



National Annual Report

2020-21

September 2021



Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
2	Main findings	6
2.1	Staffing issues and key work.....	6
2.2	Safety	9
2.3	Fair and humane treatment.....	18
2.4	Health and wellbeing.....	27
2.5	Progression and resettlement	34
3	The IMB year.....	48
	Annex A: Applications to IMBs	51
	Annex B: Applications made via the IMB Covid freephone line	52

1 Introduction

This report on IMB findings in adult prisons divides into two distinct and very different periods: the world before Covid and the world after Covid¹. During the first period, the prison system was in the process of recovery from earlier staffing and stability crises; during the second, that progress was abruptly halted. The good news was that predictions of thousands of fatalities were averted, thanks to the Prison Service's swift action; the bad news was that prisons became places of containment, of people as well as infection, rather than of rehabilitation. The story of The Mount prison, on pages 34-35 of this report, shows how three years of gradual progress towards regaining its purpose as a training prison was suddenly reversed.

The impact of the 2020-1 lockdowns is clear from this report. Lives were undoubtedly saved, and in many prisons levels of violence reduced, but there were immediate and longer-term costs, both direct and indirect. The experience of 23 hours locked in cell for extended periods inevitably impacted on mental health and wellbeing, at a time when support from both prison and healthcare staff was less available. In women's prisons in particular, self-harm often spiked when lockdown was most severe. Just as damaging was the lack of positive opportunity for rehabilitation and progression: education, vocational training, drug treatment and offending behaviour programmes. There were similar findings in the recent IMB report on under-18 YOs in England².

Many of the issues identified in the pre-Covid period of this report did not go away: they simply went into cold storage for the duration. This included the lengthy segregation of prisoners with serious and complex mental health needs; the need to strengthen equalities work and address disproportionality; and the struggle to provide a decent environment, especially in ageing prisons (see the litany of problems at Pentonville on page 18).

As prisons start to move out of the immediate crisis, there are some important lessons and challenges. The first is around regime. There is a risk that locked-down prisons are seen as safer and therefore better places. But there is not a binary choice between safety on the one hand and humane treatment and rehabilitation on the other. Instead, the question is how to make humane and rehabilitative prisons safe. That requires enough staff, with the confidence and support to manage prisoners in a normalised regime, as well as sufficient genuinely purposeful activity to engage those prisoners. It is a long time since prisons learnt the importance of 'dynamic security': based on activity and relationships, not just locks, bolts and bars.

¹ This report summarises annual reports of IMBs in adult prisons in England and Wales published between April 2020 and April 2021, as well as more recent updates provided by Boards during the pandemic.

² [Independent monitors flag 'damaging effect' of Covid lockdown on education and mental health for prisoners under 18 - Independent Monitoring Boards \(imb.org.uk\)](https://www.imb.org.uk/independent-monitors-flag-damaging-effect-covid-lockdown-education-and-mental-health-for-prisoners-under-18-independent-monitoring-boards-imb.org.uk)

That means investing in staffing, including reinvigorating the flagging key worker scheme, and also in activities, particularly those that increase employability.

Second, prisons need to be able to engage better with the other agencies and services that are essential for rehabilitation and safety. One of the important IMB findings during Covid-19 was the very variable quality and quantity of education provision, even from the same education provider. In some prisons, in spite of the Covid challenges, prison managers worked with the provider and actively managed the contract; in others, these relationships were weak and very little of value was delivered.

Those relationships are equally important with organisations and services operating in the community. Just as hospitals cannot properly function without adequate social care provision, prisons will continue to have revolving doors unless there is support and cooperation with agencies that can provide secure and community mental healthcare, stable and affordable housing, substance abuse treatment and employment opportunities. The impact of a lack of sufficient external mental health provision is well-illustrated in the example from Thameside on page 29. This could be replicated across other prisons and in other areas, such as accommodation provision. There are examples of cooperation – for example the Homelessness Prevention Taskforce during Covid-19 – and this should become part of business as usual, not an emergency response. It is a two-way street, in which prisons need to look outwards, and external services need to be resourced to engage early and often.

Third, the pandemic has exposed large areas of prison life that have so far been untouched by the digital revolution. In many prisons, prisoners had no easy access even to phones to contact families and provide support, information or health advice; remote learning took the form of worksheets posted under doors; property is still recorded (and too often lost) on paper cards. Covid-19 provided a stimulus to innovation: such as the rapid roll-out of video visits, the speeding up of in-cell telephony and in some prisons the provision of laptops or iPads. Investment in fully functional and secure in-cell technology is essential to equip prisoners for a digital world. However, this is not a substitute for the face-to-face relationships and activities that are crucial if prisoners are to be motivated to engage and change.

Covid-19 has thrown up challenges for the IMBs, as well as the prison service. Nevertheless, during this exceptional time Boards have been able to continue to provide independent oversight (see chapter 3). At times, and for some Boards, this has been done remotely, with innovative ways of keeping in contact with the prison and sometimes directly with prisoners. It is a huge credit to our members and to the secretariat that, within five weeks of the first national lockdown, a national freephone telephone service was available for prisoners to contact the IMB directly with their concerns: during the first 12 months, over 9,000 calls were answered. Over the course of the year, direct monitoring returned in nearly all prisons.

As a result, we have been able to provide regular updates to ministers and parliament throughout the pandemic – and this annual report is a tribute to everything that our 1,200 members did and found this year. I am extremely grateful

to all members and Board officers, to our regional representatives and management board, and to the secretariat staff, all of whom have helped to ensure that we maintained oversight of prisons, at a time when prisoners were more than ever cut off from the outside world.

As prisons move into the post-Covid era, one of the themes that is emerging is that time in prison should be 'time well spent'. That also means ensuring that resources are well spent. With the current focus on building more prison spaces, the risk is that those resources will be stretched too thinly: that there will be width, rather than the depth of focus that comes from investing in the people, services and support that can reduce both the prison population and crime.

Dame Anne Owers, IMB National Chair

September 2021

2 Main findings

2.1 Staffing issues and key work

While there were some improvements in staff retention across prisons, Boards continued to report staff shortages resulting in regime curtailments and increased time in cell, together with a high number of new and inexperienced staff. This was compounded during Covid-19 by staff absences due to sickness or isolation.

Even before the pandemic, the key worker scheme in men's prisons was struggling, with staff diverted to other operational duties. The scheme was almost non-existent in the initial months of the pandemic and remains limited in both its delivery and impact. It did not exist in the women's estate until after this reporting period. Boards, however, commended the welfare support that staff provided to prisoners during lockdown.

Staffing

Pre-Covid, some Boards, such as Gartree, noted an improvement in staff attendance and retention. However, others remained concerned about staffing levels. At Woodhill, staff shortages affected Rapiscan reception scanning and led to closures in education, workshops and resettlement services, and to reduced staff in the segregation unit. At Manchester, which was in the process of re-rolling, full activity was only possible for two days a month during May to September 2019. The Board at High Down noted an increase in the number of lockdowns due to understaffing but was unable to quantify them due to the prison's poor record keeping.

The Board at Leyhill reported an unsatisfactory level of night-time staffing, while Grendon IMB noted improvements by the end of the reporting year after raising concerns about inconsistent staff awareness during the night shift and poor response times to cell call bells.

Several Boards, including The Mount, Woodhill, Humber and Hewell, raised concerns about the large number of inexperienced staff. At Bullingdon, out of 276 uniformed staff, around 180 had less than two years' experience; the previous funding cuts had led to a serious loss of experience and confidence.

During the pandemic, these issues became even more acute. At one point, at Foston Hall, 50 out of a total of 158 operational staff were on sick leave. Prisoners received even less time out of cell than the already restricted regime, and additional staff had to be transferred in from other establishments. At Northumberland, in March 2021, there were over 60 staff absent, with just under half of the residential blocks in lockdown.

Key work

As reported last year, the initial positive rollout in closed men's prisons was not sustained, and many establishments struggled to embed the key worker scheme. There were some initial successes: the Board at Risley pointed out that in the first four weeks of the scheme there was a 23% reduction in violent incidents and a 33% drop in self-harm.

However, in most prisons, after some early promise, the scheme began to fall away and was not prioritised. At Lancaster Farms, a large number of prisoners had no regular contact with an assigned key worker. At Cardiff, the Board attributed the decrease in the number of key worker sessions by early 2020 to high levels of staff leave and sickness. Pentonville IMB reported that key working was suspended in summer 2019 due to staffing pressures. The scheme was reintroduced by a new Governor in January 2020, with 350 weekly sessions taking place by the end of that month. At Isis, only between 6% and 20% of key work sessions took place towards the end of 2019.

At Nottingham, the inconsistent allocation of time for key worker sessions due to staffing pressures 'eroded both confidence in and the effectiveness of the scheme'. In early 2020, the Board reported improvements, in part thanks to renewed commitment by staff.

The scheme as such ceased to operate at the outset of the pandemic, when there were initially only welfare checks, and its limited resumption in July 2020 mostly focused on the most vulnerable prisoners. The Board at Full Sutton noted that, during the summer, weekly sessions were delivered for up to 65 prisoners who were deemed 'priority cases'. Fortnightly welfare checks were conducted on other prisoners, when staffing allowed. By December 2020, the key worker scheme was still very patchy. Boards in the south-west region and in Kent, Surrey and Sussex reported little evidence of its delivery. An adapted version had not yet been rolled out in open prisons during the reporting period. There were reports of positive staff-prisoner relationships, particularly in prisons with settled populations. The Board at Wakefield reported that staff on the residential units often understood prisoners' specific needs and risk factors, though there were isolated examples of this not being the case. Similarly, at The Verne and Usk/Prescoed, Boards reported mutual respect between staff and prisoners. In the open estate, Boards at Haverigg, Kirkham and Hollesley Bay reported that prisoner-led councils allowed prisoners to raise issues and engage with senior members of staff, which improved staff-prisoner communication.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Boards commended the positive steps being taken by staff to support prisoners, at some risk to themselves, including welfare checks by safer custody staff and the chaplaincy, which continued to be a visible and supportive presence. Boards also noted that prisoners' acceptance of the exceptionally restricted regime was assisted by clear communication and a recognition of the pressures on prisoners, as well as on staff. Some Boards reported that there was more meaningful interaction between residential staff and prisoners when prisoners were unlocked in small groups. One Board surveyed prisoners, the

majority of whom commended staff for going 'above and beyond'; only a few members of staff were criticised for inflexibility and over-use of control.

However, especially as lockdown continued, there were some reports of staff resorting to unofficial punishments, to compensate for the lack or reduction of the usual means of behaviour management through the incentives or disciplinary system: this included the removal of televisions, or the withholding of exercise and showers for a number of days, without any disciplinary charge or process.

2.2 Safety

As reported last year, the incidence of violence and self-harm remained high in many closed prisons before the Covid-19 pandemic. Prisons holding young adults experienced significant fluctuations in levels of violence and self-harm, and Boards reported that very few initiatives were in place to tackle the specific issues within this younger population. Bullying and intimidation were commonplace at a number of women's prisons and, as reported in previous years, levels of self-harm remained exceptionally high. The use of challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIP) had however led to improvements in some prisons.

While the use of body worn video cameras had increased, their activation during use of force incidents remained patchy across the estate. Boards were the first to report the wider deployment of PAVA spray in men's prisons. There were concerning variations and apparent disproportionality in its use.

At the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a drop in levels of violence, as prisoners spent all but one or two hours a day locked in cell, with limited interaction with staff and other prisoners. As restrictions eased, some Boards began to report pockets of inter-prisoner violence and assaults on staff. In the initial months of lockdown, levels of self-harm also dropped in many men's prisons, particularly those holding young adults, though by early 2021 Boards were beginning to report an increase after many months of lockdown. In women's prisons, however, there were significant increases and spikes in self-harm during the year.

Pre-Covid findings

Reception and induction

Local prisons, under pressure of arrivals, sometimes struggled to carry out all the safety procedures and checks necessary. A number of Boards reported inconsistent induction sessions, or gaps in health screening; though the Board at Durham noted improvements in the physical layout of the reception area.

