



Ministry
of Justice

Annual Statement on Prison Capacity: 2024

December 2024

CP 1220





Annual Statement on Prison Capacity: 2024

Presented to Parliament
by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
by Command of His Majesty

December 2024



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Introduction

1. The government has committed to improving transparency by publishing an annual statement on prison capacity, setting out the prison population projections and the department's projection for supply. The additional transparency provided by this statement will hold the current and future governments to account on long-term planning to ensure that decisions on prison demand and supply are in balance. This statement fulfils that commitment for 2024.
2. The government has also committed to legislating to make laying this statement before Parliament a statutory requirement in the future. This will be done when parliamentary time allows. Given the importance of probation service capacity in managing offenders with community orders, suspended sentences and on licence, this statement also includes information on probation service staffing.
3. The prison population has been under considerable pressure for some time, with the adult male estate running at over 99% capacity for much of the 18 months from February 2023. As a result, earlier this year the government took quick action on assuming office to change the automatic release point for Standard Determinate Sentences (SDS) for some offences from 50% to 40% in order to avoid reaching gridlock in the criminal justice system. This change will be reviewed 18 months following implementation. The change to the SDS automatic release point allowed us to end the previous government's emergency release scheme: End of Custody Supervised Licence (ECSL). Accounting for the urgent action this government has already taken, we still project the prison population to increase by an average of 3,000 annually over the coming years – the equivalent of building two large prisons per year. Therefore, despite the government's commitment to build 14,000 prison places, further action is needed to avoid reaching critical capacity in the estate.
4. The Independent Review of Sentencing, led by the Rt Hon David Gauke, is underway and will report its findings to the Lord Chancellor in spring 2025. The review is guided by three principles:
 - firstly, sentences must punish offenders and protect the public – there must always be space in prison for the most dangerous offenders
 - secondly, sentences must encourage offenders to turn their backs on a life of crime, cutting crime by reducing reoffending
 - thirdly, we must expand and make greater use of punishment outside of prison
5. The government will carefully consider the findings of the review, including any measures to be taken forward to ensure that we are never again in a position where the country has more prisoners than prison places, and the government is forced to rely on the emergency release of prisoners.

Prison Capacity

6. As of 2 December 2024, the population of the adult prison estate was 85,688, comprising 82,193 in the adult male estate and 3,495 in the women's estate. The number of useable adult prison places (useable operational capacity) was 88,400.¹
7. Accounting for the additional demand measures announced by the government in October 2024, the total adult prison population is projected to increase steadily, reaching between 97,300 and 112,300 prisoners by November 2032 absent any further demand measures being introduced (central estimate of 104,100). The range and central estimates come from three equally plausible scenarios for future population growth, and it is entirely possible that the reality may lie outside of this range.
8. As of 30 September 2024, the adult prison population stood at 86,704. Of this, 79% (68,754) were sentenced prisoners (including those who are in prison as a recall), 20% (17,565) were on remand, and less than 0.5% (385) were non-criminal prison population.²
9. The supply of prison places in the adult male and women's estate is expected to increase to c.99,000 by November 2032. Further details are available in the 10-Year Capacity Strategy, published alongside this statement. The figures below show projected future demand and supply for the adult estate (both male and female).

Notes on the projections

10. Prison population projections are subject to several uncertainties, particularly regarding future levels of demand entering the criminal justice system (CJS). For purposes of the projections, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) have agreed scenarios reflecting potential upstream demand for prison places. These scenarios are presented as a range to account for uncertainty, but they do not capture the full range of possible outcomes. The projections do not reflect any possible impacts from the Sentencing Review, given that the review is yet to report.
11. Published population projections cover the period up to March 2029. For longer term planning, these projections have been extended by assuming a continuation of the estimated demand levels entering the courts and resulting growth rates for the remand and sentenced prisoner populations (detailed in Annex A).
12. Prison population estimates quoted in this document are based on the published prison projections³ alongside the impact of further measures announced by the Lord Chancellor in October 2024 to increase the maximum period eligible offenders can spend on Home Detention Curfew (HDC) from six months to twelve months, and to change the Risk Assessed Recall Review (RARR) process, so that a greater number of lower risk recalled offenders can be considered suitable for re-release.
13. The projected increase in the prison population is driven by several factors including: continued growth in police charging and prosecutorial activity; increased flows into the courts; rising levels of people on remand; and changes in sentencing policy and behaviour to keep the most serious offenders in prison for longer.

