



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Brixton

**For reporting year
01 September 2020 – 31 August 2021**

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Introductory sections 1 - 3

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 IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

During the year under review, Brixton has continued as a category C resettlement prison. The certified normal accommodation is 528. At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the operational capacity was reduced to 760, to give some headroom for men who might be ill or shielding. The population fell below that when there were no transfers in and releases continued. At 31 August it was 661 but it had been below 700 for some of the year. There are five residential wings: A accommodates general population and the London Pathway Unit (LPU) for up to 36 prisoners who have committed to psychological therapy. B is used for induction. C accommodates full-time workers and enhanced men; and D is a mixed drug recovery and wellbeing unit. G accommodates men convicted of sexual offences.

A wing houses 232 prisoners in 135 cells;

B wing 150 prisoners in 88 cells;

C wing 133 prisoners in 70 cells;

D wing 48 prisoners in 26 cells and

G wing 235 prisoners in 149 cells

The segregation unit has seven cells and one special cell, which doubles as a holding cell. Overall, the condition of the accommodation is unacceptable, and the cells are too small for two men sharing in normal circumstances: even worse when they were locked up for up to 23 and a half hours a day as a result of the Covid lockdown, and 24 hours on Fridays, when canteen is distributed.

The main external service providers, largely unchanged since last year, are:

- maintenance and kitchen: Mitie
- education and training: Novus, subcontracting to Bounce Back and Allandale
- The Clink Restaurant
- National Prison Radio
- Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC): Penrose, subcontracted by MTC Novo
- housing: St Mungo's subcontracted by the CRC¹
- work and benefits: Jobcentre Plus (JCP)
- healthcare: Practice Plus Group, subcontracting to Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust and others
- substance misuse and wellbeing (with healthcare): Forward Trust (FT)
- visitors centre, and work with families and children: Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)
- employment/training information, advice and guidance (IAG): Prospects, part of the Shaw Trust.

¹ This changed in June 2021 when the CRCs were incorporated into the National Probation Service. Some services e.g. accommodation and finance, benefit and debt (FBD) were not re-contracted by June, and not all staff were in place.

Other organisations and volunteers provide additional training, support and advice, and religious services.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

This year was dominated by Covid-19. As the regime was starting to open up, positive cases began to appear, and by early October 2020 an outbreak had been declared. Initially, track and trace efforts kept the numbers low, but as cases peaked nationally, the situation worsened, becoming very difficult – with around 200 prisoners affected in total and many staff absent – in December and January.² On 11 and 12 January, there were 132 prisoners positive and isolating, and about 90 staff absences. Prisoners refusing to take a test also had to isolate. There were five bedwatches, and 11 mobile phones out of action. Prisoners had to wear a face covering when out of cell, and staff in contact with positive or isolating men wore full personal protective equipment (PPE). A mass testing the following week also produced high positive numbers for men and staff.

The prison had been working in the autumn to open up the regime. This meant producing detailed documentation for HMPPS Gold Command, for instance assessing the number of men from a cohort who could safely use a classroom (with or without an officer present), and details of the cleaning regime. What progress there had been was ended, and time out of cell (for those not isolating) reduced. Although three rotating bubbles of kitchen staff were formed, to increase resilience against infection, in one week wing staff and the Clink had to step in to keep the meal service going. Activities, gym, and some support work on the wings, from the offender management unit (OMU), Forward Trust, the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) and induction groups stopped. However, Routes to Change (R2C) triaged seven prisoners a day and completed casework via remote call appointments and the Email A Prisoner Service with support from OSG staff. Those in need of urgent support were offered appointments and telephone support; other low-level cases were given support via the Email a Prisoner Service. In addition, the Family and Significant Others Service contacted families via emails, newsletters and by telephone. Legal visits and assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) reviews continued, and chaplains and offender managers were visiting the wings. Some men who were new receptions had to be housed on A wing in the LPU, which was disruptive. Collective worship, suspended in March 2020, did not resume till June 2021. Meals were delivered to cell doors, denying even the limited association with others in the servery queue. Mobile phones (supplementing the limited number on the wings) were withdrawn for a time in October, until better cleaning between use could be put in place. Key workers were reassigned to work on their 'home' wing (to reduce cross-infection), instead of being with the same men until their release. This, combined with the lack of time out of cell, meant that men had possibly less confidence in finding support. The safer custody team continued to work on the wings until their officer members (and gym staff) were redeployed for wing cover.

With the resumption of court hearings and pressure on the local prisons, the offender flow to Brixton had changed in September, with men arriving from local prisons without passing through training prisons, some very soon after being sentenced.

² Brixton was also in amber state in June, because of the prevalence of the Delta variant in Lambeth.

This, and the restrictions on the regime, meant that Brixton could no longer function effectively as a resettlement prison. Men arrived with only a few weeks to serve before release, for which no preparation had been made; without the basic educational qualifications; without having started courses required in their sentence plans (courses not offered at Brixton); or with long sentences to serve. Initial efforts to provide some support for the latter two groups had to be given up because of the lack of staff resource. Induction and assessment were suspended for months in the winter. Coupled with the increased shortage of places within the prison estate for D category prisoners, this had the effect of creating a significant group of men whose needs could not be met or were not identified. The Board's perception was that the number of recategorisations to B also increased; certainly there were more men who were very disruptive, taking up a disproportionate amount of staff time, and the number of men posing a high risk for cell-sharing increased by about half, from under 40 to over 70, and had not returned to its former level in August 2021.

The impact on prisoners, back in lockdown after a few months, was severe; particularly since in October there were few national restrictions. Against all expectations, reported incidents of self-harm almost halved during lockdown compared to the period immediately before its implementation. Men seemed more resigned than angry about the limited regime, as IMB members found when they were able to visit, and one Listener reported in September that family problems were more of an issue than the restrictions. More understandably, given the reduced opportunities, there was a large reduction in violence within the prison. Over the year, however, mental health problems increased significantly and stretched capacity.³ At the end of May, violence also increased, and there were more recategorisations to B.

The Board recognises some of the findings contained in the Chief Inspector of Prisons' report of February 2021, *What happens to Prisoners in a Pandemic?*⁴ It also recognises the significant efforts made by prison staff, led by the safer custody team, and by healthcare and agencies, to support men in difficulties and to provide as much extra as they could – gym work on the exercise yards, for instance, the activities committee, and excellent food. In the spring, the kitchen team started providing cooked breakfasts to small groups of men, on a rotating pattern.

Staff were under severe pressure in the lockdown months, with many absences. Although there was a reduction in prisoner-on-prisoner violence, assaults on staff increased, and there was more disruptive behaviour. Nationally, staff training was interrupted – for instance, control and restraint training could not be done. It was recognised that relatively new officers, of whom there was a high proportion, had little experience of supervising large numbers of men out of their cells at the same time, and exercising authority. Advice and training was implemented on the wings when possible.

³ In June 2021, the National Probation Service reported that for men being released, those reporting physical health needs had increased by a third over the previous twelve months, and for mental health needs by a half (see Annex).

⁴ [What happens to prisoners in a pandemic \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmipri/reports/what-happens-to-prisoners-in-a-pandemic/)

The Governor and staff at all levels did their best to fulfil their duty of care towards the men in the prison, even in the worst weeks. They anticipated difficulties and planned ahead whenever it was possible, winning funding for significant accommodation improvements in the autumn,⁵ and producing a new strategy in April. The Board recognises and applauds their commitment, their skill in dealing with difficult and changing conditions, and their efforts to make life for the men in Brixton as decent as possible.