Suicide and self-harm

Men's prisons

Levels of self-harm in local prisons remained in general high. A number of Boards reported significant increases: between 48% and 66% at Cardiff, Manchester and Belmarsh (though sometimes attributed to a number of repeated self-harmers) and 14% in Pentonville. However, at Winchester there had been a reduction, attributed to staff proactively monitoring likely triggers, such as court appearances. At Wormwood Scrubs, there had also been an overall reduction, though there was a spike in July

2019, linked to higher levels of violence and fewer staff on the wings due to staff shortages. At Bristol, where there had been two apparently self-inflicted deaths, the Board had, on occasion, expressed concerns about the poor standard of ACCT documentation (raised for prisoners identified as at risk of suicide or self-harm). Some Boards, such as High Down, continued to raise concern about the lack of healthcare attendance at ACCT reviews.

Boards at some category C training prisons, including Holme House and Lindholme, reported an increase in the number of self-harm incidents. At Guys Marsh and Isis, even though Boards noted a reduction in acts of self-harm the number of incidents still remained high. At the latter, a small number of prisoners with mental health issues self-harmed at least 10 times each month. At Ranby, where levels of self-harm remained similar to the previous year, the Board called for greater officer presence on the wings in order to better understand the prisoners under their care.

Self-harm incidents had increased at a number of long-term high security prisons. At Wakefield, not only did the number of incidents rise by over a third, but the number of self-harming individuals more than doubled. There was a smaller rise at Whitemoor, though the number of ACCTs rose by a third. At Woodhill there were levels of self-harm that the Board considered too high, and the poor quality of ACCT documentation was, in the Board's opinion an 'unnecessary risk'. Conversely, at Frankland ACCT case management had improved, following a number of Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reports on deaths in custody.

There were also striking differences in the two prisons exclusively holding foreign nationals. Huntercombe reported a 16% decrease in ACCTs and praised the recently-introduced safety intervention meetings for prisoners with complex needs. However, at Maidstone there had been a 55% increase in self-harm incidents, in spite of additional preventive measures.

Among young adults in particular, self-harm was often associated with gang-related issues, debt and bullying. At Swinfen Hall, reporting on a year that ended in April 2020, the Board noted a 10% increase in self-harm incidents, though levels had decreased among the under-21s.

Women's prisons

Boards in most women's prisons continued to report high and often increasing levels of self-harm, with a very high proportion of prolific and frequent self-harming women, who required considerable support. At Peterborough women's prison, there was a 78% rise in incidents, with nearly three-quarters being usually attributable to no more than ten women, many with complex needs that required considerable support. Similarly, at Styal, between 64% and 85% of incidents involved between nine and 12 women who self-harmed frequently, and at Eastwood Park, 13 women accounted for 149 out of 196 incidents in one month.

At New Hall, however, there had been a drop in self-harm incidents, even though many women continued to have complex mental health needs: the Board associated

this with a more effective use of ACCTs and the introduction of daily triangulation meetings between healthcare and prison staff to record and analyse incidents.

Violence

Men's prisons

Prisons had introduced the CSIP process, to support both perpetrators and victims of violence. At Ashfield, the Board noted that its implementation had led to a reduction in violence and improved quality of reporting, and the Board at Wormwood Scrubs commended the introduction of prisoner safety representatives on the wings. However, at Bedford, where assaults on staff remained high, the Board did not believe that the new strategy had made much difference.

In some prisons, irrespective of processes, there appeared to be a clear link between the incidence of violence and staff relationships and numbers. In Cardiff, where violent incidents had always been comparatively low, they reduced by a further 42%, and the Board attributed this to good staff-prisoner relationships. Similar comments were made by the Board at Hull, which reported that key working and the use of body worn video cameras had contributed to a 25% decrease in assaults on staff.

At Bullingdon and Huntercombe a decrease in assaults on staff was linked to higher staffing levels, and at Bullingdon the Board also attributed this to improved staff-prisoner relationships and greater body worn video camera usage. By contrast, at Woodhill, where there continued to be high levels of violence, the Board highlighted the large number of inexperienced prison officers, some of whom mishandled delicate situations and many of whom lacked full knowledge of rules and procedures, leading to prisoners' safety being compromised and a curtailed regime.

Drugs and drug debts were significant drivers of violence. So were gang affiliations and rivalries, for example at Lindholme (where almost a fifth of prisoners had links to organised crime) and at Belmarsh. At Pentonville, the Board reported that there were 129 gang members from 51 different gangs: 13% of the prison population. In Lewes, though there had been a 15% reduction in violent incidents, the Board still reported that some prisoners were reluctant to leave segregation for fear of violence, bullying or drugs.

Levels of violence remained low in prisons holding men convicted of sexual offences, though there were some concerns about increases due to the arrival of younger prisoners; this was also the case at one of the foreign national prisons, Maidstone. Violence also remained rare in open prisons.

Young adults

Young adult prisoners continued to be over-represented in violent incidents, with gang affiliations being a major factor, for example at Brinsford. At Isis, which was reverting to a largely young adult establishment, 80% of violent incidents were attributable to under-25s, who were only 60% of the population. At Swinfen Hall, there were over 300 violent incidents during the reporting period, around seven out of ten by prisoners under 21: force was used on prisoners on an almost daily basis.

At both Swinfen Hall and Deerbolt, a few prisoners were ‘self-isolators’, who retreated into their cells and refused to associate with others due to safety fears. At Aylesbury, the number of violent incidents and serious assaults dropped, but the population had also almost halved.

Women’s prisons

Violence in women’s prisons predominantly takes the form of bullying and intimidation. At Downview, the Board reported that canteen distribution remained a flashpoint for bullying issues, and at Styal incidents tended to occur while prisoners waited in medication queues. Some Boards at women’s prisons, like New Hall, Peterborough and Low Newton, reported that the CSIP process had been effective in reducing bullying and anti-social behaviour. However, at Send, where there had been a 46% increase in violent incidents, often related to drugs and bullying, there had been only six CSIP plans. The Board also noted that almost half the incidents occurred at weekends, when staffing levels were low and prisoners were more likely to be out of their cells.

Use of force

This remained variable. For example, the Nottingham Board reported that a use of force strategy, with monthly reviews of video footage, had improved monitoring and reduced serious incidents. However, at Bristol, use of force had risen, even though the population had declined, and the Board expressed concern about a failure to use de-escalation and the use of force on a prisoner with autism.

Similarly, while there was some good practice, the use of body worn video cameras remained patchy. The Board at Aylesbury reported that increased use had made it easier to adjudicate claims of excessive or misapplied force, and the Board at Low Newton women’s prison praised the use of body worn video camera footage in training to encourage good practice. However, other Boards, including those at Dartmoor, Cardiff, Wormwood Scrubs and Norwich, noted that cameras were not routinely activated during use of force incidents to capture valuable evidence; at Stoke Heath there was still some staff resistance to their use. At Pentonville, where body worn video cameras were rarely used, the Board considered that there was insufficient management grip on use of force in general, with paperwork often incomplete; the Board at Brinsford raised similar concerns about governance and poor-quality post-incident paperwork.

Among women’s prisons, use of force had increased at Send, alongside increased incidents of violence. But at Styal, which had the highest level of use of force in the women’s estate in 2019, most incidents were responses to women self-harming, often with ligatures.

In our previous national annual report, we expressed concern about the decision to roll out the use of PAVA (synthetic pepper spray), given some of the issues raised in the original pilot sites. It continued to be the case, pre-Covid, that use was extremely variable in those prisons: high at Wealstun and Risley, but low at Hull. At Wealstun, the Board was concerned that there was no requirement to conduct refresher

training, which was continually postponed even before the pandemic. At Risley, the Board found that the healthcare team had given incorrect instructions to prisoners following its use and needed additional training.

Substance misuse

As already stated, drugs and the associated disinhibited behaviour and accumulated debt are key drivers of violence in prisons. Lack of consistent provision of scanner technology, the availability of 'spice' (new psychoactive substance), and the physical vulnerability of many prisons to throw-overs continued to be an issue, though there were some positive results from new supply reduction initiatives.

At Pentonville, the Board noted that delays in installing a scanner, inadequate drug dog provision and broken windows exacerbated drug availability. At Wormwood Scrubs, drugs continued to be easily available, with some prisoners telling the Board that it was difficult to avoid drug-related activities; it was hoped that additional funding for body and mail scanners would reduce this. Funding for additional security was also being sought at Styal women's prison, where there had been a significant increase in drug and mobile phone finds.

At Nottingham and Manchester, additional resources for scanners and infrastructure appeared to be having the desired effect, with one Nottingham prisoner telling the Board that there was less drugs and violence than he had ever seen, and a nearly 30% decrease in positive drug tests at Manchester.

Covid-19 findings

Reception and induction

Whether arriving directly from court or on prison transfer, reception and induction processes had to be substantially altered during the pandemic. Newly arrived prisoners were held in reverse cohorting units (RCUs) as part of a 14-day quarantine period. This usually meant that prisoners did not get the support and induction that would usually be available at this point, particularly for those new to prison; some of the regimes were also extremely restricted, without daily access to showers or in some cases exercise.

In the women's estate, some Boards raised concerns about the limited induction process. Foston Hall IMB reported that group induction was initially suspended and replaced by an induction booklet. Prisoner-led induction was then introduced, and induction packs were distributed. The Board found that these packs were out of date and only available in English. However, the Board at Eastwood Park reported that care was taken to ensure that prisoners were not disadvantaged as a result of the altered induction process and staff carried out additional welfare checks.

Self-harm and suicide

Men's prisons

A number of men's prisons experienced a reduction in self-harm incidents during the first months of lockdown, though this was not universal: the Chelmsford Board reported a 14% increase, and three of the six self-inflicted deaths at Durham occurred between May and September 2020, during lockdown. At Cardiff, the Board reported a substantial decrease in self-harm between April and August, though this increased in August, partly due to repeated self-harm by a small number of prisoners. The same pattern was observed at Channings Wood, where in August the Board reported 54 self-harm incidents, the highest in the reporting year and the number of open ACCTs increased to an average of 33 between June and August. At Elmley there was also a steady increase between July and November. In March 2021, the Board at Pentonville reported that more Listeners were required than in the last 12 months, illustrating the high level of need among prisoners there.

In young adult establishments, self-harm dropped during the early months of lockdown, suggesting that there may be a strong link with fear of violence and intimidation, since there was much less opportunity for this.

By March-April 2021, a number of men's prisons, including Isis, Brixton and Wormwood Scrubs, were reporting rises in self-harm, sometimes significant. At Bullingdon, the Board raised concerns about a considerable increase in the number of prisoners who frequently self-harmed and the lack of mental healthcare provision. On one day in April 2021, there were 42 prisoners on an open ACCT plan, five on constant watch (because of imminent suicide risks) and five serious self-harm incidents. This all suggests that the cumulative effect of lockdown on wellbeing was beginning to be felt.

Attempts were made to provide support for prisoners at risk. Prisoner Listeners were unable to have face-to-face contact with the Samaritans, though some telephone help was available. Some prisons, like Elmley, increased staff support for prisoners at risk of self-harm. At Ashfield, prisoner representatives were proactive in identifying and supporting prisoners who were struggling, and the number of personal intervention plans (PIPs) open for those prisoners doubled.

In May 2021, Boards in Wales reported a general increase in self-harm. Self-harm incidents increased by 25% at Parc and nearly doubled at Cardiff. Between December and June 2021, the Wandsworth Board reported that there had been seven apparently self-inflicted deaths since December 2020, three of them within the last month, and all but one the result of ligaturing. Five of the seven individuals were foreign nationals. Boards at prisons holding a significant number of foreign national prisoners associated self-harm with the limited Home Office contact regarding immigration decisions during the pandemic (see chapter 2.3).

