



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Garth

**For reporting year
1 December 2024 to 30 November 2025**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework (NMF) agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release,
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated, as it judges appropriate, any concern it has,
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have a right of access to every prisoner, every part of the prison and the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The Board is part of the United Kingdom's NPM.

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Garth is a category B secure training prison that accommodates long-term prisoners who pose significant risk but do not meet the criteria for the highest risk category. It opened in 1988 and houses a population with complex needs, mainly consisting of convicted adults serving more than four years and those serving indeterminate sentences, as well as long-term and life-sentenced prisoners. It has an operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the prison) of 807¹.

The prison has seven residential wings and a care and separation unit (CSU), where prisoners are kept apart from the rest of the prison population. Two of the seven wings hold sex offenders, who are isolated from the other prisoners.

Prisoners are housed in single cells on the wings, with a few cells specifically adapted for physically disabled men who have mobility needs. There is an increasing number of the population in the prison who are over retirement age (4.5% in November 2024 and 4.7% by November 2025).

There are several specialist units, including:

- Beacon unit: treating those with personality disorders.
- Building Hope unit: a reintegration unit for prisoners who may have a history of disruptive behaviour.
- ISFL (incentivised substance-free living) unit: for prisoners who have previous substance misuse issues but want to live drug free (and they are regularly tested for compliance.)
- Residential support unit: for vulnerable prisoners who have not been convicted of sexual offences.
- Drug recovery unit.

The prison is set in a rural location, with no direct connections to mainline train services. The local bus services from Preston, Leyland and Chorley, which are the nearest towns, is infrequent and poor. There is ample parking for visitors who travel by car and there are reliable taxi services in the area. The prison is adjacent to HMP Wymott and close to a site that has been deemed suitable for a third prison to be built next to HMP Garth.

¹ Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's position at the time of reporting but may be subject to change following further validation and therefore may not always tally with Official Statistics later published by the Ministry of Justice.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- Self-harm, the use of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans (to support prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide) and the need for the constant supervision of vulnerable prisoners have all remained at similar levels to those noted in our previous report. Unfortunately, the number of deaths in custody has also stayed the same, at five.
- Violence between prisoners and against officers has remained high, with several serious incidents during the reporting year.
- The incursion of illicit items, particularly via drones, continues to be high, with more sophisticated drones and handler strategies being seen.
- More prisoners are testing positive for drugs. Regular and random drug tests are carried out, and a significant number of prisoners are continuing to test positive.
- Staffing remains a concern. Although there is an increase in the number of officers with two or more years' service, high levels of sickness and restricted duties reduce the staff available to deliver the regime. This also increases cross-deployment which, in turn, affects prisoners and staff relationships.
- A proportion of officers (40-50%) continue to be reluctant to use body worn video cameras.

Fair and humane treatment

- Food in the prison remains adequate, given the daily funding.
- Accommodation and facilities are continuing to deteriorate due to lack of funding.
- The CSU continues to frequently holds prisoners with extremely complex needs, some of whom remain there for exceptionally long periods. This is primarily due to delays in securing a place in a specialist unit or hospital.
- There has been a slight improvement in key working, with key workers having more contact with priority prisoners than a year ago. However, non-priority prisoners still rarely receive key worker sessions.
- The reduction in the number of less experienced officers is a positive development.
- There has been little improvement in access to the prison for prisoners with disabilities.
- The hearing and resolving of adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules) remain an issue, with a renewed cycle of large numbers building up in the backlog.
- The number of complaints within the HMP Garth system continues to rise. In the reporting year, it increased to 2,838 (from 2,521 last year), with only 59% of complaints answered within the agreed timescales.
- The Board remains concerned about prisoners' missing, lost or backlogged property, which continues to cause unnecessary distress for prisoners and their families. Some changes to practices have been implemented, and it is hoped that these will improve the situation in the next reporting period.

Health and wellbeing

- The change of healthcare providers occurred in April, and it has taken several months for the changeover to be complete.
- Non-attendance at prison appointments has continued throughout the year, with many missed due to escorts for prisoners not being provided, and others resulting from short-notice lockdowns across the prison.
- Applications (prisoners' written representations to the IMB) regarding healthcare provision have increased and are now the third highest category of work for Board members after property issues.
- The mental health team continues to be overburdened with the continuing number of referrals. This has resulted in some segregation reviews proceeding without input from a health or psychology professional.

Progression and resettlement

- During the reporting year, 350 prisoners were moved from HMP Garth, with 104 released from prison. As a non-resettlement prison, this causes difficulties for prisoners with contact with their community offender manager (COM).
- Education funding was reduced in the year by around £400,000, which has reduced both the range and availability of education options, especially in functional skills (maths and English). 'Getting on at Garth' and peer mentoring programmes have been reduced by 50%. However, a new workshop has been opened, providing skills in upholstery.
- As in past years, the Board remains concerned about IPP (imprisonment for public protection) prisoners, particularly in relation to providing effective pathways for their eventual release.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- As raised in last year's report, indeterminate sentences for IPP prisoners remain an unresolved and pressing issue. It continues to be a significant problem for IPP prisoners who have either never been released or who have been recalled. At the end of November 2025, the number of IPP prisoners had fallen from 39 (in the last reporting period) to 37. However, the number fluctuates almost monthly as prisoners are moved around the estate. The problems created by the sentence and the release process are well understood, but the very injustice of this sentence continues to be ignored by the Government. What specific actions will the Government take this year to set out a clear plan for resolving the cases of people still serving IPP sentences or those who have been recalled?
- What funding improvements will be made to address the deterioration of facilities and ensure that preventative maintenance is carried out rather than only funding critical or emergency repairs?
- What additional funding will be provided to prevent illicit items entering the prison, given their impact on stability and safety?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- How will the issue of insufficient staffing, needed to maintain a stable regime and support effective prisoner and staff relationships, be reviewed to improve retention and ensure adequate cover for staff absence and, ultimately, deliver better outcomes for prisoners?

