



# **Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Channings Wood**

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

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# Contents

<b>Introductory sections 1 – 3</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of establishment	4
3. Executive summary	5
<b>Evidence sections 4 – 7</b>	
4. Safety	8
5. Humane treatment	12
6. Health and wellbeing	16
7. Progression and resettlement	19
<b>The work of the IMB</b>	23
<b>Applications to the IMB</b>	23

## 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**

HMP Channings Wood is a category C adult male training and resettlement prison with a capacity of just over 700. The prison operates a split site regime across all areas for the two groups of prisoners it holds: main location and the vulnerable prisoner unit (VPU) which includes people convicted of sexual offences (PCSO).

The prison opened in 1974 on the extensive site of a former Ministry of Defence base and is in a rural area of south Devon between Totnes and Newton Abbot. The site is bounded by a high fence and there are a number of public footpaths around the perimeter. Internal fences separate the two prisoner groups and control prisoners' movement on the site. After the decommissioning this year of one living block (LB7), there are now seven permanent LBs, as well as one that is temporary, comprising Bunkabins. There are also workshops, a kitchen, a care and separation unit (CSU), a health centre, a well-equipped gym and sports hall, a multifaith place of worship and a separate chapel, greenhouses and polytunnels, and buildings housing other services. All buildings are either single or two storey.

The eight living blocks are split between main prisoners (LB2, 3, 4, 6 and 8) and VPU (LB1, 5, and 9), with LB2, LB6, and LB9 housing enhanced prisoners. New receptions are placed in LB1 and LB8, which during the pandemic have been reverse cohorting (i.e. quarantine) wings (RCUs). Five of the living blocks have a central entrance area, off which there are offices, classrooms, a servery and two association rooms. Cells in these blocks are on four corridors on each wing, two on each floor, arranged at right angles to each other. Most blocks have single cells with a toilet and communal showers, while LB8 has double cells with ensuite showers. Part of LB1 has been equipped with bunk beds for dual occupancy by new arrivals.

Education and vocational courses are provided by Weston College, the Shaw Trust, the community rehabilitation company (CRC), Catch22, Job Centre Plus and Prospects, which is concerned with careers guidance.

Healthcare services are provided by Practice Plus Group (PPG), whose staff are based in a health centre adjacent to the CSU. There are no inpatient beds. Nursing staff are on duty every day and the out of hours GP service is provided by Devon Doctors. Most acute care is provided by Torbay Hospital. Practice Plus also provides on-site pharmacy services and social care. Dental health services are provided by Time for Teeth. The psychology service is regionally managed across the South West cluster of prisons and oversees offending behaviour courses. The integrated substance misuse service (ISMS) is contracted to PPG.

### **3. Executive summary**

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

The Covid-19 outbreak has had a significant impact on the Board's ability to gather information and discuss the contents of this annual report. The Board has therefore tried to cover as much ground as it can in these difficult circumstances, but inevitably there is less detail and supporting evidence than usual. Ministers are aware of these constraints. Regular information is being collected specifically on the prison's response to the pandemic, and that is being collated nationally.

In order to hear the men's voice while monitoring remotely, for the first time the Board conducted two surveys – a general questionnaire on safety, fairness and decency and a second on progression and resettlement. The general questionnaire was issued at the annual report six-month point to all prisoners and over 100 responded. The resettlement survey went to men who, in the period June to August, had entered their 12-week window for discharge. Of 105 men surveyed, 46 (44%) responded.

The Board recognises the demands that operating the prison throughout the pandemic have put on staff and prisoners and notes that the prison has largely remained settled despite the significant restrictions.

#### **3.2 Main judgements**

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

The Board still judges that the prison remains largely safe. Following the trends of the previous year, the number of incidents of self-harm and assaults both continued to decrease. Anecdotally, prisoners and staff reported that these reductions had been the result of limitations in the amount of movement and free association. This was reflected in the IMB survey, when over 70% of those who responded said they felt safe most of the time. Incidents of substance misuse more than halved, most likely because of limited access to illicit substances during the pandemic restrictions. The Board will continue to monitor the situation and the measures the prison management put in place once the regime permits more movement and visiting returns to normal.

Use of force incidents dropped by just over a quarter. There was only one use of a baton and although staff were trained to use pelargonic acid vanillyl amide (PAVA), it was not used on the only occasion that it was drawn. The Board's judgement is that force does not appear to be overused and seems to be used proportionately.

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

During the reporting period, the prison regime was determined by the relevant stage of the exceptional delivery model (EDM). Within the restrictions that this imposed, the Board judges that prisoners were treated with fairness and humanity.

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

The EDM significantly limited the time that prisoners had out of their cell and, although prisoners reported the difficulties in using the restricted time to carry out basic tasks, including showering and making phone calls, it is to their huge credit that most men remained tolerant and positive about these severe limitations. Additional 'comfort packs' were supplied by the kitchen providing some treats. As the

changes in regime impacted on work and education opportunities, distraction packs and remote learning packs were made available. Healthcare adapted its distribution of medication and, where appropriate, men were given their own drugs. The Board believes that, as far as was possible, men's health and wellbeing needs were met.

