

Chair
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Lancaster Farms
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MoJ ref: SUB137554

28 August 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP LANCASTER FARMS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 FEBRUARY 2025 – 31 JANUARY 2026**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Lancaster Farms. I am very grateful to you and your colleagues for your continued resilience and commitment in monitoring the prison and capturing your helpful observations. It was reassuring to note how staff supported your important work, and I hope Board membership continues to remain stable.

I was deeply saddened to hear that one prisoner died following release during the reporting period. Although the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) investigation is ongoing, such deaths are very tragic as they were unable to benefit from their rehabilitative journey. I offer my condolences to their friends and family and would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are always taken very seriously.

I appreciate there is a cohort of very complex needs prisoners across the estate. HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) screens all prisoners as part of the induction process to identify any needs that may affect their ability to engage with the regime and navigate its environment and opportunities. To improve prison screening practices, a new Additional Learning Needs tool was introduced in October 2025 as part of the new Prisoner Education Service. This tool identifies individual strengths, and any additional learning needs an individual may have together with what adjustments might help support them. The results of this screening informs support across the estate as this new digital service enables key information on prisoner needs to be accessed by relevant staff and provide appropriate support. This information moves with the prisoner when transferring, supporting consistency in provision. HMPPS continues to enhance functionality and embed the use of this service across the estate.

Additionally, HMPPS take a needs-led approach to supporting all prisoners, including those with neurodiverse conditions. This focuses on identifying and responding to an individual's specific support needs rather than relying solely on formal diagnoses. Neurodiversity Support Managers (NSMs) are now available at every public prison in England and Wales. NSMs lead a whole-prison approach to ensuring consistent support for neurodivergent prisoners across education, skills, work opportunities, and the wider prison environment. To further drive improvements in the consistency of support, HMPPS updated the NSM Framework in February 2026 which sets out the five priority areas for the role. One of these priorities is to ensure specialist or targeted support is available for those with higher support needs where appropriate, practical, and reasonable.

I am acutely aware of the critical role that education plays in providing purposeful activity and reducing reoffending and continue to focus on how we can drive the maximum value for money and quality outcomes from the available provision. This includes ensuring that allocations and attendance remain a priority locally and nationally. Many prisons have seen changes in the volume of provision that can be delivered through the Core Education contract from October 2025, despite the national budget for prison education not having reduced. This is driven primarily by inflationary pressures across all education services, which impacts the proportion of the budget that can be spent through the Core Education contract.

The extent to which prisons are affected varies due to the funding formula. This was refreshed to ensure that allocations are a fair reflection of prison population, function, and regional cost differences. Many of these factors have changed since the funding formula was last set in 2019, and also because of local commissioning decisions as some types of delivery are more expensive than others. This delivery reduction applies only to Core Education contracts and does not affect other services such as libraries, careers advice and guidance, distance learning or vocational training delivered through industries and workshops. HMP Lancaster Farms has attempted to limit the impact of the changes by expanding the range of enrichment activities and moved to a 4-day week for education provision to limit closures. The prison has also utilised all additional funding streams when they have become available through the Dynamic Purchase Scheme to try to mitigate the effects on prisoners and give them as much opportunity for meaningful time out of cell as possible.

Healthcare provision at HMP Lancaster Farms is already being improved through a Health & Social Care Needs Assessment being completed. The healthcare provider and NHS England local commissioner are developing an action plan to deliver those recommendations. A new Head of Health Care at the prison is also expected in post by August 2026 and will further lead on improvements. Across the wider prison estate, to improve provision for those with severe mental illness who require treatment, the Mental Health Act 2025 introduces a new statutory time limit of 28 days for transfers from prison and other places of detention to hospital. This reform is due to commence 18-24 months post Royal Assent and health and justice partners remain committed to commencing this reform in the published timeframe. This time limit, together with operational improvements, aims to reduce unnecessary delays and deliver swifter access to treatment.

