



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Gartree
Market Harborough
Leicestershire
LE16 7RP

MoJ ref: SUB135578

19 July 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP GARTREE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 DECEMBER 2024 – 30 NOVEMBER 2025**

Thank you for submitting the Board's annual report for HMP Gartree. I appreciate that this will have been a particular challenge given continued low membership numbers, which are far below your recommended complement. I hope this position improves over the coming year and I am grateful for your endeavours in producing such a thorough report.

I was very sorry to learn of the ten deaths in custody during the reporting year. Every death is a tragedy, and my condolences are with the families and friends of the deceased. Whilst it appears that there is further learning to be applied around regular welfare checks, I was encouraged to read about the support offered by family liaison officers and the changes made to establish a multi-disciplinary team to support prisoners near the end of life in response to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's findings.

I recognise that the issue regarding the imprisonment of public protection (IPP) sentences has been raised by the Board over a number of years. The Government remains determined to support those serving IPP sentences to progress towards release. However, we must ensure that any decisions do not put victims or the public at risk and for that reason those serving IPP sentences must continue to satisfy the statutory release test. Legislative changes in the Victim and Prisoners Act 2024 which reduced the qualifying period for licence termination and introduced automatic termination, have already reduced the number of people serving IPP sentences in the community by around two-thirds. Further measures in the Sentencing Act 2026, implemented on 1 June 2026, will provide a clearer pathway to bringing these sentences to an end once individuals have been released.

For those still in custody, cases are referred to the Parole Board to assess their suitability for initial release on licence, in line with statutory requirements. Following tariff expiry, cases must be reviewed at least every two years, with policy requiring more frequent referrals where appropriate. IPP prisoners are not eligible for consideration of licence termination until released by the Parole Board for the first time. Where individuals have been recalled, their suitability for licence termination is considered as part of the Parole Board's review of recall. While these changes strengthen progression pathways, I recognise the Board's concern that progress can remain slow for some individuals.

The impact of drones and the delivery of illicit items into the prison continues to be tackled, nationally. On 11 June the Deputy Prime Minister announced that an extra £35 million will be invested to strengthen physical security at 17 prisons vulnerable to drone activity. There has already been investment in window replacements, external grilles and specialist netting. Alongside physical measures,

HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) continues to explore the use of technological and intelligence-led approaches to tackle this threat. At HMP Gartree, physical security measures including anti-drone wiring and enhanced window grilles are programmed for installation and are due to be completed by September 2026. While I recognise the frustration regarding delays, this reflects the complexity of delivering such work safely within a live environment.

I understand that the prison's infrastructure is a longstanding concern for the Board. A range of projects for HMP Gartree is currently under consideration as part of the estate wide investment pipeline. These include major works such as boiler and plant replacement, roof repairs, gate replacement and upgrades to critical systems including fire alarms and cell call systems. These projects remain at different stages of development and must undergo design, assurance and cost scrutiny processes before funding decisions can be confirmed. As you will appreciate, projects of this scale are complex, costly and require careful sequencing to minimise operational disruption. While all requests are considered, demand across the estate exceeds available funding and investment is therefore prioritised based on risk to life, capacity and decency.

Regarding the issue of the availability of suitable accommodation for elderly and disabled prisoners, several measures are in place to support those with additional needs. These include dedicated older prisoner accommodation, increased access to ground floor cells and adaptations such as grab rails where required. Support is also provided through social care services, with staff able to make referrals to ensure needs are assessed promptly, alongside additional assistance through schemes such as prisoner buddies. Further needs are considered through local review processes and reasonable adjustment arrangements and work is underway to improve provision, including accessible exercise opportunities. In addition, NHSE England has commissioned a Health and Social Care Needs Assessment to better understand demand and inform future provision.

Mental health services at HMP Gartree are delivered as part of the commissioned healthcare contract with most patients receiving timely assessments. Recent performance shows that most routine and urgent assessments are completed within expected timeframes with all patients triaged to ensure risks are managed appropriately. Where needs cannot be met within the prison, referrals are made to secure mental health hospitals. Work is ongoing nationally and regionally to improve the timeliness of these transfers, including through the introduction of a 28-day statutory transfer limit under the Mental Health Act 2025, alongside improvements to care pathways and bed capacity. Regular oversight arrangements are in place to support timely decision making and to try to minimise delays.

