Independent Monitoring Boards

Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board

at YOI Aylesbury

For reporting year
1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

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national preventive mechanism

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1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent Board, appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

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

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison, and also 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 Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

Aylesbury Young Offender Institution (YOI) is housed in a mixture of buildings, ranging in age from Victorian to early 21st century. It has seven residential units, of differing sizes and ages. There is a refurbishment programme under way for four of the residential blocks.

The three oldest wings are of traditional Victorian pattern but have been modernised over the years. The two wings which are the next oldest, dating from, we believe, the 1930s, were also modernised over 20 years ago. The two newest units date from 1997.

The care and separation Unit (CSU), otherwise known as the segregation unit (or 'seg'), is 10 years old. A modern healthcare building, which included the reception unit, was also built at that time. There is a modern, well-equipped gym.

Gov Facilities Services Limited (GFSL) holds the contract for maintenance of the prison fabric. Care UK provided healthcare, until this rebranded to Practice Plus on 1 October 2020.

When fully operational, the prison can hold a maximum of about 402 prisoners. All the cells are designed for single occupancy.

In February 2019, the prison was put into 'special measures' by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). This was a reflection of the prison's poor performance at that time. One of the results of this was a temporary reduction in the number of prisoners to 209. Three wings were taken out of use, allowing for a project of refurbishment.

Through this reporting year, one of these wings became fully operational again. Two others were almost completed, and readied again for use. Refurbished cells, a new shower block and a modernised servery in the completed wing have all helped to make this accommodation cleaner and more comfortable.

Once the refurbishment of one of the wings was complete, the prison was then ready to start taking in more prisoners, with the aim of ultimately returning it to full occupancy. This is expected to happen gradually. As a result of Covid-19, the courts were sentencing fewer young people and there was also less movement of prisoners between prisons.

By the start of this reporting year, the prison was out of special measures. With the previous Governor having taken a new post in January, the Deputy Governor assumed the role of Governor until the new appointee assumed the role in June. A new substantive Governor took up his post on 8 June 2020 and the Deputy Governor reverted to his substantive role.

The prison is a member of the long-term and high-security estate (LTHSE) and holds the longest-sentenced young adult males in the English prison system. Prisoner intake covers most of England and Wales. The prisoners have usually begun their sentences at other YOIs or secure institutions for children under 18.

The prisoners are some of the most disruptive and challenging young men in the prison system. For our reporting period, their sentence length ranged between four years and life.

The day-to-day regime at Aylesbury would normally mirror that of similar prisons. However, along with the whole country, Covid-19 entirely dominated life in the prison for management, staff and prisoners alike throughout the reporting year. Every section of this report reflects this.

In terms of Covid-19 infection, the prison performed well through to the end of 2020, with few cases among staff or prisoners. Staff were hit severely in the first two months of 2021, when the prison was technically rated as a centre of infection.

Prisoner infection was very well controlled, even at this time – the age of the prisoners being a positive factor. Embedding essential protective protocols among wing staff took consistent effort on behalf of management but eventually became systematically observed.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

Covid-19 dominated the reporting year. Keeping the prison functioning meant prioritising the health of prisoners and staff at all times. As the virus was better understood, particularly that close contact in closed environments encouraged its transmission, the regime in a secure prison had to change significantly.

'Gold Command' (top prison service managers) at the centre of HMPPS led most decisions on the prison regime. Risk assessments became a regular and challenging task for management in Aylesbury, and changes of protocol could occur with almost no notice. It was a very demanding year for leadership.

As with life in the outside world, Covid-19 restrictions were lifted slightly between July and October 2020. More stringent controls, limiting movement, visits, education and other aspects of a normal regime, were maintained right up until the end of our reporting year.

The report following the most recent inspection of Aylesbury by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) was published in February 2020. There were 13 key concerns noted. Covid-19 has delayed a measurable response to almost all of these, with the exception of S51 – *'[t]he management of equality work was inadequate'*. In this area, we note that good progress has been made.

The Board introduced remote monitoring right at the start of the reporting year. Two members attended the prison throughout the year and at times three or four members monitored in person.

This report should be read in the light of this unparalleled state of affairs.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the establishment?

The data for the year shows a predictable reduction in both prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff violence. This was because the Covid-19 regime provided far fewer opportunities for violence, with the vast majority of prisoners confined to their wings. Less predictably, there has been a reduction in self-harm over this reporting year. It is worth noting that prisoner-on-prisoner violence rose in the middle of the reporting year, when Covid-19 restrictions loosened and movement of prisoners across the estate began to return to normal.

Disappointingly, the year has not allowed a more strategic approach to violence in the prison to be established.

The prison adopted appropriate Covid-19 protocols, although some of the changes took repeated and insistent communication from management to ensure compliance. Infection rates among prisoners stayed at a very low level.

The prison maintained stability and order, even when up to 35% of staff were absent with Covid-19, or through self-isolation.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

The prison maintained a stable and predictable environment for the prisoners, helping them to manage anxieties concerning the virus. A daily shower and daily outside exercise were provided throughout the year, based on a structure of social 'bubbles'. This was demanding on staff, particularly at the point of highest staff absence in January/February 2021.

The loss of much of the normal regime, including social visits, and access to the gym and to education, made life for the prisoners dull and unstimulating. Speaking to prisoners, we found that, for some, Covid-19 restrictions meant fewer demands on them, which was quite bearable. The in-cell telephone became a lifeline. The provision of free credit, allowing prisoners to afford more calls, is to be commended. The introduction of screen-based family contact, Purple Visits, came on stream slowly and remains poorly used. However, some prisoners have enjoyed this service.

Board members visiting the prison found many examples of supportive interactions between staff and prisoners. In particular, staff working in the segregation team showed marked patience and engagement with the lives of prisoners temporarily in their care. Regrettably, the positive key worker scheme established last year was much weaker this year. Many prisoners, when asked, no longer know who their key worker is or recognise a special relationship with a key worker.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

The number of cases of Covid-19 among the prisoners was kept at a low level. In part, this reflects the ages of the prisoners, but sound prison planning and embedded protocols also contributed.

Early in the year, as the virus became a material factor, the psychology team acted fast. Led by this professional team, the prison focused systematically on the potential effects of increased lockdown and 'Covid-19 anxiety' on the most vulnerable prisoners. Cross-disciplinary discussions established under the case management model of a 'challenge, support, intervention plan' (CSIP) were converted to cover a list of the most vulnerable prisoners. This allowed the prison to focus support, and resources, where most needed. Much support was delivered by in-cell telephones. Face-to-face contact was reserved for extreme cases of need.

It is much harder for us to measure the effects of this year on the majority of prisoners – that is, the less vulnerable, the less violent – in other words, the silent majority. Even the Board monitors visiting the prison had much less contact with these prisoners. Their resignation to the situation, and their recognition that the outside world was recognisably limited in some of the ways that they were, kept things calm. However, for all, a year of education, of potential rehabilitation, of growing in skills, was lost.

How well are prisoners progressed towards transfer or successful resettlement?

The principal provider of education services in the prison is Milton Keynes College (MKC). Education provision has been poor throughout the year. In the first six months of the year, there was almost no education on offer, except to those few prisoners following certificated distance education – for example, A levels or Open University courses.

In the autumn, when schools and colleges were open again outside, education had still not started again in the prison. MKC then organised a more systematic offer: staff provided prisoners with a series of workbooks following different subjects. Even practical subjects, such as horticulture, were reduced to paper exercises only and, unfortunately, no tie-up was made with the few prisoners on the gardening team at that time.

Education induction, measuring the capability of new arrivals, continued on a reduced basis, paper only. Prisoners completed the forms in their cells, so there was no certainty that the prisoner in question had actually completed them. Education, beyond in-cell packs, had not started again by the end of the reporting year.

Covid-19 limited almost all services which enable successful transfer and resettlement of prisoners. However, the prison managed to maintain some of the most essential support for vulnerable and/or priority prisoners. Transfers continued, subject to required quarantining.

HMPPS psychology services continued to support and engage in the delivery of high-intensity programmes, and in assessing the risk and need of prisoners for accredited interventions, as well as parole hearings.

Prisoners were still able to access support provided by certain departments: for example, support for those close to the end of their sentence (‘programmes’), as well as some other specialist psychology services (‘Pathways’). The in-cell telephones allowed essential contact between staff and prisoners but were not suitable for sensitive service delivery to the most vulnerable. Staff access to wings was limited to those who directly managed them.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Advocate across Whitehall for a stronger national commitment to young adult prisoner rehabilitation, backed by research evidence, shared best practice and sufficient resourcing.
- To make prison sentences more purposeful, and to diminish reoffending rates, set higher requirements for basic training within the whole Prison Service.
- Reduce the number of the seriously mentally ill being sentenced to incarceration; at the same time, ensure that a greater number of emergency mental health beds are available for prisoners in extreme need.

TO HER MAJESTY’S PRISON AND PROBATION SERVICE

- In post-pandemic opening up, support institutions to rebalance strategic priorities toward a more demanding focus on prisoner outcomes, diminishing the focus on risk management.
- Set national, publicly shared, targets for educational and training outcomes in young offender institutions, backed by professionally informed practice and proper data analysis.
- Set high-quality targets, and appropriate penalties, in third-party contracts for education, training and vocational skill delivery. Maintain business-like contract management to ensure proper delivery.

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Set out a clear vision for the prison which puts improvement in prisoner outcomes first; build on the strong interdepartmental cooperation existing in the prison to realise this vision.
- Celebrate the achievements of prisoners more publicly within the prison, to help raise staff and prisoner expectations of success.
- Create a regime which sets out to resolve interpersonal threats and disagreements (non-associates), using professional interventions where needed, and in this way allow other aspects of prison life, such as education and exercise, to work more effectively.
- Negotiate resources to ensure that all prisoners (not just a high proportion) have purposeful activities every working day, including education, training and employment.

3.4 Progress since the last report

Direct comparison with last year's report is largely inappropriate, given the unique conditions arising from the pandemic. The data shows a decrease in violence and self-harm this year, which, we would suggest, is largely a result of the increased containment of the prisoners in their cells for so much of the time.

In the period of the last report, the prison was under 'special measures' and expected to make accelerated improvements. It made some of those improvements. We now know that when the prison is once again full, a process which is under way, it will not be able to maintain the more advantageous staff/prisoner ratio established last year. This ratio will revert to that prior to the period of special measures, and the decant.

