



# **Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Northumberland**

**For reporting year  
1 January 2021 – 31 December 2021**

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## Introductory sections 1–3

### 1. Statutory Role of Independent Monitoring Board

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent body which has been appointed by the Secretary of State. This Independent Monitoring Board (the Board) comprises members of the communities which are within an agreed geographical radius of the prison.

Under the National Monitoring Framework as agreed with Ministers, the objectives are as follows:

- to satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within the confines of the prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- to promptly inform the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated, as it judges appropriate, of any concerns it has
- to report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed upon it as well as what impact these have on those in its custody

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have the right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison as well as to the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventative Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and the conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The Board is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventative Mechanism.

## **2. Description of establishment**

2.1 HMP Northumberland (HMPN) is a category C men's prison situated in rural Northumberland and the estate is quite extensive, with some of the buildings being at least 40 years old. The location and distance from other prisons continues to impact transfers to other prisons and transfers from the prison to outside services, especially hospitals offering specialist medical care, which are almost thirty miles away. HMPN continues to carry out planned and pre-planned work to enable the prison to maintain the best standards it can (see section 5.1).

2.2 The certified normal accommodation is currently 1348, with an average population in December 2021 of 1,338. This reduced figure has been as the result of the loss of places in a residential block but once again, has been helpful in the exemplary management of Covid-19 in the prison. There was a slight shift in the make-up of the prison with 87.1% of prisoners classing themselves as White British in 2021 as opposed to just under 89% in 2020. Of the remaining 13%, 2.5% identify as Traveller or Gypsy, and 2.4% as foreign nationals, the latter being a decrease of 5% against the previous year's figures. Records show that almost 20% of the prisoner population was either under 25 or over 55, with approximately 9% in either category.

2.3 The prison comprises 15 residential blocks. There are five vulnerable prisoner (VP) wings, a 40-place drug and alcohol recovery unit (Gateway) and nine main wings. In addition, there is a 20-place wing for men on release on temporary licence (ROTL), some of whom have category D status. There are a number of reasons for men with category D status remaining at HMP Northumberland and these have been raised in previous reports.

2.4 The prison is in its ninth year of operation by Sodexo. The healthcare contract has been delivered by Spectrum since April 2020.

2.5 Services for prisoners nearing release are organised in line with statutory guidance. Volunteers and staff at the North East Prison After Care Society (Nepacs) continue to support prisoners' families from a dedicated facility in the grounds of the prison.

### **3. Executive summary**

#### **3.1 Background to the report**

The evidence for this report has been gathered during a global pandemic. Although some restrictions eased for periods during 2021, the Board continued to monitor with a blend of face to face and remote monitoring.

Greater use of 'dial in systems' and alternative technologies helped with accessing information.

Again, this year, the prison has prioritised prisoner and staff wellbeing and safety in the light of pandemic conditions. These measures have successfully managed peaks in Covid-19 cases and yet again the difficult decisions made by the leadership of the prison have resulted in good, strong management of a difficult situation.

#### **3.2 Main judgements**

##### **How safe is the prison?**

The Board confirms that the prison is a safe environment where many of the prison's initiatives are supporting prisoners to ensure that they feel safe. The ongoing work led by the safer custody team has supported prisoners in reducing violent behaviour and the data demonstrates there has been a significant decline in violence which continues the trend begun before Covid imposed restrictions. (see section 4.3).

##### **How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?**

The Board maintains that, in its view, the prisoners at HMPN are treated fairly and humanely. Many staff continue to pay particular attention and care when dealing with those who are extremely vulnerable. This is particularly notable in the segregation unit where the team not only deal with the most challenging of prisoners but also the most vulnerable. The Board also recognises and commends the care, knowledge and expertise of staff at all levels across the prison.

##### **How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?**

In most cases, prisoners' health and wellbeing needs are being well met. The mental health team have been supportive throughout the pandemic for those prisoners who need additional support for their mental health needs.

Where prisoners bring to our attention their concerns regarding healthcare, it is almost exclusively related to administration of prescription medication, most notably for pain relief, when they transfer from other prisons.

##### **How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?**

The restrictions imposed by the pandemic have led to a significant lack of opportunities available in education, work and training, both here in the prison and in the wider community.

New opportunities are beginning to open up in the north east and the prison has been quick to recognise them. During 2022 we have prioritised monitoring of progress in this area as the pandemic severely compromised access to the minimal

opportunities that there were.

