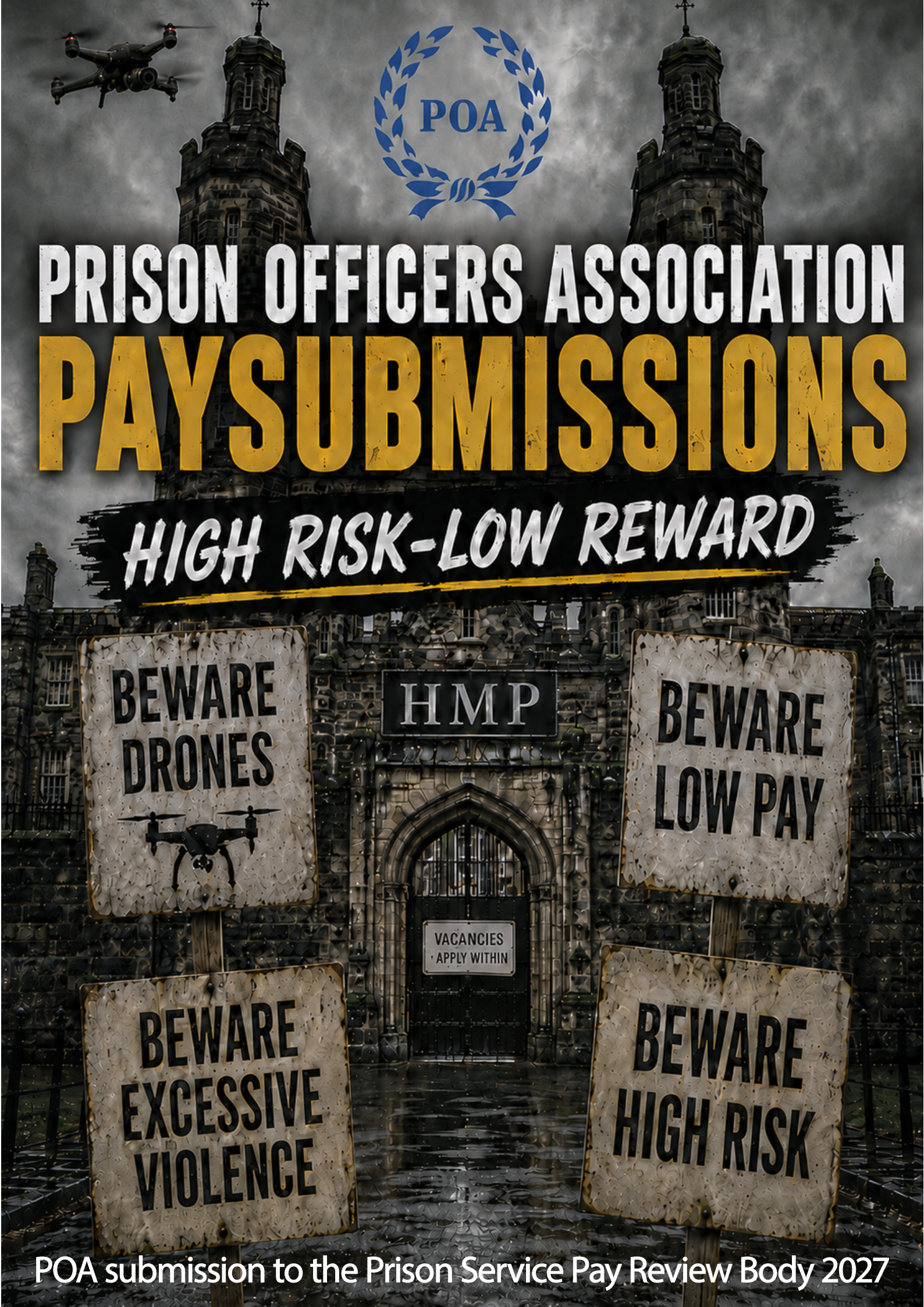
POA
PRISON OFFICERS ASSOCIATION
PAYSUBMISSIONS
HIGH RISK-LOW REWARD
BEWARE DRONES
HMP
BEWARE LOW PAY
VACANCIES APPLY WITHIN
BEWARE EXCESSIVE VIOLENCE
BEWARE HIGH RISK
POA submission to the Prison Service Pay Review Body 2027

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Executive Summary

This submission asks the Prison Service Pay Review Body to recognise the reality of modern prison work and to make recommendations that properly value the operational grades who keep prisons safe, secure and functioning. The POA's central proposal is for a 6% consolidated and pensionable pay award for all operational Bands 2–5 staff, supported by targeted measures to recognise risk, restore pay, improve retention and sustain safe staffing.

The case for a restorative award cannot be separated from the levels of violence, risk and unsafe working conditions experienced by POA members. Prisons remain among the most violent workplaces in the public sector. Staff face assaults, weapons, intimidation, psychoactive substances, serious disorder, self-harm, suicide attempts and medical emergencies as part of their daily duties. Recent data cited in this submission show thousands of assaults on staff each year, including serious assaults, alongside incidents that demonstrate the life-threatening nature of the role.

Safety is therefore not an abstract issue. It is directly linked to pay, staffing, retention, experience and working conditions. When prisons operate with insufficient staff, reduced resilience, excessive reliance on overtime, detached duty and inexperienced workforces, the risk to staff and prisoners increases. The POA's evidence shows that staff do not believe current staffing levels are sufficient to supervise prisoners safely, and that many members feel the prisoner regime is prioritised above staff safety.

Working conditions across the prison estate remain demanding and, in many areas, unsustainable. Operational staff work nights, weekends, public holidays, early starts and late finishes while managing overcrowding, violence, trauma, poor facilities, fatigue and disruption to family life. Too many staff rely on Payment Plus, overtime or additional duties simply to maintain income, while the Service relies on those same additional hours to mask structural staffing pressures. This is not a sustainable workforce model.

The POA submits that pay must properly reflect the risks and responsibilities of frontline prison work. The proposed Supplementary Risk Allowance would recognise the exceptional occupational risk borne by operational staff, including risks that extend beyond the prison gate into members' private lives. The submission also asks for the Band 2 Unsocial Working Hours payment to be made permanent and increased from 25% to 30%, and for the Bands 3–5 payment to be increased from 20% to 25% initially while those arrangements are reviewed against contemporary operational working patterns, night duties and safety responsibilities.

Retention remains fragile. Although some headline leaving rates have improved, HMPPS still has fewer Bands 3–5 Prison Officers than a year earlier and continues to rely heavily on a workforce with limited service. A shrinking-experienced workforce weakens mentoring, confidence, security, consistency and operational resilience. Pay restoration is therefore not simply a reward issue, it is a safety, recruitment and retention measure.

The submission further argues that detached duty should not become a permanent substitute for properly funded establishment staffing, that Prison Officers should not be expected to remain fully operational until the age of 68, that allowances should be subject to regular review and that specialist roles, including dog handlers, should receive fair recognition for duties and responsibilities that extend beyond ordinary hours of work.

The POA therefore asks the PSPRB to recommend:

- a 6% consolidated and pensionable pay award for operational Bands 2–5 staff;
- a Supplementary Risk Allowance of £4,000 for operational Bands 3–5 staff and £2,000 for Band 2 OSGs;
- the Band 2 Unsocial Working Hours payment to be made permanent and increased from 25% to 30%, with no reduction unless robust evidence demonstrates a material and sustained reduction in actual unsocial working, and the Bands 3–5 payment to be increased from 20% to 25% initially while the arrangements are reviewed against contemporary operational working patterns, night duties and safety responsibilities;
- full recognition of violence, safety risk, trauma, fatigue and deteriorating working conditions in the overall rewards package; and
- urgent action on safe staffing, retention, detached duty, retirement age and the regular review of allowances.

The POA believes these recommendations are necessary to recruit, retain and respect the professionals who maintain order, safety and security in prisons every day. A meaningful award must recognise not only the cost of living but also the violence, responsibility, unsocial working, personal risk and deteriorating conditions carried by frontline prison staff.

Glossary of Terms

ACH: Additional Committed Hours
ACHP: Pensionable Additional Committed Hours
ACCT: Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork
AED: Area Executive Director
ASHE: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
AWDL: Average Working Days Lost
Covid-19: Coronavirus
CPI: Consumer Prices Index
CPO: Custody Prison Officer (Northern Ireland)
ECSL: End of Custody Supervised Licence
EEI: Employee Engagement Index
FTE: Full-time equivalent
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
HMIP: His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
HMP: His Majesty's Prison
HMPPS: His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (or the Prison Service)
HMPS: His Majesty's Prison Service
HMT: His Majesty's Treasury
HMYOI: His Majesty's Young Offenders Institution
IDR: Incomes Data Research
ILO: International Labour Organization
LPA: Locality Pay Allowance
MoJ: Ministry of Justice
NDTSG: National Dog and Technical Support Group
NHS: National Health Service
NLW: National Living Wage
NTRG: National Tactical Response Group
OBR: Office for Budget Responsibility
OME: Office of Manpower Economics
ONS: Office for National Statistics
ORRU: Operational Response and Resilience Unit
OSG: Operational Support Grade
PCS: Public and Commercial Services Union
PEI: Physical Education Instructor
PGA: Prison Governors' Association
POA: The Professional Trade Union for Prison, Correctional and Public and Private Mental Health Trust Service Providers and Immigration Services.
PSPRB: Prison Service Pay Review Body
RHA: Required Hours Addition/Allowance
SANEO: Shaping a New Employee Offer
SPS: Scottish Prison Service
SRA: Supplementary Risk Allowance (Northern Ireland & proposed for England and Wales)
TOIL: Time off in lieu
TUPE: Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006
UWH: Unsocial Working Hours allowance
YCS: Youth Custody Service
YOI: Young Offender Institution

Foreword

The POA again reminds the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) that the review body process is intended to provide a compensatory mechanism for Prison Officer grades who do not have the right to take industrial action. Our members cannot lawfully withdraw their labour to exert pressure over pay or conditions. That restriction places an exceptional responsibility on the PSPRB to act independently, fairly and on the evidence.

The POA therefore remains firmly opposed to Government interference in the PSPRB process. A review body cannot command confidence if its recommendations are constrained by restrictive remit letters, predetermined affordability limits or Treasury guidance that places departmental budgets ahead of fair reward. The previous Prisons Minister's remit letter was deeply disappointing because it implied that improvements for prison staff must be funded from existing budgets and balanced against prison capacity and sentencing reforms. Prison Officers should not be expected to fund the repair of a system weakened by years of underinvestment and pay restraint.

Last year's award did not command the confidence of POA members, and it did not restore the value of pay lost through pay freezes, caps, below-inflation settlements and non-consolidated awards. Members regarded the additional £1 per hour on Payment Plus as wholly inadequate. Payment Plus is not consolidated or guaranteed income; it requires staff to surrender rest days and family time to support a service already structurally dependent on overtime. Increasing Payment Plus is no substitute for a meaningful increase in basic pensionable pay.

The operational evidence is stark. Prisons remain among the most violent workplaces in Western Europe. In the 12 months to March 2026, there were eight prison homicides and 30,820 assaults. Of these, 9,833 were assaults on staff, a rate of 27 per day, and 871 were serious assaults on staff – more than 2.3 every day. Self-harm and suicide continue to impose a profound emotional and psychological burden. Recent incidents, including life-threatening attacks at HMP Frankland, HMP Woodhill and HMP Long Lartin, demonstrate the reality behind the statistics. Prison Officers routinely face violence, weapons, intimidation and trauma while maintaining order in an overcrowded system operating at more than 97% of usable capacity.

Pay and conditions no longer reflect these dangers, responsibilities and personal sacrifices. Many experienced staff are considering leaving for work that carries less risk and places fewer demands on their physical health, mental wellbeing and family lives. As of June 2026, only 24.9% of Bands 3–5 Prison Officers had 10 or more years' service, while 30.2% had less than three years' service. The Bands 3–5 workforce fell by 701 FTE in the year to June 2026, whilst Band 2 Operational Support Grade numbers increased by a meagre 242 FTE. This represents an erosion of experience, institutional knowledge and frontline capability – not a healthy workforce transition.

Although the overall number of Bands 3–5 leavers fell in the year to June 2026, the composition of those departures remains troubling. Of those who left, 62.3% resigned, 23% were dismissed and 8.5% retired. The proportion leaving through dismissal or retirement increased. A slower rate of departure must not be mistaken for recovery when the frontline workforce is shrinking and the Service continues to lose experienced staff. Recruitment activity cannot compensate indefinitely for the loss of operational knowledge, mentoring capacity and professional confidence created by persistent churn.

The progression route from Band 2 to Band 3 is also weakening. Band 2 members increasingly tell us that the financial benefit of becoming a Prison Officer does not justify the additional responsibility, violence and pressure. Unless the pay structure properly recognises that step, HMPPS will struggle both to retain experienced Band 3 officers and to persuade capable Band 2 staff to progress.

The expectation that Prison Officers may remain operational until the age of 68 – and potentially 70 due to State Pension Age planned rises – further undermines the idea of a sustainable lifelong career. Staff are expected to respond to alarms, use control and restraint, intervene in violence and manage emergencies throughout their working lives. Police officers, firefighters and members of the Armed Forces have pension arrangements recognising the physical demands of their occupations. Prison Officers perform an equally vital uniformed frontline role and should receive comparable recognition. A pension age that ignores operational capability damages morale today and deters long-term commitment among new recruits.