For the second year, the Board has been unable to visit the prison regularly for months on end. This report is based to a much larger extent than we would wish on the prison's reports and data. We believe it does give some reflection of the conditions experienced by prisoners during the year.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

The prison has been a physically safer place with slightly fewer incidents of self-harm, and of those that did occur, 82 (of the 192 incidents) were by 12 men. There were fewer prisoner on prisoner assaults than in the corresponding period last year, but prisoner on staff assaults and their seriousness increased. One man was severely ill-treated by his cellmate during lockdown over a period of several months.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

The restricted regime during lockdown could not be described as humane. In the Board's resettlement survey, 57% of men reported that they were fairly and humanely treated by staff. For comparison, in the last HMIP inspection in March 2019, 72% of men said they were treated with respect by staff, and 78% said they could ask staff if they had a problem. Inevitably, during the lockdown and the restricted regime, men had less contact with staff, and the key worker system was disrupted. The focus had to be on prisoners with obvious problems: there was less attention paid to men who were quiet and resigned.

The changes in the offender flow system were not fair and humane, because they prevented a significant number of prisoners in Brixton from being prepared for release.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

Prisoners have been protected from Covid as well as possible in the crowded conditions. They have had the opportunity to shield (which some refused), and cohorts to provide for new arrivals have worked well. Covid vaccinations have been offered in line with community provision and the vaccine refusal rate has been

⁵ This included upgrading of CCTV, cell and wing flooring, and showers – which were significantly improved.

broadly consistent, for the age ranges. The healthcare teams have been very stretched, particularly during the outbreak, but there has been no disruption in treatment on the wings, including GP visits when movement to the healthcare building was not possible in lockdown. Outpatient appointments were resumed as soon as possible. Within the constraints of lockdown, there has been good support from the chaplaincy team, Forward Trust and PACT. PE instructors were available on the yards during lockdown, and the food remained excellent.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

For the second year, resettlement work was severely disrupted. There was no education or training from August 2020 until the limited provision starting in June 2021, except for in-cell work and some distance learning, and work in the kitchen and the Clink. PACT continued working, remotely during lockdown and until June, on family ties and support, as did the CRC on pre-release needs. The departure lounge continued operating until summer 2021, and there was through the gate support for some men from RECONNECT, an NHS project, and Forward Trust. A smaller proportion of men than in 2019 and 2020 surveyed in summer 2021 before release had accommodation.

As noted above, the changes in the offender flow system worked against resettlement.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

The already inadequate number of places in category D prisons has been exacerbated by remedial works at existing open prisons taking a number of places out of commission. The absence of the benefits of experiencing open conditions before release for prisoners who have earned them not only increases the likelihood of re-offending but also removes the incentive for good behaviour for men still working towards D categorisation. An increase in the number of D category places is urgently required.

As in previous years, the Board is concerned at the number of men revealed by our annual survey (29% in 2021 compared with 36% in 2019) as having no accommodation to go to upon release. The impact of homelessness on reoffending was confirmed in a study published in July 2021 undertaken by Royal Holloway, University of London; and PACT data showed that 68% of prisoners released to rough sleeping and 55% of prisoners released to other forms of homelessness re-offend within one year, compared to 42% released to settled accommodation. Those who are homeless at the beginning of their sentence are at a higher risk of reoffending and 79% reoffend within a year. 60% of prisoners believe having a home would help them to stop reoffending. Accordingly, and to help the prison fulfil its rehabilitative mission, increasing the supply of accommodation for men released from prison is urgently required.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

The introduction of the offender flow process has resulted in men who do not meet the profile being sent to Brixton which is not equipped to support men very recently convicted, or those who have not been in a training prison, or men with substantial sentences still to serve. The process is setting up both these prisoners and the prison to fail and needs to be amended to ensure that only men who do meet the profile are directed to Brixton.

Brixton continues to manage a prison population that includes a number of men over 70. The infrastructure of the prison is not geared to men with mobility impairments, nor does it have appropriate residential accommodation for the elderly and infirm. Better living conditions appropriate for frail men and those with mobility impairments is urgently required.

Prisoner pay varies across the estate depending on the other pressures on a prison's budget. This should be reviewed so that a standard amount can be provided across the estate, to match the standard costs of items available through canteen and of telephone calls.

TO THE GOVERNOR

The Board raises matters of concern with the Governor from time to time as they arise.

Evidence Sections 4–7

4. Safety

By September 2021, the prison had been under different degrees of lockdown for 18 months. For the first seven months of the reporting year (to March 2021) this prevented the IMB from visiting anywhere other than the exercise yards, and even that was impossible for half of the time. Monitoring safety for the first half of the reporting year depended on telephone conversations, mostly with prison staff and a few times a month with prisoners, the presentations and minutes from meetings,⁶ the daily operational report (DOR), and notices to staff, prisoners, and community notices. Through this period, it proved difficult to confirm what the prison staff told us: but on the occasions we spoke to prisoners they showed appreciation of the efforts made by staff to support them. Experience of Brixton over the years and the frankness of our working relationships with the Governor and her staff also encouraged confidence in what they told us.

We were reassured by the results of a safety audit undertaken by the Operational and System Assurance Group which reported in May 2021 and gave the prison an Amber/Green rating.

4.1 Reception and induction

There had needed to be considerable changes the previous year to reflect Covid-19 but the process had settled down this year. Transferees should have shown no symptoms of the virus for 48 hours before transfer. On arrival, all transferees were quarantined for 10 days in segregated sections of the wings.

This was even more important because the new national offender flow system meant that men could arrive from local prisons only 10 days after court judgments. This inevitably meant that, on average, men being received were newer to prison procedures and less mentally adjusted to their new lives. HMP Brixton also had less scope than before for resisting disproportionate transfers of (in various ways) higher-risk prisoners – and it was clear that it was receiving such prisoners quite often. As a result, the population profile of HMP Brixton was over time becoming more varied in terms of risk profile.

Induction continued to be affected by the necessities of social distancing. Day 1 and Day 2 induction sessions were held in portacabins while the prisoner was in his reverse cohort. The weekly induction fair remained suspended at the end of the reporting period, though there were hopes that it might be reopened in a modified form before too long. The offender flow change means that men have on average more to learn about prison life, which makes this more important.

⁶ These were: security and harm reduction (SDH), safety intervention meeting (SIM), use of force (UoF) and segregation, monitoring and review group (SMARG) meetings.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Self-harm and violence have been addressed generally at monthly security and harm reduction (SDH) meetings and specifically at weekly safety intervention meetings (SIMs), with wings and half a dozen relevant departments participating, which typically consider six to eight men. Minutes of the SIMs have pointed IMB members to individuals at risk and informed subsequent conversations with relevant wing officers and managers. The detailed knowledge they showed of individual cases (cause, character, agreed steps to support them) reassured us that there was a continuing discussion between safer custody, healthcare, Forward Trust, wing staff and each man's key worker, to ensure wide awareness of those most vulnerable. Though on occasions we questioned whether Brixton was the right place for some prolific self-harmers, there was no widespread self-harm and only one life-threatening instance of it.

Our main concerns during the year were that the length of lockdown and uncertainty about when it would end were doing cumulative harm to the mental health of both prisoners and staff; that the number of staff absent as a result of Covid further reduced time out of cells, damaged the relationships of wing officers with men and eroded the relaxed authority on which the prison relies; and that frustration, exhaustion and boredom might lead to violent rejection of authority or widespread self-harm. These risks were foreseen by safer custody in March 2020 as lockdown began and alleviating measures were taken; but over the months, the novelty of distraction packs, ideas for quizzes and competitions, and the imagination to provide diversion and incentives for study in cells inevitably wore thin.

