



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Birmingham
Winson Green Road
Birmingham
B18 4AS

MoJ ref: SUB132058

27 February 2026

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Birmingham. I very much appreciate you and your colleagues' efforts in putting together an informative report, particularly as you continued to operate with a shortage of members which reduced further during the reporting year.

I was very saddened to read that nine prisoners died during the reporting year. Every death in our care is a tragedy and I offer my sincere condolences to all their friends and family. I can also provide reassurance that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously. While most of the deaths were due to natural causes, it is reassuring that lessons have been learned where care of prisoners fell short. I was encouraged to receive your account of subsequent actions taken to provide training to staff, the issuing of frequent notices to staff to highlight the importance of welfare and improved early days in custody for prisoner during reception and induction.

I do understand the Board's frustrations about the completion of the infrastructure refurbishment work on A, B and C wings at HMP Birmingham. Unfortunately, we had no control over ISG entering into administration and from the point that this happened, every effort has been made to work towards appointing a new contractor and recommencing work. For clarity, the project was not as close to completion as it may have appeared which was confirmed by surveys of the abandoned building site, including a wing missing a roof, gable ends not being secured and missing floors between landings. Due to the size of the project, this has been subject to complex commercial negotiations. It was assessed as better value for money to retain the existing crane and scaffolding rather than remove and replace in the future, given the costs and complexities involved in removing and reinstalling. The scaffolding and temporary structures have also been necessary for the relevant experts to access the building safely during the revalidation process. However, I am pleased to be able to advise you that an early works contract has now been signed with a new contractor and work is due to restart on A, B and C wings imminently.

I appreciate your continued concerns about overcrowding within prisons and reiterate that the safety and decency of our prisoners is paramount. Prison conditions are continually monitored and prison places taken on and offline depending on safety, stability, staffing levels and maintenance needs. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) will not take decisions that create unacceptable risks, but as indicated in the

response to last year's report, it was right that we had to explore every measure to deal with capacity pressures, as the public would expect, while we continue with delivering new prison places. While most single cells in the prison estate could physically hold two people, the maximum crowded capacity of a prison is a matter of operational judgement via the cell certification process. This ensures that use of cells is subject to a formal assessment of safety and decency when crowded. Locally the prison also always undertakes a cell sharing risk assessment and where possible, prisoners' preferences are considered where accommodation needs to be shared. In addition, the significant reforms of the Sentencing Act 2026, which received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026, will provide further options to the Courts and will help inform future requirements for the prison estate at a strategic level.

I also recognise the Board's repeated concerns about older prisoners in custody, which have risen over the past 20 years. This has caused challenges for some prisons, particularly due to the often complex health and social care needs of prisoners and the ill-equipped design of some the existing prison estate. As outlined in my response to you last year, the new prison places we are building are accessible by design and will significantly increase the number of cells adapted to the needs of an ageing population. NHS England commission health services which support HMPPS to ensure that the needs of elderly and frail prisoners are met whilst in custody. We also remain committed to ensuring people in prison have access to an equivalent standard of health and social care to that available in the wider community and this is reflected in the National Partnership Agreement on Health and Social Care in England. Following the recommendation made by the Independent Sentencing Review, there is a greater spotlight on producing a strategy for older prisoners. This will include consideration of how to best to use the estate to better support older prisoners. HMP Birmingham is also continuing to make local improvements to the prison environment and facilities to support its elderly population.

Despite a number of ongoing concerns and the level of churn of prisoners at HMP Birmingham, it was reassuring to receive your comments about the understanding of the triggers and causes of violence and self-harm and the efforts being taken to address these through a number of initiatives to improve safety and stability. I welcome the Board's view that the experience and leadership of the new Governor have enabled the prison to continue to build on previous improvements. Whilst it is recognised that there is more work to do to improve the regime, it was encouraging to note the support that education can provide prisoners with, and the prison will be continuing to encourage engagement in both education and wider activity. I was also pleased to read about the neurodiversity visits initiative for prisoners or family members who would otherwise struggle in a crowded visits hall.

I note you have raised four 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 value the contribution of Independent Monitoring Board members in improving our prisons. We are very grateful for your ongoing dedication on behalf of HMP Birmingham.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Lift Access

It is acknowledged that the lifts at HMP Birmingham are well used, which has resulted in them being temperamental and prone to failure. The prison always reports when the lifts are out of service to the Facilities Management provider to allow timely repair and critical equipment is a standard agenda item that is discussed daily during the week at the Governor's briefing. Where there is lack of progress or a repair fails these are escalated through the complaints process and to the MoJ Area Property Operations Manager to ensure these are addressed promptly. The long-term solution would be a replacement which will require capital funding. However, it should be noted that demands for maintenance across the prison estate are much greater than the available funding and HMPPS is therefore having to prioritise works very carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency.

Recruitment

Recruitment of prison officers is undertaken via a streamlined centralised approach to accommodate the high number of applicants required to cover current and future demand in an expanded prison estate. This model ensures that a consistent standard is applied in assessment, in line with the Civil Service recruitment principles of fair and open competition, and on merit. It also helps to mitigate unconscious bias and supports our compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Constitutional Reform & Governance Act 2010. The Board can be assured that HMP Birmingham has a healthy pipeline of new prison officer candidates to fill vacancies.

An increased focus on values is being introduced in the early sifting stages for prison officers and operational support grades, which follows the successful adoption in the national recruitment process for trainee probation officers. The introduction of values is also being explored in the ongoing review of accreditations for custodial manager, head of function, deputy governor and governor roles to reflect recommendations made in the Rademaker review. There is also a national approach being designed that will enhance the Governor's role in recruitment decision-making, such as the online sifting stages and new assessment content. This will offer greater opportunities to evaluate skills, English language standards, and candidates' values, motivation, and engagement. These changes are expected to be introduced by April 2026 followed by a period of evaluation to assess impact. Once complete, further consideration will be given to increased Governor interaction. In addition, as part of the review of the prison officer foundation training that is being carried out, new assessment methods will be introduced during training, focusing on evaluating an individual's practical competence and moving beyond measures of academic ability. All these changes will better reflect the skills and behaviours required in operational environments and set a high standard for new prison officers.