### **3.3 Main areas for development**

To prioritise opportunities for men to re-engage with learning, employment and training to mitigate the disadvantages of the lockdowns and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on preparation for release. This remains the same as last year because the pandemic, combined with very few local opportunities, severely restricted progress.

#### ***TO THE MINISTER***

Whilst we are aware the prison has managed the pandemic very effectively, we are concerned that the full effect on prisoner mental health has yet to be seen. We would like assurance from the minister that a fully funded infrastructure of support is available to the entire prison estate to support adequate opportunity for mental health support, along with adequate education and employment opportunities on release.

Additionally, the full effect of the transition to the new probation service has yet to be evaluated, but we are aware that men are released into homeless situations and we find this unacceptable. We would seek confirmation from the minister that those agencies charged with the responsibility of housing men on release are doing just that and, more importantly, that there is adequate appropriate housing stock available.

#### ***TO THE DIRECTOR***

We continue to support the measures taken by the Director to ensure the safety and wellbeing of men in the care of HMPN. We look forward to monitoring the new initiatives for 2022 relating to employment, education and preparation for release and see these as a welcome development.

### **3.4 Progress since last report**

We have observed the maintenance of the higher standards of cleanliness and dignity for men in the care of the prison throughout 2021.

3.4.1. We recognise that, although the contract for healthcare provision is not in the gift of the organisation running the prison, every possible step has been taken to secure appropriate staffing and stabilise delivery to the residents. Given the difficulties presented by the ongoing pandemic, the location of the prison and the crisis in healthcare recruitment nationally, delivery has continued with considerable attempts to reduce waiting times for both GP appointments and dentistry.

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

Once more the prison management's stated priorities for the year included:

- Reduce the availability of drugs through use of intelligence to disrupt supply.
- Increase staff visibility and engagement with prisoners to help them feel safe and therefore be more likely to engage with the regime.
- Adhere closely and consistently to processes such as the challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP), as this sends a clear message that unacceptable behaviour is not tolerated.
- Keep prisoners occupied to minimise boredom and the likelihood of disruption and poor behaviour.

There is no doubt that the restrictions on association and movement because of covid supported these aims, but our observations are that every opportunity has been taken to emphasise the potential for individual prisoners achieving their targets through higher standards of behaviour.

The prison continued to prioritise prisoner safety within the context of the Covid-19 guidelines and restrictions. In essence, this meant that for most of the year, despite the limited opportunities for education, employment and out of cell activity generally staff across the site made strenuous efforts both to provide men with in cell activities and to engage with them individually.

#### **4.1 Reception and induction**

HMPN continued to receive transfers from HMP Durham and other prisons on an almost daily basis. Numbers varied from less than ten to the mid-teens daily. Infection control measures were observed in reception to limit the introduction and spread of Covid-19. All new arrivals went into designated house blocks for reverse cohorts until they were able to go to allocated longer term placement. Induction was carried out in these residential blocks, but with the Board having limited access for most of the year, because of the pandemic, it was difficult to observe and ascertain how effective this was.

During 2021, there were 105 discharges to court, seven prisoners were deported and two were sectioned under the Mental Health Act. We note that, although the pandemic restricted face to face contact from the Home Office for foreign national prisoners, regular checks were made on men in this cohort in line with government guidance.

## 4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

During 2021, there were six deaths in custody. Two deaths were from natural causes, two were self-inflicted and two were suspected heart attacks. In all cases the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman concluded that the healthcare and general care given to these men was in line with expected standards. As always, our thoughts are with the families of the men.

The prison introduced an action plan to ensure that assessment, care and custody teamwork documents (ACCTs) were monitored weekly by the safer custody team. In the latter part of 2021, new ACCT documentation and procedures were introduced and staff were given additional training. During 2021, 314 ACCTs were recorded as opened and 276 were closed, 34 were subsequently reopened and there were nine opened in the care and separation unit (CSU). The appropriate opening, completion and closure of ACCTs will be a continuing area of monitoring activity by the Board in the coming year.

We are pleased to note that the number of men requiring an ACCT in the CSU remains very low.

Self-harm incidents varied from a monthly low of 15 in December to a high of 35 in April, with a monthly average of 26. These figures are somewhat lower than those in 2020, and we credit this as due, in the main, to the care the staff offer to those in custody. These figures might also be a reflection, given the restrictions of the pandemic in the prison, that prisoners felt less anxious and pressurised by their peers.

