



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Askham Grange
Askham Grange
York
YO23 3FT

MoJ ref: SUB132440

6 March 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI ASKHAM GRANGE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2024 – 30 JUNE 2025**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Askham Grange. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to you and your colleagues for the dedication and commitment shown throughout the year. The care with which you have captured your observations and reflections provides valuable insight into the lived experience of women in custody.

I was saddened to hear that one prisoner died during the reporting year due to natural causes. I recognise the distress such events can cause for those living and working within the prison. I am reassured that staff acted promptly and that appropriate support was available for anyone affected. The findings of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, which identified no clinical or non-clinical issues of concern and consequently made no recommendations for change to the prison, demonstrate the professionalism and care exercised by staff at the establishment. I am grateful for the Board's close oversight of this sensitive matter.

I appreciate the Board's continued concerns about the impact of short custodial sentences on women. The Government recognises the disproportionate effect such sentences can have on women and their families, and the Women's Justice Board advises Ministers on reducing the number of women entering custody where community options may be more appropriate. At this stage, it is too early to see the effects of recommendations made by the Independent Sentencing Review but the recent passing of key legislation in the form of the Sentencing Act 2026 and the Mental Health Act 2025 will enable us to implement changes that will reduce short custodial sentences for women.

The significant reforms contained in the Sentencing Act 2026 will provide the courts with further options. Its measures are intended to reduce the use of short custodial sentences and expand opportunities for women to be managed in the community. These include a presumption to suspend sentences of twelve months or less unless exemptions apply, greater flexibility through extended suspended sentence orders, new community-based restrictions, and longer periods for deferred sentences. The new Mental Health Act 2025 will also have an impact on women receiving custodial sentences given it ends the use of prison as a place of safety for individuals who require hospital-based mental health care, and the Bail Act 1976 will be amended to prevent remand solely for a defendant's own protection. Instead, courts will be required to bail individuals and work with local health services to ensure appropriate support is in place.

It is encouraging to read that HMP/YOI Askham Grange continues to be regarded as a safe environment for both prisoners and staff, with no incidents of serious violence or self-harm reported. Strong relationships between staff and the women in their care, alongside early intervention to prevent issues from escalating, clearly support this stability. I also welcome your observations on the fair and humane treatment of women, including tailored support and effective information sharing. Your comments on education, skills, and work highlight a positive and productive environment, with strong course success rates and a continued commitment to maintaining the high standards achieved at its last inspection. Helping women build confidence and skills remains vital to their future stability, and I am pleased to note the progress you have observed.

Issues raised for the attention of the Governor will be addressed locally who will continue to keep you updated as work progresses. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to the issue raised in your report for its consideration are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I value the insight provided by Independent Monitoring Boards across the estate and we are sincerely grateful for the continued dedication your Board has shown in supporting the work of HMP/YOI Askham Grange.

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

Sexual and Domestic Violence Support Services

Unfortunately, no additional funding has been secured for this area of provision. However, HMP/YOI Askham Grange has been considering options for developing its links with specialist sexual and domestic violence support services in the community, so that staff can signpost women to appropriate services during Release on Temporary Licence and on their release.

HMP/YOI Askham Grange's core function as an open establishment is to prepare individuals for release and successful reintegration into the community. As such, it is expected that relevant risk-related interventions will have been completed before a person is approved for open conditions, and women are encouraged to access services in the community wherever possible.

HMP/YOI Askham Grange is supported by Women's Estate Psychology Services, and a Mental Health Team is in place to respond promptly to any needs that arise during a person's time at the prison.