In the last reporting year, for the pre-Covid six months to February 2020, self-harm averaged 22 incidents per month and there were seven incidents of men harming four or more times in a month (maximum seven times). For the next six months, March-August 2020, the most restrictive period, the average was 13 incidents per month, with three incidents of men harming four or more times in a month (maximum five times by any man). Over the full year of this reporting period, the average has been 17 incidents per month, a total of 209. The pattern has changed however, and a very few prolific self-harmers have accounted for an increased share of the total: to illustrate, over November-February one man was responsible for 52 of the 83 incidents, albeit all superficial.

This points to several factors: the changed national offender flow system led to men being transferred to Brixton from local prisons. For some, this had offered no chance for self-harm or mental health issues to be addressed by their first prison; and some new arrivals hoped that goal-orientated self-harm would work in Brixton as it had done elsewhere. They had to be disabused of this notion after initially displaying violence to property, themselves or others. The mental health challenge posed by severely unwell individuals led to some men being held in the segregation unit for long periods before either transfer to a more suitable prison was arranged⁷ or they could be coaxed back to good behaviour on the wings. Early transfer out as a solution was not favoured, since this might encourage others to self-harm as a

⁷ One man was in segregation awaiting transfer for more than 42 days by October.

means to secure a transfer. Considerable patience, personal involvement and imagination was needed from staff (especially those in the segregation unit and healthcare) to resolve such situations. Some men – two in particular around the same time – caused significant damage to the segregation unit and to wing cells, resulting in flooding, loss of electrical power, and several cells in the segregation unit being unusable.

Measures to spot any men in an emotionally vulnerable state included the key worker system (suspended face-to-face for a short time during the tightest lockdown) for which wing manager monitoring of NOMIS⁸ entries ensured that interviews took place and were recorded. The Listeners were encouraged to be proactive, in D wing checking up on all men daily.

Through the year there was each month an average of 12 Listeners across the prison. For much of the time, however, there was no Listener on A wing and, as in previous years, it proved consistently difficult to recruit and retain Listeners there (due to natural progression, as staff do not want to hold back their move to C wing). Otherwise they were evenly distributed across the prison. The availability of the special Samaritans cordless phone was consistent. We know from Samaritans (who were for several weeks of extreme lockdown unable to visit the prison) that they considered the prison support for the Listeners was excellent. New cohorts of Listeners were trained by Samaritans in September 2020 and June 2021, quite an achievement in view of the restrictions. There has been consistent good work in maintaining Listener numbers for the past four years, with average Listener numbers double the average in the previous four years.

The number of open ACCTs (the plan for men at risk of or practising self-harm) has been lower this year than in recent periods. There was average of 18 open at any one time for the year during lockdown compared with 11 for the months following. There are several factors behind this: limited time out of cells (initially half an hour in 24) and, with the same group from their landing each day, reduced opportunities to get into debt, be bullied or settle gang issues. Goal-orientated self-harm to gain privileges was pointless while restrictions were so tight and movement between wings not possible for anyone. Payment Plus incentives put plenty of staff on the wings, willing to attend to needy prisoners.

Regrettably, there were four deaths in custody (DICs) during the year: two occurred shortly after release, which are classed as DIC. We have been told that police did not consider these suspicious and there will be no Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) investigation of them. Two men died in hospital from Covid-related illness. A family liaison officer (FLO) is deployed to support families if men are terminally or seriously ill in hospital and also after every death, including those that occur outside of the prison.

Constant supervision has been required on five occasions (with four men). We were concerned to note that a man managed to self-harm during supervision (by turning away from the supervisor as if to use the lavatory). The special cell was used (for about one hour each time) on three occasions (the first time in two years), once to

⁸ The HMPPS electronic record system.

house a man already in the segregation unit after he had damaged cells faster than Mitie could repair them.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Assaults increased slightly this year (130 incidents against 126) and were back to pre-lockdown frequency by August 2021. For the six months up to the end of February 2020 (pre-lockdown), the monthly average was 13 assaults (of which three were on staff, 10 on prisoners). For the next six months, to August 2020, the average was eight (three prisoner on staff; five prisoner on prisoner) and for the six months to the end of February 2021 the average was about the same. This is explained by the much-reduced time out of cells (30-60 minutes in 24 hours) and in smaller numbers (one third of a landing out at a time); bully and victim have had less chance to meet. We are however concerned that, whereas in 2019 24% of assaults were against staff, it was 51% this reporting year. Thirteen incidents were serious enough to require hospital treatment, compared with four the previous year. Male and female officers have been equally at risk. One attack took place within a wing office where there was no CCTV coverage and with such suddenness that the officer's body-worn camera (BWC) was not switched on.

The most serious prisoner on prisoner case was a man assaulted by the same cellmate on B, A and then D wings over an extended period, without detection by staff until December when a violence reduction (VR) representative reported it. The victim had not confided in staff, including his key worker. There had been no indication that the aggressor should have been high risk for cell sharing. Hospitalisation was not required but considerable and ongoing mental health support was needed for the victim's PTSD. The case was still under police investigation in August 2021. The prisoner had been released earlier, with support from the NHS through the gate worker.

Since January, the reporting paperwork following assaults has been amended: 16 check boxes cover mandatory actions to be considered, guiding wing officers in support for the victim and, where relevant, contributing to investigation of the source of drugs. Previously more attention had been paid through challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs) to the perpetrator's problems than those of the victim.

The need for staff training in the assertion of authority was noted (though unavailability of trainers delayed its start). Staff who joined after lockdown have only known wings with 22 (later 44) men out at a time ('and sometimes lack jail craft', commented a more experienced officer). In one incident (under investigation) there appeared regrettable reluctance to get engaged in support of a colleague being assaulted.

There were four serious incidents during the reporting year. For two of them, an IMB member attended throughout, and saw the prisoner afterwards. The other two were over very quickly; in one, an IMB member saw the prisoner at the end. All ended peacefully with no injuries.

Prisoners vulnerable because of the nature of their offence are housed on G wing. There is no separate accommodation for prisoners otherwise considered vulnerable.

4.4 Use of force

Use of force was reviewed at well-attended monthly meetings, some of which IMB members attended. Age, ethnicity and location of prisoners involved were analysed, as were the time of day, day of week and reason for the requirement to use force. All BWC recordings were reviewed by a member of the safer custody team, a use of force instructor; who collated footage to be reviewed at the meeting. We were reassured that the prison has this system in place and that the assessment is rigorous. The IMB has attended one serious incident and spoke to the prisoner concerned after the incident.

The wearing of BWC was continually monitored and daily take-up of units was in the mid-50s, a significant proportion. It is a valuable de-escalation tool. No body-belts, batons or PAVA were used during the year. It was noted in April that a large number of staff were under-trained in SPEAR or PAVA because it is no longer taught in college training: limited availability of trainers delayed refreshers.

There were two external audits of safer custody. In May, Brixton was chosen to pilot an audit measuring the effectiveness of early days in custody work, ACCT, CSIP, violence reduction, segregation and key working processes. The findings were not available by August 2021. The July audit addressed the information reporting system and gave an amber-green assessment (having found two records out of 50 unsatisfactory).

