



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Rye Hill

**For reporting year
1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022**

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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

HMP Rye Hill opened in January 2001 and was operated by Group 4 Falck, which became Global Solutions Limited (GSL) in 2004, on a 25-year contract to the Home Office. In May 2008, GSL was bought by G4S, which took over the running of the prison.

The premises are purpose built, with eight residential units, with a certified normal accommodation of 600, an operational capacity of 625 and a maximum capacity of 664. The prison was previously asked to provide an additional 39 operational spaces, bringing it to maximum capacity. This increase has been cancelled and the population dropped to 616 by the end of the reporting year, averaging 620 during the year. However, plans are in place to build two new accommodation blocks to provide an additional 458 category C places; these were originally planned for April 2024 but at the end of the reporting period no start date for the building has been agreed.

The prison is a category B training prison for men, or occasionally transgender prisoners, convicted of a sexual offence. Once the new accommodation is completed it will hold both category B and category C prisoners convicted of a sexual offence.

At the end of the reporting year, the prison held 70 prisoners under life sentences; this is only a small change from the 67 held at the start of the year. The number held on an indeterminate sentence for public protection (IPP) decreased slightly, from 22 in March 2021 to 19 in March 2022.

At the end of the reporting period, there were 405 category B prisoners, 210 category C prisoners and one category D prisoner. The large increase in category C prisoners reported last year has continued; it is believed this is partly due to transfers being slower during the Covid-19 restrictions but may also be caused by a shortage of category C spaces for people convicted of a sexual offence and some category C prisoners may stay at HMP Rye Hill and transfer to the new accommodation once built.

The ethnic breakdown has remained predominantly White, with approximately 81% White, 6% Black, 9% Asian and 4% others.

Healthcare services are provided by sub-contract to a division of G4S called G4S Medical Services but are currently under tender to be transferred to the NHS.

The education provider is Novus.

Catering is provided by Aramark.

Links with the Samaritans are established, together with a Listeners service.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

This report presents the findings of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Rye Hill for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. During this period Covid-19 restrictions have continued with periods of lockdown to control the spread of the virus. These restrictions have had a material impact on the Board's ability to gather information, the Board has therefore tried to cover as much ground as it can in these difficult circumstances, and ministers are aware of these constraints.

The framework of different stages of restrictions implemented by the Ministry of Justice in March 2020 remained in place during the reporting year. This framework had five stages, from Stage 5: full lockdown to Stage 1: prepare for a return to normal operation.

At the start of the reporting year the prison was part way through a nine-week transition from Stage 3 into Stage 2 and actively moving towards a 50/50 employment model for 95% of the prison population; this involved one day on, one day off working. Activities such as the violence elimination team (VET) football league were also restarting.

Plans were worked on during June/July to expand the weekend regime with more structured activities and at the end of July the prison moved fully to Stage 2 with the reintroduction of face-to-face library sessions and the restarting of face-to-face faith groups. Being at Stage 2 also allowed for the opportunity to dine out of cell with others on alternate evenings and the restarting of face-to-face visits.

During August/September focus groups were held with prisoners and staff to plan how best to move to Stage 1 with full employment and four evenings of structured activities per week for the whole prison being planned. The move to Stage 1 happened in early November but by this time cases in the community were rising quickly and on 2 December HMPPS issued a directive that all prisons should return to Stage 3.

During January and February plans were put in place to move back to Stage 2 with 50/50 employment and the return to face-to-face education and faith services. This Stage 2 regime was again in place by the end of the reporting period with plans developed for a return to Stage 1.

The opening up of the regime was facilitated by the much wider accessibility of testing, with staff taking daily lateral flow tests (LFTs), reduced to three times a week at the end of the reporting period, and the possibility of testing all prisoners on a unit when a case was identified, allowing the isolation of non-symptomatic sufferers and reducing transmission.

