

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Highpoint
Stradishall
Newmarket
CB8 9YG

MoJ ref: SUB137500

2 September 2026

Dear Chair,

**HMP HIGHPOINT INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2025**

Thank you for sharing your Board's annual report on HMP Highpoint. I want to express my sincere appreciation for the work undertaken by you and your colleagues in producing such valuable insights. Despite you continuing to operate with a depleted complement of members, I note the increased recruitment by the end of the reporting period and hope this position continues to improve.

I was saddened to read that two prisoners passed away in custody during the reporting year and I offer my sincere condolences to all their friends and family. Prison and Probation Ombudsman investigations following a death provide an important role to allow lessons to be learned and I can provide you with assurance that any recommendations that they make will be given careful consideration.

I acknowledge your further concerns about the transfer of prisoners' property and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) remains committed to improving the management of personal belongings. During your reporting period carefully consideration was being given to the IMB national thematic report on the impact of property loss on prisoners, as well as the thematic review by Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations of the property complaints they have received. As a result, a revised Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was published on 17 November 2025. This additional guidance was a result of consultation with prison staff and covers the sending on of excess property, the handling of prisoners' laundry and the correct completion of the cell clearance certificate, as these have been identified as common areas of difficulty. It also remains important that prisoners comply with volumetric control since the property within those limits will be moved with the prisoner when they are transferred.

It is also recognised that due to the amount of property some prisoners accumulate above volumetric control this can result in follow-on property arriving later. However, once received, Reception staff at HMP Highpoint process and issue this property as quickly as possible. To improve the management of property within the prison a local review was undertaken earlier this year, allowing parcel applications to be approved to incentivise work, engagement, and positive behaviour. In addition, since the south site Reception resumed responsibility for property management, complaints have significantly reduced and appointment applications are up to date for prisoners wishing to access their stored property.

I hope that the visit to HMP Highpoint by my predecessor, Lord Timpson, during the reporting period was useful and I note from his response to your previous report that he was impressed by the Rail Track Programme and the employment opportunities it creates for prisoners on release. Its introduction in 2022

to create a centre of excellence for rail training has been a significant achievement, as it is the only prison in the country delivering training across track, signalling and overhead line disciplines. What is most encouraging is it provides a direct route into employment with 76% of those that have completed the programme remaining in employment 12 months post their release. In November 2025 a rail apprenticeship was also introduced creating a longer-term pathway into skilled employment. These evidence what partnership working and employer engagement can achieve to help reduce reoffending.

I can also understand the concerns about prisoners transferring close to their release and it is acknowledged this can place pressure on resettlement services. However, in times of population pressure it is imperative that prisons can safely receive new arrivals from court. In these cases, the Board can still be assured that the prison and partners will prioritise urgent release work, assessments and interventions as quickly as possible to assist with the individual's needs, such as housing, job skills, and money management. Commissioned Rehabilitative Services are also currently being re-procured to introduce an enhanced community support service for men from Summer 2027 to better support resettlement and reintegration into the community. In addition, while we expect improvement following the Sentencing Act, pressures will remain in some parts of the estate, therefore HMPPS will continue with the ongoing estate configuration work to better reflect the changing cohort mix of prisoners.

Regarding the searching of all people entering HMP Highpoint, I hope the Board welcome the recent introduction of the enhanced gate security that was implemented in July 2026. This supports the improved control of people entering the site and the prisons commitment to strengthen searching arrangements through the effective use of available resources and equipment.

In terms of access to psychological therapies, it is acknowledged that waiting times have been longer for some prisoners due to demand. Whilst demand is high, the Board can be assured that all referrals are being prioritised by a multidisciplinary team to identify and agree an appropriate treatment pathway, with prioritisation informed by length of wait, release date, veteran status, and identified clinical need. Cases are also reviewed during daily morning meetings to identify any change in presentation or need, with wellbeing checks offered and priority may be escalated following consideration through clinical supervision, the Mental Health Team, or the Safety Intervention Meetings. NHS England will also continue to work with the Forward Trust, healthcare partners and the prison to improve timely access to support.