- How will the Prison Service review the long-term segregation of prisoners who need a different secure environment? Holding them in segregated cells leads to deterioration in their mental state and places unsustainable pressure on the CSU staff, who are containing them but are not trained to meet their healthcare or behavioural needs.
- How will the access needs of an ageing prison population be addressed? HMP Garth is almost inaccessible for disabled or more infirm prisoners, which restricts their ability to obtain food, healthcare and basic social interaction.

TO THE GOVERNOR

- How will the cyclic peaks and troughs in the adjudication backlog be addressed at their root cause? Without a robust deterrent system, poor behaviour in the prison is likely to remain high.
- There have been some improvements to prisoner property processes during the reporting year. What further steps will be taken to reduce lost and missing items and improve the compensation process, which often leaves prisoners out of pocket through no fault of their own?
- How do you plan to encourage staff to use body worn video cameras consistently and ensure they are operated during incidents?

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister		
<p>The whole policy and process of staff recruitment needs to be reviewed and revised as a matter of urgency, because many of the operational problems within the prison derive from the inadequacies of the current process.</p>	<p>'I recognise the Board's concerns regarding the recruitment processes and the importance of these meeting operational needs. The Ministry of Justice continuously reviews its approach to recruitment to ensure prison officers are best suited to their role. There are now strengthened vetting procedures to root out applicants who fall below our high standards. Work is ongoing to re-design the assessments and these changes are being phased in during 2025/26. This includes ensuring our assessment tools, wherever possible, provide a realistic job preview and remove unsuitable applicants at the earliest stage to allow only the most suitable applicants to progress to the latter stages.'</p>	<p>There continue to be numerous occasions when insufficient staff are available to maintain the regime. However, there has been an increase in staff with more than two years' experience, suggesting that retention has improved significantly.</p>

<p>The ongoing scandal of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) needs to be finally resolved. This continues to be a problem with numerous IPP prisoners who have either never been released or who have been recalled. At the end of November 2024, there were 39 IPP prisoners in Garth, including eight recalls. The problems created by the sentence and the release process are understood, but the very injustice of this sentence continues to be ignored by the Government.</p>	<p>'I am very mindful of the specific challenges faced by both those serving Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection (IPP) and their families. This is an issue I feel passionately about. The Government is not standing still on this important matter and we are determined to make further progress to support those serving the IPP sentence towards a safe and sustainable release, but not in a way that compromises public protection. The Government is determined to support the rehabilitation of IPP offenders through a refreshed IPP Action Plan, which can be found in the HMPPS Annual Report (HMPPS annual report on the IPP sentence 2024 to 25 - GOV.UK), which we published on 17 July 2025. The report signals a continued commitment to reform, with a focus on reducing the IPP population, improving fairness and consistency in decision-making, and supporting rehabilitation and reintegration. The Action Plan includes measurable targets to ensure transparency and accountability and puts an important emphasis on effective frontline delivery in our prisons and probation services, to ensure that those serving IPP sentences have robust and effective sentence plans, with which they are actively engaging, in a prison most appropriate for their needs. The traffic light system in place helps to identify individuals who may be suitable for re-release or require further intervention'.</p>	<p>At the end of the reporting period, there was a reduction in IPP prisoners at HMP Garth. However, this number does fluctuate as prisoners are moved within the estate.</p>
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<p>It is requested that the recommendations made in the recent HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) inspection be fully funded in order that they may be implemented.</p>	<p>'I understand the Board's frustration regarding the limited progress in securing major infrastructure investment at HMP Garth, which HMIP has identified as necessary. Although the Governor has submitted bids to advance these projects, HMPPS must assess investment needs across the wider prison estate. Whilst all establishment requests are considered, as you will be aware, current maintenance demands exceed available funding. Once a bid is received, HMPPS must therefore prioritise works carefully to ensure the most effective use of resources, focusing on projects that address risks to life, capacity, and decency.'</p>	<p>This issue continues and is highlighted again in this report.</p>
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To the Prison Service		
<p>A recent unannounced inspection by HMIP reported that this prison was 'of real concern' and 'unsafe', with a 45% increase in violence. What measures are being taken to provide additional investment and support to address the problems of safety, violence, staff capability and other identified areas that require attention?</p>	<p>No response.</p>	<p>Violence has remained and is reported on again in this report.</p>
<p>Statistics suggest that staff turnover has been too high, particularly with uniformed staff leaving. The whole process of recruitment and retention needs to be addressed</p>	<p>See the Minister's response on the same issue, above.</p>	<p>As reported this year, staffing experience has increased, with a smaller percentage of officers with less</p>

<p>with the Governor and senior management being included in the process and able to determine suitability of individual applicants for this prison</p>		<p>than two years' service.</p>
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<p>To the Governor</p>		
<p>It is recognised that 2023/4 has been a difficult year for HMP Garth. Regime problems have caused unrest amongst the prisoner population, and it is significant that the level of violence - prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff - has increased significantly.</p>	<p>No specific response.</p>	<p>NA</p>
<p>Applications containing complaints about staff have increased by 47%. Work is required by the prison to establish the cause of this rise and put in place any necessary remedial steps.</p>	<p>No specific response.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and Induction

New arrivals at the prison are received at reception. There is a dedicated medical assessment room and a holding area. The escort duties have been amended during the year, and the Board has observed officers following these polices. The reception area was not designed for frequent arrivals or departures but seems to manage well most of the time. There are often considerable delays in prisoners receiving their property after arrival, due to the need for searches. This should improve with the training of new scanning operators. The reception area is usually crowded, with numerous bags of property waiting to be delivered to prisoners on the wings, and there are often complaints of property going missing.