HMPPS comments in response to issues raised for the attention of the agency are set out in the attached annex. Issues raised for the attention of the Governor will be addressed locally who will continue to keep you appraised of progress of as work continues. I appreciate there are some longstanding issues at HMP Lancaster Farms that need to be addressed. It was therefore encouraging to receive your comments about the prison's efforts to maintain a largely safe environment where prisoners are treated fairly, together with the measures taken around drugs, debt, and other contributing factors for ill-discipline. I was also pleased to note the Building Choices Programme is now available at the prison and of the continued success of resettlement delivery.

The Lord Chancellor and I sincerely appreciate the value and scrutiny brought by members of Independent Monitoring Boards to improve the estate and we extend our thanks for your continued dedication on behalf of HMP Lancaster Farms.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP LANCASTER FARMS INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 FEBRUARY 2025 – 31 JANUARY 2026

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

HMPPS fully recognises the importance of prisoners' property and is committed to ensuring it is managed with care and respect. HMPPS has considered carefully the IMB national thematic report on the impact of property loss on prisoners, and the thematic review by Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations of the property complaints they have received over the last five years. In considering the reports, consultation with prison staff took place on the issues raised. A revised version of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was published on 17 November 2025 and includes additional guidance on the sending on of excess property, the handling of prisoners' laundry, and on the correct completion of the cell clearance certificate, as these have been identified as common areas of difficulty. Alongside that, HMPPS has reminded Governors and other senior leaders of key points around property handling, including the importance of prisoners complying with volumetric limits. Compliance with volumetric control remains of key importance, since property within those limits (as well as certain items, such as legal papers, which are exempt from the limits) will be moved with prisoners when they transfer to other establishments. HMPPS remains committed to improving the management of prisoners' property and considers possible areas for improvement on an ongoing basis.

HMP Lancaster Farms Status

In the configuration plans for 2027, HMP Lancaster Farms' primary function is to operate as a Category C 100% resettlement prison. The ambition is to prioritise proximity to home for prisoners in the resettlement cohort.

Education and Training Funding

Please see the response in the Minister's letter which contains comprehensive information about funding.

Purchase of Books and Clothing, and Handling Rule 39 Legal Mail

Purchasing of Books

The published framework for Prison Education and Library Services For Adult Prisons In England, that can be found on GOV.UK, sets out the expectations nationally for the purchase or donation of books. This states in Annex A (section 4) that the Governor can consider at a prison or individual level whether to accept the books into the prison taking into account the particular prison's population or a prisoner's offending behaviour. HMP Lancaster Farms will purchase any requests for books from prisoners, subject to local and national rules, and also cover the cost of the books.

Prisoner Clothing Purchases

Prison-issue clothing is procured centrally. Prisoner clothing is governed by Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 75/2011: *Residential Services* and states that prisoners must have access to clothing (including footwear) and bedding adequate for warmth, decency, health, and safety. Residential staff are the first point of contact for any problems or concerns and must report them to the relevant parties. It further places a responsibility on Governors to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the ordering and delivery of such clothing and bedding.

Prisoners have the opportunity to purchase non-essential items using funds from their prison account. Where an item is not available through the central Prison Retail contract (such as clothing), these purchases are made at a local level via the Government Procurement Card (GPC). This is a Ministry of

Justice system whereby prisons are given pre-approved card(s) to purchase things on an ad-hoc basis if it's not something for which a contract exists. Individual establishments will purchase the items for the prisoner either online or via a catalogue with their GPC and charge the prisoner accordingly. Local policies are in place at every establishment to determine what items can be purchased that also adhere to security and safety standards.

Rule 39 Mail

HMP Lancaster Farms has established that this route has been corrupted on several occasions either through mail that was not from legitimate legal representatives or via legitimate solicitors where staff working in their practice were found to be corrupt. HMP Lancaster Farms therefore allows all prisoners who receive rule 39 mail to read it out of sight of staff. If the prisoner then wishes to retain a copy of the paperwork, they are given access to a photocopier at no cost to themselves and are able to make a copy themselves to take back with them. The original is then sealed in their presence and placed in their stored property until their release. This system was discussed with the local prisoner council that raised no objections and deemed it to be a good safeguard.