Detached duty provides further evidence that recruitment and retention problems remain unresolved. A short-term contingency has become an embedded workforce mechanism, relied on since 2013 to support establishments unable to maintain sufficient permanent staffing. Compulsory detached duty disrupts family life, damages morale and transfers pressure from one prison to another. Staff should not be treated as a mobile reserve used to conceal systemic shortages. If HMPPS claims that recruitment and retention are recovering, the PSPRB should ask why reliance on detached duty continues and why officers are again being compelled to work away from home.

The POA also renews its call for a Supplementary Risk Allowance. The risk attached to prison work does not always end at the gate. Officers have had vehicles attacked, received threats and intimidation, been followed home and been targeted while with their families. The murder of former Prison Officer Lenny Scott by a former prisoner is a tragic reminder that vulnerability can persist long after direct professional contact has ended. A properly designed allowance would formally recognise this exceptional and enduring occupational risk.

A substantial consolidated and pensionable award is essential. Too many staff rely on Payment Plus or overtime simply to maintain a reasonable standard of living. A safe Prison Service cannot be built on employees having to sell increasing numbers of rest days because basic salary is inadequate. Pay must make a long-term prison career financially worthwhile and must begin to repair the accumulated real-terms losses of previous years.

This is also an issue of resilience. Excessive reliance on additional hours increases fatigue and reduces the recovery time available between demanding shifts. It can keep an understaffed regime operating temporarily, but it does not create the stable, experienced workforce needed for safe and consistent delivery. Consolidated pay supports recruitment, retention and pension security. Overtime should remain genuinely voluntary and should not function as a permanent substitute for properly funded staffing levels.

Unsocial hours working must also be rewarded properly. The POA remains willing to work with HMPPS on a sustainable solution, but any arrangement must recognise the permanent disruption caused by nights, weekends, public holidays, early starts and late finishes. It must also protect safe staffing. Previous benchmarking reduced night resources and transferred work between grades to save money, despite warnings that some establishments lacked enough staff to respond safely to fires, medical emergencies or serious incidents.

Modernisation cannot be delivered at zero cost or by removing frontline resources from prisons that are currently functioning. The POA's engagement with the Workforce Delivery Model has not removed our concern that it may redistribute resources rather than address the real requirement. Key-work, introduced to strengthen relationships, reduce violence and self-harm and support rehabilitation, should not be weakened merely to increase nominal staffing availability. Nor should higher assumptions for non-effective staffing be imposed without separate and adequate funding. Unfunded pressure reduces annual-leave opportunities, damages resilience and drives further departures.

There is already an agreed Regime Management Plan framework for managing genuine staffing shortages safely. Its principle is straightforward: properly profiled staff should deliver properly profiled work, and regimes should be adjusted according to the staff actually available and the risks present. Safe staffing must be determined by hazards, operational requirements and local controls – not by financial pressure or staff-to-prisoner ratios alone.

The evidence before the PSPRB is therefore clear. POA members continue to work in an overcrowded, violent and under-resourced system. They have endured years of pay restraint and awards that have fallen significantly short of their expectations. The POA asks the PSPRB to demonstrate its independence and recognise the true value of the remit group through a substantial consolidated award, meaningful pay restoration, a properly designed Supplementary Risk Allowance, improved reward for unsocial-hours working and full funding for safe staffing.

A review body that merely implements predetermined Government or Treasury policy cannot credibly operate as an independent compensatory mechanism for a workforce denied the fundamental right to strike. The POA urges the PSPRB to fulfil that responsibility and make recommendations capable of recruiting, retaining and respecting the professionals on whom the Prison Service depends.

The POA National Executive Committee

Section 1: POA Pay Proposals

The POA proposes a 6% consolidated increase in current salaries for all operational Bands 2–5 staff. The separate Band 3 structure uses £39,025 for new entrants and protects existing staff at no less than the £41,092 baseline. The proposed Band 5 three-point structure applies the 6% award to each current Band 5 pay point.

Proposed Pay Structure by Grade:

Band 2 (B2) – Spot Rate

Grade	Service / Eligibility	Salary After 6% Increase
B2 (Spot Rate)	All staff	£35,487

Calculation

Description	Amount
Current Salary	£33,478
6% Increase	£2,009
Revised Pensionable Salary	£35,487

Band 3 (B3) – Proposed Three-Point Pay Structure

Pay Point	Service / Progression Point	Proposed Salary
Pay Point 1	On appointment	£39,025
Pay Point 2	After 12 months	£41,772
Pay Point 3	After 24 months	£44,520

This structure would:
- increase progression;
- deliver a meaningful incentive to remain in post; and
- ensure that foreign national staff sponsored on three-year visas can clearly demonstrate progression to salaries exceeding the current immigration threshold.

Band 4 (B4) – Current Rates

National Pay Scales – 39 Hour Week, ACHP

Grade	Service / Eligibility	Current Pensionable Salary (39 hrs inc. ACHP & 20% Unsocial Hours)
B4	All staff	£43,562

Band 4 (B4) – Proposed Pay Structure Following a 6% Consolidated Increase

Grade	Service / Eligibility	Salary After 6% Increase
B4	All staff	£46,176

Calculation

Description	Amount
Current Salary	£43,562
6% Increase	£2,614
Revised Salary	£46,176

Band 5 (B5) – Proposed Pay Structure Following a 6% Consolidated Pay Award

Pay Point	Service / Progression Point	Salary After 6% Increase
Pay Point 1	On appointment	£50,167
Pay Point 2	After 12 months	£52,644
Pay Point 3	After 24 months	£55,120

In considering these proposals, there must be an acknowledgement that market supplements are an implicit acknowledgement that base pay is insufficient to attract staff to specific locations. They create inconsistency and fragmentation within the pay system, leading to perceptions of unfairness and further complicating workforce planning. They also represent an additional financial layer that could be rationalised if the underlying issue – uncompetitive starting salaries – were addressed.

The POA's proposal offers a far more efficient and strategic alternative. The proposed progression structure provides a nationally consistent entry salary and takes Band 3 staff above the £41,700 immigration threshold after 12 months, at the second pay point of £41,772. This would help HMPPS attract recruits directly to establishments that currently struggle to fill vacancies and reduce reliance on localised market supplements.

This approach would also significantly reduce reliance on detached duty. If establishments can recruit and retain their own staff, the need to import officers from other sites diminishes. That, in turn, would lead to substantial savings in the associated costs and improve operational stability by fostering a permanent, experienced workforce within each prison.

From a financial perspective, the current model is demonstrably inefficient. Funds are being diverted into temporary, high-cost interventions rather than invested in a sustainable solution. Redirecting this expenditure into an enhanced starting salary is not an increase in overall cost pressure but a reallocation of existing resources toward a more effective outcome. It represents better value for money, with long-term savings generated through reduced turnover, lower recruitment costs and the elimination of expensive stopgap measures.

The PSPRB's reference to cost-of-living pressures further strengthens this argument, yet it stops short of linking those pressures to the operational decisions being made. If staff are struggling with the cost of living, it is unsurprising that certain locations – particularly those with higher living costs – experience acute recruitment and retention difficulties. Market supplements and detached duty are, in effect, attempts to patch over this reality. A higher baseline salary would address it directly and more equitably.

In critique, the PSPRB's position again identifies the symptoms but does not fully engage with the implications. The continued use of detached duty and market supplements should be seen not as a neutral operational choice but as evidence of a pay structure that is failing to meet workforce needs. Without addressing that core issue, these costly measures will persist.

In summary, the POA's proposal to increase starting salaries provides a practical and financially responsible solution. It would reduce unnecessary expenditure on detached duty, remove the need for fragmented market supplements and create a more stable and self-sufficient workforce across the prison estate. The current approach is reactive and costly, while the POA's proposed approach is strategic, sustainable and ultimately more economical for the taxpayer.

POA asks the PSPRB to recommend that:

- a 6% consolidated and pensionable pay award is applied to current operational Bands 2–5 salaries;
- the Band 3 and Band 5 three-point structures are introduced as separate progression reforms, with existing staff protected so that no individual receives less than the 6% headline increase; and
- the award and progression reforms are treated as part of a wider recruitment, retention and safety strategy.

A Restorative Pay Award – The Effect of Inflation on Prison Officer Pay

YEAR	INFLATION RATE	BAND 3 PAY AWARD (Closed)	F&S BAND 3 PAY AWARD	DETRIMENT Closed	DETRIMENT F&S
2011	5.2%	0% (£250 under £21k)	N/A	-5.2%	N/A
2012	3.2%	0% (£250 under £21k)	N/A	-3.2%	N/A
2013	3.0%	0% (£250 non-Consolidated)	Intro of F&S Pay scales	-3.0%	F&S begins
2014	2.4%	1%	1%	-1.4%	-1.4%
2015	1.0%	0%	1.8%	-1.0%	**+0.8%**
2016	1.8%	0% (£300 non-Consolidated)	1%	-1.8%	-0.8%
2017	3.6%	0% (£400 Consolidated)	0% (£400 Consolidated)	-3.6%	-3.6%
2018	3.3%	2.75%	2.75% (Max pay point 5.25%)	-0.55%	-0.55%
2019	2.6%	2.2%	3%	-0.4%	**+0.4%**
2020	1.5%	2.5%	2.5%	**+1.0%**	**+1.0%**
2021	4.1%	0%	0%	-4.1%	-4.1%
2022	11.6%	4%	4% (£3k increase base salary)	-7.6%	-7.6%
2023	9.7%	0%	7%	-9.7%	-2.7%
2024	3.6%	0%	5%	-3.6%	**+1.4%**
2025	4.1%	0%	4%	-4.1%	-0.1%
2026 (YTD Jan–Jul)	3.4%*	0% base pay (3.5% non-consolidated for eligible closed grades)	3.5%	-3.4%	**+0.1%**
TOTAL	**64.1% F&S 52.7% (2014 onwards)**	**12.45%**	**35.55%**	**-51.65%**	**-17.15%**

** 2026 inflation figure is YTD January–July.*

Source: https://iamkate.com/data/uk-inflation/ & ONS
Notes: For consistency, the inflation column uses the ONS Retail Prices Index (RPI) annual average rate, which is also the basis of the historical series used for 2011 to 2024.

RPI remains widely used in contractual uprating and provides a consistent comparator across the period.

The 2026 figure is provisional – it is the simple average of the published RPI 12-month rates for January to July 2026.

ONS RPI annual average (2025): 4.1%

2026 RPI 12-month rates, Jan-Jul: 3.8%, 3.6%, 4.1%, 3.0%, 3.1%, 3.0%, 3.2%

Average RPI rate for Jan-Jul 2026: 3.4% (provisional)

Sources: Office for National Statistics (RPI series CZBH) and Prison Service Pay Review Body reports.

On the table's simple percentage-sum methodology, Fair and Sustainable Band 3 pay awards from 2014 to 2026 total 35.55% compared with 52.7% of RPI inflation over the same period, giving an indicative shortfall of 17.15 percentage points.

This is a comparator rather than a precise real-pay calculation – annual percentage changes compound, and Band 3 also received targeted cash increases and progression in some years. A fully compounded calculation based only on the percentage awards shown in this table gives a real-terms gap of about 15.0%.

POA asks the PSPRB to recommend that:

- the 2027 award begins to restore the real-terms value of Prison Officer pay lost through pay restraint and below-inflation settlements;
- historical pay erosion is considered alongside current inflation, not treated as a closed issue; and
- pay restoration is recognised as necessary to maintain recruitment, retention, morale and operational safety.

Supplementary Risk Allowance (SRA)

This is the second time the POA has formally submitted a request for a Supplementary Risk Allowance (SRA) for operational frontline staff in Bands 2–5. This allowance is intended to differentiate operational staff from non-operational colleagues on the basis of the inherent and now intolerable risks they face solely by virtue of their roles within secure custodial environments.

The POA wishes to convey the depth of concern and disappointment felt by its members regarding the observations made by the PSPRB in support of its decision not to recommend the introduction of SRA. In particular, members found the comparison drawn between the risks faced by prison staff in England and Wales and those experienced by colleagues in Northern Ireland to be both inappropriate and unpersuasive. The POA does not believe that the threshold for recognising exceptional occupational risk should be determined by comparison with a jurisdiction that has experienced unique historical circumstances.

The fact that prison staff in England and Wales have suffered fewer fatal attacks does not diminish the seriousness of the risks they face. The murder of a single prison officer is one too many and the existence of a credible and continuing threat to staff should, in itself, warrant formal recognition.

The POA is also concerned by the recommendation that HMPPS should continue to "monitor" the situation. In practice, many prison staff choose not to report threats and intimidation to their employer because they have little confidence that effective action will follow. This lack of confidence has developed through experience. There is widespread concern among members that, even where serious threats are made within the workplace, decisive protective measures are not consistently taken. Prisoners who threaten staff are not always segregated or transferred to another establishment, leaving staff to continue working in an environment where the threat remains. Against this background, it is understandable that many staff have limited confidence that threats occurring outside the workplace – including harassment at home, intimidation of family members, or other off-duty incidents – will be effectively monitored or addressed.

The enclosed testimonial evidence provided by the POA demonstrates that these concerns are not theoretical. It documents numerous examples of prison staff being subjected to threats, intimidation and targeted criminality directly arising from their employment. Collectively, this evidence illustrates that the risks extend well beyond the prison perimeter and continue into employees' private lives.

A Supplementary Risk Allowance is justified because prison staff are exposed to exceptional occupational risks that extend beyond the prison environment and continue after they have finished work. Unlike many public-sector occupations, the nature of prison work means employees can remain identifiable and vulnerable to intimidation, harassment and targeted violence in their private lives because of the duties they perform. There is well-documented evidence of prison staff being subjected to serious criminal acts outside the workplace. Incidents have included officers' vehicles being firebombed both within prison staff car parks and at their private homes, incendiary devices being left on the doorsteps of officers' residences, threatening telephone calls from withheld numbers, sustained harassment and intimidation through social media, staff being followed home after duty, and officers being deliberately targeted while socialising with family and friends. These incidents demonstrate that the risks associated with prison employment are not confined to the prison estate but can extend into employees' homes, their communities and their family life.