This is a severe disappointment to the Board. We now have little reassurance that, as the number of prisoners increases, and the pandemic restraints are lifted, the prison will be able to maintain improvements gained last year. The focus now is increasingly on risk management and too little on prisoner outcomes.

One notable difference this year, led by the new Governor, has been a greater focus on improving the working conditions of staff, and wider communication of staff dedication and successes.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

As a result of the pandemic, all prison staff had to work very hard, with great flexibility, to keep prisoners safe. Most prisoners lost the chance to work, and all had very little chance to socialise. Officers had to put a human face on a much more restricted regime, and management had a completely new set of issues to deal with.

Access to the prison and direct communication with prisoners were limited. We contacted them on their in-cell telephones when possible. We could not do this from outside the prison, and, as time went on, they began to unplug the in-cell telephones.

The safer custody team continued to operate but their access to the prisoners was also restricted in the first part of the year. Direct access became available later in the year.

4.1 Reception and induction

As the chart (below) shows, the number of arrivals of prisoners at Aylesbury fluctuated in the year. In total, it was not much less than last year – 152 compared with 187. From March 2021, we expect to see a faster flow into the prison, as new wings open up.

New prisoners initially arrived in groups of about five, once a fortnight. They stayed in quarantine for 10 days, in these small groups. Their cells were next to each other, on the same floor, in the wing designated for this quarantining. The group had tests for Covid-19 at reception, as well as during the isolation period, and again, before they moved on to their new wings.

An extra reception wing was used from February 2021. This allowed Aylesbury to continue to receive prisoners if anyone in an existing group in quarantine tested positive for Covid-19. It also meant that Aylesbury could double the numbers of new prisoners from five a fortnight to five a week, using the two wings on alternate weeks.

Vans (from GeoAmey or Serco) brought new arrivals into a secure compound behind the reception unit. The unit is in the same block as the healthcare department. We occasionally inspected the vans and found them to be generally clean. The individual compartments are small, with a hard seat and a small window. Personal property is carried in a separate compartment. There is no toilet on board. The use of ‘potty bags’ on journeys raises a concern about decency, but on longer journeys comfort stops are made.

Reception officers checked new prisoners in. They searched them, and their property. During the year, a full body scanner was introduced to the prison and this is used in reception to scan all arrivals. Prisoners are weighed and measured, and checked by healthcare staff according to guidance.

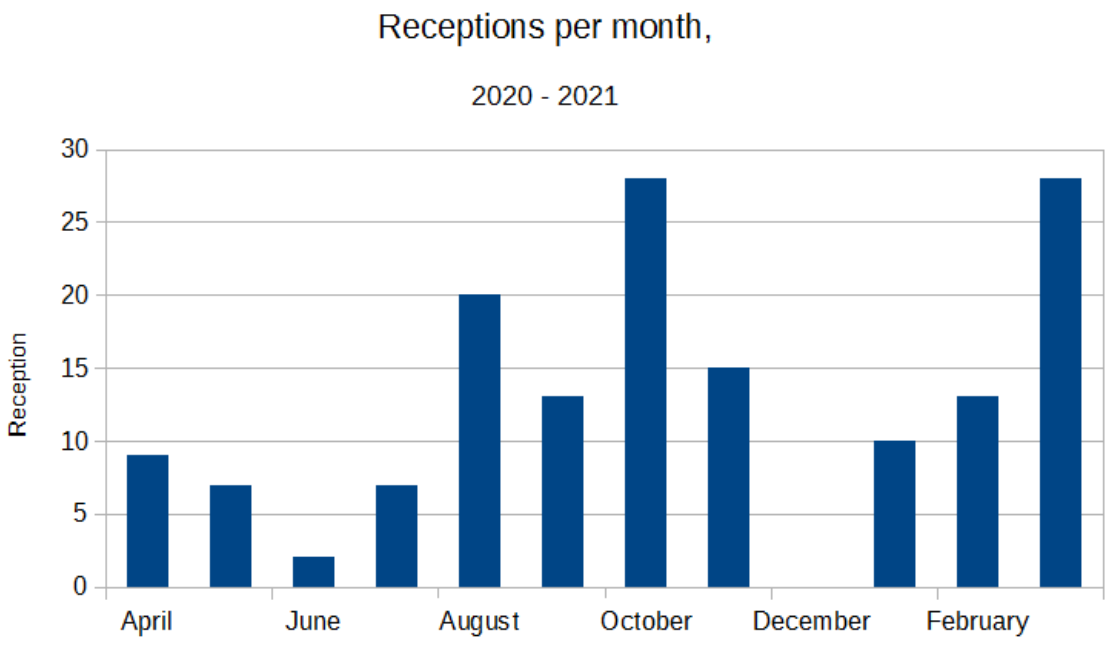
Reception staff explained the HMPPS rules about the property and clothing which prisoners can keep with them. We note that some prisons use discretion, and permit

some items which are forbidden in Aylesbury. Non-permitted items, and any that are more than the permitted quantity, are placed in storage.

Staff also gave new prisoners information about other important matters, such as using in-cell telephones and booking virtual visits. Officers interviewed them and completed a spreadsheet, with information including mental/physical health issues, language abilities, religion and dietary requirements (such as halal). Circulation of this information helped us to keep track of new prisoners and to meet them. We observe that foreign national prisoners seldom tell officers if their knowledge of English is weak, which leads to problems later.

Prisoners declaring vulnerabilities at this initial interview, and those with known special needs, were immediately added to a special list. Specialists from across the prison reviewed these prisoners every week. This cross-disciplinary cooperation is a positive element of life in Aylesbury, but some of the best results are diluted by poor follow-through by wing officers, especially the newer staff. For example, we have observed that CSIP recommendations for given prisoners are not necessarily known, or shared, by staff on the wings.

With the threat of Covid-19, there was no possibility of continuing with a peer support system for new arrivals. First night support fell to staff on the quarantine wings. Equally, other established induction systems, such as screening prisoners' educational skills, were much reduced.



4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

We are saddened to report two apparent suicides by prisoners this year, in May 2020 and January 2021 (last year, there were none). The first was by a very recent arrival. Prison psychologists had been working hard with the second prisoner, who had seemed stable at the time. We commend the senior leadership team for the

support it gave to staff and families, and especially to the family of the second young man. Prison and Probation Ombudsman reports and inquests are pending, expected summer 2021.

Compared with similar prisons, the self-harm rate was below average at the start of the year, but slightly above average by the end. There were 115 self-harm incidents – about 40% less than last year (197; see chart [1]). One prisoner, given to repeated self-harm, features often in these statistics. Several departments gave him considerable help, and he did not self-harm at all for long periods.

The assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) process is 'the care planning process for prisoners identified as being at risk of suicide or self-harm' (Ministry of Justice report, 2019). Its use ensures that staff take certain actions to lower the risk of suicide and self-harm. Staff across the prison were involved in the management of prisoners at risk of suicide or self-harm. Any staff member/volunteer with concerns about a prisoner could open an ACCT, to set the process in motion. ACCT documents moved around the prison with the prisoner, and were kept up to date.

When staff know a prisoner is vulnerable, they are able to open an ACCT. Wing staff visit and speak to prisoners on ACCTs a certain number of times every day. When there is a strong concern, this is several times an hour. This means that they both check on prisoners' safety and build relationships with them. Our observations showed that this pattern is well adhered to and recorded.

There were 79 ACCTs (last year: 87), for 43 prisoners. The maximum number of ACCTs for any prisoner was nine. ACCTs stayed open for an average of under 18 days (last year: 12). Twenty-nine ACCTs stayed open for over 14 days (last year: 19). The longest period on an ACCT was 95 days (last year: 107). Twenty-four (last year: 11) were closed by the 48th day. The total number of days on ACCTs was 1,349.

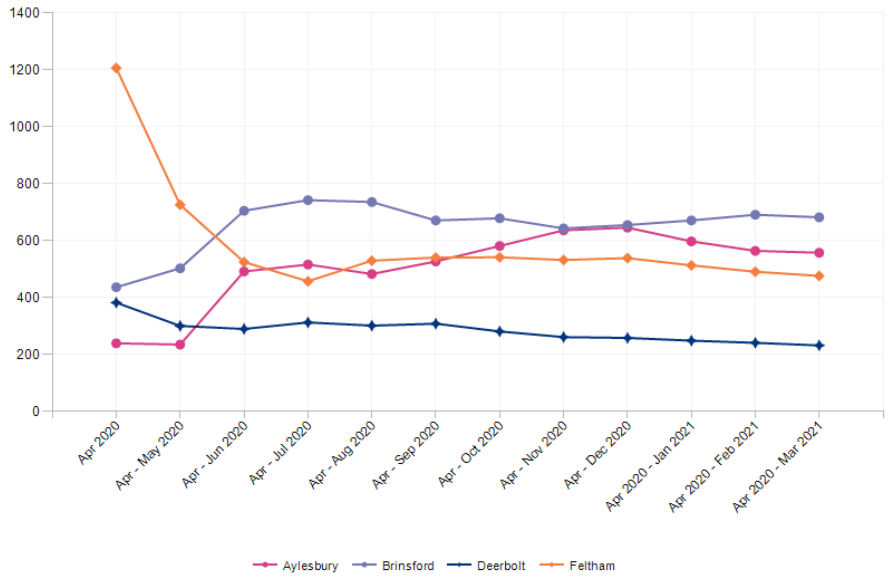
Just under 12% of all prisoners spent some time on ACCT.

Staff identified issues and developed strategies for dealing with prisoners on an ACCT. They audited ACCT documents when they were closed. With remote monitoring, our access to the paperwork was limited. We saw no hesitancy to use the process, and no wish to close ACCTs too soon. We support the prison's use of this valuable process.

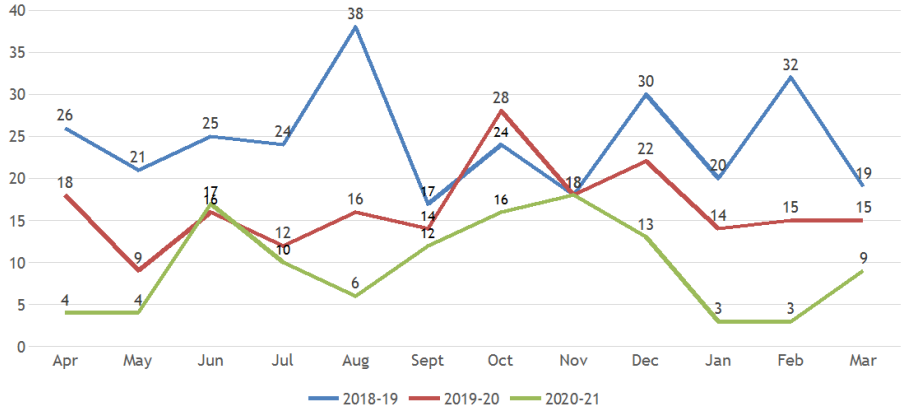
Weekly multidisciplinary safer prisons meetings monitored prisoners on a CSIP. As noted earlier, from April 2020 they monitored prisoners identified as vulnerable, and reviewed them weekly. We believe that this reduced both self-harm and violence.