We have observed prison officers being polite and respectful with the prisoners, and signage supports expectations of the first few hours in the prison.

IMB induction leaflets have been updated this year and are part of the pack of documents given to a new prisoner.

During initial induction, prisoners should be informed of how to keep themselves safe from radicalisation and extremism.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Prisoners have continued to self-harm during the reporting period. A total of 303 new assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents have been opened. This figure is lower than the 386 ACCTs reported in the previous year.

Unfortunately, there were five deaths in custody during the reporting period, the same number as last year. Three appear to have resulted from natural causes, while two were suspected to be either suspicious or accidental. Inquests are ongoing.

Generally, we have heard prisoners increasingly say that they do not feel safe at HMP Garth, expressing concerns that they are not supported by officers and feel at risk of harm from other prisoners. This year, a small but increasing number of family members and friends have also contacted the IMB with concerns about the safety of their loved ones.

The IMB has monitored several safety intervention meetings (SIM), which discuss the progress of all vulnerable prisoners, including those with an ACCT. These meetings have been observed to be respectful and supportive with the aim of increasing safety for these prisoners.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Over several years, the IMB at Garth has raised concerns about the escalating number of violent incidents within the establishment. This year, there is a notable escalation in the severity of the attacks (both prisoner on prisoner, and prisoner on staff), resulting in the need for injured parties to attend hospital. One incident resulted in six officers requiring hospital treatment; in another, an officer feared they may lose their sight; and in a third, an officer sustained bites to the upper body. These injuries lead to significant staff absence and have a detrimental impact on the wider staff team.

In September 2025, the Deputy Prime Minister confirmed plans to expand access to protective equipment across the long-term high-security estate (LTHSE):

- To make training available for up to 500 prison officers in the use of Tasers as a potential control measure during certain incidents.
- To make protective body armour available for up to 10,000 staff to use when risk assessed, as necessary, including every officer working in the LTHSE.

HMP Garth was expecting deliveries of protective body armour by the end of 2025 for the care and separation unit, where prisoners are kept apart from other prisoners, but this was not received; a delivery date is yet to be confirmed. Once delivered, this should provide additional protection for officers.

From our observations, the prison has been operating with fewer staff than its full complement on many occasions, placing both prisoners and officers at increased risk. There is also a shifting demographic within the officer group, with a growing number employed through the 'right to work' scheme, rather than coming from traditional recruitment routes. While this brings positive diversity in terms of cultures and practices within the prison, the IMB is concerned that some of these officers are inexperienced and unfamiliar with the prisoner population, which can lead to misunderstandings or communication issues that may escalate into violence.

In May 2025, HMIP inspectors returned to HMP Garth to review the progress made against their findings from the full Inspection in 2024. They found that 24 prisoners were self-isolating compared with 17 at the time of the inspection. In most cases, this was because prisoners feared for their own safety, often due to being in debt to others. Some remain self-isolating for long periods. Notably, many of these individuals had, at some point in the past, been on an ACCT.

The health and welfare of those self-isolating is regularly checked, and it is worth noting that all prisoners on residential wings have a phone in their cell and can call the Samaritans 24/7, 365 days a year. Prisoners in segregation can request a phone to call the Samaritans. All residential wings have Listeners available (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to offer confidential emotional support to their peers). A request is made to a staff member, who must facilitate an appointment.

4.4 Use of force (UoF)

There have been occasions when force has been used to relocate a prisoner and, occasionally, an IMB member will be asked to observe the situation. In most cases, the relocation has been concluded with the prisoner complying with instructions. On all the occasions that the IMB observed, prison officers and healthcare teams have followed the correct procedures and dealt with situations in a correct and professional manner.

UoF is also employed during an incident, if necessary. All these events are reviewed afterwards by the UoF co-ordinator and Deputy Governor to ensure only appropriate levels of force were used. It has been observed that these reviews are hindered by officers frequently failing to activate their body worn video cameras (BWVCs), which results in key information not being recorded. In some cases, as few as 40% of incidents have activated camera footage, and the prison continues to struggle to obtain officers' statements within the recommended timeframe.

During the reporting period, 43 band 3 officers received training in the use of Pava incapacitant spray, bringing the total number of Pava-trained band 3 officers to 193. No officers in the prison are trained in the use of Tasers.

Metric	Dec 24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25	Nov-25
Self-harm (CU127c)	49	53	49	48	59	54	79	56	69	40	54	72
Assaults on staff (VR001)	12	15	11	14	16	14	26	10	16	5	11	16
Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (VR005)	19	10	19	18	22	22	24	26	19	11	14	13
How many times Pava was used	0	1	0	2	2	1	6	5	2	2	0	1
How many times a Taser was used	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
How many times batons drawn	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	3
How many times batons were used	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
How many adjudications heard	248	243	290	327	347	363	362	303	285	289	311	229
How many ACCT documents opened	20	26	20	25	17	35	23	27	25	23	38	24
How many key worker sessions have taken place	276	187	179	286	286	220	259	295	248	301	298	239

4.5 Preventing illicit items

The use of drones to deliver illicit items remains a serious issue, with handlers displaying increasing levels of sophistication. Although drones carrying drugs, weapons and communication devices have been intercepted, those that evade security measures continue to contribute to violence and instability within the prison.