These threats are not random criminal acts but arise directly from an individual's employment as a prison officer or operational member of staff. The potential for retaliation from prisoners, former prisoners, organised criminals and associates is a recognised occupational hazard of prison work. Consequently, the

risk cannot be fully mitigated by existing workplace health and safety measures because the threat continues beyond the employer's physical premises and outside normal working hours. Organised criminal groups operate within our prisons as well as our communities. Terrorist activity also remains a credible threat, with the current UK threat level set at severe, which includes prisons.

The murder of Prison Officer Lenny Scott provides the clearest evidence of the enduring nature of this risk. Mr Scott was murdered by a former prisoner more than four years after he had resigned as an officer. His death demonstrates that the dangers associated with prison employment can persist for many years after professional contact has ended and that Prison Officers may remain targets long after offenders have left the prison system. The cumulative impact of these risks extends beyond physical safety. Staff and their families frequently live with the knowledge that they may be identified, located or targeted because of their employment. This creates an ongoing psychological burden, affects family life, and places restrictions on where staff live, socialise and spend their personal time. Such risks are exceptional within the public sector and distinguish prison work from many other safety-critical occupations.

An SRA would therefore recognise the unique and continuing occupational risks faced by prison staff. It would acknowledge that these risks are inherent in the role, extend beyond the workplace and cannot be eliminated through conventional workplace controls alone. Recognition through a dedicated allowance would represent an appropriate response to the exceptional personal risks accepted by prison staff in the service of protecting the public

The POA respectfully submits that this evidence provides a compelling justification for the introduction of an SRA. Such an allowance would represent formal recognition of the exceptional and enduring risks accepted by prison staff in carrying out their duties on behalf of the public.

Included in these submissions on a confidential basis are testimony from serving Prison Officers about threats they have received.

They are provided on an eyes-only basis for the PSPRB and will not be published by the POA as part of their submission, and we request the same from the PSPRB.

Accordingly, the POA submits that:

- a consolidated SRA of £4,000 per annum is awarded to all operational Bands 3–5 staff; and
- a consolidated SRA of £2,000 per annum is awarded to all Band 2 OSG staff.

The differential in payment reflects the additional risks faced by Bands 3–5 staff, whose daily frontline duties place them in constant and direct engagement with prisoners on landings and wings. While OSGs face significant and rising risks, the role of Bands 3–5 staff exposes them to higher frequency, intensity and direct physical confrontation, which justifies the higher rate.

If accepted, the POA believes this approach would also make it financially viable for all closed grade officers to opt in to Fair and Sustainable.

The POA therefore contends that the introduction of an SRA, with a clear differential between Bands 2 and 3–5, is an essential and proportionate recognition of the extreme dangers frontline staff endure. The current Prison Officer recruitment campaign in Northern Ireland advertises an SRA of £4,110. The POA's proposed £4,000 allowance for operational Bands 3–5 in England and Wales is therefore slightly lower than the Northern Ireland comparator, while recognising the same principle of exceptional occupational risk.

https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/prison-service-jobs

POA asks the PSPRB to recommend that:

- a consolidated Supplementary Risk Allowance of £4,000 per annum is introduced for operational Bands 3–5;
- a consolidated Supplementary Risk Allowance of £2,000 per annum is introduced for Band 2 OSGs; and
- the allowance formally recognises violence, intimidation, off-duty risk and the continuing occupational threat faced by operational prison staff.

Cost Estimate of POA 2027 Proposals

Estimated cost of the 6% consolidated headline award, with the proposed Band 3 and Band 5 three-point pay structures shown separately, using the latest publicly available staffing data:

Grade	Staff in Post (FTE)	Current 2026 Salary	Proposed 2027 Salary / Structure	Annual Cost Increase
Pre-F&S Unified*	115.1	£32,915	£34,890	£227,311
F&S Band 2	5,661	£33,478	£35,487	£11,371,137
F&S Band 3 - 6% baseline*	18,672	£38,766	£41,092	£43,430,325
Band 3 Pay Point 1	TBC	N/A	£39,025	TBC
Band 3 Pay Point 2	TBC	N/A	£41,772	TBC
Band 3 Pay Point 3	TBC	N/A	£44,520	TBC
F&S Band 4	1,624	£43,562	£46,176	£4,244,681
F&S Band 5 - 6% baseline*	1,705	£49,600	£52,576	£5,074,080
Band 5 Pay Point 1	TBC	£47,327	£50,167	£2,840 per FTE
Band 5 Pay Point 2	TBC	£49,664	£52,644	£2,980 per FTE
Band 5 Pay Point 3	TBC	£52,000	£55,120	£3,120 per FTE
Former G4S / TUPE*	26.8	£25,876	£27,429	£41,609
Introduction of SRA**	—	—	—	**£99,326,000**
Uplift in USH Payments***				N/A
Total 6% Salary Cost****				**£64,389,143**

Band 3 progression costing note: £39,025 is for new entrants. Existing staff receive at least £41,092. Final cost needs the 18,672 FTE distribution.

Band 5 progression costing note: Current points rise by 6% to £50,167, £52,644 and £55,120. The £49,600 row is a proxy; final cost needs the 1,705 FTE distribution.

Method and caveats:

* Latest HMPPS headline data at 30 June 2026 give 5,661 FTE Band 2 OSGs and 22,001 FTE Band 3-5 officers. The latest detailed grade mix surfaced in the PSPRB material is 30 September 2025; that mix has been proportionately scaled to the June 2026 total, giving an estimated split of B3 18,672, B4 1,624, B5 1,705 FTE.

* Closed-grade data are not published at the same June 2026 granularity. The latest published split is 31 July 2025: 115.1 FTE officer/support closed grades and 26.8 FTE TUPE-transfer grades. The salary figures shown for these two rows are therefore proxies, not exact weighted averages.

** The SRA total is £99.326 million: 5,661 F&S Band 2 FTE × £2,000 plus 22,001 F&S Band 3–5 FTE × £4,000, consistent with the SRA proposal set out above.

*** Changes to the USH percentage are not part of the simple 6% salary uplift calculation and need their own eligibility/rate assumptions based on how HMPPS propose to structure nights going forward.

**** Annual cost increase = Staff in Post FTE × Current Salary × 6%. Figures exclude employer NI, pension contributions and other on-costs.

Sources:

HMPPS workforce quarterly: June 2026 – https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-june-2026

PSPRB Twenty-Fifth Report 2026 – https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/psprb-twenty-fifth-report-on-england-and-wales-2026

Please see Annex A: POA Pay Proposal Costings 2027.

POA asks the PSPRB to recommend that:

- the cost of the POA proposals is assessed transparently and separately from unrelated departmental affordability pressures;
- the 6% consolidated award and SRA are considered as investment in safe staffing, retention and workforce stability; and
- HMPPS provides full costing assumptions, including on-costs, staffing baselines and allowance eligibility.

Section 2: Supporting Evidence

Inflation Forecasts

Inflation has moderated from the peaks seen in 2022–23 but the cumulative loss of purchasing power remains embedded in household budgets and in the real value of Prison Officer pay. The latest fully published ONS figures available show CPI inflation at 2.9% in the 12 months to July 2026, up from 2.6% in June. The Bank of England's July 2026 projections should be presented using the relevant quarter and forecast measure, rather than as a single unspecified peak.

The temporary impact of higher household energy bills is again a significant driver of inflation in mid-2026, along with the increasingly volatile long-term impact on fuel costs due to the conflict in the Middle East. These factors have a significant impact on Prison Officer pay, with POA members increasingly witnessing their pay awards being eroded by normal cost-of-living increases in basic essentials. It is vital that the PSPRB recognises these factors and recommends an award that affords POA members the ability to surpass yearly and sometimes weekly increases in basic goods that erode their quality of life and eat away at their salaries.

Underlying measures of inflation:

The conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine and the associated rise in energy prices are expected to lead to higher UK inflation. Prior to the Iran conflict, the CPI annual inflation rate was expected to fall to around 2% from April and remain around 2% for the rest of 2026. On 18 June 2026, the Bank of England said, based on energy market pricing as of 15 June 2026, that CPI inflation was expected to be "a little under 3% in 2026 Q3" and "a little over 3¼% in Q4" – lower than it expected in its April forecasts. Since then, energy prices have gone back up and indeed the Government announced on 26 August 2026 that the energy price cap will rise by 4% in October 2026.

Source: Commons Library Economic indicators July 2026: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02792/SN02792.pdf

Prison Officers Hit Hardest

Prison Officers have been hit especially hard by years of real-terms pay erosion. At the same time, Prison Officers in England and Wales have been denied one of the fundamental tools available to other workers to defend their pay and conditions – the right to withdraw their labour. That restriction has repeatedly left Prison Officers exposed to Government-imposed restraint, while the POA has faced injunctions and court action designed to prevent the union from taking industrial action on behalf of its members.

The pay comparison is equally stark. From 1 September 2026, a police constable at the top national pay point will earn approximately £52,015.

From 1 April 2026, the highest-paid national Band 3 F&S Prison Officer working a 39-hour week, including 2 x pensionable ACHP and the 20% unsocial-hours payment, earns £38,766.

That is an annual difference of approximately £13,249.

Put another way, the top-rate police constable now earns approximately 34% more than the comparable Band 3 Prison Officer.

This disparity is particularly difficult to justify when both occupations are disciplined, uniformed frontline public services dealing with risk, violence and vulnerable people, and who serve to protect the public. Indeed, the independent Prison Service Pay Review Body itself continues to recognise police constables as an appropriate comparator and records that the Band 3 maximum remains below the maximum available to a police constable.

Although the POA welcomed the 2025 pay award as a step in the right direction, this did not repair the accumulated damage caused by years of pay restraint. The subsequent 3.5% award for 2026–27 again falls short of the level required to achieve meaningful pay restoration. The issue is therefore no longer simply the size of an individual annual award, it is the cumulative effect of more than a decade in which Prison Officer pay has failed to keep pace with both the cost of living and appropriate comparator occupations. Prison Officers

cannot continue to be expected to accept second-class pay for first-class public service. Pay restoration is now essential, not optional.

The contrast with Scotland is stark. The Scottish Government restored Prison Officers' right to strike in 2015. More than a decade later, Scottish Prison Officers have still not lost a single day through strike action. Rather than creating industrial chaos, the existence of that right has supported a mature industrial-relations environment in which partnership working and negotiation have remained the preferred means of resolving disputes.

Sources:

Office for National Statistics, Consumer price inflation, UK: July 2026 (19 August 2026)
Bank of England, Monetary Policy Report - July 2026
House of Commons Library, Inflation in the UK: Economic indicators (19 August 2026)
House of Commons Library, High cost of living: Impact on households (21 August 2026)
Prison Service Pay Review Body, Twenty-Fifth Report on England and Wales 2026
UK Parliament, Prison Service Pay Award 2026/27 - Written Statement HCWS1463 (26 March 2026)
UK Parliament, Police pay award 2026/27 - Written Statement HCWS264 (15 July 2026)
Home Office, Police Regulations 2003 Annex F - current constable pay scale
UK Parliament, Written Question 8598 - prison officers and the right to strike (answered 18 June 2026)
UK Parliament, Early Day Motion 251 - Ban on industrial action by prison officers (tabled 2 June 2026)
Scottish Government, Building a New Scotland: Justice - prison officers' right to strike

Pay Settlements and Bargaining Context – LRD Payline August 2026

The Labour Research Department's Payline data provides a useful external benchmark for the PSPRB when assessing the POA's 2027 pay proposals. Payline gives trade unions access to information on more than 2,000 collective agreements covering employers of different sizes in both the public and private sectors. It therefore provides a broad picture of negotiated pay outcomes beyond departmental pay policy and affordability assumptions.

The August 2026 Payline release is the latest LRD bargaining update cited in this submission. Read alongside LRD's wider 2026 Payline series, it shows why current settlements need to be considered against both inflation and the cumulative value of pay over time. During 2026, LRD reported public-sector median settlements of around 4% in several reporting periods, while its 12-month measure, which captures staged increases, was also around 4% in its spring releases. RPI inflation nevertheless remained a material pressure and at times exceeded the headline value of recent settlements. Pay deals kept their lead on prices in the three months to July 2026. The LRD Payline service recorded an average pay deal of 3.8% for the lowest-paid and 3.6% for standard increases. Turning to the cost of living, inflation was 3.2% in July 2026, according to the RPI measure, while CPI was 2.9%. Both figures were higher than in the past few months but still lower than earlier in 2026.

Energy bills pushed up the overall inflation figures. The Ofgem energy price cap rose by 13% for the period from July through September. Ofgem attributed the increase to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Pay deals have kept ahead of inflation for every month in 2026 except March, when RPI spiked to 4.1%. Pay deals have beat the CPI measure of inflation every month this year by at least 0.5%. Overall wage growth across the economy was 3.5% for April to June 2026, meaning that on average incomes are just 0.3% higher than last year in real terms. Pay growth in the private sector was just 2.8%, according to ONS figures, the lowest rate since 2020.

Significant new deals:

- Arriva Wales workers agreed a 9.1% increase over two years, with 5.3% in 2026 followed by 3.8% in 2027.
- Workers at Alpla Plastics secured a 4% increase backdated to January 2026, while at Cammell Laird the final stage of a three-year agreement delivered 3.1% from 6 July. The Cammell Laird settlement was inflation-linked, guaranteeing the higher of May RPI or 1.75%.
- In logistics, STL Logistics workers received a 4% uplift from July 2026 as part of the third stage of a four-year settlement, plus a one-off payment worth 1.5% of annual basic pay. The long-term agreement has

delivered 4% increases plus top-ups in each year so far, with a further 4% scheduled from July 2027.

