



Ministry  
of Justice

**Lord Timpson**  
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Northumberland  
Acklington  
Morpeth  
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**MoJ ref:** SUB117882

7 October 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP NORTHUMBERLAND: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 JANUARY 2023 – 31 DECEMBER 2023**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Northumberland. Having read the report, it is clear that you and your colleagues have, as ever, put in a huge amount of work to capture the current state of the prison. This is particularly impressive given the fact that you have continued to be so short of members. I am really grateful to each and every one for their contributions – please do pass on my thanks to them.

I was deeply saddened to read that five prisoners died during the reporting year. Any death in our prisons is a tragedy and I offer my heartfelt condolences to their friends and family. I would like to reassure the loved ones of those who have passed away that deaths in custody are taken extremely seriously. As the Board will know, it is important in these tragic circumstances that we act on recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. This is something that I discuss with Governors whenever I have the opportunity to visit prisons.

I share the Board's concerns about mental health provision at the prison. NHS England recognised that a lack of staff was affecting performance and I was encouraged to see that there has been significant investment in staffing – with a psychologist, two higher assistant psychologists and a new Mental Health Team Manager all joining the prison this year. I was pleased to read that services have improved in a number of areas but it is crucial that the prison builds on this progress.

As your report notes, despite the referral pathway into the Integrated Support Unit at HMP Durham for those that are acutely mentally unwell, most of the individuals involved in the five successful transfers from HMP Northumberland this year waited too long in segregated conditions for a bed to become available. It is clear that more work needs to be done locally to ensure that secure hospital beds are made available as quickly as possible.

There is also a role for the Government on this and we at the Ministry of Justice are working with the Department of Health and Social Care to introduce a Mental Health Bill as soon as possible.

This will include a range of reforms to support people suffering severe mental illness in the criminal justice system and aims to speed up access to specialist inpatient treatment – so that those affected get the timely care they need.

Despite the challenges at HMP Northumberland, I was pleased to read that the prison provides a safe environment in which prisoners are treated fairly and humanely. As you have set out, staff are friendly, professional and have positive relationships with prisoners – something which, as you know, is crucial to turning lives around.

I was really encouraged by the improvements in the prison's response to threats of drug, alcohol and other illicit items entering the prison, as well as in the cleanliness and investment in kit for prisoners and cell furniture. Getting these basics right will no doubt enable the prison to provide a better launching pad for rehabilitation.

I also welcome the progress with the rates at which prisoners are remaining in employment six weeks after release from custody – which is vital to them keeping on the straight and narrow in the longer term. The rate reached nearly 20% at the end of the reporting year and I note that the Board have been impressed with the ambitious plans of the new Director to improve education, skills and work. I look forward to reading about how this work develops and the resulting progress in your next annual report.

The Secretary of State and I are hugely appreciative of the valuable role Independent Monitoring Boards play throughout the estate – and we are extremely grateful to you and your team for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Northumberland.



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