Another key factor allowing the easing of restrictions was the vaccination programme with 554 prisoners with one vaccination, 549 with two and 503 with a third booster by the end of the reporting period. Seventy-four prisoners declined to be vaccinated. These numbers do change as people transfer in and out of the prison, but additional vaccination clinics are held if new arrivals, or previous decliners, agree to further vaccination. Although cases continue to be found there has been no serious illness inside the prison in recent months and no prisoners hospitalised due to Covid-19.

In order to try and maintain the open regime for most prisoners in spite of continuing cases, when a prisoner tests positive they are isolated in their cell with a specific daily period when they can take a shower and have 30 minutes' exercise time on their own or with other prisoners testing positive on the same unit. Staff who test positive are not allowed to return to work until they test negative even if this exceeds the 10-day period set for isolation in the community.

Although there have been many changes to the regime those prisoners spoken to by the IMB, including a sample of older prisoners, have stated they have felt safe and appreciated the level of information provided about plans for the prison and about what was happening in the community. The reduction across all categories of violence, use of force and self-harm underpins the statements from prisoners that the environment was safe.

The Board enjoys an excellent working relationship with the Director, the Deputy Director and other members of the senior management team (SMT) and appreciates the open, honest, cooperative, and transparent way in which they interact with the Board. In particular, the Board wishes to highlight the excellent work done by the SMT involving the development of an innovative communication strategy which ensured prisoners and staff were kept fully informed during the unprecedented pandemic. This method of ensuring the same message to everyone contributed to the environment remaining safe and secure. The Daily Vlog (an update transmitted to every cell other than the care and separation unit) has become a feature of life for prisoners held at Rye Hill and now forms one of the pillars of communication to all prisoners. The critical role played by the staff in maintaining a calm atmosphere within the prison should also be recognised.

3.2 Main Judgements

How safe is the prison?

The Board considers the prison to be a safe environment for prisoners, and this is supported by conversations with prisoners including the older population (see section 4). The reduced level of violence and self-harm also supports this conclusion (see sections 4.2 and 4.3).

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

The Board considers that the treatment received by prisoners has been fair and humane although there have been periods of restriction due to Covid-19 cases. A lot of effort has been expended to keep the prisoners involved with, and informed about, the regime changes and the need for them (see section 5).

The Board also wishes to recognise the efforts of all who are involved in managing the care and separation unit (CSU). The number housed there remains consistently low with the vast majority staying for only a very short time.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

The Board considers that the health of prisoners was adequately provided for with access to healthcare for most prisoners, most of the time. The flexible vaccination programme was a key tool in preventing serious illness. However, the Board has

concerns about the time being taken to action the change in primary healthcare supplier as a delay may impact staff recruitment and motivation (see section 6.2).

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

The Board considers the delivery of programmes to have been flexible, within the restrictions, allowing a reasonable number of prisoners to complete their sentence plan requirement, but continues to have concerns about access to vocational training and higher education for those prisoners who are not suitable for programmes (see section 7.1). It is pleasing to see some of the category C prisoners who have not been able to transfer have been given a parole-directed release, but it is still a concern that though the prison has a substantial number of releases it is not part of the estate considered as needing specific 'through the gate' resources (see section 7.5).

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

Progress for the IPP cohort remains a concern. This issue not only impacts Rye Hill, but the whole prison estate. Prisoners subject to this sentence often present major challenges in their management making it even harder for them to progress.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

The difficulties surrounding appropriate arrangements for end-of-life care and compassionate release, imposed by current HMPPS facilities and procedures, impact HMP Rye Hill disproportionately because of the higher than average age profile of the prisoners held. The current procedures do not seem to facilitate humane treatment of these prisoners.

The Board remains concerned that the stated preparation for release path of staged movements from category B to category C and then to a local or category D prison, as defined by HMPPS, represents a particular problem for prisoners convicted of sexual offences and frequently does not seem to happen in practice leaving them to be released from an establishment with no specialist 'through the gate' support.

There does not seem to be a process for managing the impact on prisoners of changes to the rules on in-possession property with items being allowed, then disallowed with no explanation or transition period leading to unfairness especially for those prisoners who have recently acquired withdrawn items.