For the POA, the significance is not that a 4% settlement should become the ceiling for the 2027 award. The Prison Service enters this pay round after a prolonged period of real-terms pay erosion, significant recruitment and retention pressures, exceptionally high occupational risk and continuing reliance on overtime and additional-duty payments. A settlement based merely on the prevailing median would preserve much of the historic loss in the value of Prison Officer pay rather than restore it. The POA's proposed 6% consolidated award should therefore be viewed as a restorative measure. It is intended both to protect earnings against continuing cost pressures and to begin repairing the accumulated gap between Prison Officer pay, inflation and appropriate labour-market comparators. The LRD evidence reinforces the importance of looking beyond a single headline inflation figure or a single year's median settlement when determining an award for a workforce that has experienced sustained pay restraint.

Source: Labour Research Department, Payline release - August 2026: https://www.lrd.org.uk/news/payline-release-august-2026

Staff Retention

The PSPRB in last year's report concluded that: "Retention remains fragile with considerable numbers of staff still leaving the Service within their first 24 months of joining; "

The issue of retention goes well beyond a simple acknowledgement that staff are leaving within the first 24 months. While the PRB correctly identifies that "retention remains fragile", its assessment does not adequately confront the underlying causes driving this attrition. In particular, it fails to give sufficient weight to the reality that Prison Officers operate in a uniquely high-risk environment, where exposure to violence, intimidation and sustained psychological pressure is routine.

These risks do not end at the prison gate. The POA has evidenced that many officers experience threats that extend into their personal lives, affecting their sense of safety and wellbeing beyond the workplace. It is therefore entirely rational that many new recruits reassess their decision to remain in the role once they fully encounter these conditions. When the level of risk and responsibility is not matched by appropriate financial reward, the decision to leave becomes not only understandable but predictable. In this context, attrition within the first 24 months is not simply a workforce trend, it is a direct reflection of a pay structure that fails to value properly the demands of the role. The PSPRB's statement identifies the symptom but stops short of addressing the cause. By not explicitly recognising the relationship between pay, risk and retention, it limits the scope of its own conclusions.

Retention cannot be meaningfully improved without addressing the fundamental imbalance between what is asked of Prison Officers and what they receive in return. The POA's proposal to increase salaries by 6% would mean that incremental pay would also reduce the immediate financial pressures that can exacerbate early departures, particularly for those with families or existing financial responsibilities. Importantly, this approach would not only improve retention but also strengthen recruitment. At present, the Prison Service struggles to attract individuals with broader life experience or those who are already established in other careers. These individuals often bring valuable skills in communication, conflict resolution and resilience, all qualities that are essential in a custodial environment. However, they are unlikely to consider a role that represents a significant financial sacrifice relative to the risks involved. By raising starting salaries and shortening top pay scales to a more competitive level, the Service would widen its recruitment pool and attract candidates who are both more experienced and more likely to remain in post, while also ensuring that a significant number of foreign national recruits would be able to remain in the Service.

There is also a strong economic argument underpinning this position. High turnover carries substantial costs, including recruitment campaigns, training, onboarding and the loss of productivity associated with inexperienced staff. When officers leave within two years, the Service fails to realise a return on its investment in their training. Improving retention through better pay is therefore not only operationally sensible but also financially efficient.

Describing retention as "fragile" is accurate but insufficient, as it does not capture the true nature of the

problem. Low pay contributes to attrition, which in turn increases pressure on remaining staff, further driving departures. Without a decisive intervention, this cycle will persist. In summary, the POA's position directly addresses both the causes and consequences of poor retention. By aligning pay with the realities of the role and external requirements such as immigration thresholds, it offers a solution that is practical, targeted and economically justified. The PSPRB's acknowledgement of the problem is a necessary starting point but, without a stronger commitment to addressing pay as a central factor, it falls short of providing a credible path to improving retention.

Leaving and Resignation Rates – June 2026

The latest HMPPS workforce statistics, covering the 12 months to 30 June 2026, show a reduction in the overall number of Bands 3–5 Prison Officers leaving the service. However, the figures should not disguise the continuing challenge around retaining an experienced operational workforce. In the year ending 30 June 2026, 2,095 Bands 3–5 Prison Officers left HMPPS, compared with 2,881 in the previous year – a reduction of just 786, or 27.3%. The annual Bands 3–5 leaving rate has fallen to 8.9% while the resignation rate has fallen to 5.6%, but resignations accounted for 62.3% of Bands 3–5 leavers compared with 65.3% in the previous year.

This is an improvement on the position at June 2025, when the Bands 3–5 leaving rate stood at approximately 11.6% and the resignation rate was around 8%. However, these headline improvements need to be considered alongside the wider workforce position and the position with the pensions provider Capita, which has witnessed prolonged and continuing delays in processing retirements, ill health and medical inefficiency departures, thus masking the true figures.

Despite the false positivity from HMPPS, as of 30 June 2026 there were 22,001 FTE Band 3–5 Prison Officers in post – 701 fewer than a year earlier, a reduction of 3.1%. HMPPS appointed only 2,116 Bands 3–5 officers during the year, 333 fewer appointments than in the previous 12 months. The experience profile also remains a concern.

In June 2026:

- 30.2% of Bands 3–5 Prison Officers had less than three years' service;
- only 24.9% had 10 years or more service, equivalent to 5,469 FTE officers.

The proportion of officers with less than three years' service has improved substantially from 37.3% in June 2025, but almost one in three Bands 3–5 officers still has fewer than three years' experience. There has also been a notable change in the reasons why officers leave. Of Bands 3–5 officers leaving during the year to June 2026:

- 62.3% resigned;
- 23.0% were dismissed; and
- 8.5% retired.

Although resignations have fallen, almost two-thirds of all Bands 3–5 departures are therefore still voluntary resignations. Employees do not resign from jobs that pay well, offer decent staff facilities, safe working conditions and a career path. A similar improvement is evident among Band 2 Operational Support Grades. 662 Band 2 OSGs left HMPPS in the year ending June 2026, a reduction of 185, or 21.8%, compared with the previous year. The Band 2 resignation rate stood at 6.9%. At the same time, the Band 2 workforce increased to 5,661 FTE, an increase of 242 or just 4.5% over the year. However, 43.3% of Band 2 OSGs still have less than three years' service, while only 21.8% have 10 years or more experience.

The reduction in leaving and resignation rates is welcome but it does not amount to recovery. HMPPS has 701 fewer Bands 3–5 Prison Officers than a year earlier, while almost one-third have less than three years' service and fewer than one in four have 10 years or more. The Service therefore continues to face a shrinking frontline workforce and a shortage of experienced officers.

Retention should be judged by whether HMPPS can build and sustain an experienced workforce over the long term, not simply by a fall in annual departures.

See Annex G: HMPPS Workforce Statistics June 2026. Source dataset: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/689f34791fedc616bb133a86/hmpps-workforce-statistics-tables-jun-2026_final.ods

POA 2025 Survey

Due to the changes made to the PSPRB submission dates for 2026, the POA have not yet completed this year's ongoing POA Member Survey.

Therefore, the POA refer to the 2025 survey's top 10 key points raised by members.

Pay and Comparability

- 88.45% say their salary is too low for the work and risks involved.
  61.42% strongly agree and 27.03% agree. This is probably the single strongest direct pay finding in the survey.
- 82.64% say their salary does not accurately reflect their roles and responsibilities.
  Only 6.69% agree or strongly agree that it does. This provides very strong evidence that members perceive a fundamental mismatch between job weight and remuneration.
- 69.12% say their salary is not in line with similar public-sector jobs.
  35.61% disagree and 33.51% strongly disagree that their pay is comparable. This is a strong argument based on police, Border Force and other frontline public-service comparators.

Retention and Motivation

- 37.16% intend to leave the Prison Service within five years.
  10.20% say within one year and another 26.96% within 2–5 years. Extending the window to 10 years takes the figure to 53.65%. This is powerful evidence of a potential retention and experience crisis rather than merely dissatisfaction with pay.
- 71.71% disagree that morale is good in their prison.
  38.29% disagree and 33.42% strongly disagree, while only 11.28% positively rate morale. This is highly relevant to the PSPRB's consideration of motivation and retention.

Risk, Safety and Career Sustainability

- 72.31% report being stressed at work a few times a week or more.
  25.55% strongly agree and 46.76% agree with that statement. This demonstrates that the job's demands extend well beyond ordinary workplace pressures and should form part of the case for appropriate remuneration.
- 85.48% say there are not enough staff to supervise prisoners safely.
  Only 14.52% believe staffing is sufficient. This shows a clear link between staffing shortages directly to safety, rather than simply workload.
- 80.26% believe senior management put the prisoner regime above their safety at work.
  This is an exceptionally stark finding and strengthens the argument that Prison Officers are being asked to carry exceptional occupational risk while their pay remains below appropriate comparator occupations.
- 60.71% have been physically assaulted at work at least once – and 44.70% have been assaulted more than once.
  Only 39.29% say they have never been assaulted. The fact that almost 45% of respondents have suffered repeated assaults displays a powerful link when linked to the survey finding that 88.45% consider their salary inadequate for the risks involved.
- 97.23% believe a Prison Officer retirement age of 67/68 is too high.
  Only 2.43% think it is about right and just 0.34% think it is too low. This is an extraordinary level of consensus and provides strong evidence that the present reward package does not adequately recognise the physical and psychological demands of a custodial career.

Taken together, the POA member survey 2025 tell a very clear story:

88% say the pay is too low, 83% say it does not reflect their responsibilities, 69% say it is behind comparable public-sector work, 85% say there are insufficient staff to supervise prisoners safely, 72% experience frequent workplace stress, 61% have been assaulted and more than one-third intend to leave within five years.

Inadequate reward → poor morale → retention risk → loss of experience → staffing pressure → increased workload and safety risk → further retention problems.

The survey had 1,607 respondents, with 63.6% being Bands 3–4 Prison Officers, so the results are substantially grounded in the experience of the operational grades at the centre of the POA's pay claim. The POA's position is clear: the HMPPS survey is not tailored to operational frontline staff. It encompasses the entire Ministry of Justice workforce, many of whom benefit from working conditions such as home working, flexible schedules and safer environments – options not available to POA members. Frontline staff face higher risk, larger spans of control in management roles and work in outdated, violent environments with inadequate rest facilities.

HMPPS consistently acknowledge low level of engagement in their staff survey from members in our remit group, yet they consistently fail to introduce a survey that addresses the root and cause of the lack of engagement and appear to find it easier to lay the blame for low engagement at the door of the POA. The POA think that HMPPS dare not do a similar survey to the POA as they already know the result. By contrast, the POA's own survey provides an accurate, unfiltered view of staff morale and the realities faced by those on the ground. The 2025 results are a stark reflection of a workforce under strain.

Detached Duty: The Cost of a Temporary Staffing Solution

Detached duty should be a short-term response to exceptional staffing pressures, not a permanent workforce model. Yet reliance is increasing; the number of staff recorded at receiving establishments rose from 152 in August 2025 to 199 in August 2026, a rise of 30.9%.

The cost is significant. Official Parliamentary evidence put the additional cost of national detached duty during 2023 at £313,093.04 per week for travel, subsistence, accommodation and incentivisation – around £16.3 million if sustained for a full year. The August 2026 OFFSEN data request does not separately identify current detached duty costs so it cannot provide a replacement annual figure for detached duty itself. It does,

however, show the wider cost of managing staffing shortages through additional working.

Establishment-level overtime cost £15.339 million in 2025–26. Payment Plus then cost £16.563 million in just the first three months of 2026–27 – an average of £5.521 million per month. If that first-quarter rate continued for 12 months, Payment Plus alone would cost about £66.25 million.

A better use of the money:

- Redirect savings from reducing routine detached duty and other structural staffing workarounds into consolidated basic pay.
- The POA's 6% consolidated headline award is estimated to cost £64.389 million before employer on-costs. The annualised 2023 detached duty cost of £16.3 million is equivalent to roughly 25% of that salary cost.
- At the April-June 2026 Payment Plus run-rate, annual expenditure would be about £66.25 million – slightly more than the estimated salary cost of the entire 6% award.

These budgets are not directly interchangeable and the POA is not suggesting that all detached duty, overtime or Payment Plus can be eliminated. The point is that substantial sums are already being spent managing the consequences of vacancies and poor retention. Reducing structural reliance on these temporary measures would release resources and strengthen the affordability case for investment in permanent, consolidated pay.

The POA therefore suggest that:

- HMPPS should publish the current full annual cost of detached duty, including travel, accommodation, subsistence and incentive payments.
- Savings achieved by reducing structural reliance on detached duty, overtime and other temporary staffing measures should form part of the affordability case for the POA's 6% consolidated pay award.
- Permanent pay should be treated as an investment in recruitment and retention, reducing the recurring costs created by persistent staffing shortages.

68 Is Too Late: A Fair and Dignified Retirement Age

The POA's position on pension age is straightforward: 68 is too late. Expecting frontline Prison Officers to remain fully operational into their late sixties is neither reasonable nor fair. The role requires staff to respond to violence, use control and restraint, manage emergencies and intervene physically to protect life. Pension arrangements should reflect that operational reality.