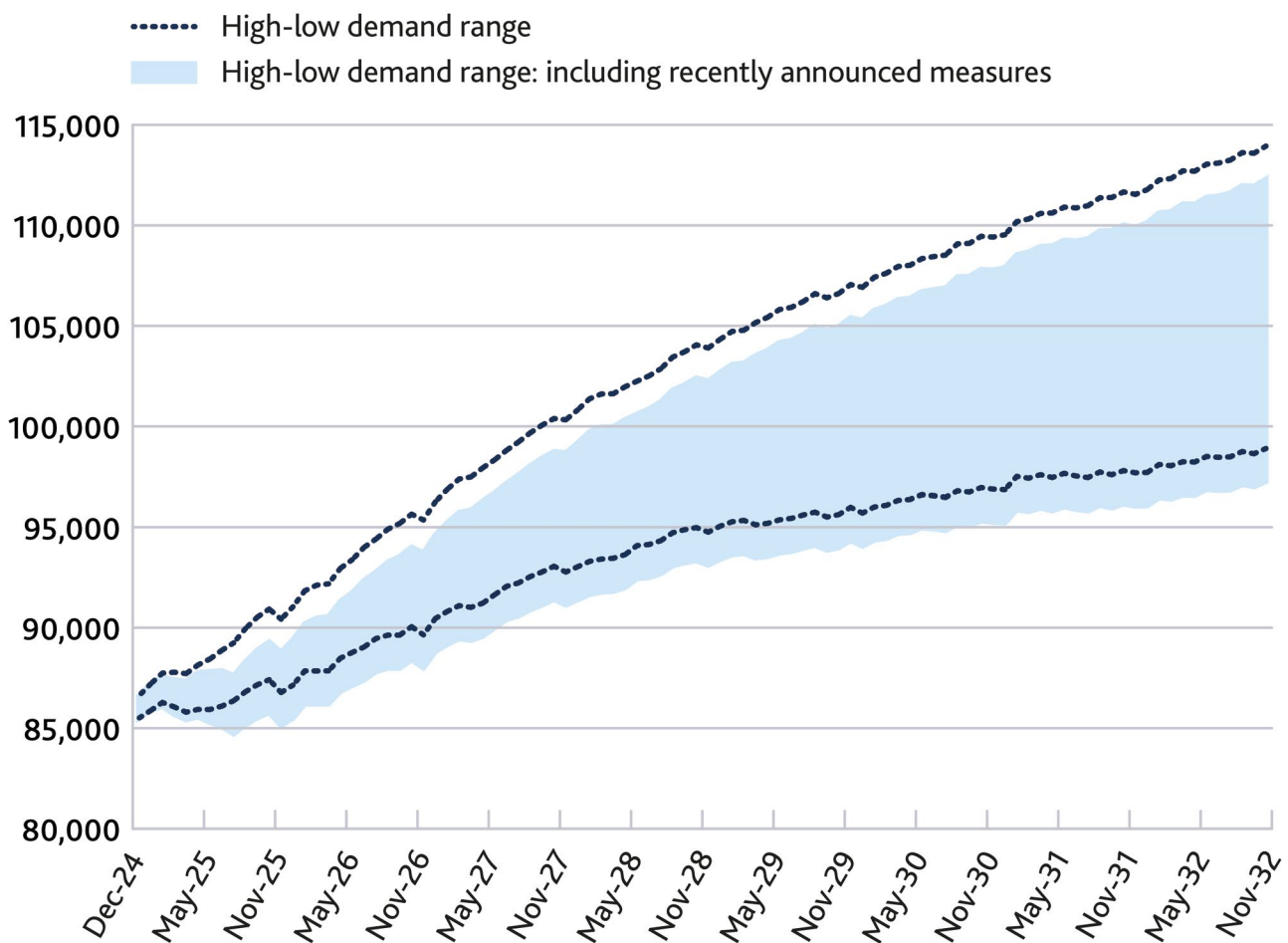
1 www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-population-figures-2024