Women's prisons

Much greater concern was expressed about self-harm by Boards in the women's estate. There were significant increases at Eastwood Park, Foston Hall and Bronzefield. At the latter, there was an average of 224 monthly incidents between March and July 2020, with a peak of 261 in July; there was also a rise in the number of women self-harming: from 33 to 42 each month. At Foston Hall, even though opportunities for bullying decreased significantly, the Board reported an increase in the first six months of lockdown: over 1,000 self-harm incidents, up from 900 during the same period the year before. The daily number of ACCTs ranged between 25 and 30, in a population of around 300 prisoners, for most of the reporting year. In response, the prison introduced additional welfare checks on prisoners immediately after self-harming, in order to identify triggers. This was, however, short-lived due to staffing pressures.

While Drake Hall also experienced an increase in self-harm incidents in August and September 2020, the numbers remained low when compared with other closed women's prisons. However, the continuous observation suite was used on several occasions, and some injuries were so severe that prisoners required hospital treatment. In the open estate, such as at East Sutton Park, there was also a relative increase in the number of ACCT plans opened, associated with the regime restrictions; and Askham Grange reported only its second self-inflicted death in 13 years.

The Board at Bronzefield expressed concerns that the number of prisoners who self-harmed continued to rise, with 57 individuals in May 2021, compared to the monthly average of 33 in the previous reporting year. At the beginning of 2021, the number of self-harm incidents dropped to the lowest it had been for three years, but then spiked again to 250 incidents between April and June 2021.

Violence

Men's prisons

Initially, most prisoners understood and accepted the restricted regime on public health grounds. With limited interaction among prisoners and between prisoners and staff, levels of violence dropped at many prisons. However, as restrictions were maintained over many months, tensions and frustration grew.

Some Boards, such as Cardiff, reported increases in violence in the summer, as prisoners' accumulated frustration and mental distress manifested itself as violent behaviour. At Chelmsford, most violence was directed towards staff, with 99 incidents from March 2020 to the end of August, compared with 64 incidents in the previous six months of the reporting year, before lockdown.

At Bristol, however, there were slightly fewer incidents between March and July than in the previous year. Nevertheless, as restrictions were gradually loosened, the Board reported fighting between prisoners and outbursts of anger towards staff.

Some training and resettlement prisons, like Guys Marsh, Featherstone and Channings Wood, saw a substantial decrease in violence, with prisoners reporting that they felt safer in a more secure environment. The Board at Channings Wood reported that fewer prisoners were self-isolating due to debt-related bullying. However, the Board at Guys Marsh reported that pent-up frustration among prisoners due to the long-term restrictions was leading to acts of vandalism and substance misuse.

In the open estate, there were evident frustrations; they essentially became closed prisons, but without the same facilities and staffing ratios, and with prisoners who had expected to be able to benefit from release on temporary licence (ROTL) for work or family links. At Ford, there was a slight increase in both drug use and prisoner-on-prisoner violence. Some prisoners reported feeling less safe since the start of lockdown. The Board at Kirkham noted that the excessive time behind locked doors led to irritability, with arguments arising between prisoners and occasionally violence.

On the whole, Boards at establishments holding young adults, such as Swinfen Hall and Feltham B, reported lower levels of violence than pre-pandemic. At Feltham B, the number of assaults on staff initially increased, but then dropped as the weeks went on. As young adults mixed in very small groups when out of cell, there were fewer opportunities for prisoner-on-prisoner violence. At Deerbolt, there were also fewer inter-gang rivalries, with more prisoners arriving from local areas due to limited inter-prison transfers to minimise the spread of Covid-19. However, as a result, there were also delays in securing transfers for several prisoners who wished to remain in segregation, as they were fearful of other prisoners.

Women's prisons

The levels of violence in general decreased in some women's prisons, but in some frustration and mental distress began to manifest itself as violence towards staff. The Board at Foston Hall reported the highest rate of violence in the women's estate, with 15 assaults on staff in July 2020. By the summer, prisoners had already spent months locked in cell, with limited family contact and unable to engage in purposeful activity. There were 72 assaults on staff between March and November, compared to 60 for the same period the previous year, and between August and November, 29 CSIPs were opened, compared with five during the same period the previous year.

Use of force

In prisons that experienced rises in violence, there was also an increase in use of force. The Board at Foston Hall found that there was scope for improvement in body worn video camera use and de-escalation tactics. At Birmingham, increased use of force was associated with prisoners refusing to transfer elsewhere or to return to their cells after being allowed out for just an hour a day.

It was of considerable concern that Boards began to report the deployment of PAVA outside the previously-agreed sites, even though Her Majesty's Prison and Probation

Service (HMPPS) had announced that the roll-out was to be paused during the pandemic. It was then discovered that in fact PAVA use had been authorised across all men's closed prisons in May 2020 by use of force instructors and previously-trained staff. This was in expectation of a rise in disturbances due to lockdown, which never in fact happened.

As in the pre-lockdown period, there were considerable variations in the use and deployment of PAVA, including among the original sites. Statistics also showed a troubling and persistent pattern of disproportionate use on black, mixed race and Muslim prisoners, which has so far remained unexplained. There had still been no refresher training.

Substance misuse

During the early months of lockdown, mandatory drug testing was halted. It was also more difficult for illicit substances to enter or be distributed in prisons due to lockdown.

Most Boards reported a decrease in drug finds. However, the restricted regime and boredom drove demand and supply in some prisons, particularly the use of allegedly legal mail. At Birmingham, 330 pages of such drug-impregnated letters were found in one month, and there was an eightfold increase in drug-contaminated mail at Downview women's prison between March and April 2020 as lockdown began. Mail impregnation was also associated with a spice outbreak at Elmley, where 60 prisoners in one block were under the influence over three days.

In most prisons, there were also indicators that prisoners were turning to other forms of illicit substances. Many Boards, including Gartree, Birmingham and Foston Hall, reported a rise in the use of 'hooch' (alcohol brewed from foodstuffs), and at Cardiff cell searches found a rise in prescription medication.

2.3 Fair and humane treatment

As reported in previous years, budgetary constraints and a lack of investment had led to deterioration in the infrastructure and a backlog of maintenance work. There were some improvements in response time under the new GFSL contract, but Boards still reported delays in even the most basic repairs. In many cases, the result was a lack of decent living standards for prisoners.

There were particular concerns among Boards about the segregation of prisoners whose complex mental health needs could not be adequately treated in that environment. Boards continued to report unacceptable delays in transfers to appropriate NHS secure mental health facilities.

At many establishments, it seemed that equality and diversity was not prioritised, and staff charged with driving forward equality issues were often diverted elsewhere, even before the pandemic. Some Boards identified disproportionalities in the use of force, segregation and adjudications for black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners. During Covid-19, information deficits and the withdrawal of Home Office staff added to the stress on the growing number of foreign national prisoners. Provision for older prisoners remained patchy.

Boards continued to raise concerns about systemic property loss across the prison estate.

Accommodation

Overall, some progress appeared to have been made in addressing backlogs in repairs and equipment replacement, but the basics of maintaining a decent and safe environment were still not consistently delivered across the prison estate. All but critical maintenance was suspended in March 2020.

At Pentonville, for example, the Board recited a litany of neglect:

Persistent plumbing issues across the prison cause frequent lack of hot (and sometimes cold) water, blocked toilets and showers, and leaks.

Many cells still have inadequately screened toilets.

Many showers are mouldy, infested with flies and in a poor state of repair.

The plan to deep-clean all toilets by the end of 2019 has not been completed.

There is a persistent problem of vermin, especially cockroaches, despite weekly Rentokil visits.

The refurbishment of a landing by GFSL Projects was completed in May 2019 but it remained non-operational owing to plumbing issues until its deployment in March 2020 for prisoners self-isolating because of Covid-19.

Several lifts were out of operation for extended periods, causing problems for prisoners (and visitors) with mobility issues.

Similar issues were reported by many other Boards, particularly in ageing local prisons like Preston and Bedford; at Wandsworth, the Board considered that ‘the age, decay and physical limitations of the buildings created conditions for the prisoners which the Board considered inhumane’. Concerns about sanitation were also raised by Boards in some training and long-term prisons, like Long Lartin and Aylesbury: and the Board at Whatton wrote to the Minister to report damp and sewage smells in the healthcare centre, an infection control risk.

The Board at Belmarsh welcomed the decision to finally phase out by 2021 triple occupancy in cells designed for two, but many other boards continued to report the basic lack of decency involved in two prisoners sharing a cell, especially where these cells were only designed for one, as at Bullingdon and Wandsworth. A number of Boards, including Holme House, Lancaster Farms, Bristol, Swinfen Hall and Peterborough women’s prison, reported on the lack of decency when prisoners had to share a single cell without any adequate privacy screening, and in many cases where they had to eat meals. As we have said on many occasions, there is no other public building where this would be acceptable. One of the few benefits of the Covid-19 lockdown was that cell-sharing was reduced or stopped in many prisons, for reasons of health and safety, which serves to illustrate its unacceptability.

Several Boards, including The Mount and Lincoln, continued to report a backlog of maintenance work: At Exeter, the Board still reported 400 outstanding work requests, and at Highpoint the number was growing, partly due to recruitment challenges. There were some improvements recorded, such as shower refurbishments and equipment replacement, at a number of prisons. However, the cumulative effect of years of ineffective maintenance was apparent in many prisons. At Eastwood Park, though the backlog had reduced, there had been significant deterioration in the state of the buildings, and a ‘planning blight’ in remedying serious defects, such as roof leaks. Privately run prisons, such as Ashfield, appeared to have higher maintenance standards.

There were some successful local initiatives to involve prisoners in cleaning, decorating and maintenance, which had the potential to develop skills as part of progression or preparation for release. At prisons such as Whitemoor, Bedford and Ashfield, Boards commended the work of prisoners involved in cleaning and maintenance work alongside staff. At Bristol, a prisoner maintenance party had refurbished three wings; at Lancaster Farms the introduction of a wing cleanliness competition had proved successful. At Stoke Heath, the ‘Active Citizenship’ committee designed the yard of the drug rehabilitation wing, which included planters to improve mental wellbeing.

Though cell-sharing was significantly reduced during lockdown, other issues were exacerbated. Most maintenance work was suspended, and Boards reported that, as a result, the existing backlog would continue to build. For example, the Board at Wayland noted that unresolved heating issues would probably result in accommodation units being too cold once again during the winter months. At Bristol, prisoners were confined to cells that were too cold in winter and too hot in summer.

Segregation

As in previous years, there were reports of some good practice and a reduction in the use of segregation in some prisons. However, underlying and longstanding issues remained unresolved: the number of prisoners with complex mental health or behavioural issues spending lengthy periods either awaiting transfer to secure mental health facilities or being rotated around segregation units, where their support and progression needs could not be met in spite of the efforts of staff. In addition, safety fears meant that some prisoners actively sought to stay in segregation rather than return to normal location. Physical conditions and education provision in segregation units continued to vary significantly in quality.

Some Boards were able to report reduced use of segregation, because of other interventions. At Lindholme, both the number of segregated prisoners and the length of stay in segregation had reduced by 2020, as a result of more effective use of the CSIP process. Brinsford IMB found that after a less serious incident, prisoners would be given a 'cooling off' period in the residential areas, rather than the immediate use of segregation. It was also noticeable during the Covid-19 pandemic that some Boards reported fewer prisoners in segregation: at Gartree, for example, the Board noted that prisoners, including some who had spent prolonged periods in segregation, were moved out more quickly.

However, there were still many reported concerns about the use, and extent, of segregation. Some Boards, like Isis, reported that segregation was used for an extended period for prisoners in a higher security category who were awaiting transfer. Similarly, at Stocken, a category C training prison, the Board raised major concerns about category B prisoners being held in the segregation unit while awaiting transfer.

There was also concern, for example at Featherstone and Lewes, about prisoners who had deliberately engineered their segregation, or were reluctant to leave it, because of safety fears on residential wings. At Feltham B, a group of five young adults were held in the segregation unit for their own protection until they were eventually transferred to another establishment.

