



Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

Chair: Lynn Emslie
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Michelle Jarman-Howe
Director General Operations
HMPPS

6 January 2026

Dear Michelle,

I am writing to you about the marked increase in homicides across the prison estate. Amid the capacity pressures of the last few years, I believe there is a real risk that, without a concerted strategy, this number will continue to increase. I would be grateful to know what measures are being taken to both understand and address these disturbing developments.

The latest safety in custody [statistics](#) released by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) reveal that the number of homicides across the estate this year has increased to 6, around double what has been the usual number of 0-3 in recent years. I welcome assurances that HMPPS gave at the last meeting of the Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody in November that this increase is being carefully monitored to identify whether it is a long-term trend.

As HMPPS's statistics show, the rate of assaults continues to increase each year. The most recent annual report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMCIIP) noted that "[p]risoners were not safe enough in 17 of the 38 prisons we inspected", with 20% of adult men reporting to an HMIP survey that they felt unsafe with the figure rising to 30% in the high security estate. I am keen to understand what is being done locally and nationally to understand and address these challenges and target areas of the greatest risk to reduce deaths in custody. I am particularly interested to know if near-death investigations are being instigated following the most serious incidents and to see all available data on the number of such investigations in recent years.

Further, there have been recent homicides of Vulnerable Prisoners (VPs), such as two in HMP Wakefield where an HMIP inspection report prior to the incidents [highlighted](#) a 72% increase in serious assaults. The report referenced safety concerns among older sex offenders "who increasingly shared the prison with a growing cohort of younger prisoner". There have been cases where such prisoners have completed suicide apparently as a result of fear of assault, such as [Daniel Binfield in HMP Lowdham Grange](#). In a Prevention of Future Death report, the coroner noted as an issue in his death the management of his transfer between establishments, with HMP Lowdham Grange not having specific provision for VPs.

I understand that not all prisons have dedicated units for VPs, with governors having the discretion to place such prisoners in quieter wings or in Care and Separation Units (CSU)

instead. Governors are no doubt doing their best to fulfil a wide range of obligations in a highly strained system and there may be considerations for or against the use of VP units in individual cases. However, my Panel are concerned that without a concerted strategy to manage these decisions, capacity pressures may be leaving governors with invidious choices around housing those at risk.

I welcome that the number of homicides is still very low overall, especially in comparison to other kinds of deaths within the prison estate. However, with the highest number of such deaths in some years, I am keen to understand more of what HMPPS is doing to analyse patterns to inform a preventative strategy and address some of these serious issues.

I am happy to meet to discuss any aspect of this letter, prior to the end of my tenure in February 2026, and I look forward to your response.

As ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Emslie". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Lynn Emslie, Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

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