I was encouraged to note the Board's recognition of the continued professionalism and resilience of many staff in managing a complex and often challenging population and that it considers prisoners are treated fairly and humanely. This is an important foundation from which to build further improvement.

The Governor will continue to keep you informed of progress in relation to the issues you have raised. Responses to matters raised for HMPPS are set out in the attached annex.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I greatly value the contribution of Independent Monitoring Boards and are grateful for your continued dedication to HMP Gartree.

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

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Estate Funding

Investment requirements at HMP Gartree are identified through condition surveys, which assess the state of buildings, cells and critical infrastructure across the site. These surveys inform long term forward maintenance registers, which are used to prioritise works against available capital funding. All requests submitted by the establishment are considered as part of this process. However, demand across the prison estate exceeds available funding. As a result, HMPPS must prioritise investment based on risk to life, operational capacity and decency. While this ensures that the most critical risks are addressed, it does mean that not all works can be progressed at the pace required locally.

Preventing Drone Activity and Illicit Items

HMPPS operates a multi-layered approach to tackling this risk. This includes physical security measures, intelligence activity and partnership working across Government and with law enforcement agencies. Nationally, this has included joint operations between HMPPS and the police, which have resulted in over 200 arrests linked to drone activity and the disruption of organised crime networks. A number of operational countermeasures are deployed across the estate, including X-ray body scanners, enhanced gate security, drug trace detection equipment and dedicated search teams using specialist tools to detect illicit items and mobile phones. At HMP Gartree, this is supported by enhanced local activity. The establishment has been subject to a programme of intensified searches delivered through the Long Term and High Security Estate Taskforce approach. These operations have resulted in the recovery of illicit items and act as a deterrent to further activity.

Property Lost on Transfer

HMPPS has reviewed this issue nationally, including consideration of the IMB thematic report and Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations. As a result, a revised Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was introduced in November 2025. This includes strengthened guidance on key areas such as the sending on of excess property, the handling of laundry and the correct completion of cell clearance documentation, which have been identified as common sources of issues. At a transport level, Prison Escort and Custody Services (PECS) reviews complaints during formal contract meetings with the supplier. During the reporting period, no complaints have been recorded from HMP Gartree relating to property loss attributable to PECS. The introduction of the digital Person Escort Record (dPER), which includes a dedicated property section, is now embedded. This provides an accurate record of property held and transferred with the prisoner and of handover between stakeholders. This has improved accountability and supports investigation where concerns are raised.

Standardisation of Property Rules

All establishments must comply with the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework. This ensures a level of consistency in terms of procedures followed and volumetric controls. It also provides for where prisoners arrive on transfer from another establishment with items which are not permitted in the receiving establishment's facility list but were permitted at the previous establishment. Governors are required to consider these items on a case-by-case basis and decide whether or not they should be allowed. However, unless the item is considered a risk to good order, discipline, security, safety and/or exceed volumetric control limits, the expectation will be that the prisoner should be allowed to retain it in possession.

Responsibility for Healthcare Provision

NHS England Health and Justice Commissioners are responsible for commissioning integrated healthcare services at HMP Gartree in line with national service specifications. Responsibility for inpatient and

specialist care does not sit with the prison or HMPPS. This is provided either through Provider Collaboratives, which manage secure mental health beds, or through local Integrated Care Boards and Hospital Trusts. Performance of healthcare services is monitored through quarterly contract review meetings. During the current financial year, complaints and concerns have reduced, alongside an increase in positive feedback. Service improvements have included the introduction of a dedicated patient engagement lead, analysis of complaint themes, and weekly complaints clinics. In addition, listening groups are being introduced to strengthen engagement and a *“You Said, We Did”* approach has been used to respond to priority issues identified through patient feedback.

Education and Purposeful Activity

HMPPS remains focused on maximising the value and quality of provision within available resources, including ensuring that allocation to education and attendance are prioritised. Delivery and outcomes are monitored through contract management arrangements, and the Ministry of Justice is currently undertaking a full evaluation of the Prisoner Education Service to inform future development. Wider provision continues to include vocational training, work-based activity and additional opportunities funded through flexible commissioning routes.