

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Berwyn
Bridge Road
Wrexham Industrial Estates
Wrexham
North Wales
LL13 9QE

MoJ ref: SUB137555

1 September 2026

Dear Chair,

HMP BERWYN INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
1 MARCH 2025 – 28 FEBRUARY 2026

Thank you for submitting the Board's annual report for HMP Berwyn. I appreciate that this will have been a particular challenge given the 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 that there was a death in custody during the reporting year. Every death is a tragedy and my condolences are with the family, friends and all those affected. All deaths are subject to investigation by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman and any recommendations will be carefully considered.

I recognise that the impact of early release schemes on staff workload and release planning has been raised by the Board previously. These measures have created additional pressure on prison and probation staff, particularly in relation to sentence recalculations and managing high volumes of releases. Several operational measures have been introduced to support delivery, including the provision of indicative caseload volumes to enable forward planning, the introduction of prioritisation tools, extended timeframes for recalculations and additional support through overtime arrangements. Processes have also been strengthened to monitor pre-release activity and ensure that essential actions are completed. While these measures support delivery, I recognise that the pressure on staff remains significant.

I understand the Board's continued concerns regarding the provision of mental health services and delays in accessing appropriate care. Healthcare delivery in custody is provided in partnership with health services and while most care is delivered within the prison, delays persist where transfer to hospital is required. Work is ongoing with health partners to improve access and reduce delays, including planned reforms which introduce a statutory timeframe for transfers with the intention to improve timeliness.

The Board has also highlighted the ongoing challenges associated with holding a high proportion of prisoners from England in a Welsh establishment. These cross-border issues continue to present difficulties, particularly in relation to healthcare pathways and resettlement arrangements. While many of

these challenges sit beyond the control of the establishment, staff continue to work closely with partners across both systems to mitigate their impact as far as possible.

I recognise the concerns raised regarding infrastructure and long-standing issues such as the heating system. Investment needs at HMP Berwyn are identified through condition surveys and form part of the wider estate planning process. Several projects are being progressed through the pipeline, including improvements to systems and accessibility. While all bids are considered, demand exceeds available funding and works must be prioritised based on risk to life, capacity and decency. In the meantime, local teams continue to manage conditions and maintain a safe and decent environment while longer-term solutions are developed.

Experience at HMP Berwyn has provided valuable learning which continues to inform how new prisons are designed and delivered. Operational feedback from the site is being used to ensure that lessons are identified and applied across future developments.

I was encouraged to note the Board's recognition of staff efforts in managing a challenging and highly transient population while maintaining a focus on safety and rehabilitation. I also welcome the progress noted in Welsh language provision, the continued delivery of resettlement support and the positive impact of peer-led initiatives such as the wellbeing helpline.

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

The Lord Chancellor and I remain grateful for the important role played by the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Berwyn.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine'.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Population Turnover and Stability

In times of population pressure, it is imperative that prisons can safely receive new arrivals from court. This means movements out of reception prisons are prioritised over long-term progression. While we expect improvement following the Sentencing Act, pressures will remain in some parts of the estate. Configuration of the estate to better reflect the changing cohort mix of prisoners is ongoing, although there will not always be a precise alignment between the prison estate and the needs of the population.

Young People Transitioning to the Adult Estate

Under the National Allocation Protocol, young adults may arrive at HMP Berwyn directly from court, from the children's and young people's secure estate or through transfers from other prisons. Transitions are managed in accordance with the Transitions Policy Framework, which requires close collaboration between establishments to ensure safeguarding needs and individual requirements are identified and addressed. The Young Adults Custodial Strategy sets out the framework for supporting those aged 18 to 25 and prisons are expected to develop local strategies to ensure this group receives appropriate support while in custody and during resettlement planning.

Facilities Management Performance

Any delays in routine maintenance are managed through established contract escalation processes and reviewed through monthly meetings involving the facilities management provider, Ministry of Justice Property teams and prison leaders. These arrangements are intended to improve accountability and responsiveness, while ensuring maintenance issues are prioritised appropriately. Work continues with providers to strengthen performance and improve the timeliness of maintenance delivery across the establishment.

Family Contact and Compassionate Transfers

Prisoner location decisions are made nationally and are influenced by prison function, population pressures and operational capacity across the estate. While these factors can affect proximity to family members, maintaining family contact remains an important priority. Support is available through social visits, video calling, email services and the Help with Prison Visits Scheme. Staff continue to work with operational colleagues to support meaningful family relationships and compassionate cases continue to receive appropriate consideration where circumstances warrant it.