## 4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Throughout the year, the prison adhered to the national guidelines through the pandemic, resulting in various levels of lock downs and other movement restrictions. This meant that for much of the year, opportunities for mixing and violent interaction were very limited, and that officers ensured that safety of the prisoners was paramount. The Board had limited access to some residential blocks for parts of the year as a result of Covid restrictions, limiting opportunities to gather prisoner views.

Figures obtained regarding assault show a variation from six to 13 episodes per month, with an average of 10 per month throughout the year.

Violence reduction has continued. The table below offers an overview of the number of assaults against all adjudications, in the last six months of the year. Given the size of the prison population of 1,348, the percentage of assaults is very low and we attribute this to better staff training in de-escalation, restricted movement because of Covid and strong management on residential blocks, among other things.

**Table 1: Assaults and adjudications statistics July to December 2021**

	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Assaults</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Adjs (Proven)</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>63</b>



#### **4.4 Use of force**

Our deep scrutiny of the data in the last six months of 2021 showed 118 episodes of use of force, with an average of 13 per month. It would appear that eight were planned and 110 were unplanned. Of those planned, the following reasons have been recorded:

- non-compliant – 3
- threatening – 1
- escorting – 3
- multiple reasons – 1.

The following reasons have been identified for the unplanned episodes:

- non-compliant – 58
- assault/fighting – 22
- escorting – 2
- threatening – 23
- multiple reasons – 5.

Overall there has been a reduction in the use of force compared to previous years. We would suggest that this is a result of a combination of factors including limited contact between prisoners as a result of Covid-19 restrictions and better use of de-escalation techniques and training of staff.

There was no evidence of any group, individual, ethnicity or religion being targeted disproportionately with use of force.

We are pleased to note that during the period of deep scrutiny there were no injuries due to use of force reported as well as no investigations into complaints regarding the use of force.

#### **4.5 Preventing illicit items**

The availability of drugs inside the prison has been a continuing concern in recent years, despite the introduction of the counter-measures documented in our previous reports. The presence of illicit drugs, production of hooch, and attempts to smuggle banned items remain a constant challenge, although it is clear the prison operates a thorough and responsive security policy. Hooch finds had seasonal variations, not unexpectedly rising towards the Christmas period.

Whilst it has only been possible to attend one security committee meeting, regular minutes have been received throughout the year, documenting illicit activity and the counter measures taken by the prison. Closed visits, banned visitors and direct surveillance were all employed during the months when visits were allowed, and a

number of attempts to pass illicit items to prisoners at visits were successfully intercepted.

**Table 2: Total finds July to December 2021**

<b>Total finds</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sept</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
	<b>46</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>47</b>

Intelligence priorities were shown to be responsive to changing circumstances and several new initiatives appear to be having a positive effect. Throughout the year, mandatory drug testing was not possible due to Covid-19 restrictions. The metal detection portal continues to be used in reception, as well as on an intel basis, and staff also now go through a scanner on arrival at the prison. The use of drug detection dogs in the post room has been effective, along with regular perimeter and house block visits. In October 39.5 litres of hooch were found, 85.51 litres in November and 84.21 litres in December. The increase in November and December is in line with previous years.

The preventative measures outlined above are being expanded and the Board believes that some of the reduction in violence and drug related behaviour is due to this interruption in supply.

## **5. Fair and humane treatment**

### **5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food**

The age of most buildings (over 40 years) was again reflected in the extensive programme of works carried out throughout 2021. During the year there have been issues with drainage and heating, which have been managed extremely well, but this is not unusual for an estate of this size and age.

Each residential block has a named resident who is the residential support worker. They have responsibility for living standards, one of many measures introduced to raise standards of accommodation for all prisoners. It is a requirement that duty staff inspect cells on a random selection basis to ensure standards of decency are maintained.

### **5.2 Segregation**

Yet again we believe the management of the CSU is a useful indicator of the standards of care across the prison estate. We continue to observe that staff are incredibly knowledgeable and caring in this unit. Occupancy has remained very low throughout the year and we attribute this to restrictions because of Covid-19, better training of staff in de-escalation skills and better management on residential blocks by all staff teams.

The occupancy of the CSU over the last six months of 2021 was as follows:

**Table 3: CSU occupancy July to December 2021**

<b>July</b>	<b>August</b>	<b>September</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>December</b>
<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>47</b>

A high proportion of those sent to the CSU were there under rule 53(4). This is due in part to the fact that if the body scanners, which are being used to find unauthorised articles, indicate there is a concealed item then the prisoner concerned is put on report and sent to CSU to await adjudication.