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

The Covid-19 pandemic and the prolonged adoption of the EDM has significantly impacted those areas where one to one work is so vital. The measures required to minimise the risk to prisoners, taken together with the resultant staff shortages, has seen education, offender management and resettlement particularly hard hit. Despite some of the concerns noted, the Board applauds the successes that have been achieved and recognised in this report, in particular the very encouraging judgement of significant progress given by Ofsted on the provision of education, skills and work, and the 'outstanding' grading awarded for through the gate services by HM Inspectorate of Probation. The Board is also aware that a return to 'normal service' will take both time and a sustained effort and will look to see it over the coming year.

## **3.3 Main areas for development**

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

What measures are planned to address the backlog in the provision of offending behaviour programmes? What is being done in order to minimise the detrimental effect on men awaiting courses prior to parole board hearings while at the same time ensuring that public safety requirements are met?

### ***TO THE PRISON SERVICE***

The Board restates the question it posed last year: Why are the Prison Service and its contractors unable to manage the efficient and secure movement and storage of prisoners' property, particularly during transfers? The loss of personal items causes a great deal of frustration and unhappiness for the individuals concerned that often detracts from their ability to settle. The costs to the Prison Service in replacing lost items must be significant.

### ***TO THE GOVERNOR***

What can be done to ensure that men arriving at Channings Wood late on a Friday receive the same level of support during the reception process as those arriving during the working week?

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

Issue raised	Response given
Significant delays in making arrangements requiring secure mental health provision, despite concerted efforts by prison and healthcare staff?	The Minister acknowledged that despite the concerted efforts from prison and healthcare staff, there were often significant delays in transferring prisoners diagnosed with mental ill health to a secure hospital when the transfer is outside the Devon, Cornwall and Wiltshire clinical commissioning group (CCG) catchment

	<p>area. Mention was made of work to establish an effective escalation protocol and that an Early Days Mental Health Practitioner pilot was taking place across six sites which will be evaluated to inform future provision. Some progress on waiting times has been noted in the Board's monitoring.</p>
<p>Why are the Prison Service and its contractors unable to manage the efficient and secure movement and storage of prisoners' property, particularly during transfers? The loss of personal items causes a great deal of frustration and unhappiness for the individuals concerned that often detracts from their ability to settle. The costs to the Prison Service in replacing lost items must be significant.</p>	<p>Little evidence of progress has been seen during monitoring.</p>
<p>While the Board very much welcomes the continued downward trend in many key safety indicators, progress in reducing levels of self-harm and the use of psychoactive substances (PS) is slower. What steps are planned to further reduce the number of prisoners self-harming at Channings Wood? Despite successes in the interception of drugs, can even more effective measures be taken to reduce the availability of drugs in the prison?</p>	<p>Further significant reductions in psychoactive substance (PS) related incidents and self-harm have been noted.</p>

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

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

During this reporting year there were 936 receptions at Channings Wood, despite the pausing of movement between prisons early in 2021. For much of this time the Board was monitoring remotely, with members returning to the establishment from April 2021. Over this four-month period monitoring was facilitated through telephone conversations with managers and wing staff, as well as orderlies on the two induction wings. Given the constraints of EDM and the requirement to quarantine, prisoners spoken to were generally understanding and somewhat positive about reception procedures and the induction process. During the first lockdown, and even after members returned to direct monitoring from September 2020, it had been agreed with the Governor that face-to-face induction briefings on the role of the IMB would be suspended. These weekly briefings were replaced by the provision of an information and fact sheet, which also explained how to contact the Board and the use of the 0800 applications system. Regular confirmatory checks were made with induction staff and orderlies to ensure that new arrivals were receiving these sheets.

On the return to direct monitoring, reception procedures were observed by members, who reported that these were well conducted. All staff wore masks and social distancing was observed as far as was possible in the reception area. Healthcare staff conducted temperature checks and lateral flow tests were taken by all men arriving. Body searches were carried out as men changed into prison clothes in decent conditions, with some privacy provided. It was noted though that the body scanner, while in place, could not always be used, either due to staff shortages or late arrival times. During wing visits, one induction orderly told the Board that some shortages of clothing, bedding and privacy curtains had been experienced, but this was not borne out by subsequent investigation. All arrivals were provided with drinks and a hot meal.

An issue was noted relating to prisoners arriving later than 3pm on Fridays, which sometimes happened as Channings Wood is often the final destination after HMPs Bristol and Exeter. Because non-operational administrative staff were not available at that time, men were told that they would not get their telephone PIN until the following Monday afternoon at the earliest. However, an initial phone call to alert families to their location was facilitated.

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

Last year the Board highlighted a small drop in the number of self-harm incidents. Over this period there has been a more significant reduction from 477 to 370, a fall of 22% with an average of 30 incidents a month. However, there was a spike of 51 incidents in December 2020. Cutting has remained the usual method although most incidents were low level. Self-harm remains the main reason for men being placed on an assessment, care in custody and teamwork document (ACCT). As with self-harm, open ACCTs peaked in December 2020 at 38, otherwise averaging around 31 each month. The Board noted a number of receptions into the prison on open ACCTs, some arriving without their documentation. Channings Wood is now embracing version 6 of the ACCTs process, with quality assurance measures taking place at the weekly safety intervention meetings (SIM).