2 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2024

3 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-projections-ns

14. The prison supply projections provide estimates of future capacity, incorporating plans to expand supply (such as building new prisons) and adjustments for factors that reduce capacity, such as places taken offline temporarily for maintenance-related reasons and cell dilapidations making spaces unfit for use. Delivery timescales are based on the most up-to-date information but are subject to revision due to uncertainties in external factors, like planning permission and site-specific complexities (e.g. power and ground works), which can also impact timelines. As with all major infrastructure projects, future prison supply depends on funding from future Spending Review settlements, including for maintenance of the existing estate.
15. The prison supply projections include an 'operating margin' to account for unusable places on any given day. For example, some prisons are designed for specific types of prisoners, such as remand prisoners in reception prisons or low-risk offenders in Category D ('open') prisons. As a result, not all spaces may be utilised if available spaces do not align with the types of prisoners in the estate. The operating margin is regularly reviewed to ensure it is suitable for maintaining a safe regime.
16. Prison supply in the adult estate is expected to rise over the next few years as new projects are delivered and maintenance targets are met. However, supply growth is not expected to keep pace with demand increases in the estate over the medium to long term. Further detail on prison supply is set out in the 10-Year Prison Capacity Strategy published alongside this statement.

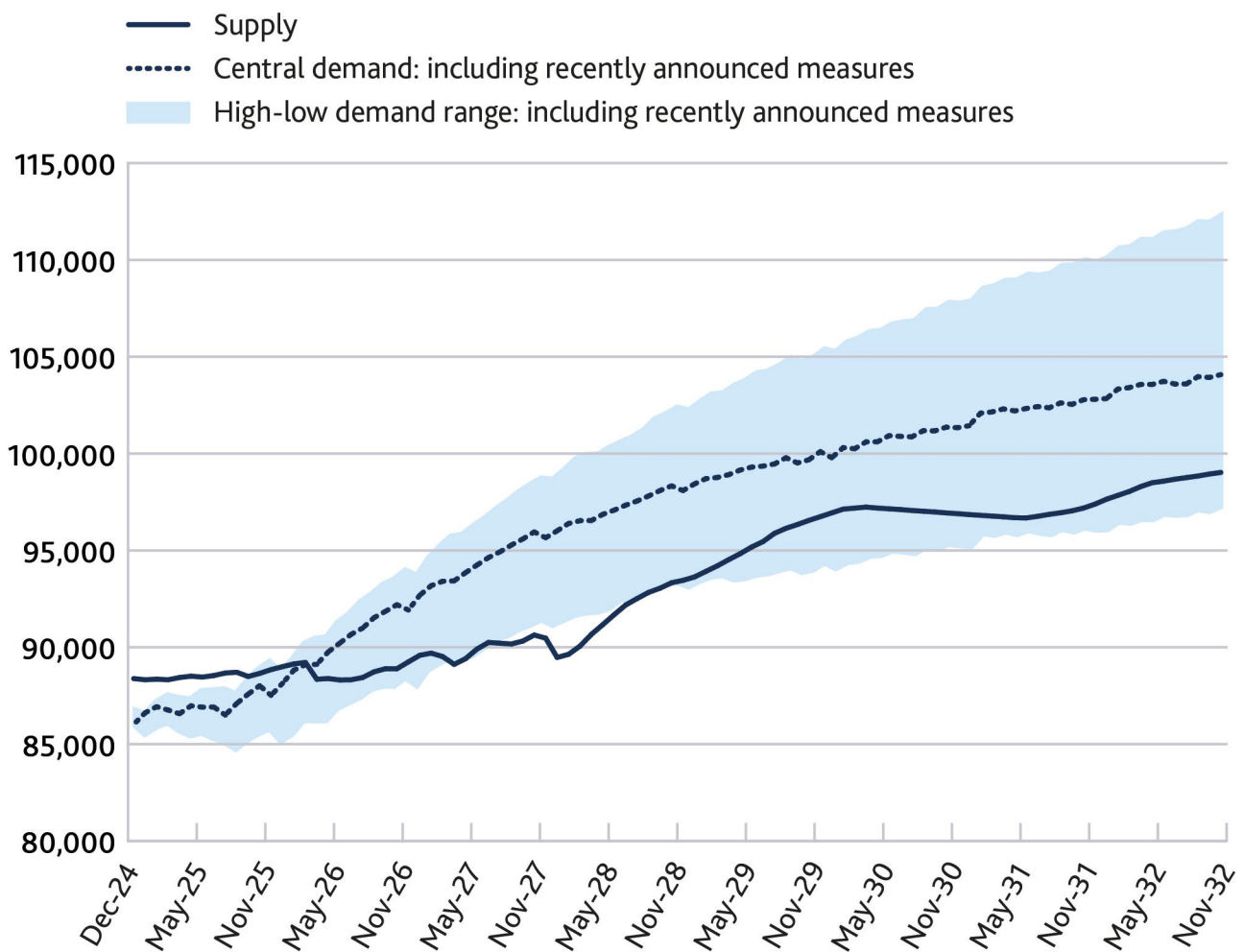
Figure 1 – Future demand: impact of recently announced demand measures on the adult prison estate⁴