It is clear that the staff in the CSU are experienced and efficient. In the last six months, all health screenings were completed within two hours and all review boards were held within the specified time. On the few occasions that the Board was able to visit in person it was obvious that the staff had positive relationships with the residents. There has been no use of force within the last six months and no use of the special cell during the entire reporting year.

Improvements were made in the CSU which included every cell being repainted with anti-graffiti paint, unsuitable or damaged furniture being replaced and cells being cleaned and prepared for new residents immediately they became vacant. During the year it was noted that the sustained efforts to improve the surroundings in the CSU have been maintained, with cleanliness and good order being a priority. Wherever possible, prisoners were provided with educational and recreational

material, with the occasional option of a DVD player. Shared exercise on the yard took place where practicable.

Because there is a concern when a man on an ACCT and/or with mental health problems is held in segregation, the Board paid particular attention to their care, and the recording of it. The following extract shows the position from April to June:

**Table 4: Demographic and segregation statistics for second quarter 2021**

	<b>Disability – MH</b>	<b>Disability – other</b>	<b>Arrived on ACCT</b>	<b>ACCT opened whilst in CSU</b>	<b>Segregated for over 42 days</b>
<b>April</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>May</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>June</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

The information available about the remainder of 2021 indicates that this was typical of the whole period. The situation is carefully monitored by the prison through regular meetings, which a Board member normally attends, when Covid-19 restrictions allow. In all instances where men were held in the CSU and had serious mental health issues, we considered that these men were best served in this location and that the level of care afforded was higher than it would have been on the residential wing. This is largely due to the very low occupancy of the CSU, and more facility time capacity for staff to support these men.

It was also noted that the violent and/or disruptive behaviour of a significant number of those with mental health problems resulted from their condition or a failure to take their medication.

As in previous years, we continue to have concerns regarding the shortage of places on specialist units in the area, for those with significant mental health needs.

The Board is also in receipt of statistics for the number of adjudications for the year. The monthly totals varied from 106 in May to 182 in the month of June, with an average monthly figure of 132. Over the course of the year, 45% were proven, 14% dismissed, 35% adjourned (most usually for legal advice), 4% referred to the independent adjudicator and 2% referred to the police.

### **5.3 Staff/prisoner relationships, key workers**

Unfortunately, key work was suspended during the first national lockdown in March 2020. If any key work was given, it was very limited and basic. The Board welcomed that in June 2021 HMPN delivered key work to priority groups, for example those with mental health issues, those preparing for release and those with a history of self-harm. In November 2021, key work resumed in residential house blocks and face-to-face meetings with prisoners were restarted. This is something that will be monitored in the next reporting year.

Staff-prisoner relationships are generally good, and men have acknowledged this, particularly during lockdown. As additional evidence, thank-you cards from prisoners

were received, thanking staff for their front-line work and dedication to keeping prisoners safe during the pandemic. This reporting year, the Board has received a relatively low number of applications relating to relationships, as illustrated on page 22.

Vulnerable prisoners continued to be managed safely across five separate residential blocks. These men had access to separate libraries and education facilities and also had separate visiting times to ensure appropriate safety measures were in place.

#### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

At the end of the reporting year, the proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners at HMPN was as follows:

- Black/Black British – 2.3%
- Asian/Asian British – 1.9%
- Mixed – 0.8%
- Other – 4.1%

The proportion of people from ethnic minority groups within HMPN is relatively low.

At the start of the reporting year, there were 54 foreign nationals; by July this figure decreased to 40 and remained in the late 30s and stood at 39 in December.

Provision for these men is adequate and overseen by a named officer. Monthly visits from a Home Office colleague from Leeds ceased during the periods of lock down and communication was conducted via remote methods.

Although numbers of foreign nationals are relatively low, the Board is monitoring provision to ensure the men are adequately supported during their sentence.

Our sampling of discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) shows that they were dealt with well and efficiently. The low number of applications, three in total, made to the Board in 2021 regarding potential discrimination reflects our analysis in other areas (see for example paragraph 3, section 4.4 use of force) that discrimination for any reason is rarely if ever evident at the prison.

#### **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

Yet again we would like to recognise the excellent work that continues to be offered by the chaplaincy team. Their relentless drive to offer support and comfort to residents and staff at the prison means they are held in the highest regard by everyone.

There is one full-time chaplain, and two, including the imam, working three days a week, representing a wide range of faiths. Although regular worship had to be discontinued, in line with national guidance, the chaplains provided weekly faith packs, and where possible spoke to individuals face to face. Where appropriate, prisoners were allowed to live-stream funerals, or attend in person. The chaplaincy support to prisoners in distress or at times of great need, such as bereavement, has

been exemplary and, in our view, reflects the focus across the prison to help prisoners get through the difficulties presented in the past 12 months.