Prisoners could call the Samaritans via in-cell telephones, free of charge. The Listener service – peer support by Samaritan-trained prisoners – stopped in April. Staff hope to be able to restart this soon.

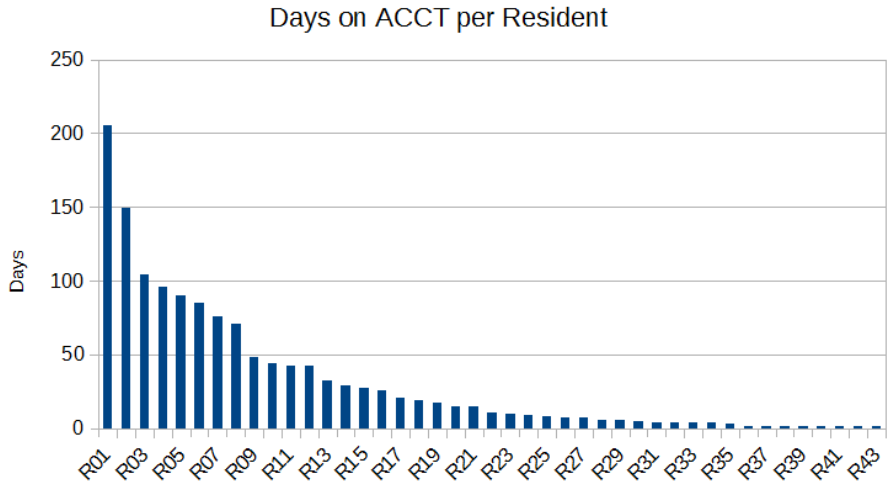
[1] Self-harm incidents per month



[2] Relative rates of self-harm in YOIs holding young adults



[3] self-harm incidents per month, Aylesbury



4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Grouping the prisoners into two or three bubbles on each wing, limiting the interaction on and between wings, as well as out-of-cell activities, put Aylesbury into an artificial state this year. Less education and few work activities meant less movement and interaction, so less violence.

At times, many prisoners spent roughly 22.5 hours every day locked in their cells. They went out for showers, exercise and to collect meals, with others in their bubble. There were variations on this position through the year, with the sports field used for exercise at times and the sports hall opened in the autumn, only to have to close again in January 2021.

There were 54% fewer assaults against staff (34; last year: 74), and fewer serious assaults against staff (two; last year: five). (Serious assaults are defined as those that:
• result in admission to an outside hospital as an inpatient
• require treatment for concussion or internal injuries
• involve fractures/burns/stab wounds or similar/sexual assaults/bodily fluids.)

Assaults against other prisoners were down by 46% (108; last year: 202). There were 10 serious assaults (last year: seven). (The number of prisoners, and officers, involved was approximately the same as last year.)

There was a zero-tolerance attitude to violence; gang culture is often behind violent incidents. Staff worked on identifying and recording gang-related activity. New prisoners arriving on wings sometimes unsettled others, leading to conflict. Trying to establish their places in the existing hierarchy can lead to bullying.

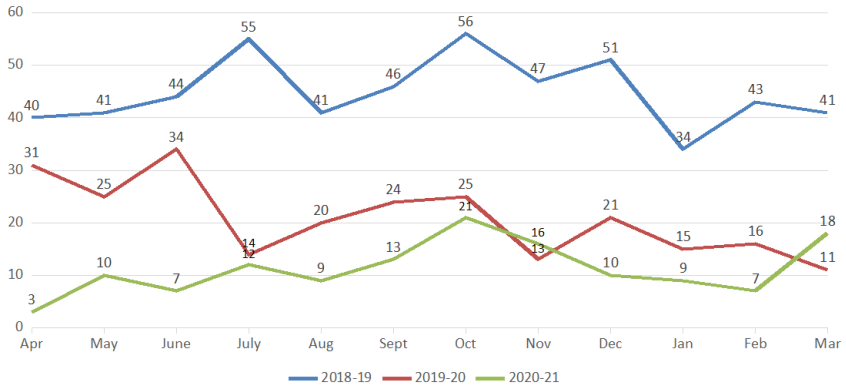
The CSIP system was in place from May 2019, supported by weekly meetings of a multidisciplinary team. These review the case of each prisoner, suggesting ways of helping them control violent tendencies. This helps staff and prisoners to recognise prisoners' triggers, and to avoid unnecessary confrontations. There were usually 10–15 prisoners on a CSIP at any one time. Covid-19 made it much more difficult for prisoners to follow the intervention programmes from March 2020.

In the second half of the year, there were some uses of PAVA (synthetic pepper spray) to control violence (see section 4.5).

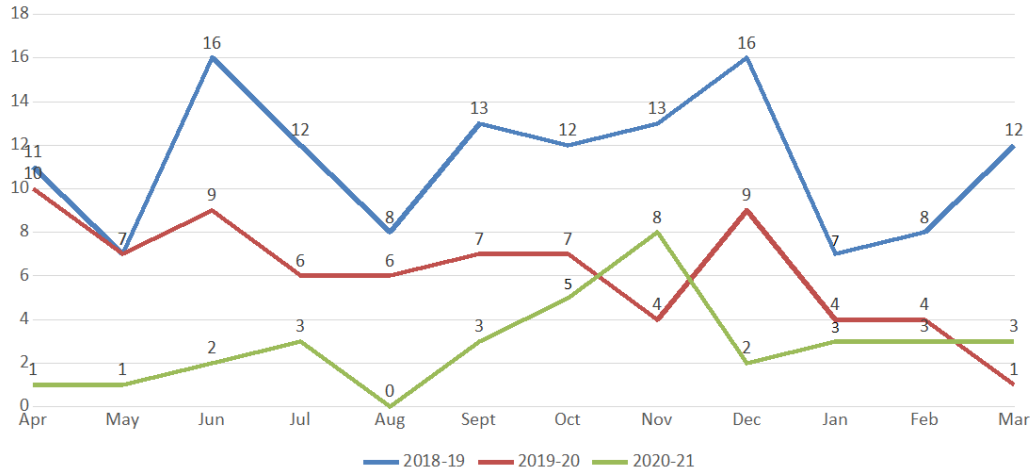
Aylesbury produced a report on prisoner violence in September. This detailed incidents six months before, and six months after, being on a CSIP. The data showed noticeably less violence after prisoners had been on the plan.

HMIP's October 2019 report noted that many prisoners felt unsafe in Aylesbury. Staff introduced some measures to improve this, including the election of safer prisons wing representatives, and wing meetings with staff. Covid-19 slowed progress. Professional mediation was budgeted for, but did not start this year. Without systematic training in professional mediation techniques, we suggest that the impact of gang culture will extend, and will severely curtail the opportunities for prisoners to undertake activities out of their cells and off their wings.

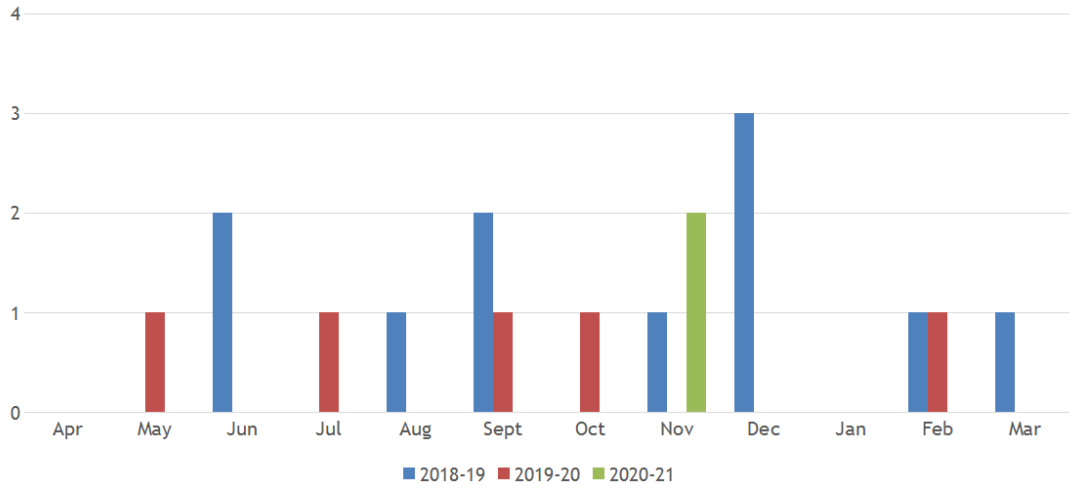
We hope that the impact of strategies begun in 2019/20 will limit any growth in violence, as the prisoner numbers continue to grow, post-pandemic.