Drone incursion levels appear to be in line with other similar establishments in the prison estate.

Residents living near the HMP Garth were invited to a meeting at the prison with staff and representatives from Lancashire Police, and a substantial number attended. Staff outlined the security challenges faced by the prison, and residents were encouraged to report any concerns, such as drone sightings or suspicious vehicles near the perimeter. It is pleasing to note that this initiative has already generated positive and useful intelligence.

The Governor is striving to get funding for more secure windows and drone interception or deterrent mechanisms, with limited success, in the Board's view.

There needs to be investment in the prison to improve and support additional security measures.

A range of drugs remains available in the prison, particularly Spice, but also heroin, cocaine and, at times, substances contaminated with other agents. To better support prisoners with addictions, the drug rehabilitation unit has been relocated to a more secure wing, reducing access to illicit drugs for the most vulnerable prisoners.

There has been no significant reduction in the volume of drugs entering the prison.

The smell of drugs is regularly found around the prison. Random drug testing is completed at the minimum required levels, with up to 36% of these tests showing drug use within the previous 30 days.

Illicitly brewed alcohol remains a concern in the prison, and additional items were removed from the canteen (prisoner shop) lists during the reporting period to make production more difficult, including sugar from prisoners' 'brew' packs."

Weapons manufactured by prisoners continue to be regularly discovered, alongside mobile phones and other prohibited items. During a visit in October, search teams deployed by the long-term high-security estate carried out comprehensive searches of every cell on two wings, uncovering a substantial haul of weapons, mobile phones, chargers, drugs and other banned items.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

HMP Garth, opened in 1988, is predominantly a concrete structure, and over the years little preventative maintenance has been carried out; remedial work is typically only undertaken once issues reach a crisis point. Throughout the year, the IMB has highlighted several areas where early action could prevent further deterioration, but the Governor appears to remain constrained by limited funding to address problems before they become critical. Despite submitting numerous bids for infrastructure and security improvements, success has been minimal, and significant investment is now required to resolve the growing number of issues.

Several issues have been identified, including broken flooring that creates trip hazards and prevents effective cleaning; showers in need of repair, affected by mould, and often failing to drain; inadequate or non-functioning ventilation; and poorly equipped wing kitchens with damaged or unusable appliances. A more detailed discussion of the Board's observations regarding the Amey contract is provided in Annex A.

An HMIP Inspector's report raised concerns that standards of cleanliness and decency needed improvement. Work is underway to upgrade some showers to support these improvements, though progress remains slow due to funding constraints. When inspectors returned six months later, they were pleased to note improvements in overall cleanliness. The IMB, however, continues to observe a build-up of rubbish in stairways, on wing spurs and in external areas. Despite this, wing cleaners generally maintain a high standard of floor cleaning on the wings and in access corridors and have repainted many areas during the year to create a brighter and cleaner environment.

All cells at HMP Garth have reverted to single occupancy.

The IMB receives very few applications (prisoners' written representations) relating to food or clothing. In a prison holding more than 800 prisoners, only four applications were received in 2023-24, and just six in 2024-2025. These applications typically concern requests for special diets for medical or religious reasons.

The allowance for food is £3.01 per prisoner, per day. This is proving challenging, given the rising costs of food over the reporting period.

Despite the challenges of low budget, the kitchens have a five-star food hygiene rating from environmental health inspections and were awarded a Gold Recipe for Health Award by Lancashire County Council; Garth is the first establishment in the northwest to achieve the bronze, silver and gold merits for this award.

During the latter part of the reporting year, work has been underway to prepare for the new Food in Prisons policy, due to be implemented in February 2026, and for the introduction of the Nutritics system through BidFood. The Food in Prisons policy aims to support the 'eat well, move well, be well' strategy by reducing red meat, ultra-processed foods, and sugar and salt in meals, while increasing the provision of fruit, vegetables and plant-based options. Nutritics provides detailed insight into the calorific and cost profile of proposed menus, highlights allergen risk, and supports the team in delivering better-balanced meals while aware of cost implications.

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit (CSU) contains 22 cells and operated at almost full occupancy throughout the reporting year, with additional prisoners at times segregated

on the residential wings. Most prisoners are placed in segregation for breaches of good order or discipline (GOoD), such as failing to follow staff instructions, while a small number are segregated for their own safety. The Board is concerned that some prisoners with long-standing and serious mental health needs continue to be held in segregation for unacceptably long periods. Although they may eventually be transferred to long-term psychiatric facilities, these moves take far too long, placing considerable strain on prison staff and failing to provide the level of clinical care these individuals require.

The IMB has reviewed much of the segregation paperwork during the year and, in the main, it has been correctly completed, with valid reasons given for segregation. We observed 87 segregation review meetings during 2024-2025 to monitor procedures and noted that prisoners were treated with respect and encouraged to speak and participate in the process. Some prisoners choose not to take part in reviews, and, in those cases, we will try to talk to them individually. Typical complaints from prisoners include not receiving the paperwork after a review and concerns that their views are not recorded in the 43-day review documentation.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

In general, we have observed a sense of mutual respect between officers and prisoners, although interactions are often limited. The IMB continues to receive applications from prisoners who feel that they are not adequately supported by staff, as well as from those who report feeling unsafe in the prison.

