



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Garth
Ulnes Walton Lane
Leyland
PR26 8NE

September 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP GARTH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 DECEMBER 2023 TO 30 NOVEMBER 2024**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMP Garth, which I have read with care. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for the hard work that has been put into capturing your helpful observations, particularly as you have been operating with just over half of your recommended complement. I appreciated talking to Board members during my visit last month and trust you found it equally beneficial.

I was saddened to hear that five prisoners died during the reporting year. I offer my condolences to all their friends and family and would like to reassure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously. It is encouraging to note that at HMP Garth a Family Liaison Officer acts as a consistent point of contact for the bereaved, offering dedicated support from the initial notification of the death through to the conclusion of the Coroner's inquest.

I recognise the Board's concerns regarding the recruitment processes and the importance of these meeting operational needs. The Ministry of Justice continuously reviews its approach to recruitment to ensure prison officers are best suited to their role. There are now strengthened vetting procedures to root out applicants who fall below our high standards. Work is ongoing to re-design the assessments and these changes are being phased in during 2025/26. This includes ensuring our assessment tools, wherever possible, provide a realistic job preview and remove unsuitable applicants at the earliest stage to allow only the most suitable applicants to progress to the latter stages.

There was an interesting, localised recruitment initiative in August 2022 at HMP Berwyn to test if increased local autonomy delivers better quality candidates and improved retention rates. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) have taken learning from this local recruitment pilot and are using it to inform how establishments can be further involved in the process of selecting prison officers. I am aware that the Governor at HMP Garth is currently offering a local visit to all potential new prison officers and more involvement in recruitment is something he would support.

I am very mindful of the specific challenges faced by both those serving Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection (IPP) and their families. This is an issue I feel passionately about. The Government is not standing still on this important matter and we are determined to make further progress to support those serving the IPP sentence towards a safe and sustainable release, but not in a way that compromises public protection. The Government is determined to support the rehabilitation of IPP offenders through a refreshed IPP Action Plan, which can be found in the HMPPS Annual Report ([HMPPS annual report on the IPP sentence 2024 to 25 - GOV.UK](#)), which we published on 17 July 2025. The report signals a continued commitment to reform, with a focus on reducing the IPP population, improving fairness and consistency in decision-making, and supporting rehabilitation and reintegration. The Action Plan includes measurable targets to ensure transparency and accountability and puts an important emphasis on effective frontline delivery in our prisons and probation services, to ensure that those serving IPP sentences have robust and effective sentence plans, with which they are actively engaging, in a prison most appropriate for their needs. The traffic light system in place helps to identify individuals who may be suitable for re-release or require further intervention.

HMPPS has also enhanced quality checks on recall decisions to ensure that recalls are proportionate and that re-release occurs as soon as it is safe to do so. In 2024, 602 recalled IPP prisoners were released which was the highest number recorded in a single year reflecting our shift toward more proactive case management and risk assessment.

Regarding the living conditions at HMP Garth, as reported by to HM Inspectorate of Prison (HMIP) in its report published In November 2024, I am pleased that in its follow up Independent Review of Progress undertaken in May this year, HM Inspectorate considered reasonable progress had been made in response to its recommendations. I can confirm that substantial repairs to the leaking roof on the secure corridors and in the visits hall have been completed and these have vastly improved conditions. There is an ongoing in-house programme of shower refurbishment and a local initiative to repair window vents is being implemented.

I understand the Board's frustration regarding the limited progress in securing major infrastructure investment at HMP Garth, which HMIP has identified as necessary. Although the Governor has submitted bids to advance these projects, HMPPS must assess investment needs across the wider prison estate. Whilst all establishment requests are considered, as you will be aware, current maintenance demands exceed available funding. Once a bid is received, HMPPS must therefore prioritise works carefully to ensure the most effective use of resources, focusing on projects that address risks to life, capacity, and decency.

It was encouraging to receive your comments about the mutual respect between prisoners and the staff and volunteers at HMP Garth. I noted this first hand when I recently visited the prisons. I was particularly encouraged to read about the good work that is being done by staff to welcome new prisoners on arrival, with the men reporting to the Board that they were treated well on reception and through the induction processes. The early days in custody are crucially important and it is a credit to the team at HMP Garth, that they have maintained these standards despite the added pressures you have reported as a result of the increase in movement of men both to and from the prison over the last year.

I note you have raised two 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 appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Garth.

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 GARTH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 DECEMBER 2023 TO 30 NOVEMBER 2024

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Investment and support to address problems of safety

Reducing violence in prisons is a key priority for HMPPS and a range of measures are being implemented to support this. This year has seen a £40 million investment in physical security across 34 prisons, which includes anti-drone measures such as window replacements, external window grilles and netting across 15 priority prisons. Whilst all counter drone tactics cannot be disclosed, an anti-drone solution is being trialled in the Long Term and High Security Estate (LTHSE) to further tackle drone incursions. Lancashire police drone team have visited HMP Garth and established improved reporting mechanisms and the security team held a drone awareness meeting with local residents which has proved fruitful.

Targeted support is being provided to a number of prisons, including HMP Garth, to improve safety, security and substance misuse processes. All Category B LTHSE sites have been given a bonus payment scheme to increase staff supervision during key times and at hot spots for violence. At HMP Garth these initiatives have enabled additional capacity and improved delivery during activity movements and on the four main residential wings. A Tier 3 search by the Dedicated Search Teams targeting several wings was undertaken in June 2025 resulting in the removal of around 100 homemade weapons. HMP Garth has also recruited a safety analyst to ensure a more data driven proactive approach to managing safety and a Crime in Prisons Coordinator to manage referrals of incidents involving violence to the police.

HMPPS are aware of the correlation between greater levels of staff experience and lower rates of assault. HMP Garth have taken several proactive steps to address the issue of inexperience among its staff. An additional monthly training day has been allocated to focus specifically on upskilling and building confidence, ensuring regular opportunities for development. For newer staff, HMP Garth have extended the local induction period from one to two weeks upon return from the college based Prison Officer Entry Level Training. This is providing essential time to acclimatise to the establishment and identify any immediate training needs. A buddy system is also being embedded, enabling new prison officers to work alongside more experienced colleagues on the same shifts. This peer support fosters on-the-job learning and confidence-building. The prison is also engaging with the national Enable team to further develop newer staff in key areas such as wellbeing and procedural justice.

Recruitment and Retention

At HMP Garth, staff retention is currently just above the national average (9%). Since February 2025, the establishment has maintained a healthier staffing level, supported by a sustained reduction in resignation rates. This marks a positive shift in its recruitment and retention efforts. The current position of staff in post versus the target staffing figure has significantly improved since the IMB reporting period and numbers in the pipeline remain positive. All new staff are given a two week induction period when they return from training as opposed to the mandated one week and our other measures to support staff in building experience and resilience, as discussed above, should have a positive impact on staff attrition rates. Exit interviews are conducted by the Governor and the Human Resources Business Partner with staff who resign, and any issues within their remit are actively addressed.