TO THE DIRECTOR

Based on comments from staff members, refresher training for key workers would be valuable once regimes are fully reopened.

Prisoners have asked for a specific appeal form concerning recategorisation decisions (rather than using a Comp1) and the Board considers this would be a useful upgrade to the process.

3.4 Progress since the last report

The continuation of Covid-19 restrictions has made it hard to implement improvements, however several initiatives have been completed or are underway:

- A new gatehouse has been built providing an automated key issuance system.
- A media hub has been opened to allow the restarting of the production of the *Rye Hill Times*, a newspaper produced by the prisoners themselves. This facility will also allow other communication projects in the future.
- An education improvement plan has been agreed and tasks are now being actioned.

If the planned expansion building work goes ahead this is planned to include improvements in work locations, healthcare, and multi-faith facilities.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

The number of transfers in increased from the last reporting year with incoming prisoners tested and initially isolated. Inductions occurred on the unit, with each group of incoming prisoners being considered a separate cohort. Incoming prisoners were allocated a key worker although this process was taking longer than pre-Covid with 78 prisoners without a nominated key worker in October 2021; this number had been reduced to zero by March 2022 by making use of non-residential staff as part of the key workers team.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

At the end of the reporting period there were three open ACCTs, down from the 10 at the start of the period. The policy remained that an ACCT was opened whenever a prisoner reported thoughts of self-harm or depression, not just after an act of self-harm. The reduction in ACCTs was also mirrored by the reduction in actual acts of self-harm down from 405 to 240 for the year; though it should be noted that again three prisoners accounted for 50% of these incidents. There has been a recent change to the management of razors in the prison with blades being issued in the morning and collected in the evening as the most common cause of self-harm is cutting with a razor blade. It is hoped this change may reduce further actual acts of self-harm.

There were three deaths in custody during the period, all from non-Covid-19 related natural causes. There remain seven prisoners with cancer diagnoses, including two who are seriously ill and not able to be active. Within the period, applications for compassionate release have been made on behalf of at least three prisoners but none have so far been granted. With the population at HMP Rye Hill having a higher percentage of older and frailer prisoners (40% aged over 50 and 18.5% aged over 60) than the overall estate, the difficulty of appropriate arrangements for end-of-life care and compassionate release, represented by current HMPPS facilities and procedures, impacts HMP Rye Hill disproportionately.

The prisoners had access to the Samaritans via a free call on the in-cell phone, but in-cell Listener services had not restarted. Socially-distanced peer group support via PEN and ASSIST continued on the units other than for positive Covid-19 cases who were isolated.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Violent incidents continued to be low, averaging three a month with a spike of 10 in October 2021; towards the end of the reporting period incidents were as low as one per month. Most of these were minor pushing/fights and only four serious assaults have been recorded during the year. A lot of the incidents in the previous reporting year were due to conflict between prisoners sharing double cells and extra measures were successfully put in place to help reduce this, but similar conflicts have risen again so the provisions put in place last year are being reviewed.

The prison continues its reward scheme for 100 consecutive days free of violence, and a number of units have actually achieved over 100 violence-free days during the year.

4.4 Use of force

The number of incidents of use of force had again reduced to less than 10 a month in 2021 and only four a month in the first quarter of 2022. This is down from approximately 17 per month last year. This reduction mirrors the reduction in violent incidents. All use of force incidents are recorded on body worn cameras and are reviewed by a management committee. Any prisoner on whom force has been used is also seen by healthcare.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

There was a spike in positive results for mandatory drug tests (MDT) reported in December 2021 but on average over the year positive results remained low with the main concern being trading in prescribed opiate painkillers and occasional finds of Spice on incoming paperwork or clothing.

5. Fair and humane treatment

The Covid-19 restrictions on the regime have continued to reduce the time out of cell and productive activities hours for most prisoners however, in spite of varying numbers of staff being forced to isolate following positive tests, we are not aware of any occasions when the regime has been curtailed beyond the target minimum of a shower and 30 minutes' exercise a day. When interviewed, prisoners have in the main been understanding of the need for restrictions and have appreciated the efforts the prison has made to keep them informed.