An historic anomaly

Lord Hutton's 2011 review of public-sector pensions recognised that uniformed services had historically required a lower pension age because of the unique nature and physical demands of their work. The subsequent reforms provided a normal pension age of 60 for police officers, firefighters and members of the Armed Forces, but excluded Prison Officers – despite their existing pension age of 60 and their plainly uniformed frontline role.

Newly recruited Prison Officers instead have a normal pension age linked to State Pension Age and may be required to remain operational until 68, with the prospect of 70 at some future point due to suggested State Pension Age rises. A young recruit could therefore face approximately 50 years in the Prison Service before receiving an unreduced pension. That disparity has never been convincingly justified.

House of Lords Library – Prison officers' retirement age

Parliament has repeatedly challenged the injustice

The strongest Parliamentary evidence goes directly to operational reality. In the House of Commons on 10 May 2023, Ian Lavery MP asked how a 68-year-old officer could be expected to confront some of the country's most dangerous prisoners, and contrasted the position with police and fire-service personnel who can retire at 60.

Hansard – Prison Officers: Pension Age, 10 May 2023

In the House of Lords on 30 March 2023, Earl Attlee described a retirement age of 68 as "morally wrong" and rejected the suggestion that prisons are a controlled environment comparable with ordinary Civil Service workplaces. Prisons are controlled only because Prison Officers intervene when violence, disorder, self-harm and emergencies occur.

Hansard – Prison Officers: Retirement, 30 March 2023

A 2021 Written Answer relied on the fact that Prison Officers belong to the wider Civil Service Pension Scheme and argued that other civil servants also undertake demanding work. That explains the current scheme structure; it does not explain why it is fair. Few Civil Service roles routinely require staff to restrain violent offenders, search for weapons and drugs, respond physically to life-threatening incidents and face serious assault as an occupational risk.

UK Parliament – Written Question 88626, answered 15 December 2021

The issue remains live

Parliamentary pressure has continued because the problem has not been resolved. An Early Day Motion called for the retirement age to be reduced to 60, and a 2025 petition attracted 12,713 signatures. The Government's response acknowledged the issue as complex and confirmed that the Lord Chancellor had requested advice from officials. Complexity must not become a reason for indefinite delay.

UK Parliament Petition – Reduce the minimum retirement age for Prison Officers to 60

Operational capability and fairness

The modern prison environment strengthens the case for change. Overcrowding, violence, illicit drugs, weapons, organised crime, serious mental ill-health, self-harm and suicide all increase the physical and psychological demands placed on staff. Prison Officers cannot opt out of emergency response as they age – they must remain capable of performing the full role safely.

Early retirement with an actuarial penalty is not a fair answer. It forces staff to choose between remaining in a physically demanding role beyond a reasonable operational age or accepting a permanently reduced retirement income. Nor is redeployment a complete solution when suitable non-operational posts are limited and the Service already faces severe frontline shortages. The POA is not seeking preferential treatment. It is seeking parity of principle with other uniformed services whose pension arrangements recognise the physical demands of their work. The appropriate starting point is a normal pension age of 60, supported by an independent, evidence-led review of operational capability and long-term workforce sustainability.

The role of the PSPRB

Pension policy is determined by Government but pension age directly affects recruitment, retention, morale and the employment package considered by the PSPRB. The PSPRB should therefore state clearly that requiring Prison Officers to remain operational until 68 is inconsistent with a sustainable workforce model and recommend urgent action toward a fair retirement age. The question is no longer whether the injustice has been raised, as Parliament has raised it repeatedly. The question is whether Government is finally prepared to resolve it. For Prison Officers, 68 is too late.

POA asks the PSPRB to recommend that:

- Government urgently reviews the Prison Officer retirement age with the objective of restoring a fair and dignified normal pension age of 60;
- the current expectation that Prison Officers remain fully operational until 68 is recognised as incompatible with the physical and psychological demands of the role; and
- pension age is treated as a recruitment, retention, morale and workforce-sustainability issue within the overall reward package.

Five-Year Rolling Review of Allowances

Unsocial Working Hours Payments

Purpose of the allowance

Unsocial Working Hours (USH) compensate operational staff for the disruption of maintaining a 24-hour custodial service – nights, early starts, late finishes, weekends and public holidays. The payment should reflect both the hours worked and the cumulative effect on sleep, health, family life and the ability to plan normal social time.

Band 2 – make 25% permanent and increase it to 30%

The PSPRB temporarily increased Band 2 USH from 20% to 25% in 2025. POA branch evidence now indicates that Band 2 OSGs work approximately 41% of their hours during unsocial periods. There has therefore been no material reduction in the working pattern that justified the enhancement, and the evidence supports making 25% permanent and increasing it to 30%.

Any future change to Band 2 night working must be judged on what actually happens, not on planned staffing models. Band 2 USH allowance should not be reduced unless reliable, estate-wide evidence demonstrates a material and sustained reduction in the unsocial hours Band 2 staff are required to work. HMPPS has discussed moving more night duties to higher operational grades but the necessary Bands 3–5 USH data requested by the PSPRB has not yet been shared. Any safer night model will carry legitimate staffing costs. Those costs should not be funded by reducing Band 2 compensation before Band 2 exposure to unsocial working has actually fallen.

The historical context reinforces that position. Benchmarking increased the use of lower-paid Band 2 OSGs on nights, generating savings for HMPPS. It would be inequitable to remove or reduce the enhanced payment while broadly the same night-working burden remains. Night staffing must be assessed against operational reality. Prisons run with reduced complements overnight and those numbers are further depleted by predictable abstractions such as hospital bedwatches, external medical escorts, constant supervision and, in some local prisons, late prisoner receptions. These demands can leave very limited resilience when a fire, medical emergency, self-harm incident, violence or disorder requires an immediate response.

Working at night in a prison therefore carries more than inconvenience, as staff operate when reinforcement is limited and individual responsibility can be greatest. Before changing who delivers night duties, HMPPS should demonstrate that the replacement model can respond safely to simultaneous incidents and foreseeable abstractions. The POA asks HMPPS to provide the PSPRB with estate-wide data showing planned night staffing against the staff actually available after bedwatches, escorts, constant supervision and other predictable abstractions. The relevant question is how much operational resilience is genuinely available at 2am.

Bands 3–5 – increase to 25% initially and review

POA branch evidence indicates that Band 3 staff work approximately 33% of their hours as unsocial hours, with Band 4 approximately 21% and Band 5 approximately 30%. The incidence varies between establishments but substantial unsocial working remains inherent across all three operational grades. The existing 20% payment for Bands 3–5 should therefore be increased to 25% initially. At the same time, HMPPS and the PSPRB should review the arrangements against contemporary working patterns, actual night duties and safety responsibilities rather than historic assumptions about grade deployment. If HMPPS transfers additional night duties from Band 2 to Bands 3–5, that will strengthen the case for the 25% initial rate and may justify further adjustment once reliable evidence on the new operating model is available.

Regular night and rotating-shift work carries a genuine occupational burden. Band 2 staff in some establishments can work a week of nights around once every six weeks, yet the POA remains concerned there is no systematic occupational-health screening targeted specifically at the long-term effects of night working. USH is also a recruitment and retention issue. Staff who must work nights, weekends, public holidays, early mornings and late evenings need a meaningful premium over predictable daytime employment. Undervaluing that disruption risks increasing turnover, recruitment and training costs, overtime and reliance on inexperienced staff.

Compensation should reflect the working patterns staff are actually required to undertake. Band 2 exposure remains high and substantial unsocial working is also evident across Bands 3–5. Pay should follow operational reality, not assumptions about what future staffing models may eventually deliver.

POA asks the PSPRB to recommend that:

- the Band 2 Unsocial Working Hours payment is made permanent and increased from 25% to 30%;
- Band 2 USH payment is not reduced unless robust evidence demonstrates a material and sustained reduction in actual unsocial working; and
- the Bands 3–5 payment is increased from 20% to 25% initially, while USH arrangements for Bands 3–5 are reviewed against contemporary operational working patterns, night duties and safety responsibilities.

Dog Handler Care & Maintenance Allowance

Prison dogs play an essential role in delivering HMPPS's vision and purpose: keeping those in our care safe and secure and supporting rehabilitation. Reliable security underpins the rehabilitative work of prisons and probation. Dogs have been deployed by HMPPS for over 50 years for their unique ability to detect illicit items and as a non-lethal use-of-force asset during serious incidents and escape attempts. They are an effective security tool in preventing and fighting crime in custody and are indispensable to the service HMPPS provides.

The dog handler's role extends far beyond guiding the dog during duty hours. Handlers are responsible for training, feeding, watering, exercise, grooming, care and maintenance, kennel cleaning and the control and security of the dog. They also accommodate service dogs at home with their families, creating a continuing impact on both the handler and family life.

Current Number of Dog Handlers & Dogs

Category	Current figure
Dog handlers – total	588
HMPPS	530
Private sector	58
Licensed & unlicensed dogs	883
HMPPS handlers with 1 dog	230
HMPPS handlers with 2 or more dogs	300
Of the above, handlers with 3 dogs	40

Data note: These are approximate figures because the recording database is live and updated daily by each establishment/area. HMPPS has 530 dog handlers in total. Of these, 230 handlers have one dog and 300 handlers have more than one dog. The figure of 40 handlers with three dogs is a subset of the 300 multiple-dog handlers and must not be added separately. The POA cost estimate therefore uses 230 one-dog handlers and 300 multiple-dog handlers, giving a total of 530 HMPPS handlers.

Current allowance

Dog responsibility	Annual allowance
One dog	**£2,735**
Two or more dogs	**£3,418**

Case for an Increase

A suitable increase to the current Care & Maintenance Allowance is needed to reflect the increased duties, responsibilities and costs arising from mandated requirements in the current Prison Dogs Policy. The role attracts staff who have the passion and patience to care for dogs, but it also requires handlers to accommodate Prison Service dogs at home – not simply as part of their job, but as part of their daily life. Evidence supplied by the National Dog & Technical Support Group (NDTSG) Inspectorate and dog handlers demonstrates the increasing duties and consequences borne by HMPPS dog handlers and supports an increase in the Care & Maintenance Allowance. HMPPS HR evidence presents a positive picture of recruitment campaigns and retention, although it is difficult to attribute those outcomes to the allowance itself.

The handler must continually assess the exercising area and may need to travel further to locate suitable space. DEFRA exercise requirements, combined with the DRA, can increase both daily travelling time and distance. The handler must also have a home and vehicle capable of accommodating a service dog. In some circumstances this may require acquiring or maintaining a suitable vehicle. The Care & Maintenance Allowance is the appropriate mechanism through which associated burdens can be recognised. Dog handlers remain responsible for feeding and watering, exercising, grooming, maintaining the health and wellbeing of the dog(s), kennel cleaning and control and security when off-duty. These are hidden household costs and should be considered alongside increases in utility prices.

The majority of dogs of the size procured by HMPPS require approximately four 30-minute exercise periods per day. Even where the handler has been on duty, dogs still require a minimum of two 30-minute exercise periods. Weatherproof footwear and clothing are frequently purchased by handlers at their own expense. Routine grooming and inspection must be undertaken daily. It also enables handlers to identify signs of illness or disease and maintain the dog's skin and coat in good condition. Handlers deal with minor injuries and veterinary requirements, including annual inoculations and emergency treatment as required. When off-duty, public safety remains a priority. Handlers must comply with HMPPS policy and legislation, risk assess exercise areas and consider safe transport and control measures, including vehicle transport or muzzling. Exercise off lead for general-purpose dogs must only take place in a secure area with controlled access managed by the handler. Such areas are limited and may require additional walking or driving. Search-dog handlers must complete a dynamic risk assessment before letting a dog off lead, and all handlers remain responsible for dynamic risk assessment throughout the exercise period.

A handler must give up part of their garden for a kennel, including a suitable concrete or slab base for a single or double kennel. Additional screening may be required where children are present. Official vehicles parked at the handler's home require frequent cleaning. There have also been incidents where the size and weight of vehicles have contributed to subsidence at a handler's home address. Handlers using their own vehicle must have sufficient capacity for an appropriate dog transit box. The vehicle may also be the family vehicle, requiring regular removal of the transit box and more frequent cleaning because of dog hair and odour. As the Care & Maintenance Allowance is paid annually, the following assessment is based on 365 days.

A handler will have their dog(s) with them for a minimum of 321 or 316 days per year. This is based on 365 days less kenneling entitlement, which reflects annual leave entitlement plus eight rest days before, during and after block leave, equating to 44 or 49 days. Of those 321 or 316 days, around 96 days (approximately 30%) will be rest days when the dog(s) remain with the handler for the whole day. These days have the greatest impact on the handler and family because feeding, watering, exercise, grooming, kennel cleaning, control and security obligations continue. Dogs must not be left unsupervised for more than eight hours, meaning the handler cannot be away from the premises for longer than that period while the dog is kenneled at home.

Before 1987, dog handlers were paid one hour of flat-rate overtime per day to compensate for the care and maintenance of their dog(s) when off duty. If that arrangement still applied today, based on the current salary figures supplied for a Band 4 specialist dog handler, it would equate to:

Working pattern	Salary	Hourly rate	Annual equivalent
37-hour week + 17% USH	£36,889	£19.17	£6,997.05
39-hour week incl. 2 hrs ACHP + 17% USH	£38,593	£19.03	£6,945.95

These figures require verification but are close to a true reflection of the modern equivalent value.

