



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for
Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Swaleside
Eastchurch
Isle of Sheppey
Kent
ME14 4AX

MoJ ref: SUB129282

1 December 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP SWALESIDE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2024 – 31 APRIL 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Swaleside. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for the hard work that has gone into capturing your helpful observations. This is particularly commendable given that you have continued your monitoring with less than half of the recommended complement of board members. I would also like to extend my thanks to your clerk and her colleagues for the invaluable support and good cheer they bring to facilitate the work of the Board.

I was saddened to learn of the five deaths in custody during the reporting year. This would undoubtedly have been very difficult for staff, fellow prisoners and the families affected, to whom I extend my sincere condolences. I want to reassure the Board that each death is taken extremely seriously. HMP Swaleside has been prioritised for targeted input from the Safer Prisons Team and I refer you to the response from HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) contained within the attached annex for further detail.

I appreciate the Board's continued commitment to highlighting concerns relating to Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences. The Government is not standing still on this important issue and remains focused on progressing those serving IPP sentences towards a safe and sustainable release. Our view does, however, remain that resentencing could lead to the release of individuals whom the independent Parole Board has deemed too dangerous. This would pose an unacceptable risk to victims and the public and is therefore not an option we support.

As outlined in my letter dated 21 November 2024, the Government believes the best way to support those serving the IPP sentence is through the IPP Action Plan which was revised on 17 July 2025. The Plan includes measurable targets and commitments to increase access to Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL), expand the Approved Premises pilot and enable swift re-release following recall through Risk Assessed Recall Review (RARR). These measures are working. As of 30 June 2025, the IPP prisoner population fell to 2,486 (down from 2,734) with 946 never been released (down from 978) and 1,476 recalled to custody (down from 1,508). Recalls dropped to 619 in 2024, the lowest since 2017, and 602 recalled prisoners were re-released: the highest ever in a single year. At HMP Swaleside, IPP initiatives launched in 2024

helped progress four long term IPP prisoners, previously considered 'stuck' in the system, being supported towards release via appropriate treatment pathways.

I am very concerned about the drone incidents around prisons which pose a major threat to prison security. HMPPS is taking a multi-faceted approach, investing over £40m in physical security across 34 prisons, including around £10m on anti-drone measures such as window replacements, grilles, and netting. We are also advancing technology strengthening legislation and working across Government and with international partners on this global issue. Due to operational sensitivities, I am, however, not able to share specific tactics as that could aid the organised criminals who seek to undermine prison security.

At HMP Swaleside, proactive steps have already been taken to detect and disrupt drone activity for example, by the replacement of the window grilles at known incursion points. Additional measures being implemented include, drug detection scanning, perimeter checks and robust counter corruption and covert testing programmes.

You will be aware of the legislative changes introduced to address chronic and acute overcrowding. These have inevitably influenced, in the shorter term, the mix and number of prisoners across the estate. The HMPPS Estate Configuration Review will assess the impact of both the Independent Sentencing Review and the Independent Review of Criminal Courts on the prison population and the future needs of the prison estate as a whole. A provisional 2027 Configuration Ambition has been agreed to guide ongoing work. HMP Swaleside is currently modelled to accommodate a 100% Category B training cohort, with current alignment showing Swaleside as 87% compliant. This reflects a small number of Category C men awaiting transfer. As pressures ease across the Category C estate, as a result of the measures the Government has taken, we anticipate a corresponding reduction in transfer delays, supporting progress towards the 100% target.

I recognise the Board's concerns about staff inexperience and limited training. HMPPS is actively improving both recruitment processes and training to ensure staff are equipped to meet the complex demands of the prison officer role. Central to this is the Enable Programme, a core element of which is the Foundation Training Reform, a long-term review of the initial training offer for Prison Officers. By investing in staff development and wellbeing, Enable aims to equip staff with the confidence and skills to make a meaningful difference in their roles, enhance operational effectiveness and improve retention by fostering a positive and sustainable working culture.

Although the year has brought considerable challenges, particularly in relation to staffing, safety, and population pressures, I welcome and echo the Board's recognition of the dedication shown by staff across the prison. The commendation of Care, Segregation and Resettlement Unit staff and the Senior Leadership staff for their professionalism in managing complex cases and maintaining decency under pressure is well deserved.

I was delighted to read about the Education Department's continued success, with positive course completion rates and exceptionally strong engagement in Open University programmes. The Healthcare Team, under new leadership, has also made notable improvements in service delivery and morale.

I note that your report has also raised some local concerns. The Governor will continue to keep you informed of any developments regarding these matters. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I very much appreciate the valuable role played by all members of the Independent Monitoring Boards operating throughout the prison estate and we remain grateful for your ongoing dedication on behalf of HMP Swaleside.