⁴ Chart presents data for the last week of the month from Dec-24 to Nov-32

17. Figure 1 presents the impact of the further measures to address the rising prison population that the government announced in October 2024. The shaded area represents the high to low range of the demand projections, accounting for the further measures. The blue dashed lines represent the high to low range of the demand projections without these measures. These measures will increase the maximum period eligible offenders can spend on Home Detention Curfew (HDC) from six months to twelve months and will change the Risk Assessed Recall Review (RARR) process, so that a greater number of lower risk recalled offenders can be considered suitable for re-release.

Figure 2 – Future demand and supply: adult prison estate including recently announced demand measures⁵



18. Figure 2 presents the capacity outlook following the impact of these demand measures. The dark blue continuous line represents the projected supply (further detail on prison supply is set out in the 10-Year Prison Capacity Strategy). The blue shaded area represents the high to low range of the demand prison population projections, and the medium blue dashed line represents the central demand projection, accounting for the measures discussed in paragraph 17.

⁵ Chart presents data for the last week of the month from Dec-24 to Nov-32

Prison Staffing

19. We know that sufficient and skilled frontline staffing is fundamental to delivering safe, secure and rehabilitative prison regimes. Our target staffing level is the number of staff required to run an optimal regime in each prison and is greater than the minimum number of staff required for a prison to operate safely. It also includes allowances for staff taking leave, being off sick, or on training. Prisons are generally well staffed for core operational grades – as of 30 September 2024, nationally we are at 99.5% of our target staffing figure (hours-adjusted) for Band 3-5 Prison Officers.⁶ This marks an improvement from the same period in September 2023, when there was a staffing deficit of 417 hours-adjusted FTE (Full Time Equivalent).
20. While the overall staffing picture is positive, vacancies persist in some establishments. We continue substantive recruitment at all sites with current or projected vacancies, with targeted interventions applied to those prisons with the most need. We are also expecting the number of staff in post to fluctuate as we look to rebalance our staffing across the estate. In response to recruitment and retention challenges, we purposefully over-recruited at sites with a strong track record of recruitment, allowing staff to be temporarily deployed to other prisons. We have been managing down the number of staff at these sites, which have been above their target staffing levels and focusing on filling vacancies substantively.
21. All prison expansion projects, whether new prisons or expansions of existing sites, are factored into our staffing plans to ensure we recruit on time and build up the experience needed to continue to deliver safe and secure regimes. HMPPS and privately-managed prison operators have also worked collaboratively to share learning and good practice in improving recruitment and retention.

Probation Capacity

22. The Probation Service does vital work supervising offenders released from prison on licence, including prior to their release from prison, as well as supervising offenders on community orders or suspended sentence orders.
23. As of 30 June 2024, 238,646 people were receiving probation supervision, of whom:⁷
 - 62,316 had community orders
 - 45,387 had suspended sentence orders with requirements
 - 76,027 were being supported pre-release
 - 60,772 were under post-release supervision
24. Of the total population, 91% (216,818) were men and 9% (21,828) were women.

6 Prison and Probation Officer Recruitment Annex – www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-september-2024

