

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

**For reporting year  
1 June 2021 – 31 May 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 Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

## **2. Description of the establishment**

HMP Woodhill is a complex prison serving multiple functions that is part of the long-term and high-security estate (LTHSE). The prison re-rolled to become a category B long-term training prison in late 2019, but the outbreak of Covid-19 and staff shortages has prevented many of the changes needed to implement fully the provision of services for this type of prisoner. This remained true for the whole of the reporting year. As the national Covid-19 restrictions loosened, local staffing shortages meant there was little real change in the regime for prisoners.

The prison accommodates primarily category B male prisoners serving sentences of four or more years. It also holds a small number of category A prisoners, mainly on remand and attending trial. In addition, Woodhill has a close supervision centre (CSC), a separation centre and a discrete unit (see below). The perimeter security is category A level, as is part of the interior of the site.

The main prisoner accommodation is made up of five house units, and there is a healthcare inpatient facility and a segregation unit. House units 1–4 are each divided into two wings, A and B. Each wing holds 60 prisoners. House unit 5 holds 90. Almost all prisoners occupy single cells.

For most of the reporting year, one of the wings (4B) has been closed due to staff shortages. In April 2022 a decision was taken to reopen 4B but close house unit 5 in order to maintain staffing levels across the prison. Even with this closure the prison often is running with around 50% of the required staffing.

House unit 6 has two CSC units, which are administered and managed under a national strategy through the security directorate. These units hold some of the most challenging prisoners in the prison system, requiring demanding efforts to make progress in rehabilitation. They can hold a maximum of 10 prisoners each. The prisoners spend almost all of their time in the house unit.

House unit 6 also contains a separation centre, to hold extremist prisoners away from the general population, and a small discrete unit for other prisoners who need to be held away from those on normal location. The units on house unit 6 are self-contained, with their own gym, visits areas and other facilities. One small area of house unit 6 remained unused throughout the year.

The operational capacity of Woodhill when all accommodation is in use will be 614 but for this reporting year it varied between 450 and 480 because of the temporary closures of units.

There has been a gradual increase in the number of men with less than 30 months to serve, from 139 in October 2021 to 161 in March 2022, and from January 2022 to

March 2022 there has been a steady increase in the number of men with less than three months to serve. The IMB is concerned that the systems and services to support these men approaching their release date are not in place, especially for men being released into other areas as they do not have easy access to their probation officer. Discharges are mainly to other prisons with direct discharge into the community running at single figures each month. Fifty percent of all prisoners are from the south central region with 25% from London and 25% from the south west region.

### **3. Executive summary**

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

The IMB is concerned that a restrictive regime that was implemented nationally, in response to the risk to life from the Covid-19 pandemic, is at risk of becoming the norm due to the lack of staffing across the prison. This regime has had a significant detrimental effect on prisoners' mental health and wellbeing and is, in our opinion, the single biggest challenge facing the Prison Service.

The reporting year was dominated by the restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. For the first part of the reporting year, prisoners were confined to their cells for 23 hours a day, being allowed out only for exercise and showers. Visits, religious services, education and the gym were all stopped. Prisoners were kept in small groups and not allowed to mix, to reduce the chance of transmission of the virus.

The prison implemented national policy to reduce the spread of the virus, including isolation measures for all transferees to Woodhill which helped protect the resident population. An outbreak was declared at Woodhill from late December 2021 to February 2022.

Staffing levels and staffing confidence are a significant concern to the IMB because of their impact on the delivery of the regime. Projections show that Woodhill will continue to lose staff faster than can be recruited for the foreseeable future, with the attrition rate running at nine per month, expected to rise to 11 per month over the next two months. At the time of writing the prison is relying on staff redeployed from other prisons to maintain an often severely reduced regime. The IMB is concerned that this is not a solution which supports the fair and humane treatment of prisoners, nor does it allow prisoners to progress toward rehabilitation. Discussions are ongoing at a senior level in the Prison Service over whether some accommodation can be closed.

As the evidence in this report shows staffing levels impact on every aspect of a prisoners life, across all four aspects covered in this report: safety – fewer cell searches; fair and humane treatment – time out of cell; health and wellbeing – cancelled appointments; progression – access to work and education.

There was some relaxation of the restrictions from the autumn of 2021; visits restarted and time out of cell was increased to four hours a day. Communal worship restarted in April 2022. However the IMB is concerned that the majority of men spend much of their time either locked in their cells or unlocked on the wings with little purposeful occupation. This in turn leads to frustration and aggression building up. Education continued to provide in-cell education, and a wider allocation of televisions, DVD and games loans, and activity packs; however the men say these are inadequate for their needs and that they need more structured activity

The levels of violence remain high across the prison. At the end of the year assessment, care in custody and teamwork documents (ACCTs) were open for 5-7% of prisoners.

During the reporting year the prison IT system was updated, giving timely access to information. This has improved productivity for both staff and Board members.

The preparation of this report has been difficult due to the combination of Covid-19 restrictions and the staffing shortages. The assessments made are based on observation throughout the reporting year and information obtained from the prison where it was available. However, it has not always been possible to triangulate the evidence to substantiate our observations as well as we would have hoped. Thanks are due to prison staff for providing us with information despite the difficulties they faced.

Note that the statistics quoted in the report may refer to the prison's reporting year, which runs from April to March, rather than the Board's reporting year, and to reduce the burden on the prison the demography statistics have been taken from the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) report of the inspection in early June 2022.