POA Cost Estimate

Using the handler-category figures and current allowances set out above, the estimated annual HMPPS cost and the effect of a 6% uplift are as follows:

Handler category	Handlers	Current allowance	Current annual cost	Allowance +6%	Annual cost +6%	Annual uplift
One dog	230	£2,735.00	£629,050.00	£2,899.10	£666,793.00	£37,743.00
More than one dog	300	£3,418.00	£1,025,400.00	£3,623.08	£1,086,924.00	£61,524.00
COMBINED TOTAL	**530**	—	**£1,654,450.00**	—	**£1,753,717.00**	**£99,267.00**

Estimated additional annual cost of a 6% uplift: £99,267.00

Conclusion

Dog handlers fully understand and accept the responsibilities and impact on family life that come with the role. For many, caring for dogs is an enjoyable but demanding part of the job, and handlers have accepted the recompense provided by the Care & Maintenance Allowance for many years. However, the increased responsibilities and family impact set out above make this an appropriate time to reconsider the allowance and provide fair recompense for the time and responsibility involved in looking after prison dog(s) during off-duty hours.

The POA therefore asks for a 6% increase to the Care & Maintenance Allowance, in line with the headline pay award this year, and for the allowance to be increased in line with the headline award in each following year

Parliamentary References – Prison Dogs and Dog Handlers

Parliamentary material provides useful historical and operational context for the POA case that prison dog handling carries distinct responsibilities requiring specific recompense:

- 27 July 1989 – House of Commons, "Prison Dog Handlers" – The Government confirmed that prison officer dog handlers had previously received one hour of plain-time overtime each day for grooming, exercising and feeding the dog, and expressly accepted the need to recompense handlers for their continuing care and maintenance responsibility.
- 24 October 1994 – House of Commons, "Prison Dogs" – The Prison Service described patrol dogs as undertaking patrols, prisoner escorts, searches for escape equipment and would-be escapers, apprehension, perimeter security and control during prison disturbances, alongside specialist arms, explosives and illicit-drug detection.
- 20 April 1983 – House of Commons, "Prison Officers" – A parliamentary answer recorded dog handlers among specialist prison officers receiving additional allowances, demonstrating longstanding recognition that the role attracts responsibilities beyond the standard prison officer function.
- 30 June 1975 – House of Commons, Prison Service dogs – The Government stated that prison dogs and handlers normally patrolled inside prison perimeters to assist in preventing escapes and could be redeployed to other tasks required to maintain security.

POA asks the PSPRB to recommend that:

- the Dog Handler Care & Maintenance Allowance is increased by 6% in line with the headline pay award;
- the allowance is automatically reviewed and uplifted in line with headline awards in future years; and
- the allowance properly reflects off-duty care, family impact, household costs, vehicle requirements and the continuing responsibility of accommodating service dogs at home.

Payment Plus

Although payment plus is not part of this year's five-year rolling allowance review, the PSPRB did say that it intended to revisit the issue of payment plus and the POA appreciate that payment plus in its current form is a payment and not an allowance.

Payment Plus Actual Spend by Grade, 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026:

Grade	Payment Plus 2025/26	Share of total
F&S Band 2	£49,353	0.10%
F&S Band 3	£38,633,946	78.92%
F&S Band 4	£7,534,799	15.39%
F&S Band 5	£2,516,244	5.14%
F&S Band 6	£8,087	0.02%
F&S Bands 7–12	£4,248	0.01%
Closed Prison Officer / Senior Officer	£208,279	0.43%
Total PSPRB remit group	**£48,954,956**	**100.00%**

Source: OFFSEN – PSPRB 2027/28 Paybill Data 2025/26, shared with unions. Figures are actual payments made between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026. The total comprises £48,746,677 for F&S grades and £208,279 for closed grades. See Annex H: PSPRB 2027/28 Paybill Data 2025/26.

Payment Plus Cost by Month and Grade, April to June 2026:

Month	Band 3 PP	Band 4 PP	Band 5 PP	Total PP (all grades)
April 2026	£4,426,820	£794,982	£257,560	£5,498,587
May 2026	£3,997,685	£687,246	£246,229	£4,942,924
June 2026	£4,965,254	£851,243	£287,108	£6,121,350
Three-month total	**£13,389,759**	**£2,333,470**	**£790,897**	**£16,562,861**

Source: OFFSEN PP POA Data Request, August 2026. Figures are actual Payment Plus payments; Bed Watch and Constant Watch costs are reported separately in the source workbook.

Payment Plus expenditure totalled £16.563 million in the first three months of 2026/27, an average of £5.521 million per month. Monthly spend fell from £5.499 million in April to £4.943 million in May, before rising to £6.121 million in June – 23.8% above May. Bands 3-5 accounted for £16.514 million, or 99.7% of the three-month total. If the first-quarter rate were sustained across the year, Payment Plus alone would exceed £66 million – before the separately recorded costs of Bed Watch and Constant Watch. This reinforces the conclusion that Payment Plus is functioning as a structural staffing mechanism rather than an occasional contingency.

The August workbook does not disaggregate Payment Plus expenditure by establishment, so it would not be accurate to present an establishment ranking as Payment Plus alone. It does, however, provide an establishment-level schedule of total overtime expenditure for 2025/26. The 10 highest-cost prisons were Belmarsh (£742,548), Manchester (£544,719), Pentonville (£524,551), Full Sutton (£456,186), Woodhill (£438,175), Long Lartin (£394,623), Ranby (£394,595), Feltham (£392,150), Berwyn (£327,734) and Frankland (£317,169).

Together, these 10 establishments accounted for £4.532 million, 29.5% of the £15.339 million establishment-level overtime total. The concentration of almost three-tenths of expenditure in 10 prisons demonstrates that reliance on additional hours is particularly acute at a relatively small group of establishments and should trigger targeted recruitment, retention and safe-staffing interventions. This submission sets out the case for revising Payment Plus (PP) rates for Bands 3–5 to ensure overtime payments are fair, attractive, proportionate to substantive salary levels and capable of supporting operational resilience across the service.

The POA are aware of proposals from HMPPS that include raising the rate of PP to £26 per hour and widening its scope and use, including introducing a PP payment for Band 4 specialist staff, namely PE Officers. We fail to see how these proposals satisfy the review body recommendation 14 that asks how HMPPS intend to reduce the reliance on PP. In contrast, their proposals will fundamentally expand its use and increase demand.

We cannot accept any proposals that omit specific bands (5) from the same suggestion, solely based on the HMPPS rationale that Band 5 staff are covered via temporary promotion. This does not aid the cover of long-term absences at that grade or shortfalls. The POA therefore propose a complete overhaul of the PP scheme to include all operational Bands 3–5, paying them an incentivised, realistic and affordable rate based on an enhanced hourly rate on existing rates of pay. The proposal is based on the maximum Inner London pay scale calculated on a 39-hour week including two hours ACHP.

The principle behind this submission is that overtime should properly recognise the premium time staff volunteer to give up, and remain attractive enough to encourage experienced staff at the top of the pay scales to continue volunteering additional hours. The Service continues to rely heavily on the professionalism, flexibility and goodwill of staff to maintain safe staffing levels and operational effectiveness. PP arrangements are therefore not supplementary, they are an essential part of maintaining service resilience. Current overtime rates increasingly fail to reflect substantive salary levels, particularly for experienced staff at the top of their pay bands. As a result, the financial incentive to volunteer additional hours is reduced, despite staff often being asked to cover shortages at short notice and during periods of operational pressure. There is also a clear issue of fairness. Staff working beyond their contracted hours should receive enhanced pay that properly reflects the disruption to their work-life balance and the voluntary surrender of rest days, evenings, weekends and family time. It is proposed that all PP rates should be calculated using an hourly rate multiplier (Inner London) equivalent to time-and-two-thirds (x 1.6667).

This approach would properly reward staff for volunteering premium time, ensure consistency and transparency across grades, reflect the operational dependence placed on overtime, encourage experienced staff to continue volunteering, maintain the attractiveness of PP arrangements and ensure overtime rates remain proportionate to substantive salary levels.

The following annual salaries are based on the maximum Inner London pay scales for a 39-hour working week including 2 hours ACHP:

- Band 3: £45,366
- Band 4: £50,162
- Band 5: £56,200

Calculation Method:
Annual Salary ÷ 2,028 = Basic Hourly Rate
Basic Hourly Rate × 1.6667 = PP Rate (time-and-two-thirds)

Proposed PP Rates

Band 3 Top Salary: £45,366, Basic Hourly Rate: £22.37
Proposed PP Rate: £37.28
Band 4 Top Salary: £50,162, Basic Hourly Rate: £24.73
Proposed PP Rate: £41.23
Band 5 Top Salary: £56,200, Basic Hourly Rate: £27.71
Proposed PP Rate: £46.19

The proposed time-and-two-thirds premium is operationally, financially and morally justified. Firstly, PP hours are entirely voluntary and are frequently worked during anti-social hours, weekends, rest days and periods that would otherwise be used for recovery and family life. A meaningful premium is therefore necessary to reflect the personal sacrifice involved.

Secondly, overtime must remain attractive to experienced staff. Where PP rates fail to reflect substantive earnings, there is little incentive for experienced employees to volunteer additional hours. This reduces operational resilience and increases staffing pressures across the service.

Thirdly, a strong PP arrangement supports staff retention. Employees who feel properly valued for the additional contribution they make are more likely to remain engaged and continue supporting operational delivery.

Finally, the proposed structure is simple, transparent and equitable. It creates a clear relationship between grade, substantive pay and overtime reward, ensuring fairness across all affected bands. It also mirrors similar overtime arrangements already available to OSG colleagues.

In practical terms, a properly incentivised overtime structure is significantly more cost-effective than operating with persistent staffing shortages, increased fatigue pressures and reduced operational effectiveness. This submission seeks agreement that all PP rates for Bands 3–5 should be based on the maximum Inner London pay point for each grade and paid at an hourly equivalent of time-and-two-thirds. The proposal recognises the voluntary nature of overtime, the premium personal time being surrendered by staff, and the operational necessity of maintaining attractive overtime arrangements for experienced employees.

We further propose that if the review body reject separate PP rates for all grades, the minimum PP rate should be set at £35 per hour. All PP and OSG overtime rates should increase annually in line with the headline pay award.

The POA would also strongly resist HMPPS ambitions that part-time staff would only receive the PP rate once they had worked the hours of a FTE member of staff.

Payment Plus (PP) Cost Comparison: Actual 2025–26 Grade Mix

The 2025–26 paybill records (see Annex H: PSPRB 2027–28 Paybill Data 2025/26) £48.685 million of Payment Plus expenditure for F&S Bands 3–5. As the Payment Plus rate during 2025–26 was £22 per hour, this equates to approximately 2.213 million hours. For comparison, the same volume of hours would cost approximately £50.9 million at the current 2026/27 rate of £23 per hour.

Proposal / basis	Weighted rate	Annual cost	Increase vs. 2026/27 current	% increase
Actual 2025/26 paybill	£22.00	£48.7m	−£2.2m	−4.3%
2026/27 current rate	£23.00	£50.9m	—	—
HMPPS proposal	£26.00	£57.5m	+£6.6m	+13.0%
POA grade-specific rates (actual B3–5 mix)	£38.35	£84.9m	+£34.0m	+66.7%

Cost per Operational Band 3–5 FTE

Based on 22,001 Band 3–5 operational FTE at 30 June 2026:

Proposal	Cost per Band 3–5 FTE	Increase vs. 2026/27 current
2026/27 current rate	£2,313	—
HMPPS proposal	£2,615	+£302
POA grade-specific rates	£3,857	+£1,544

The paybill data demonstrate a substantially greater reliance on Payment Plus than the previous submissions. F&S Bands 3–5 alone received £48.685 million in PP during 2025–26, representing 99.45% of all PP expenditure across the PSPRB remit group.

At the 2025–26 rate of £22 per hour, this represents approximately 2.213 million additional hours, equivalent to around 1,091 full-time 39-hour posts. Using the same volume of hours, the current £23 rate would cost about £50.9 million a year, the HMPPS £26 proposal about £57.5 million, and the POA grade-specific time-and-two-thirds proposal about £84.9 million.

This reinforces the POA's case that PP has become a structural staffing mechanism rather than a marginal contingency. If HMPPS considers this level of expenditure unsustainable, the long-term answer is to recruit and retain sufficient permanent staff rather than depress the value of voluntary rest-day working.

See Annex B: IR-776-26-MF - Without Prejudice Proposals on Payment Plus and OSG Overtime.
See Annex C: Meeting Summary - Payment Plus and OSG Overtime.
See Annex D: 200726-HMPPS Final POA Letter on Payment Plus.

B2 OSG Overtime

The POA asks for B2 OSG overtime to increase to day-rate-and-a-half for green hours and double time for red hours.

The new OFFSEN data records £15,133,396.59 in Band 2 overtime payments during 2025–26 – an average of approximately £1.261 million every month. For scale, that expenditure is equivalent to the current gross annual salary of roughly 452 Band 2 staff at £33,478, before employer on-costs.

The separate establishment schedule totals £15.339 million across all recorded overtime entries. The small difference reflects the wider scope of that schedule and should not be treated as part of the Band 2-only figure. Expenditure on this scale shows that overtime is not a peripheral cost, it is a recurring operational requirement used to sustain staffing and service delivery. It strengthens the case for fair green- and red-hour premiums while also underlining the need to improve substantive recruitment and retention. The POA reaffirms our submission that, if the PSPRB decide not to increase the rate of overtime, they align payment of the higher rate with the F&S definition of unsocial hours, weekends, public holidays and any hours worked between 19.00 and 07.00 during the week.

It was stated within the 21st annual report that the PSPRB would look at Band 2 overtime as part of a five-year rolling programme within the 22nd report. Despite comprehensive evidence to support the POA submission and a failure from HMPPS to supply any evidence to why they requested no increase in Band 2/OSG overtime, the PSPRB made no recommendations to increase Band 2/OSG overtime rates, deciding instead on a welcome uplift to the headline pay rate for Band 2 F&S.

