



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Low Newton
Brasside
Durham
DH1 5YA

MoJ ref: SUB135355

26 June 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI LOW NEWTON INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
1 MARCH 2025 – 28 FEBRUARY 2026**

Thank you for submitting the Independent Monitoring Board's Annual Report for HMP/YOI Low Newton. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your continued commitment to independent scrutiny in what remains a complex and challenging women's establishment.

I recognise that the issue relating to the number of severely mentally unwell women sent to prison has been reiterated by the Board over a number of years, including in its previous report. Commissioners are aware of the recommendations from the Health of People in Prison, on Probation and in the Secure NHS Estate in England report and that HMP/YOI Low Newton was highlighted as good practice within those recommendations for joint leadership and an innovative regime. The recommendations within the report are nationally driven and involve a number of partners across the health and justice system. Joint partnerships work is in progress, which will improve outcomes for women in their care. While this reflects continued work at a local level, I recognise the Board's concern that this remains an ongoing issue, particularly where needs are complex and challenging to meet within a custodial environment.

I was encouraged to note the Board's positive observations across a number of areas. In particular, the management of young offenders at HMP/YOI Low Newton is highlighted as a key strength, with behaviour generally well managed and staff demonstrating a clear understanding of the specific needs of this group, maintaining a safe and supportive environment. I also welcome the Board's recognition of further improvements in how women are supported to maintain contact with their families, including the high level of support provided to help them cope with life outside prison.

The Governor will continue to keep you informed of progress in relation to the issues you have raised. Responses to matters raised for His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I remain grateful for the valuable role played by Independent Monitoring Boards and thank you for your continued commitment on behalf of HMP/YOI Low Newton.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James', written in a cursive style.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

**HMP/YOI LOW NEWTON: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MARCH 2025 – 28 FEBRUARY 2026**

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Transport

Under current contractual arrangements, Prisoner Escort and Custody Service (PECS) suppliers are permitted to transport women on mixed-sex journeys, provided that a privacy screen is inserted between men and women. PECS Escort Contractors are contractually required to return prisoners by the establishment's Latest Reception Time. Specific performance measures are in place to monitor the return journey of women from court, including a focus on transporting women within two hours of their court appearance. The dispersed nature of the women's estate requires contractors to manage their fleet effectively. However, there may be occasions where late court sittings, longer travel distances, traffic conditions or adverse weather impact arrival times. In such circumstances, escorts are required to ensure that receiving prisons are informed of delays and that agreement is sought in advance for the safe receipt of late arrivals. PECS continues to monitor all aspects of contractor performance, and where this does not meet the agreed levels it is raised with the contractor for improvement. Decency, including toilet and sanitary provision, remains a key consideration and is monitored through Safe, Secure and Decent Compliance audits carried out by regional PECS Contract Delivery Managers.