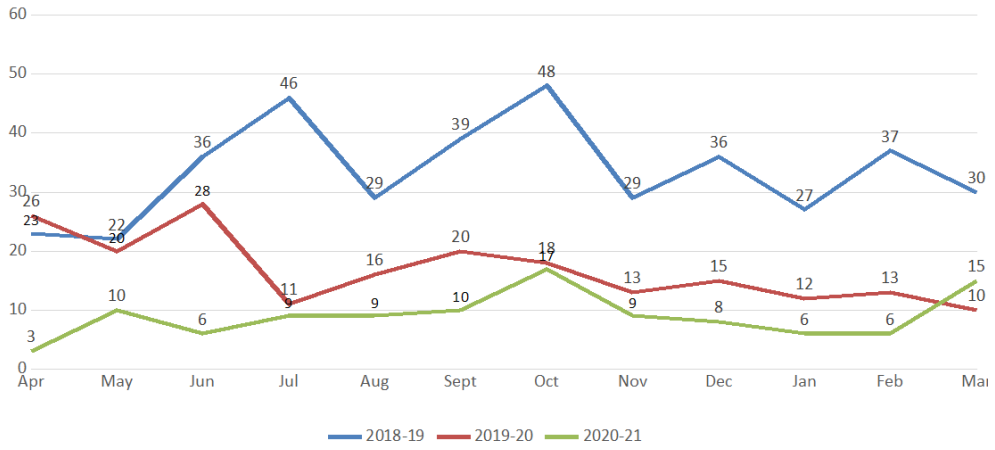
1.Total violent incidents per month



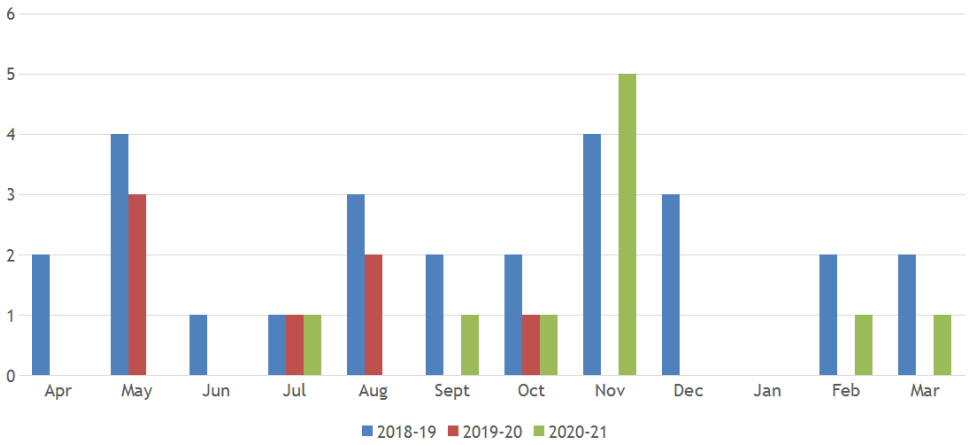
2. Assaults against staff, per month



3. Serious assaults against staff, per month



4. Total assaults against other prisoners



5. Serious assaults against other prisoners

4.4 Young people with specific vulnerabilities

HMIP's October 2019 report criticised Aylesbury for its management of safeguarding and the treatment of vulnerable prisoners. Aylesbury now has a local safeguarding policy, managed by the safer prisons team, which has been explained clearly to staff. This year, the team started to set up links with the safeguarding board of the local authority (this ensures that local companies/organisations act according to the law).

As mentioned in section 4.1, reception officers noted on the prison's information technology system (IT) information about existing/known mental health/other issues, including vulnerabilities, of all new prisoners. They circulated this to all relevant departments. It helped officers and others to deal appropriately with vulnerable prisoners.

Vulnerable prisoners, including those convicted of a sexual offence, used to be housed together on a specific wing. This is no longer the practice, although the 'reputation' of that wing remains hard to shift. Vulnerable prisoners can now be housed in any wing.

As a result of the pandemic, there were many fewer out-of-cell activities and (as already noted) at times prisoners spent 22.5 hours in their cells. For some of the more vulnerable prisoners, spending more time in their cells gave a greater sense of security and could be felt as a relief. There were fewer unwanted interactions, and less risk of bullying. As interaction increases, there may be more self-harm and self-isolation.

Aylesbury's psychologists worked with those prisoners assessed as vulnerable. Special departments – Pathways and Programmes – also worked with particularly complex prisoners, including vulnerable and violent ones. During Covid-19, members of these teams, plus clinical services, had to try to help prisoners by calling them on their in-cell telephones, but this was difficult. The subjects these professionals cover can often be sensitive, and usually require face-to-face interactions to build the trust needed to engender progress. Also, as mentioned elsewhere, prisoners sometimes unplugged their telephones. When possible, professional staff visited the wings. These have meeting rooms but they are not ideal for relaxed, confidential, therapeutic conversations, and use of them was tightly controlled because of the virus. Psychology staff also completed 'about me' documentation for over 80 prisoners at this time. The information in an 'about me' document provides wing staff with detail about young prisoners, and enables them to develop more appropriate care and support.

A multidisciplinary team – including wing officers – maintained a strong focus on the wellbeing of vulnerable prisoners. We joined these formal meetings occasionally. We noticed that when one officer learned about a prisoner's brain injury, their attitude changed from judgemental to sympathetic, and it was encouraging to witness this.

4.5 Use of force

There were fewer incidences of use of force this year (see table and chart), partly because prisoners spent so much time in their cells. The staff/prisoner ratio was also very favourable: staff who had worked with 400 prisoners now dealt with about 207.

No incidents needed help from the national tactical response group (advanced control and restraint techniques specialists). No incidents were so serious that they needed overseeing by an external 'Gold Command'.

There was also less prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff violence (see section 4.3), so less use of force was needed. Incidents dropped by 50% . There were no statistics available about the ethnicity or religion of prisoners involved.

Batons were drawn 14 times, and used eight times. Not all officers had training in the use of PAVA (pelargonic acid vanillylamide; a synthetic pepper spray) or SPEAR (spontaneous protection enabling accelerated response; a behaviourally inspired method of self-protection). PAVA canisters were available to those who had done the training. PAVA was drawn, but not used, in September 2020, and four more times in March. It was used once in January and four times in February – so, drawn, or used, 10 times in total.

We were disturbed by a specific incident, although there was full support for the officers and their actions in the incident after a full investigation. Officers used PAVA on a prisoner, at height, who had two home-made weapons. His father was dying at the time, and died three days later. The incident triggered a bout of severe mental health problems in the prisoner concerned. He spent over 12 weeks in a bare cell on the segregation unit, waiting for a bed to be available in a secure psychiatric hospital. Looking after a grieving prisoner, with such severe psychological problems, strained the staff on the unit. It also pointed up very clearly the shortage of suitable hospital beds for prisoners in great psychological need.

Officers recorded each incidence of force, from low levels, such as 'guiding holds', to, for example, control and restraint. They submitted these reports within 72 hours, and noted them on the prison's computer system. After any incident, healthcare staff checked the prisoners. If needed, they went to hospital.

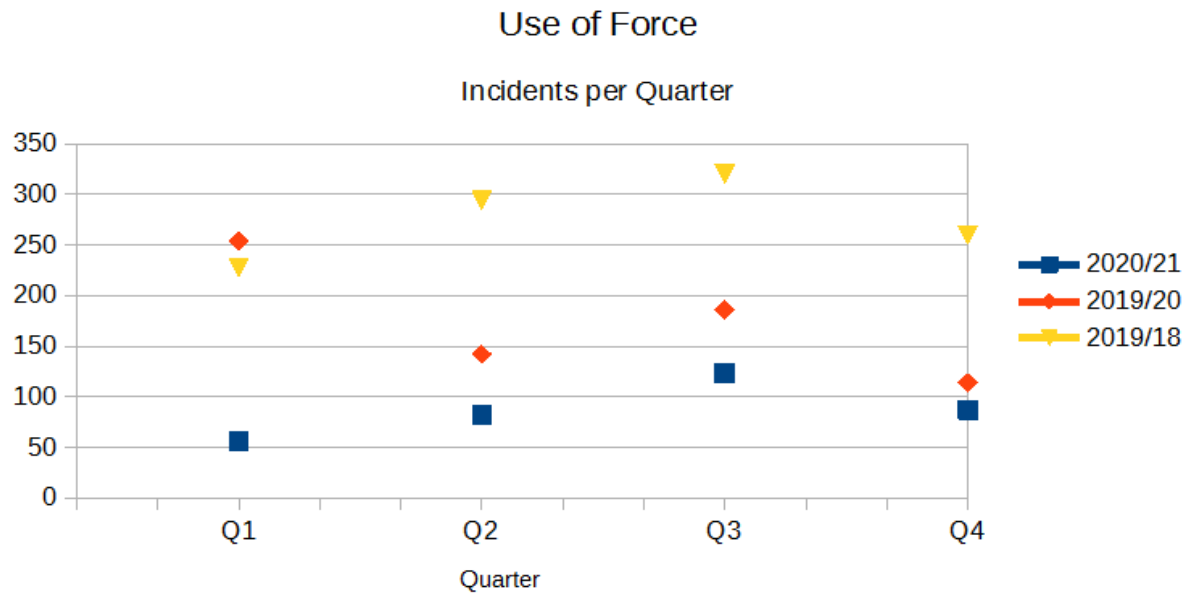
Sixty-three per cent of use of force incidents were filmed on body-worn video cameras, which were more widely used than before. They provided valuable evidence for dealing fairly with any claims of undue force.

If an officer thought that a prisoner had a hidden item on them, they could use the new body scanner in reception (see section 4.1). Wing staff did random cell searches; the dedicated search team) did intelligence-led ones. They recorded all results. We did not get copies of these, and have yet to see the data showing the distribution of searches between ethnic groups, which we have asked for several times.

The safer custody team held two use of force meetings. Participants reviewed statistics and video footage after events. They evaluated techniques used, and identified further training needs. They kept track of the number of outstanding reports, which was minimal.

As a result of having insufficient qualified instructors, and also the pandemic, the prison had fallen behind with the personal safety training of staff and Board members.

	2020/21	2019/20	2019/18
Q1	56	254	228
Q2	82	142	294
Q3	123	186	320
Q4	87	114	260
Total	348	696	1102



4.6 Substance misuse

Staff checked new arrivals for illegal substances, and offered them an amnesty: a chance to show that Aylesbury is 'firm but fair'.

On a positive note, there was much less use of illicit materials (mainly spice and cannabis) this year. It is likely that the extensive periods of Covid-19-related lockdown made it less easy for prisoners to get drugs. There was some evidence of spice getting into the prison but this was infrequent.

Mandatory drug testing (MDT) was carried out in April. Officers had to get rid of these samples due to Covid-19, and thus, these samples were not analysed. There was more MDT testing in October, November and December 2020. It then stopped again for the rest of the reporting year. Intelligence-led testing was permitted throughout the year.

There was an increase in drug incidents, and finds, towards the end of this year, but that was from a low level. There were 34 drug finds in the year and 94 prisoners were treated for substance misuse.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

After significant delays and budgetary issues, the prison has seen considerable investment in the past 12 months. This is welcome, but inevitably this could have been higher; some important elements are still untouched.

Two years ago, the prisoner population was cut by half, to approximately 220. Disappointingly, nothing happened during the next 12 months. This past year, funds were made available, contracts were placed and the refurbishment work started. At

first, two contracts were placed with Amey (for A and E wings) and one placed with Paragon (for C wing). When the A wing works were finished, further contacts were placed with Paragon for B and D wings.