There has been an improvement in the proportion of band 3 officers with less than two years' service, falling from 42% in December 2024 to 29% in December 2025. This increase in overall experience should help strengthen staff and prisoner relationships over time.

There have been several verbal reports from prisoners during the year alleging corruption in the prison. The IMB has not seen specific evidence to support these claims; however, we do monitor complaints upheld by the Independent Prison Complaints Investigators (IPCI) and the Comp 2 complaints (confidential complaint from prisoners when issues are too sensitive to be raised through the standard process) raised within the prison, both of which provide an independent review or investigation.

Detailed data from the Comp 2 system, at the level of granularity required, has only been available since July 2025. Between July and the end of November 2025, the Governor received 76 Comp 2 complaints. All underwent a fact-finding review, and 17 proceeded to investigation, of which only four resulted in compensation to a prisoner, advice or guidance being issued, or a reprimand to staff. Three cases were taken to full investigation due to the volume of evidence available. It is possible that more complaints might have been upheld, but Comp 2 submissions are often received after relevant video footage has been deleted (footage is retained for only 30 days unless there is a specific reason to preserve it), or the information provided by the prisoner is too vague for supporting evidence to be located. The IMB can view requests for information from the Independent Prisoner Complaints Investigation (IPCI) as they assess complaints, but this year has not tracked the number of cases upheld.

After an unannounced HMIP inspection in 2024-2025, the Prison Service standards and coaching team were placed at the prison for six months to share their guidance and experience. Since this time, there has been new initiatives and changes that have

improved various aspects of how the prison is operated. There have been fewer changes to the regime and experienced staff seem to be more assured of their roles.

Key work has seen some improvements in the number of sessions delivered, with 3809 having taken place between 1 December 2024 and 30 November 2025. HMP Garth introduced a priority keywork model, in line with the regime management plans. This prioritises support for the more vulnerable and/or challenging prisoners, with one session per month required for those on the priority caseload. The priority cohort includes prisoners in the following categories:

- Imprisonment for public protection (IPP)
- Young adults
- ACCT
- Terrorism (TACT)
- Self-isolators
- High violence in prison estimator score (Viper)
- First three months in HMP Garth
- Those to be released within three months
- Prolific drug users

Once the above key work is completed, all wings are expected to continue sessions with prisoners who are not on the current priority list. Poor behaviour is frequently left unchallenged, with some staff lacking the confidence or interpersonal skills to challenge bad behaviour, in the Board's view. Officers are also often redeployed at short notice and do not have the time in their permanent place of work to build relationships with prisoners in their care.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Few prisoners make complaints about equality and diversity issues to the IMB. During the reporting year, there were just three applications to IMB about equality issues, a fall from nine in 2023-2024.

A neurodiversity support manager (NSM) began working at HMP Garth during the 2023-2024 reporting period, and progress is now becoming evident. The NSM has provided training to 92 staff members (including wing staff, industries, the offender management unit, the substance misuse service, education staff, and officer support grades), with a further 150+ staff expected to receive indirect training through joint involvement in CSIP, segregation reviews, ACCT reviews, SIM meetings and other multidisciplinary processes. The NSM has supported 21 prisoners with release and helped 75 prisoners move into education, skills, and work activities. New prison signage has been developed with neurodivergence input, and sensory rooms are planned for installation at HMP Garth in 2026. This work has increased neurodiversity awareness within the prison and resulted in around a 20% increase in the number of prisoners identified as having neurodivergent needs.

No progress has been made to improve access for those with mobility issues or who must use a wheelchair. The prison has been built over three floors, with two or three flights of stairs between most floors. There are two lifts, one on the most recently added wing and another, which is accessed via the main stores in the prison. There are no stair lifts in stair wells.

Emergency evacuation plans are in place on all wings.

As a training prison, Garth has some workshops that can offer work opportunities for prisoners with disabilities, although many will only be accessible once further adjustments are made, and accessible toilet facilities are not currently available. The healthcare department provides peripatetic services for prisoners who are unable to access healthcare independently. There are also a number of support groups, forums and special-interest networks available, including for prisoners over 55, foreign national prisoners, black, Asian, Gypsy and Roma prisoners, armed forces veterans, and the Pride (LGBTQ+) group.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Chaplaincy offers daily services for prisoners throughout the year. It is supported by a multi-faith team, with leaders from a range of faiths. The chaplaincy is managed by a full-time Imam, along with ordained and lay ministers and a dedicated group of volunteers, all of whom work effectively across the prison. Feast days, fasting days and religious celebrations are scheduled throughout the year. There are designated spaces for prayer and private reflection. Chaplaincy staff visit the wings daily and see prisoners on request, which is particularly valuable for those who have experienced bereavement and need pastoral support. IMB members visit the chaplaincy regularly.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The intention of the incentives scheme is to maintain good order and discipline in the prison. Each prisoner is informed of the level they are at, which will be either 'entry', 'basic', 'standard' or 'enhanced'.

Garth has recently reviewed its incentives policy, with changes introduced from 1 October 2025. The policy now includes two levels of basic status: Tier 1 applies to any prisoner involved in an act of violence, in whatever form that may take; Tier 2 applies to any other form of non-compliance (such as, for example, non-attendance at education or work). Both are separate from an adjudication (a disciplinary hearing held when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules) and are reviewed by the wing custodial manager after meeting with the prisoner to discuss the incident and any resulting consequences.