4.5 Preventing illicit items

It was difficult during most of the reporting year to understand the extent of substance misuse issues, due to both the Board's absence from the establishment and the suspension of mandatory drug testing. However, a diagnostic support visit from the drug diagnostic team took place in July 2021 and provided a good oversight view of the issue in Brixton. This confirmed the widely held view that psychoactive substances (PS) were the primary drug of choice and were readily available, usually in a paper-based form. The team made a number of recommendations for better joined-up work within the prison, better demand reduction work, additional measures to combat the supply of drugs and improving building recovery, which the prison will consider in the coming months.

A body scanner was installed in reception in October 2020. This is used for intelligence-led searches of individuals and cohorts and on a suspicion basis. The X-ray dosage is very low, so that an individual can safely have 115 scans in a year. There is robust record keeping, including justification for each use made of the equipment. If a suspicious item is identified on the scan, the prisoner is given the opportunity to evacuate it. If he refuses this, or refuses a scan entirely, he goes to the segregation unit.

The entry process for staff and visitors was reconfigured and additional staffing provided in May 2021. A baggage scanner will supplement this in the future. While there

have not been significantly more finds, the processes provide a deterrent effect. A passive drugs dog is also deployed for people coming into visits.

Incoming mail continued to be opened and scanned to detect paper-based PS. It was difficult for the equipment to keep up to date with new types of PS, and shortly after the end of the reporting year it was decided that all social mail from October 2021 would be subject to photocopying. Letters purporting to come from solicitors were not opened but a small insertion made in the envelope to allow for drug testing. Some legal mail was required to be opened by the addressee in the presence of staff (who do not read the contents) to provide a further check on contraband. Additional checks on the legitimacy of such letters were also introduced.

Drug testing – both on suspicion and randomly – restarted as Covid restrictions relaxed and the backlog of information reports was cleared. Cell searches were carried out regularly and particularly in response to suspicions. These were supported by the allocated dog handlers.

5. Fair and Humane Treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The Board has consistently reported that accommodation at Brixton is small, cramped and unsatisfactory. In the last report, we drew attention to the impact of lockdown on men living in such poor conditions. During the lockdown in the current reporting period, nothing has changed. The relaxation in the necessary regime restrictions has alleviated the pressure of living in these conditions to some extent.

After the Board returned to in-person visits, we noted that the cleanliness of the wings was good. There was a rat problem over several months in the autumn, with rats seen on the wings as well as outside.

The Board reviewed the minutes of the monthly catering meetings with wing representatives. These meetings reported very favourable comments about the quality and, often, the quantity of the food produced, and men comment to IMB members that food in Brixton is good. The meetings also allow requests to be made about the menus and possible alternatives. As far as possible, these requests are incorporated into the menu options. Special meals are provided for particular occasions – religious festivals and the months celebrating black history and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture.

5.2 Segregation

As the Board has noted in the past, regular segregation staff continued to work with professionalism, consistency and compassion with some very difficult men. During lockdown, the segregation unit was less busy on average than in previous years; however, several very disturbed men were accommodated in the unit for relatively prolonged periods since their behaviour could not be managed on the wing. As noted above, this included two men in particular who repeatedly damaged cells, leading to one being placed in special accommodation briefly.

The Board attended two adjudications in the months when in-person monitoring was possible. Neither provoked concerns regarding procedural justice. We have not seen data on the percentage of adjudications that resulted in the case being proven and how many were rejected, how many decisions were overturned on appeal, the outcome of cases considered by the independent adjudicator, the percentage of cases both presented to governors and to the independent adjudicator that were not proceeded with due to being timed out, or missing paperwork. We hope to consider these aspects of procedural justice more closely in future.

5.3 Staff-prisoner relationships, key workers

The Board commented last year on the positive relationships between staff and prisoners and the beneficial impact of key worker sessions. We heard from officers and

men that these good relationships continued in some cases. During lockdown, wing managers monitored NOMIS to check that interviews had taken place and were recorded. After Easter, the pattern where key workers followed a man to different wings was restored. Quality assurance continued to be checked.

During lockdown, 'community notices' encouraged prisoner engagement. Daily welfare checks were completed on the wings, though these were sometimes cursory. A prisoner survey was done through the prisoner information desks (PIDs) in early spring, and produced mixed responses across the wings, which was discussed at the prison council. On G wing, the most negative, action was taken. There was also follow-up on better communication, key working, TV provision, and supply of kit.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Equalities statistics are collected but not on a consistent basis with, for example, the age profile being divided into different ranges on different wings and as at different dates. The approximate age profile in August 2021 was:

	>21	22-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60/-9	<70
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
A Wing	6	47	35	9	3	0	0
B Wing	0	37	34	18	10	1	1
C Wing	0	35	30	20	10	4	1
D Wing	3	24	33	33	6	0	0
G Wing	1	18	24	24	18	9	7
LPU	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Ethnicity figures for August 2021 were available for all wings except B (the reception wing)

	A Wing	LPU	C Wing	D Wing	G Wing	Total
Asian/Asian British Indian	2	1	4	2	4	13
Asian/Asian British Pakistani	2	0	2	0	2	6
Asian/ Asian British Bangladeshi	6	0	6	0		12
Asian/Asian British Any other background	10	2	7	0	7	26
Black/Black British Caribbean	33	6	20	1	14	74
Black/Black British African	18	2	14	3	15	52
Black/Black British	4	0	12	4	5	25

Any other background						
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	10	1	2	2	6	21
Mixed Black and White African	4	0	1	1	1	7
Mixed White and Asian	0	0	0	1	1	2
Mixed Any other background	1	1	4	1	3	10
Other Any other Background	5		3	0	3	11
White English, Welsh, Scottish, N Irish, British	51	15	33	19	112	230
White Irish	6	0	1	3	2	12
White Any other background	12	0	8	2	10	32
White Gypsy or Traveller	4	1	0	1	3	9
Preferred not to say	0	0	0	1	1	2
Total	168	29	117	41	189	544

On 9 September 2021, the self-declared religious breakdown of the prison population (670) was:

• Agnostic	3
• Buddhist	15
• Christian *	305
• Hindu	3
• Jewish	9
• Mormon	3
• Muslim	175
• No religion	115
• Rastafarian	14
• Seventh Day Adventists	1
• Sikh	8
• Spiritualists	2

* includes Christian 76, Anglican 95, Methodist 1, Orthodox 3, Protestant 1, Quaker 1, Roman Catholic 129, Salvation Army 2. The classification is HMPPS'.

Equality data is essential in monitoring whether internal prison systems such as the incentives and earned privileges (IEP) process is fair. In the reporting year, the IEP scheme was largely suspended with a very low number of men on basic – ranging

between 0 and 28 but averaging for the whole year at 8.5. Ethnicity data is not currently available for this process.

For a time, there was an increase in the number of foreign nationals in Brixton after the introduction of offender flow. This increased the challenges facing the prison of expertise, and interpretation, although Big Word was available. In one exceptional instance, officers contacted a man's uncle on video link to interpret for him in an ACCT review.

IMB received six applications about equalities issues.

Older prisoners are housed on the first floor of G wing and on the ground floor of A wing. Conditions in these cells remain unacceptable when shared, with space for only one man to sit and bunk beds, which present a challenge for men with mobility impairments. Occasional problems have been reported with using the lift on G wing. On other wings, men with mobility injuries sometimes have cells upstairs, and their meals are delivered by a buddy.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

For the first half of the reporting year, there was a very heavy load on the three chaplains who were in the prison. In September 2020, there were two full-time staff in post – the temporary managing chaplain (Muslim), who was on sick leave for over a month, the Catholic chaplain, and a sessional Muslim chaplain. A full-time Anglican chaplain joined shortly afterwards, but after a short time was off sick or working at home until the late spring.