### **3.2 Main judgements**

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

The Board judges that the prison requires improvement due to:

- a) the high levels of all types of violence
- b) the high proportion of inexperienced staff, which results in delicate situations being mishandled, inadequate knowledge of rules and processes, and safety being compromised
- c) the high number of redeployed staff who, whilst bringing much-needed experience, often do not know the prisoners, their triggers and the best way to approach them

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

The Board judges that prisoners are mainly treated humanely, despite:

- a) too many prisoners being held in segregation for long periods. There appears to be a lack of options across the Prison Service to support these men.
- b) continuing problems with moving prisoners' property, principally by prisons transferring property to Woodhill
- c) the impact of the Covid regime and on going staffing restrictions on prisoners' wellbeing, essential though they may have been to protect their physical health

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

The Board judges that the healthcare services operated well, despite:

- a) the severe difficulties caused by the Covid-19 restrictions during much of the year
- b) the high level of cancellations of appointments due to lack of prison staff
- c) the disruption caused by relocating prisoners partway through a hospital-based treatment pathway, resulting in delays with the new healthcare provider

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

The Board judges that progression has been inadequate because:

- a) the case workers based in the prison have too high case loads to be effective.
- b) there are too few offending behaviour programmes to progress prisoners towards parole release
- c) Covid-19 restrictions meant that education and library provision was curtailed
- d) social visits cannot take place at weekends, limiting contact with family, particularly for working families
- e) there are too few work placements to provide men with meaningful activity

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

#### **TO THE MINISTER**

- a) To work with colleagues across government departments to develop a meaningful plan for the recruitment and retention of prison staff.
- b) To review the funding provided to prisons for food in the light of the current rise in the cost of living.

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

- a) To review the impact of the current staffing levels on prisoners' lives and develop innovative responses to mitigate these.
- b) To increase the recruitment and retention of uniformed and non-uniformed staff.
- c) To redesign the property system, bringing it in line with 21<sup>st</sup> century distribution practices.

#### **TO THE GOVERNOR**

- a) To continue to expand the capacity of education and work placements at HMP Woodhill.
- b) To continue to support the development of operational staff to increase confidence and consistency of behaviour.
- c) To work with operational staff to stabilise the amount of predictable time prisoners have out of cell.



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

The Board's report for 2020/21 included requests for improvements to the following areas, and the resulting action has been taken :

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

- a) To ask the minister to work with ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that delays in transferring prisoners to secure mental health facilities are reduced – no progress.
- b) To review the per-day funding allocation for food and to ensure that prisoners can access, for example, five portions of fruit and vegetables per day, in line with current Department of Health and Social Care guidance – limited progress.

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

- a) To increase the number of specialist units to cater for prisoners now kept in long-term segregation – no progress.
- b) To review and reform the property system to reduce delays in transportation, inconsistencies in entitlements and reduce losses – no progress.
- c) To ensure sufficient funding for works and maintenance – limited progress.
- d) To increase efforts to recruit and retain uniformed staff – deterioration of situation.

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

- a) To continue to work with the Prison Service to reduce the number and length of stay of prisoners placed in segregation – some progress although a small number of long-term prisoners remain.
- b) To ensure that appropriate offending behaviour programmes are reinstituted as early as possible to support the progression of prisoners – limited progress.
- c) To expand work and education opportunities to a level where all those seeking work can be supported and ensure that education opportunities at a range of entry levels are available to all – limited progress.

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

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

Staff shortages have led to officers from reception being redeployed on wings throughout the year. This has led to many arrivals being located onto residential units without their property. There have been improvements more recently in reuniting prisoners and property but there were delays of two weeks or more during the year. During rota visits reception staff have reported frustration in not being able to deliver a better service and feel the service is reactive and runs on the goodwill of a small number of staff. Rota visits and applications from prisoners support this view.

In February of this reporting year a cohort of 11 prisoners arriving at HMP Woodhill on the same day were tracked for the first eight weeks of their stay, to better understand their journey through the prison system. All said that their journey to Woodhill was fine, and a hot meal was provided on arrival. All experienced delays in receiving their property, either because it was coming from another location or had been ordered whilst at another location, but had not been received, or their medicines remained in reception. In general, all prisoners spoke well of their experiences in the first few days when they were isolating with the cohort they arrived with. As time passed, this cohort of men seemed less willing to engage in this study but those who did said that the prison was slow to organise their PIN credit and slow to respond to complaints, which also seemed to get 'lost'. The other learning point was the concern over the lack of activities and work available to them and the attendant ability to earn money.

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

There was one death in custody on 29 August 2021, which whilst unexpected appeared to be from natural causes. At the time of writing an inquest is yet to be held.

Evidence from rota visits indicate that ACCT documents are by and large up to date although the quality of the comments and interactions with the men varies widely, with some comments showing a clear understanding and concern for the men in care whilst others can best be described as 'satisfying' the requirements to fill in the paperwork.

The number of ACCTs as a proportion of the prison population started the year at 2% but was persistently between 5% and 7% in the last four months of the reporting year. Frustration with the regime has been reported in other contexts so it is not surprising, as the rest of the UK emerged from a prolonged period of social restrictions, that the prisoners at Woodhill became increasingly frustrated at the slow pace of change and the continued restrictions to their regime, and resorted to self harm as well as violence as a way of managing their frustrations.

Month (end date)	Roll	ACCTs	% of population on ACCTs	Constant supervision
June	487	11	2.26	1
July	496	21	4.23	4
Aug	494	23	4.66	4
Sept	503	21	4.17	4
Oct	496	35	7.06	4
Nov	487	28	5.75	4
Dec	469	21	4.48	4
Jan	490	15	3.06	3
Feb	504	29	5.75	3
March	499	28	5.61	4
April	487	34	6.98	1
May	503	32	6.36	1

Cell cards identifying the men in different cells have been poorly maintained this year, with one or two notable wing exceptions. This is particularly important with many inexperienced staff and an important safety issue in an emergency if men in individual cells cannot be quickly identified. Given the reduced throughput of prisoners this year this is especially disappointing and indicative of a system that needs improvement.