Tier 1: restricted to 1 hour visit twice per month. Prisoners must wear prison clothing on all visits; one gym visit per week; removal of TV and games console; one hour out of cell for domestics.

Tier 2: two visits per month; one hour gym per week; removal of TV and games console; one hour out of cell for domestics.

During the final three months of the reporting year, changes to the regime resulted in prisoners having increased time out of cell, and the enforcement of attendance at work and training has led to good progress and noticeable improvement, although issues with punctuality remain.

When prison rules are not followed, an adjudication may be required. The IMB observed 115 adjudication hearings during the reporting year. Unfortunately, many scheduled adjudications could not proceed on the listed day due to staff shortages to escort prisoners. HMP Garth continues to experience difficulties, with a backlog of adjudication hearings building up. A year ago, this backlog stood at around 500. The Governor assigned a dedicated Governor to work mornings and afternoons on

adjudications, which significantly reduced the backlog; however, it has since increased again and is now approximately at the same level.

5.7 Complaints

The prison complaints department remains extremely busy, having received 2,838 complaints during the reporting year, compared with 2,521 the previous year. The IMB has serious concerns about the length of time taken for prison staff to respond to complaints, with 41% answered late, and - at its peak - more than 100 complaints left unanswered, many of them several months overdue.

Prisoners regularly ask the IMB to chase up responses to their complaints. Their key worker or wing staff should be the first point of contact and act on their behalf, but this often does not lead to any action, resulting in prisoners submitting applications to the IMB instead.

The Board is asked to independently review the prisoner complaints system by sampling 10 complaints each month. Feedback is then given to the prison. Most responses reviewed are written respectfully and reach a reasonable conclusion; however, some officers appear to not re-read their replies, as sections of the template are occasionally left in the response letters, which can cause confusion.

We also note that many prisoners submit repeated complaints about the same issue, as well as multiple complaints on a variety of topics. This pattern is similarly reflected in applications made to the IMB. During the reporting period, 40% of the applications received by the IMB came from prisoners who raised five or more applications, with one prisoner submitting 30. Regardless of the volume submitted, each application is considered on its own merits and answered to the best of the member's ability.

5.8 Property

The Board is seriously concerned about the processes for handling prisoners' property. Issues arise in many situations where the Prison Service fails to ensure that items are reunited with the prisoner, including:

- property arriving with a prisoner new to custody
- property belonging to a prisoner transferring from another establishment
- new purchases made by a prisoner
- items sent in by friends and family
- legal post and mail

All property entering the prison and is searched, checked and given to the prisoner once that is complete. The volume of work in the reception department can be overwhelming. The process for prisoners to claim compensation for missing property is long and complex and often results in reduced valuations, meaning that, in most cases, the items cannot be fairly replaced.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The Governor has a planned monthly meeting with the head of healthcare (and holds ad hoc meetings, as required).

To date, the healthcare forum with prisoners is combined with the prison council meeting. There are plans, however, to finalise and re-introduce a specific prisoner healthcare Forum soon. There was a change in the healthcare provider in April 2025, and the transition did not go smoothly. Staff vacancies took time to fill, and both a new concerns and complaints system and new IT procedures had to be learned by staff. A recruitment drive at the end of the reporting period for healthcare workers and administrative staff should help improve the services offered to prisoners.

During the first part of the reporting year, non-attendance rates for health appointments were high. Although there was some improvement by August and September, many appointment slots are still going unused. Attendance remains particularly difficult for prisoners on vulnerable wings and for those with mobility issues due to the location of the healthcare department.

Applications to IMB about health increased by 10% in the reporting year compared with the previous period in review, especially in relation to medication availability and access to appointments.

Two wings now have on-wing treatment rooms, which offer easier access, and new medication treatment hatches are being installed.

6.2 Physical healthcare

There have been some changes to improve access to healthcare appointments. Non-attendance had been a persistent problem, and the introduction of a dedicated officer responsible for facilitating movement from the wings to the healthcare department appears to have helped reduce delays and missed appointments to some extent.

For many years, IMB members have raised concerns about the poor waiting facilities. There is single gated area with benches to hold the queue, with no direct access to toilet facilities. The area is small, and the Board is concerned about the risk of cross-contamination between prisoners, particularly where infections are present.

The healthcare department offers GP services, dentistry, optical care and physiotherapy, and appointments can be booked by prisoners via laptops or the kiosks. Generally, prisoners receive appointment as needed.

Medication is delivered to the wings or to collection points for prisoners to pick up at set times during the day. Some prisoners are allowed to hold their own medication, but most receive their doses as required. There are regular complaints that medication is not available at the correct times, that prescriptions are delayed and that prisoners experience gaps in their medication.

Prisoners are also regularly escorted to hospitals for scheduled appointments, as well as for urgent care or diagnostic procedures.

6.3 Mental health

The IMB was previously concerned that the mental health team was not regularly attending segregation reviews. However, partway through the reporting year, there was a marked improvement in both attendance and continuity of staff.

The mental health team is now fully staffed, with temporary staff employed on short-term contracts. Demand for mental healthcare continues to increase, with a great deal of time dedicated to those in the CSU or on open ACCTs. These prisoners receive a daily visit, usually in the morning. An assessment is undertaken when a prisoner is placed in the CSU, and arrangements are made for ongoing intervention and support where needed.

Many men at Garth are serving significantly long sentences, much of which must be served in a category B prison, and this has had an adverse impact on their mental health. This is particularly true among IPP prisoners.