No religious services could be held, but they were recorded for transmission on prison radio. Until the December lockdowns, a chaplain visited each wing weekly when men were out of their cells; pastoral literature and in-cell study material was provided, and bereaved men were supported. During the lockdowns in the winter, only bereaved men were visited, and supported by video links to funerals.

After Christmas, all the sessional chaplains returned, except those who worked in more than one prison. A Pagan chaplain started, and the Quaker chaplain returned later. The managing chaplain returned, initially part-time, in May.

Following consultation, including with a prisoner representative, a fuller programme was authorised on 25 June 2021. All statutory duties were being covered, with one to three chaplains available during the core day. Religious services started, to the extent possible while keeping 'regime groups' separate. This meant a five-week rotation for Friday prayers, and a two-week rotation for Christian services. Some smaller faith groups could meet weekly.

By August 2021, work was in hand to replace sessional chaplains who had left, and to restart the Sycamore Tree victim awareness course, as well as to renew security clearances for the two remaining prison visitors.

5.6 Incentives schemes

In the reporting year, the IEP scheme was largely suspended with a very low number of men on basic – ranging between 0 and 28 but averaging 8.5 for the whole year.

5.7 Complaints

The prison's responses to prisoner complaints (Comp 1s) were generally timely. Complaints about property lost in another prison or during transfer generally took longer.

Applications to the Board fell from 315 to 238 but, within that reduced total, many were the product of several frequent correspondents whose activities distort the statistics. The Board averaged 11 days to respond to applications. The two largest categories of application were property (52) and staff/prisoner concerns including bullying (44), between them accounting for just over 40% of all applications. Most property-related applications concerned property lost on transfer (40 out of 52).

5.8 Property

The processes for checking, recording, release and storage of property transferring with prisoners continued largely unchanged. The facilities list, of which items were allowed in-cell, was reviewed regularly, in particular for electronic items.

Property being transferred from previous prisons separately from the limited number of bags permitted to accompany each man remained the cause of many complaints about non - or partial - arrival. Complaints were forwarded to the relevant prison; responses continued often to be slow, but at least the men were told of the situation so that they knew where the delay was happening.

6. Health and Wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Pre-Covid, healthcare had a stand at the weekly induction fairs with information about all their services. We were told this would not be re-instated until Stage 2. All wings have healthcare representatives. Attendance at ACCT and rule 45 reviews, and at the weekly safer custody meeting about men in particular difficulty, was generally good, especially from the mental health team. All parts of healthcare attended a weekly meeting to review medically complex patients. The health and wellbeing co-ordinator held daily referral meetings attended by primary healthcare, mental health, counselling and Forward Trust. Regular monthly meetings resulted in improved communication between the prison residential team and healthcare.

Healthcare complaints average about eight to 10 a month, with most being requests for further treatment information. The IMB received 33 applications about healthcare during the year, about the same as in the past three years.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Through much of the reporting year, healthcare services were dominated by managing the Covid pandemic, concentrating on testing and vaccination. During the lockdown, non-essential services were reduced in scope or cancelled altogether. The uncertainty over potential and actual further outbreaks of the virus impacted on planning and addressing backlogs in healthcare, as in much of the rest of the prison. With continuing dependence on bank nurses, staffing levels remained adequate. A second part-time paramedic joined the in December, giving the prison full weekday coverage. Both men and staff commented on their reassuring presence. The life of one man whose heart stopped on the yard was saved by the prompt action of PE and wing officers and healthcare.

Health screening on arrival, including a mental health assessment, continued throughout the year, including during lockdown before men went into 14-day quarantine in their reverse cohort. All men were seen by healthcare pre-release. In addition, and provided they had at least four weeks' notice of a man's release date (which did not always happen with home detention curfew (HDC)) some of the most vulnerable men received support through the NHS England-funded RECONNECT project, where designated healthcare staff help men prepare for their release and link to health and social support when released, and this helped some of the most vulnerable men.

During lockdown, all clinics stopped, and many subcontractors ceased visiting. Almost all primary care was done on the wings. GPs did daily 'ward rounds' on all the wings – and continued to do so through the year. After triaging, the physiotherapist, optician and podiatrist likewise continued to see men on the wings unless they needed to use equipment in healthcare, in which case a single man could be brought over for treatment. The dentist and optician also continued to give advice by phone.

Once the regime began to open up again at the end of February, clinics began to re-start with men attending in their wing bubbles, and the dentist began seeing emergency cases and put in extra days to try and deal with the backlog. Pharmacy started up minor ailment clinics on the wings again. By the end of the reporting year, all staff had returned to the prison.

Prison supervision of the dispensing hatches continued to be uneven, although nursing staff reported an improvement during lockdown but, for some of that time, medication was issued at cell doors – a safe but time-consuming practice. In June 2021, the dispensing of tradable medication was reported to be unsupervised by prison staff on all but one wing. Towards the end of the year and with the help of prison staff, pharmacy began doing spot checks of men's IP (in possession) medication to try to detect and deter the trade.

Prisoners received the same advice as people in the community about vulnerability and shielding. The numbers shielding changed throughout the period with as many as 55 shielding at the beginning of the reporting year but with some 31 in the vulnerable category refusing to shield. By February 2021, the numbers shielding had come down to 15.

Covid testing was made available to prisoners and staff, with both groups encouraged to participate. There were four whole-prison tests in response to new variants being prevalent in the community when very nearly everyone – 95% - was tested. Vaccinations were made available for prisoners in line with the roll out across the community as a whole. With the turnover of men accommodated, getting a figure for the percentage vaccinated is difficult and changes almost daily, but about half the men have had one dose and about one third two, all men eligible receiving their second dose on schedule. There were daily vaccination clinics, and a 'get vaccinated' drive was launched in August with the appointment of a wing manager vaccination lead and vaccination reps on all wings. The number of vaccine refusers largely paralleled that in the community at approximately 30%, because of the younger population.

Flu jabs were offered to all men who wanted them. Men 65 and over and those between 70 and 79 were offered vaccination for pneumonia and shingles respectively, as in the community.

6.3 Mental health

The Capptive Briefing #3 prepared by the Prison Reform Trust⁹ and the Prisoner Policy Network¹⁰ examined prisoner experience of lockdown across the prison estate and reported a negative impact on prisoner mental health through a lack of stimulation, choice, agency and human interaction, and acute boredom. This was reflected

⁹ www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/CAPTIVE3_Healthcare_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰ Prison Reform Trust > What We Do > Projects & research > Prisoner Policy Network

in the increase, reported by the National Probation Service (NPS), of men reporting mental (and physical) health problems before release.¹¹

Stretched mental health staff provided support where needed – they had to prioritise the most urgent cases – and conducted welfare checks during the lockdown period. Prisoners in the segregation unit were seen daily by healthcare staff. The speech therapist worked with the learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) specialist in education to help identify and support neurodiverse men with autism and learning difficulties. The safer custody team worked with men at risk of self-harm or violence to others, in co-operation with healthcare through the weekly SIM meeting, to which men could be referred by wing staff. The chaplaincy continued to support men in bereavements and serious family illnesses.

In the LPU, where men on the offender personality strategy pathway commit to psychological therapies, group work ceased during lockdown and until after the end of the reporting year, but the psychologists continued to come into the prison and work with their patients individually.