The contracts varied, depending on what needed doing. Overall, refurbished wings saw the building of new showers and ventilation, new serveries and replacement floors. There were also new cell call bells and fire alarm systems, new furniture, and complete painting and decoration. The budget was not large enough to permit upgrading of the plumbing and drainage system. We hope this does not turn out to be short-sighted, as prisoners tend to abuse these. We also believe that there should be more computers for officers in the wing offices; this would help with reporting and free officers up to have more time to engage with prisoners.

With the pandemic throwing schedules into disarray, the timing of the work has generally over-run. Managing oversight of the contracts has also been a challenge, with the GFSL site/contract manager appointed late in the contract terms.

Overall, the work gives a good impression. In each case, the wing is light and bright, and fresh-looking. We understand that staff and prisoners welcome the improved environment. This should encourage the prisoners to treat the facilities with more respect.

In parallel with these projects, GFSL appointed a new facilities manager for the prison. He and his team have focused on tackling the number of outstanding maintenance issues which faced the prison historically. We understand that the number of work orders has gone down considerably. There is good evidence that the site is now better managed.

The Board had just one complaint about the food during the year, while the prison had six. It seems that the food is generally acceptable to this young group, although they say there is not quite enough of it. As noted elsewhere (see section 5.5), the kitchen staff made mistakes at times, with dietary issues being the main cause for complaint. which is a concern.

We are not aware of any issues about clothing; the prisoners appear to be decently dressed.

5.2 Segregation

- The segregation unit (officially known as the CSU), is where disruptive prisoners are held after incidents, and where officers deal with disciplinary matters. The aim is to hold prisoners in the unit for shortest period of time, although some prisoners spend long periods there as they have so many non-associates on other wings. The unit is well managed and in good physical condition. Dedicated officers support the prisoners appropriately. there were 303 movements of prisoners to and from the unit
- each month it held between four and 12 prisoners in total
- between 16 and 36 prisoners spent time in the unit, for at least one day, each month.

A number of prisoners were there pending their first adjudication (disciplinary hearing). There were 1,466 adjudications, 16 involving an external adjudicator. We

note that referrals to the external adjudicator were down by about 90% since last year. During the pandemic, adjudicators could not visit the prison, and suitable video links were not available. The Governor and his staff took responsibility for many of the cases that would normally have gone to the external adjudicator.

Some prisoners stayed in their cells for three to 10 days, as a punishment (on 'cellular confinement').

12 prisoners on the unit were on ACCTs, due to suicide or self-harm concerns (see section 4.2*)*. Officers checked them five times an hour. Most were there because they were unsafe on their wings (on good order and/or discipline (GOOD)). A number stayed until officers could reintegrate them by finding a different wing or, if necessary, another prison to move them to.

Limited space and gang affiliations often meant that moving to another prison was necessary. This was difficult to arrange. Certain prisons refused to take Aylesbury's more disruptive prisoners; LTHSE managers occasionally helped with this. Transport could be problematic, with pick-ups postponed. Occasionally, the prison made its own, expensive, transport arrangements.

Officers and others reviewed all of the segregated prisoners regularly. We – with representatives from the chaplaincy, and healthcare department – went to, or phoned in on a conference line, six to eight reviews weekly. Poor acoustics often made phoning in unsatisfactory. Reviews were well conducted; governors and officers encouraged prisoners to express themselves, and gave them guidance and sensible advice.

Prisoners felt frustrated when their situations changed little between reviews. The reasons – complicated by Covid-19 – were generally clear to us. A number of staff focused on moving prisoners out of the unit quickly, mindful of the safety of all prisoners and staff.

Seven prisoners stayed on the unit for over three months. The longest period spent there was 182 days – much longer than appropriate for these young prisoners. A few had severe mental health problems, and, ideally, should not have been in prison; segregation staff coped very professionally with them (see also section 4.5).

When dealing with two very challenging prisoners, officers wore special protective clothing (body armour) every time they opened their cell doors. Restraints were not used. Force was used 21 times on the unit.

As described in section 4.5, one of these prisoners was in the unit for over 12 weeks. As he often made weapons from anything to hand, he was held for that time in a minimally furnished cell, with a mattress and non-tear bedding. He had some books, and, when his mental state permitted this, access to a radio. This prisoner urgently needed a place in a secure hospital. Due to the shortage of suitable places, he continued to be held in the Aylesbury segregation unit. This was most unsuitable for the prisoner and put considerable pressure on the staff there, and we were very worried about this. Senior staff in the prison, including the mental health

professionals, worked hard to organise a move for him, and managed to do this eventually.

When possible, we did weekly rounds, speaking to each prisoner face to face, usually within hearing of accompanying officers. Prisoners appeared well looked after, often cheerful. They had regular showers and exercised in the (clean) yard. In contrast to the availability of in-cell telephones on other wings, the only access so, even in winter, when some said their cells were cold, prisoners would make calls to a confidential telephone for segregated prisoners is out on the yards,.

Some enjoyed reading books from the bookshelves. Only those few who studied distance education (for example, Open University, A levels) continued with any education while in the unit. Prisoners on GOOD normally had televisions and radios in their cells, and access to a pleasant television room. Cleaning jobs were available to a few.

Staff/prisoner relationships on the unit appeared constructive and the atmosphere was normally pleasant and friendly. Staff were up to date with paperwork.

5.3 Staff/young people relationships

During the period of lockdown, when prisoners stayed in bubbles, good relationships often developed between officers and prisoners. We sometimes saw gaps between management expectations and 'real life' on the wings. Occasionally, prisoners felt that officers spoke to them disrespectfully. For example, we heard officers shouting at prisoners to hurry up during meal service. We noticed confusion when residents were moving cells, as staff had not labelled cells correctly in advance. Prisoners with mental health issues would have found these events disturbing. Better planning could have helped; the inexperience of some officers does not help.

There was little emphasis on rehabilitation through this difficult year. The key worker (KW) system – a designated officer for each prisoner – continued, within the prisoners' own wings. Prisoners too often did not know who their KWs were. This meant that they were unsure who, on the wing, they should turn to with problems, and who was consistently following their progress. KW entries on the prison's computer system (P-NOMIS) are often quite thin, and not oriented towards advice or problem solving.

As the number of prisoners started to rise, there was refresher training for officers, who were used to higher staffing levels.

Staff liaison about prisoners' mental health, debt, gang or family matters is essential, but the slow computer system did not help with this important information-sharing. Use of body-worn video cameras, and better understanding of prisoners' 'triggers', defused a number of difficult situations.

Staff/prisoner forums were valuable but limited by Covid-19. Imaginative innovations by officers helped build relationships and lessened prisoners' boredom. Many prisoners painted their own cells, often together with officers. Officers occasionally collected library books for prisoners.

At Christmas, quizzes, and ‘cell bell bingo’ – with prizes – provided fun, and the special lunch was enjoyed.

Dealing with these often challenging young people is not easy and staff turnover continued to be relatively high. Around 25% of band 3 (= normal wing) officers have less than one year’s experience, and under 50% have less than two years in post. *(Exact figures were not available at the time of writing.)*

Although as many as 80+ members of staff were, at times, off sick/self-isolating, we appreciated all their hard work, and flexibility, in keeping the prisoners safe and well.

Prisoners nominated two staff members as ‘hidden heroes’; one officer won a national Ministry of Justice humanity award as recognition of the help he had given one particularly complex prisoner. One young prisoner told us that he had more support at Aylesbury than at his four previous prisons.

	this year	**last year**
Dropout rate: officers	3 per month = Approximately 30%	17% (basic grade officers after full training) *Since approximately June 2019*
Staff/prisoner ratio *Prisoner numbers are increasing*	1:12 – 1:14	1:12.5

5.4 Equality and diversity

On average, during the reporting year, there were many more black, Asian and minority ethnic) (72%) than white prisoners (28%).

- 38% of prisoners were black
- numbers of Christians and Muslims were similar
- more black and Muslim prisoners were on ‘standard’ rewards
- black and Muslim prisoners made more complaints (this changed later in the year).

Most (94%) discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs) were from black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners. DIRFS were not always readily available; and responses could take three weeks.

Many prisoners mistrust the complaints process and the DIRF process so did not use it. Some Muslim prisoners said that the dedicated search team did not handle religious items, such as Qu’rans, appropriately, and that the searchers with dogs did not appear to respect Muslim beliefs about ‘defilement’ (Muslims believe that dogs are unclean). It could be difficult to get clean bedding after it had been in contact with dogs. These prisoners refused to make formal complaints, as they feared that that might lead to worse treatment.

Other statistics (not included here) show that the proportions of black and white prisoners in the segregation unit were approximately equal (37%). More black prisoners (49%) and Muslims (51%) were involved in disciplinary procedures.

It was harder for us to speak to prisoners this year. Equality representatives expressed their views at some staff/prisoner forums, including the prison council, in bubbles. The often mature level of discussion impressed staff. These discussions showed, for example, that what prisoners thought was discrimination was sometimes clumsy use of words. Some new, younger officers helped to change the culture. The pandemic limited staff training in equality, but more information-sharing improved awareness, and identification, of prisoners' disabilities, particularly hidden ones (for example, autistic spectrum disorders).

Access to many prison resources is via written applications, so poor literacy disadvantages prisoners. They often do not want to show weakness by admitting difficulties, and help can be slow in coming. Some communications with prisoners improved, with more information, and forms, in simple language, with pictures; illustrated newsletters reinforced messages. Prison departments had clear, new signs, made on the premises. However, this is not consistent. Noticeboards on the wings are used to provide important, as well as much less important, messages. It is hard for prisoners, particularly unmotivated ones, to pick out the information they need. Wing staff, when questioned, often showed little knowledge of these notices.

Non-native speakers had no English language tuition. Induction information was available only in English, and at least one non-native speaker had difficulties on arrival. Another has tended toward self-isolation since arrival. We do not know how often officers made use of the register of staff with language skills but believe that use was limited; we do not know of any instance when they used the prison's telephone interpreting service. For disabled people, there is an accessible cell, lift, ramps, a hearing loop (in the visits room) and use of an extra room for those with impaired mobility.

During Black History Month, prisoners enjoyed African and other special dishes, thanks to much planning and inter-departmental liaison. An impressive Black Lives Matter display – seen by 64% of prisoners – included prisoners' work (they were given photographs of their contributions, and of themselves). A discussion panel included local and national speakers. LGBTQ+ month, and other special occasions, were also marked, with for example, quizzes and prizes.