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

There has been a gradual increase in activities during the reporting period with prisoners allowed to dine with others on Fridays and weekends on a scheduled rota to ensure some access for all.

There have been no reported difficulties with food supplies or access to the CMS terminals used to order meals and canteen items, and only one food-related application was received by the IMB during this period. A sample of prisoners were asked about the food quality and 76% said it was good or very good.

Prisoners have been allowed to receive parcels from family on nominated months and to make purchases from the approved supplier list, although it has taken longer for purchases to be distributed, partly due to increased volumes and availability of staff; nine IMB applications were received about property within the establishment including a number about this issue.

5.2 Segregation

The number spending time in the CSU remains low (on average 10 prisoners a month) and for most the length of stay is only a few days. There is now only one long-stay prisoner in the CSU (down from three last year) who had been in the CSU for 122 days at the end of the reporting period; this prisoner was mentioned in last year's report as he was moved from a secure hospital back to the prison estate and, in spite of managing periods on normal location, continues to exhibit challenging behaviours and have difficulties adapting to the standard regime on the unit.

5.3 Staff-prisoner relationships, key workers

The Daily Vlog shown over the in-house TV channel, introduced during the original lockdown, continues, and is valued by the prisoners as both a source of information on what is happening and being planned in the prison and also what is happening in the community. This method of communication has been so successful that a permanent media hub has now been established and is due to open shortly, staffed by prisoners.

As part of the planning to move back to Stage 1, there is a prisoner-led group assisting in planning a new Challenge2Change initiative to encourage prisoners to return to more exercise and healthier eating after the lockdown period. This will include structured games involving teams of prisoners and staff and prizes for challenges between different units.

Key worker sessions have restarted with each key worker having eight prisoners to meet with. Vulnerable prisoners and those on ACCTs are seen weekly but for others

meetings may only be once a month. Once the prison moves back to Stage 1 it is hoped the key worker scheme will return to its pre-Covid regularity.

Although there is a review of the notes entered on P-NOMIS after each session and a useful 'crib-sheet' on topics that should be raised there is no continuing training for key workers and several of the current key workers have only had the training included in their initial training course (ITC) when qualifying as a prison custody officer. As the scheme has had to be curtailed for a period there is some concern that refresher training may be needed.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The bimonthly equality action team (EAT) meetings and regular forums for protected characteristics have only returned on a sporadic basis with meetings often cancelled.

The IMB has only received five applications on equality issues, down from nine last year, but the number of discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) received by the prison increased from 68 in 2020 to 106 in this reporting period; though it should be noted one prisoner submitted 12 of these. Last year's report expressed a concern as only 18 of the 68 DIRFs were logged and four upheld but this year 62 were logged and 22 upheld. The majority of DIRFs were race-related complaints with only 14 concerning discrimination against other protected characteristics. It is not clear whether the increase in DIRFs is due to more incidents or just a greater willingness of prisoners to complain; in our interaction with prisoners there has not been an increase in complaints/comments about discrimination.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Access to face-to-face services has been variable during the reporting period. While the prison has been at Stage 2 face-to-face socially distanced services have been available for a proportion of the population with a schedule ensuring equal access over the month. TV-based recorded services have continued for those unable to attend in person. Officiants from faiths with smaller numbers of followers such as Buddhism, Paganism and Sikhism have also recorded services and by July the officiants had started to plan visits to the prison although attendance was still not always possible.

Chaplaincy staff have been available for general and bereavement counselling and organised memorial events such as lighting a candle for a loved one. Streaming of funeral services has also been arranged on occasion for services for a close relative.

Faith days continue to be observed with followers allowed a day off on key dates.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The changeover to the new incentives policy has been fully implemented and most prisoners remain at one of the two enhanced levels (582 of 616 at the end of the period). There has been an average of nine prisoners at the lowest Incentives scheme level (often called basic) with one month as few as three and never more than 13. It is also pleasing to note that the positive mentions under the scheme outnumber the negative challenge conversations by 135 to 64 over the year.