Boards continued to report that prisoners on an open ACCT, because of the risk of self-harm or suicide, were being held in what amounts to solitary confinement. On average, there were between five and six such prisoners in segregation at Lowdham Grange at any one time, though this had decreased significantly from the previous year. Similarly, at Isis, though there had also been a reduction, in some months there could be up to six segregated prisoners on an ACCT. The Boards at Lewes and Manchester reported constant watches (due to imminent suicide risks) in the segregation unit.

This was even more acute in some women's prisons. At Downview, 48 women on open ACCTs had been placed in segregation, and a further three had an ACCT opened while there; though the number of segregated women on ACCTs had decreased at Eastwood Park.

There also continued to be serious concerns about the use of segregation for prisoners with serious mental health issues; and the more serious and complex the condition, the longer segregation might persist. This was partly because of unacceptable delays in transfers to secure mental health hospitals. At Cardiff and Exeter, two prisoners were held in the segregation unit for seven months and 18 weeks respectively, awaiting transfer to a secure mental health hospital. At the latter, four prisoners were on constant watch for between two to six months while awaiting transfer. At Peterborough women's prison, the Board continued to raise concerns about women with complex mental health needs who were segregated for lengthy periods, and the Boards at New Hall, Eastwood Park and Bronzefield noted the delays in transfers: at Bronzefield only 14 of the 39 transfers had taken place within the recommended 14 days from the second mental health assessment. At Eastwood Park, the Board wrote to the Minister about a woman with acquired brain injury who had been segregated for over 900 days, stating that this amounted to inhumane treatment. Some Boards also reported the premature re-transfer back to prison of patients who had been temporarily stabilised, only to deteriorate rapidly once returned to prison.

The IMBs recently submitted evidence to the Reforming the Mental Health Act consultation on the proposal to introduce a 28-day statutory time limit on transfers to secure mental health hospitals. We argued strongly in favour of an expedited time limit, to ensure that prisoners are held in appropriate therapeutic settings, but pointed out that without a significant increase in secure mental health provision, this would almost certainly be unachievable.

In other cases, prisoners who clearly had complex behavioural needs and risks, often diagnosed as personality disorder, were not deemed to fall within the parameters of the Mental Health Act. Particularly in the high security estate, they could spend many months in segregation, often being passed around from one segregation unit to another in what the Board at Wakefield described as a 'merry-go-round'. At Woodhill, in May 2020, there were two prisoners who had been in segregated conditions for over 400 and 500 days respectively and at Wakefield one prisoner had cumulatively spent 949 days in segregation, while three others had accumulated 300, 200 and 100 days respectively. There appeared to be little progression planning at Long Lartin or at Wakefield, where the Board noted that 'transferring problematic prisoners around the LTHSE without a long-term plan is unlikely to provide any meaningful opportunities to tackle the root causes of their behaviour'.

There were some promising initiatives in other high security prisons. At Full Sutton, the supporting transition and enabling progression (STEP) unit opened in August as an attempt to break the cycle of long-term segregation. However, after a promising start, a combination of staff changes, budgetary reviews and in particular the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, had a very damaging impact on its ability to assist reintegration.

Conditions and regime

Boards also commented on the support, conditions and regime available for segregated prisoners. Inconsistent attendance at segregation review boards continued to be noted, for example at Durham. However, the Board at Lowdham Grange reported improved involvement of the mental health team, who were better informed and regularly attended segregation reviews.

A few Boards, such as Birmingham, reported improvements in the physical environment of the segregation unit. However, this was not the case elsewhere. At both Lancaster Farms and Feltham B, Boards described the segregation exercise yards as 'bleak', ill-equipped and unfit for purpose. At Whitemoor, the cells were in poor condition and at Manchester, there were broken windows and heating issues. At Wayland, the Board for the sixth time called for the replacement of the wholly unsuitable unit.

Several Boards raised concerns about the impact of segregation on rehabilitation, with very limited access to education, and sometimes, as at Isis, a lack of even basic distraction activities, due to budget constraints. At Long Lartin, the Board found that staff shortages resulted in an even more restricted regime in the segregation unit and subsequent poor prisoner behaviour.

Most Boards, including at Isle of Wight, Humber, Liverpool and Northumberland, commended staff in the segregation unit for supporting some of the most challenging prisoners. Featherstone IMB commended the 'patience and perseverance' of staff in the segregation unit. Most Boards in women's prisons noted that staff in the segregation units treated difficult and challenging prisoners with care. At Bullingdon, the Board reported an improvement in the management of the unit, with prisoners collecting their meals from the servery, increasing their contact with others. Ironically, some Boards reported that during the lockdown, segregated prisoners were better supported than those effectively living in segregated conditions on normal location: with a higher staff ratio and more certainty about exercise and phone access.

Equality and diversity

A few Boards reported increased prisoner engagement in equality initiatives. At Haverigg, 15 prisoners were involved in the development and promotion of the equality agenda. Isle of Wight IMB noted an improvement in equalities management, with prisoner-led forums and a reduction in discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs).

Many Boards linked staffing pressures to an insufficient focus on equality and diversity. At Highpoint, while the Board praised the diversity and inclusion team, the equalities officer had only 17.5 hours a week for this role across two prison sites. At Whitemoor and Send, equalities action team meetings and focus groups on protected characteristics were only held sporadically. At Foston Hall, monthly support groups were regularly cancelled.

The Board at Nottingham noted an improvement in the time taken to deal with DIRFs, with the longest response time decreasing from 10 weeks to five days. However, at Grendon none of the 15 DIRFs raised by the end of July 2020 had been answered on time. New processes were subsequently introduced. Woodhill IMB reported that, in 2019, over 60% of DIRFs had not been investigated at all, and only 14% had been answered in time, despite the reduction in the number of submitted forms. None of the DIRFs were upheld, as had been the case the previous year.

During the pandemic, support groups and equality forums were suspended in most prisons; some resumed when regime restrictions were relaxed for a time. There were some attempts to keep work going: the Board at Full Sutton reported that the equalities team spoke to prisoners twice a week to identify any issues, though this reduced to weekly visits when there were staffing shortages.

Race and ethnicity

A few Boards, such as Full Sutton, raised concerns about the lack of diversity among prison staff. At Swinfen Hall, the Board found that the proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic officers was only 5%, compared to 42% of prisoners.

The Board at Ford raised concerns that fewer black, Asian or minority prisoners engaged in paid work outside. While they accounted for 44% of the prison population, 67% of those in paid work in January 2020 and 74% in March were white. When paid work resumed in August, only four black, Asian or minority ethnic prisoners out of 47 were working outside the prison.

There were also reports of disproportionality in disciplinary issues. At Lewes, between April and October 2020, 33% of uses of force were on black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners, who were only 17% of the population. At Littlehey, black prisoners (10% of the population) were involved in 26% of adjudications, and mixed-race prisoners (5%) in 11% of adjudication. At Birmingham, in June 2020, the Board had similar findings: black prisoners (15% of the population) accounted for 23% of adjudications and mixed-race prisoners (8%) for 14%. It should be noted that the Prison Service's own statistics continue to show disproportionate use of PAVA across all sites against both black and mixed-race prisoners.

This also translated into disproportionality in the use of segregation, for example at Dovegate and at Cardiff, where 10% of segregated prisoners were black or mixed race, though they accounted for only 4% of the population. The Board was concerned that diversity and equality action team (DEAT) meetings began receiving only aggregated data in relation to black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners, which could mask the experience of prisoners from certain sub-groups.

Concerns were raised by two Boards monitoring prisons holding young adults. At Aylesbury, the Board found that a disproportionate number of Muslim prisoners were in segregation, that black and Muslim prisoners were disproportionately more likely to be on the basic level of the incentives scheme and less likely to be on the enhanced level, and that black prisoners were disproportionately likely to be subject to the use of force and segregation. A new equalities team in 2020 worked to raise awareness of equality and diversity and had found a backlog of 21 unaddressed

DIRFs that could not be dealt with as they were too overdue. The Swinfen Hall Board found that, while there had been some improvement, white prisoners were still more likely to be in employment than prisoners of other ethnicities. There was even greater disproportionality in relation to the segregation of black, Asian and minority ethnic than in previous years; they accounted for 54% of those in segregation, while being only 42% of prisoners.

Sometimes, racial disproportionality goes unrecorded and therefore unnoticed. The Board at Isle of Wight prison asked for a breakdown by ethnicity of cell searches (carried out when there is a suspicion that a prisoner may be concealing illicit items). At first, this was said to be unavailable, but when the Board persisted, it became apparent that only 11% of white prisoners had been subject to cell searches, 19% of which resulted in no finds, whereas 27% of black prisoners had had their cells searched, with 31% of searches finding nothing. The prison is now regularly keeping those statistics and investigating the reasons for the discrepancy.

In the women's estate, there continued to be issues with the provision of appropriate personal care items for black women at Send and Foston Hall, and at Peterborough women's prison more than half of the 76 DIRFs submitted in 2019 related to racial discrimination. Towards the end of the reporting year, the prison was seeking to obtain independent scrutiny of these forms, as recommended in the Lammy Review³.

Foreign nationals

Some Boards reported improvements in translation services. At Send, after a number of complaints from foreign national women, the Board reported that there was more usage of the Big Word 24/7 telephone interpreting services, with three-way handsets available on all wings, and complaint forms were available in various languages. However, at Maidstone, a specialist foreign national prison, the Board reported issues with the translation service used for adjudication and healthcare due to 'a lack of skilled translators in some languages or dialects'. Most written information both in prison notices and Home Office documents were only available in English.

At Styal, a senior member of staff acknowledged to the Board that foreign national prisoners struggled to access the enhanced level of the incentives scheme, as they were often overlooked by operational staff. A peer mentor system was subsequently introduced in order to address this issue.

In the initial months of lockdown, Boards expressed concern about the growing number of foreign national prisoners held under immigration powers, while at the same time contact with the Home Office was almost non-existent. The Board at Huntercombe reported a significant increase in the number of foreign national prisoners issued with an IS91 notification (having completed their prison sentence and now being detained under immigration powers) during 2020, up from three in January to 24 by the end of December. The Board found that this was 'neither fair

³ [The Lammy Review \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

nor humane' and this uncertainty exacerbated mental health issues for those being held beyond their conditional release date.

At Cardiff, no Home Office representative attended between April and August 2020, although some teleconferencing took place. Home Office documentation was only available in English, and the Board reported that the delays and lack of information had led to an incident of self-harm and food refusal. At Maidstone, there was a disagreement between the Home Office and Prison Service about the wearing of appropriate personal protection equipment, as a result of which the Home Office team was instructed not to engage with prisoners on the wings. Papers were sometimes served under cell doors. The Board believed that this reduced engagement had been one of the triggers for negative behaviours including self-harm, which increased by over 40% on the previous year.

Age and disability

There is an increasingly ageing population at some establishments, who require more active support to facilitate their engagement with the regime, sometimes due to deteriorating health conditions or limited mobility. Some Boards reported a lack of facilities or specialist provision for these prisoners: for example, there were no over-55 gym classes at Woodhill, though 7% of the population were over 50. At Littlehey, where almost half the prisoners were over 50 and one in five were over 65, the Board noted with concern that many positive initiatives for these older prisoners had closed or ceased to operate over the last few years, and that nearly half of the over-65s had no allocated activity to earn money to top up their £6 pension allowance, and were socially isolated. The Board acknowledged that health and social care provided an excellent service, and there was now a team of full-time carers in the prison.

The Board at Whitemoor reported that activities were very limited for older and less able prisoners. There was, however, some focused provision at Full Sutton, where approximately 13% of the prison population were over 60. The Board noted that the older persons' group facilitated age-appropriate social activities and some health-related checks, and that an older persons' forum, held every two months and chaired by a prison equality officer, gave them the opportunity to discuss their issues. At Eastwood Park, there were also frequent meetings for prisoners aged over 50.

A number of Boards, expressed concerns about social care provision for elderly prisoners. At Bullingdon, the Board reported that some prisoners had to remain on the healthcare inpatient unit due to a lack of suitable accommodation on the wings, which limited their access to the mainstream regime. At Birmingham, there was an excellent social care unit, but it did not have enough space for the number of older men arriving at the prison.