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

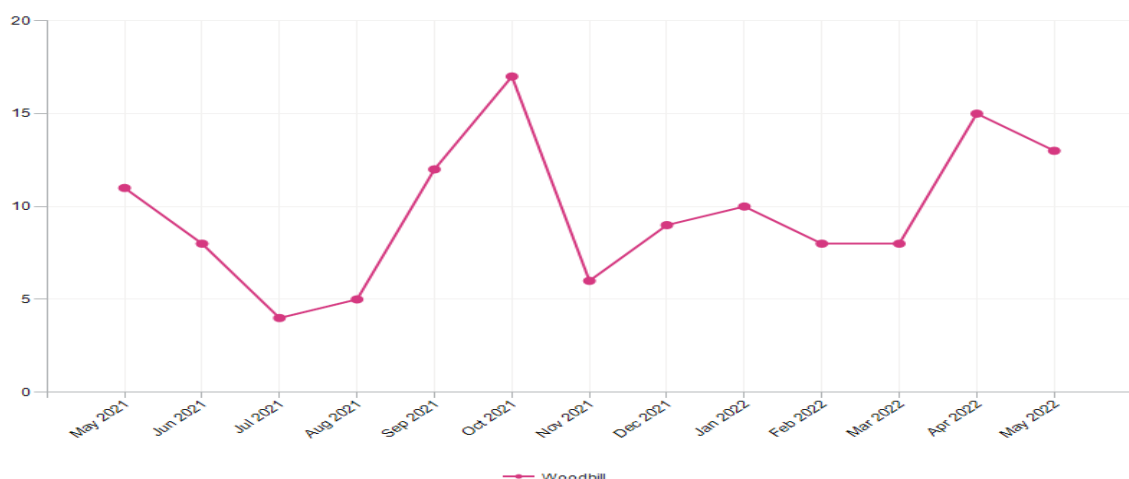
A big concern for all this year has been the shortage of staff. At the time of writing Woodhill is considered to be in the top three prisons most affected by staffing gaps. The impact on the prisoners has been serious and detrimental. Evidence from speaking with prisoners has shown that whilst they understand the difficulties, the way they are treated by officers and the information they get from the prison is at the heart of much of the self-harm and violence. Examples included experiencing tensions because of the perception of 'broken promises', short notice of 'lock up', and too few officers to answer cell bells and on some occasions to unlock a cell in an emergency.

The number of prisoners who are self isolating or who ask not to be unlocked remains high. Reasons given are usually about staying out of trouble prior to release or a parole hearing although feeling unsafe due to religious beliefs and having debts also featured in discussion with these prisoners. Encouragingly these prisoners are kept on the prison radar and discussed at weekly meetings, however reintegrating these prisoners appears to be less successful.

Levels of violence both against officers and other prisoners have remained high for much of the year.



### Prisoner on prisoner assaults



#### 4.4 Use of force

Monthly meetings continue to monitor use of force and learn lessons from incidents that have occurred. Analysis of the reasons shows that refusing to follow a lawful order (to locate to the cell) is the most common reason for the use of force. The mix of prisoners serving long sentences who have been at other establishments and know how the system works and inexperienced officers and supervisors are possible reasons for the apparently high levels of the use of force as such situations escalate quickly. During rota visits prisoners report their frustration at the inexperienced staff who do not get to know them or deal with their basic enquiries and complaints. The lack of meaningful activity and the ability to earn a wage has also been cited by prisoners as a reason for their frustration and their refusal to locate when asked and is in small measure a way of them taking back some control.

It is not clear why the number of incidents (33 - 90) or the number of prisoners involved (24 - 56) varies so greatly month on month.

Month	No. of incidents	No. of prisoners involved	Officers attending outside hospital	Prisoners allocated to special accommodation
June 2021	33	24	7	0
July 2021	66	41	4	0
Aug 2021	43	30	5	0
Sept 2021	56	41	7	3
Oct 2021	71	50	5	7
Nov 2021	65	51	0	1
Dec 2021	74	51	1	2
Jan 2022	34	26	3	2
Feb 2022	43	32	1	1
March 2022	52	39	0	3
April 2022	58	41	3	5
May 2022	90	56	2	4

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

The introduction of window bars in some of the residential units reported last year had a positive impact in preventing the acquisition of illicit items by prisoners. In addition the absence of visitors during much of the reporting year and the relatively low numbers of prisoners coming into the prison all meant that the levels of illicit items being brought into prison has declined. However, Spice remains a problem within the prison, as does the brewing and consumption of hooch, , of which there were 21 - 37 finds per month over the last quarter. It is a credit to the prison that much of this is found before it is distributed and consumed, with relatively few prisoners being found under the influence or needing medical attention as a result of the consumption. Substance misuse incidents are reported to the addictions team. Mandatory drug testing was suspended throughout most of the year.

In the last month the finds of weapons have increased dramatically (from 12 finds in April 2021 to 41 finds in May 2022) and have overtaken hooch as the most frequently found illicit item. It is unclear at this stage whether this is the start of an upward trend or just an odd peak.

Like many areas of the prison, the drug strategy team (DST) has been operating with reduced staff levels for this year. Nevertheless they have continued to provide a service which has prevented many illicit items reaching prisoners and thus created a safer, but not safe, environment for officers and prisoners.

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

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

#### ***Accommodation***

During the year all cells have been single occupancy. The fire alarm system upgrading work was completed with all areas reverting back to their intended use.

The showers on all the house units, excepting house unit 1 which has been refurbished, are in poor condition. On rota visits men complain that the water is not always hot, there are no privacy screens which increases feelings of vulnerability, and the showers are impossible to keep clean.

During the year, in response to requests from prisoners, the prison has installed toasters, microwaves and grills on each wing, which have been well used, however there has been an increase in fire alarm activations due to smoke and steam from these items.