5.7 Complaints

The number of COMP1 complaints actually dropped slightly from the previous reporting period with an average of 108 per month down from 140 per month. This figure was also lower than the previous year's pre-Covid figure of 117 per month. The number of confidential COMP2 complaints was also very low with only 26 received over the whole period.

IMB received very few applications concerning complaint handling with the previously-introduced system of senior manager oversight of any complaints near due date seeming to work to ensure responses are timely. There were some issues raised by prisoners about complaints being returned without a response due to being deemed 'a request' not a complaint; these were not logged, and the prisoner advised to use the unit application process.

5.8 Property

There were only 11 IMB applications received concerning property and none of these were about loss of property on transfer, a previously regular problem. A number of these applications concerned changes to the HMPPS rules on in-possession items such as gaming consoles and their accessories; although a notice to prisoners was issued about the changes there remained some confusion and when raised by the IMB the prison responded by reissuing a clarified notice. It does appear that technology is moving a lot faster than HMPPS's response and this may lead to unfairness with prisoners being allowed to purchase an item then having it withdrawn almost immediately with no opportunity to reclaim the cost.

6. Health and wellbeing

There have been a number of periods when there have been no detected cases of Covid-19 in the prison but with the reinstatement of face-to-face visits and the opening of the regime there continues to be a small number of cases being identified. There is a regular testing regime for staff (initially a daily LFT and weekly PCR, now reduced to a LFT three times a week) but no routine testing for prisoners, so when a prisoner shows symptoms and tests positive a trace exercise is carried out and other prisoners who have been in contact are tested, often finding further asymptomatic cases. The affected prisoners are isolated in their cells and have a regime on their own or with other positive prisoners on the unit until retesting at day 5/6. They are kept on the same isolation regime until they test negative.

These repeated small outbreaks represent a challenge to opening the regime and put extra pressure on staffing but seem inevitable until cases in the community reduce drastically.

6.1 Healthcare general

Another impact of the older population is bed-watches, with an average of 19 days of bed-watches a month but a peak of 33 in October 2021. These put more pressure on staffing at a time when Covid-19 isolation requirements also impact staff numbers. Some of the prisoners on bed-watch are so frail they have a delayed return to the prison while an appropriate care package can be put in place. As mentioned elsewhere (see section 4.2) it remains a concern to the IMB that there seems little provision in the HMPPS estate for these frail/end of life prisoners.

6.2 Physical healthcare

The primary healthcare team is currently provided by G4S medical services; however a tender has been issued for these services to be taken over by the NHS. It was initially expected this change would occur in April 2022, but we understand this date has been put back and is now likely to be by October 2022. Although there will be provision for the transfer under TUPE of staff as part of the handover, there remain concerns that recruiting staff has been difficult for some time and any vacancies occurring now may not be filled until after the new provider is in place. Of especial concern is the support for long-term conditions such as diabetes, as the specialist nurse left some time ago and the current HMP Rye Hill population has an unexpectedly high rate of diabetes of 16%, which is much higher than the age-adjusted average of 10.4% in the general population.

The number of patients waiting longer than the target 18 weeks for treatment has increased from 28 to 49 during the reporting period. This is unfortunate, as the trend had been a decrease in numbers, but is not out of line with the current situation in the community.

The number of face-to-face appointments has increased during the period with clinics being held for GP, nurse triage, opticians, dentist, blood tests, podiatry, pain management and long-term conditions review. While the small outbreaks continue there will still be a few prisoners with no access to face-to-face services at any point in time but the prisoners choosing not to attend (DNA) figures are low with only seven not attending in over 1,995 appointments, including welfare checks, physical and mental health care sessions, booked in March 2022.

A large number of outpatient hospital appointments continue to be needed due to the older population, with up to 80 a month being booked and an average of 68 escorts to hospital occurring per month. The number of appointments being cancelled continues to be a concern with an average of 17 a month (including a peak of 29 in June 2021) but the reasons for cancellation vary and include the prisoner refusing to attend; only an average of two cancellations per month are by the prison.