Some Boards, including East Sutton Park and Leyhill, noted the installation of facilities for prisoners with physical disabilities. At Peterborough women's prison, there were lifts and ramps for prisoners with mobility issues, though still no grab rails or raised toilet seats in cells allocated to prisoners with disabilities. However, boards

elsewhere, such as at Cardiff, Bristol, Manchester and Lincoln, continued to report accessibility issues for prisoners with physical disabilities.

Property

Property continued to constitute a significant proportion (over 20%) of the unresolved issues that prisoners brought to IMBs as applications. Almost all boards criticised the manual paper card system and continued to report cases of lost, misplaced or damaged prisoners' property across the prison estate. This continued to be a problem even when there were fewer transfers during the pandemic,

Where there were fewer instances of property loss within prisons, Boards pointed to local efforts by staff to improve management and increase accountability. Extra secure storage space was made available at Bristol. The Board at Isle of Wight reported that staff at reception were managing internal property more efficiently and the number of prisoner complaints had halved. At Dovegate, after a discussion with the IMB, the then Director appointed a property manager as the single point of contact for property. Within a few weeks, over 1,000 items had been found on site and returned to their owners, forwarded to another establishment or discarded. This resulted in less work for both staff and the IMB, as well as significantly fewer complaints from prisoners. The Board at Wormwood Scrubs also reported fewer instances of property loss within the prison, after the introduction of a more robust property management system. Ashfield IMB reported that the establishment had introduced an electronic property card system in April 2020, which facilitated several aspects of property management.

However, there continued to be major problems in relation to property transferred between prisons. Many Boards, including Hollesley Bay, reported that inter-prison engagement on property lost on transfer rarely resulted in positive action, and inter-prison property loss almost doubled for prisoners arriving at Wormwood Scrubs. At Lindholme, the Board noted that property issues were a source of aggravation to prisoners, which would occasionally result in poor behaviour. Kirklevington Grange IMB reported that, on one occasion, the prisoner's property arrived over three months after their transfer to the establishment. The Board at Eastwood Park reported that the baggage storage area was 'cluttered and somewhat chaotic', due to a backlog of property for inter-prison transfers, the lack of available storage space and reception staff being redeployed to other duties due to staff shortages.

The much-delayed HMPPS consultation on prisoners' property, promised for over two years, was finally launched in 2021. To Boards' frustration, a digital solution to tag and trace property appears to be as far away as ever, and they have continued to express concern about the lack of clear targets or focus on this area. They repeatedly point out that items of personal and sentimental value - letters, family photographs, legal correspondence – become all the more important when in prison, and the loss, inefficiency and apparent disregard for the consequences can seriously affect prisoners' wellbeing.

2.4 Health and wellbeing

Before the pandemic, there were some noticeable improvements in healthcare appointment waiting times though, due to staffing issues, cancelled or missed appointments remained an issue in many prisons. There remained serious concerns about the level of unmet mental health need. During Covid-19, healthcare services were reduced and in particular mental healthcare was initially restricted to crisis intervention.

Pre-Covid, some Boards reported full regimes and adequate time out of cell, though in other prisons regimes were limited due to staffing pressures. During most of 2020, prisoners in most adult prisons were locked in cells for 22-23 hours a day, though some establishments were able to offer more. This restricted Covid-19 fatalities to much fewer than predicted, but cumulatively had a severely detrimental effect on mental health and wellbeing.

Pre-Covid findings

Healthcare: general

Some boards reported noticeable improvements in healthcare services. Gartree IMB reported that the new NHS provider was effectively addressing quality and access issues, with recruitment of additional staff and subsequent shorter waiting times. Similarly, the Board at Stoke Heath pointed to the considerable improvement in staffing levels, with a new GP clinical lead and, for the first time in several years, a full team of primary care nurses. The Board at Whatton reported a significant improvement from the level of service that had been strongly criticised in previous reports. Peterborough women's prison also reported improvements in governance and delivery after the appointment of a new head of healthcare: for example, there was a weekly nurse-led well-woman clinic.

However, in other prisons, staffing problems, both among healthcare and prison staff, impacted badly on services. Boards including Bristol, Onley and Manchester reported healthcare staffing shortages. Understaffing was also an issue in some women's prisons, for example at Foston Hall, where there were four vacant primary care nurse posts. There were particular problems in the high security estate, due to the time taken to obtain security clearance: at Belmarsh, this could take up to nine months, during which time appointees got jobs elsewhere: the prison had 11 vacancies for primary care nurses.

Waiting times remained a concern. At Holme House, the Board reported that GP appointment waiting times were occasionally as high as five to six weeks. In the women's estate, there were some noticeable improvements in waiting times, at Styal, Bronzefield and Peterborough, where GP waiting times averaged only 4.7 days. Dental waiting times remained mixed, with improvements in a few prisons, like Durham, Stoke Heath and Send, but increased waiting times at others, like Highpoint.

Missed appointments (DNAs or 'did not attend') remained of concern. This had improved at Nottingham, but at a number of other prisons there were high levels of DNAs: at Wormwood Scrubs and Risley the DNA rate was 30%. There were a number of reasons for this: insufficient residential staff to unlock or escort, late delivery of appointment slips and prisoner refusals. Some Boards in women's prisons also reported problems; however, Bronzefield reported a reduction in missed appointments and at Styal a peer mentor chased up women on the dental appointments list, resulting in fewer missed appointments.

A number of Boards also reported concerns about cancelled appointments at outside hospitals. At Pentonville and Winchester, there were last-minute cancellations due to a shortage of prison officer escorts; at Belmarsh in January 2020, 26 out of 89 hospital appointments were cancelled, for a variety of reasons.

Mental healthcare

Mental health continued to be a major issue, and mental health teams struggled to meet the need. At Guy's Marsh, around 40% of prisoners had complex and challenging mental health issues. Wandsworth IMB reported that each month between 300 and 380 prisoners were referred to mental health services in a population of around 1,450 prisoners. The Board at Nottingham reported that there were over 200 monthly mental health referrals, and the Board at Bristol reported 60 referrals a day. At Elmley, the Board also raised concerns about the number of prisoners arriving with a mental health diagnosis.

In many women's prisons, there was a high proportion of women with complex mental health needs, and limited capacity to meet them. Boards noted that the challenging behaviour of such women presented real difficulty for prison staff trying to support them. At Send and Styal, the Boards reported that around a third of the women were referred to, or supported by, mental health services at any one time. At Eastwood Park, 71% of women coming into the prison had mental health needs, and the complex needs unit for women with serious mental health issues was at full capacity. The Board at Bronzefield reported that the 24-hour inpatient healthcare unit had been at or near full capacity with mental health patients throughout the reporting year.

A few Boards, such as Gartree, Drake Hall and Bronzefield, noted an improvement in recruiting permanent mental health staff and shorter appointment waiting times. At Bronzefield, this had resulted in a reduction in waiting list times as well as improvement in access to services. At Foston Hall, two new members of staff worked with the psychologist as part of the intensive multidisciplinary case management team, which aimed to support prisoners with complex mental health needs that were hindering their progression.

However, this was not the case elsewhere. At Peterborough women's prison, the Board noted that the mental health team had lacked an on-site psychologist for most of the year, although there was some part-time cover to mitigate this. At Styal, the service did not meet the high level of need. The psychologist only attended once a

week, leading to long waiting times. The Board also reported delays in meeting some prisoners' health needs due to incomplete recordkeeping and poor communication between the healthcare team and prison staff.

This was also the case in some men's prisons. Wormwood Scrubs IMB reported that, while the mental healthcare team met assessment targets, it struggled to provide therapy services, with 64% of groups cancelled during the reporting year as a result of staff shortages. Belmarsh and Thameside were among prisons where most inpatient beds were occupied by mental health patients. At Bullingdon, while there were primary and secondary mental health services, the Board noted that the lack of counselling, a neglected service reliant on volunteer counsellors, left a 'significant need unmet'. The Board at Bristol pointed out that lack of access to treatment for mental health issues, or medication changes without explanation, were some of the main reasons given for self-harm.

Some Boards reported gaps in support for prisoners with a learning disability or difficulty. This provision remained uncoordinated at Swinfen Hall, and there was a vacant post at Foston Hall. However, the Board at Bronzefield noted that specialist learning disability or difficulty tutors continued to provide high-quality support.

There was a particular issue in the women's estate, where there were women with mental health issues who were sent to prison, not because they had committed a crime but because they were a risk to themselves or others. As there was no suitable community provision, prison was considered a 'place of safety'. Boards at Low Newton and New Hall raised this as a serious concern, and at Eastwood Park, the IMB reported that there were five mental health assessments for such women. Boards pointed out that placing individuals with such complex mental health needs in prison increased the risk of harm to themselves and to others.

As mentioned in the previous chapter (chapter 2.3), Boards continued to raise major concerns about the delays in transfers to secure mental health hospitals. Wandsworth IMB continued to report delays, as it had done for the last ten years.

At Thameside, the Board reported the domino effect of a lack of outside capacity:

The scarcity of secure outside hospital beds for prisoners with severe mental health issues creates an inhumane situation for these individuals. It also leads to a 'bed blocking' problem. As the inpatient unit is nearly always full, prisoners who need to be there often have to wait until a transfer has happened and a cell is freed up. Occasionally, there are prisoners housed in the CSU for whom it has been decided that the inpatient unit is a more appropriate location, but they cannot be moved there.

Only eight of the 48 men assessed for transfer there were transferred within 14 days. The Eastwood Park Board noted that of the 28 women assessed as needing transfer to secure mental health provision, 11 were declined by the outside provider. In prisons without their own inpatient units, such as Stoke Heath, there were also

delays in moving seriously mentally ill prisoners to other prisons with such units so that they could be assessed, with the result that they remained in segregation.

Time out of cell

Some Boards reported good levels of time out of cell for prisoners. At Peterborough women's prison, daily time out of cell averaged almost 12 hours. At Belmarsh, the Board noted an improvement in the consistency of time out of cell as a result of higher staffing levels. Better governance had also resulted in significantly fewer cancelled exercise sessions.

A number of Boards, however, raised concerns about excessive time locked in cell. At Manchester and Lewes, this was due to operational requirements and staffing issues. At the latter, the Board found that meals were eaten in cell and prisoners who did not engage in work or education were locked up for more than 22 hours a day. The Board at Wormwood Scrubs continued to express concern that the establishment did not honour the promised association time, thereby affecting prisoners' morale and '[diminishing] their respect for the regime'. Aylesbury IMB raised concerns that a large proportion of young adult prisoners stayed locked in their cells due to a lack of meaningful activity on weekdays. While there was capacity for 96% of the prison population to be out of their cells, the percentage of prisoners actually out of cell ranged from 54% to 74%. The Board identified two main contributory factors: the occasional shortage of uniformed staff to escort prisoners and the need to keep apart certain prisoners who had previously displayed violent or threatening behaviour towards each other.

Covid-19 findings

In the early months of the pandemic, as a result of exceptionally restricted regimes, the number of Covid-19 infections and deaths in the prison estate was far lower than initial predictions. However, this came at a cost to mental and physical health.

By the winter of 2020, the incidence of infections rose in many prisons, as in the community. In early December 2020, there were outbreaks in over 60 prisons, some of them involving more than 100 prisoners. As a result, regimes that had gradually relaxed reverted to very restricted Stage 4 status during the Christmas period, and this continued through early 2021, in line with the imposition of lockdown in the community.

Healthcare: general

At the outset of the pandemic, regular scheduled health checks were suspended. This resulted in a backlog of appointments and an increase in waiting times. In some cases, healthcare services were restricted to emergency appointments. Drake Hall IMB reported that a triage system was introduced at the beginning of the pandemic.

Prisoners with health concerns could notify healthcare staff and assessments would be arranged accordingly.

In prisons with in-cell telephony, such as Belmarsh, prisoners had access to teleconsultations in order to maintain patient care. At Gartree, the Board commended the imaginative ways of working adopted by the healthcare team, who used computer video equipment to assess and treat patients. Haverigg IMB reported that many prisoners expressed their appreciation for the work of healthcare staff under stressful and uncertain circumstances.

