm incidents, a resolution to the longstanding transfer of funds issues, and the success of the pilot IT system for allocation and attendance monitoring of purposeful activity. Rehabilitation within the prison is vital and equally important is post-release employment for prisoners, something I am passionate about, and it was therefore very heartening to learn of the good work of the prison's reducing reoffending team that was supported by prisoner feedback. I am also optimistic about the outcomes of the Enable programme at HMP/YOI Downview.

I note you have raised a number of local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of progress as work continues. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I sincerely appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work and dedication on behalf of HMP/YOI Downview.

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

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

HMPPS note the Board's concerns about the handling of prisoners' property and this is an area to which HMPPS is currently giving further attention. Careful consideration is being given to the findings in the IMB national thematic report on how property loss impacts on prisoners, as well as those received from Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations following a thematic review of the property complaints they have received in the last five years. Since receiving the reports, Governors and other senior leaders have been reminded of the most important property handling points. This includes the need to ensure compliance with volumetric control limits; this is important since any property within those limits transfers with prisoners when they move establishments. Consultation is taking place with prisons on further areas raised in the reports. HMPPS also note the Board's concerns about the lack of digital improvements on property handling. Whilst it is recognised this will be disappointing, other pressures around digital changes mean that it is not anticipated that an electronic property card will be in place in the immediate future.

At HMP/YOI Downview, a more structured approach to tracking property issues with sending establishments has recently been introduced. This includes the implementation of an "Outstanding Property Tracker," a shared spreadsheet where staff manually log follow-up actions. The tracker enhances visibility and accountability across teams and represents a move towards greater consistency in managing property-related concerns. Although the system is still in its early stages, it is intended to support quicker resolution of property issues. The Head of Operations is overseeing implementation of this process and improvements in this area have already been noted.

Female Offender Flow Policy

The primary function of the seven Reception prisons is to serve the courts and as such they need to routinely transfer women to other prisons, such as HMP/YOI Downview, to ensure there is space to meet the court function. When women are transferred, wherever possible, their needs and distance from home are considered when determining where they will be transferred to.

Work to draft and confirm Offender Flows for the Women's Estate is underway. This work will take into account population pressures and impacts from the Independent Sentencing Review, whilst aiming to ensure women are held in the right place at the right time of the sentence.