7 Probation – www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2024

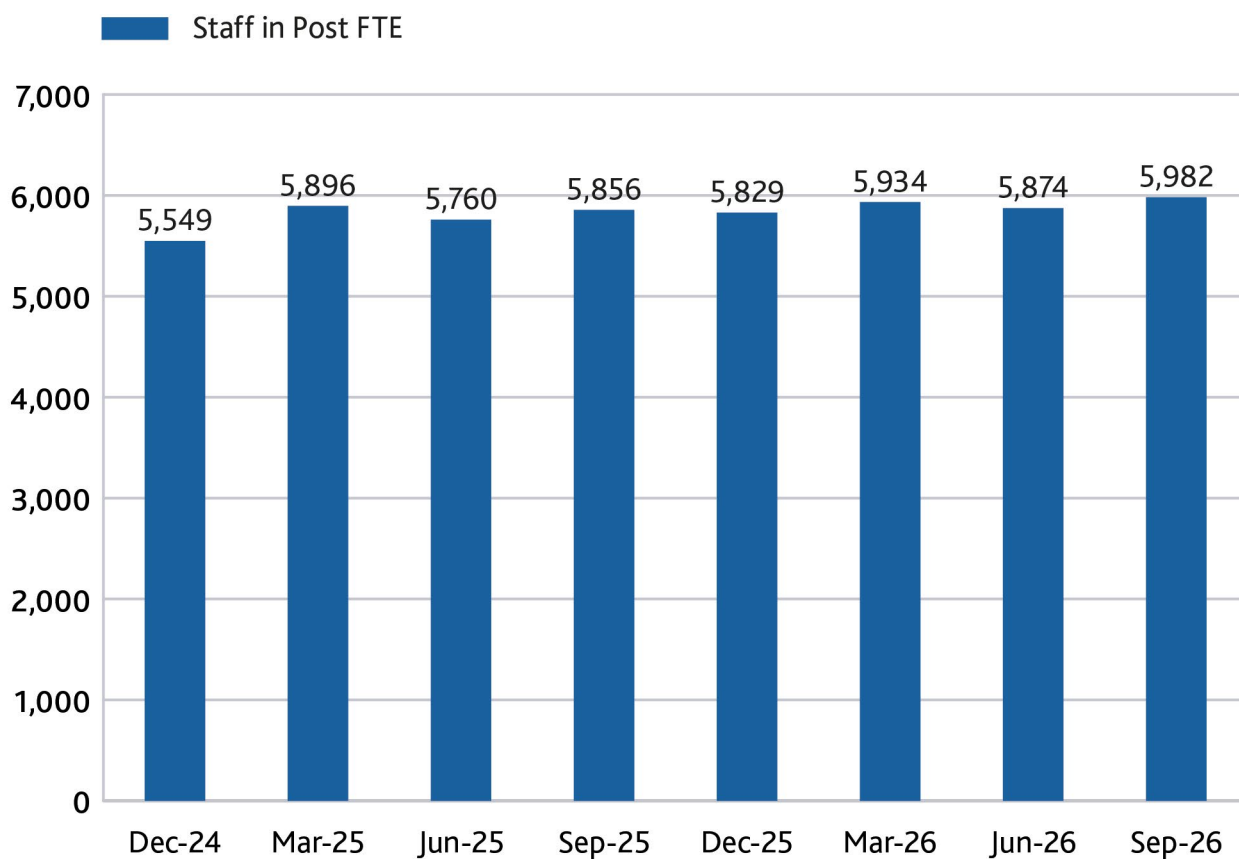
25. Caseloads fluctuate due to several upstream factors, and current caseload is broadly comparable to average levels over the past 10 to 15 years. The 2024 figure is higher than during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the number of people receiving probation supervision dropped to 222,657 in September 2020,⁸ but lower than the peak of 268,062 in March 2017.⁹
26. As of 30 September 2024, the Probation Service had:
 - 5,413 FTE Probation Officers in post, against a target staffing figure of 7,115 FTE (giving a 76% staffing level), with levels varying by region from 64% to 89%¹⁰
 - 1,641 FTE Trainee Probation Officers in post
27. Since unification in June 2021, the number of Probation Officers in post has increased by 896 FTE (a 20% increase).
28. By September 2026, staffing levels are expected to rise to around 6,000 FTE Probation Officers, factoring in trainee graduates, forecast attrition, and promotions. For the 2024/25 financial year, at least 1,000 Trainee Probation Officers will be onboarded to strengthen future staffing levels (Figure 3).
29. Target staffing levels are reviewed annually to reflect changing demands on probation services. Given the ongoing challenges in the prison estate forecast targets are likely to evolve.

8 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2020

9 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2017

10 For further details please see Table 2 of the Prison and Probation Officer Recruitment Annex – www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-september-2024

Figure 3 – Forecast Probation Officer Staff in Post (FTE)



N.B. Progress in increasing Probation Officer staffing numbers for this period is limited by the smaller Trainee Probation Officer intake for 2023 to 2024 (543 individuals) compared to previous years and also compared to the commitment we have made for 2024 to 2025 to onboard at least 1,000 trainees.

Annex A: Demand and Supply Assumptions

Supply projections

The supply projections used in this publication are the internal Ministry of Justice Supply Projections. These projections have been used for decision-making from November 2024 onwards. The projections cover the period to November 2032.

Background

To estimate the capacity of prisons in the adult male estate over the next 10 years, we have used the following approach:

- We project the expansion of the estate through new prisons, houseblocks and refurbishments. These are projects MoJ has a high confidence in delivering, typically with an Outline Business Case or equivalent at the time of projections. We apply reasonable contingency to delivery timelines.
- We project the number of places required to be offline for maintenance work through the maintenance requirements of the estate, including places for fire safety work.
- To estimate the number of places lost permanently to dilapidations we use historical averages for losses.
- To estimate the daily unusable places due to mismatched offender categories, high-risk individuals who cannot share a cell, or short-term cell damage, we use historical averages for these as an operating margin, deducted from current operational capacity.