6.3 Mental health

The primary care mental health (PCMH) nurses are part of the healthcare provision covered by the tender mentioned above so subject to the same future uncertainty. Psychiatry and in-reach services have always been provided by the Northamptonshire NHS Foundation Trust so it is not anticipated these will change. Appointments for both PCMH and in-reach have continued during the reporting year with 165 and 159 appointments, respectively, booked in March 2022 with no non-attendance noted and only 11 prisoners in total having no access to their appointments due to factors such as need for self isolation. The IMB has received no applications concerning access to mental health services.

6.4 Social care

Access to social care from the outside provider continued for six prisoners; some of the prisoners require four care periods a day but most have fewer. It is noted that the carers remain in the prison between care periods but do not have any other duties; presumably because of the contract arrangements with the outside provider, but this does seem a waste of resources.

There have been a few requests for care needs assessments in the reporting period, however at the moment these are taking up to 15 weeks to be completed.

6.5 Exercise, regime

The regime has varied during the year depending on both the HMPPS framework stage (see section 3) and the number of prisoners testing positive on a unit. At all times all prisoners have had access to a shower and at least 30 minutes of exercise time and 30 minutes of housekeeping time. When off-unit work or activities have not been possible the gym staff have led exercise sessions on the outside exercise yard for individual units. Access to other out of cell activities has depended on the specific regime but there have also been periods where a single unit with a high number of cases has been put into 'lockdown' running a Stage 3 regime when the rest of the prison has remained at Stage 2.

Positive cases in staff necessitating isolation have also put pressure on the regime, with isolated days when the gym or library sessions have had to be cancelled in order to resource the main regime and/or bed-watches.

It is recognised that a lot of prisoners were taking very limited exercise during periods of Stage 4 and Stage 3 regime and therefore a peer-led initiative is in planning called Challenge2Change where prisoners and staff will compete in teams to achieve challenges set to improve physical and mental wellbeing. As the prison returns to Stage 1 activities such as the walking group for older prisoners and the VET football league have also restarted.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Face-to-face drug and alcohol recovery team (DART) services were relaunched once the prison moved to Stage 2. At the end of the reporting period there were 152 prisoners making some use of DART services and plans were in place to have a staff education event to remind staff about the services and how to refer prisoners.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

After some difficulties in the initial lockdown period the education services restarted face-to-face attendance once the prison moved to Stage 2; however there is a continuing issue of low attendance at education sessions with a typical attendance of only 75% of prisoners who were allocated to the course, even though the allocated number is often less than the capacity. The IMB was unable to get any specific information about why this is occurring although it does appear that some prisoners are explicitly choosing to stay in their cells or go to the gym rather than education. Attendance figures are reported daily, and work is underway to try and understand the reasons for, and correct, this trend but unfortunately the picture seems to have worsened from around 80% in September to the end of reporting period figure of 75%.

Education remains an area of concern for IMB as it is an important vehicle for lower risk prisoners, not eligible for programmes, to demonstrate their commitment to their sentence plans and a reduction in their risk profile for future parole hearings. An improvement plan was agreed in September 2021 but as of the end of the reporting period the objectives concerning vocational training and higher education have not been met although there has been progress in the focus area of courses on literacy and numeracy which, although important, may not motivate prisoners to be involved.

Library visits have been possible once the prison returned to Stage 2 but books can also be ordered for delivery to the unit via a library box for those prisoners in isolation.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Once the prison moved to Stage 2 attendance at workshops restarted on a 50/50 basis to allow social distancing but ensure all prisoners could have some productive activity. At the end of the reporting period plans are in place to return to full-time working. A lot of effort was made to explain the impact of the return to work on a 50/50 basis as it did mean a change of job for some prisoners; each prisoner was told in person what their new job assignment and hours would be and in the main the process of returning to work went smoothly.

Although the vocational training in the kitchen continued, work-related courses such as horticulture are only just restarting.