The introduction of a peer support programme for vulnerable individuals, as well as daily visits from safer custody staff, has been established, but the Board is not yet in a position to comment on its effectiveness. Listeners have been active throughout the year, working with the VPU wings, and reported a reduced number of call outs between January and August: 117, averaging 14.6 each month peaking to 24 in August. On the mains wings, however, Listeners were only active up until April 2021 and recorded just 17 call outs in the four-month period prior to this. After that, the Listener scheme on Mains has been suspended due to a shortfall of trained Listeners, a lack of training opportunities and no Samaritans supervision. Safer custody representatives are filling in, but cannot conduct night-time visits. The Board has registered its concern over this temporary gap in Listener provision. By comparison, the safer custody representatives have been very active throughout the year, due in part to covering the absence of Listeners. They have reported monthly engagements with other prisoners up by a third, with debt, the regime, access to medication (or lack of it) among the main issues raised with them.

Over this year there have been three deaths in custody, the same number as in the previous reporting period. These deaths were assessed to be of natural causes, but Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's (PPO) final reports have yet to be completed. The one initial report seen by the Board made recommendations regarding improvements in consistency of unlock practices across the establishment and this has since been actioned by the senior management team (SMT).

### **4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation**

The Board is encouraged that the downward trend noted last year in most of the safer custody key indicators has continued. The number of assaults was down every month of the year compared to 2019/20, except for December 2020 when a total 27 were recorded. Prisoner on prisoner assaults showed a fall from 122 to 106 (down 13%) giving an average of eight a month, but with a significant spike of 22 in December 2020. Violent incidents during the first part of the year more frequently involved younger prisoners under 34 years of age. Equality staff attempted with limited success to analyse any underlying causes for this, but by the second half of the year the situation had changed, with those men over 34 years old forming the largest group.

To complement remote monitoring and the data provided by the safer custody department, the Board conducted a survey at the six-month point which included a specific question on safety. Of the 108 men who responded:

- 53% said they felt safe
- 20% said they felt safe most of the time
- 5.5% said they felt safe some of the time
- 21.5% said they did not feel safe very often

Challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) referrals related mainly to bullying, with the men involved ranging in age from 22-49 (although over 30% were under 30 years of age, roughly double that age group within the prison population)<sup>1</sup>. The Board has noted an overrepresentation of black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME)

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<sup>1</sup> Precise figures are difficult to specify as some men are multiple referrals and the prison population fluctuated over the reporting period.

prisoners on CSIPs in the final months of the report and welcomes the investigation into this by the equality team. The introduction of a 'Lifting the Lid' initiative designed to support those men involved with debt is welcomed by the Board. Though still in its infancy, this initiative will be monitored closely over the coming year so that its impact can be assessed.

There were three serious incidents during this reporting period requiring the opening of the command suite and the attendance of national assets. The IMB was able to observe all three and noted that they were all managed and concluded satisfactorily.

Last year the Board commented on the number of men who were self-isolating and this year, due to remote monitoring, its capacity to access men who were 'behind their door' has been limited. However, the data provided suggests that the total number of self-isolators this year has fallen since 2019, with an average 7.5 a month, down from 11. By the end of this reporting period there was an upturn, with most on the Mains blocks LB3 and LB4, either because of debt or mental health issues. Board members have been encouraged to see the use of enhanced welfare checks and complex needs support plans for isolating individuals and will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these processes over the coming year.

#### **4.4 Prisoners with specific vulnerabilities**

Channings Wood remains a non-integrated establishment, with limited contact between prisoners on the vulnerable prisoner wings (such as PCSO or those otherwise potentially vulnerable or needing special support) and Mains prisoners.

The prison's safeguarding arrangements are overseen by a member of the senior management team (SMT) in partnership with Devon County Council (DCC) who review these arrangements regularly. The establishment's safeguarding policy is up to date and used frequently when assessing plans for PCSO, those self-isolating or those in need of social care support. Elderly prisoners (men aged over 60) make up 9.5% of the total prison roll and 3.1% of these are over 70, with the oldest being 89 years old. They mostly live on LB5, where social care packages are provided if required.

#### **4.5 Use of force**

From data provided by the use of force coordinator, the Board has noted a 27% reduction in the number of incidents where force was required, down to 187. There were on average 15.5 incidents per month, compared to an average of 21 the previous year. In 96% of cases the type of force was control and restraint by the use of handcuffs. Batons were drawn twice (compared to six times in 2019/20) and used once, while in the previous year they had not been used at all. PAVA spray had been available to trained use of force instructors only for the final four months of the previous year and had not been used. In this reporting year, PAVA spray was drawn once but not used. This was on the single occasion when a baton was used during an incident in the segregation unit, where a prisoner attempted to assault an officer with an improvised weapon. As already noted, there were three serious incidents monitored by the Board. All were resolved by negotiation, but all required the deployment of the National Tactical Response Group and all resulted in the use of handcuffs when the prisoners involved were moved to the segregation unit.

Channings Wood uses a post-incident debrief process involving both staff and prisoners, and most prisoners engage to varying levels. This helps to identify if any additional support or intervention would be appropriate such as CSIP plans, ACCT process or mental health or psychology referrals. Prisoners are also advised of the complaints process and during this period four men involved in incidents (down from six the previous year) submitted formal complaints relating to force being used on them.