From June 2020, Boards reported that more clinics resumed, but with reduced clinic lists. Leyhill IMB, for example, reported that the pandemic resulted in more missed appointments, and the waiting area could only accommodate two people at a time due to social distancing requirements. As a result, there was an initial reduction in the number of appointments, but the situation had improved by early 2021, with waiting times at pre-Covid levels.

Staffing issues exacerbated these problems. In the women's estate, Bronzefield IMB continued to express concern about the shortage of nurses throughout 2020: at the beginning of July 2020, over half of the nursing staff posts were vacant. Although full-time agency workers covered these vacancies, the Board noted the detrimental impact of these shortages across the establishment, including in reception and the daily triage on the houseblocks. At Foston Hall, the Board reported longer waiting times for secondary care appointments. The longest wait in August was 26 weeks, in September 30 weeks and in October 24 weeks.

Prisoners' healthcare concerns were a significant proportion of applications made to IMBs, both on paper and through the freephone line. Up to April 2021, the highest number of calls from prisoners to the IMB freephone line were about healthcare concerns. However, few were specifically Covid-related. They were mostly linked to the inability to access treatment and medication. As in the community, the focus on Covid-19 and the limited access to healthcare provision may worsen health outcomes in a population with known high morbidity rates.

By March 2021, Boards, including Thameside and High Down, continued to report that healthcare provision was struggling to meet demand. The Board at Thameside received a disproportionate number of applications on healthcare issues, particularly from newly arrived prisoners who had pre-existing health conditions, about the waiting time to see healthcare staff.

Mental healthcare

Mental health issues were intensified during the Covid-19 lockdowns, as most prisoners spent all but an hour a day in cell. Some prisoners developed mental health conditions which may have gone unnoticed due to limited staff-prisoner interactions, while others' existing mental health issues deteriorated.

Many Boards noted that for some months during the first national lockdown specialist mental health support was restricted to only crisis interventions for the most acute identified cases. Counselling services were withdrawn, and mental health group work ceased. Some face-to-face appointments were arranged: at Eastwood Park, the Board reported that the psychiatrist, along with several junior colleagues, continued to see prisoners to complete assessments and reviews.

When limited services resumed in summer 2020, there were longer waiting times at many establishments. At Lewes, on average, prisoners were waiting up to nine weeks for a psychiatry appointment, with a waiting list of 96 in August, and there was limited face-to-face work.

The level of mental health need remained high and, in many cases, had significantly increased. One Board at a local prison reported an increase in the number of sleeping tablet prescriptions. At Ashfield, the Board reported that, while mental health provision met the pre-Covid level of demand, the impact of lockdown, coupled with smaller group sessions, led to longer waiting lists. In June 2020, there were 26 prisoners awaiting a session for anxiety, 19 for low mood and 12 for relapse prevention. Staff used telephone triage in order to deal with this increased demand and try to alleviate the worsening anxiety and agitation among prisoners.

Boards continued to report the cumulative impact on mental health and wellbeing of extended lockdowns. The Board at Springhill open prison reported a significant increase in the number of men transferring from closed prisons who required mental health referrals. Pre-Covid, the highest figure had been 2.7% of arrivals; in June 2020 this figure was 27%, in September 20% and in October 17%. In a survey, a third of prisoners needed mental health support, compared to 21% four years before. The Board attributed these increases to the mental health pressures on prisoners during lockdowns in the closed estate.

It is clear that there will be a long-term damaging mental health impact of a year of lockdown, in some cases in what was effectively solitary confinement, and the mental health needs of prisoners across the prison estate will need to be reassessed.

Time out of cell

Following the imposition of the first lockdown in March 2020, most prisoners were confined to their cells for around 23 hours a day, although in some prisons, like Dartmoor, the daily time out of cell could be as little as 30 minutes. While prisoners were initially compliant, after months of lockdown the restricted regime began to take its toll on mental health (see above), and frustrations began to grow.

Many Boards described the impact of extended time spent either alone, or in cramped shared accommodation. At Belmarsh, some prisoners were still held in cramped triple occupancy cells; The Board at Leicester considered it inhumane for two prisoners to share a small cell for 23 hours a day.

A number of boards raised concerns about the inadequate regime for symptomatic prisoners in isolation. In May 2020, the Board at Wandsworth reported that symptomatic prisoners could not access showers for two weeks while in isolation. At one prison, healthcare staff only visited symptomatic prisoners on the first and fifth day of isolation in their cell. Concerns were expressed via the IMB freephone line that some prisoners were reluctant to reveal symptoms in order to avoid such extreme isolation. However, at Drake Hall, for example, the Board reported that, during an outbreak in April and May 2020, healthcare and prison staff in full personal protective equipment visited symptomatic prisoners regularly during the day.

In June 2020, with restrictions gradually beginning to ease in the community, Boards reported inconsistency in time out of cell, which did not appear to be dependent on the function or layout of each establishment. In some cases, prisoners were only allowed to exercise every other day. At Lewes, as a result of staffing issues, time out of cell for exercise or showers took place early in the morning. This meant that, apart from collecting their food at 11am, prisoners on any two wings would not be released again until the following day. Even by the autumn of 2020, prisoners at Wealstun were locked in cell for 30 hours at a time, as time out of cell alternated between morning and evening.

In some other prisons, physical education instructors provided regular sessions in small groups. Belmarsh IMB reported that the gym was moved to the Astroturf area, so it could be used throughout the lockdown period, which proved to be popular with prisoners. At Full Sutton, the Board reported that prisoners were able to access the gym between mid-November and the end of December with the easing of restrictions.

However, regimes were again severely restricted when lockdown returned by the end of 2020 and into 2021. Time out of cell was restricted to two to three hours a day, and less at outbreak sites. Unusually, there was an almost full regime at Coldingley, while at other prisons like Lewes, an outbreak site, prisoners were only out of cell for 30 minutes a day.

At Leicester, the Board found that the cramped accommodation resulted in strict timetabling of time out of cell. At the end of March 2021, the following restricted regime remained in place for the 80% of prisoners not in employment:

- a 10-minute shower on 11 days per fortnight
- 30 minutes of outside exercise on 11 days per fortnight
- a daily 10-minute phone call
- daily attendance at the servery for the evening meal.

2.5 Progression and resettlement

Pre-Covid, there were improvements in education attendance and success rates at some prisons, but elsewhere there were low levels of engagement and staffing shortages that resulted in class cancellations. There was still too little purposeful activity at a number of establishments. The shortage of category D places resulted in long waiting times for transfer to the open estate. Boards continued to raise major concerns about the imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentence, with many prisoners held well beyond their tariff date. There was some improvement in resettlement support, including employment links, but too many prison leavers did not have permanent accommodation on release.

During the pandemic, opportunities for progression and rehabilitation were severely reduced. Education delivery was greatly disrupted and remained patchy across the prison estate. Offending behaviour programmes were also initially stopped and then significantly reduced. In the absence of social visits, remote alternatives, in particular video visits, were rapidly made available, though there were some technical issues that inhibited take-up. Very few prisoners were released under the early release scheme. Fewer prisoners left without some temporary accommodation, due to the national homelessness reduction scheme, but there continued to be problems with permanent accommodation.

The IMB's annual reports on The Mount, a category C training prison in Hertfordshire, from 2017 onwards chart very clearly the difficult journey that the prison, like many others, had experienced over the last three years, with a gradual and slow recovery from the damaging staff cuts of 2012-15 abruptly halted by the pandemic. The Board's reporting year ends in February.

Case study: The Mount 2017-21

2017-18 – In 2016, the Board had warned that there was a risk of violent disorder: staff shortages as a result of the severe cuts after 2012 had led to the loss of experienced staff and a lack of control. This prediction proved sadly true, with serious disturbances in August 2017, which the Board attributed to a 'vicious spiral of decline'. This was followed by a 'draconian regime' of very little time out of cell, as the only way to provide a baseline of safety and control. By early 2018, the Board noted that at no time during the year were there sufficient staff to operate a category C training prison safely, with the result that only around a third of the prisoners were being unlocked to go to work, education or other activities and many prisoners were spending far too long locked behind their doors.

2018-2019 – by early 2019, the Board was able to report steps towards recovery, with the prison fully staffed. However, over half the staff had less than a year's experience. At the beginning of the reporting year, only 30 prisoners were allocated to each education session; this rose to 120 by

early 2019, but attendance was only 70% as a result of failures to unlock, and a lack of effective monitoring. During the effective shutdown in 2017-18, contracts and work places had been lost, so workshops and other activities were having to be restarted from scratch.

2019-20 – reporting just before the pandemic, in early 2020, the Board was able to report progress, in spite of considerable obstacles. Effective allocation and monitoring had resulted in 87% attendance at education. More workshops were open, but difficulties in recruiting instructors, with salaries below local market rates, meant there were still insufficient opportunities. A quarter of prisoners were still unemployed and on one day in February 2020 only 119 of the 246 prisoners allocated to workshops were actually able to attend them.

2020-1 – the steady, but challenging, improvements ground to a halt due to the pandemic. Reporting in February 2021, the Board said: 'for much of the year, prisoners have not had adequate time out of their cells ... access to education or work, [or] the opportunity to take part in offending behaviour programmes on their sentence plans'. Face-to-face education, on a very limited basis, had been possible only for two to three weeks, though around a fifth of prisoners had been able to enrol on distance learning. Most workshops had been open for only three weeks, and it was not clear whether recently renegotiated contracts would be renewed. An innovative rugby programme, leading to professional qualifications, opened in February 2020 but had to close four weeks later. The Board hoped for speedy rebuilding of opportunities.

Pre-Covid findings

Education, vocational training

Men's prisons

Local prisons

Many Boards reported unpredictable regimes and varying levels of attendance, with a shortage of training opportunities, particularly because of the short stay of many prisoners.

At Manchester and Birmingham, there were last-minute education cancellations. A number of Boards, including Wormwood Scrubs, Pentonville, Norwich and Chelmsford, reported low attendance at education sessions. The Board at Chelmsford noted that spaces were regularly over-allocated due to high levels of non-attendance, with the attendance rate varying between 58% and 66%. The Lewes IMB raised concerns about allocation and attendance rates that continued to be unacceptably low, at 73% and 67%, respectively. An understaffed education team meant that an average of 128 hours a month were lost; this began to improve towards the end of the reporting year.

A number of Boards reported that prisoners would be released or transferred elsewhere before being able to complete a course. At Lewes, for example, the Board reported that the average stay of more than half of the population was five weeks. The Board there found that there were only 18 accredited work placements, although this was an increase on the previous year. Despite sufficient workshop places at Nottingham, the Board reported low attendance levels. It also found that shortages of materials in workshops, such as textiles, hindered activity levels. The Board at Exeter called for more workshop and employment opportunities that could promote both personal and professional development.

Training prisons

Education and training should be central to the work of training prisons, yet many continued to struggle to ensure adequate provision. A great deal seemed to depend on local management, both of the education contract and its implementation, as well as on resourcing and staffing.

Some Boards recorded positive developments in attendance and success rates, which often coincided with more focused management. At Buckley Hall, under the new education manager and head of learning and skills, the attendance rate had increased from 64% to 71%, the number of course completions from 236 to 468, and qualifications gained from 202 to 379. At Erlestoke, the education department was almost fully staffed and there had been improvements, such as an increase in the success level in maths from 30% to 65%.

Boards at prisons holding men convicted of sexual offences, such as Littlehey and Bure, continued to report good education provision and engagement. At Ashfield, the Board reported that there was a wide range of courses and qualifications. Distance learning was also popular, with 15% of the population engaged in such courses, half of which were through the Open University. At Whatton, the Board noted a high average success rate of 83% across all courses.

