



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Jake Richards MP
Parliamentary Under-
Secretary of State for
Justice

The Rt Hon. the Lord Foster of Bath
Chair of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0AA

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7 July 2026

Dear Lord Foster,

PUBLICATION OF HMI PRISONS ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26

We are writing to inform you that Charlie Taylor, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, is today publishing the HMIP Annual Report 2025-26. We are grateful for the important independent scrutiny HMIP provides across the custodial estate.

The report identifies serious concerns across a number of areas, including safety, purposeful activity, living conditions and overcrowding, and health care. The Government recognises the concerns raised and is taking action to address them. However, we are pleased that it highlights some positive developments, including work to embed reading and literacy in prisons, the expansion of some drug-harm reduction measures, and examples of strong rehabilitative culture and leadership in some prisons. It is also encouraging that recent inspection outcomes show signs of improvement in a number of establishments during the period covered by this report. Furthermore, the quarterly safety statistics, published in April, indicate reductions in self-harm and staff assaults in the 12 months to December 2025, and a decrease in self-inflicted deaths in the 12 months to March 2026, pointing to positive momentum in safety and outcomes across prisons.

The report notes the four Urgent Notifications issued during this reporting year. We have acted swiftly at all establishments subject to an Urgent Notification, with action plans published within 28 days and senior HMPPS leaders, working directly with governors to drive improvement. We are pleased to note some early progress at HMP Pentonville, Oakhill STC and HMP Swaleside.

The report raises a number of concerns regarding safety and security, including illicit drugs. We are continuing to tackle both supply and demand, including strengthened local approaches to tackling drugs, investment in physical security and counter-drone measures, and continued work with health partners to support treatment and recovery. This includes the expansion of Incentivised Substance Free Living units, which are associated with reduced violence and self-harm. We are also undertaking action to strengthen violence reduction, improve support for prisoners at risk of violence or self-harm, and build staff capability to prevent and respond to these risks.

The report also highlights the impact of population pressures on progression, living conditions, and regime delivery. We recognise these pressures and are taking action to put the prison population on a more sustainable footing through a combination of capacity expansion and sentencing reform. This includes delivering 14,000 additional prison places by 2031, supported by £4.7 billion of investment, and opening more than 3,000 places since taking office. Alongside this, reforms through the Sentencing Act are expected to reduce the prison population by around 7,500 by February 2028, while maintaining public protection and improving outcomes for victims.

We also recognise concerns raised in the report regarding time out of cell, access to education, skills and work, and the consistency of offender management and release planning. We are working to improve regime delivery, improve access to meaningful activity, and ensure that prisoners are better prepared for release. This includes the Working Week Project, greater use of digital learning, and a continued focus on reading as a key priority.

The report also raises important concerns about access to healthcare and mental health support, including delays in transferring vulnerable prisoners to secure hospital. We are working closely with our health partners to improve access to timely treatment, including through reforms in the Mental Health Act 2025, and to strengthen healthcare delivery more broadly across the estate. We also recognise the growing and increasingly complex needs of an ageing prison population and are developing an Older Prisoners Strategy to address these challenges.

We acknowledge the concerns about weak multi-agency coordination in court custody, poor conditions in some facilities, delays, and inconsistent care and release planning for detainees. We are working with partners to improve conditions and outcomes in court custody.

The Youth Custody Service is addressing concerns raised in the report about the youth estate through action to improve access to education and time out of room, and support safer, more stable environments for children in custody. This includes action to reduce violence, enable safer mixing so that more children can access fuller and more purposeful learning and enrichment opportunities, and strengthen resettlement and transition arrangements so that children are better prepared for release or transfer.

This month we launched the Independent Review of the Prison System, chaired by Amber Rudd. The Review will provide the evidence base and options to support long term decision making and investment that will improve the resilience, performance and effectiveness of prisons.

We have written separately to HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, setting out the Government's full response to the issues raised.

We hope this provides assurance that we take the concerns raised by HM Inspectorate of Prisons very seriously and that the Department is continuing to take action to improve outcomes for prisoners across the custodial estate.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and
Reducing Reoffending



Jake Richards, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
Sentencing, Youth Justice, and
International