



Ministry  
of Justice

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**Lord Timpson**  
Minister of State for Justice

**Jake Richards MP**  
Parliamentary Under-  
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Justice

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Dear Jane,

### **PUBLICATION OF THE IMB NATIONAL ANNUAL REPORT 2025**

Thank you for your National Annual Report, published on 10 June 2026. I am grateful for your leadership as Interim National Chair and for the continued independent scrutiny provided by Independent Monitoring Boards.

I welcome the report's recognition of areas of progress, including the expansion of vocational training in the youth estate, particularly in English YOIs, and the positive reception to in-cell technology, such as Launchpad, in establishments where it has been introduced. However, I also recognise the seriousness of the challenges highlighted. As your report makes clear, these reflect sustained pressures on the prison system, including rising demand, and the impact this continues to have on safety, regimes and progression across the estate.

Addressing these issues remains a priority for this Government. We are taking forward a programme of reform across the criminal justice system, including implementing the measures in the Sentencing Act and our long-term capacity strategy, alongside targeted operational action to improve safety, stability and outcomes for prisoners.

I have set out in the annex the specific actions we are taking and further steps we are pursuing, in response to the issues raised.

Thank you again for the vital work of IMBs across the prison estate and Youth Custody.

Yours sincerely,

**Lord Timpson**  
**Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending**

**JAKE RICHARDS MP**

## **Annex**

The IMB's report highlights a number of interrelated challenges across the estate, many of which are driven by population pressures and impact on safety, regimes and progression.

### **Population pressures and system-wide impact**

The Government recognises that population pressures continue to place strain on the prison system. The safety and decency of our prisoners is paramount, and we continually monitor prison conditions, taking places on and offline depending on safety, stability, staffing levels and maintenance needs. Prisons are never required to hold more prisoners than their operational capacity.

We are taking action to put the prison population on a more sustainable footing through the delivery of 14,000 additional prison places by 2031 supported by £4.7 billion of investment. We have already opened more than 3,000 prison places since July 2024. On top of this, the landmark sentencing reforms in the Sentencing Act 2026 are expected to reduce the prison population by around 7,500 by February 2028, while keeping the public safe and improving outcomes for victims. These measures are designed to deliver a more stable and resilient system, enabling prisons to operate safely, provide more consistent regimes and better support progression and rehabilitation.

### **Safety: violence, self-harm and drugs**

We recognise the continued challenges across the estate relating to violence, self-harm and the impact of illicit drugs. As the IMB highlights, these issues are often closely interlinked and remain a significant threat to safety and stability in prisons, with clear links to wider issues of violence, self-harm and instability across the estate.

We are strengthening our approach to self-harm through improved case management, including the ACCT process, alongside enhanced staff training and targeted support for individuals with complex needs. This is particularly important in the women's estate, where rates of self-harm remain significantly higher, more than nine times those in the male estate, and are often driven by a small number of individuals with complex and overlapping needs, including trauma, mental health issues and addiction. We are continuing to strengthen specialist support in women's prisons, including increased access to psychological support and a greater focus on trauma-informed approaches.

Reducing violence remains a priority. We are supporting staff to better understand and manage the drivers of violence, including the role of drugs, debt and group dynamics, alongside improving staff capability and confidence.

Tackling the supply and demand for drugs is critical to improving safety. We are taking a whole-system approach, combining strengthened security measures with expanded access to treatment and recovery support, working closely with health partners to ensure consistent and high-quality provision across the estate.

This includes strengthening delivery through dedicated Drug Strategy Leads in key prisons, supported by Group Drug and Alcohol Leads providing oversight across prisons, alongside expanding Incentivised Substance Free Living units, now operating in 88 prisons, which are associated with significantly improved outcomes in reducing violence and self-harm.

## **Use of force**

We acknowledge the concerns raised by the IMB regarding the use of force, including issues of proportionality and its impact on vulnerable groups. Force must only ever be used as a last resort and in a manner that is lawful, necessary and proportionate, in line with established policy frameworks, training and governance arrangements.

We are strengthening oversight and assurance across the use of force system, including improving data quality and analysis, enhancing scrutiny and governance, and supporting local leadership to ensure consistent standards are applied. Alongside this, we are continuing to build staff capability in de-escalation, dynamic security and trauma-informed approaches, recognising that reducing the need for force relies on effective engagement and strong staff-prisoner relationships. This is particularly important in the women's estate, where staff are supported to take account of the impact of trauma and individual vulnerability when managing challenging situations and to consider all appropriate alternatives before the use of force.

