



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Garth
Ulnes
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Leyland, Preston
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31 October 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMP GARTH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 DECEMBER 2022 – 3 NOVEMBER 2023**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP Garth. I have read your report carefully and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing the current state of the prison. This is particularly impressive given you have continued to operate with several vacancies and I thank each of your members for their valuable contribution.

I was deeply saddened to read that three prisoners died during the reporting year. All deaths in our prisons are a tragedy and I offer my deepest condolences to their friends and family. I would like to offer reassurance that any deaths in custody are treated very seriously and it is imperative that we take action on recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman in these circumstances.

I fully understand and share the Board's ongoing concerns around the recruitment and retention of uniformed staff. HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) operates a centralised recruitment model for Prison Officers which has been tailored to provide real life job examples for candidates throughout. It is designed to keep candidates engaged and supports self-selecting out, a process which allows candidates who would not fit with the job or want to do the job to leave the recruitment process at the earliest stage. Prisons are encouraged to take an active role in engaging with applicants locally, and HMP Garth offers a site visit to all new recruits. The staffing position at the prison improved significantly following a national recruitment campaign in 2023, with the recruitment pipeline being able to meet the ongoing needs of the prison. HMP Berwyn is currently piloting a localised recruitment initiative that is testing the hypothesis that increased engagement locally will deliver better results in both the quality of candidates recruited and on retention. HMPPS will draw lessons from the HMP Berwyn pilot to inform future strategies to improve recruitment and retention.

Turning to the delivery of key work, HMPPS acknowledge that delivery of this work has been affected over the reporting period. This was due to vacancies and high levels of staff sickness. Going forward all establishments, including HMP Garth, have set out a Regime Plan for 2024/25 agreed by their Prison Group Director (PGD) on what they can deliver, and this includes regime activities and key work. The minimum expectation has been set at one session of approximately 45 minutes every four weeks for every prisoner. Regime plans will be reviewed quarterly by PGDs and Executive Directors. Any issues with key work delivery will be addressed and agreed with the PGD taking into account the risks and needs at establishment level.

I sympathise with the the Board's frustration and continued concerns about prisoners subject to Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection (IPP). The Government is keen to continue to focus on the rehabilitation of IPP offenders through a refreshed and updated Action Plan, which is due to be published this Autumn. The refreshed Action Plan will focus on frontline delivery in our prisons and the Probation Service, to ensure that those serving IPP sentences have robust and effective sentence plans, which they are actively engaging with, and that they are in the correct prison to access the right interventions and rehabilitative services. This is the most effective way to help them to reduce their risk so that they can progress towards safe release from custody. I am very mindful of the specific and substantial challenges faced by those serving IPP sentences and this is an issue I feel passionately about.

The Board may also be aware on 5 September 2024 the Lord Chancellor announced the timings for important legislative changes which will directly impact IPP offenders being supervised in the community. From 1 November 2024, anyone who was released on IPP licence for the first time five or more years ago and has spent at least the last two years of that period continuously in the community without being recalled will have their IPP licence terminated without the need for a review by the Parole Board. The Secretary of State will have two new powers, the power to disapply a recall and 'Risk Assessed Recall Review' (RARR). The first enables her to not reset the two-year period after someone is re-released from a recall. Secondly she will be able to re-release people who have been recalled at any point without referring the case to the Parole Board. It is right that IPP sentences were abolished and the Government is committed to working with organisations and campaign groups to ensure the appropriate course of action is taken to support those still serving IPP sentences.

Whilst I appreciate frustrations that some of the Board's concerns are repeated issues, I was encouraged to receive your comments about the prison being safe for both prisoners and staff with the Board regularly observing a good level of mutual respect and empathy between prison officers and prisoners. I was reassured to learn about the security measures made to improve the finding of illicit items, including preventing paper impregnated with drugs entering the prison together with increased searches of staff and visitors, which I believe is very important in ensuring safety and rehabilitation in our prisons. I was also pleased to read about the Storybook Dads initiative enabling prisoners to read approved stories to their children by phone which has proved a success with parents.

Local issues of concern raised in your report will be addressed by the Governor who will continue to keep you aware of progress as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Secretary of State and I hugely appreciate the invaluable role of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful to you and your team for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Garth.



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP GARTH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 DECEMBER 2022 – 3 NOVEMBER 2023

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prison Environment

A major maintenance bid of £400k has been successful and secured for this year. A project to repair the flat roof is currently going through the tender process. Contractor site visits have taken place and it is anticipated the project will be completed later this autumn.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Property Team are working with engineers to resolve the heating temperature issue, and with the maintenance contractor (Amey) to resolve issues with the ventilation. A contractor visited the site in early September 2024 with quotes expected later in the month. There is now a process in place with the maintenance contractor to replace all broken window vents and prisoners have been allowed to purchase cooling fans to mitigate the warm conditions until the issues are resolved.

It is acknowledged that the healthcare waiting area is too small for the current population as it was designed when the prison was half its current capacity. Due to the design of the healthcare facility there is no room to expand the waiting area. Healthcare staff now hold more clinics on residential units to alleviate this issue.

Prisoners' Property

HMPPS notes the Board's concerns about property when a prisoner transfers establishments. Prisoner Escort Custody Services (PECS) provide transportation for prisoners and their property. As part of the planning for the current PECS contract, MoJ Policy reviewed property limits on transportation and it was agreed that the new vehicle fleet would have increased capacity to facilitate an additional half bag of property for consumables to the limit of 7.5kg. The vehicle fleet is designed to transfer the number of prisoners intended together with their property in line with volumetric limits. PECS suppliers will also transfer a reasonable volume of legal documentation.

The introduction of the digitally recorded Prisoner Escort Record (dPER) included a property section that accurately records the number and type of sealed property 'owned' by and transferred with the prisoner and an accurate record of property handover between different stakeholders. This is now embedded as business as usual. The digital process has assisted with investigations for property that is lost in transit with PECS suppliers. For property delay, as per the Prisoner Property Framework, if the limit of items allowed in possession has been reached and if there is no space on the escort vehicle to transport items safely and securely, then responsibility for transfer of any remaining items remains with the sending prison.

The emphasis must remain on prisoners complying with volumetric control limits, since any property within these limits will be transferred with them. It is not possible to transfer with a prisoner all excess property which they might have accrued above these limits. There has been a requirement since the introduction of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework for prisons to transfer any excess items within four weeks. Previously, there was no time limit in place. HMPPS is aware of the problems around property and continues to look at what further can be done.