Alongside the core team of chaplains, there are around 40 volunteers. Volunteers deliver the Sycamore Tree programme, part of the restorative justice programme developed by the Prison Fellowship, which is suspended for the time being. Junction 42, a faith-based charity that normally has two workers based in the prison, has continued to offer support by sending in packs and other resources. The chaplaincy team also coordinates the work of volunteers through the National Association of Official Prison Visitors, as well as a small number of letter writers. This model of working is exceptional and without it, prison life would be the poorer.

## **5.6 Incentives schemes**

During the first lock down, inline with other prisons nationally, HMPN provided additional privileges to everyone, such as extra credit for in-cell telephones, regardless of incentives status. Restrictions on having a TV and some other items were lifted and there was no charge for accessing the TV going forward. At the end of the reporting year, 568 prisoners were on standard and 746 were on enhanced status.

## **5.7 Complaints**

In 2021, the Board experienced a 34% decrease in applications: 127 compared to 192 in 2020. Most noticeably:

- Four applications in regard to visits, telephones, letters, compared to six applications in 2020.
- Only one application was made in regard to purposeful activity (including work, education, library) compared to 19 in 2020. This is against a background of fewer work opportunities because of the pandemic and much greater understanding amongst the prisoners of the circumstances they and the world found themselves in

Healthcare continued to be a concern to some prisoners, with 28 applications in 2021 versus 26 in 2020. However, the Board believes that not only was this because of the impact of Covid-19 regarding reduced access to face to face appointments but also a lack of understanding by the prison population about access to health care for the general public at this time.

However, the Board experienced a decrease in applications regarding ROTL, home detention curfew (HDC) and sentence management: 20 in 2021, compared to 32 in 2020. This is understandable, as men began to understand the reduction in movement between establishments in line with Covid-19 restrictions and national guidelines.

## **5.8 Property**

The steady flow of applications to the Board about property makes clear that even smooth transfers between prisons can give rise to property being misplaced. The Board received eight applications regarding property transfers to or from HMPN in 2021 as compared to 18 in 2020. The applications regarding property within the prison rose to 20 in 2021 compared to 17 in 2020. Our investigations revealed a lack of understanding of how property can be distributed and the local governance of this process.

Despite other pressures on reception staff, however, prisoners' property is carefully managed and when we have needed to make enquiries, there was no backlog in dealing with requests to view property. We note that there are no issues relating to property, or to the registration of property, and our view is that the record keeping of property cards is accurate and up to date.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare: general**

In 2021 Spectrum took over the contract for the provision of healthcare, a transition with the additional challenges of

- staff had to contend with Covid-19 restrictions while continuing to deliver regular services to men every day, including on at least two house blocks where there were reverse cohorts.
- prisoners diagnosed with Covid had to be isolated and cared for, and up to seven of the 15 house blocks were involved at any one time.
- the vaccination programme had to be delivered.

Throughout the year, the Board was aware of the team's own struggles to function with significantly reduced numbers and changes in leadership. Our limited observation of this satisfied us that the temporary leadership succeeded in uniting staff into a single team, with shared aims and a strong sense of purpose. Core staff had been co-located in one building, which had been repainted and re-ordered. There were daily updates so that everyone knew what was happening, and midday contact ensured that extra support was available where needed. We welcome Spectrum's recognition that managing a complex team like this requires highly skilled leadership and, having not succeeded in appointing a new manager in 2021, at the time of writing they have upgraded the post. Temporary leadership with an element of management consultancy has, in our view, held the team together.

### **6.2 Physical healthcare**

We received a number of applications relating to healthcare but the majority were related to access to care or medication, and could readily be resolved by helping residents understand, for instance, changes in medication, and how to book appointments.

The delivery of vaccinations to prisoners was in the same priority order as elsewhere. The priority groups were treated first; the first vaccines arrived at the end of January and the programme began on 2 February, with all staff giving it priority; by 22 February priority groups one to four had all been vaccinated. In March, mass testing began, with two extra staff members drafted in to help carry out up to 240 tests per day. Other preventative programmes were maintained and by the beginning of December, staff had also succeeded in vaccinating 50% of those eligible for flu jabs.