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 SWALESIDE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY 2024 – 30 APRIL 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Deaths in Custody

HMPPS Safety Group continues to work closely with HMP Swaleside to strengthen systems and better support those prisoners who are most at risk. During the IMB reporting period, targeted support was provided through the Cluster process. This included a two-day visit by Safety Group members in July 2024 to review and test actions following HM Inspectorate of Prisons recommendations and support further safety improvements. A joint Safety Support meeting was held in February 2025 to review risks, share learning, and agree next steps. Additional resource has been allocated to support the management and quality assurance of ACCT and CSIP by the implementation of Band 4 floorwalkers. Thorough quality assurance processes have been implemented and are monitored by the Safer Prisons Team.

Care, separation and reintegration unit (CSRU):

To reduce the time that prisoners spend in the CSRU, a new function head has been put in place who will review all segregation processes and policies. The Head will be supported by the LTSHE specialist Pathways to Progression* team to identify and mitigate the barriers to progression and ensure any staff development needs are met.

** see also response below regarding Mental health facilities*

Kitchen and preparation of food

As part of the wider estate development strategy, it is essential to address the operational pressures in catering for HMP Stanford Hill, highlighting the need for a dedicated kitchen facility. While the support from HMP Swaleside has ensured continuity, it was always a temporary solution and the outlined pressures and risks confirm the necessity of this investment to ensure long-term sustainability, efficiency, and service excellence. The new contractors, Bovis, are to undertake all new surveys for the expansion at HMP Stanford Hill, with commencement of work not expected until summer 2026 with a completion date set for the end of 2028/beginning of 2029. In the interim MOJ and HMPPS have agreed to install a temporary finishing kitchen at Stanford Hill, which will ease the pressure at HMP Swaleside.

Mental health facilities

The Mental Health Bill has now progressed to Report Stage in the House of Commons. The Bill introduces 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, aim to reduce unnecessary delays and deliver swifter access to treatment. The MoJ are working with the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England, the Welsh Government, the Home Office, and the Youth Custody Service to create an implementation plan which sets out the operational improvements necessary to fulfil our commitment to commencing these reforms 18-24 month post Royal Assent. The

MoJ are also working closely with health and justice partners to support the development of the recently established Mental Health and Justice Strategic Advisory Group. This group will improve oversight of the transfer process by bringing together key partners across operational delivery to scrutinise data and intelligence on transfer timeliness and identify and deliver solutions to address common causes of delays. In addition, the LTHSE specialist service, Pathways to

Progression* will improve collaborative working with health settings to better meet the needs of prisoners with complex mental disorder whose needs result in difficulty progressing through their sentence and coping with custody. This includes joint working with health to provide better access to hospital settings for prisoners as well as more meaningful collaborative health-prison pathways for men as they progress through their sentence.

** see also response above regarding CSRU.*

Body worn video cameras (BWVCs)

BWVC is governed by a specific Policy Framework which outlines that any extension of BWVC to other roles, including non-operational roles, must be considered by the Governor to be 'necessary and proportionate.' In cases where this test is met, the rationale for deployment of BWVC needs to be recorded. The Governor at Swaleside would therefore need to determine a security need to widen the deployment of BWVC beyond operational staff, bearing in mind that BWVCs should not be used as a substitute for appropriate operational presence. The national rollout provided 190 cameras to Swaleside, which is sufficient for all mandated operational staff on shift, with a buffer for other staff. On average, 100 to 120 cameras are drawn daily. Any consideration regarding expansion of use at Swaleside would need to include LTHSE representation given the potential implications for the wider estate.

Constant watch cells

HMP Swaleside needs more cells to conduct constant supervision when it is required and MoJ are currently developing projects to improve the standard of cells across the site. In the interim, when needed, other prisons in the region are approached to help provide constant supervision cells. When alternative suitable locations are unavailable, added staff are deployed to supervise prisoners in the most suitable available cells within Swaleside.

Non-attendance at adjudication hearings

We agree that there is a high and unacceptable number of remanded adjudications at HMP Swaleside. This results from too many low-level charges being laid because officers are not sufficiently challenging behaviours directly and are laying charges as a first resort without personal challenge or utilisation of the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme or other interventions. The current quantity of charges laid makes it difficult to reschedule hearings. We know that prisoners do not attend due to the belief that charges, once remanded, will not be followed up and have a general lack of regard for the outcomes from adjudications. By reducing the number of charges laid, the available resource can focus on ensuring all adjudications are heard effectively and efficiently. HMP Swaleside will achieve this by upskilling and empowering officers to directly challenge low level behaviours and use alternative disposals, such as IEP and Five-Minute Interventions.