Rota visits last year observed improved standards in the serveries but this is an area that appears to have lost focus again. Paperwork is often not completed or missing and in many cases servery equipment needs to be replaced. The servery in the clinical assessment unit (CAU) is not fit for use.

Furniture is often in short supply and cells sometimes have items missing. Rota reports record several cases of men being placed in cells without basic furnishings being in place.

Cleanliness varies between units. Through the first part of the year cleaners were only allowed 30 minutes per day out of their cells to clean. Currently the cleaners complain that they are often not allowed out of their cells to work, due to prison staff shortages. The IMB received applications during the year from prisoners concerned about the lack of cleanliness on the wings.

#### ***Clothing***

Clothing was an issue during the year, with men complaining that there were not enough clothes and bedding available. This was triangulated by the IMB by visiting both the wing stores and the laundry. However in April a significant amount of funding was made available to increase supplies and there have been no further applications to the IMB.

Access to wing laundries has been an issue since the new regime has been implemented, with wing laundry workers complaining that there were not enough unlocked hours for the number of required washing and drying cycles to be completed. This has been mitigated to some extent by the placing of domestic driers on the wings, rather than in the laundry rooms.

## **Food**

Portion sizes of food was also raised as an issue with the IMB during the year. In February 2022 the kitchens budget was increased to £12-13 per head per week to allow for an increase in portion sizes. The IMB received very few applications about the quality of food, as opposed to quantity, although men spoken to complained it lacked flavour.

Difficulties in recruitment have affected the kitchens in the same way as other parts of the prison, however two new chefs have been recruited and speak with enthusiasm about being able to cook meals from scratch, as opposed to buying in prepared food.

Appropriate arrangements are in place for men of different faiths although some of the Muslim men express concern that the trays for the halal food are not permanently marked and so cross contamination through poor cleaning could occur.

## **5.2 Segregation**

The segregation unit is a 10-bed unit with one special accommodation cell. It also has a further attached unit which has been used during the year as an overflow segregation unit, with as many as 18 men being held in segregation at one time. In addition, during the year prisoners have been held under rule 45 on the CAU.

The management of the unit is generally good but suffers from staffing shortages like other units. Rota visits observations record that the staff were caring and engaged well with the men, but also on occasion how much pressure the staff were under to deliver the regime and carry out their other prisoner-facing duties. This then impacts on the prisoners themselves.

Throughout the year, the unit held several prisoners for very long periods. In December 2021 11 men had been held over 42 days; by the end of the year this was four but three of these men had continuous stays of over 750 days. For these men there is little evidence of progression, with men constantly asking for access to a more suitable location during their reviews. Some of the men in segregation refuse to be located back on the wings, giving reasons such as fear of losing control and threats to their person. On occasion such men have been offered transition plans whereby they receive extra support to reintegrate, but in most cases such offers are turned down. The IMB is concerned that this group of men see segregation as a place of safety.

Sourcing a prison willing to take men who cannot remain at Woodhill remains a challenge. The lack of alternatives, across the prison service, to progress and support these men is a national issue.

During Covid, prisoners in segregation were not held on the basic level of the incentives scheme. From March the basic level was reintroduced, with enhancements only being applied in individual cases.



### **5.3 Staff-prisoner relationships**

The lack of experience among uniformed staff, together with the restricted regime, continued to mean that staff did not have the opportunity to develop the necessary interpersonal skills with prisoners. At May 2022, almost two-thirds of prison officers and nearly one-third of the supervisory officers had less than two years' experience. The standards coaching team has been deployed across the prison but, despite this a lack of confidence in challenging prisoners has been observed. Long-term prisoners are very aware of this and on occasion took advantage to create disorder and trouble.

House unit 6 has generally been well run but has suffered from staff shortages on occasions, mainly due to staff being redeployed to keep the rest of the prison safe. This has resulted in disruption of the regime and increased the length of time men spend in their cells. It is particularly important that the CSC units have consistent staffing by trained and experienced staff to maintain relationships with volatile prisoners. To maintain a good routine, the CSC units try to preserve an established staff base, which allows a weekly risk assessment meeting to take place with each prisoner. During rota visits the IMB has observed individual staff members developing good relationships with very challenging prisoners and supporting them to feel more secure and therefore more able to manage their behaviour and participate in the regime.

Prisoners were allocated a key worker before Covid hit, with a caseload of four to six men, usually a prison officer from a different house unit, to ensure the allocated 45 minutes per week was meaningful but not always face to face. This was intended to engage, motivate and support the prisoner, and any issues to be reported to the POM. Yet feedback from prisoners suggests they rarely knew their key worker's name and did not see them often. During Covid, key workers were assigned prisoners on their own house units but contact was reduced to a wellbeing conversation.

Currently, due to a shortage of prison officers, key workers are being allocated to prisoners with immediate needs, but there is not currently the capacity for everyone to have a key worker. The wing clinics have enabled the OMU to identify prisoners with an immediate concern, however this is far from ideal and theoretically could be resolved if the prison had a full complement of prison officers.

The prison council met for the first time in the year in May. An outside company, Clearview Research, has offered pro bono a number of co-creation workshops with prisoners to design a new council and train and mentor individual members to be researchers. Membership of the council is intended to become a full-time role.

Wing forums restarted in February 2022 and as a result of these meetings kitchenettes and tumble driers have been placed on the wings, improving the domestic life of prisoners. However, a more consistent approach to how these meetings were implemented across the wings would lead to prisoners having greater confidence that action will be taken.

Staff shortages, particularly at weekends, sometimes with only one regular officer on a wing and the rest cross-deployed, has been a continuous problem and reduces the ability of staff to develop good relationships with prisoners on the wing and for experienced staff to demonstrate good practice and provide role models for the newer recruits.