#### **4.6 Preventing illicit items**

During the last reporting period there were 322 incidents related to substance misuse, which this year fell to 147, a drop of 54%. The monthly trend from September to December 2020 showed an average of 13 incidents a month, rising to 20 in January 2021 before peaking at 36 in February. Safer custody representatives told the Board that they had noticed an increase in the use of PS, especially in the 41–45 age group, mainly on LB3, a Mains block. The period from April to August averaged only two incidents per month, with none at all recorded in June. The Board's discussions with the integrated substance misuse staff (ISMS) revealed that a number of factors might account for this reduced level of incidents in the second period of the report. These included the limitation on association time, different visitor arrangements, transfers out and changes to the mail processes. However, mandatory drug testing (MDT) ceased during the pandemic and has yet to restart.

Illicit alcohol (hooch) was found to be present within the establishment for periods of the year and this has resulted in the intermittent removal of sugar from the canteen since June. Sugar remains unavailable on canteen sheets at the time of this report. The lack of sugar or the provision of a workable alternative to supply it to prisoners is raised frequently at wing representatives' meetings, although most men understand the rationale for the measure.

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

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

The quality of accommodation varies between living blocks (LB). The Board has been impressed by the standard of 'self-help' schemes underway, to improve LB décor. A good example is the redecoration of the segregation unit by an enhanced prisoner. Staff have supported this work effectively by providing time and materials. The Board is particularly pleased that LB7 has been closed and its prisoners transferred either to the new LB9 or LB5. Prisoners appreciate the quality of the new LB9 units, though they have commented on the lack of recreation space provided, which the Board acknowledges but also notes that LB9 is a short-term solution pending the wider expansion of the prison site. In most LBs, showers and toilets now work efficiently. Board members expressed concerns at the long-term closure of showers in LB3, which resulted in too many men having to use too few showers on one wing. These showers have now been improved and re-opened. The condition of other showers and bathrooms has steadily improved during the year. There have been few reported problems with clothing and the laundry is now working efficiently, having experienced technical difficulties earlier in the year. There have been just a very few applications relating to clothing, mainly where property is said to have been lost on transfer. Board members have followed up appropriately.

Most prisoners express broad contentment with food, though the Board did note a small cluster of food-related complaints in July and August 2021. These were investigated but appeared to be unfounded. In 2020 the kitchen manager had established a consultative food forum, whose function was then subsumed into the agenda of the wing representatives' meeting. Catering staff respond positively to prisoners' requests, for example that more fresh herbs be made available. Because kitchen staff maintain thorough records, special diets are effectively managed, including correct observation of the food needs of different faith groups. Board members have visited the kitchen regularly, where it appeared that appropriate levels of cleanliness and proper observation of hygiene requirements were being observed.

### **5.2 Segregation**

The segregation unit can hold up to eight individuals. Throughout the year, by remote and in person visits, board members have reported low numbers held in segregation compared with other years. Typically, there have been two or three prisoners present. No prisoner has been held for more than 42 days. Prisoners' lengths of stay ranged from 30 days to one day, with the median point being six days. Almost all prisoners are transferred to the unit for breaching prison rules or for their own protection. A high proportion of these prisoners do not wish to return to the wing. The Board commends the work of prison managers in ensuring consistency of the staffing arrangements, since this provides continuity for prisoners and helps promote positive relationships.

During the year, members listened in to reviews and adjudications by telephone and concluded that prisoners were suitably treated. When attending in person, members reported that prisoners were dealt with fairly and decently, with good rapport observed between staff and prisoners. When questioned, prisoners almost always asserted that they had understood the review process and were aware of next steps. Members normally visit men transferred to the unit within 72 hours of their arrival.

When this was not possible during Covid-19 restrictions, members telephoned to satisfy themselves about the prisoner's wellbeing.

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

Prisoners who responded to the survey conducted by the Board in April 2021 painted a mixed picture of staff-prisoner relationships. Over 80% of this group felt able to talk to staff and said that they were treated fairly and decently. Board members gather evidence from conversations with prisoners, which largely supports evidence obtained from applications, from the survey and from attendance at wing meetings that relationships are generally professional and positive. The Board believes that there are efficient management systems for addressing staff/prisoner problems including the effective fortnightly wing representative meetings. Occasionally, prisoners complain to members about unfair treatment by staff. Members have guided prisoners to the complaints system and have followed up with prison management where there has been a lack of response.

Prisoners held in segregation, or those who are self-isolating or in the constant watch cell, tend to speak positively of the arrangements put in place by staff to ensure their wellbeing.

The key worker system has suffered over the year, mainly because of Covid-19 related staffing shortages. It has not always been possible for each key worker to see approximately six prisoners at least once per fortnight. Prison officers who are trained as key workers reported to members that they felt the system works best when staff work regularly on the LBs where their allocated prisoners are based. The Board recognises that internal transfers of men between wings may not always allow this, but agree that on balance such arrangements should be in place for as many prisoners as possible, when staff numbers stabilise.

Evidence of positive relationships is seen in data which demonstrates that there have been fewer recorded incidents of self-harm, damage to property, or assaults on staff during the year. The longer periods spent in cells during Covid-19 restrictions could account for some aspects, though data from the summer, when association opportunities expanded, shows that challenging behaviour has decreased overall.

### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

The Board remains concerned that the lead equalities officer has been unable to fulfil that role to their own satisfaction this year as a result of regular redeployment to cover for absence in other parts of the prison. The Board has noted the loss of equalities officer time in previous reports and is disappointed that the situation has not improved. This officer, along with other members of the equalities team, reported that there have been fewer discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRF) logged this year, which they linked to the change of regime during Covid-19 lockdowns. The number of applications about equality and diversity reduced by around three quarters compared to the previous year, but it is not possible to ascertain the reason without further investigation.

