



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Styal
Styal Road
Wilmslow
SK9 4HR

MoJ ref: SUB129610

1 December 2025

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Styal and I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your diligence in compiling such an informative report. This is particularly appreciated given that you have continued to operate below your recommended number of Board members.

I was saddened to hear that there were six deaths in custody during the reporting year, two of which occurred shortly after release. This must have been particularly challenging to fellow prisoners and staff, and I offer my heartfelt condolences to all their friends and family. Whilst this site being designated a 'cluster site' is a cause for concern, I hope it means renewed safety support that ensures improvements. I was encouraged by the Board's assessment that the prison has implemented almost all of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's recommendations received so far.

My recent visit to HMP Styal with Lord Bradley was very informative and focused on the mental health needs of women there. I recognise that prisons and other places of detention are not the right environment for individuals with severe mental illness and the government is committed to ensuring that people in contact with the criminal justice system can access appropriate and timely support to meet their 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. It is hoped that these reforms will introduce the much needed change to enable us to support this cohort of individuals effectively.

I note that you have raised concerns in relation to the Prison and Probation Ombudsman reports on deaths in custody and the comparison to the provision in the community. HMPPS is committed to working in partnership with health and social care partners so that people in prison can access the equivalent standard and range of health and social care services as they would receive in the community. HMP/YOI Styal has commissioned mental health provision delivered on site that links to wider specialists as and

when required based on the needs of the individual. The service works to the NHS England national service specification for mental health within the prison estate.

I echo the Board's concerns regarding illicit contraband such as drugs. I recognise they pose an unacceptable threat to the safety and security of our prisons. The majority of women's prisons, including HMP/YOI Styal have Trace Detection Units designed to prevent the smuggling of psychoactive substances. However, it is acknowledged that further support is required to stem activity across a wider range of ingress routes. In 2025, HMPPS will invest over £40 million in physical security across 34 prisons including anti-drone measures. More specifically, as part of the Security Programme, investment will be made in CCTV Capability across the Women's Estate and consideration given to the potential benefits of installing X-ray Body Scanners. Locally, HMP/YOI Styal has had approval to install a Body Scanner and is now awaiting approval for the supporting infrastructure.

I acknowledge your concerns relating to alternatives to prison for female prisoners. The Government's plan to support women is clear and ambitious: to reduce the number of women going to prison, with more managed in the community. The Women's Justice Board is supporting implementation of this plan. The independent expert members are setting the vision and direction for addressing women's individual needs. There is a clear commitment to finding community-based solutions that support women whilst providing suitable punishment. For example, the Birmingham Intensive Supervision Court pilot is diverting women with complex needs from short custodial sentences into enhanced community support, demonstrating effectiveness of this approach. There has also been considerable investment in community services for women, including giving grants to women's service providers to deliver residential alternatives to custody. This year a further £7.2million is being invested in charities, community organisations and local Police Crime Commissioner areas already doing vital work to steer women away from crime. In addition, I welcome the recent Independent Sentencing Review's consideration of the needs of women, and the recommendations that will help address these. The reforms to short and suspended sentences will support the reduction of the number of women in custody.

I fully appreciate the Board's frustrations about the standards of accommodation. You will appreciate that projects to replace accommodation are costly, lengthy, and may require taking many prison places offline, so need to be considered carefully. As you will be aware, £13 million has been agreed for the new healthcare building. Work will commence in 2026. Further plans are in place to address other issues related to HMP/YOI Styal's estate. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) are working closely together to decide what action will be taken to avoid an over reliance on reactive maintenance. I was encouraged by your comments relating to areas of development including the implementation of trauma-informed practices that have enhanced staff understanding and reduced the Use of Force. I am pleased to see that the Women's Estate Psychology Services team has been commended for its effective support to both staff and prisoners, while the establishment of the Young Adult Hub has provided a stimulating and supportive environment for younger prisoners at higher risk of self-harm.

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 recognise the vital role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we appreciate your ongoing dedication on behalf of HMP/YOI Styal.

