



Ministry  
of Justice

**Lord Timpson**  
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP/YOI Askham Grange  
Askham Grange  
York  
YO23 3FT

MoJ Ref: 116477

19 August 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI ASKHAM GRANGE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 JULY 2022 – 30 JUNE 2023**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Askham Grange. I have read your report with care and I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing your helpful observations.

All our Womens prisons are designated as resettlement establishments. Consequently HMP/YOI Askham Grange has resettlement services in place to meet the needs of all the prisoners detained there irrespective of sentence length. Probation Practitioners have overall responsibility for providing resettlement support, however the pre-release team, who are embedded in the prison, are the link between the probation practitioner and all of the other specialist teams in the prison to ensure that everything is in place for when the prisoner is ready to leave prison, including those outside their home area. The pre-release team identify and address the immediate resettlement needs of women arriving in prison, and this includes prisoners with ten months or less to serve.

Regarding short sentences for female offenders, the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan (2023) includes a commitment to work with the courts to raise awareness and increase understanding of the specific issues faced by women who offend and increase understanding of the possible implications and opportunities of sentencing. Judicial briefing materials have been created to help raise awareness of the specific issues faced by criminalised women and available community-based sentencing options. A set of three short videos looking at women's distinct needs in the Criminal Justice System, implications for custody (including remand), and opportunities available in the community as alternatives to custody, have been shared as part of existing engagement events with the judiciary (including sentencers and legal advisors) and delivered to frontline court practitioners. Ongoing engagement with sentencers and the judiciary will continue to highlight the different and often complex needs of women and encourage the use of robust community penalties as an alternative to custody.

I was reassured to receive your comments that HMP/YOI Askham Grange has been observed to be a safe establishment for both prisoners and staff with incidents of violence and self-harm appearing to be rare. I was impressed to learn that the grounds are well kept by the prisoners with regular replanting of flowers and a wild meadow. The example of the care given to a

prisoner with a neurological condition should also be commended and recognised as good practice.

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. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work and dedication on behalf of HMP/YOI Askham Grange.



**Lord Timpson**  
**Minister of State for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending**

## HMP/YOI ASKHAM GRANGE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2022 – 30 JUNE 2023

### HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

#### **Community Offender Managers**

##### *Recruitment*

Recruitment and retention remain a priority for HMPPS. Since 2021, we have injected extra funding of more than £155 million a year to deliver more robust supervision, recruit thousands more staff and reduce caseloads and we are beginning to see the results of our focus on recruitment and retention. As at 9 August 2024, Yorkshire and The Humber had 596 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Band 4 Probation Officers against a required staffing of 791, with an additional 222 FTE trainee Probation Officers. There has also been accelerated recruitment of trainee Probation Officers to increase staffing levels, particularly in Probation Delivery Units with the most significant staffing challenges. In January 2024, we launched a Probation Alumni Scheme to encourage qualified Probation Officers and Senior Probation Officers who left within the last five years to return, enabling us to significantly reduce time to hire and streamline the process.

##### *Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) and Release Planning*

HMPPS is always seeking to improve access to ROTL. Decisions on ROTL is subject to thorough risk assessment of the individual and the place where they will be working, together with consulting agencies such as the police and serious organised crime unit (SOCU) as required. Work is underway to streamline workplace vetting processes and improve information exchange between prisons and community offender managers. Yorkshire and The Humber region has had another cohort of trainee Probation Officers complete their training during the last six months which will improve the timely completion of ROTLs moving forward. Additionally, a Pre-release team that will work across the twelve prisons in the region was recently established to ensure every person leaving prison has a robust Resettlement Plan in place to assist with their rehabilitation in the community.

#### **Capacity Utilisation**

All female prisoners who have been granted Open conditions are routinely asked to consider transferring to HMP/YOI Askham Grange and HMPPS' other Open site HMP/YOI East Sutton Park. Often this option is declined due to the distance that women would be held from their homes and resettlement opportunities and the barriers that could create when trying to maintain family ties. Another factor that results in women declining to transfer is that once they have been categorised for Open conditions, both men and women are eligible for consideration for Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL). Female prisoners however do not have to be in an Open category prison (as men do) in order to access ROTL, which results in many opting to stay in their local prison. HMPPS' Women's Group is undertaking a range of activities to increase occupancy of all Open spaces across the group.

#### **Shared Cells**

HMPPS currently has no plans to phase out cell-sharing where the accommodation has been designed for that purpose. Cells are only shared where a Prison Group Director (PGD) has assessed them to be decent and of an adequate size and condition. The capacity of all accommodation at HMP/YOI Askham Grange remains equal to the Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) level originally certified by the PGD. Additionally, in Open prisons, there

is a clear expectation that prisoners will spend significant amounts of time unlocked from their cell, either occupying communal areas, undertaking purposeful activity or working outside of the prison. This should further mitigate any issues concerning decency that are linked to cell size specifically.