The Board notes the establishment of prisoners' equality and diversity group meetings. Prisoner equalities representatives have asserted to members that BAME prisoners are more likely to face adjudications than white British. Board members are not able to detect such a difference from information provided in monthly safety

assurance reports by prison managers. However, as this perception exists, it will be monitored in the year ahead. The same representatives have also told Board members that relationships between staff and prisoners are generally good.

The Board is aware that there are approximately 30 foreign national prisoners held, of whom seven (at the time of reporting) have been seen by immigration officials.

Elderly prisoners (men aged over 60) make up 9.5% of the total prison roll and 3.1% of these are over 70, with the oldest being 89 years old. They mostly live on LB5, where social care packages are provided if required.

There are currently a very small number of prisoners who identify as transgender and are in a transition process.

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

The Board commends the work carried out by prison chaplains during the pandemic. Chaplains have provided much-appreciated support for prisoners and their families at difficult times such as bereavement, including those occasions when a prisoner has died in custody. Chaplaincy staff work as a tight unit. They offered support to prisoners in cells or in the chapel during Covid-19 conditions and provided prisoners with written and other materials for reflection during lockdown. A range of faiths and denominations are covered, and the Board welcomes the introduction of a dedicated chaplain to work with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. Religious festivals have been observed during the lockdown period, along with dietary requirements or other means of observance. There is a very strong desire by the staff to return to normal ways of working and towards the end of the reporting period chaplains were making plans to restart religious services for prisoners.

### **5.6 Complaints**

Compared with the same period last year, there were 126 more prison complaints on record in this period. From May 2021, monthly complaints have been the highest since the beginning of the reporting period. This growth may reflect increased movement around the prison, as a more normal regime returns. The Board is also aware that some prisoners regularly submit multiple complaints, which provides some explanation for the overall increase. Prison records show that complaints received each month ranged in number from 54 in January to 129 in August, with the mean number being 68 per month. The Board further notes that the top three categories are residential issues, property and staff. Property issues feature heavily in applications received by the Board in the same period.

The majority of complaints are dealt with through the Comp 1 process, with a small minority progressing to Comp 1a. They appear to be received from all living blocks and wings, with no detectable patterns. Most were dealt with in Comp 1, 7% required a further response and progressed to Comp 1a. The Board is pleased to say that most complaints are answered within the set timeframe, which prison managers monitor closely. More recent response delays are attributed to staff absence as a result of Covid-19 conditions.

### **5.7 Property**

The Board received fewer applications from prisoners about property during the period that Covid-19 restrictions and lockdown were in place. This was largely because of the halting of transfers. Once restrictions were eased, applications about property, and perceived lack of response from staff about property losses, featured heavily again, with several received most weeks. The Board notes (and can verify from members' observations) the comments of reception staff that increasingly, new prisoners are arriving late in the day. There are fewer staff, and no prison orderlies, present to operate reception procedures when these late arrivals reach Channings Wood, resulting in delays to property distribution and occasional confusion about what has been received from the previous prison.

Applications about property often relate to transfers from other prisons in the region being the source of the problem. When following up such applications, members believe that the system for the movement of property is inefficient and the Board once again notes with concern the frustration felt by men when property fails to arrive or goes missing and the sometimes poor communication that they receive.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare general**

Healthcare has been provided by PPG since 1 October 2020, taking over from Care UK. There has not been a full Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection or Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) report on healthcare during the reporting year. However, there was a CQC Transitional Monitoring Assessment from which the feedback was given to healthcare staff verbally, who reported a positive outcome.

Healthcare staff almost always attend segregation reviews and wing representative meetings.

The Board feels that PPG operates an effective system for complaints. These progress from concerns (where most issues are resolved informally and usually on a face-to-face basis) through to complaints at Stage 1 and Stage 2 or ultimately to the Ombudsman when an independent arbitrator is required. In this reporting year 191 concerns were received, with only nine moving to Stage 1 or 2 complaints. There was no referral to the Ombudsman. This year, the senior manager was creative in establishing a new post aimed at increasing prisoners' engagement and to deal promptly with initial concerns face to face.

### **6.2 Physical healthcare**

After the experience of handling an early outbreak of Covid-19 in the previous year, it is to the credit of staff that there have been no outbreaks this year. Men transferring into the prison are subject to strict quarantine arrangements on the two induction wings, which prevented any transmission from men who tested positive. A dedicated testing service was set up in November 2020 and staff are encouraged to undertake lateral flow and PCR tests twice a week. Lateral flow tests only became available from February 2021. To the end of the reporting year, 10,200 PCR tests were taken by staff, with 48 positive, and 7,721 lateral flow tests, with five positives. 1,124 PCR tests were taken by prisoners with 15 positives.

Prisoner COVID reps were appointed in each block in September 2020 and given noticeboard space to provide prisoners with information.

COVID-19 vaccination was rolled out in line with that in the wider community from February 2021. There was good take up initially from the oldest and more vulnerable prisoners, but as the offer was extended to younger men, there was some reluctance reported. During the reporting year, uptake of dose 1 for groups 1-11 was 80% and dose 2 for groups 1-9 was 75%. However, on some living blocks up to 50% of men declined, perhaps due to peer pressure from other prisoners. Healthcare staff wrote to those prisoners in an effort to 'myth bust' and to reduce vaccine hesitancy.