Having said that, the IMB has noted on many occasions staff maintaining good relationships with men, demonstrating understanding and empathy and going out of their way to deliver what they can under very difficult circumstances.

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

A new equalities Officer was appointed in November 2021. However progress was slow due to a combination of staffing shortages and Covid restrictions. From February 2022 a monthly safety and equalities newsletter has been produced. One of the protected characteristics is explored in each issue and other topics have included care experience – offering support to those in custody who have experienced the care system – mental health and different cultures.

Owing to the Covid-19 restrictions, the equalities forum did not meet until March 20. Wing prisoner equality representatives, who support prisoners in submitting discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs), amongst other things, met individually with members of the equalities section each month. The equalities forum has representatives from each of the wings, giving a range of views from those with different backgrounds, for example Muslims and members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, however there has been no systematic consultation with prisoners in the protected characteristic groups during the year. Equality representatives spoken to by the Board reported that they liked the role and appreciated being able to help other prisoners, however they also reported that lockdown had made contacting them more difficult.

Training in equality and diversity was reinstated in February 2022, but some courses had to be cancelled due to lack of staffing.

#### ***Protected characteristics***

##### ***Race***

Fifty-five percent of the prison population is from Black and minority ethnic communities, including 3.2% from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. The largest ethnic group is white at 55% followed by Black or Black British at 25%. However just 7% of operational staff are from an ethnic minority.

Foreign nationals are not represented as such on the equalities committee.

##### ***Disability***

Thirty percent of the prison population is registered as having a disability.

Personal emergency evacuation plans are not always readily available on the wings, and, as staffing shortages result in staff cross-covering, this is a risk for prisoners.

### *Age*

The majority of the prison population at Woodhill are below the age of 50. There were no DIRFs alleging age discrimination during the year.

### *LGBT+*

In LGBT+ History Month, February 2022, the equalities team visited each wing to encourage discussion between staff and prisoners on the subject.

### ***DIRFs***

From June 2021 to May 2022, there were 144 DIRFs received. During the year the responsibility for DIRFs transferred from the complaints team to the equalities team. This has improved the recording and analysis of DIRFs but the IMB is still awaiting the ability to access the new system directly. It was intended to work with the Zahid Mubarak Trust during the year, including guidance and an audit of DIRFs, however this has not taken place.

The Board reviewed a 20% sample of the DIRFs submitted from May 2021 to January 2022 (30 DIRFs). Of those audited, two DIRFs which related to Woodhill were not responded to within the recommended timescale, with no obvious reason for this. Four had no response on file. A further two DIRFs related to discrimination at another prison and these took two to three months to be responded to.

Race and religion were the protected characteristics most commonly identified. In seven cases changes made as a result of the DIRF were clearly identified.

Responses audited included a clear narrative describing the investigation, any mediation attempted, the rationale for any decision, resolution or not, and actions to be taken to stop recurrence.

Most complaints in the DIRFs reviewed were not supported. Many of these related to prisoners feeling that their request for a transfer or access to a job or education had been refused due to their race or religion.

On the wings there was a general feeling that DIRFs were not responded to and in fact frequently got lost in the system. The IMB was not able to substantiate this but the widespread belief undermines prisoner confidence in the system.

## **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

Prisoners report a high regard for the chaplaincy service. There is good contact across all the parts of the prison, with the chaplains supported by volunteers who provide pastoral and bereavement support.

Thirty-five percent of prisoners identify as Muslim, with Roman Catholic and no religion making up 18% each. During the Covid-19 restrictions the chaplains maintained contact with prisoners by visiting the wings and also by telephone.

For much of the year the chaplaincy and prisoners were frustrated at the slowness in being able to implement worship due to Covid restrictions. From mid-March single house units were able to worship together, however this still only meant that individual prisoners could worship with others once a month. Religious instruction classes restarted in March for small groups of prisoners and prisoners reported good access to written materials through the chaplaincy.

## **5.6 Incentives schemes**

As a result of the Covid-19 regime restrictions, the incentives scheme did not fully operate until March 2022. The withdrawal of privileges and money for bad behaviour was substantially curtailed. Some prisoners told us that they felt that, during this period, poor behaviour was rewarded. Prisoners felt that this was often a consequence of inexperienced officers having to deal with complex situations.

The relationships between the prisoner and their key worker is an important one in terms of the incentives scheme. This is currently a weakness as key workers are not engaging regularly with their allocated prisoners.

From May 2022, as the restrictions were lifted, a clear message was sent out that poor behaviour would be penalised. The penalties for serious incidents are clearly set out in the policy – a return to basic level and loss of privileges. The effects of this will be monitored during 2022/23, however the number of prisoners on basic doubled between April and May from 20 to 42, while the number of prisoners on enhanced remained steady at approximately 240

For much of the year prisoners were not allowed to have their television removed, except for a very short time by exception.

## **5.7 Complaints**

During the reporting year, the prison received a total of 5,213 complaints, up by 1,543 from last year.

The prison has key performance targets for the initial response times for complaints and appeals (COMP1 and COMP1a forms). These varied throughout the reporting year, from a low of 73.56% in August 2021 to 100% in May 2022, with the average being around 81.15%.

There were three main areas that accounted for the most complaints: house unit 1B, 959; segregation, 747; and house unit 4A, 616.

There were 525 complaints about property during the year, the highest single issue.

## **5.8 Property**

Prisoners continue to arrive at Woodhill with large amounts of property from other establishments, often more than the three 15kg bags they are allowed. All new arrivals are body scanned and their property searched and listed.

Staff shortages in reception were a feature throughout the reporting year. Staff are frequently cross-deployed to other areas of the prison because of shortages, meaning that property allocation is delayed.

