



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Five Wells
Millers Park
Doddington Road
Wellingborough, NN8 2NH

MoJ ref: SUB128858

18 November 2025

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Five Wells. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing such helpful observations, especially as you continued to operate with several vacancies and faced challenges in recruitment.

I was saddened to hear that there had been three deaths during the reporting year. 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 will be taken extremely seriously.

I have read your report with care and understand the Board's concerns around the increase in number of recalled prisoners. The decision to recall a person to custody is never taken lightly and is guided by rigorous thresholds based on licence compliance and the ability to manage escalating risk in the community. Nationally, we recognise that good resettlement planning is key to reducing the likelihood of recall, particularly for minor breaches. However, challenges such as securing suitable accommodation can hinder successful reintegration. In response, the East of England region has undertaken a review of recall cases over the past 12 months to identify common themes and addressable issues. We are also strengthening pre-release planning and expanding the role of peer mentors, including initiatives where mentors meet individuals at the gate to provide immediate support. Prison and probation colleagues are collaborating more closely to improve communication at the point of recall, ensuring that timely and accurate information is shared to support individuals effectively. This includes the use of a standardised proforma to ensure timely information sharing, particularly for those on fixed-term recalls, enabling us to better identify and meet resettlement needs and support individuals towards successful re-release.

With reference to the Board's concern of improvements to the design of new prisons, we are committed to learning from experience and continuously improving the design and delivery of new prisons. The Ministry of Justice is actively applying lessons from across the New Prisons Programme to ensure that each successive build addresses previously identified weaknesses. For example, at HMP Fosse Way, built following HMP Five Wells, 84 additional interview rooms were incorporated as well as seven large group rooms, and air-conditioning in the staff training space to improve working conditions. Unfortunately, there are no immediate plans to make physical improvements to HMP Five Wells as there are a number of competing demands for maintenance across the prison estate and HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) must prioritise work based on risk to life, capacity and decency.

I recognise the importance of a strong and diverse Board and appreciate the difficulties that you have had in recruiting suitable candidates. I am pleased to say that the IMB Staff is taking active steps to improve recruitment processes and outcomes. The IMB recruitment process is currently under review to streamline procedures and improve efficiency. This includes updating guidance for both applicants and interview panels to ensure high-quality candidates are attracted and appointed. It is also developing a new database and application system to make it easier for individuals to apply and for vacancy managers to track progress through each stage of recruitment. The IMB Staff's next national campaign is scheduled to launch in January 2026, and as with all campaigns, it will target promotional efforts to support establishments facing recruitment challenges, such as HMP Five Wells. It also has regionally based staff dedicated to local outreach, community engagement, and tailored advertising to ensure as broad and representative a pool of potential volunteers as possible can be reached.

I am encouraged to read that since the appointment of a new Director in June 2024, you have seen a marked and encouraging shift in the operational culture and performance of the prison. The Board's observations highlight a notable uplift in staff morale, improved communication across all levels, and stronger inter-departmental collaboration.

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 truly appreciate your ongoing dedication on behalf of HMP Five Wells despite the membership challenges faced.

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 FIVE WELLS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Designated function of HMP Five Wells

There are currently no immediate plans to change the designated function of HMP Five Wells. However, the contract for the prison was designed with flexibility in mind, recognising the need to adapt to pressures within the wider prison system and operational requirements on site. As such, while the primary function remains resettlement, the cohort has been flexed in response to system-wide capacity demands. Notably, in January 2024, a trainer cohort was introduced, and as of August 2025, the population at Five Wells comprises approximately 56% resettlement and 39% trainer.

Looking ahead, the HMPPS Estate Configuration Review, alongside the Independent Sentencing Review and the Independent Review of Criminal Courts, will inform future decisions about prison functions and offender flows across the estate. A 2027 Configuration Ambition has been agreed as a holding position, which for HMP Five Wells includes a model of 85% Resettlement C and 15% Trainer C, ensuring the prison continues to meet the evolving needs of the system while maintaining its core resettlement focus.

Prisoner Property

We take the concerns raised about the handling and transfer of prisoner property seriously and are actively working to improve systems and accountability in this area. In response to the findings of the IMB national thematic report and the Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations review, HMPPS has actively reminded Governors and senior leaders of key property handling responsibilities, including adherence to volumetric control limits.

While digital transformation in this area remains constrained by wider pressures, we have embedded the use of the digitally recorded Person Escort Record (dPER), which includes a property section that accurately logs sealed items transferred with the prisoner and supports investigations into any loss. Additionally, the Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) contract includes regular complaint reviews and has introduced a new vehicle fleet with increased capacity to carry additional property.

We continue to consult with prisons on further improvements and remain committed to strengthening the integrity and traceability of prisoner property handling across the estate.