



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Wealstun
Walton Road
Wetherby
LS23 7AZ

MoJ ref: SUB129850

27 November 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP WEALSTUN: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JUNE 2024 – 31 MAY 2025**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Wealstun. I am sincerely grateful to you and your colleagues for the hard work that has gone into producing this helpful report, especially given the challenges of operating with fewer members than recommended.

I was saddened to read that three prisoners died in custody during the reporting year, and one shortly after release. I appreciate any death, regardless of the circumstances, impacts on both staff and fellow prisoners and I would like to express my sympathy to their friends and family. I note that the circumstances of two of the deaths in custody are yet to be determined but want to reiterate that any subsequent recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman will be taken seriously and acted upon.

I recognise the concerns around increased prisoner churn and staffing pressures. His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has reviewed staffing models across adult public sector prisons, including HMP Wealstun, as part of its Workforce Delivery Project. Implementation planning is underway, and any resource increases will be reviewed subject to affordability. Emergency measures such as End of Custody Supervised Licence, Standard Determinate Sentence (SDS40), and expanded Home Detention Curfews have helped ease capacity pressures. At HMP Wealstun, increased prisoner churn over the past year has been managed effectively. Despite added strain on the Offender Management Unit and resettlement services, staff have responded admirably. HMP Wealstun continues to lead on the employment on release at 6 weeks metric, outperforming other Category C wing prisons by 3.5%.

I share your repeated concern about the detention of individuals with severe mental illness. As I outlined in my response to your last report, the Mental Health Bill, which has now completed its Commons Stages, introduces a statutory 28-day transfer limit, aiming to reduce delays in transfers to hospital. It also includes measures to prevent courts from detaining people with severe mental illness in prison as a place of safety. NHS England's Strategic Advisory Group will oversee implementation once Royal Assent is received.

A new healthcare contract for male prisons in West Yorkshire, including HMP Wealstun, is also expected from April 2026. At HMP Wealstun, segregation is rarely used for mental health cases and only when safety is at risk, with improved psychiatric referral times being achieved through the prison's Safety Intervention meeting.

I understand the Board's continued concern regarding the re-sentencing of prisoners serving Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences. The Government is not standing still on the important issue of progressing those serving IPP sentences towards a prospective future release, including those in the open estate. Whilst this Government does want to make progress in relation to IPP prisoners, we cannot take any steps that would put the public at risk. The Justice Committee Report outlined the key principles that any resentencing exercise should balance the protection of the public and justice for the offender. The Government does not think this balance could be achieved when the independent Parole Board has determined, in many cases repeatedly determined, that the IPP offenders in custody are too dangerous to be released, having not met the statutory release test.

Despite the challenges, our commitment to progressing IPP prisoners towards safe release has seen good progress. As of 30 June 2025, there were 2,486 IPP offenders in custody, a reduction from 2,734 the previous year. Of these, the never been released population had fallen to 978 and 1,508 had been recalled. The refreshed IPP Action Plan, published in the HMPPS IRP Annual Report on 17 July 2025, outlines reforms focused on reducing the IPP population, improving fairness, and supporting rehabilitation. It includes measurable targets and emphasises effective delivery across prisons and probation.

I also note your concerns about illicit substances. Prisons already use a range of security measures including X-ray body scanners, Enhanced Gate Security, detection dogs, and drug trace detection equipment. Over £40 million is being invested this year across 34 prisons to strengthen physical security, including anti-drone measures at 15 priority sites. HMP Wealstun has responded effectively to this challenge through strong supply reduction tactics and support from regional teams. The prison employs intelligence-led searches, drone patrols, and works closely with law enforcement and specialist units. Measures include mail and Personal Identification Number monitoring, drug detection, mobile phone detection, and physical barriers to prevent drone deliveries. Staff are trained to identify risks and uphold security standards, while corruption prevention and community engagement remain central to operations. Despite challenges, we remain committed to disrupting criminal activity and reducing demand through health and substance misuse partnerships.

It was encouraging to receive your comments on the improvements at HMP Wealstun, particularly increased time out of cell supported by Extended Working Week funding. I'm pleased the new K Wing has been well received, offering enhanced prisoners greater autonomy. The Board's praise for segregation staff's compassionate care in complex mental health cases is noted, as is the improved vocational training attendance following changes to movement procedures.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor 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 remain deeply appreciative of the important contribution made by Independent Monitoring Boards across the prison estate, and we are sincerely grateful for your continued efforts and dedication on behalf of HMP Wealstun.

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 WEALSTUN: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JUNE 2024 – 31 MAY 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Overcrowding

In December 2024, we published the 10-Year Prison Capacity Strategy, committing to deliver 14,000 additional prison places by 2031, including approximately 2,500 already completed since July 2024. On 14 May 2025, we announced a further £4.7 billion investment, bringing total funding to £7 billion between 2024–25 and 2029–30. Following the publication of Dame Anne Owers' Independent Review of Prison Capacity on 5 August, we began implementing reforms to ensure sustainable prison capacity. The Sentencing Bill, introduced on 2 September 2025, includes measures to address the current situation such as suspending short custodial sentences, reforming recall, and introducing earned progression for determinate sentences. In the interim, changes to Home Detention Curfew, recall practices, and the Early Removal Scheme are helping manage demand and reduce overcrowding.

