



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Durham
Old Elvet
Durham
DH1 3HU

July 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP DURHAM: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 NOVEMBER 2023 – 31 OCTOBER 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Durham. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your dedication and hard work in capturing your helpful observations, particularly as you continued to regularly monitor, and remarkably increase your visits to the prison, despite operating with a depleted Board and ending the reporting year with fewer members than at the start. I hope this situation improves during the current reporting period.

I was very saddened to read there were four deaths in custody during the reporting year, three of which I understand were apparently self-inflicted. Every death in our care is a tragedy and I offer my heartfelt condolences to the friends and family of all the deceased. I would like to reassure the Board that any recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) are taken very seriously.

It is regrettable that overcrowding continues to be a concern. This is not a simple issue and that is why on 12 July 2024, the Lord Chancellor announced a package of measures aimed at addressing prison capacity issues and preventing the collapse of the criminal justice system. Further, on 11 December 2024, we set out our long-term plan for prison capacity through the publication of the 10-year Prison Capacity Strategy. This sets out our plans to deliver 14,000 new prison places and create a resilient prison estate that includes the construction of four new prisons as well as expansion and refurbishment of the existing prison estate. Whilst this does not address the immediate crowding and cell sharing issues at HMP Durham, the strategy underlines our commitment to improving the overall estate and future direction.

As mentioned in last year's response, the Community Accommodation Services (CAS) Tier 2 service provides short-term accommodation for individuals on bail or Home Detention Curfew. The CAS Tier 2 provision in the North East region is at 88 bed spaces, with a further four bed spaces planned to be opened in 2025. There are currently no further expansion plans in the North East for 2025/2026. However, 55 of the 88 bed spaces were opened in 2024/25, which represents a 167% increase in North East CAS Tier 2 provision in the last twelve months. In neighbouring Cumbria, eight new CAS Tier 2 bed spaces were opened in March 2025 (previously there was no CAS Tier 2 provision in Cumbria). There are currently 110 beds overall in the North West CAS Tier 2 provision and will continue to expand into 2025/2026 by a further ten bed spaces.

CAS Tier 3 supports prison leavers who are at risk of being released from prison homeless and will be subject to probation supervision upon release. As the Board will be aware, the CAS Tier 3 contract in the North East Probation region is for 124 bed spaces. These are dispersed across the region and the

contract ensures that 50% of these are for sole occupancy. Individuals will be offered up to twelve weeks of basic, temporary accommodation to provide a stable base on release. Cumbria's CAS Tier 3 contract is for 285 bedspaces. There are currently thirty CAS Tier 3 beds provided within the Cumbria area of the North West region, which is proportionate to the remaining area. There are not currently any plans to further expand the CAS Tier 3 provision in these regions during 2025/2026.

Whilst recognising that you have a number of ongoing concerns, I was encouraged to receive your comments about the good relationships between prisoners and staff that was also evidenced by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. I also read with great interest the work of the employment hub, particularly the links with external employers, as I know that supporting prisoners into employment on release can have a transformative impact. I would also like to recognise and commend the mental health team for their nominations for the Pride Award and the Nursing Times Best Team Award. I welcome the good work of the Reconnect Hub, which provides immediate and ongoing support to ex-prisoners.

Local issues of concern raised in your report will be addressed by the Governor who will keep you aware of progress 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 sincerely appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are extremely grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Durham.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

Annex

**HMP DURHAM: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Accessible Cells

HMPPS is investing £2.3 billion in prison buildings for the financial years 2024/2025 and 2025/2026, and £500 million over two years in prison and probation service maintenance to improve conditions across the estate. The aims and intentions of the 20,000 prison place programmes are to build a modern, efficient prison estate that is safe and productive to live and work in. This involves improving the physical design and structures of the sites to encompass the safety of all individuals.

In new prisons such as HMPs Five Wells, Fosse Way and Millsike, and in the expansion projects that use the new houseblock design, HMPPS has catered for a growing number of elderly and/or disabled prisoners by providing a larger number of accessible cells including low mobility cells, wheelchair accessible cells, and medical cells for a range of accessibility needs associated with older prisoners. Amenities have been designed to ensure that there is equality of access for all prisoners through their locations on ground floor levels, ensuring lifts are available and by building technology infrastructures that enable the use of hearing loops and other technology that can support access and care for elderly prisoners. Specific activity spaces will be provided that would enable older prisoners to engage in age-

appropriate activities, and décor designed to aid a person's wayfinding and accounts for needs around dementia and other cognitive impairments prevalent within the older prisoner cohort.

Boilers

Boiler replacements in A, B, C, D, and E wings were completed in April 2025. A bid has also been submitted for replacement boilers in the gymnasium and workshops and is currently awaiting confirmation of funding approval for the current financial year. The Board will appreciate there are budgetary pressures and whilst all requests from the establishment will be considered, demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding. Therefore, once a bid for a project is received, HMPPS must prioritise works very carefully to make best use of that funding, focusing on risk to life and risk to capacity and decency.

Cluster Death Site

HMPPS provides individualised support through the case management process for people assessed as at risk of suicide and self-harm. This approach places a strong emphasis on identifying individual risks, triggers and protective factors and having effective care plans in place to record, address and mitigate risks. All new members of staff with prisoner contact receive training on suicide and self-harm prevention. All staff who undertake key roles relating to risk assessment and case management also receive specific training relating to these roles. HMPPS has created a quality assurance tool to help establishments understand how effectively they are using the case management process to support those at risk of self-harm or suicide. We continue to work with Samaritans to provide support in the period following a self-inflicted death to reduce the risk of further deaths and for the delivery of the Listener scheme, through which selected prisoners are trained to provide emotional support to their fellow prisoners. During 2023 Samaritans volunteers and Listeners offered emotional support to 2,675 prisoners and 55 staff following 43 incidents of self-inflicted deaths.

Locally at HMP Durham, all PPO recommendations following a death in custody during the reporting year due to natural causes have been completed with assurance of compliance provided via the Prison Group Director safety team. No recommendations were made by the PPO following the self-inflicted deaths. Significant changes have been implemented at the prison to improve safety outcomes and prevent further deaths in custody. Reception opening hours have been extended to 22:00hrs, which is matched by the health providers. This has contributed to a significant decrease month on month in the number of prisoners not receiving a first night health screen. Figures for March 2025 show that only 2.6% of arrivals did not receive a health screen (2.1% excluding those refusing to undergo a screening). Assurance has been introduced on the completion of enhanced first night welfare checks, and the recent reprofiling exercise has increased the night staffing complement to bolster early days work. The Local Safety Strategy was launched in January 2025, aligned with the National Safety Strategy, which sets out strategic actions to support reductions in self-harm, violence and debt.

An Early Days in Custody working group, chaired by the Deputy Governor, now drives and monitors progress across all elements of the first night and induction. This includes changes to reception processes to reduce the time prisoners spend there before locating to the First Night Centre; ensuring all Spectrum staff have access to the digital personal escort records and Suicide and Self-Harm (SASH) warning forms; Samaritans trained Listeners being available on first night in custody; putting in place a comprehensive second-day induction, and improvements to quality around defensible decisions made for prisoners arriving with SASH warning forms where an Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) document is not opened. A quality assurance process for ACCT documents has been implemented in line with national expectations and standards, enabling feedback and learning for case coordinators.