6.4 Social care

HMP Garth has an increasingly ageing population, many of whom may require regular social care. Prisoners needing care are assessed and their needs met by healthcare staff, with additional assistance provided by approved prisoners employed as carers. There are 63 'buddies' allocated to older prisoners.

The number of prisoners on long sentences continues to rise, and the number needing social care is likely to increase accordingly. This raises a broader question about the suitability of a prison environment for meeting the more complex care needs of an ageing population.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

The regime has been adjusted to increase prisoners' participation in education, work and skills, and to provide more time for domestic activities, particularly in the afternoon. The regime has been more consistent this year, with better advance notice of changes when staffing issues arise. This has had a positive impact, as prisoners appear more settled within their environment. A further regime change was introduced on 1 December 2025 to operate certain wings with different cohorts, with the aim of improving safety within the prison. As this was implemented at the very end of the reporting year, it is too early to assess its effectiveness.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Substance misuse service staff, who moved under the Practice Plus Group in April 2025, work with prisoners, individually and in group activities, providing active support for prisoners to deal with certain addictions.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

National funding cuts of 50% to the prison education budget have had a significant and adverse impact at HMP Garth. These cuts resulted in the loss of 1.5 administrative posts and 1.75 functional skills teaching posts. To preserve as much of the current education offer as possible, the education and skills provider has been changed from Milton Keynes College to Novus.

There has had to be 50% cuts to functional skills (Maths and English) classes and a 50% reduction to the 'Getting to know Garth' and peer mentoring schemes. This comes at a time when engagement and interest from the prison population are increasing. However, from our monitoring, it seems that many prisoners still do not engage in any purposeful activity that would support their skills development or rehabilitation.

In relation to library provision, prisoners can visit the library in person by appointment, and they can also order books for leisure or study using their in-cell tables. In addition, most wings continue to have library trolleys available (introduced during Covid), stocked with a selection of books to browse.

There is a range of workshops in the prison that introduce and train prisoners in the skills needed to prepare them for employment on release, and there has been some success this year in expanding the available options. However, even with these additional efforts, too many prisoners still do not appear to be engaging in purposeful activity or education.

Prisoners are expected to engage in either education or work, with refusal to attend resulting in penalties. Many prisoners arrive at the prison with few or no qualifications and some are unable to read or write. All are encouraged to achieve at least basic levels of Maths and English and courses available include English at Entry Level (part-time) and Levels 1 and 2 (full-time). Some prisoners do wish to progress further, with a number undertaking Open University courses. From our observations, those wishing to do so are encouraged and supported by the education department staff.

There are several workshops, including:

- Workshop 1 – Plastics: Injection moulding machines producing essential plastic items for distribution across the prison estate, including toothbrushes, cutlery, bowls and plastic boxes for charities.
- Workshop 2 – Textiles: Manufacture of prison clothing for the prison estate.
- Workshop 3 – DHL: Warehouse workshop servicing the canteen (prisoner shop) process for HMP Garth and prisons in the northwest region.
- Workshop 4 – Upholstery.
- Workshops 6 & 9 – Morgan Hope Electrical: Production of LED lighting provided across the prison estate.
- Workshop 7 – Upcycling.
- Workshop 8 - Industrial Cleaning (education).
- Workshop 9 – Electrical.
- Workshop 10 – Facilities Management.
- Workshop 11 – New Fabrics: Cutting up fabrics to produce rags for LMB Supplied Ltd.
- Workshop 12 – Assembly/Packing: Completing manufacture of toothbrushes and assembling of charity collection boxes.

- Workshop 13 – Woodwork: Production of furniture for the prison estate.
- Workshop 14 – Gardens: Maintenance of the grounds in the prison and the welfare of hens.
- Workshop 15 – Waste Management Unit
- Main Kitchen: Daily provision of meals for HMP Garth.

National vocational qualifications (NVQs) are available in catering and industrial cleaning.

Throughout 2025, an external company was commissioned to deliver workshop qualifications. These included the ETA Level 1 and Level 2 Certificates in Manufacturing Practices, the NCFE Level 1 and Level 2 Certificates in the Principles of Warehousing and Storage, and the City & Guilds Level 1 Horticulture qualification. They also delivered one-day courses in customer service and manual handling, aimed at prisoners undertaking such roles within the establishment. Delivery of the CSCS card and the Health and Safety for Construction qualification has proved particularly popular and provides an excellent opportunity for those nearing release to improve their employment prospects. It is anticipated that, during 2026, workshop qualifications will be delivered by the instructional officers within the workshops, with an external company providing quality assurance and holding direct claims status with the awarding body.

Staffing and regime problems often affect attendance at these activities, but we observed improvements during the reporting period

7.2 Offender management, progression

The offender management unit (OMU) is managed by a Governor and two senior probation officers (one full-time and two part-time). There should be 13 probation officers, with 11.8 being in post, and 3.5 (full-time equivalent) band 4 officers.

At the end of the reporting year, the department was up to date with recategorisations, OASyS assessments (which identify a prisoner's risks and needs) and resettlement boards.

We remain concerned that a community offender manager (COM) is not usually allocated to a prisoner until they are within nine months of release, and that restrictions frequently prevent them from visiting the prisoner. In our view, this may contribute to licence breaches, as a working relationship between the prisoner and the COM has not had enough time to develop.

