



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for
Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Oakwood
Oaks Drive
Featherstone
Wolverhampton
WV10 7Q

MoJ ref: SUB128497

27 October 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP OAKWOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Oakwood, I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations, especially as you continued to operate with several vacancies.

I was saddened to hear that there had been eight deaths during the reporting year. Of these, six occurred at a local hospital, one in a local hospice, with the remaining one death at the prison. I offer my heartfelt condolences to their friends and family and would like to reassure them and the Board that any recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken extremely seriously.

I have read your report with care and understand the Board's concerns around funding for the Probation Service. I am pleased to inform the Board that the Government is increasing Probation funding by 45%, with up to £700 million in additional investment by 2028. As part of this commitment, 1,300 trainee probation officers will be onboarded by March 2026. This will, where appropriate, strengthen our approach to alternatives to recall. The funding will also expand the use of electronic tagging and provide more accommodation, helping to monitor and manage offenders effectively within the community. Probation Services will focus on the critical period immediately after release, directing resources where they can make the greatest impact. To further support frontline staff, an additional £8 million will be invested in new technology to free up time for staff to enable them to focus on managing and rehabilitating offenders.

With reference to IPP, as of 30 June 2025, the number of IPP offenders in custody was 2,486, down from 2,734 from the previous year. Of those, 978 had never been released, down from 1,132 the year before and 1,508 had been recalled to custody, down from 1,602 the year before. In 2024 there were 619 recalls, the lowest since 2017, which the Government expects to reduce further given the number of IPP sentences being served in the community. The highest number of IPP re-releases, following recall, were recorded in 2024 (602). Over a third more compared to 2023.

The Government remains committed to progressing individuals serving IPP sentences towards potential release and supporting their rehabilitation. A refreshed IPP Action Plan, published on 17

July 2025, emphasises effective frontline delivery across prisons and the Probation Service. It ensures that IPP prisoners have robust, actively engaged sentence plans and are placed in establishments suited to their needs — helping them reduce risk and move towards safe release. The updated Plan also introduces measurable targets to promote transparency and accountability and can be found here as part of the IPP Annual Report.

I recognise the Board's concerns about provision for the high number of neurodiverse prisoners, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has strengthened its support for neurodiverse individuals through a needs-led approach. All prisoners are screened on entry to identify additional needs, with appropriate support and reasonable adjustments provided where necessary.

The role of the Neurodiversity Support Manager (NSM) is to lead a whole-prison approach to neurodiversity, improving access to education, skills, and work. While there are no current plans to expand the number of NSMs, additional support is provided through Neurodiversity Staff Champions and Peer Mentors. Further work is also being undertaken in other areas - to enhance consistency and understanding across the estate, HMPPS have introduced a digital Additional Learning Needs (ALN) tool. This tool is being rolled out nationally under the new Prisoner Education Service contracts.

It was encouraging to receive your comments about The Smooth Dad's Project, which encourages fathers to engage with their children by making smoothies together during visits, giving fathers some parenting responsibility as well as encouraging healthier eating. I was also pleased to read that the Barbering Academy had been shortlisted for the National Barber Training Award, an impressive achievement as well as learn of the opening of the Cherry Blossom - a supermarket training academy. Both are important initiatives to provide valuable skills that will aid employment opportunities on release.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Director will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I recognise the vital role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we appreciate your ongoing dedication on behalf of HMP Oakwood.

Yours sincerely,

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

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

HMP OAKWOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoner Property

We recognise that prisoner property continues to be an area of concern at both HMP Oakwood and across the estate. Subsequently, HMPPS is taking steps to improve practices. Governors and Senior Leaders have been reminded of key property handling procedures, with particular emphasis on compliance with volumetric control limits to ensure property transfers appropriately between establishments. To help identify how practice can be further improved, consultation is also taking place with prisons on areas raised in both 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.

Mental Health Transfers

HMPPS is committed to ensuring that people in contact with the criminal justice system can access appropriate and timely support to meet their mental health needs. The Mental Health Bill is progressing through Parliament, with the third reading having taken place in the House of Commons. Clause 38 of the Mental Health Bill creates a statutory time limit of 28 days for transfers from prison, and other places of detention, to hospital. It places the existing NHS England best practice guidance on a statutory footing, and, together with operational improvements, aims to reduce unnecessary delays and deliver swifter access to treatment. Implementation of the 28-day time limit for transfers will be supported by the Mental Health and Justice Strategic Advisory Group. 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 work plan to support implementation of the statutory time limit, identifying solutions to common barriers to timely transfers and holding partners to account. The Chief Medical Officer's report on health in prisons is also due to be published this year and will provide recommendations for further action.

PPO Clinical Review

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) decision to no longer share clinical reviews with IMBs was made in 2023. The decision was informed by legal advice that was received in relation to the Access to Health Records Act 1990, under which it has an obligation to protect the common law duty of confidentiality in relation to the health records of deceased individuals whose deaths it investigates.

Given the amount of confidential medical information contained in the clinical review, it was concluded that the PPO's duty of confidentiality outweighed the public interest of the IMB having this information, 'unless the Board could successfully explain why they needed this level of information on a case-by-case basis.' It was concluded that Boards could still carry out their monitoring role by receiving the clinical recommendations and relevant clinical information contained in the report.