## **Living conditions, prisoner property and transport**

We recognise the IMB's concerns regarding living conditions across parts of the estate. As highlighted in the report, the age and condition of many prisons continue to impact safety, decency and the overall quality of life for prisoners.

A significant proportion of the prison estate is old and requires substantial investment, with over half of prisons more than 50 years old and a large number dating back to the Victorian era. Historic population pressures have also limited the ability to undertake wider maintenance activity, with work previously focused on essential repairs.

We are now increasing investment in the estate to address these challenges, including increasing maintenance funding and continued investment in fire safety improvements. This is supported by the Prison Estate Condition Survey Programme, which enables us to better understand estate condition and target funding to where it is most needed.

Alongside this, our 10-Year Prison Capacity Strategy sets out the longer-term approach to renewing and modernising the estate, ensuring that it is better able to support safe, decent and rehabilitative environments.

We recognise the importance of prisoners' property and the impact that loss or damage can have. Following the IMB's thematic report and wider scrutiny, HMPPS has strengthened the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, including clearer guidance on key areas such as transfers, cell clearances and the management of excess property. We continue to work with prisons and partners to improve consistency of handling and reduce the likelihood of property being lost during transfers.

We also recognise concerns raised regarding prisoner transport, including long journeys and late arrivals, and continue to work with providers to improve standards and ensure appropriate welfare and dignity are maintained.

## **Staffing and staff-prisoner relationships**

We recognise the critical role of staffing levels, experience and capability in maintaining safe, stable and rehabilitative prisons. As the IMB highlights, staffing pressures and inexperience can undermine the delivery of consistent regimes, weaken staff-prisoner relationships and impact on safety.

Our staff are central to delivering safe and effective prisons, and we continue to invest in developing their skills, capability and confidence. We continue to focus on recruitment and retention, alongside strengthening leadership and workforce development across the estate.

Strong staff-prisoner relationships are essential to effective prison operations. We are supporting establishments to prioritise meaningful interaction between staff and prisoners, recognising its importance in reducing violence, improving behaviour and supporting rehabilitation.

### **Regime, time out of cell and purposeful activity**

We share the IMB's concerns regarding time out of cell and access to purposeful activity. As highlighted in the report, restricted regimes in some prisons continue to limit opportunities for prisoners to engage in education, work and other rehabilitative activity. In some cases, this has resulted in prisoners spending extended periods of time locked in their cells, which we recognise is not acceptable over the longer term.

We fully acknowledge the scale of the challenge, with factors such as staffing pressures, the availability of suitable activity space and competing operational demands all impacting the delivery of consistent regimes. Some of these challenges will require wider system change, including addressing ongoing population pressures, which we are taking forward through our longer-term reform programme.

Prisons are expected to provide a reasonable and predictable level of time out of cell to support decency, wellbeing and access to purposeful activity. While Governors have flexibility to manage regimes in response to operational pressures, restricted regimes should be exceptional, proportionate and time limited.

Alongside this, we are taking forward targeted work to improve regime delivery, including test-and-learn approaches to identify practical solutions to enhance purposeful activity within existing resources, and sharing good practice across the estate. We remain committed to the manifesto pledge to increase access to purposeful activity, which includes education, work and other rehabilitative activity, recognising the important role this plays in reducing reoffending and supporting stable prison environments.

We also acknowledge the concerns raised by the IMB regarding changes to education provision and are working with providers and partners to ensure that provision remains effective, accessible and aligned to the needs of prisoners.

### **Progression, resettlement and employment**

We recognise the concerns raised by the IMB regarding prisoner progression, communication and preparation for release. As highlighted in the report, population pressures and operational constraints can limit access to regime activity, disrupt sentence progression and affect the ability of prisoners to progress through the system as intended.

We also recognise the importance of clear and timely communication. We are working to strengthen offender management processes, including improving engagement between prisoners and offender managers and ensuring clearer communication with prisoners about their progression, sentence planning and release arrangements.

Supporting effective resettlement remains a priority. We are strengthening pre-release planning and working closely with probation and partners to ensure that prisoners have access to

accommodation, employment and other support on release, particularly those at risk of poor outcomes, including homelessness.