Despite your concerns and the challenges presented by the current expansion, the Board can be assured that regional operational leaders including the Governor have requested that the prison receives targeted national support to tackle issues of safety and security. This will complement the robust arrangements that the dedicated local safer prisons team have in place and I was encouraged by the effective operation of the segregation unit to support some of the most challenging prisoners. It was pleasing to read about the launch of the local staff charter, the improved staffing position and the proactive communication with prisoners about the regime. I was also interested to read about the other valuable work opportunities, therapeutic courses and excellent education teaching and it is pleasing that post-release employment outcomes have consistently exceeded targets giving prison leavers the best chance to resettle in the community.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Lord Chancellor and I recognise the important contribution that members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide and we are appreciative of your ongoing dedication behalf of HMP Highpoint.

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

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

HMP HIGHPOINT INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2025

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Facilities Management Contract

The Ministry of Justice is nearing completion of a programme to secure new and competitively tendered prison maintenance contracts. The new contracts remain on track for award in November 2026 and services due to commence from June 2027, with HMP Highpoint scheduled to transfer on 1 September 2027. The new contracts include more detailed and comprehensive requirements, aligned to customer needs with new Key Performance Indicators to provide stronger contract management tools and clearer levers to improve performance. A dedicated contract management team will be established for the new contracts to provide greater focus and consistency in managing the providers to support timely repairs and address any poor performance where needed. The existing provider, GFSL, is not participating in the tender competition for the new contracts and will transfer maintenance services to the new suppliers. Until then, arrangements are in place to manage the existing service robustly in line with the performance management framework in the Memorandum of Understanding. This continues to operate at several levels, including a Governance Board, an Operations Board, and on-site meetings. At HMP Highpoint, the Area Property Operations Manager works closely with the GFSL on-site team and the Governor to manage performance by meeting monthly to ensure prioritisation of ongoing issues. The Governor also holds weekly meetings with the on-site team to raise concerns and review outstanding work.

Retention of Prison Officers

The Enable Programme within HMPPS is taking targeted steps to strengthen the capability and support the retention of the increased proportion of inexperienced staff across the estate. A key focus of this work is the redesign of Foundation Training for new Prison Officers to introduce a 12-month, experience-led training model that places greater emphasis on practical, on-the-job learning that provides sustained support. This will allow staff to build confidence and competence over time and ensure they feel more capable, supported and likely to remain in post. Alongside this, national Core Capability Packages have been introduced to support staff beyond their initial training, to build capability across 16 core operational and behavioural areas. This structured, continued development is focused on a key stage of service where retention risk is at the highest and by investing in staff early this aims to ensure staff feel supported and can strengthen their skills and confidence to remain engaged in their careers. Locally to support staff, HMP Highpoint is adding to its training team to prioritise local up skilling. A two-week shadowing period has been implemented for staff returning from initial training to support their transition into operational duties and to develop confidence within the custodial environment. This is further supported through floor walkers, local training provision and targeted input from the Security team, with confidence, competence or operational readiness addressed promptly through appropriate guidance. The Board's recognition of the efforts being made by the local staff retention committee and the initiatives put in place to develop skills is also welcomed.

Illicit Items

HMPPS is committed to tackling all methods of conveyance of illicit items into prisons, including throwovers and drones. In February 2025 the Security Netting project at HMP Highpoint was successfully completed across units three, four, five, and ten. It is recognised further damage has occurred across the site and repairs continue to be managed locally through the facilities management provider, with temporary patch repairs completed where safe and practicable. However, this is not always feasible due

to operational or structural constraints, including circumstances where netting cannot be installed. To complement the physical barriers, prisons will conduct perimeter searching based on their Local Security Strategy and HMP Highpoint continues to conduct site-wide searches conducted by the dedicated search team and dog section. Prisons also undertake close working with local police forces across the country to identify and bring to justice those who seek to convey illicit articles into prisons. For example, a large scale joint operation between the police and HMPPS has resulted in over 200 arrests so far linked to drones smuggling contraband into our prisons and disrupted the activity of serious and organised crime networks. Prisoners with drug-related concerns are also proactively supported locally with Recovery Support Groups in place which are facilitated twice weekly and in case of emergency 96 staff, including members of the senior leadership team had received training in the administration of nasal naloxone by the end of June 2026.