By September 2020 healthcare reported that its services were returning to business as usual. However, there was a waiting list for doctors' appointments due to the reduced availability of GPs. Some appointments were covered by healthcare staff to ensure that more prisoners were seen. The Board believes that prisoners received a comparable service to that available in the community, but the men often expected to see a GP rather than an alternative practitioner, again as could happen in the community. Problems over access to GPs have been a regular cause of concern for prisoners. Although there were times when locums were not readily available, due to security clearance issues, prisoners continued to have access to GPs without undue



delay. Routine dispensing continued throughout the emergency and after assessment more prisoners were allowed to hold their own medication.

The Board noted a recurring theme of prisoners complaining about changes to or withdrawal of their medication, especially from those transferring in to Channings Wood. For those new arrivals, their levels and type of medication were reviewed by a healthcare professional. If necessary, changes were made and prisoners advised. Many prisoners had been on a particular named medication and were often upset if they did not receive the same product. Indeed, some might receive the same prescription, but from a different manufacturer. Every application about these issues to the IMB is checked with healthcare to ensure these procedures have been carried out and prisoners advised directly. The Board is aware of a general perception amongst prisoners that treatment in prison is inferior to that in the wider community. In fact, prisoners receive similar, if not better, levels of service from healthcare at Channings Wood, especially in these challenging times.

During the Board's remote monitoring it was difficult to engage with prisoners to explore their experience of healthcare. Its survey in February 2021 included a question on healthcare. Of the 77 men who replied, 64 said that their access to medication, healthcare or the GP had not changed in that month. However, some men made negative comments about what they felt were delays in accessing healthcare: 'Appointments are being made two months after I sent a healthcare application'; 'I have requested medication two weeks ago: I'm still waiting'; 'I hope to see the optician before my release date but have heard nothing for several months'; 'I had to wait five weeks for a GP appointment'. The IMB dealt with 22 applications on healthcare matters, which was one less than the previous year. Of these, 12 came via the 0800 service. However, 11 of these were lodged by just two prisoners and always reporting the same issue.

Dentistry had to limit the range of treatments available because of concerns about aerosol generating procedures and the necessary additional safety measures required. But by July 2021 a full service had been restored and the backlog of cases was being dealt with.

### **6.3 Mental health**

Last year, the Board highlighted some serious delays in men with complex mental health needs being transferred to appropriate secure accommodation. This year, delays were not as long, and the Board is pleased that men were not held in segregation for extended periods while they waited. However, the time taken for mental health hospital transfers from the day of referral to actual transfer was, in September 2020 and February 2021, much longer than the target of 28 days. Snapshots at various points during the year showed a transfer time of 48 days on 11 September 20, five days on 11 December 20, 29 days on 8 February 2021, 45 days on 26 February 2021 and 20 days on 2 July 2021. These transfer times were largely dictated by the availability of places in the receiving establishments.

In its last report the Board welcomed the introduction of an offender personality disorder unit, 'Outside the Box' which has remained in operation throughout Covid-19 restrictions and is due to be fully staffed by the end of the year. Members have discussed with the unit lead indications of behaviour change in long-term prisoners

once classed as difficult to manage, who have engaged with activities such as visits by outside organisations, including the local birds of prey centre.

#### **6.4 Social care**

At present there are 45 prisoners on the personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) register and these are well documented on each wing. There is also a team of Buddies who are fellow prisoners trained to support others who require assistance in addition to personal care. The Board understands that this support has continued throughout the COVID-19 response, with Buddies supporting 19 prisoners by June, reducing to 16 at the end of August. DCC continue to work with healthcare staff to provide social care packages for five of the men also on LB5.

#### **6.5 Exercise, regime**

Throughout the reporting period, the prison regime was significantly restricted because of the pandemic, with men having little time out of their cells. In September 2020, the prison was at Stage 4 and it was possible to exceed the nationally directed minimum of 30 minutes and give all prisoners one hour to one hour 15 minutes to shower and have access to telephones. Although prisoners understood the reasons for these restrictions and largely accepted them, there were many comments about the difficulties of having only 10 minutes for phone calls. By October, the prison had moved to Stage 3 and there were split association periods on the wings, offering two hours in the morning or afternoon each day, and gym sessions resumed. In August 2021, the prison moved to Stage 2 and continued with split association. There was increased gym attendance.

#### **6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

The level of ISMS support this year has varied because of Covid-19 restrictions and all group work was suspended until May 2021, with the service focusing on the care of complex and high risk prisoners in collaboration with other partner organisations. The team was able to maintain the other aspects of their work, reporting that they had undertaken all induction interviews, the 13-week reviews and new referrals, which was achieved through higher caseloads. There were 4,113 one to one sessions and 90% of the 622 new referrals were seen within five days of being referred. From May 2021, socially distanced group work restarted with a maximum of six per group, including the facilitator. By the end of the year, ISMS was able to run four or five groups each week. Additionally, Alcoholics Anonymous had resumed weekly sessions and Narcotics Anonymous was visiting fortnightly. The Board is pleased to be able to report that the feedback on these services from one participating prisoner has been good.