6.4 Exercise, regime

Unless a man had a prison job, the regime for nine months of the year allowed for only one to one and half hours out of cell each day. In order to manage the different cohorts, this was split into a morning and afternoon session, one for domestics (shower, phone call etc), the other for association in half-landing or isolation cohorts, and access to the yard. Those who were in ‘reverse cohort’ isolation on arrival into Brixton, or had tested positive, or were on a wing in outbreak, were more severely restricted. Men complained to the IMB about the unfairness of isolation, and the lack of showers or clean clothes.

From May, the regime began to improve. More men were allowed out at any one time and the serveries opened, which gave men more association time as well as providing a few more jobs.

By August, the prison was again talking with Chelsea FC to come in and work with men, with an offer of support after release. The England Boxing Association were also in the process of offering mental health and wellbeing interventions. Yoga sessions were being planned.

Gym staff were on the yards and providing some equipment throughout the year, giving guidance in circuit training, weights, fixed bars and structured training sessions. Men have played football, tennis, basketball and, more recently, adapted football. Remedial gym was on offer to men over 50 and to those medically vulnerable. The gym staff did wellbeing checks on men in their cells and advised how best to stay active in a small space, particularly important and appreciated by men during the most severe lockdown period.

¹¹ See Annex paragraph 15

The indoor gyms opened again in May and each wing was allocated weekly sessions. To begin with uptake was sluggish, and there were some teething problems with escorting men over (B wing men missed their slots two weeks running in June). At the end of the year the gym staff were escorting the men and the uptake was 70% or above. Men in the Bounce Back workshops, in the same building as the gym, were able to go to the gym in their tea break.

6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Forward Trust offered men a wide range of psycho-social group therapies across the prison, including an alcohol dependency course. Their work was disrupted by lockdown, but they continued to work on all the wings, doing welfare checks, giving clients distraction and information packs, and providing release planning including appointments and links to support after release. By the end of the reporting period they were back seeing their clients one to one and doing group work on D wing. Forward Trust initiate conversations with men who fail a mandatory drugs test (MDT) or a suspicion-led test, but many do not engage.

Forward Trust reported that for many men, the use of new psychoactive substances during lockdown was an attempt to relieve boredom and that there was no intention to continue to use after release.

Healthcare and Forward Trust were also co-operating on the management of prisoners with substance misuse issues, and Forward Trust had increased their group work, with a new programme which had worked well in HMP Rochester, and a record number of referrals. The possibility of an incentivised drug-free wing was being developed.

6.6 Soft skills

Certitude, a charity working with the learning and skills team that runs accredited peer mentoring courses, had one worker supporting men on an informal basis on G Wing through most of the year. By the summer, a second worker joined, and men were able to obtain formal qualifications, the first five graduating in July.

The HMPPS worker in prison radio continued to lead the Covid activity team (CAT), working hard to find pockets of funding and providing a wide range of extra-curricular activities and competitions to try and keep men busy and engaged. Library staff, when they were allowed back in the prison, were involved and, before things began to open up and prison staff were deployed elsewhere, some were detailed to help. There was an 'employment challenge' for men under 25, who had to complete four workbooks, a comic strip challenge, a competition to design a mosaic (painted on A Wing yard), learning to sign and to play chess, 'create your own quiz', back to school letters, and photos of men in their 'visit' clothes to send home at Easter.

7. Progression and release

7.1 Education, library

For the first half of the reporting year, teaching staff came into the prison two or three days each week to teach prisoners in bubbles of eight. While staff were unable to see men face to face, a backlog of men needing assessments built up. Tailored in-cell learning packs were prepared and marked, and PID workers used for delivery and collection. The return rate was about 75% and men were paid £2 for every in-cell pack satisfactorily completed. Inevitably there were some muddles: one PID complained that men ‘were getting explanatory letters and learning packs, but not often both at once’.

Once tutors were able to see men face to face in March, they were allocated a particular wing and began to tackle the backlog of assessments (by then over 250) as well as supporting men with their in-cell work. They reported that there had been an increase in the number of men transferred to Brixton with less than 12 weeks of their sentence to serve – not enough time to do an education course. In July, after nearly 18 months, the prison resumed classroom teaching, the first London prison to do so. Attendance at the beginning was poor and there were some initial escort problems, but by the end of August was a steady 70%.

Although hampered by the lack of access to the virtual campus in the prison or even access to word processing – all correspondence having to be handwritten – between 30 to 40 (over 80 pre-Covid) distance learners have been well supported. Telephone calls to their tutors were facilitated by prison staff.

In-person education assessments at induction began again in July. Only 45% of men were arriving at Brixton with level 1 or above in English (33% in Maths). This had dropped from an average of 59% pre-Covid. Historically an English level 1 has been a precondition for a job, including vocational training. Towards the end of the summer and to encourage more men to get their level 1, this rule was relaxed to allow men who had a job to do the qualification at the same time, either in-cell or in class if they needed the support. In-cell learning using DVDs was being tried out with five men at the end of the reporting year.

Systematic screening of men for learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) began in February. Key workers were notified if their men needed LDD support and were sent copies of their support plan. Ofsted acknowledged the appropriate use of learning support plans for men identified as needing them and praised the LDD awareness training given to some prison staff and wing PID workers. One of the PID workers said he found it ‘very interesting’, with a well-qualified trainer.

Novus and the prison are to be commended for Ofsted’s award of reasonable progress following their short ‘progress monitoring’ inspection in August, noting good teamwork between different departments and being ‘pleasantly surprised’ by the level of activity.

Lambeth Council had one member of staff in the library processing applications for books, CDs, DVDs and legal materials. Staff and, from June, library reps kept wing bookshelves stocked. The library ran a series of initiatives like Lambeth Lockdown Diaries and the Six Book Challenge, and were also an important part of the activities team trying to keep men busy during the lockdown. Multiple copies of the same book were provided to a small, socially distanced reading group which restarted at the end of June. The library staff continued to co-ordinate the Shannon Trust mentors for men identified at induction or others as possibly needing literacy support.

Men were finally able to visit the library in July, each wing given a limited number of sessions for three men to come and do research only. As in all prisons, HMPPS agreement for men to browse books had not been approved by August, despite the library having had plans in place since May.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Apart from the Clink and the kitchens, and some industrial cleaning, no practical training had been available since March 2020. Men could access in-cell learning packs covering the theoretical parts of some vocational training, for example for the construction skills certification scheme (CSCS) card and customer services. In July men were able to start returning to the Bounce Back workshops, doing painting and decorating, dry lining, and scaffolding. As they had to keep to their wing bubbles, this had to be restricted to two days a week.

Except for six weeks after Christmas, when two prison learners and some staff had tested positive there, the Clink worked with eight and, at the end of the year, 12 men doing a variety of City & Guild qualifications ranging from barista and front of house to level 3 food preparation and cooking. Pre-Covid, there were 20 men employed. The restaurant was open to staff and (until lockdown) preparing boxed food for click and collect and local delivery (the delivery area was extended in the spring).

The Clink was intended to take over the Bad Boys Bakery, but this was delayed because the contract was not cleared by HMPPS. It would have offered another eight training places. It also took on teaching the food safety qualification for men working in the prison kitchens. This is welcome because of the support the Clink offers after release.

The call centre, which employed 16 men full-time pre-Covid, and brought welcome funds into the prison, reopened with two groups of eight men working part-time at the end of the reporting year. The barbering workshop, that had always been popular with men, sadly permanently closed its doors.

There were on average about 120 prison jobs for men on the wings and about 70 off the wings (not during outbreak), over 25% of the reduced population. These have included cleaning, stores, laundry, waste management, kitchen, Listeners, PIDs and all the various reps and orderlies.