Waiting times for dental and GP services at the beginning of 2021 were 249 days for dental care and five days for a telephone appointment with a GP. To appreciate the workload for primary care staff, it is worth noting the range of services on offer: GP and nurse practitioner sessions dovetail each other five days a week, conducting both consultations and medication reviews; there are regular sessions each week from the optician, physiotherapy, podiatry and a sexual health clinic. An outbreak of



Covid-19 late in the year adversely affected the provision of all these services. Covid-19 continues to have an impact on appointment availability, especially face to face appointments, not only to prisoners but also to the general public. Although restrictions have been relaxed, there were, and continue to be, limitations on how many men can be escorted for appointments in groups and wait in the same area.

**Table 5: Waiting times for physical healthcare**

<b>Service</b>	<b>No. of patients</b>	<b>Longest wait</b>
<b>GP/ANP Medication review</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>4 weeks</b>
<b>GP/ANP Triage</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>11 weeks</b>
<b>Nurses</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>No waiting time</b>
<b>Optician</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>18 weeks</b>
<b>Physiotherapy (after triage)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7 weeks</b>
<b>Podiatry (Review + routine)</b>	<b>31 (+ 12 new)</b>	<b>18 weeks</b>
<b>Sexual health</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>7 weeks</b>

Extra resources are being deployed to reduce waiting times whenever possible.

**Table 6: Waiting times for dentistry**

<b>Service</b>	<b>No. of patients</b>	<b>Longest wait</b>
<b>First visit after clean, May 2021</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>39 weeks (273 days)</b>
<b>Dental Therapist</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>7 weeks</b>
<b>Specific activity ongoing:</b>		
<b>Extractions</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Ongoing treatment</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Oral health</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Age related</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>

### **6.3 Mental healthcare**

The Board was concerned there would be significantly more prisoners on ACCTs, because of increased hours spent alone in a cell and reduced family contact. As is shown elsewhere in this report (see section 5.2, Segregation), across the estate men somehow coped better than we expected; the numbers of men held in the CSU for their own safety were in single figures, and adjudications decreased.

Despite these pressures the initiative begun in 2021 of training mental health peer support workers continued and, by May, they were operating on nine of the 15 house blocks. Unfortunately, their activity was limited as restrictions on movements fluctuated in line with increases and decreases of covid and numbers of prisoners in isolation.

#### **6.4 Exercise, regime**

Being locked in a cell for long hours can easily make anxieties loom large. The efforts of wing and other staff to provide distraction activities and guidance on personal fitness should not be underestimated, given personal concerns and the pressure upon them when significant numbers of a team were off sick. Many prisoners enjoy gym sessions and similar activities and we noted that indoor PE began again at the end of April. In August, the three gyms gradually reopened and during September new equipment was purchased for them all. In the same month, one-hour sessions were offered across the estate.

We have seen references to activities to promote wellbeing but at this stage have been unable to obtain further information on what these activities entailed. We also note that one of the overall aims of the healthcare team is to work with prisoner representatives and find out what other facilities they would appreciate as well as alternative ways of delivering services. This is dependent on a more relaxed regime where there will be more opportunities to talk directly to the men, but we too are convinced that developing a positive dialogue between healthcare staff and residents will lead to improvements.

#### **6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

In previous reports the Board has consistently commended the work of the drug and alcohol recovery team (DART). In 2020 we commented that they had still managed to continue their high standards, with an exceptionally high workload, throughout the lockdown. As far as we are aware, since we have been unable to monitor the service during 2021, this has continued. We aim to report in more detail on this service next year but for 2021 we let the words of the service users speak for themselves.

*‘They stay in regular contact with me and are always helpful’*

*‘Since I’ve been on Gateway\* I’ve had the chance to think about things and I know now what I need to do to stay drug free’*

*‘I’d have more appointments if I could’*

(Source: DART user feedback)

*\*Gateway is the dedicated unit for drug and alcohol recovery*

#### **6.6 Soft skills**

The restrictions of Covid-19 throughout 2021 impacted on access to wellbeing and mindfulness support groups. The chaplaincy continued to play an important part in the support of residents but links to various community groups and charities were severely disrupted.

## **6.7 Staff welfare**

Although the Board does not usually comment on issues about staff welfare, we have been particularly impressed by the priority given by the prison leadership to staff wellbeing, an all-important task at the time when the pandemic continued. Levels of infection did not decrease and, unlike workers in many industries, most prison staff could not work remotely. Our own limited direct contact with prisoners revealed that few men fully appreciated the impact of the illness and the restrictions in the community, which added an extra pressure on staff.

And yet, as we comment elsewhere in this report, as far as possible the priority to keep men safe, help them to stay healthy and have some form of occupation continued.