Staffing within ISMS remained an issue throughout the year and the planned recruitment of a full time ISMS worker was unsuccessful. Subsequently, the post's job description was adjusted and there is a proposal to recruit an additional pharmacy technician, whose skills will be upgraded through appropriate training.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

In September and October 2020, plans were being drawn up to implement the return to face-to-face learning on a restricted basis. On reversion to Stage 4 in January 2021, in-cell provision resumed and limited face-to-face learning did not begin again until May. Those men who responded to a survey conducted by the Board were generally satisfied with both the content provided and feedback received. An Ofsted progress monitoring visit in August made a similar judgement, finding that education staff had made significant progress in meeting prisoners' needs. Inspectors also judged that the distance learning coordinator had maintained a good level of support to prisoners engaged on distance learning and Open University courses.

The Board commends the engagement of five BAME learners in reviewing learner packs to comment on their suitability for the BAME community. Prompted by data which showed that only three of the 65 prisoners classified as BAME engaged with in-cell learning, this initiative led to 15 new applications from BAME prisoners.

With the return of face-to-face learning, staff reintroduced 'taster' courses in music, cookery and functional skills in order to encourage harder to reach groups to engage. The Board observed a cookery course designed for the Traveller community and noted a high level of engagement together with pride in the food being produced.

Despite these successes, managers were realistic about the challenges faced. They told the Board that in-cell learner packs provided had little real benefit to those seeking meaningful employment on their release. The provision of specialist support to men with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is also a concern to both managers and the Board. Although some staff have training or experience in this area, a qualified specialist is not yet in place. Prison data indicates that 28% of the population were either referred for or receiving LDD support. The Board's own survey revealed a similar figure of 30% and considers the recruitment of an LDD specialist to be a priority. The survey also indicated some weaknesses in the induction process, showing that of those who received initial maths and English assessments (57% of those who responded) only about half received their results.

The remote library service described in the last annual report has continued and by end of this reporting year the library had reopened, though full access is not yet timetabled. Some wing libraries have proved so popular that they have been maintained.

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

The impact of Covid-19 restrictions experienced across education was also felt in vocational training and work. The November 2020 lockdown restrictions meant that workplaces could not mix men from different wings, significantly reducing numbers. Workshop capacity fell from 231 spaces to 107, a cut of 54%. Managers actively looked for ways to mitigate the reduced time out of cells. By prioritising activities deemed essential, the Board was told that in February 2021, on any given day, about 250 men (almost one third of the prison population) were engaged in work such as cleaning, buddy support and industries.

For the six months from November 2020 to May 2021, only in-cell theory vocational training was delivered, covering some 15 vocational courses including warehousing and storage, painting and decorating, horticulture, barbering, cycle maintenance and business enterprise. From May, face-to-face learning for restricted numbers restarted across the full range of vocational training and those prisoners who had successfully engaged with in-cell education were prioritised.

By June the Board was able to observe a prison group, peer-led deep dive exercise focused on industries, not just as places of work, but as places of learning where prisoners gained hard and soft skills. Such skills were then recorded on individual learning progression packs for each man. One prisoner the Board spoke to said that his in-cell theory work had been delivered on time. His marked worksheets came back in good time with clear feedback provided. He said that he was 'constantly learning', was better motivated, had more energy and his well-being was improved. Another prisoner confirmed he was using his individual learning progression record containing his initial in-cell theory work and that he had been filling in his horticulture training with his instructor. He told us that as a result of his work he felt more confident and better able to mix with others.

The Board judged that the deep dive highlighted a number of positive areas, but also noted areas for development, including the need to better share the results of induction assessments (LDD, maths and English, any physical disabilities) with both industries and wing staff, in order that prisoners' needs could be better understood and met. The generally positive impression gained by the Board, once direct monitoring resumed from April, was confirmed by Ofsted in August, when it conducted a progress monitoring visit and assessed that significant progress had been made.

### **7.3 Offender management, progression**

Pressures caused by staffing issues and an imbalance in offender flows (an excess in the resettlement need over the training function) have hindered offender management in custody (OMiC) to the extent that managers told the Board that 'it has all gone slightly wrong'. Although initially caseloads were manageable, by the end of August 2021 there were 69 men who had not had an offender assessment system (OASys) assessment and of those, half were past the 10-week post sentence deadline. Despite face-to-face work restarting in May, in June some wing staff told the Board that the offender management unit (OMU) had not been visiting prisoners and in their opinion this was causing anxiety and frustration. Some comments in the Board's own survey reflected this. Of those men who responded, 69% said that they did not have a sentence plan, but of those who did have a plan, 72% said they had been able to complete it.

While on paper caseloads have generally been in line with OMiC targets, some vulnerable staff members were required to shield for most of the period, with one still working from home. More significantly, regular staff shortages, due to the need to self-isolate, saw operational prison offender managers (POMs) from OMU frequently assigned to backfill on the wings. This meant that OMU's strength was routinely cut by a third. This also applied to key workers, who for the same reason did not have the time to deliver the level of interactions required by OMiC. As one manager told the Board, 'You can't achieve OMiC if you can't achieve key work'. The Board shares

this frustration, especially as there had been early signs that applications and adjudications began to reduce as more key worker sessions were being delivered.