At HMP Wealstun, all places meet HMPPS criteria, and cell sharing risk assessments are carried out effectively. While continued vigilance is essential, HMP Wealstun is one of the least crowded prisons in the North of England, with 130 prisoners in 65 shared cells. All cells include privacy screens for toilets, supporting standards of decency.

Refurbishment

HMPPS acknowledges concerns about the condition of A and B wings. Due to the scale of work required and current funding and capacity constraints, full replacement of these wings cannot proceed at this time. Although all establishment requests are considered, maintenance demands currently exceed available funding, so projects are prioritised based on risk to life, capacity, and decency.

However, HMPPS continues to explore opportunities to progress this work. Following feasibility studies, the MoJ has identified a preferred £32 million option for A and B wings, which is currently at the Options Appraisal and Outline Business Case stage. If approved, this will enhance security and decency through the installation of new flooring, toilets, sinks, and windows. A separate project to refurbish all showers in A and B wings is also under consideration. If both projects are approved, they will be aligned to minimise disruption during wing decanting.

Over the past year, many cell floors have been replaced and showers partially refurbished, including upgrades to wall finishes, lighting, and drainage.

Drug Testing

The forensic analysis of seized items contract has been in place since April 2023. High volumes of submissions above agreed thresholds impacted the delivery of standard (non-urgent) reports to prisons in 2024 which subsequently led to a backlog of standard submissions and turnaround times that increased from the contracted 28 days to approximately 98 days.

Action was taken to reduce the volume of submissions to avoid a contractual overspend and reduce the backlog and the non-urgent submission route for forensic testing was paused in December 2024. The non-urgent testing route was reopened on 1 April 2025. The urgent testing route remained in place to detect immediate risks to health and avoid drug-related fatalities, and an authorisation route was put in place to ensure that all submissions between 9 December 2024 and 31 March 2025 met the urgent

testing criteria. As a result of the pause to non-urgent submissions, the backlog was reduced to a sufficient volume, standard testing resumed, and results were delivered within the contracted key performance indicator of 28 days.

First Night Accommodation Data

Data on prisoners' accommodation status on first night of release continues to be collected and forms part of the prison performance framework. Prison-level data are published annually as part of the Prison Performance Ratings. The 2024/25 publication can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-performance-ratings-2024-to-2025>

Officer Retention and Training

To address officer retention, HMPPS has implemented a Retention Strategy supported by a toolkit that outlines local, regional, and national interventions. These are used by establishments to develop tailored retention plans based on identified drivers of attrition. In 2021, a new exit interview process was introduced to gather insights into why staff leave, using structured questions aligned with the strategy. This feedback informs targeted interventions. Additionally, the Retention Research Team, led by an Occupational Psychologist, conducts interviews and focus groups to explore underlying causes of attrition and support evidence-based solutions.

A Retention Oversight Process was launched in February 2023 to focus on priority sites with high attrition or other concerning indicators such as poor attendance and increased assaults. To enhance training and support retention, HMPPS introduced the Enable Programme, a workforce transformation initiative aimed at creating safer, more supportive environments. It includes a long-term reform of foundation training, shifting to experiential learning over 12 months, and the rollout of Core Capability Packages for officers with 6–24 months of service. A Capability Oversight Function will launch in October 2025 to ensure training quality and guide future development through pilot programmes in London and selected prisons.

At HMP Wealstun, retention has improved, with the resignation rate now at 5.64%. This is attributed to increased pay, additional onsite training after college, and prioritised attendance at safety-critical training using the Confidence and Competence Toolkit.

Performance Targets

Performance targets are set through a combination of central and local processes. Some are applied uniformly across prisons of similar function, while others, like purposeful activity, are tailored to individual establishments based on available resources and agreed locally by the Governor, Prison Group Director (PGD), and Area Executive Director (AED). A common concern arises when a prison meets its target one year and is then given a stretch target the next, which can feel punitive and demotivating. A mitigation process exists at year-end to moderate the impact of overly ambitious targets, and this has been used with mixed success in regions like Yorkshire.

For the racial disparity in use of force measure, changes for 2025/26 now assess outcomes for individual ethnic minority subgroups rather than comparing all minorities to the white group. Ratings are based on the subgroup with the poorest outcomes, and minimum thresholds ensure statistical validity. This requires 12 months of data, making short-term progress harder to demonstrate.

HMPPS continues to refine the performance framework, with a target challenge process and end-of-year moderation in place to ensure fairness. While national consistency is necessary, it can result in unrealistic expectations for high-performing prisons. At HMP Wealstun, strong performance has led to higher targets, which some staff view as inequitable. Nonetheless, the prison remains committed to continuous improvement aligned with both local and national objectives.