The equalities team met infrequently, and statistics were collected and discussed. Work slowed as team members left, leaving a new equalities governor, with appointment of a new officer and others pending. Lack of staff made full analysis of statistics difficult.

Ethnicity and religions: **Prison population**	**Complaints**	**Rewards – standard** *Few on 'basic' during Covid-19*	**Rewards – enhanced**

	This year	Last year	This year	Last year	This year	Last year	This year	Last year
Black	38.00%	34.5%	39%	-	48.5%	40–60%	32%	18–28%
Muslim	35.5%	37%	42%	-	46.5%	30–57%	29.5%	30–35%
Christian	41%	41%	31.5%	-	31%	32–48%	46.5%	38–48%
White	27.5%	30%	21%	-	17%	0–10%	33.5%	32–48%

Numbers for 3/4 quarters, averaged.
Where columns add up to over 100%, it is because of intersecting characteristics.
In England and Wales, 80% of the population is white. 5% of the population in England are Muslim.

DIRFs submitted			
Ethnicity | DIRFs total 32			**Ethnicity | prison population**
Black, Asian and minority ethnic	30	94%	72%
Black	11	34%	38%
White	2	6%	27.5%

Last year: 51 DIRFs: 18% about religion; 86% about race.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The Muslim managing chaplain had 26 regular staff (last year: 30); there were two full-time paid posts. The 13 volunteers included two bereavement counsellors; 28 other volunteers (last year: 30) joined as needed. The team covered most faiths and religions – for example, Hindu, Sikh and Baha'i (also Pagan) – and worked well together. They were fully involved in many of the prison's activities, including management meetings and conduct (prisoner behaviour) reviews. Officers often sought their help – for example, with complaints about alleged discrimination.

Covid-19 restrictions made it harder for them to engage with prisoners, but they spoke to all new arrivals via their in-cell telephones; this was time-consuming, as prisoners regularly unplugged these). When possible, they visited them in person soon afterwards. They had regular contact with all prisoners – regardless of faith – particularly those in the segregation unit, whom they visited daily. They gave prisoners copies of their own induction booklet, and ensured that faith details on the prison's computer system were correct.

Chaplains played an important role in supporting prisoners and their families, including in the 26 occurrences of serious illness (last year: 20) and 34 of bereavement (last year: 29) (from January to December 2020). They set up virtual visits for prisoners with critically ill family members/carers, and also virtual funeral attendance, via Zoom. They particularly supported prisoners with mental health issues; one prisoner who regularly self-harmed was greatly helped by his job as a chaplaincy cleaner.

There were very few of the usual services or group meetings, which cover the faiths of all the prisoners, this year. When groups started again, numbers were limited by the prisoners' bubbles. Muslim chaplains organised Ramadan celebrations and liaised with kitchen staff about food – in the evenings, staff delivered hot meals in insulated food boxes to prisoners who had been fasting. Some with serious food allergies got the wrong meals, several times. Chaplains worked with other staff to try to ensure that this would not happen again, and allergy information is now part of the induction information circulated to all staff.

The Angel Tree scheme of the Prison Fellowship charity (https://prisonfellowship.org.uk/about/how-we-work/) made it possible for chaplaincy members to send small Christmas presents to prisoners' children. Also helped by this charity, volunteers were able to send £5 gift vouchers and cards with personal messages from the prisoners to their mothers, for Mother's Day. There was 'the best response we've ever had', with 90 cards sent, many with very moving messages. It is much to the credit of the chaplaincy team and their volunteers that these things, which were quite labour-intensive, were possible this year.

Covid-19 limited community contacts, but the chaplaincy's 1847 fund, which assists with them , was available for hardship grants to prisoners. Chaplains also played an important role in looking out for extremist views, in order to counter them.

	Number of prisoners		**Last year**	
Muslim	62	57%	76	37%
Total Christians *C of E, RC, Pentecostal, etc*	95	45%	85	41%

5.6 Incentives and earned privileges (IEP)

In January 2020, the prison launched its new incentives policy framework (historically known as IEP). This involved a points-based system; it was intended to be transparent. As the prison was starting to use this, the country went into lockdown. It was not possible then to make the minor changes needed to improve it.

The core of the policy was to encourage prisoners to do certain things, including a series of positive behaviours. These included attendance at activities, such as education, workshops, programmes and certain jobs.

Certain off-wing activities – for example, laundry, kitchens, serveries and wing cleaning – were essential. Prisoners continued to do these during lockdown. Most prisoners were unable to do activities which would otherwise have been available to them. This made the incentives scheme complicated; with the prisoners spending much of their time in their cells, it was more difficult to identify good behaviours and penalise bad ones. Staff continued their regular behavioural reviews of the prisoners.

As a result of the amount of time that prisoners were spending in their cells, HMPPS changed the core policy framework to ensure that they had the benefit of televisions, regardless of IEP levels. In the past, those with the worst behaviours might have lost that privilege.

HMPPS also made it necessary for staff to write a ‘defensible decision’ statement, justifying the placement of any prisoner on the lowest IEP level (‘basic’), which was, in any case, strongly discouraged.

Prisoners’ behaviour has generally improved during lockdown, although that might be because of a lack of opportunity. One consequence has been the gradual upgrade of prisoners’ IEP levels to the highest category, ‘enhanced’. Historically, 20–35% of prisoners might have had ‘enhanced’ status, with the majority, around 50–60%, on ‘standard’. The table below shows how IEP levels have changed over the past three years.

In adopting a traditional policy framework as the country opens up post-Covid-19, the prison could face an issue in bringing IEP levels back to their historic levels. This may be important in re-establishing sensible targets for improved behaviours.

	Basic		Standard		Enhanced		Total	
2018/19	55		200		137		392	
		14%		51%		35%		100%
2019/20	22		97		86		205	
		11%		47%		42%		100%

2020/21	5		72		123		200	
		2%		36%		62%		100%

5.7 Complaints

The number of complaints submitted to the prison this year went down 61%, from 828 last year to 320 this year.

This reflects the inactivity of the prisoners, with less interaction and fewer activities which might have led to complaints. There is no significant evidence of slow response times to the complaints by the prison.

The most significant reduction in complaint numbers related to visits ('social visits') and the segregation unit, and those submitted as 'confidential'. Often, the confidential complaints relate to staff interaction and bullying.

Interestingly, there were more complaints this year relating to letters and censorship, security matters and transfers. The role of the dedicated search team has expanded in the past two years; the prison has also had use of search dogs. These together proved more effective in finding illicit materials. Transfer delays due to the pandemic have also resulted in complaints.

In a similar manner, the number of applications to the Board fell by 70%, from 73 last year to just 22 (see section 9). This is an unusually small number, as our Board has averaged 75–100 applications in previous years, for the same number of prisoners (210).

As this report records, apart from two Board members (periodically increasing to three or four), we were unable to meet and interact with prisoners in a significant way during the year, for understandable pandemic control reasons. We also adopted a rather more complicated applications procedure, which may also have inhibited prisoners.

Key areas of complaint to the Board related to discipline and censorship. With such small numbers of applications, it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from them.

5.8 Property

The management of prisoners' property continues to be an issue within the prison system. A quarter of all complaints in Aylesbury were about property, although we should note that the number of property complaints during the past 12 months is down by 50%, compared with last year. This is mainly because there were far fewer prisoner movements, due to the pandemic.

A core theme is loss of property during prisoner movements. For security reasons, prisoners do not know in advance when they are scheduled to move between prisons. In some cases, they do not have the opportunity to pack their own belongings – officers do this for them. This may cause delays in the packing and forwarding of property. Occasionally, property never arrives at the new prison at all.

With a determined focus on illegal items (for example, drugs), and ever more inventive ways used to smuggle items into the prison, some traditional privileges have become more restricted. An example of this is family parcels to prisoners; this privilege was understood to be widely abused. During this past year, prison managers decided that prisoners could get parcels of, for example, new clothes only on their birthday.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

NHS England commissions healthcare services for the prison. The Practice Plus Group – a privately owned company – provides these services. We should note that Practice Plus, and the other related units, operated in difficult, and constantly changing, circumstances during this past 12 months, due to the pandemic. They continued to provide their essential services, but it was not possible to provide exactly the same services as before.

The department monitors closely the 23 services it provides; it recorded 15,971 activities in the 12 months. There were just 813 non-attendances (less than 5%). This compares impressively with a normal year – for example, 2019, when the numbers showed a total of 13,820 booked appointments.

One role which proved very difficult to fill was that of clinical psychologist. It sits within secondary care (the in-reach team, which is covered by Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust).

6.2 Physical healthcare

Staffing was a challenge at times. The department has generally been fully staffed, with some agency staff brought in to fill posts, as needed. In non-Covid-19 times, a GP would visit the prison three times a week, and a dentist once a week. During this past 12 months, the GP visited once a week. The GP also held virtual clinics, via the telephone, with virtual consultations as needed for the two other clinics. To help with this, the nursing staff carried out extensive triage duties; they first checked the prisoner to determine his needs, and then made sure that the GP referrals were better targeted.

During the reporting period, 162 prisoners visited the GP and 214 visited the dentist. There were 51 hospital appointments, including planned and unplanned. This compares with 140 visits to the GP, 53 visits to the dentist and 49 hospital referrals last year.

We should note that the prison mainly managed to avoid much Covid-19 infection among prisoners. Early on, it was not easy to be sure who might actually have the virus. Including the period when there was mass testing, it seems that no more than 10 prisoners actually had it. Approximately 23 prisoners were placed into isolation due to potential exposure, following government guidelines. This is remarkable when set against the number of infections among the prison officers and staff. At one point,

the combination of infection and self-isolation, due to potential exposure, resulted in one-quarter of all staff being off duty.

Some services stopped completely, with inevitable backlogs building during March to June. The main one was in dentistry, provided by Time for Teeth, where all but emergency treatment was stopped. At the time of writing, they can deliver aerosol-generated procedures (AGPs), such as fillings and polishes. They are working through the routine waiting list, which now comprises just three new referrals, four in ongoing treatment and 22 AGPs.

6.3 Mental healthcare

The prison offers a range of accredited programmes and other interventions which promote better mental health, better quality of life and successful rehabilitation. A needs analysis, when the prisoner population was reduced, determined the programmes on offer. These included specific courses to help those at high risk of violence, and courses to support those with low motivation or willingness to engage.

