



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Belmarsh
Western Way
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London
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23 January 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP BELMARSH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2024 – 30 JUNE 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Belmarsh. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in compiling such an informative report. It was refreshing to note that the number of board members increased from the start of the reporting period and is nearing the recommended complement. My peers and I appreciated our visit to the prison in September 2025 where we were able to discuss some of the themes in more detail and we trust you found the visit equally beneficial and useful.

I was saddened to hear three prisoners died during the reporting year, two of which were shortly after release. I offer my sincere condolences to the friends and family of all the deceased. I note that the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman has raised concerns and recommendations following previous deaths in custody and I am grateful to the Board for monitoring progress against these to help ensure any necessary changes are made.

I fully understand the Board's continued concerns about the handling of prisoners' property and appreciate your frustration that you have raised similar concerns in your last three reports. HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) has carefully considered the IMB national thematic report on the impact of property loss on prisoners, and the thematic review by the Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations of the property complaints they have received over the last five years. In considering both reports, consultation with prison staff took place on the issues raised. A revised version of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was consequently published on 17 November 2025 and includes additional guidance on the forwarding of excess property, the handling of prisoners' laundry, and on the correct completion of the cell clearance certificate, as these issues have been identified as common areas of difficulty.

Additionally, HMPPS has once again reminded Governors and other senior leaders of key points around property handling, including the importance of prisoners complying with volumetric limits. Compliance with volumetric control remains of key importance, since property within those limits (as well as certain items, such as legal papers, which are exempt from the limits) will be moved with prisoners when they transfer to other establishments. I also note the Board's concerns about the lack of digital improvements on property handling. Whilst it is recognised this will be disappointing, other pressures around digital changes mean that it is not anticipated that an electronic property card will be in place in the immediate future. Please be

assured that HMPPS remains committed to improving the management of prisoners' property and considers possible areas for improvement on an ongoing basis.

I can assure the Board that we are not standing still on the important issue of progressing those serving Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences towards a prospective future release. As mentioned in last years' response, we are continuing to support the rehabilitation of IPP offenders through the IPP Action Plan that was refreshed on 17 July 2025. The Action Plan now also includes measurable targets to ensure transparency and accountability. The refreshed Action Plan was published in our IPP Annual Report and can be accessed on GOV.UK. With public protection as the number one priority, we are working with organisations and campaign groups to ensure appropriate action is taken to support those still serving these sentences, such as improved access to mental health support and rehabilitation programmes.

With regard to the issues you raise around secure hospital transfers, NHS England and healthcare providers are focussing on ensuring that where people in prison have increasing and complex mental health presentations, there are services in place within the prison setting that can meet their needs, reduce further deterioration, and help people to stay well, thereby reducing the likelihood of an admission to inpatient services or external hospital. Where prison is not the right environment for a person with mental health needs, prompt referral to external services is made so that people can receive treatment in clinically appropriate settings.

NHS England's 2024/25 priorities and operational planning guidance reinforces this focus on improving patient flow as a key priority, with systems directed to reduce the average length of stay in adult acute mental health wards in order to deliver more timely access to local beds. To address the wider system issues that impact on health services, a further £1.6 billion has been made available via the Better Care Fund from 2023-25. This funding can be used to support mental health inpatient services as well as the wider system. This is being supplemented by a further £42 million recurrent investment from 2024/25 for all Integrated Care Boards in the country to recommission inpatient care, in line with local models that provide the best evidence of therapeutic support.

HMP Belmarsh is no doubt a challenging prison, it was therefore reassuring to receive your comments about the positive way staff deal with the challenges presented to them on a daily basis and that senior leaders are visible and dedicated to providing a safe and positive environment for both staff and prisoners. I was encouraged to learn about the delivery of a new incentivised substance free living spur and the prison's efforts to promote equality and monitor its performance against protected characteristics. The marked fall in the number of prisoners discovered under the influence of illicit substances is also encouraging.

Local issues of concern raised in your report for the attention of the Governor will be addressed locally and the Governor 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 Deputy Prime Minister and I are deeply appreciative of the important contribution made by Independent Monitoring Boards, and we recognise your continued dedication on behalf of HMP Belmarsh.

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

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Infrastructure Investment

HMPPS remains committed to maintaining safe, secure, and decent prison environments across the estate. At HMP Belmarsh, bids have been made for the installation of anti-drone wires and the replacement of the main generator. These projects are currently at an early stage of development and are progressing through the project assurance process and funding consideration. A range of other bids have also been submitted to HMPPS Estates. Projects currently estimated to complete by the end of the financial year include upgrade/replacement of visitor recognition system and key racking system and replacement of the residential unit fire alarm panel.