## **7. Progression and release**

### **7.1 Education, library**

Education, delivered by Novus, has been run under a blended approach of a number of elements because of Covid-19 restrictions.

Learning takes place in small groups of residents face to face in a classroom setting or in cell via self-study. Tutoring and support are offered by trained specialist staff. Opportunities to engage with new technologies, while limited, are available and the prison is seeking to develop these options in the future.

This strategy has seen a higher uptake of educational places and outcomes have been successful.

Before the pandemic, classroom places were 220 and, while the numbers in a class have dropped from 10 to five, due to Covid-19 restrictions, the blended approach has resulted in an increase to 300 classroom/in-cell opportunities. Each week there are nine teaching sessions (two on Mondays through to Thursdays and one on Fridays), six face to face and three in-cell.

The blended approach allows courses to be split into more manageable segments. Success rates in learning are good. Pre Covid-19 the drop out rate was 45%; it is now 5%. This is in large part attributed to greater opportunity to engage in education, not just in the classroom. Successful completion of modules and courses is celebrated with certificates that recognise achievement and can provide evidence to future employers of commitment as well as achievement. This in turn provides strong incentives for prisoners to complete courses and gain qualifications.

The number of prisoners who were able to attend behavioural programmes has been seriously impacted by the Covid-19 restrictions. There were 11 completions in the Horizon module, nine in the Resolve module and four in the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP). In normal circumstances, these numbers would be approximately 140 in total. Residents are prioritised in order of those who have a release date within the next 12 months and who will not be able to complete a programme on licence. Groups of prisoners are ready to start a programme once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. Ten prisoners will participate in each group, and it is hoped to engage more facilitators so that these numbers can be increased further. All of this will be monitored in 2022.

### **7.2 Vocational training, work**

Restrictions, in line with government guidelines, have meant that for parts of the year, access for all prisoners to work placements (aside from the core offer at stage 4) were restricted. Initiatives like the continuing appointment of residential support workers on every house block also increased employment opportunities.

However, we were extremely pleased to note that as soon as was possible, and working with Public Health England, the prison focussed on widening the opportunities to prisoners as much and as quickly as possible. The table below illustrates the breadth of offer and demonstrates the remarkable efforts to engage as wide a population as possible across the prison.

Of particular note are the opportunities to engage in activities which significantly increase job prospects on release such as Café 16 and the Roydons contract for men who might be nearing release.

**Table 7: Employment opportunities 2021**

Workshop/Area	Residential block	Workstream	Workforce numbers	Stage
Mains kitchen	8	Kitchen	25 in 2 bubbles	4
11	10	Waste and recycling	6	4
7	7	Laundry	20	4
8	8	CES	4	4
1	1	Tea packing	30, 15 per split regime	4
18	12	Tea packing	30, 15 per split regime	4
19	11	Tea packing	30, 15 per split regime	4
Main stores	10	Stores	8	4
Furniture Repair	12	Cottage industries	2	3 in addition to Stage 4
17	13	Tailors 1	50	3
14	14	Tailors 2	20	3
15	9	Engineering	15	3
16	9	Engineering finishing	8	3
Internal Gardens	12	Internal gardens	20	3
Cafe16	16	Catering and hospitality	5	3
Market Gardens	10	Market gardens	5	2 in addition to Stages 3 and 4
3	2	LMB	30, mixture of full- and part-time	2
6	5	Roydons external contract	30, mixture of full and part-time	2

### 7.3 Offender management and progression

At the end of 2021 there were 67 category D prisoners at the prison. Of those men who have applied for a category D place, transfer opportunities can be limited,

dependent on capacity available in the category D estate and suitability of available places.

**Table 8: Releases and discharges 2021**

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Release</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>T/out</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>

In 2020, 188 category D prisoners were either transferred out to a number of category D establishments or completed their sentences. In 2021, this number was 108. There is not an obvious explanation for the shift in numbers other than that this the sentencing pattern for the cohort in 2021.

Because of the Covid-19 restrictions, the majority of parole boards have been convened via video or telephone. Prior to Covid-19 restrictions, they were all face to face. In 2021 258 took place, compared to 216 the previous year.

Prison offender manager (POM) caseloads are currently running at 80 to 82 per manager which is slightly higher than in 2020. A number of factors have been involved, not least transitional arrangements to the national probation service, with different ways of allocating caseloads. It is too early to appraise the impact of the new arrangements but this is on our future monitoring programme.

