



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Askham Grange
Askham Grange
York
YO23 3FT

MoJ ref: SUB125642

10 July 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI ASKHAM GRANGE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 JULY 2023 – 30 JUNE 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Askham Grange, which I have read with care and attention. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work, particularly as you were short of members during the reporting period.

In terms of an update on the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan (FOSDP), which covered the period from 2022 to 2025, between June 2021 (pre-publication of FOSDP) and June 2024, there was, unfortunately, an increase in short custodial sentences. Sentences of less than 12 months rose by 36%, from 2,979 in June 2021 to 4,060 in June 2024. Similarly, sentences of 6 months or less increased by 40%, rising from 2,752 to 3,849 over the same period. I would like to reassure the Board that this Government remains committed to minimising short sentences and reducing the number of women in custody by managing more women within the community.

To support delivery of this, I have been closely involved in the establishment of the Women's Justice Board (WJB), comprising external experts to oversee improved outcomes for female offenders and a new set of deliverables. The WJB met for the first time under my chairmanship on 21 January. The WJB will initially focus on: work to intervene earlier and divert women away from the criminal justice system where appropriate; community solutions to increase the use of robust community sentences and support resettlement from custody; addressing issues specific to pregnant women and mothers with young children across the CJS, including those in prison; and reducing the number of young adult women entering the CJS and improving outcomes for them across their journey.

The recent Independent Review of Sentencing recognised the need for a particular focus on women given currently around two thirds of female offenders receive short sentences. Its recommendation on reducing short, deferred and suspended sentences will reduce the number of women in prison.

I acknowledge the Board's concerns regarding the relatively low number of prisoners at HMP HMP/YOI Askham Grange. However, I am assured that over the past year, efforts have been made to actively promote the wide range of opportunities available within the establishment. These efforts have included visits to other prisons, increased use of a promotional video, and participation in relevant forums. More broadly, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Women's Group continues to review categorisation levels across all female prisons, ensuring appropriate challenge where categorisation rates are low. Additionally, HMPPS published a revised Security Categorisation Policy Framework in April 2025

to include women's prisons and to reflect changes in eligibility for open conditions, with the new approach being rolled out in the women's estate. As part of this update, the women's estate will also have access to the Digital Categorisation System, which is designed to simplify and expedite the recategorisation process.

I was pleased to read your observations that HMP/YOI Askham Grange continues to be a safe environment for both prisoners and staff, with no significant incidents of self-harm, violence, or use of force during the reporting period. It was encouraging to learn about the positive educational and vocational initiatives at the establishment and that the average improvements in Mathematics and English exceeded initial targets. Additionally, I was heartened reading about residents' artwork being showcased in the 'We Roar' exhibition and the inspirational impact it had on prisoners.

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 continue to appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we would like to reiterate our thanks for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Askham Grange.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James', written in a cursive style.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation, and Reducing Reoffending

HMP/YOI ASKHAM GRANGE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2023 – 30 JUNE 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Promotion of Open Conditions

HMPPS acknowledges the Board's observations regarding HMP/YOI Askham Grange being below capacity and would like to offer reassurance that all women prisoners who have been granted open conditions are routinely invited to consider transferring to HMP/YOI Askham Grange as well as to our other open site, HMP/YOI East Sutton Park. However, this option is frequently declined due to the significant distances these establishments are from their home areas, which can create barriers to maintaining vital family ties. Another key factor influencing these decisions is that once categorised for open conditions, women, unlike male prisoners, do not need to be held in an open prison to be eligible for Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL). As a result, many choose to remain in their local prisons, where they can still access ROTL whilst staying closer to their families and support networks.

Sexual and Domestic Violence Support Services

The Board's concerns regarding sexual and domestic violence support services are noted. Currently, HMP/YOI Askham Grange is partnered with two local providers; however, these services are under significant demand. To address this, additional funding is being pursued to expand the Domestic Abuse Link Worker provision at HMP/YOI Askham Grange. This should enable women greater access to community based sexual and domestic violence support.