Risks

- The prison supply projections are created from planned prison expansion projects throughout the projection period. It is inevitable that current plans will change to reflect operational realities.
- The dilapidation assumption is based on historic averages. Site-specific risks of future closures are not modelled.
- The operating margin is based on operational data at a point in time. With changes in composition of the estate the usability of some cell types may change, leading to different operating margins in the future.
- The supply line does not reflect the risk of unpredictable major shocks to supply, such as places lost to disorder or temporary losses for other operational reasons.

Demand projections

The demand projections used in this publication are based on the population projection Accredited Official Statistics which are published: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-projections-2024-to-2029 (last updated 5 December 2024).

These projections include recent measures such as the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods) Order 2024 which brought forward the custodial release point for some offenders from 50% to 40%. In addition, the estimates in this annual statement include the impact of further measures announced by the Lord Chancellor in October to increase the maximum period eligible offenders can spend on Home Detention Curfew (HDC) from six months to twelve months, and to change the Risk Assessed Recall Review (RARR) process, so that a greater number of lower risk recalled offenders can be considered suitable for re-release. The impact of these two recently announced policies are not included in the Accredited Official Statistics as at the time of modelling they had not yet received final parliamentary approval and so were not included due to uncertainty over the timelines. Similarly, the impacts that the Sentencing Review may have are not reflected in these projections.

These five-year published projections cover the period from October 2024 to March 2029 and further detail on the methodology can be found: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-projections-2024-to-2029. The Annual Statement and 10-Year Prison Capacity Strategy cover a longer horizon than the demand projection publication to provide transparency on the long-term prison capacity outlook.

To indicate a possible trajectory for the prison population beyond five years, population growth has been extrapolated based on an assumption that the levels of demand seen over the final years of the published projections continue to flow through the prison system.

This approach is experimental and provides an illustrative projection only. As such it does not form part of the Accredited Official Statistics. The method used to extrapolate the projections to cover a longer period to November 2032 is the following:

- To estimate the determinate sentenced population, we assume that the volume of demand through the courts and sentencing outcomes will match those estimated in the final year of our published projections (2028/29). This results in an estimate that the adult determinate sentenced population will continue to grow but at a decreasing rate, rising to 57,100 in the central scenario by November 2032.
- To estimate the remand population, we assume the growth rate between March 2026 and March 2029 persists into the future. This results in an estimate that the adult remand population will grow by an average of c.600 each year from March 2029 to November 2032 in the central scenario.
- The adult recall and indeterminate projections maintain the assumptions of the 5-year projections and, in the central scenario, are projected to rise to 14,800 and 8,200 respectively by November 2032.

In November 2032, including recently announced measures as well (see paragraph 17), the population is projected to be between 97,300 and 112,300, with a central estimate of 104,100.

The overall projections reflect the cumulative impact of the estimates for each of these sub-populations in each scenario. There is increased uncertainty around the prison population over this longer time horizon. This is due to the increasing contribution of uncertain factors to prison population growth over time, like the nature of crime in society, the volumes and crime mix of police charges, the capacity of courts and the sentencing practices of the judiciary.

Figure 4. Prison Supply and Demand Projections (Figures rounded to the nearest 100)

Date	Total Supply (Adult Estate)	Total Demand (Adult Estate including recently announced measures)		
		Low Scenario	Central Scenario	High Scenario
May 2025	88,500	85,600	87,000	87,800
November 2025	88,700	85,800	88,000	89,300
May 2026	88,400	86,800	89,800	91,300
November 2026	88,900	88,400	92,200	94,000
May 2027	89,400	89,600	93,900	96,300
November 2027	90,600	91,400	96,000	98,700
May 2028	91,200	92,000	96,900	100,300
November 2028	93,300	93,300	98,300	102,400
May 2029	94,800	93,500	99,200	103,800
November 2029	96,600	94,000	99,700	105,000
May 2030	97,200	94,700	100,600	106,400
November 2030	96,900	95,300	101,400	107,800
May 2031	96,700	95,800	102,200	109,000
November 2031	97,200	96,200	102,800	110,000
May 2032	98,500	96,600	103,600	111,100
November 2032	99,000	97,300	104,100	112,300

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