



Ministry
of Justice

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Pentonville
Caledonian Road
London
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Dear Chair,

**HMP PENTONVILLE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
1 APRIL 2025 – 31 MARCH 2026**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Pentonville. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your continued dedication and producing such informative reflections on the current state of the prison, especially as you had several vacancies at the start of the reporting period. Thankfully, you reached nearly a full complement of members by the end of the reporting period and I hope this improved position continues.

I was most saddened to hear that three prisoners died in custody during the reporting year and a further death occurred shortly after release. I offer my condolences to all their friends and family and would like to reassure the Board that any recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman will be taken very seriously.

I understand your ongoing concerns that the conditions at the prison are having a negative impact on prisoners. HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) is doing what it can to ensure that living conditions are sustainably improved to provide a safe and secure environment that facilitates genuine rehabilitation. Please be assured that investment in the prison estate is underpinned by condition survey data, which has assessed the fabric, cells, and critical assets at each prison and is informing future maintenance. HMPPS is progressing major projects for HMP Pentonville as set out by my predecessors update to you in June 2026. These are to the value of approximately £29 million to improve the fabric of the prison and this is in addition to £1.5 million recently invested on window and grille replacements.

The impact that crowding can have on living conditions and time out of cell on wellbeing are also recognised. Plans are in place to invest in new prison places alongside improving the existing estate and HMPPS continues to review operational capacity across the estate to ensure it balances safety, decency, staffing and operational requirements. The Board can be assured that capacity decisions, in line with the Equality Act, take account of the needs of prisoners with disabilities and mobility requirements with reasonable adjustments made to minimise disadvantages. A revised core day introduced at HMP Pentonville in January 2026 has enabled a more consistent regime, providing a calmer environment and enabling all prisoners to access a domestic period, as well as work and education. In addition, further reviews are being undertaken by the prison to maximise purposeful activity and time out of cell, such as half-time work and enrichment activities, including afternoon access for unemployed prisoners.

I recognise your apprehensions about the proposal to bring monitoring and inspection functions together within a single organisation. Its purpose is to focus on improving the effectiveness of the scrutiny system, but the importance of independent monitoring in the system is acknowledged and I am keen to ensure that this is maintained through any new combined structure. The aim is to create a more sustainable function of monitoring and inspection across the prisons, youth justice, immigration, and court custody estates which strengthens consistency and scrutiny, to provide stronger links between monitoring and inspection. The Ministry of Justice is in the early stages of working through what a potential model could look like, however the value of prisoners being able to escalate individual concerns to an independent organisation is recognised and consideration will be given to how this is reflected in the new model.

I also understand your concerns regarding education as it plays a critical role in providing purposeful activity and helps reduce reoffending. Whilst the national budget overall for prison education has not been reduced, many prisons have seen changes in the volume of provision that has been delivered through the Core Education contract since October 2025. This has been driven primarily by inflationary pressures across all education services and at HMP Pentonville, Core Education for the period October 2025 to March 2026 was 17% lower than the preceding period of April 2025 to September 2025. However, this reduction applies only to Core Education and does not affect other education services such as libraries, careers advice, distance learning or vocational training delivered through industries and workshops. HMPPS is also investing in digital infrastructure, new assessment tools, and specialist staff to ensure that every pound spent delivers the greatest possible impact for learners. In addition, HMPPS is monitoring delivery and outcomes through contract support and is conducting a full evaluation of this new Prisoner Education Service to assess the impact of the provision to inform future policy decisions.

It was encouraging to receive your comments about the employment hub providing a remarkable range of opportunities to support prisoners' release preparations. I was pleased to read about the constructive developments in the reception process and improved cell readiness and standards of cleanliness. Despite the high churn of prisoners, I was reassured that prisoners feel they are treated with respect and that the Pentonville Prisoner Platform provides a constructive forum to improve communication and address issues with prison staff. It was also encouraging to note that there was a marked decline in incidents of self-harm during this reporting period year, as well as a reduction in use of force.

I note you have raised three 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 continue to appreciate the value and scrutiny brought by members of the Independent Monitoring Boards to improve the estate and we extend our thanks for your committed dedication on behalf of HMP Pentonville.