7.3 Offender management, progression

There was an average of 73 recategorisation reviews a month with 11 (15%) of prisoners being awarded their category C status; this was an increase from 11% last year, partly caused by the new HMPPS digital tool for assessing recategorisations. This tool was developed across the estate and is not specific to prisoners convicted of a sexual offence, and there are concerns expressed by staff that it may not assess the risk of this class of prisoner on the same basis as the old system.

Despite the higher success rate, about 10% of the prisoners who were declined recategorisation still appealed and about 1% were successful. The appeal process appears to work well but is via submission of a COMP1 complaint, and a specific appeal form would be welcomed by prisoners.

Programmes were held throughout the reporting period with 25 prisoners completing Horizon, for medium risk prisoners, and 29 completing other behavioural programmes such as Building Better Relationships. During the period there were times when group sessions had to be scaled back to smaller groups or 1:1 sessions around Covid-19 restrictions. At the end of the reporting period group programmes are again running and a Kaizen course for high-risk prisoners is also now available.

There are 144 prisoners at HMP Rye Hill currently on the waiting list for a programme place and this is expected to increase as more transfers in occur.

7.4 Family contact

Face-to-face social visits have been held for most of the reporting period. There are up to 20 slots available on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday with a further 126 slots a week via the video call system (delivered by Purple Visits). Saturdays are the most popular days and the only day when all slots may be taken; overall utilisation is 40-50% of available slots.

During the restrictions there were HMPPS mandated rules on physical contact with children – if the child was under 11 years old the prisoner could hug them, if over 11 they could not. This seemed very arbitrary and was especially unfair for families with a child in both categories.

Only about a third of prisoners at HMP Rye Hill have contact with family and significant others. This may be lower than average due to the nature of their offences. There is a waiting list of prisoners who would like to use the official National Association of Prison Visitors scheme managed via the chaplaincy but there are recruitment problems for volunteers and only one prisoner currently has an allocated visitor.

7.5 Resettlement planning

There have been 49 releases direct from Rye Hill during the period, a big increase on 31 last year and 20 the year before. This increase in releases may have been partly due to the difficulty in transferring category C prisoners around the estate and the reluctance of local prisons to take people convicted of a sexual offence. The Board remains concerned that the stated preparation for release path defined by HMPPS just does not seem to be possible in practice.

It is however noted that some of the increase in releases are for prisoners who have held their category C status for a while and the Parole Board seems to have moved away from requiring a 'period of testing under category C conditions' before they will direct a release. With the large number of successful recategorisations and the difficulty of finding appropriate places in the category C estate it is reassuring that these prisoners are not being held back for a circumstance they have no control over.

The work of the IMB

Board meetings returned to being held in person in the prison in May 2021 although Zoom was still used for some working group meetings.

One induction member left during the year, and another has just started and, very sadly, one experienced member died after a short illness. Further recruitment campaigns have had no applicants. This limitation on numbers has meant the Board has had to focus on essential duties only.

There have been periods when in-person visits to the prison have only been possible to the administration areas and no face-to-face meetings with prisoners were possible, although during these times the Board could speak to most prisoners via the in-cell telephones.

Most applications are now again being received on paper; although access to the 0800 number remains it has little use. The number of applications received was lower than last year, though the distribution of topics remains largely similar with the only noted reduction in category J, general prisoner issues/concerns, which last year mostly concerned the lockdown regime.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8, including 4 members in induction
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7, including 4 in induction
Total number of visits to the establishment	243
Total number of segregation reviews attended	37

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	14	9
B	Discipline, including adjudications, ISP, sanctions	6	3
C	Equality	9	5
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	4	5
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	18	10
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	8	5
F	Food and kitchens	1	1
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	13	15
H1	Property within this establishment	16	10
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	0	1
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	1	2
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	24	24
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	49	21
K	Transfers	2	1
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	12	11
	Total number of applications	169	116

NB: Some of the applications covered more than one category area; therefore the category totals exceed the overall total number of applications.



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