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

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

New Futures Network

New Futures Network (NFN) have facilitated partnerships with a range of employers and organisations, including major brands and specialist support services. These collaborations provide valuable opportunities for skills development, interviews and employment preparation. Recent events and visits have included workshops, interviews and seminars with various partners, alongside active participation in the Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) programme which continues to expand through new employer engagement. In addition, NFN are supporting a tender process to replace The Clink ROTL and training offer, with a programme of training and employment that is more suitable to the establishment profile of HMP/YOI Styal.

A significant proportion of eligible prisoners at HMP/YOI Styal are engaged in employment or education, predominantly on a part-time basis. Efforts to increase engagement include a review of workspace suitability and risk assessments, particularly for women with complex needs. A revised employment policy and weekly activities meetings with the Deputy Governor aim to improve participation and outcomes.

The upcoming launch of The Marsden Academy is expected to enhance employment opportunities and accredited learning, helping to offset the impact of recent reductions in the education budget. To further mitigate this, a new Community Hub will be introduced, focusing on mentoring and support for individuals with additional needs, including life skills development. Successful completion of the academy will lead to job opportunities on ROTL and release.

Prison Resource, Complexity and Need

The complexity review process is a detailed one and is initiated by the Job Evaluation and Assurance Team. All reviews take into consideration prisoner population size, staffing group size, complexity and risk profile of the prisoner population, people management challenges, site logistics, categorisation and reconfiguration, stakeholder scrutiny and financial and external management. Each factor is scored according to defined criteria, and the aggregate score determines the site's complexity.

The assigned complexity level directly determines the minimum core structure required for the Senior Management Team (SMT) at each site. HMP/YOI Styal was last reviewed in March 2021, at which time it was classified as a Complex establishment. It is scheduled for review during the 2025/26 financial year.

Separate to the existing Prison Complexity ratings, recent work has been completed to review the underpinning staffing model for adult public sector prisons, including HMP/YOI Styal. This review has included consideration of the impact that cohort complexity and physical infrastructure have on daily resourcing requirements. This is currently at the implementation planning stage and remains subject to affordability decisions. Therefore, we are unable to comment on planned resource uplifts at this stage. In the interim HMP/YOI Styal has been supplied with some immediate tactical support equivalent to 8 officers.

All health provision is in line with national service specification requirements. There has been significant additional resource provided to the healthcare teams to support and develop provision. Through contract meetings, site visits and ongoing dialogue with providers and stakeholders any gaps in provision are identified and at this point there would be discussions around the best approach to address these gaps – from amending service models to linking to wider commissioned services as appropriate.

Resourcing Hospital Appointments

The number of escorts provided per site are aligned with data provided by the MoJ. Where there is additional need and demand above that of the modelled provision, NHS England are willing to fund this. However, staffing unplanned medical escorts will be dependent upon the number of staff HMP/YOI Styal have available to deploy. HMP/YOI Styal is working with the Prison Group Director to identify potential options to enhance staffing, support and supervision to provide support to prisoners needing medical care when required.

Digitalisation of Assessment Care in Custody and Teamwork paperwork

Digitisation of Assessment Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) has been considered, and whilst recognising the benefits it could offer, enabling staff to update records on the go, and allowing for different departments to access and update records remotely, concerns were identified around system integration, access, security and confidentiality. Consequently, it was decided to implement forms that could be completed electronically (for those that did not require a wet signature) to enable staff to type up forms and copy and paste information elsewhere to save time and/or duplication, rather than explore a fully digital process. There are no plans to digitise ACCT documentation currently.

Locally, HMP/YOI Styal has implemented an enhanced ACCT Quality Assurance Framework which is designed to improve quality and address concerns relating to duplication and errors. The framework closely monitored and where necessary follow up is provided through group coaching sessions and on a one-to-one basis to provide ongoing development.

Resourcing Fire Safety

The Mini Fire Safety Improvement was completed at the beginning of 2025. Those risk assessed as higher need are located in cells with fixed detection on the residential units, and all cells in the Care and Separation Unit now have in-cell detection. In total 22 cells have been equipped with automatic fire detection under this project.

HMPPS has commissioned a trial for a “door screecher” in one residential unit to ensure an effective building fire strategy and address the issue of fire doors being wedged open. A “door screecher” is a device that makes a loud screeching sound if fire safety doors are left open for too long. If successful, this will be installed in all residential units.