From our observations, good work is carried out with IPP prisoners to support their progress towards release, but it has long been recognised that this sentence is unjust. While no one would wish to see further victims harmed by any released prisoner, many IPP prisoners have been seriously affected by the nature and length of their sentence and should receive appropriate support and treatment on release.

7.3 Family contact

Contact with families is actively encouraged at HMP Garth. The visits hall is open Tuesday to Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday. It has recently had some refurbishment to make it more welcoming. Security measures have been increased to ensure illicit items are not brought into the prison.

Once a month, prisoners are entitled to a social video call, allowing them to speak to their families via a video link.

Prisoners have phones in their cells and can contact family and friends once they have provided the prison with contact details and a risk assessment has been completed.

Family days (which bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings) are arranged, which appear to be appreciated. A prisoner and their family can spend up to four hours together, with catering available, and some staff offer their time to facilitate entertainment for children during the day. These social visits make use of outdoor space, weather permitting, which provides a much more relaxed atmosphere than would be available in the visits hall.

The Storybook Dads initiative, which enables parents to record personalised bedtime stories that are sent home as audio or video for their children, has been much appreciated by the prisoners for several years.

7.4 Resettlement planning

Garth is not set up to operate as a resettlement prison. The number of prisoners released directly has traditionally been low, but this is increasing due to the difficulties of transferring prisoners to lower-category prisons. The policy introduced by a recent Secretary of State for Justice, which restricted the number of prisoners moving to category D prisons, caused a major slowdown in transfers and resulted in Garth having a backlog of category C prisoners awaiting relocation. This has led to a rise in the numbers being released directly from Garth in 2024-2025.

- 104 prisoners were released directly from HMP Garth.
- 136 were transferred to an alternative establishment (same category or hospital); and
- 110 prisoners progressed to a lower-category prison as part of their progression.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	10
Total number of visits to the establishment	591

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	17	21
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	4	24
C	Equality	9	3
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	6	11
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	21	33
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	25	44
F	Food and kitchens	4	6
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	39	46
H1	Property within the establishment	65	85
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	33	48
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	15	15
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	27	11
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	123	107
K	Transfers	1	5
	Total number of applications	389	459

Annex A

A more detailed discussion of the Board's observations regarding the Amey contract.

Amey is contracted to provide total facilities management of the establishment estate, including preventative and routine maintenance, as well as reactive repairs following damage or vandalism. Performance indicators focus on the delivery of the planned and cyclical inspections (such as PAT testing and water and fire safety checks), in which Amey performs well.

There are, however, two significant areas of concern.

The first relates to response times for reactive maintenance involving major infrastructure issues, particularly where significant investment or use of HMPPS-approved framework contractors is required. The establishment has experienced long-standing issues with the boilers and heating and hot water systems, most recently resulting in a loss of hot water and some wings having to use the gym for showers, disrupting the regime. Addressing these issues will require significant investment, in the Board's view, and it is unclear how the establishment is expected to fund such large-scale capital works.

The current 'patch, repair and make the best of it' - undertaken by the establishment and Amey to the best of their ability - is no longer sufficient and leads to increasingly costly temporary fixes. For an estate of this age, dedicated capital funding is needed to undertake essential infrastructure repairs and refurbishment.

There is also a conflict arising from the contract mechanism regarding how works are identified. The Amey site manager reports that they cannot log works on Planet FM, as this could be viewed as 'making work for themselves'; however, it is unclear how prison officers are expected to take responsibility for reporting all structural defects in an area outside their expertise. Clear issues such as weeping pipes, damp walls and deterioration of the building fabric are visible around the exterior of the wings - problems that are already causing damage to flooring, mortar loss and vegetation growth in brickwork, and large damp patches on walls. These defects will inevitably lead to issues in prisoners' cells and, in some cases, damaged flooring has already resulted in wing spurs being closed. This matter needs to be reviewed and addressed with the Ministry of Justice Property Services.

The Halal fridge issue took over a year to resolve, as the framework contractor that Amey was required to use was slow and appeared to provide poor advice and poor value for money. Once a different contractor was engaged, the fridge was repaired within weeks.

The second area of concern is Amey's performance in responding to reactive maintenance, including vandalism and repairs across the estate. Data presented at the estates meeting showed that levels of vandalism and damage at Garth were significantly higher - on average more than 2.5 times higher - than at other prisons in the northwest (except for HMP Liverpool, although Garth's figures remained notably higher even in comparison). Amey struggles to deploy sufficient resources to address all defects promptly; however, their efforts are often undermined by prisoner behaviour, with instances observed of damage being repeated immediately after an engineer completes a repair.

While this behavioural issue requires review and action, further investigation is also needed to understand how Amey's resource levels are set, the basis on which staffing is agreed, and whether current service-level requirements for reactive maintenance are sufficient to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both staff and prisoners.

Annex B

Service providers

Various services are provided in the prison. Some are contracted local or regionally, whilst others are delivered directly through national contracts negotiated by HMPPS. These include the following:

- Practice Plus Group Healthcare including the substance Misuse Service, Pharmacy provision, Optical Services, Mental Healthcare
- GP healthcare: locum GPs from various agencies
- Dental services: Smart Dental Services
- Adult social care: Lancashire County Council
- Education and training: Offender Learning and Skills Services / NOVIS – Changed to MKC partway through the reporting period
- Shared learning: University of Central Lancashire
- Prisoners' canteen: DHL
- Main food supplier: Bidfood
- Library services: Lancashire County Council
- Listeners and online support: Samaritans
- Prisoner transport: GeoAmey (main contractor)
- Facilities maintenance and management: Amey



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