Many applications to the Board concerned the loss of property in transit from another prison either at the prison of origin or by the courier. Often in this situation no one is willing to take responsibility for resolving the issue. Obtaining compensation is a difficult, time consuming and lengthy process.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare general**

Healthcare services at HMP Woodhill are provided by Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL), commissioned to provide primary care and mental health services, as set out in the national contract.

Both the primary care and mental health teams are currently understaffed and both services found it difficult to recruit band 5 nurses. Delays in vetting new recruits exacerbate this problem.

#### ***Covid-19 response***

During 2021/22, the healthcare service was responsible for delivering not only healthcare services as usual, but also the continued healthcare response to Covid-19. The integrated response implemented by both the prison and healthcare department resulted in only one outbreak within the prison between December 2021 and February 2022. Currently prisoners are placed into isolation if they are suspected/confirmed as having Covid.

A testing centre was set up within the prison in February 2021, to make it easier for staff to access tests. Staff and other people using the prison, e.g. the IMB, were continually encouraged to be tested twice weekly, in line with national guidelines. Lateral flow test kits were provided where needed.

Vaccinations began to be delivered to prisoners and staff in March 2021, according to the national criteria, including a booster programme, however the uptake was low compared to the general public.

### **6.2 Physical healthcare**

The IMB has received several applications from prisoners concerned about the waiting times to access healthcare. Access to GP appointments is generally good, however staffing shortages to escort prisoners has resulted in appointments being cancelled. This is particularly problematic where the appointment is with a clinician who has a specific booked session each month, as it results in prisoners having to wait at least a month before rebooking. Overall 24.8% of primary care appointments were cancelled in May 2022 due to staffing shortages, but the range among specialities was from 13.3 % for opticians to 50% for ultrasound. With regard to hospital appointments 41% were cancelled in May 2022 due to staff shortages.

There have been several cases reported to the IMB during the year where a prisoner has been transferred to Woodhill partway along a secondary care pathway and has waited a significant amount of time to receive a hospital appointment. The IMB would like to see a pathway developed whereby these prisoners are either not transferred during treatment or receive seamless care after transfer.

Dental capacity has been reduced due to Covid as most procedures are aerosol generating resulting in the requirement for extensive cleaning between appointments. Several prisoners have submitted applications, or spoken to the IMB on the wings, concerned that they are in pain and are having to wait long times to be seen. At the time of writing there are 112 prisoners waiting for routine dental appointments with the longest wait being 33 weeks. Again these prisoners are particularly adversely affected if appointments are cancelled due to prison staff shortages.

Prisoners have access to a full range of primary care services including physiotherapy, optical, dentistry, etc. National screening programs remain in place e.g. bowel cancer screening. Prisoners aged over 50 and therefore classed as older people for health purposes are entitled to access annual healthcare checks and screening in line with the outside population.

### **6.3 Mental health**

The maximum waiting times for mental health services, according to the contract, are 48 hours for urgent referrals and five working days for those that are non-urgent. In practice, the mental health team reviews all referrals every morning and most prisoners are assessed on the same day subject to all staff working.

The number of prisoners with severe mental health problems appears to be increasing, increasing the number of hours the safer custody team and wing officers need to spend to stop them self-harming. Families can contact safer custody 24/7 if they have concerns about a prisoner.

The Compass unit opened in May 2021 and, subject to space being available, aims to support those prisoners who struggle to cope on the wings (e.g., those who have been in self-isolation or segregation for some time) to regain their confidence to join the general population. This unit is partially funded by the NHS to provide a SPAR programme, led by a senior psychologist. Up to March 2022 the ability to provide a full range of psychological interventions was curtailed due to Covid-19, however these programmes are now in place and the IMB will continue to monitor how this supports prisoners in reintegration into the general population.

In the past year there have been cases of men meeting the mental health criteria for a healthcare bed at Woodhill remaining in segregation due to a shortage of beds in the CAU.

### **6.4 Social care**

Social care assessments for specialist equipment for prisoners with disabilities are carried out by Milton Keynes unitary authority occupational therapists. The HMIP inspection in June 2022 found that this system worked well to support prisoners. The provision of equipment remains the responsibility of the prison, and, in contrast to 2020/21, the IMB has received no applications concerning delays in supply of equipment.

## **6.6 Exercise, regime**

The Covid-19 restricted regime was in place throughout most of the year. Cohorts or 'bubbles' were established in each house unit, with each group of prisoners being out of their cell for 45 minutes of domestic time and one hour of exercise each day. However the IMB has observed that the relaxing of Covid-19 restrictions has not significantly increased the amount of time prisoners spend out of their cells. Currently the average time out of cell is around 2.5 hours a day except for part-time, off-wing workers. No regime is offered on Wednesday or Friday afternoons. On many days regime is cancelled or reduced due to staff shortages.

Currently the regime allows for one wing in each house unit to be unlocked in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Prisoners say they are frustrated that they spend too long locked in their cells, and when unlocked have to make choices between, for example, having a shower or attending chapel.

While the wing is unlocked prisoners have access to pool tables, table football and the gym. Conversations with prisoners have highlighted that if a prisoner does not wish to go to the gym and has no work there is little to occupy them. Inevitably, many were drawn to destructive and self-destructive behaviour. Prisoners describe increased tension between prisoners, and between prisoners and officers, and boredom and frustration at not being able to work.

Prisoners now have access to two gym sessions a week during domestic periods, providing no extra time out of cell. The wing-based exercise equipment in the yards was refurbished during the year.

The IMB is concerned that although the Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted and the Covid-19 payments to prisoners stopped, due to staffing shortages prisoners' lives have changed little. Visits are restricted to weekdays; a long time is spent alone in cells and there is little work available. Men report that they cannot afford to maintain contact with their families and manage their own mental health; with the cost of canteen etc increasing this is only going to become more difficult.