The Aylesbury Pathways Service (part of the contract for the national offender personality disorder framework) offers a broader set of interventions. This is an outreach and day centre service for prisoners who are at high risk of harm, or who have emerging personality disorder traits.

The Pathways team has a combination of officers dedicated to the team, and also specialist clinicians. For most of this year, these clinicians could not visit the wings to engage with referred prisoners very often; the officers were able to complete their key worker roles, and meet many of them. From August to December, close to full engagement was achieved, with those prisoners in greatest need visiting the unit for their therapy sessions.

From the outset of the pandemic, the prison drew on its strengths in the provision of mental healthcare services. The CSIP system was adapted. The psychology team ensured that prisoners vulnerable to all aspects of poor mental health were supported in a commendably strong cross-disciplinary manner.

Through the reporting year, 52 prisoners engaged with the Pathways service. On average, 32 prisoners are engaging with Pathways at any one time. A shortage of specialist staff limits this number.

Here is just selection of courses offered: Anger Plus, Mentalisation-Based Therapy Introduction, social skills, one-to-one psychological therapy, art therapy and music production. Many of these are certificated, and recorded as part of a prisoner’s ongoing profile.

The Pathways team creates a warm, enabling atmosphere to support vulnerable prisoners, many of whom have had great trauma in their lives. Prisoners often form strong bonds with team members when they are working with them.

We commend the fact that staff check up on prisoners after they have left Aylesbury for other prisons.

The greatest achievement of Pathways this year has been the building of the sensory garden, with the help various staff and the prisoners’ gardens team.

6.4 Social care

Aylesbury does not have links with the local authority, to our knowledge.

6.5 Exercise, regime

This past 12 months have seen the amount of time that prisoners engaged in activity outside their cells reduced to levels which would otherwise have been quite unacceptable. A small number (approximately 30) had essential jobs in the kitchens, laundry, gardening, recycling, design technology (signage) and estate parties, plus the wing cleaning parties (which average eight per wing, totalling 32).

During the first lockdown, most prisoners were allowed out only for an hour of exercise a day and a shower; this was similar during the later lockdown. All other activities stopped. Additional exercise periods were introduced in the evenings on 8 July, and operated until the evenings became too dark. Prisoners were encouraged to do some in-cell activities, including keep fit, education, and 'distraction packs' (for example, puzzles).

Since January 2021, we have taken 'snapshots' of prisoners' out-of-cell activity. During the first quarter of the year, approximately a dozen samples were taken across all wings. This showed that about 40 residents were out of their cells during a given session, morning or afternoon, for either off-wing (work, Purple Visits (a virtual visits facility using laptop computers), in-person visits, legal visits, healthcare visits) or on-wing (cleaning, painting, serving of meals) activity. The remaining 80% spent about 22.5 hours a day in their cells.

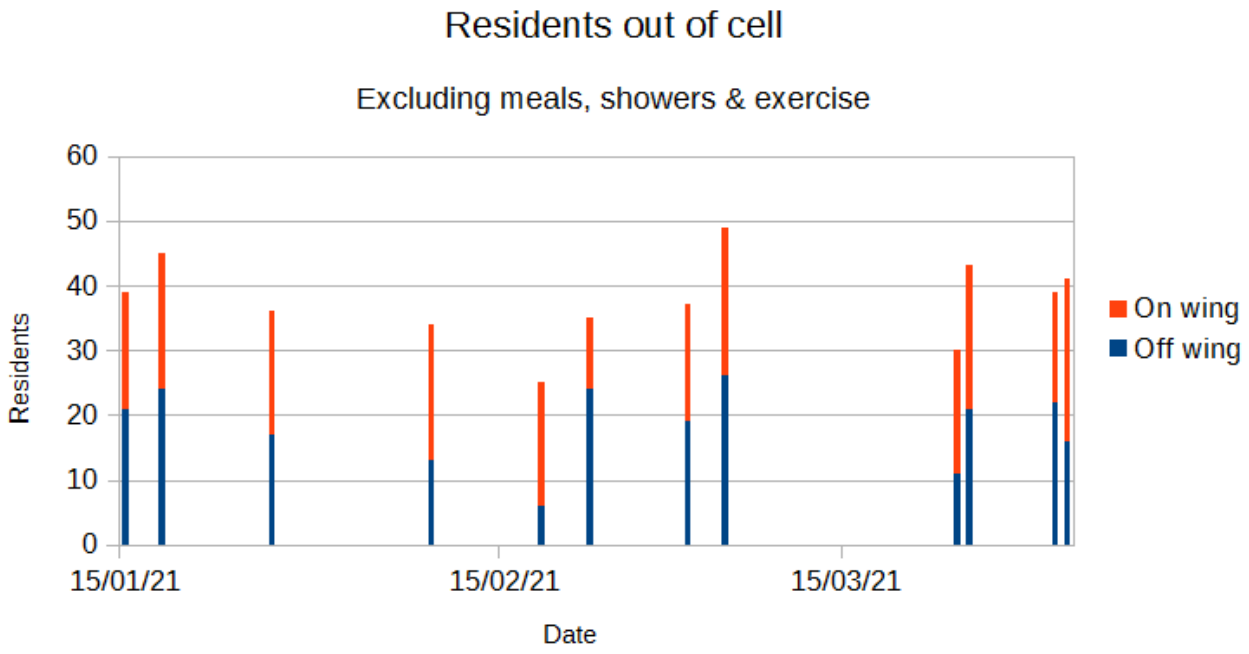
We calculate that, for most of the year, the proportion of prisoners who were out of their cells at any one time was a worryingly small 15–20%, as staff grappled with Covid-19 regulations, bubbles and the prison's designation as a Covid-19 'red site'.

Some limited outdoor gym activity started again for a time, but with wings split into bubbles, and limits on the equipment that was permitted, there was mixed enthusiasm for the activities; some prisoners preferred afternoon rest periods instead.

During the winter lockdown, many limitations began again. We can only hope that, as restrictions ease in the spring, most of the usual activities will restart.

In previous reports, we would have commented that there are not enough activities, whether in education, programmes, work, PE or training, to keep prisoners out of their cells for the entire working week.

We understand that a return to near full employment is still the goal as restrictions ease. We look forward, in next year's report, to comparing pre- and post-Covid-19 levels of activities.



6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Inclusion, part of Midland Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, is subcontracted to provide psychosocial services, delivered by the drug and alcohol recovery team (DART).

Prisoners who need drug rehabilitation are identified in three ways: through the DART induction; by a member of staff making a referral; or by the prisoner self-referring. After a referral, staff assess prisoners to decide what their needs are.

The DART can offer a range of support. The most intensive is the 16-session course called the Inclusion Recovery Programme (IRP), delivered over a five-week period. The IRP is certificated; sustained success is recorded, and forms part of the prisoner's ongoing profile. It has not been possible to deliver this course for the past year.

Ordinarily, DART staff meet prisoners face to face. In this past year, they changed their way of working, so that they could still meet the needs of service users. Although the team could not meet prisoners on the wings, they met a few, based on risk, in the healthcare facility. They also did one-to-one sessions, calling prisoners on their in-cell telephones.

We should note that not being able to see service users face to face, in combination with the long period of lockdown, has had an impact on service user motivation. DART staff are currently working with 30 prisoners.

As the prison regime starts to open up, the specialist skills of DART staff will be made more widely available to prisoners, one to one and, eventually, with group sessions. This will restart the focus on raising awareness and relapse prevention.

6.7 Soft skills

As noted above (see section 6.3), the prison has a special provision in Pathways for some of the most vulnerable prisoners to benefit from a gentle learning, nurturing environment. Soft skills are taught there. Apart from this, the prison lacks almost any type of provision for this. The excellent coffee roastery and café closed at the end of the last reporting year.

Early in lockdown, in the absence of education and other activity, managers announced a number of creative competitions. There were fewer than three entries for any of these. On close examination, the announcements seldom reached the prisoners, apart from a single sheet of paper pinned on a wing noticeboard. There were no creative materials available for them to use. In one announcement, mention was made of submitting collages or photographs, yet there was no possibility of prisoners being able to do this. Later, some creative packs were made up, which could be given out, if prisoners asked for them, but they were not helped to access these. Much later in the year, creative packs were put in wing offices, but most wing staff did not know about them.

By contrast, the Black History Month display (see section 5.4) was a notable success, and provided a space where prisoners interacted with staff and others in a slightly more natural way than is normally possible elsewhere. The chaplaincy also continues to provide a cleaning role, which gives prisoners the chance to interact with a variety of people from both inside and outside the prison (see also section 5.5), although there is only one such role available.

7. Education and training

7.1 Education

MKC provides education courses for the prison, under contract to the Ministry of Justice. This year, the pandemic badly impacted education across the prison. The changing phases of the Covid-19 regulations largely dictated the pattern of provision throughout our reporting period.

From the March 2020 lockdown to September 2020, very few MKC staff came into the prison. Those who continued to visit supported the distance learners to complete ongoing courses. They used in-cell telephones and delivered materials to prisoners via the internal mail system. They also made sure that 21 learners who were half-way through ‘functional skills’ courses (developed to improve literacy, numeracy, and information and communications technology skills – at Aylesbury, just mathematics and English) were awarded passes by City and Guilds through the predicted grade mark scheme: three at level 1 and five at level 2 English, seven at level 1 and six at level 2 mathematics.

During those six months, staff gave most prisoners ‘distraction packs’. These were of variable quality. Some content came from MKC and some from the prison itself. Many prisoners found the packs interesting at the start of the lockdowns, but inevitably became bored by them, and greatly missed the face-to-face learning opportunity that would have been afforded to students at schools through Zoom classes.

There were also some attempts to involve prisoners in creative activities in their cells. Competitions were announced, but many prisoners had no materials to take part in these.

More MKC staff were in the prison from September onwards. They began to build packages of in-cell learning, developed according to the original curriculum plans which would have been in place if the pandemic had not hit.

We looked at these packages, including some that had been marked and returned to prisoners. They were carefully developed to be effective without face-to-face support. They were dependent on the intermittent support available through written comment, as well as in-cell telephone conversations. From the list of subjects (see chart), it is easy to see that many of the subjects need a practical, hands-on element. In view of this, the number of prisoners who completed these courses, although variable, is quite positive.