There were 90 multi-agency public protection arrangement (MAPPA) reports and 14 inter-departmental risk management meetings (IDRMMs) attended by POMs. These figures are very similar to those in the previous year.

There were 820 public protection interception awareness risks (PPIRAS) completed in the reporting period, compared with 755 during 2020. In 2021, figures for completed case reports were 635 (298 low/medium and 337 high/v. high) compared with 409 for the previous year.

All in all, against a background of Covid-19 restrictions and limitations, the Board considers that this was a good effort by all concerned.

#### **7.4 Family contact**

Once again, family visits and contacts were compromised because of the pandemic and the restrictions on close contact were strictly observed by HMPN. However, the prison made significant steps to maintain prisoner links with families. These included the continuation of additional monies for telephone calls, and visitors and prisoners being able to maintain social distancing once visiting was allowed. Purple Visits (video calls) were successfully implemented and those eligible were permitted one per month. As capacity allowed, this increased to two per month (again for those eligible). No cost was incurred to prisoners for this service.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

There are a number of initiatives to assist and support prisoners on their release. Within the prison, the chaplaincy plays an important part in the welfare of recently released prisoners as well as preparing them for their release.

The OMU continued to process release preparation documentation as usual during national restrictions, along with HDC reviews (96 prisoners were released in this way during March-June)

Thirteen Housing Group, part of the St Giles Wise Group, is responsible for providing accommodation for men leaving prison. This is a fairly new venture. It is sad to note that the charitable organisation Shelter no longer operates in the prison. However, the Shirley Community Chaplaincy, run by a chaplain who used to work at HMP Northumberland, does similar work.

Through Novus, the education provider, and their exit service, prisoners are engaged in the last 16 weeks of their sentence in additional preparation for release. They are supported in creating CVs, letters of disclosure, cover letters and with practising interview skills.

The careers centre publishes, through Jobs Unlocked and Novus Works, lists of companies willing to employ ex-prisoners and are also advertising jobs that are prisoner specific. There is a job-matching database where prisoners with certain skills and training can be offered suitable routes to employment. They also refer prison leavers to colleges, the Department for Work and Pensions and recruitment and training providers in the community.

In the circumstances we believe the prison has done its best to support men in their preparation for release and as we come out of the pandemic, our monitoring will be able to evaluate better the success of these strategies and that of the newly formed 'employment advisory board.'

There are some instances where prisoners in certain categories will not know where they are to be housed until they present themselves to the local council on the day of their release. If they don't meet certain criteria relating to ill health, either physical or mental, or drug dependency and the council does not have accommodation, then they can be homeless and forced to live on the street. It is hoped that there could be communication between the local prisons and the prison and probation services prior to release so that accommodation can be made available. This could help minimise reoffending, if prisoners are not subjected to the same type of environment from which they came.

## The work of the IMB

The work of the Board continues via a blend of face to face monitoring, meetings, dial-in conversations, alternative technologies for meetings and remote monitoring in light of the pandemic that the country continues to face.

At the beginning of 2021, we had nine members and during the course of the year we lost three of these. In the latter part of 2021, we engaged in the collaborative recruitment programme and were successful in gaining a new member who has progressed extremely well. We are currently operating with a membership of seven.

As we did in 2020, we continued to consider ourselves to be extremely fortunate in 2021 to be able to access a wide range of information and data from the prison because of the excellent lines of communication with all staff including the Director and her leadership team. Particular thanks must go to our Board clerk who has co-ordinated many of our activities and facilitated our many requests for information and data.

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	(see below)
Total number of segregation reviews attended	(see section 5.2)

- As last year, face to face monitoring was adapted to meet the needs of the prison and our Board members - many of whom are either in a medically vulnerable group or live with someone in such a group.
- \*\*Physical visits to the establishment have been severely restricted by local and national restrictions.
- Yet again, the Chair would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Board for their commitment and support over the past 12 months in very difficult circumstances and to thank the staff of the prison who have been incredibly supportive to all our members.



## Applications to the IMB

In 2021, the Board experienced a decrease in applications (127) compared to last year (202).

The significant drop in applications relating to purposeful activity was in large part due to a much better understanding by prisoners of the restrictions regarding Covid-19 and implications of greater mixing and infectious contamination.

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	3	4
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	3	1
C	Equality	3	3
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	19	1
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	6	4
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	12	5
F	Food and kitchens	2	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	26	28
H1	Property within this establishment	17	20
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	18	8
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	4	3
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	32	20
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	21	23
4K	Transfers	12	5
5L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	24	N/A
	Total number of applications	<b>202</b>	<b>127</b>



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