However, other training prisons reported problems both with staffing and attendance. Coldingley, Gartree and Lancaster Farms all reported staffing issues. At the last, agency staff were used to cover tutor absences, but the cancellation rate was still over 11% towards the end of the reporting year. The Board at Featherstone raised concerns about recruitment, retention and high levels of staff sickness, which resulted in 'significant underperformance' in core subjects. By November 2019, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the education provider, Novus, subcontracted part of its work.

At Guys Marsh, the provider, Weston College, had been made the subject of an improvement notice due to poor performance. Completion rates in all levels of English and mathematics were still below 70%, with ESOL at under 40%. The Board at Stoke Heath highlighted the 'woefully inadequate' funding for both education and vocational training, with a 32% budget cut over three years. As a result, only 110 prisoners were in education in the morning and 88 in the afternoon, which amounted to only a quarter of the prison population, and fewer than 40% of prisoners were engaged in purposeful activity during the reporting year.

There were similar differences across vocational training. The Boards at Channings Wood and Guys Marsh reported that both completion and attendance rates were at or close to the 90% target. At Moorland, take-up and attendance at education and training was good, though there was insufficient workshop space.

However, this was not the case in all training prisons. The Board at Portland expressed great concern about the number of education and training hours lost because of the regular shutdowns and the inability to get prisoners to work and classes; similar concerns were noted at Berwyn about the number of prisoners who failed to attend allocated work. The Board at Ranby noted that a shortage of instructors, coupled with the short stays of many prisoners, made vocational training difficult. Other Boards, including The Mount and Wayland, called for additional funding for vocational training and workshops.

There were also issues in the long-term and high security estate. The Board at Full Sutton found that there were insufficient jobs for all prisoners who wished to work and almost all applicants were placed on a waiting list. At Whitemoor, the Board deplored a 'lamentable performance in delivering basic education programmes', with 52% of class closures which prevented many learners from completing courses on time and which also affected the vocational training workshops. The Swaleside IMB reported that, despite high levels of unemployment among the prison population, there was an almost daily failure to meet the required allocation to workshops. There were signs of improvement towards the end of the year, with the engagement of the New Futures Network to try to expand the range and quality of vocational training in a number of high security prisons.

In the open estate, there were many more opportunities both within prisons, and outside through ROTL. The Board at Haverigg reported that 86% of prisoners were in work or education. At Ford, approximately 200 prisoners a day were on ROTL, and on average 110 from Prescoed were in paid employment. Kirklevington Grange IMB reported an increase in ROTL, with only a few cancellations during 2019.

Young adults

At Aylesbury, success rates in English and mathematics were higher than the national average. While the attendance rate was good, the Board continued to express concerns about issues with staff recruitment and retention that occasionally disrupted courses during the reporting year. At Swinfen Hall, although performance in English at level 2 significantly increased, performance in mathematics was 'unacceptably low', and had dropped by about 40% since the previous year. This was partially attributed to staffing issues, which were eventually resolved.

At Brinsford, the Board raised concerns about the limited courses on offer, the lack of activity spaces, and the high number of unemployed prisoners not engaged in purposeful activity. It stressed the need for a shift from the traditional classroom-based setting that was not always conducive to maintaining the engagement of young adults to more practical classes, an issue also raised in previous years by the Board at Deerbolt. The Aylesbury IMB regretted the large number of young adults locked in their cells all day, even though the prison population had reduced, and that

those in workshops were often disengaged: ‘work options remain unexciting, seldom recognisably accredited and poorly related to modern life’.

Women’s prisons

There were reports of good practice. At Bronzefield, the Board commended the high-quality support available for prisoners with learning difficulties and disabilities, though there was insufficient education provision in general, with waiting lists for English and mathematics classes in January 2020. The Board at East Sutton Park open prison reported that success rates remained high, with 79% and 89% in English and mathematics respectively, and that 96% of women were engaged in education or work.

However, the Boards at Downview and Eastwood Park, reported that staff shortages hindered prisoners’ progress. At Eastwood Park, the Board found that over a month’s worth of teaching sessions were lost due to the redeployment of operational staff to bedwatches and constant watches. Low Newton IMB reported that attendance levels needed to be improved, from the low 70s.

There were some improvements in vocational training, for example at Downview, with 35 courses available. Boards at both Foston Hall and Drake Hall reported that there was a good range of work and vocational training opportunities, including hairdressing, catering, horticulture, customer service and animal care. However, the Board at Low Newton reported that there was not enough space to set up a new workshop in manual subjects, such as bricklaying, despite high demand.

At Eastwood Park, there was an increase in the small number of prisoners going out to work on ROTL. Conversely, at Downview, the Board reported a decrease in ROTL employment over the reporting year, from a monthly average of 16 a week in May 2019 to an average of seven in March 2020. This was due to a range of factors, including offering ROTL too close to the release date.

Offender management, progression

Some boards, including Stoke Heath and Bullingdon, reported a reduced backlog of offender assessment system (OASys) plans; at Wayland, the number of outstanding plans had almost halved, from 242 to 123. This allowed better sentence planning and rehabilitation of prisoners. However, some Boards continued to raise concerns about OASys backlogs. At Huntercombe, a prison exclusively holding foreign nationals, this was attributed to a shortage of offender managers, which resulted in staff prioritising prisoners who would be released into the UK.

Training prisons, such as Onley, continued to report that OASys planning had not started before prisoners were transferred there, which delayed sentence planning and hindered rehabilitation. The Board at Swinfen Hall found that, during the reporting year, almost half of the prisoners who arrived at the establishment did not have an OASys from the previous prison.

Boards, including Belmarsh, Ashfield and The Verne, continued to raise concerns about the shortage of category D open prison places. At The Mount, the Board reported that prisoners could wait many months before being offered a place in the open estate. They would occasionally have to accept a place that was far from their local area, hindering reintegration. At Stocken, at any one time during the reporting year there were around 60 prisoners waiting to be transferred to open conditions.

In the women's estate, Boards raised a number of staffing concerns. Send IMB reported that there were too few probation officers despite several recruitment campaigns. At Downview, there were delays in responses from offender management unit staff to prisoners, as a result of significant staffing shortages. At Foston Hall, the Board lamented the 'serious loss' of the CARE (Choices, Actions, Relationships, Emotions) offending behaviour programme, as its accreditation had not been renewed.

IPP prisoners

Boards remained concerned about prisoners serving IPP sentences, who may be held for many years beyond their tariff date and are also subject to recall after initial release. Some prisons had a high proportion of IPP prisoners: around a third at Swaleside and a quarter at Haverigg. At Foston Hall women's prison, there were three women who were nine years past their tariff date, and at Send seven women were at least five years over tariff, and one more than 12 years over. At Leyhill, where 29% of prisoners were IPPs, the Board noted that one prisoner whose tariff had been set at 11 months had spent 14 years in prison: they described the situation of IPP prisoners as 'highly disproportionate and grossly unfair'.

Several Boards, including Wakefield, Lindholme and Haverigg, continued to report the negative impact of the absence of a release date on the mental health of IPP prisoners. The Board at The Mount reported that the establishment was not resourced to provide the support these prisoners need, and they were simply being 'warehoused'. Similarly, at Wealstun, suitable offending behaviour programmes were not available. The Board there also reported that all of the 35 IPPs released from prison had subsequently been recalled; they noted that there were poor links with, and late appointment of, the community probation officers who would provide post-prison supervision.

Family contact

Men's prisons

Increasingly, prisons are recognising the importance of maintaining and strengthening family ties, with the support of voluntary sector organisations and chaplaincies. At prisons that took part in the Storybook Dads initiative, prisoners could record a story on to a disc to be sent to their children. At Stoke Heath, the Angel Tree project enabled prisoners to send Christmas and Mother's Day cards to their families, and family conferences were facilitated with social services to assist fathers to regain contact with children in care. At Wormwood Scrubs, there were

child-friendly weekend visits, as well as a homework club on Saturday mornings for fathers to help their children.

Family visits were also supported. The Board at Kirklevington Grange reported an increase in the number of visitor days, including family days, and at Lancaster Farms staff were proactive in contacting and supporting prisoners who had not received a social visit in six months, offering them additional telephone credit and assisted visits. The Board at Risley welcomed the introduction of an online booking system and allocated visit times, which resolved previous issues for potential visitors.

Women's prisons

As primary caregivers, mothers in prison who have been separated from their children may experience additional anxiety and distress. At Send, the prison offered financial assistance for travel expenses and hotels for visitors who had to travel a long way and struggled to afford the associated costs. At Eastwood Park, the Board noted that successful efforts had been made to improve family ties for prisoners with children under 12, by introducing overnight stays in the mother and baby unit for children to spend time with their mothers. At Styal, the Board reported that family intervention workers from Phoenix Futures liaised with social and children's services, setting up child contact, delivering parenting classes and providing support at final meetings between mother and child prior to adoption.

The Board at Downview, however, considered that the recommendations of the Farmer Review into women and families had been implemented in a 'half-hearted manner' despite the review's recommendation that this should be central to the provision for women. The family strategy had not been revised, there were no parenting or family courses, and a shortage of PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust) staff had led to significant waiting lists for women needing family casework support. Similarly, Eastwood Park IMB reported that, at the end of the last reporting year, HMPPS had withdrawn funding for two of the three PACT workers. Visitors subsequently complained about the loss of support, for example organising family photographs during the festive period.

Resettlement

Men's prisons

Resettlement services and CRCs

Some Boards reported improvements in resettlement support. The Board at Risley noted that the new information, advice and guidance team was helping prisoners to find local employment by creating CVs and liaising with employers in the Greater Manchester area.

The Birmingham IMB welcomed the initiative to provide a mobile phone with credit to any prison leaver who would otherwise have no means of contacting their probation officer. At Nottingham, the Board noted that the CRC collaborated with local retailers

and voluntary sector organisations to provide a food, toiletries and clothes bank for prison leavers.

At Humber, the Board found that the two-week *Ready 4 Release* programme, to support prisoners in the run-up to their release, was popular. The Board at Norwich reported that additional recruitment of CRC staff resulted in fewer applications to the Board about pre-release support. Boards at Nottingham, Exeter and Lincoln commended the departure lounges that provided advice and immediate help to prisoners on the day of release.

However, a number of Boards reported on poor resettlement provision. At Wayland, the Board noted that only 14% of prisoners could be described as 'local', which hindered the establishment's efforts to effectively liaise with the relevant CRCs, or to receive post-release updates. At Lewes, the Board reported on the regular closure of the induction and pre-release centre, which resulted in 'inconsistent and disappointing' access to the delivery of support services. Pentonville IMB reported that, despite the appointment of a new manager and the establishment of a new team, the CRC remained under strength by the end of the reporting year in March 2020, with limited access to prisoners on the wings.

Accommodation

At many prisons, especially local prisons with a high population turnover, there were ongoing issues with securing stable accommodation on release. A few Boards reported a reduction in the number of prisoners released with no settled accommodation: at Bristol, this had been achieved because of close working with the city council intervention team, which liaised with other local authorities. Others, such as Lincoln, referred to links with council homelessness teams, but noted that two-thirds of prisoners were not from the Lincolnshire and their outcomes were uncertain.

In some prisons, homelessness was increasing: at Bullingdon 44% of prisoners were released to no fixed abode, compared to only 33% in previous years. At Nottingham, the Board reported that about 40% of around 1,850 prisoners a year released into the community had no fixed abode. At Exeter, the Board reported on the shortage of suitable accommodation in the region, with prisoners occasionally falling through the gaps if they did not meet the criteria for priority need or local connection: over 40% of leavers in 2019 had no fixed abode, and a young prisoner with whom the Board had spoken at the departure lounge planned to spend the discharge grant on a tent, as he had not secured any accommodation.

There continued to be particular difficulties in securing accommodation for prison leavers in the London area. During a four-month period, only between 24% and 48% of Wandsworth prisoners were released to allegedly settled accommodation - which included staying with friends. At Pentonville, however, an innovative pilot scheme had been started with St Mungo's, which provided temporary private sector accommodation and two-year post-prison support to 79 prisoners between August 2019 and March 2020; however, there were barriers, including the cap on universal credit payments, which did not cover the high London rents.