## **6.7 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

The rehabilitation service is managed by the addictions team within the healthcare department. Complex cases, often involving prisoners dependent on prescribed painkillers, are reviewed in a fortnightly complex case meeting. Referrals to the service are made from house units or can be by self-referral.

The service recognises that not all the drug users in the prison have any interest or motivation to change their behaviour. The success rate for complete detoxification is only about 3%. Currently there is a high use of vaping across the prison with little or no demand for smoking cessation courses.

## **6.8 Soft skills**

The stabilisation, progression and rehabilitation programme is led by an experienced clinical psychologist and funded by the NHS.



Positive initiatives include art therapy sessions and the Finding Rhythms music group, which both support prisoners in exploring their past, current trauma and poor mental health in a safe space. Men who attended these groups reported with pride what they had achieved.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education and library**

The priority for the education department is basic literacy, which is necessary to access work and support programmes and build the confidence needed to progress through a sentence plan. New arrivals are therefore assessed within a week of arriving.

However, during most of the reporting year, education activities were extremely limited by Covid restrictions. The education wing was closed to classroom-based learning until February 2022, with men having in-cell learning and activity packs alongside the distraction packs provided by wings. The distraction packs were regarded by prisoners as poor. Education staff reported engagement was higher during in-person contact with staff, albeit through doors, when compared to receiving learning packs through the internal post.

To encourage engagement with the process of learning, prisoners have access to Way2Learn TV packs supported by paper-based workbooks and receive a certificate of completion if successful. There are 11 courses including fitness, warehousing, maths and creative writing, which are unaccredited with no barrier to entry, so learners can try new topics independently, regardless of previous experience. There were 23 packs completed between December 2021 and May 2022.

Reluctant learners are encouraged through independent learning, where they try topics, have autonomy in their rate of progress. The interactive style holds attention, and this often leads to later engagement in Stepping Stones accredited packs, classroom-based functional skills, national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and distance learning through the Open University.

In February classroom learning restarted, providing one wing 'bubble' of 12 men, with one session each week, supported by in-cell learning for the remainder of the week. Numbers gradually increased and by the end of the reporting year, 48 men each day were able to access education on four days each week. This is still very low and compared to pre-Covid-19. Classes offered are English, maths, art, and music, and all, except art, lead to an accredited qualification, however there are long waiting lists. In art men can make up to five entries per year to the Koestler Awards, with some men winning top awards.

The Board notes that there is a real need for education provision to increase as soon as possible to the pre-Covid levels of 60 men per session (120 men per day). The education department are confident they have the capacity, but operational prison staff shortages are hampering progress. The IMB will monitor progress during the coming year.

The library has been closed to direct access throughout the year due to Covid restrictions and operational prison staff shortages, but men have been able to order books and there are currently 188 active borrowers. Early in the reporting year many of the technical books were either out of date or not appropriate for the current prison

population, however the library was restocked at the beginning of 2022, including technical books and incorporating audiobooks which have been well-received.

Library staff have worked closely with education, by attending sessions and coordinating reading material with learning; this maximized the use of available time for prisoners.

The Board is concerned about the lack of access to library sessions due to operational prison staff shortages. Although books can be ordered, this limits opportunities for prisoners to discover new books or genres, as well as experiencing time out of cells.

## **7.2 Vocational work and training**

There has been no access to vocational training throughout the reporting year. This impacted the ability of men to assist the works department within the prison, although some men with pre-existing vocational skills have helped with painting on the wings.

To mitigate this, the education department created theory packs for prisoners so they could advance theoretical knowledge prior to practical sessions recommencing. This was expected to save time for learners when the course restarted, and revision packs were issued to ensure all the theory was covered.

Vocational training in education workshops was due to reopen fully in May for City & Guilds levels 1 and 2: painting and decorating, plumbing, electrics, carpentry, catering and hospitality etc. However, operational prison staff shortages caused men to miss sessions and frequently vocational training had to be paused to cope with shortages elsewhere in the prison.

Wing-based work continued throughout the year (wing cleaners and laundry), and since the reduction of Covid restrictions has included kitchen, laundry, waste management, garden, market garden and other wing work opportunities. By the end of the reporting year, this equated to:

- 86 full-time roles
- 171 part-time roles

As all wing work was previously full-time, some roles were being made part-time to increase available opportunities for men to work.

However, prisoners tell us they are frustrated by being limited to part-time work and differing pay rates. Additionally, the movement of prisoners about the estate is new and difficult for many staff, not having experienced a full daily regime since early 2020.

The lack of purposeful activity remains a key issue and the Board has been concerned about delays in opening a new workshop to replace previous contracts. It has been assured a new contract with Sky will commence in June 2022, intending to give 80 men part-time work. The aim is for 80% of men to be in part-time work during

the next reporting year, however operational staff shortages are limiting access to vocational work.

### **7.3 Offender management and progression**

The objectives of the offender management unit (OMU) are to reduce reoffending, manage the custodial sentence and reduce the risk of serious harm. The offender management in custody programme (OMiC) commenced prior to Covid-19, as the prison was recategorised.

Prisoners arriving at Woodhill are allocated a case administrator and prison offender manager (POM) within 24 hours of arrival and are notified by letter. Before Covid-19, they were seen for an initial assessment within a week, but during the reporting year, staffing shortages caused difficulties, meaning prisoners were receiving the letter, which confirmed they would be seen 'as soon as possible'. To mitigate this, wing clinics were created, so that prisoners could access the OMU at least monthly.

At the beginning of the reporting year, there was a concern that OMiC had still not been fully resourced following the recategorisation of the prison and Covid. In April 2022, the OMiC board agreed that HMP Woodhill should have:

- 9 probation officer POMs and,
- 3.5 Band 4 POMs

However, at the end of May 2022, the prison had:

- 3.5 probation officer POMs and
- 5 Band 4 POMs (using the case management support model where Band 4s assist probation officers when acceptable).

