Ministry of Justice

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Leyhill
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25 September 2026

Dear Chair,

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

Thank you for sharing your Board's annual report on HMP Leyhill. I want to express my sincere appreciation for the work undertaken by you and your colleagues in monitoring the prison and for your commitment in compiling this informative report, particularly as your membership had reduced by the end of the reporting period. I hope this improves in the coming year.

I was saddened to read that a prisoner died in custody during the reporting year at hospital due to natural causes and I offer my condolences to all the friends and family. I understand that following the investigation by the independent clinical reviewer and Prison and Probation Ombudsman, the care provided at HMP Leyhill was found to be of a good standard and equivalent to that in the community.

I recognise your ongoing frustrations about the capacity within Approved Premises. It is still the case that demand outstrips supply, however, the digitalised approach for referrals that was introduced nationally is ensuring that individuals are matched to placements that maximise occupancy of the available capacity. This has helped HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to improve timeliness, but it is acknowledged that some prisons such as HMP Leyhill, can have a greater demand for places given the significant proportion of Prisoners Convicted of Sexual Offences (PCoSO). Where an individual is serving an Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence there is close working with probation practitioners and the Parole Board to provide an appropriate placement as quickly as possible that manages their risks and needs. An IPP Approved Premises Pathway pilot has been introduced to support stability during resettlement. This provides enhanced pre-release engagement, structured support during residence in an Approved Premise and continued support post departure. Results so far have been encouraging with reduced recalls and move-on outcomes. In addition, to support the increased housing needs across the South West Prison Group an additional Strategic Housing Specialist (SHS) is being introduced who will work with the existing SHS at HMP Leyhill to continue to improve accommodation outcomes by building relationships with key partners and removing barriers to accessing accommodation.

Regarding your request about catering budgets, whilst there is no automatic mechanism to increase this in line with future food price rises, funding allocations are considered as part of the

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wider budget setting process to take account of a range of operational priorities and affordability considerations. The Board can also be assured that this funding undergoes regular review which includes the impact of inflationary pressures on operating costs, including food. Financial pressures experienced across the prison estate are monitored and will be considered as part of the budget review. As the food budget increased during the 2025/26 financial year, this is currently considered sufficient to meet the needs of the prison population at HMP Leyhill. However, Governors remain responsible for managing their prison's own local budgets and have the discretion to determine how these resources are used to meet the local needs, including the provision of food services for prisoners.

The Board is right to highlight that the in-cell mobile PIN phone pilot at HMP Leyhill was considered a successful alternative to the wired in-cell telephony service, which can be found in many other parts of the prison estate. Supporting prisoners to maintain contact with their family and the wider community remains an important priority, and the learning from the pilot is now helping to shape future decisions on the provision of PIN phone services. HMPPS is reviewing the outcomes in detail to be able to inform the next steps for the wider provision of secure in-room mobile phones but are unable to provide further details at this early stage.

It is recognised that local and national businesses can play an important role in supporting rehabilitation. However, it is also acknowledged that there are challenges in securing employment for some prisoner groups, particularly PCoSO, via Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) and on release into the community, due to the willingness of employers. Work continues to be undertaken to strengthen links with employers to provide sustainable employment on release through the Prison Employment Lead and the dedicated ROTL team at HMP Leyhill. Over the past year, employers such as Morrisons and GXO have been helping to expand work placements and recruitment pathways and the new Employment Advisory Board Chair is strengthening engagement through an extensive business network. These efforts have contributed to improved performance against post-release employment Key Performance Indicators compared to last year. In addition, the prison has taken innovative steps with a local educational institution to produce a promotional video showcasing prisoner skills and training opportunities to demonstrate how employers can engage with the prison.

It was reassuring to receive your comments that the prison is safe and stable with incidents of bullying, assault, anti-social behaviour and self-harm reducing. I was encouraged to read that staff and prisoner relationships continue to be good and to hear prisoners praising staff for their support. I welcome that the focus on rehabilitation was commended and it was interesting to read about the range of education, vocational training and work opportunities to improve the chance of employment on release. It was particularly encouraging to note external work placements have increased and that The Lounge at Leyhill café opened during the reporting year for public use and will be complemented by a prison shop opening, both providing further opportunities for prisoners.

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 recognise the important contribution that members of Independent Monitoring Boards provide across the estate and we extend our thanks for your continued dedication on behalf HMP Leyhill.