The underlying leaving rate for Band 2/OSGs continues to highlight a significant retention issue within HMPPS. It peaked at 18.9% in March 2023, before falling to 15.9% in March 2024, 14.4% in March 2025, 12.4% in March 2026 and 11.2% in June 2026. At June 2026, it remained above the 9.2% operational total and was the highest leaving rate among the operational prison grades.

The resignation rate for OSG staff was 6.9% for the year ending 30 June 2026, a decrease of 0.7 percentage points since the year ending 31 March 2026. This is down from 9.0% in June 2025.

HMPPS Workforce Quarterly: June 2026

B2/OSG remains the operational prison grade with the highest leaving rate.

It should not surprise HMPPS that Band 2 recruitment and retention remain difficult. Repeatedly allowing Band 2 pay to drift towards the National Living Wage, then responding only when statutory wage increases force action, is not a workforce strategy. It is reactive pay management for a grade performing essential safety-critical duties in a secure custodial environment. In 2016, a £5-an-hour temporary top-up was introduced by the PSPRB. In 2019, that temporary top-up became permanent.

The POA believe the Band 2/OSG package needs to be significantly improved to attract and retain staff, and an integral part of that improvement should be to align the higher rate of overtime to all unsocial hours worked. While the attrition rate of Bands 3–5 Prison Officers often draws attention from Parliament and the media, the consistently high turnover of Band 2/OSGs is frequently overlooked. This lack of focus fails to recognise the vital role that Band 2 staff play in the daily functioning of prisons. Yet their underlying leaving rate – 11.2% in June 2026 – remained the highest among the operational prison grades and reflects a continuing failure to value and retain these staff.

Without urgent action to improve all aspects of pay, conditions and recognition, the service risks continued operational instability at the very foundations of prison staffing. The POA obtained the cost of Band 2/OSG overtime for the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025: £10,541,867.00. We have not received a detailed breakdown in respect of the rates paid, or the time of delivery, nationally or by establishment.

The Band 2/OSG grade is an overtime grade and, as such, should be paid an overtime rate that reflects their worth and compensates them for the additional hours they work during premium periods that disrupt their scheduled rest days and private life. The POA believe an increase to OSG overtime is long overdue. The high demands on the OSG group for unsocial hours working also means it follows that a significant amount of the overtime required are unsocial hours.

Closed Grades

Closed grades subject to historical pay allowances are given the opportunity to opt into F&S.

To give some context, the POA believes that the following statistics from HMPPS reward and recognition show that the number of closed grades continues to decrease.

CLOSED GRADES
Latest available salary and detailed FTE data
Salary rates from 1 April 2026 | Detailed FTE breakdown at 31 March 2026:

Pay grade	Salary	FTE
Senior Officer	£35,429	3.4
Prison Officer (excluding Lowdham Grange)	£32,915	33.3
Operational Support Grade (OSG)	£25,876	15.9
G4S E1	£49,148	1.0
Prison Officer - Lowdham Grange	£30,900	0.1
CM B5 - Lowdham Grange	£49,820	18.0
Total		**71.7**

Data note:
FTE values are rounded to one decimal place. The general Prison Officer figure excludes 0.129 FTE at Lowdham Grange, shown separately, to prevent double counting. Prison Auxiliary and G4S Security Officer have been removed because no FTE is recorded for those grades in the March 2026 detailed-grade data.
Sources: PRB Stats Pack 2026, Table 2b (FTE at 31 March 2026); Prison Service Pay Review Body Twenty-Fifth Report 2026, Appendix E (salary rates).

For some closed grade staff, it is still not financially viable for them to opt into F&S because of legacy local pay allowances. This means that, through no fault of their own, they will be penalised because they are long-serving members of staff who remain on their original terms and conditions. This is grossly unfair and needs to be remedied.

We call on the PSPRB to award a pay increase to Band 3 operational Prison Officers that ensures this anomaly is engulfed, and all closed grades, no matter what their historical allowances, get the opportunity to opt into F&S pay scales and are not penalised because of their longevity in the service. Non-consolidated awards are not an acceptable alternative to the POA.

PSPRB Remit Group

B2/OSG and non-operational staff to be removed from the PSPRB remit group.

The POA resubmits the proposal to remove all grades who have the right to take industrial action from the remit group. It is grossly unfair on operational Prison Officers that they are forced to suffer financially due to any pay award encapsulating non-operational staff and OSG grades who have the right to strike.

The review body was formed solely as a compensatory measure for Prison Officers who are prevented from taking any form of industrial action due to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 section 127 and a permanent high court injunction. Therefore, they should be the only body of staff subject to a pay review body that has been formulated specifically as a compensatory measure because their right to strike does not exist.

Staff Motivation

POA members continue to experience high levels of violence and exposure to self-harm in their workplace. The latest accredited official statistics, published by the Ministry of Justice on 30 July 2026, report:

- 8 homicides in the 12 months to June 2026, up from 7 in the previous 12 months and a new peak in the time series;
- 359 deaths in prison custody in the 12 months to June 2026;
- 71 self-inflicted deaths in the 12 months to June 2026;
- 70,632 reported incidents of self-harm in the 12 months to March 2026;
- 16,031 self-harm incidents in January to March 2026;
- 13,181 individuals self-harmed in the 12 months to March 2026, the rate was 152 self-harming individuals per 1,000 prisoners;
- 340 women per 1,000 prisoners self-harmed in the 12 months to March 2026, up 4.0% from 327 per 1,000 in the previous 12 months;
- 30,820 assault incidents in the 12 months to March 2026, broadly unchanged from 30,849 in the previous 12 months;
- 3,419 serious assault incidents in the 12 months to March 2026, broadly unchanged (up 0.4%) from the previous 12 months;
- 9,833 assaults on staff in the 12 months to March 2026, a rate of 27 per day; and
- 871 serious assaults on staff in the 12 months to March 2026, a rate of 2 per day.

Source note: Accredited official statistics published by the Ministry of Justice on 30 July 2026. Deaths cover the 12 months to June 2026; self-harm and assault figures cover the 12 months to March 2026. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to-march-2026/safety-in-custody-statistics-england-and-wales-deaths-in-prison-custody-to-june-2026-assaults-and-self-harm-to-march-2026

Although several headline measures decreased, the continuing scale remains severe. 30,820 assaults, including 9,833 assaults on staff and 871 serious assaults on staff, underline the sustained violence and trauma experienced across the prison estate.

Pay Comparators

Prison Officer pay has fallen behind the market value of comparable operational public-sector roles, creating an increasingly difficult recruitment and retention challenge.

The comparator table below contains source-year PSPRB 2026 figures, not current rates. The current comparison used here is £52,015 for a top-rate police constable and £38,766 for the comparable Band 3 total:

- In the source-year comparator data, Band 3 Prison Officer basic pay started below the entry salary for police officers, NHS Band 5 staff and firefighters.
- The source-year maximum Band 3 basic salary of £30,648 was below the competent salary for firefighters and the top of NHS Band 5.
- In the source-year figures, the police constable maximum basic salary was £19,608 higher than the maximum Band 3 Prison Officer basic salary.
- In the source-year figures, Border Force Higher Officer basic pay started £6,652 above the maximum Band 3 salary before its annualised-hours allowance – comparable round-the-clock airport and port AHA may add 40–52% of salary.
- Police officers benefit from substantially stronger incremental progression, allowing experience and competence to translate into significantly higher basic pay.
- Prison Officers increasingly need to rely on PP or exceptional contracted hours and unsocial-hours payments to generate earnings that comparator occupations can achieve through basic salary.
- The wider labour market provides experienced operational and security workers with credible alternatives, including rail, HGV and passenger transport, policing, Border Force and private security.

The significance of these differences is better illustrated by considering the pay increase trajectory available to an employee over the course of their career:

Comparator	**Entry salary**	Top/experienced salary	**Progression**	**Key relevance**
Prison Officer	**£29,107**	**£30,648 basic**	Band 3 points; higher earnings increasingly require additional hours and unsocial-hours payments	**Baseline**
Police Constable	**£31,164**	**£50,256 (source-year)**	Annual increments; normally reaches maximum within 6 years	Law enforcement / public protection
MOD Police Constable	**£29,606**	**£47,743**	**7 incremental points**	Specialist public-sector policing
NHS Band 5	**£32,073**	**£39,043**	National incremental structure	Skilled public-sector occupation
Firefighter	**£31,539**	**£40,358 competent**	Development → competent	Emergency response, shift work and risk
Border Force Higher Officer	**£37,300**	**£39,911 + AHA**	**Career progression**	Law enforcement, security and shift work
Train Driver	**£28,000**	**£65,000**	Experience / competence	Safety-critical operational work
HGV Driver	**£27,000**	**£47,000**	**Experience**	External labour market
Bus / Coach Driver	**£25,000**	**£37,000**	**Experience**	Shift-based, public-facing operational work
Private Security	£13–£15.53 per hour in cited examples	Dependent on hours/site	Site / experience dependent	Alternative security labour market

The source-year comparator evidence points to a weakness in the Band 3 structure. The issue is not whether additional hours, bedwatches or unsocial shifts can increase earnings above the cited £30,648 basic salary, but whether basic pay adequately rewards experienced officers when competing employers offer stronger progression.

A prison officer who has developed experience in custodial security, conflict management, emergency response, prisoner supervision and the management of serious incidents possesses skills that have value beyond HMPPS. Those skills are transferable into policing, Border Force, MOD Police, private security, transport and other operational occupations.

This creates a retention risk that cannot be addressed simply by considering whether the initial salary is sufficient to attract new recruits. HMPPS is not only competing for applicants, it is competing to retain experienced employees after they have acquired the very skills and operational competence on which safe and effective prisons depend. The relevant comparison is therefore the total career earnings opportunity, rather than the headline starting salary alone.

A pay structure may appear sustainable when assessed solely against the cost of recruiting a new entrant. It becomes considerably less competitive when the employee reaches the point at which they have accumulated several years of operational experience but finds that their basic salary has little room to progress. At that stage, comparator occupations can offer materially greater financial recognition for experience and competence. Additional payments should not be treated as a substitute for competitive basic pay.

The POA considers it particularly important that the PSPRB does not regard additional hours or unsocial-hours payments as evidence that Band 3 pay is competitive. The PSPRB's own comparator research records that Bands 3–5 staff receive a 20% Unsocial Working Hours payment and that Payment Plus is used for unpredictable bedwatch and escort duties and to address persistent vacancies. These payments are important elements of Prison Officer earnings but they should not obscure the underlying weakness in basic pay.

If an employee must routinely work additional hours or unsocial shifts to achieve an income comparable with the ordinary basic salary available in competing occupations, that is evidence of a pay-structure problem.

This distinction is particularly important in assessing recruitment and retention. Additional payments compensate employees for additional demands on their time and working patterns. They should not be relied on to compensate for an inadequate basic salary. The objective of a sustainable pay structure should instead be to ensure that the basic salary itself properly reflects the value of the role, while additional payments compensate for genuinely additional demands such as unsocial hours, overtime or exceptional duties.

The PSPRB reported in 2025 that Band 3 remained the principal operational recruitment grade, that retention remained fragile and that significant numbers of recruits continued to leave within their first 24 months. It also identified a cost to HMPPS of at least £13,000 for each new Band 3 recruit, before taking account of the wider operational consequences of turnover. The economic case for improving the underlying pay structure is therefore not simply about increasing individual earnings, it is about reducing avoidable turnover and retaining experienced operational staff.

Every experienced officer who leaves represents the loss of accumulated custodial knowledge, local operational knowledge, training investment and experience in managing risk and serious incidents. Replacing that officer requires further recruitment and training, while the prison continues to operate with a less experienced workforce. A competitive pay structure should therefore reward officers for staying, developing their competence and acquiring operational experience. At present, the Band 3 structure provides insufficient financial progression to achieve that objective.

The POA's position is not that prison officers undertake identical work to police officers, firefighters, NHS staff, Border Force officers or other comparator occupations. The purpose of these comparators is different. They demonstrate the external labour market against which HMPPS must compete for people possessing the resilience, judgement, flexibility, interpersonal skills and capacity to work in demanding operational environments.

The POA submits that the starting salary must be competitive with relevant operational public-sector comparators, and a meaningful incremental career structure that delivers substantially greater financial recognition for experience, competence and continued service should be adopted.

If HMPPS expects Prison Officers to acquire and retain the skills and experience necessary to operate safe, secure and effective prisons, the pay structure must provide a credible financial reason for experienced

officers to remain. The evidence demonstrates that the current Band 3 structure does not adequately achieve that objective. Prison Officer pay is increasingly dependent on additional hours and unsocial-hours payments, while competing operational occupations offer higher basic salaries and stronger opportunities for progression.

Sources: PSPRB 2026 Pay Comparator Review; PSPRB 2026 Report and prison officer pay scales; Home Office evidence to the Police Remuneration Review Body 2026–27; MOD Police salary scales; NHS Employers 2026/27 pay scales; Home Office Border Force Higher Officer salary information; Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service pay rates; National Careers Service profiles for train drivers, HGV drivers and bus/coach drivers; Mitie security officer salary examples.

Voluntary Additional Duties

A £500 payment to Bands 2–5 operational staff in the remit group who take on additional unpaid tasks, the payment to be made for each additional task delivered.