The investment required across the estate is continually reviewed to ensure resources are allocated effectively. Within this pipeline, projects awaiting compliant and affordable bids include: replacement of the Building Management System, LV switch panel replacement, installation of a new fire alarm system, upgrades to showers in the High Security Unit, replacement of cell call systems, smoke extraction system improvements, CCTV network expansion, electrical locking updates, bomb door replacement, and fire door remedial works. Future proposals will be informed by data collected during recent condition surveys at each prison. These surveys will underpin long-term forward maintenance registers, enabling prioritisation against future capital budgets.

Whilst all requests from establishments are considered carefully, demand for maintenance significantly exceeds available funding. Therefore, once a bid is received, HMPPS prioritises works to make best use of resources, focusing on projects that address risks to life, capacity, and decency

Close Supervision Centre (CSC)

Allocation and placement of CSC prisoners is centrally managed and a representative from HMP Belmarsh forms part of the Close Supervision Centre Management Committee (CSCMC) who make final decisions regarding placements across the CSC estate. Due to an increase in referrals and other population pressures, there has been an increase in the amount of Designated Cell (DC) prisoners at HMP Belmarsh. This has been a temporary measure, and CSC prisoners are moved to a suitable unit location as soon as a reasonably practicable.

HMP Belmarsh is funded to hold two DC spaces to aid the overall management of the CSC estate. The prison receives funding for an additional two Band 3 Prison Officers to assist in the delivery of a regime to the CSC prisoner population located in DCs.

High-Profile Prisoners

HMP Belmarsh's role in serving the Central Criminal Court and holding category A prisoners inevitably brings with it a cohort of high-profile prisoners. The prison has managed this cohort over many years in various locations and not limited solely to the healthcare department. In each case, individual prisoner risks and needs are considered and the Governor is able to manage their location in accordance with the assessment of the local team and relevant stakeholders. High-profile prisoners are managed across the Long Term and High Security Estate (LTHSE) and HMP Belmarsh is not the sole or default allocation for this cohort.

HMP Belmarsh continues to manage a small number of high-profile prisoners, and it is recognised their presence can place additional pressure on resources and impact the wider regime. The Governor works closely with the LTHSE Population Management teams to ensure that allocation decisions are risk-assessed and proportionate. Where possible, alternative locations are considered to avoid placing these individuals in the Healthcare Centre's In-Patient Unit, which is reserved for those with acute clinical needs. Where the use of those facilities is required, additional resources are deployed on a temporary basis to ensure safety and stability is maintained.

Education Budgets

HMPPS can confirm that there have been no cuts to the overall national prison education budget. However, the cost of delivering high-quality education has risen significantly in recent years, and while the budget has increased, it has not kept pace with rising costs. Consequently, some reductions in the volume of Core Education delivered have been necessary from October 2025. HMPPS anticipates a national reduction in delivery volume of around 20-25%, although this is subject to final analysis.

A revised funding formula has been applied to ensure fair allocation based on prison population and regional cost differences. This redistribution means that some prisons will see greater delivery reductions, while others will see increases. This delivery reduction applies only to Core Education contracts and does not affect other education services such as libraries, careers advice, distance learning or vocational training delivered through industries and workshops.

HMPPS is also investing in digital infrastructure, new assessment tools, and specialist staff to ensure that every pound spent delivers the greatest possible impact for learners. The Prison Education Dynamic Purchasing System also remains available to Governors to commission provision to meet the needs of their local prisoner cohort.

HMPPS' priority is to protect the quality of provision and focus on the most effective interventions. The new Prisoner Education Service contracts set clearer expectations for screening and assessment and offer support for learners with additional learning needs. New digital systems will also expand access to secure online education content; reduce repeated assessments; and improve recording of previous achievements and tracking of learners' progress. It is also important that prisons continue to plan their curriculum based on careful analysis of their population's needs, and that ongoing efforts are made to improve attendance and allocations to ensure learners can gain the maximum benefit from the provision available.

Translation Provision

HMPPS will be delivering a 9-month pilot of an Artificial Intelligence-powered translation tool. The proof of concept took place in eight prisons and was deemed to be very successful. The pilot will cover 30-40 prisons and HMP Belmarsh has been invited to take part. Following a successful pilot, HMPPS will need to determine if this can be taken forward nationally. A start date for the pilot has not been set but it is envisaged this may commence by April 2026 and run for six months.

Whilst it will not replace The Big Word service for legal translations, it is hoped it will become an everyday, easily accessible translation service tool in prisons to aid those whose first language is not English.