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

Annex

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

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Imprisonment for Public Protection

HMPPS is determined to continue to support the rehabilitation and progression of IPP prisoners towards a future release, through its latest IPP Action Plan. This was published on 9 July 2026 in our IPP Annual Report and sets measurable targets to ensure transparency and accountability of how progress will be made. An important emphasis has been placed on frontline delivery in the action plan to ensure that those serving IPP sentences have an effective sentence plan and that they are in the prison most appropriate to help them to reduce their risk and progress towards a safe release. Additional resources have been provided for public protection colleagues working to progress the Action Plan, including sustaining vital services such as the IPP approved premises pilot, and to trial a new IPP advocate role, designed to provide more personalised support to those serving IPP sentences. Psychology Services have also been provided with greater access to specialist assessments for individuals facing the most significant barriers to progression and the Phoenix Unit at HMP Aylesbury is due to open this year providing a purpose-designed unit to support IPP prisoners who have become disengaged from progression. A model has also been agreed for all four progression regime prisons to allow IPP prisoners to access ROTL. In addition, every HMPPS Executive Area Director now has an IPP Lead in prison and community settings working to meet the requirements of the Action Plan. HMP Leyhill also continues to prioritise IPP progression through both local and national progression panel arrangements and relevant progression plans can be shared with the Board locally should this be helpful.

Probation Workload

Since 2025, Our Future Probation Service programme has been working nationally to rebalance demand and capacity by implementing measures that will transform the way in which probation staff work, which include Community Offender Managers. The programme aims to have reduced workloads by 25% by April 2027 and significant progress has already been made by bringing in capacity release measures, digital products such as Justice Transcribe and simplified processes which have reduced the burden on staff. It is recognised that it has still been a challenging time for probation staff and for the Offender Management Unit at HMP Leyhill, whilst the programme takes effect. However, the Board's recognition that OMU staff have responded to these demands and have also received praise from the Police and Crime Commissioner in handling releases are welcomed.

Education, Work and Skills

HMPPS remains committed to expanding opportunities for prisoners to gain work experience and relevant qualifications before release to support their rehabilitation and resettlement in the community. Further to the Minister's response about employment, it is worth noting that HM Inspectorate of Prisons' recent findings have highlighted preparation for release as a particular strength of HMP Leyhill, having recognised the support available to prisoners as they move towards employment and resettlement. It is acknowledged that there remain challenges for PCoSO prisoners, but the dedicated staff at HMP Leyhill continue to develop opportunities with

support from the prison's Employment Advisory Board and the New Futures Network, which is a specialist part of HMPPS that attracts and supports employers to work with prisons in England and Wales. It remains the case that Governors lead locally on setting the curriculum for their prison to ensure it is aligned to the identified needs of their prison population. This is informed by labour market information, so that it can support prisoners to develop the skills, experience and qualifications most likely to improve their employment prospects on release. However, regional discussions are taking place about the equitable and efficient use of education and purposeful activity spaces to support prison teams to maximise the impact of the available funding and resources.

Prisoner Work Transport
Further to the vehicle replacement and capacity increase the Board was informed about in the response to the previous reporting period, there are currently no significant transport pressures affecting external employment opportunities at HMP Leyhill. Prisoners undertaking external employment contribute a weekly £35.00 levy towards transport costs and where local prison transport capacity is fully utilised, hired vehicles can be used to supplement provision.

Prisoners' Property
HMPPS remains committed to strengthening the management of prisoners' property and considers possible areas for improvement on an ongoing basis to ensure belongings are handled with care and respect. A revised version of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was published on 17 November 2025 as a result of careful consideration and consultation with prison staff on 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. Whilst this update provides additional guidance on common areas of difficulty that were identified, compliance with volumetric control remains applicable across all prisons and is of key importance, since property within those limits will be moved with prisoners when they transfer to another prison. The HMPPS Prison Performance Committee has previously discussed central oversight and assurance regarding prisoner property and 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 improvement. The South West Prison Group expects all prisons to apply the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework consistently, including the use of volumetric limits where appropriate and work is ongoing to improve the management and transfer of prisoner property to reduce the risk of loss, delays and disruption during inter-prison transfers. Whilst it is recognised that the storage capacity for retained property remains a challenge at HMP Leyhill, arrangements for the management and control of issued property locally within cells remains effective.

Education Contract
It is recognised that the transition to the new Prisoner Education Service contract at HMP Leyhill resulted in there being three teaching vacancies. As this represented approximately half of the teaching offer, the Board's concerns are understandable. However, assurance can be provided that performance of education providers is monitored by HMPPS at several levels with regular local, contractual lot and national review arrangements in place to ensure requirements are being met. This enables any issues to be identified and addressed at an early stage, with agreed actions monitored to support improvement. Where performance concerns persist, contractual remedies and escalation measures can be applied in accordance with the contract. Recruitment of the education vacancies at HMP Leyhill has now completed and start dates will be confirmed locally in due course on completion of security vetting.