Progression has also suffered, with release on temporary licence (ROTL) suspended. In January 2021, 11 men who had been recategorised were transferred to open prisons 'the first in a very long while'. Further transfers were limited and by the end of the report period 26 men were eligible, but there was little movement, with a 'one in one out' system or transfer for compassionate reasons only, due to a lack of capacity in the category D estate. Offending behaviour programmes (OBP) have been similarly impacted. Staff had used the period from July to December 2020 to deal with the backlog of men who needed to complete courses to prepare for parole or release, but programmes planned for January 2021 onwards were cancelled with little being done until May 2021. As a result, some men will have been released without attending the programmes that they needed. Managers are more hopeful that with face-to-face work restarting and OBP courses being delivered, the situation will improve. However, they are understaffed and only able to operate at 50% capacity.

#### **7.4 Family contact**

At the start of this reporting period, social visits had recently been reintroduced. In January 2021, social visits were again stopped and did not start again until 8 May. Visits were monitored by the Board in June and August and staff from Choices (the not for profit voluntary organisation who run the visitors' centre), family members and prisoners were spoken to. All reported that a common problem was the time taken to get through to the visits booking line (this was also a recurring issue at wing representative meetings) and in some cases there had been confusion over the dress policy for visitors. The vast majority though reported a very good experience and were understanding of the need for Covid-19 restrictions. A young mother spoke positively about her visit and of using Purple (video) Visits, the email-a-prisoner scheme and Storybook Dads. Her husband later said that as a result of meeting his daughter for the first time he knew that he had to 'sort himself out'. One man described his experience as 'very decent' but another noted that the social distancing requirement had made it hard for his elderly grandparents to hear him.

Staff were generally observed to be sensitive, only intervening when distancing was compromised, and visitors and men responded well. Officers said that they recognised the importance of a good visit, noting that it generally led to improved behaviour on the wing. From 22 August, visitors taking the voluntary lateral flow test and testing negative were allowed to hug their loved ones at the start and end of this visit, and said that this really improved their experience.

Choices have conducted regular surveys of those visiting men in the prison and data from June and July indicated that 33% of the men who responded had a Purple Visit more than once a month, with 67% reporting one monthly. The IMB survey showed a similar uptake for Purple Visits, with good use also being made of email-a-prisoner and Storybook Dads, though far fewer men knew about or used the prison voicemail scheme. Access to telephones in the living blocks (especially during the periods of extended lockdown) was the greatest cause of dissatisfaction, especially for those men who had been transferred from establishments with in-cell telephones. In-cell provision had been planned for November 2021, but this slipped until March 2022. When introduced it will have a major positive impact on family contact.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

While Covid-19 restrictions seriously impacted resettlement services, so have staff shortages. Over these 12 months, the community rehabilitation company (CRC), Catch22, went from eight staff down to four. In November 2020 the assumption had been that face-to-face meetings with prisoners would restart, but with the return to Stage 4 this did not happen. Instead, men were sent a resettlement assessment questionnaire at their 12-week point. Catch22 also produced and distributed to wings information packs which included a range of letter templates with opening bank accounts and access to benefits prioritised.

This lack of direct interaction may explain the mixed responses to the Board's own resettlement survey. Of those prisoners in their 12-week window who responded, only 57% stated that they had received help from the resettlement team. 61% said they had received advice on accessing universal credit and other benefits, but only 27% reported receiving banking and financial advice. StepChange (a debt advisory service) provided some remote assistance, with their 0800 number added to all men's PINs. By August 2021, Job Centre Plus were still not visiting the prison, but had provided remote access to work coaches for prisoners approaching discharge. The highly regarded pre-release employment workshops were also stopped, but will start again at Stage 1. Notwithstanding these limitations, a report published by HM Inspectorate of Probation in July 2021 graded the 'through the gate' services provided by the Dorset, Devon and Cornwall CRC (of which Channings Wood is a part) as Outstanding.

Accommodation has remained a major concern, despite some relief being provided by the £65 per night emergency funding from the Homelessness Prevention Taskforce. The impact of the change to the new dynamic framework probation model has yet to be felt. Resettlement practitioners expressed concern that under the old system CRC accommodation staff could talk direct to housing providers. From 26 June this function was transferred to probation practitioner accommodation services, so that on-site pre-release staff 'no longer have their hands on the levers'. Potential problems have not yet arisen, as men being released up to September 2021 were supported under the old model, but this is a real concern. The Board's survey indicated that in the three-month period since June, 57% of prisoners who responded had settled accommodation to go to, 39% did not know where they would go, while two stated they would become homeless intentionally. The provision of accommodation on release will remain a high priority for the Board's monitoring.

## The work of the IMB

During the reporting year, members' attendance at the prison was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and from December 2020 until May 2021, few in-person visits were made. During this time members continued to work remotely, dealing with applications, phoning in to segregation reviews and other meetings, and keeping up to date through email and telephone contact. One member worked on the 0800 service.

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	13
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	116
Total number of shifts on the 0800 telephone line	87
Total number of segregation reviews attended	25

### Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	2	3
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	1	3
C	Equality	9	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	8	5
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	18	8
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	3	2
F	Food and kitchens	5	1
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	21	22
H1	Property within this establishment	19	3
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	24	12
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	3	4
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	14	6
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	24	26
K	Transfers	16	3
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	24	4
	Total number of applications	191	104

While working remotely, members continued to deal with applications. The number received through the 0800 service rose from 27 in the previous year to 36.



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