All men continued to be paid a furlough 'Covid pay' whether they had a job or not. This increased call on the Prison's pay budget meant that pay, already low in Brixton even by prison standards, was cut in November, as were the number of sessions for many jobs on the wings. The Board was told this would be reviewed in April, the next financial year. At the end of August, over 400 men were on furlough and the rates of pay remained unchanged.

Information and guidance (IAG) continued to send out their action plan self-assessments to men arriving in Brixton through the year. There was already a backlog for processing of 170 in October 2020. With only one worker in the prison and with limited direct contact with men, the returns were poor; in May only 35 of the 108 were returned. Useful information booklets were produced and distributed on subjects like disclosure for employment, electrical and plumbing apprenticeships and self-employment. By July, the IAG were able to join induction in person, an additional worker returned and a backlog of over 200 action plans was being worked through.

By the end of the reporting year, each man engaged in education, work, or training had an individual learning plan (ILP) recording their progress but not linked to or forming part of their sentence plan. A man's key worker generally got emailed a copy of their men's ILP. Led by New Futures Network (part of HMPPS that brokers partnerships between prisons and employers) working with learning and skills, an employment group was formed halfway through the year. A one-stop employment hub within the prison is planned, co-ordinating all services relating to employment on release. At the end of August, the IT was still not available for each man to have a single PLP (personal learning plan) tracking his learning and work during his time in Brixton, linked to his sentence plan and accessible to all relevant departments including the OMU.

As noted by Ofsted, at the end of the reporting year, Brixton continued to have a shortfall of some 90 activity places needed for its population.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The Board has in previous reports drawn attention to the number of men arriving at Brixton without an offender assessment system (OASys) report – an assessment of each individual based on needs and risks. The situation became worse this year because of the offender flow system allowing for the transfer of men almost immediately from court to Brixton. As a resettlement prison, Brixton is not staffed to support men new to custody or resourced to undertake initial OASys assessments. Also, the delays in the court system due to Covid mean that some men who have spent long periods on remand arrive in prison with little time to serve. There is therefore additional pressure to complete assessments for HDC and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) as well as OASys. There was already a backlog of recategorisation reviews in autumn 2020.

From June 2021, the NPS and the CRC were combined, which involved a number of changes in roles and responsibilities. Some of the offices in London experienced

significant staff shortages which reduced the capacity for community-based officers to work in the prison.

Most of the service providers continued to work under the new offender management arrangements, although some of the contracts had not been awarded by June. Teething problems included resettlement packs, to be given to each man on release, which had not been delivered.

The problems transferring men to open conditions continued from last year (and at least the year before that). Many men at Brixton continued to progress to D category status but without the benefit of experiencing open conditions before the end of their sentences. In April 2021, 65 men were waiting for transfer, of whom 18 were on G wing, where one man had been waiting since August 2019. Men were told what their place on the waiting list was, in date order. This delay, affecting almost 10% of the population, undermines the incentive for good behaviour represented by progression to category D status. It also denies men the opportunity gradually to reintegrate into society by experiencing release on temporary licence – for work or home leave – rather than move directly from institutional life to everyday life.

The Board undertook its sixth survey of men about to be released, asking whether they had been helped with accommodation, work or training and resettlement. The data and commentary are set out in the Annex to this report.

7.4 Family contact

During lockdown, social visits were suspended (until June 2021). A limited number of laptops for Purple (video) Visits was provided by HMPPS, but Brixton, without in-cell phones for men to keep in touch with family and friends, was not prioritised and got them rather late in the process. While these visits were limited by the number of machines available, they had the advantage of flexibility in timing and removed the need for families living a long distance and/or with a difficult journey to travel. Some men preferred them, because the restrictions meant they could not have physical contact with their children, had social visits been allowed. Between April and May, the demand for Purple Visits almost doubled. As lockdown was relaxed, it was agreed that the technology should continue to be available. 'Family First' monthly awards were announced for a short time for staff who had made particular efforts to help men keep in touch.

The absence of social visits made telephone contact even more important. The prison does not yet have in-cell telephony, although scoping work for its provision began in late summer. This meant that there was increased demand for the very limited number of landing phones during the very short out-of-cell time allowed under the most restrictive regime. The prison provided 17 mobile phones to assist in maintaining family contact by enabling calls to be made from cells. Often, a number of these mobiles were out of use, for various reasons including damage by prisoners. A fight broke out on B wing in September over use of the phones – only three of the five assigned to the wing were working. Prisoners were assisted by receiving a £5 a week phone credit in addition to any contribution they made to their own telephone

accounts, although they were still paying higher charges than prisoners with in-cell phones. This was limited after a time to men who had less than £25 phone credit since some men made few or any calls. This subsidy was terminated in June, without notice by BT, and phased out more gradually by the prison.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Much of the meticulous and exhaustive work done for exceptional delivery models in the autumn, in preparation for opening up classes and activities in accordance with Covid guidelines, was lost when the prison had to lock down again. It had to be redone, to a different and less comprehensive format, in the spring. So for most of the reporting year, with limited in-cell education, little employment training and few activities apart from wing work and the Clink restaurant, about 70% of the men were deprived of the opportunity to improve their chances of employment on release. Many were also in the wrong prison, because Brixton did not offer courses required in their sentence plan. This was inefficient, even in terms of the requirement on HMPPS to accommodate as many prisoners as possible in an overcrowded estate; and inhumane, in terms of preventing men from reducing their chances of reoffending.

Agencies continued working as best they could during periods of restrictions and lockdown. Forward Trust stopped group work on D wing and one to one work with prisoners (wearing PPE) on all wings in December. Individual support on D wing and later group work (in smaller groups) resumed in February and March. There was a similar pattern in the LPU for the programmes provided by psychologists. With no other forensic psychologists working in Brixton, there were no offending behaviour courses available.

PACT supported men and families by telephone, with Christmas and activity packs for children. There were workbooks, for instance *Going Home* and *Dads Reconnected*, with additional support available. An underspend on the Routes2Change programme was used to provide essential items, like school uniform for families and clothing, travel cards and phones for men being released without these. Family visits took place in December despite the outbreak and families were able to spend time together.

The CRC issued pre-release questionnaires when they could not see men. In the departure lounge, they continued to provide advice and assistance to men on the day of release, and men going out on licence were guaranteed accommodation for two weeks while a private rental was sorted out for them until the programme ended in the spring. Others were referred to council services. For many men without somewhere to go – about ten men a week – arrangements were made on the day, and this was a source of great anxiety. Sometimes social security or probation checks caused delays or made planned accommodation impossible. The St Mungo's worker believed, from feedback from local authorities, that few if any men were actually of no fixed abode (NFA) on release, although much of this accommodation was temporary. A project to monitor accommodation on release was set up in August, along

with an accommodation sub-group. More information on the Board's survey of housing and employment on release is in the Annex.

For men who were still isolating on their release day, prison staff contacted the local authority in advance. On Christmas Eve, nine of the 14 men released were Covid isolators, and staff were trying to find them accommodation on the day. Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) staff (giving advice on employment and universal credit) were not working in the prison but could be contacted via the departure lounge for information about benefits. Prisoners who were setting up bank accounts with the HMPPS-approved provider often faced delays – which the CRC could not chase up because of account confidentiality. For men released without a bank account, universal credit could be paid through a pay point in shops.

The activities committee continued advertising on prison radio, with for instance men still being enrolled on Livery Companies' No Going Back scheme, despite the difficulties of getting the information to any wing in lockdown. There was a National Literacy Trust project to which 20 men under 25 signed up. Prospect was working with about 20 men convicted of sexual offences on work readiness. A needs analysis was produced in December.