Employment plays a key role in reducing reoffending. We are strengthening the link between custody and employment through initiatives to expand high-quality work opportunities in prison, including the Working Week Project, and by growing partnerships with employers to provide vocational training, apprenticeships and job opportunities aligned to the labour market.

We are also strengthening collaboration between prisons, probation, employers and the Department for Work and Pensions through Employment Councils and established employer partnerships, alongside improving access to employment support, benefits and identification on release to support a more stable transition into the community.

We recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that prisoners are prepared for release and able to successfully reintegrate into the community, and we will continue to work across government and with partners to improve outcomes in this area.

### **Fair and humane treatment (including older and disabled prisoners)**

We recognise the IMB's concerns regarding fair and humane treatment, including the disproportionate outcomes identified for some groups, particularly prisoners from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled prisoners, older prisoners and those with neurodivergent needs.

Addressing disparities remains a priority. We are strengthening data, governance and scrutiny to improve transparency and support evidence-based action at local, regional and national level. We are also working to better understand and respond to the needs of vulnerable groups, including improving support for older prisoners, those with disabilities and those with neurodivergent needs, and strengthening staff capability in areas such as communication, de-escalation and reasonable adjustments.

We are developing an Older Prisoners Strategy to better respond to the growing and complex needs of this cohort, including health, social care and accommodation requirements, and to improve outcomes both in custody and on release.

### **Health and mental health**

We are committed to ensuring that people in prison have access to healthcare equivalent to that available in the community, including timely and effective mental health care tailored to individual need. This is delivered in partnership with DHSC and NHS England, reflecting a whole-system approach to improving health outcomes in custody.

We recognise the significant level of mental health need within the prison population and the challenges highlighted by the IMB in meeting that demand. All prisoners should have access to integrated mental health services delivered within custody.

We also recognise that prison is not an appropriate environment for individuals with severe mental illness. As the IMB highlights, delays in transferring some individuals to secure hospital settings remain a concern, and the impact this can have on both the individual and the wider prison environment. The Mental Health Act 2025 introduces a new statutory 28-day time limit for transfers from prison to hospital, which will support more timely access to appropriate care. This will be accompanied by improvements across partners to ensure that individuals receive the treatment they need as quickly as possible. We will continue to work closely with health and justice partners to improve delivery in this area.

## Young Offender Institutions (YOIs)

### Safety, education, time out of room and separation

Levels of violence remain a serious concern in parts of the youth estate, and violence against staff is unacceptable. In response, there is a focus on creating safer, more stable environments where incidents are reduced and children feel protected, with a clear expectation that all establishments deliver consistent, child-centred practice and better behaviour management. Levels of violence are now reviewed monthly at a new Ministerially chaired Youth Custody Performance Board, where performance is reviewed across all YOIs to understand trends and drivers.

Ensuring children have consistent access to high-quality education is a priority. The Youth Custody Service is working to improve attendance and ensure education is treated as a core part of the daily regime and children receive meaningful education. To support this, the Children's Commissioner has begun a piece of work to provide recommendations as to how we can further increase access to, and engagement with, education in the YOIs. In addition, driving up the time children spend out of their room is a key priority, and we have set an ambitious target to increase this for public YOIs by 50% by the end of the Parliament.

A Youth Custody Transformation Plan will be published in the Autumn with an approach that youth custody should not just be safe, but actively support children to engage in education, develop skills and reduce their risk of reoffending.

### Resettlement

Children who have limited family ties are more likely to be unsettled in custody and struggle with accommodation, finance and routine structure that supports successful rehabilitation. The current youth estate's geographic dispersion, and the distances that children are held from home, can make this more challenging. Each setting has a family resettlement worker or equivalent and supports regular family visits and contact, together with dedicated family days, family newsletters and support for those who do not receive any visits. We want to go further, which is why the YCS has expanded its scheme to fund visits when required.

### Transitions to the adult estate

The YCS transition policy framework seeks to reduce the impact of the significant change and to manage the transition process collaboratively and effectively. All transition decisions are taken on a case-by-case basis, considering need, safety and safeguarding of others. Transitions of girls to the adult women's estate are facilitated by a multidisciplinary forum within the HMPPS women's team where YCS work collaboratively to identify the most suitable placement and ensure an individual package of support is in place. Further evaluation and lived experience feedback of the transitions process is ongoing, to ensure the YCS continually reviews and enhances the information and support available to young people and the staff working with them.