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

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

HMP PENTONVILLE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 1 APRIL 2025 – 31 MARCH 2026

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Young Adults

HMPPS issued a national Custodial Strategy for Young Adults (aged 18-25 inclusive) in 2022 covering the period 2022-2025. This was informed by evidence to set the strategic direction to meet the needs of young adults in the custodial estate and whilst this was not published it has been widely shared with external partners. To support remand prisoners, HMPPS published a *Remand Prisoners Policy Framework* in May 2026, which recognises young adults (age 18-25 inclusive) as a distinct cohort and sets out to ensure the rights of remand prisoners are applied and that they are supported with consideration to their specific needs. In addition, work is being undertaken to develop a Managing Young Adults in Custody Policy Framework to strengthen the approach to support young adults in custody and it is anticipated to be published in 2027. Your concerns about interventions are noted following the Time4Change programme no longer meeting the National Framework for Interventions requirements, however, HMPPS psychologists have supported the development of suitable regime interventions for young adults in a reception prison setting. The introduction of the Young Adult Forums has improved representation, engagement and progression opportunities for young adults, while increasing staff understanding and investment in supporting this cohort through initiatives, such as facilitation training and pathways into the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme.

Steps have also been taken to reduce the remand population while maintaining public protection, through The Sentencing Act, including expanding the 'no real prospect' test to certain defendants awaiting sentencing. These changes support the presumption against short custodial sentences by limiting the use of remand where immediate imprisonment is unlikely. As of 30 June 2026, the remand population has fallen by 13% compared with June 2025, reflecting the impact of these reforms alongside the increased Crown Court capacity and expanded Magistrates' Courts sentencing powers. The new Lord Chancellor has been clear that his priorities are to deliver swifter justice and Government is addressing court backlogs through record investment with uncapped Crown Court sitting days in 2026/27, and efficiency measures, such as targeted case listing and the rollout of Case Coordinators.

Prisoner Property

The Board's ongoing frustrations with property are recognised and HMPPS is fully committed to ensuring that belongings are managed with care and respect. Having carefully considered both the Independent Monitoring Boards' (IMB) national thematic report on the impact of property loss on prisoners and the thematic review by Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations, in response to the issues raised, a revised version of the *Prisoners' Property Policy Framework* was published on 17 November 2025. It includes additional guidance on the forwarding of excess property, the handling of prisoners' laundry, and the correct completion of cell clearance certificates, all of which were identified as common areas of difficulty following consultation with staff. Compliance with volumetric controls also remains of key importance as property within those limits will be transferred with prisoners when they move between prisons, reducing the chance of delays occurring or belongings going missing. HMPPS remains focused on improving the management of prisoners' property and the HMPPS Prison Performance Committee has previously discussed oversight and assurance regarding prisoner property. It was agreed that compliance with the policy framework would have the greatest impact through the operational

reporting line of Prison Group Directors and Area Executive Directors and leaders continue to make progress within their teams to drive improvements.

Prisoners Convicted of Sexual Offences (PCoSO)

HMPPS recognises that prisoners convicted of sexual offences may require placement in specialist prisons or dedicated cohorts to support their safety, progression and access to offending behaviour programmes (OBP). Allocation decisions are managed through national population management and offender flow arrangements, taking account of individual risk, sentence planning requirements and the availability of accommodation that can meet those needs. OBP are not generally available in reception prisons, such as HMP Pentonville, as they cannot meet the OBP needs of prisoners convicted of sexual offences with their aim being to move these people to appropriate training prisons as soon as practically possible. However, delivery of accredited programmes for people convicted of sexual offences has expanded nationally increasing the places available for any eligible prisoner. OBP are also only one form of rehabilitative activity and individuals may require different or additional support. Other specialist pathways also exist to meet complex needs beyond attitudes, thinking and behaviour with programmes being most effective when integrated within a broader rehabilitative system. HMPPS therefore continues to work across the prison estate to maximise the use of specialist capacity and support access to interventions in the most appropriate setting.