At the monthly reducing reoffending meetings in autumn 2020, updates on the resettlement pathways were patchy. By the spring, prison and agency staff were starting to return to normal patterns of working, and the resettlement team pushed hard, and successfully, to get better reporting and co-operation between different groups. Work continued on employer liaison, on railway track workers, for instance, and on providing more activity spaces in one of the car parks: a long-standing project, not successfully concluded by the end of August. By August 2021, there was much better co-ordination between agencies, and new initiatives in prospect.

The Clink restaurant and the Bounce Back/Livery Companies project continued to support men on release with training and employment. Support for veterans was limited – the SSAFFA volunteer returned to the prison in autumn 2021 – although the part-time wing officer did what he could.

The DWP work coaches had not returned by August but were working through the NPS and CRC managers in the community. The CRC debt management worker, working remotely, was liaising with companies to put debts on hold.

The Homelessness Prevention project ended, but the CRC had two community workers to provide support. Liaison between the CRC, Forward Trust and healthcare improved, and the healthcare resettlement worker was overseeing health plans for all prisoners being released, with some getting continuing support, for up to six months after release. Getting ID for prisoners who lacked any – a requirement for accommodation, universal credit and GP registration – could be a slow process. Work to get funding for the re-issue of birth certificates was not successful by end August.

PACT was meeting 87% of prisoner requests for advice, limited by the number of phone calls they could make each day. Departure packs were popular with the men. They were also supporting 65 families and there was no-one left on the waiting list.

The work of the IMB

The Board did not visit Brixton during the lockdown. Instead, as last year, one or more designated Board members phoned and emailed key areas of the prison, to produce a weekly rota report. Other Board members fed into the report if they had phoned into a meeting or had additional information from their special area of responsibility. The Board received copies of key prison documents, including daily operational reports, staff and prisoner information notices and minutes of key meetings. We were well-supported in this by our clerk, who also collected and scanned applications. The prison facilitated weekly phone calls for the duty Board member with a few prisoners when staffing allowed.

The Governor or deputy attended the monthly phone-in Board meeting. Board members are extremely grateful for the time afforded us by governors and by staff at all levels, and for the prison's ready support in making remote monitoring possible.

At the beginning of the reporting year the Board had 16 members, one of whom was still on probation and one on sabbatical. At the end of the year, the Board comprised five full members, two probationers and two probationers on sabbatical, against the complement of 14. Probationers' familiarisation with the prison has been prevented by lockdown. The reduction in active members, and lockdown periods, meant that the Board's coverage of conditions in the prison was much less thorough than we would have wished.

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing ablutions	12	10
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	34	10
C	Equalities	5	6
D	Purposeful activity including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	6	4
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	14	13
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	12	8
F	Food and kitchens	2	4
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	35	33
H1	Property within this establishment	9	12
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	46	40
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	7	6
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	66	32
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	51	44
K	Transfers	16	16
	Total number of applications	315	238

There was only a small number of applications to the national IMB 0800 number.

Annex A

Resettlement Monitoring Survey

1. Between 24 May and 31 July 2021, the Board conducted a monitoring exercise of prisoners scheduled for release in the summer. 72 of 106 men due for release were interviewed, generally in the week before release. A resettlement survey has been conducted annually since 2016, and this year's survey covered a similar period and asked similar questions. In 2020, because of the pandemic, the survey was conducted through questionnaires, to which 39 men responded.
2. This year's survey covered three areas:
 - 2.a. whether men had accommodation upon release;
 - 2.b. their plans for jobs or training on release;
 - 2.c. whether men had been helped with resettlement by prison services
3. The table below gives the percentage response to these questions, followed in square brackets by the 2019 response, since the 2020 results were not directly comparable. The table and narrative below compares the results with 2019 but the 2020 results are also included in round brackets for information. Responses from men on G wing, who have been convicted of sexual offences (7), are also shown separately, as they have different resettlement issues.

Accommodation on release?	Percentage responses	Work or training on release?	Percentage responses	Seen about resettlement needs?	Percentage responses
Secure - with family or friends	29% [33%] (36%) G wing: 57%	Arranged	18% [12%] (15%)	Yes	43% [67%] (35%) G wing: 86%
Insecure - temporary accommodation	11% [5%] (12%) G wing: 29%	Leads	33% [33%] (0%) G wing: 29%	No	44% [23%] (56%) G wing: 14%
Hostel, approved premises or rehabilitation	11% [30%] (10%)	Infirm / retired / in rehabilitat	21% [16%] (23%) G wing:	Unsure or declines to answer	[10%] (10%)

		ion	29%		
None (or only a telephone number or appointment)	38% [32%] (43%) G wing: 14%	None	45% [38%] (59%) G wing: 42%		

Accommodation

4. Fewer men than both 2019 and 2018 (29% compared with 36% and 33%) reported having secure accommodation on release.
5. Far fewer men also had a hostel, rehabilitation or an approved premises (AP) place on release – a much smaller number than in 2019 and 2018 (11% compared with 30% and 16%). This is likely to be a result of lower availability of premises in London, even compared to previous years. A number of men commented that late notification of their AP addresses and licence conditions had prevented them finding work in advance of their release.
6. A significant number of men interviewed said that they had nowhere to go upon their release (NFA), or only a person to meet or a telephone number to call. The percentage of men (38%) reporting this was higher than in 2019 (32%), but lower than in 2020 when 43% reported being NFA.
7. The last-minute notification of accommodation outcomes – which is partially a result of the shortage of accommodation – might mean that our survey results overestimate the number of men released to NFA.

Work or Training

8. The number of men with arranged employment (18%) increased slightly from 2019 (12%). A number of men indicated that this was through their own contacts. 33% of men reported they had leads for jobs. This is the same percentage as pre-Covid, and a substantial increase from 2020 when no men reported any leads.
9. The number of men with no job or training prospects (45%) decreased from 2020 (59%) but was an increase from 2019 (38%). As usual, there was a correlation between being homeless and having no job prospects.

Resettlement support

10. 43% said that they had seen someone about resettlement, with 44% saying they had not felt helped at all. The number reporting having been helped is significantly

lower than 2019, 43% against 67% probably due to lockdowns. Most men referenced their key workers, Forward Trust and probation staff.

11. 86% of men interviewed on G wing said they had received support – significantly above the prison average.

Additional Questions

12. This year there were two additional questions:

12.a Whether prisoners felt they were fairly and humanely treated during their time at Brixton.

12. b Whether they had a bank account or ID.

Feel fairly treated	Percentage responses	Bank Account or ID.	
Yes	57%	Yes	68%
No	32%	Applied	10%
		ID	54%

13. The majority of men reported that they did feel fairly treated. This is consistent with the 2020 results, where 58% reported feeling fairly treated.

NPS report

14. In June 2021, after the merger of the two services, the NPS included information from the CRC teams working in prisons in their report to London regional governors. There had been a decrease in performance, which had been getting back to pre-pandemic levels. For Brixton, three men were reported NFA on release and two in temporary accommodation, with eight having an appointment with a housing provider. One was going into supported accommodation, one into BASS, four into approved premises, and four to friends or family. Overall in the London regional prisons, for the twelve months from July 2020, about 48% of women and men had accommodation needs on release.

15. During the same period in Brixton, where there was a good healthcare pre-release structure, more men were disclosing their needs on release: those reporting physical health needs had increased by a third, and for mental health needs by a half.