



Chair
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Doncaster
Marshgate
Doncaster
DN5 8UX

MoJ ref: SUB132633

13 March 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP DONCASTER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2024 – 31 AUGUST 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Doncaster. I am sincerely grateful to you and your colleagues for your continued resilience and commitment in monitoring and capturing your helpful observations despite ongoing membership challenges. I hope the situation improves going forward.

It was deeply upsetting to hear there were nine deaths in custody during the reporting year. Whilst eight of these deaths are suspected to have been due to natural causes, I am saddened by every death in our care. I offer my condolences to the friends and family of all the deceased. It was reassuring to note your comments about the changes implemented around Assessment, Care and Custody Teamwork processes following invocation of a Performance Improvement Notice. I would again like to assure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are always taken very seriously.

I appreciate the Board's continued concerns about the timely transfer of mentally unwell prisoners to secure hospitals. I am pleased to confirm the Mental Health Act 2025 received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025, ensuring there is now a new statutory time limit of 28-days for the transfer of patients with a mental disorder from prison and other places of detention to hospital. Cross-agency work to support the implementation of this reform has led to a greater understanding of the barriers to meeting the 28-day timeframe. It has revealed the systemic barriers and the scale of the challenges that include workforce, bed capacity and estates. The Ministry of Justice will be working with partners to create an implementation plan which sets out the operational changes that will be necessary to fulfil our commitment to commencing this reform. In the meantime, I would like to assure you that HMP Doncaster will continue to work with healthcare providers to ensure the continued safety of prisoners in their care whilst they wait for a more suitable location to be identified, escalating any concerns as required. We envisage the operational improvements necessary to fulfil the new legislation will be implemented within 18-24 months.

The Board can be assured that we are not standing still on the important issue of progressing those serving to Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences towards a prospective future release. A refreshed IPP Action Plan was published on 17 July 2025 and puts an important emphasis on effective frontline delivery in our prisons and the Probation Service. It is designed 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 prison most appropriate to their needs. This is the most effective way to help them to reduce their risk so that they can progress towards safe release from custody. The Action Plan now includes measurable targets to ensure transparency and accountability. Additionally, the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 received Royal Assent on 24 May 2024 and introduced significant changes to IPP sentence licence termination, including reducing the qualifying period for consideration of licence termination together with

new Secretary of State powers under the Risk Assessed Recall Review (RARR) process. So far, the number of people serving the sentence in the community has fallen by two-thirds following the implementation of these changes.

Security vetting is vital in HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) to ensure individuals can uphold the security and integrity standards expected of their role and ensure that prisons and probation remain safe for rehabilitation to take place. The checks undertaken are required to assess individuals against a range of legislative requirements and security factors necessary for anyone working within a HMPPS environment. As pre-employment checks have been made more robust, vetting timescales have unfortunately lengthened. This has been exacerbated by a 30% rise in recruitment across HMPPS and its providers in 2025 compared to 2024. To address current challenges, HMPPS has established an Onboarding Working Group, and a number of targeted activities are underway including increasing staffing levels, reallocating existing resources, and utilising overtime within Personnel Security Vetting teams to boost processing capacity. Process enhancements are ensuring a streamlined appeals process together with improving candidate engagement and guidance, and forecasting and demand planning is ensuring future recruitment trends can be accommodated according to increased or fluctuating demand.

I understand and agree with your concerns around prisoners being released with no fixed abode. From 1 April 2026, HMPPS will trial a new Direct Delivery accommodation model to strengthen joint working with local authorities. HMPPS is also improving early identification and referrals through closer pre-release work and aligning internal resources to better support this issue. The recently published Homelessness Strategy underlines this Government's commitment to this issue, including a target to achieve a reduction of 50% by the end of this parliament in people who become homeless on their first night out of prison and are subject to probation supervision. To support this, HMPPS will continue investing in Community Accommodation Service models for prison leavers at risk of homelessness. We will also continue to collaborate with the Other Government Departments to develop a strong foundation from which we can collectively get back on track to end homelessness. Separately, the significant reforms contained in the Sentencing Act, which received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026, will provide the Courts with options to end the cycle of less serious offenders going in and out of prison.

Although there are ongoing issues to address at HMP Doncaster, I was encouraged to note the numerous positive comments captured in your report. I was particularly impressed to learn that despite being a very busy establishment, HMP Doncaster is the best performing reception prison in the country according to the HMPPS' survey on the quality of prison life. Staff should be proud that a safe, calm and secure environment is being maintained together with good staff and prisoner relationships. I was further encouraged to hear about the improving attendance figures for purposeful activities and the very heartening appointment of a former prisoner at HMP Doncaster as a drug and alcohol recovery specialist.

HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex. Local issues of concern raised for the attention of the Director will be addressed locally and you will be kept aware of progress as work continues. The Deputy Prime Minister and I sincerely value the oversight members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide throughout the estate and we extend our thanks for your continued dedication on behalf of HMP Doncaster.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Timpson

Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP DONCASTER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2024 – 31 AUGUST 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Courts Backlogs and Remand Time

To reduce the backlogs in the Courts, the Government have funded a record high of 111,250 sitting days in the Crown Court this financial year. Custody Time Limits mean that there is a statutory obligation to prioritise the hearing of remand cases, however, the listing of cases is a matter for the independent judiciary. On 2 December 2025, the Government announced its response to Part One of the Sir Brian Leveson Independent Review of the Criminal Courts (IRCC), proposing a bold modernisation of the criminal courts. More information can be found at GOV.UK. Part two, published in February 2026, considers how the criminal courts can operate as efficiently as possible, specifically looking at the efficiency and timeliness of processes.

HMPPS can also confirm that the Government remains firmly committed to the 10-year prison capacity strategy. Whilst we continue with delivering new prison places, HMPPS will not take decisions that create unacceptable risks to prison safety but it is only right that the agency explores every measure available to deal with capacity pressures. As outlined in the Minister's response, the significant reforms contained in the Sentencing Act, will provide the Courts with options to end the cycle of less serious offenders going in and out of prison.

Probation Service Staffing

The probation budget will be increased by up to £700 million over the next three years to bolster community justice, including the probation service's resource and ability to tag offenders. HMPPS is also taking a comprehensive approach to improve recruitment and retention across the Probation Service. Since unification in June 2021 there has been an overall increase to probation staffing by 21% as of September 2025. HMPPS exceeded its 2024/25 trainee Probation Officers target of 1,000, successfully onboarding 1,057 trainees. For the 2025/26 financial year, the department has committed publicly to onboarding at least 1,300 Trainee Probation Officers. In addition to recruitment activity, Our Future Probation Service (OFPS) Programme is rebalancing demand and capacity. The programme will achieve this by designing and implementing measures that will reduce workloads by making processes more efficient through technology and changing how we work.

Retention (including a focus on staff wellbeing) is a continuing priority for probation. A retention oversight process, piloted in 2022 and rolled out in 2023, targets high-attrition sites and includes 'deep dives' led by occupational psychologists to uncover root causes and share best practices. Coordination of national interventions is managed through the Retention Delivery Committee, ensuring strategic alignment and minimal disruption to operational sites. A new overarching HMPPS probation retention strategy is expected later this year.