POA Conference policy is that our members should not carry out additional voluntary tasks unless they are receiving additional pay for doing them. We take on board PSPRB comments around moving towards a more cohesive pay structure and a longer-term strategy to renumerate staff suitably for the work they do, but we also feel strongly that staff who volunteer to do over and above the requirements of their job description should be appropriately rewarded. We repeat our request that staff are paid an annual £500 consolidated payment in recognition of each of the additional roles and qualifications undertaken by volunteers. Examples of additional roles include:

- Negotiator
- ACCT Assessor
- C&R Instructor
- C&R Tornado/advanced course
- First Aid
- Mentor
- Local Response Team (LRT)
- Care Team
- Mental Health Allies (TRIM trained staff)
- OSG Drivers (includes Tornado and Cat A/High Security)
- ECR / Control Room Operators
- Separation Centres
- Discreet HSE Units
- Family Liaison Officers
- Proposed Naloxone intervention staff

This list is not exhaustive. Any staff who undertake these roles are required to complete additional training, and some of these roles include a "pass or fail" course. Staff who complete the C&R Advanced course are required to pass a fitness test and put themselves at increased risk of physical injury. In some cases, staff have found themselves medically retired from the service following injuries they have sustained in this role. Other roles, for example ACCT assessor, potentially expose staff to extremely difficult and emotive situations that can have an impact on the mental wellbeing of our members, and additionally it likely could mean them having to attend coroner's court.

Many prison staff are suffering from mental health problems, often caused by the work they do, and any member of staff who steps up and volunteers to support their colleagues in a role such as the care team, local response team or trauma risk management deserves to be suitably appreciated and rewarded. To remain qualified in these roles, the staff also often change or work their rest days as they cannot be freed up on the detail to go away on a course that may take several days to complete. Without this willingness, it would be impossible for staff to remain trained and qualified in some of these vital roles.

We note that, in early September 2025, Gatwick IRC offered a payment of £300 for any member of staff that completes C&R Advanced.

PE Officer Specialist Allowance

The POA welcomes the opportunity to provide further evidence regarding the future of the Physical Education Instructor (PEI) Specialist Allowance. We believe the evidence now available clearly demonstrates that the allowance has achieved precisely what it was intended to do and that there is a compelling case for making it a permanent, pensionable element of PEI remuneration.

The most significant measure of success is recruitment. Prior to the introduction of the allowance, there were approximately 120 vacant PEI posts across the prison estate. The March 2026 analysis recorded approximately 70 vacancies (see Annex E: Op B2-5 & PEI B4 Vacancy Analysis March 2026). The more recent July 2026 Workforce Planning Tool data records a target staffing level of 725.5 FTE, net resource of 645.6 FTE and 79.9 net vacancies. This is a net-resource vacancy rate of 12.4% on the measure used in the source workbook. 64 of the 104 listed establishments were below their target staffing level (see Annex F: Prison Workforce PEI data July 2026).

The July position remains substantially better than the approximately 120 vacancies recorded before the allowance was introduced, representing a reduction of around one-third. However, the increase from the March estimate of approximately 70 to 79.9 net vacancies in July shows that the improvement is not yet secure. The data therefore supports retaining and strengthening the allowance, as removing a proven, guaranteed recruitment incentive while vacancies remain material would risk reversing the progress already achieved. It is also important to recognise that the allowance was never intended solely as a recruitment incentive. It recognises the exceptional professional commitment expected of those undertaking the PEI role.

Unlike the vast majority of staff within HMPPS, applicants for the PEI role are required to pass a PE pre-selection course and then attend and successfully complete an intensive residential training course away from home. This is not attendance-based training but a demanding "pass or fail" programme. Failure results in an inability to undertake the role.

Completion of the initial course is only the beginning. PEIs are expected to attain and maintain a wide range of nationally recognised professional qualifications, many at a high technical standard, and they are required to undertake continuing professional development throughout their careers to retain competency and accreditation. Their qualifications cannot simply be achieved once and forgotten – they must continually demonstrate competence and remain compliant with professional standards. No other operational staff group within HMPPS is expected to make such a significant ongoing commitment to obtaining, maintaining and renewing specialist professional qualifications throughout their career. The allowance therefore recognises not simply recruitment pressures but the unique professional status, expertise and continuing educational commitment required of PEIs. That recognition remains just as valid today as it was when the allowance was introduced.

The POA is therefore extremely concerned by HMPPS's indication that it wishes to replace the allowance with a Band 4 rate of Payment Plus. This proposal fundamentally misunderstands both the purpose of the allowance and the operational realities across the prison estate. PP opportunities are entirely dependent on local staffing levels and operational demand, creating significant inequity between establishments. The July 2026 data illustrates that unevenness – net vacancies were 6.0 FTE at Cookham Wood, 5.36 FTE at Feltham, 4.50 FTE at Belmarsh, 4.0 FTE at Norwich and 3.10 FTE at Wandsworth, while 20 establishments were exactly at target and a further 20 were above target. PEIs possess the same qualifications, undertake the same specialist role and maintain the same professional competencies regardless of their establishment, yet under HMPPS's proposal their opportunity to maintain earnings would depend on local vacancies rather than the value of their professional contribution (see Annex F: Prison Workforce PEI data July 2026).

The POA cannot accept that such a system represents equitable or fair remuneration. Professional recognition should not depend on whether an establishment happens to be experiencing staffing shortages. Indeed, such an approach creates entirely the wrong incentives, as it effectively rewards vacancies rather than professionalism. Moreover, replacing a guaranteed allowance with reliance on overtime creates a range of unintended consequences.

Firstly, it encourages excessive working hours in order for staff to maintain earnings at a time when fatigue, wellbeing and work-life balance are rightly receiving greater attention across the public sector. Secondly,

overtime is significantly more expensive for the employer than a fixed pensionable allowance because it attracts enhanced rates of pay and creates additional budgetary pressures. Thirdly, reliance on overtime fails to address recruitment. Prospective applicants considering whether to undertake the demanding PEI training programme are attracted by certainty in pay and recognition of their specialist status, not by the possibility that vacancies elsewhere may allow them to work additional hours.

Finally, removing the allowance would inevitably damage morale amongst this specialist workforce. PEIs accepted the demanding training requirements and ongoing professional obligations on the understanding that HMPPS recognised these additional commitments through dedicated financial recognition. Removing that recognition sends entirely the wrong message to a workforce that has consistently demonstrated professionalism, flexibility and commitment. The POA therefore submits that the evidence supports making the allowance permanent and pensionable.

The sustained improvement from the pre-allowance baseline, alongside the continuing 79.9 FTE net vacancy position in July 2026, demonstrate both the value of the allowance and the need to retain it. The continuing professional obligations placed on PEIs justify separate financial recognition in their own right. A permanent allowance provides certainty, supports recruitment and retention, recognises specialist professional qualifications and represents better value for money than increasing reliance on premium-rate overtime.

The POA therefore respectfully urges the Review Body to recommend that the PEI Specialist Allowance be retained as a permanent and pensionable specialist allowance, rising with the headline pay award on a yearly basis, and extended to include Band 5 PE Custodial Mangers in recognition of their PEI status.

Market Supplements Have Failed to Deliver the Intended Retention Outcome

Market Supplement payments to become consolidated into base pay for all grades in receipt.

If market supplements are intended to improve the recruitment and retention of Prison Officers at Red and Red Plus establishments, the available workforce data provides little evidence that they are achieving that purpose. The appropriate action would be to incorporate the value of those supplements into consolidated pay.

The latest HMPPS data on underlying resignation rates is particularly important because it provides a multi-year picture rather than a snapshot. It covers permanent Band 3 Prison Officers over the 12 months to 31 March in each year from 2020 to 2026.

The data highlights that Red and Red Plus establishments continue to have a serious retention problem. Across Red and Red Plus establishments, the underlying resignation rate was:

- 11.6% in 2020
- 7.2% in 2021
- 15.8% in 2022
- 15.0% in 2023
- 13.2% in 2024
- 13.4% in 2025/26

The latest figure of 13.4% is therefore higher than the 11.6% recorded in 2020, before considering the substantial financial expenditure associated with retaining staff at these designated sites.

There were 505 resignations from a staff population of 3,770 in the latest year, compared with 411 resignations from a population of 3,537 in 2020. This is not the pattern that would be expected if market supplements were functioning as an effective long-term retention mechanism. The data shows that the problem is not merely that resignation rates remain elevated but also that there has been no sustained improvement.

Following the exceptionally high 15.8% rate in 2022, the rate fell to 13.2% in 2024 but then increased again to 13.4% in the latest year. The central question for the PSPRB should therefore be, if market supplements are justified principally as a means of improving retention, where is the evidence that they have delivered a sustained retention benefit? The data supplied do not demonstrate one.

Red and Red Plus sites perform worse than the wider prison estate. The comparison with the rest of the

estate strengthens the case. In the latest year the Red/Red Plus resignation rate sits at 13.4%. Formerly Amber sites resignations sit at 11.3%, while other establishments record resignations at 7.8%. Overall Prison Service establishment rate records 9.5%. The evidence confirms that the establishments receiving the special Red/Red Plus supplement have a resignation rate 3.9 percentage points above the wider establishment-based Prison Service rate, and 5.6 percentage points above other establishments. This is particularly significant because it challenges the underlying logic of a market supplement.

A market supplement is supposed to address a recruitment or retention difficulty arising from the particular labour market circumstances of an establishment. Yet the establishments receiving the enhanced treatment remain among those with the most pronounced retention difficulties. The establishments identified as requiring additional pay because of recruitment and retention difficulties continue to demonstrate substantial recruitment and retention difficulties.

The POA maintain – and the evidence confirms – that market supplements are not working. Several Red and Red Plus establishments have continued to record high resignation rates in the latest year. For example:

- Bullingdon: 24.0%
- Aylesbury: 19.3%
- Woodhill: 15.8%
- The Mount: 15.3%
- Stocken: 13.7%
- Winchester: 13.9%
- Feltham: 18.4%
- Coldingley: 20.6%
- Cookham Wood: 21.7%
- Highpoint: 16.6%

This pattern is not consistent with a successful retention intervention across the Red and Red Plus estate.

The most striking examples demonstrate just how limited the apparent retention effect can be. At Feltham, for example, the resignation rate rose from 8.7% in 2022 to 17.3% in 2023, 22.1% in 2024 and remains at 18.4% in the latest year. At Coldingley, the latest rate is 20.6%, while Cookham Wood is 21.7%.

The latest data do not support the claim that market supplements have solved the retention problem. Red/Red Plus establishments recorded 505 resignations in the latest year, compared with 411 in 2020, and the resignation rate increased from 13.2% to 13.4%. Other establishments recorded a materially lower rate of 7.8%.

If additional pay is necessary to recruit and retain experienced Prison Officers, the underlying problem is the adequacy of core pay. A targeted and potentially changeable supplement has not produced a sustained retention outcome and does not provide the permanence, transparency or pension value needed for a long-term career.

The POA therefore asks the PSPRB to recommend that the value of Red and Red Plus market supplements is absorbed into consolidated pensionable pay. This would preserve the value received by staff, simplify the pay structure and convert expenditure on an unsuccessful retention mechanism into a permanent improvement in basic remuneration.

Market supplements should consequently cease as separate payments, with their full value incorporated into the consolidated base pay of all grades currently in receipt.

Recognition and Reward for HMPPS Dog Trainers

To provide much-needed reward and recognition, and to support both recruitment and retention, the POA again proposes the introduction of an annual Dog Trainers Allowance:

- £1,000 for CT Trainers
- £1,500 for Initial Trainers

This allowance would acknowledge the critical contribution of dog trainers, help stabilise the workforce, and ensure HMPPS is better prepared to meet the emerging challenge of synthetic opioids.

Section 3: Conclusion

The POA respectfully invites the PSPRB to accord priority to the recommendations set out below.

The POA seeks a substantial consolidated and pensionable pay award, incorporating meaningful restoration of the real-terms value lost through successive below-inflation and non-consolidated settlements. In addition, the POA calls for the introduction of a properly funded Supplementary Risk Allowance in recognition of the exceptional occupational risks borne by operational staff, including threats and attacks that extend beyond the prison gate.

With regard to unsocial hours, the POA urges that the 25% Band 2 Unsocial Working Hours payment be made permanent and increased to 30%, with no reduction unless robust evidence demonstrates a material and sustained reduction in actual unsocial working, and that the Bands 3–5 payment be increased from 20% to 25% initially while those arrangements are reviewed against contemporary operational working patterns, night duties and safety responsibilities. Payment Plus for Bands 3–5 should be set at time-and-two-thirds, calculated by reference to the maximum Inner London pay point for each grade, with corresponding improvements to Band 2 overtime arrangements and the annual uplifting of all rates in line with the headline award.

The POA further seeks support for a fair and dignified normal pension age of 60 for Prison Officers in recognition of the physical and operational demands placed on a uniformed frontline service. The POA also considers it essential that a sustainable staffing strategy be adopted, reducing reliance on detached duty, compulsory deployment and routine overtime, and underpinned by transparent reporting and fully funded safe staffing levels.

In respect of market supplements, the full value of Red and Red Plus payments should be consolidated into pensionable base pay for all grades currently in receipt of them. Specialist and additional duties – including PEI, dog-handling, dog-training and voluntary operational roles – should likewise be properly rewarded rather than responsibilities being continually added without commensurate recognition. Frontline resources, key-work and agreed regime-management safeguards must be protected from unfunded workforce reforms and from assumptions that transfer risk to staff.

Finally, the POA asks the PSPRB to demonstrate its independence as the compensatory mechanism for staff denied the right to strike and to deliver its recommendations in sufficient time to permit pensionable implementation from the annual award date.

Taken together, these priorities would deliver fair reward, improve recruitment and retention, strengthen operational resilience and recognise the professionalism of the staff on whom the Prison Service depends.

On behalf of POA members in England and Wales, we thank the PSPRB for its consideration of this evidence.

The POA National Executive Committee