This is clearly short of target staffing levels agreed by the OMiC board; however, one new probation officer POM is expected to join Woodhill in autumn 2022.

Approximately 40% of prisoners at Woodhill are serving a life sentence or indeterminate sentence and 80% of the population is considered high-risk. Prison Band 4 POMs deal with medium-risk cases whereas probation officer POMs deal with the high-risk cases and should have a caseload of 50 - 60 mixed cases enabling them to see each of their caseload monthly. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that at the beginning of the reporting year at least one had a caseload of 158 and the reporting year closed with average caseloads of 100. In addition, those serving very long sentences are not seeing POMs.

Most men transfer to Woodhill with an existing sentence plan and many of the offending behaviour programmes can move with the prisoner. Psychology staff work closely with the OMU in the identification of complex needs and suitability for rehabilitation programmes, which may involve a transfer to an establishment where the programme is available.

## **7.4 Family contact**

Family contact should be promoted and acknowledged as playing a great part in the rehabilitation and progression process, however the HMIP report identified that staff did not actively encourage prisoners to keep in touch with friends and family.

Due to Covid restrictions, face-to-face family contacts (social visits) were reduced to five 90-minute sessions per week during the reporting year. At each session, up to 18 men could attend. This is much reduced from 45 men per session, six sessions per week, before Covid. Additionally, during the reporting year, the Omicron variant outbreak caused face to face visits to close at the end of December 2021, resuming on 10 January 2022.

Social video calls (delivered by Purple Visits) were offered on three mornings each week, each call lasting for 30 minutes, and 17 men were able to access closed visits during the reporting year.

This weekday availability is frustrating for men with nursery or school age children who could not therefore speak to or see those children and particularly distressing and difficult for those in separated relationships to maintain contact with their children.

Weekend visits were stopped in March 2020 due to Covid restrictions and were still not taking place by the end of May 2022. It is understood this weekday-only provision is due to a shortage of prison officers.

On a positive note, the visitor suite was refurbished during lockdown. It is clean, decorated with artwork, and children's toys are available. The provision of refreshments for visits was reinstated in May 2022, after they were paused during Covid. Compassionate visits can be arranged via the chaplaincy in addition to standard social visits, and funerals that cannot be attended by prisoners in person, have often been viewed via webcast to accommodate the needs of bereaved prisoners where possible. Going forward, father and child sessions are being introduced on Wednesday mornings, to encourage men to maintain relationships with families. The chaplaincy facilitates Storybook Dads, a scheme whereby fathers can record themselves reading a bedside story and share it with their children to help maintain family relationships.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

The offender flow model designates a category C prison as a resettlement prison; some prisoners successfully progress to category C before their sentence ends, but HMP Woodhill, as a category B training prison, does not have a resettlement team.

There is also no automatic resettlement move for category B prisoners and as HMP Woodhill admits prisoners with less than 56 days left to serve on their sentence, some prisoners will be released directly from Woodhill with their resettlement managed by community offender managers (COMs). This is difficult if resettlement is likely to be some distance away from Woodhill, and is the subject of concern and frustration to the men who would prefer to be located closer to home.

Worryingly some men can be released directly from the segregation unit into the community, some distance from home, and rely upon COMs to manage their transition and assist with financial matters, accommodation and employment.

During the reporting year, 39 men were released into the community from HMP Woodhill.

A recent snapshot by the IMB at HMP Woodhill, of prisoners due for release within six months, identified that all but one was anxious about their release, ranging across a lack of resettlement support at HMP Woodhill, a lack of family support outside the prison, concerns about accessing medication on release, and a fear of feeling overwhelmed searching for employment and housing, whilst being aware they could not access GPs and employment without housing.

Unfortunately, this Board review suggests support is not adequate for these prisoners. Many have requested help with varying success, and rather than easing transition into the community, a lack of support increases the risk of reoffending.

## The work of the IMB

Members of the Board continued to visit the prison throughout the year, despite the Covid-19 restrictions in place in the prison and outside. The outbreak from December 2021 to February 2022 significantly reduced the number of visits during that period.

Written applications and those to the national 0800 number were responded to with a visit to the wing or a phone call and a written reply following investigation.

During the year the capacity of the Board was significantly reduced due to the retirement of the previous Chair and Vice Chair and the loss of two new members due to change of circumstances. Several recruitment campaigns were launched but to date there have been no new applications. To enable the Board to effectively monitor the prison the methodology was changed to reduce the number of routine rota visits – each wing is now visited monthly – and to increase the number of focussed ‘deep dives’. This has allowed the Board to focus on areas of concern to both the prisoners and members e.g. food and clothing and new prisoners and those nearing release.

Because of the IMB being less visible during Covid the IMB developed a leaflet explaining its work which can be given to prisoners on induction or handed out on the wings. It also held an art competition to help the men explain the difficulties and frustrations they felt.

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6
Total number of visits to the establishment	286
Total number of segregation reviews attended	50

## Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year	0800 calls only 2022
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	5	6	1
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives and earned privileges, sanctions	17	10	4
C	Equality	7	8	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	5	10	0
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	3	6	3
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	6	2	0
F	Food and kitchens	0	20**	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	53*	23	10
H1	Property within this establishment	26	12	1
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	24	21	6
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	1	3	0
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	11	6	0
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	21	14	14
K	Transfers	18	0	1
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	10	5	11
M	Not classified	9	4	3
	Total number of applications	216	150	56

Note: \* includes many applications from two prisoners

\*\* includes a campaign from one wing

\*\*\* covers the period of January 2022 to May 2022



The 0800-telephone system, whilst only showing five months' worth of data, demonstrates that this has been a great alternative for prisoners to contact IMB, especially if they cannot write, and was also used well during lockdown.



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