Subjects: in-cell learning	Unique learners	Completers: percentage
Employability	2	0
English	38	83
Mathematics	36	72
Barbering	26	46
Business	15	33
Horticulture	21	43
IT	11	64
Mentoring	21	29
Music	18	72
Personal and social development	25	52
Barista and coffee roasting	30	48
English - Stepping Stones to Functional Skills (accredited)	2	0
Mathematics - Stepping Stones to Functional Skills (accredited)	3	0

However, from September to December, schools and colleges outside the prison were giving face-to-face lessons, with some restrictions, such as bubbles. We could not understand why this did not happen in the prison, with suitable restrictions. The prisoners in Aylesbury are young, and most have not had a smooth educational journey to this point. Education in the prison, when operating at its best, can help them catch up on lost years. However, this year gave almost no opportunity at all to gain a recognised qualification, so compounding their education deficits.

The flow of new prisoners arriving varied through the year. Dedicated MKC staff made sure to give all the new arrivals a form of simplified education induction questionnaire, including a basic form of placement testing. However, the data collected from this is not enough to create a personal learning profile on which to build. They started to do fuller inductions, and associated testing, at the end of our reporting period.

There is a pressing need to improve the provision of all forms of education and training in the wake of this difficult year. Relevant, and, for the most part, certificated courses, combined with skilled teaching and guidance to help maintain progress and morale among the prisoners, is what we look forward to seeing in the coming months. It would help if some of the education catch-up money made available by the government could be set aside specifically for prison education.

The teaching team has come together well to create and improve in-cell work, but most of them are new to Aylesbury. Face-to-face teaching of prisoners is likely to present many challenges, although it should also be rewarding.

7.2 Library

Covid-19 badly affected use of the library. Access was forbidden from April to September 2020. During this time, the prisoners depended on their own books. They could also use the limited range of books in wing libraries; these are provided through book donations from publishers, and from the scheme coordinated by the National Literacy Trust.

Library staff returned to work, on reduced shifts, in late July 2020. Between July and September, they did a full stocktake. They then moved on to refreshing the collection, taking out some old titles and adding new ones. There was a four-month backlog in the distribution of prison newspapers; gradually, staff delivered them to the wings again.

From October 2020, the library started up again, giving some level of service to prisoners and staff. Library visits for prisoners were not allowed, but wing staff and workshop staff were encouraged to call in to collect books that prisoners asked for.

Managers circulated information about this, and the system was made very easy to use, but this provision was not well used. When we asked wing staff about this, some said that they did not know about it. In any case, unable to visit the main library, prisoners often did not know, or could not have known, which books were available and might have been of interest to them.

Monthly loans (details below) were particularly low when staffing was at its lowest in the winter. Many loans were made to just a few prisoners. In February, the 27 loans represent the borrowing of just five prisoners.

We could not find out exactly why the library was offering such a limited service in the prison, once libraries in the community had reopened for carefully controlled use. As with education, we heard different reasons. Occasionally, we were told that this was the ruling of MKC, and at other times that it was because of Gold Command rules.

Month	Books, fiction and non-fiction, and magazines

October 2020	44
November 2020	66
December 2020	54
January 2021	34
February 2021	27
March 2021	72

7.3 Vocational training

As would be expected, access to vocational training was severely limited by Covid-19. Several workshops were closed throughout the year.

Essential activities remained operative, as allowed by Gold Command. These had restricted capacity.

Workshop	Sessions	Capacity
Laundry	9	6
Estates/recycling	9	6
Signs	9	3
Gardens	9	4
Kitchens	12	8
Total	**48**	**27**

In addition to this, there were roughly 30 wing-based jobs for cleaners and orderlies, providing around 57 jobs for prisoners on the days when vocational activities were allowed. This low number is entirely understandable, given the unusual circumstances. Our concern is how difficult it will be to build back up to greater capacity, and to improved quality, as the prison numbers increase.

Board members visiting the prison observed that prisoners taking part in the occupations listed above are frequently disengaged. They may spend time chatting, playing board games or resting. It was particularly important this year that they were out of their cells but this, in itself, does not amount to vocational training.

There is a poor match between the work activities available to the young prisoners and the types of knowledge and experience they need to accrue for successful resettlement post-sentence.

To compound this, few of the activities are assessed systematically, or certificated.

8. Progression towards transfer or release

8.1 Case management and progression

In the offender manager unit (OMU), the prison has four full-time probation officers, one drawn from the Prison Service and three from the Probation Service; there are 1.5 probation officer posts vacant. There are three offender managers in the unit and there is a vacancy for at least one more member of the team.

This level of staffing was considered adequate in our last reporting period, when the number of prisoners in the prison was at a lower level. Then we mentioned concerns that it will not be sufficient as prisoner levels rise again. These concerns are now more acute.

Prisoners generally know their OMU officer. In conversation, and in GOOD reviews, we sometimes hear that prisoners find it increasingly difficult to maintain regular communications with this officer. This may be because the staff are stretched. It makes for less smooth case management. OMU staff also had severe restrictions on visiting wings, which impacted their ability to work effectively with prisoners, as they had to speak to them on the telephone, if they could even get hold of them.

Covid-19 restrictions often made it hard for a prisoner to access courses in programmes and/or education which were sentence requirements. This raised the anxiety of those prisoners keen to maintain their progression toward release. The prison prioritised these prisoners appropriately but this did not seem to be communicated sufficiently to allay all concerns.

Twelve prisoners completed accredited programmes and seven completed validated interventions. Some courses were delivered one to one and some in very small groups, limited in number by the pandemic.

Offending behaviour programmes such as Kaizen and Identity Matters are offered on a rolling programme and were therefore offered most often in the year. Other programmes offered included Becoming New Me plus, Resolve, Motivation and Engagement, and Individual Engagement.

The in-cell telephones were used for maintaining a relationship with those prisoners following programmes but they were only used to deliver content in some cases where this was appropriate.

8.2 Family contact

For almost all of the year, family contact depended on technology. Family visits stopped in March 2020. In August, they were reinstated, on a limited basis. In October, they stopped again for the rest of the reporting year.

The prison already had in-cell telephony in place. This became increasingly valuable to the prisoners. They were given a supplement of £5 per week and could spend more of their own money on calls, to allow them to keep up contact with family and registered friends. We, and others, also communicated with them this way.

When we asked prisoners how they were coping with the Covid-19 regime, almost all of them mentioned the value of in-cell telephones. It was particularly valuable that they could talk to family and friends at times that suited the dialled party – for instance, during evenings – rather than when the prison regime made wing telephones available, as was the case in prior years.

By September, the prisoners were offered contact with registered family members via pre-booked video calls, called Purple Visits. Uptake was low and did not rise much when access was extended to weekends. There were a number of reasons given for this, including:

- Families had to download and register with the system, which many found difficult.
- The technology was unstable.
- The prisoners had almost no privacy when speaking to their families in this way, although this was rectified later in the year.

Despite the low uptake, it was a remarkable facility which added much value to those who accessed it. Some prisoners who had not seen family in a considerable amount of time benefited from this. We commend HMPPS for introducing the system.

8.3 Resettlement planning

Few prisoners leave the prison system from Aylesbury, but we saw a small increase in leavers this year, with 30 leaving the system. A total of 88 also went to other prisons (= 118 leavers in total).

Any prisoners preparing to leave could undertake accredited programmes and ‘validated interventions’. They could thus get the wider psychological support that they needed to meet probation or release requirements, despite the practical difficulties. This took effort, imagination and cooperation on the part of the teams involved.

The mentoring charity Trailblazers, which is based at Aylesbury, has been a great help throughout this year. Its work focuses on prisoners close to release, so does not usually have many clients in Aylesbury. This year, with more prisoners being released directly from the prison, Trailblazers should be commended for providing much of the pre-release preparation.

Early in the reporting year, immediately after the first full lockdown had been called nationally, the Board learned of a release that unravelled at the last minute. Transport and accommodation both fell away within a day or so of the planned release of a young prisoner. In the end, the CEO of Trailblazers drove the prisoner to his designated accommodation. No other transport was available. The address of this accommodation changed a second time at the very last minute. This was very concerning. The situation proved to be a one-off, reflecting the immediate chaos that the national lockdown visited on the systems involved. The prison system quickly recovered basic reliability.

9. The work of the IMB

This year compares with no other. Keeping prisoners, staff and volunteer monitors healthy upturned all monitoring precedents. As advised, we adopted a cautious approach to on-site monitoring and began to use remote monitoring for the first time.

We kept in close contact with the Governor, to ensure that our on-site monitoring accorded with the Covid-19 protocols adopted in the prison.

We made 229 monitoring calls and visits this year. This contrasts with 335 monitoring visits made in the last reporting year.

On-site monitoring continued throughout the year, with one or two visits a week. These were supported by remote monitoring calls to wings and other areas on most other days of the working week. With the lockdown of the prisoners, there were far fewer areas of activity within the prison to monitor. Further, we respected infection-limiting protocols on-site.

When visiting in person, we prioritised segregation unit rounds, attendance at segregation reviews, and checking in with more vulnerable prisoners. We telephoned prisoners in their cells. We used this for check-ins, and to speak about applications.

Remote monitoring was well organised, using a systematic, electronically shared matrix (spreadsheet), ensuring that all active parts of the prison were called regularly. Results from on-site monitoring were included in the matrix. Remote monitoring required the prison to have good telephone conference systems. Early on, these were not many, and were seldom of high quality. Later, these systems improved a little.

Early in the year, we tried to introduce a monitoring structure which mirrored the areas laid out in the new monitoring framework, and corresponded with headings in this report. We did not get far with our plans, and will return to this in the new year.

We devised a method of maintaining confidentiality for all prisoner applications. The number of applications made to the Board reduced during the year (see numbers below).

The Chair used the opportunity of lockdown to digitise previous applications, helping us improve team knowledge and future application responses.

The team lost morale through the year. Remote monitoring limited the role of monitors, reducing proper involvement with the life of prisoners. Two of our team members resigned and two members are currently taking a sabbatical.

We ran one recruitment exercise, giving us one suitable candidate who passed all vetting, but later withdrew due to pressure of work in the early part of her professional life.

Applications to the IMB

code	subject	this year	last year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	1	2
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	6	7
C	Equality	0	4
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	0	0
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	5	4
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	1	5
F	Food and kitchens	0	1
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	0	3
H1	Property within this establishment	1	13
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	2	9
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	0	0
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	3	7
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	3	14
K	Transfers	0	3
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	0	1
	Total number of applications	**22**	**73**

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members		12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period		12
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	Active	6
	Sabbatical	3
Total number of visits to the establishment	In person	78
	Remote monitoring	151
	Total	**229**
Total number of segregation reviews attended	Average 6–8 per week	

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