At the two prisons exclusively holding foreign nationals (Huntercombe and Maidstone), there was no formal resettlement budget. However, staff tried to equip prisoners with some basic transferable skills. At Maidstone, the Board called for improved communication between the establishment and Home Office Immigration Enforcement to enable better and more timely information to be provided to prisoners,

There were also concerns about the lack of sufficient bail hostels and approved premises, so that prisoners were unable to benefit from home detention curfew or ROTL if a higher level of monitoring was required.

Women's prisons

In August 2020, IMBs at 10 prisons across the women's estate published a report⁴ on the findings of a joint resettlement survey conducted in February 2020. It showed that 59% of women were leaving prison with no settled home to go to, significantly higher than the figures provided by the CRCs.

Some Boards reported reliance on temporary accommodation in order to avoid rough sleeping. Prisons in or near London faced particular challenges: at Downview, the Board reported that the last-minute allocation of housing created anxiety among prisoners, with 12 out of 19 women close to release having no confirmed settled accommodation. A survey by Bronzefield IMB during one week in February 2020 found that 60% of women left with no fixed abode.

Other Boards reported a lack of appropriate supported and recovery-based accommodation, especially for women with substance use issues. This was the case at Styal, even though the CRC reported that nearly three-quarters of women were released to secure accommodation. This particularly affected short-sentenced women: at Foston Hall around a third of prisoners were serving sentences of less than three months, and a significant proportion were 'revolving door' prisoners who were in and out of custody. Boards reported a lack of follow-up support after release.

Covid-19 findings

Education and vocational training

For over a year, the gradual progress that had been recorded across some prisons ground to a halt, with severe disruption of education and vocational training across the prison estate. At establishments with stronger management and better pre-pandemic provision, Boards found that some of the damage was mitigated, as prisoners continued to engage in elements of individual learning in-cell. However, remote learning was often not an attractive proposition for men with little previous positive experience of education, without the motivation that comes from direct contact with teachers and other learners. Without instructors and workshops, most vocational training was also not possible. Moreover, most prisons were unable to

⁴ [More than half of women prisoners have no settled home on release, reveals new report from independent prison monitors - Independent Monitoring Boards \(imb.org.uk\)](https://www.imb.org.uk/reports-and-publications/reports/women-prisoners-settled-home-release-reveals-new-report-independent-prison-monitors)

carry out education assessments, to identify both learning needs, and also any learning disabilities or difficulties.

At first, education provision ceased altogether, and in many prisons, it was very slow to re-start. The pattern appeared to be that there was no provision at all for over four months, between March and July, some indirect engagement through in-cell packs of variably quality up to September, and in some prisons by the beginning of 2021 some limited direct engagement. It was only in the second quarter of 2021 that some Boards, for example Coldingley and Askham Grange, began to report limited face-to-face classroom teaching in small groups.

In the first phase, there were only generic 'distraction packs' and there were reports of these packs being delivered under cell doors by uniformed staff or 'dumped' on wings. The Board at Maidstone, a prison holding foreign nationals, reported that they were only available in English. Even when restrictions eased, many education providers delivered only a limited service, often sporadic and generic, not tailored to an individual learning plan. There were reports that work was sometimes not marked, or received no feedback, and that there was a significant tailing off of prisoner engagement and involvement.

At prisons holding young adults, there was little meaningful activity for most of 2020. By October 2020, at Feltham B, there was still no face-to-face education or any kind of vocational training. At Brinsford, where the Board considered the education provision to be poor before Covid-19, it became non-existent after March 2020, at least until the end of the Board's reporting year in July. At Deerbolt, the progress made came to an abrupt halt, with no education or vocational training by September 2020, and even when there was an easing of restrictions, very limited provision due to staff availability and health concerns.

Many Boards in training and resettlement prisons also raised concerns about minimal education provision for several months. At Coldingley in July, the Board reported that education provision had been negligible since the start of the pandemic. Some packs had since been made available, but as prisoners could not gain accreditations from this material, motivation and take-up had been low. At Featherstone, even before the pandemic, the Board had repeatedly raised concerns about the quality and quantity of education from the new provider, pointing to consistently poor performance and provision that was 'in turmoil'. During the pandemic, until July 2020 there was no face-to-face education, nor was work collected or dropped off; this began to improve by September, but the quality of resources was poor and the uptake low. The in-house prison education team carried out a survey of barriers to education take-up, of which the most prevalent, at 73%, was the difficulty in maintaining concentration. However, the situation improved significantly following the arrival of a new prison manager and by January 2021 there was a detailed prospectus and in-cell packs were being delivered and marked.

Local prisons also struggled, though here again local management could make a difference. The Board at Leicester reported that, by the end of June 2020, over 200 education packs had been distributed, with high completion rates, and 63 prisoners completed 89 courses between September and December 2020. At Winchester, until a Covid-19 outbreak in January 2021, the Board reported that the prison had

achieved the most education starts of 103 prisons nationally. Tutors created bespoke resources for both distraction and learning, both accredited and non-accredited. There was an 81% approval rate from the 59% of learners who responded to a survey.

At Lewes, the uptake of in-cell packs was initially disappointing, partly due to the difficulty of actually delivering them. However, by January 2021, there was more take-up: indeed, more prisoners were engaging with in-cell education than had been in classrooms previously and bespoke curriculum-based project packs were being distributed. The Board did, however, express concerns about assessments being done remotely and failing to pick up learning disabilities and difficulties: only three out of 244 were assessed as having special needs, and referrals were not passed on to tutors.

Most London prisons, however, expressed concern about the quality and take-up of education packs well into 2021. Wormwood Scrubs IMB reported that prisoners had no additional support in completing in-cell work. At Isis, there was some small group work, but classroom-based teaching still had not resumed by May 2021. Boards in Kent, Surrey and Sussex also continued to raise concerns about the lack of face-to-face education in any form.

In general, education delivery in private prisons appeared to be better during the pandemic. At Bronzefield, where education staff were employed directly by Sodexo, they continued to work throughout lockdown. At the start of the first national lockdown, prisoners were provided with education packs according to their educational levels in mathematics and English. Approximately 60–70% of prisoners initially chose to continue with these fortnightly packs, though this dropped to about a third by July 2020. Prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties received tailored packs. The Oakwood IMB reported that nearly 500 in-cell course packs were distributed in September and October 2020, and 335 completed packs returned. However, there had been delays in awarding bodies sending out certificates and issues with the distribution and collection of course materials, which led to frustration among both prisoners and staff. At Dovegate and Lowdham Grange, there was also much less disruption of education services, with the Lowdham Grange education staff making direct contact with prisoners from the very beginning.

Towards the end of the year, Boards at some public sector prisons were also able to report more positive outcomes, which illustrated what could be achieved under good local leadership. By August 2020, provision had significantly improved at Stafford, with a curriculum for in-cell use, supported by a range of course-specific cell packs, monitored for quality by the head of learning and skills. In February 2021, around one in six prisoners were engaged in in-cell learning and tutors were visiting wings to provide some additional face-to-face support. The IMB at Lindholme reported that the arrival of a new Novus manager resulted in more prisoners engaged in education than before lockdown. Similarly, at Birmingham, the IMB reported that under a new head of learning and skills, personalised packs were being provided and external courses facilitated. At Styal, the Board was able to report increasingly personalised study packs as lockdown progressed, though here as elsewhere those who were

less motivated, less able, or did not have English as a first language were most affected by the lack of face-to-face teaching and support.

Vocational training was virtually suspended in 2020. Some prisoners were able to work, in essential services, such as kitchens, wing cleaning and laundry, or in commercial contract workshops; but no training or qualifications were provided. At Buckley Hall, the Board reported that the prison sought to rotate prisoners through employment posts so that all prisoners could be engaged in some form of purposeful activity. In open prisons, some prisoners were able to work off-site in essential services, such as supermarkets and, in the case of Prescoed prisoners, helping to construct a new district general hospital.

By May 2021, some Boards, like Swinfen Hall, were able to report the re-starting of vocational training, though the Brinsford IMB reported that it was difficult to recruit tutors, and at Deerbolt there was some modular distance learning.

Offender management, progression

Progression opportunities were severely limited during the pandemic. Offending behaviour programmes stopped altogether during the first few months, and when they restarted in summer 2020 they were delivered one to one or in very small groups, so that availability was restricted, with priority for prisoners nearing release or parole hearings. For example, at Full Sutton, the IMB reported that some programmes resumed in September 2020 for prisoners who had already started them or were close to release, particularly those who were high risk. Only 10% of planned programme completions were achieved during 2020.

Transfers to establishments providing appropriate programmes were also restricted for several months. While probation officers maintained contact with prisoners via telephone, limited probation work affected the completion of sentence planning and risk assessment. This, in turn, affected prisoners' ability to access parole or re-categorisation. At many establishments, prison offender managers no longer interviewed prisoners, except in emergency situations and to produce parole reports.

Transfers to open prisons were particularly difficult, and spaces limited. At two open prisons, Ford and Kirkham, unsafe old billet accommodation was condemned for fire risk reasons, following the Grenfell Tower fire. The Board at Kirklevington Grange reported that the operational capacity had been reduced from 283 to 162, as a result of three units being taken out of use. A number of Boards therefore reported even longer waiting lists than usual: at Brixton in April 2021, 66 men who had been recategorised to D status were still awaiting transfer, the longest for more than 18 months. The rerolling of Haverigg as an open prison did however open up additional opportunities, and there were, for example, lower waiting lists at Leyhill.

Family contact

Most face-to-face social visits were suspended, at least between March and July 2020. All prisoners were provided with additional phone credit, and where there was in-cell telephony prisoners were able to have more telephone contact than previously. However, access was very limited in other prisons, given the little time out of cell and the relatively small number of communal phones. Some Boards reported that prisoners could access the voicemail service, to record a message and listen to a reply.

Other means of communication were also made available. The 'email a prisoner' service was extended, and some prisons took part in pilots to maintain family contact through WhatsApp, or obtained iPads, for example for 'attendance' at funerals or important family events. At Eastwood Park mothers were able to record themselves reading bedtime stories for their children; however, at Downview this scheme was suspended due to faulty recording equipment.

Social visits were gradually reintroduced in July 2020, although with low take-up. This was partly due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, but also to the fact that the short time allowed for visits and the prohibition on physical contact caused distress, particularly to children, and many preferred not to meet under these restrictions. The Board at Drake Hall women's prison reported that, pre-Covid, the monthly average of family visits was approximately 230, but only 17 visits took place in July 2020.

Face-to-face social visits were again suspended in November 2020, and the hoped-for Christmas visits had to be cancelled. Visits were only reintroduced, for those prisons at Stage 3 of recovery, in May 2021.

In July 2020, video visiting was introduced, through Purple Visits. Boards reported that the initial rollout was rather slow and patchy. Some relatives did not have access to the right identity documents or equipment, and the initial security features meant that the picture froze and the visit was ended if, for example, a child moved or a new person came into the room. Initially, these calls were also only available between 9:30 and 16:00 on weekdays, which coincided with working and school hours. Some prisoners struggled with seeing their family on video after many months apart.

Prisoner responses to an Oakwood IMB survey conducted in spring 2021 illustrated some of these frustrations:

- '2 free visits a month is fantastic but the cost of adding more is prohibitive – the cost is 80% of my weekly wage.'
- 'The technology is fit for purpose but there are glitches which make it hard for you to have a proper conversation with your family.'
- 'Evening slots would be helpful or tablets in cells.'

The security features have now been revised and some of the other issues resolved in most prisons. It is planned for video visits to be a permanent feature in prisons, but

it is not yet clear whether this will be as well as, or instead of, face-to-face visits and also whether or what charge there will be.

Resettlement

Resettlement planning was very limited during the pandemic. CRC staff were unable to carry out face-to-face consultations and assessments for a number of months. At Lewes, for example, staff members were on site for only four hours on two days a week and relied on prisoners filling in forms for paper-based assessments, which they worked on remotely. However, the Board at Brinsford reported that the CRC 'through the gate' team spoke to prisoners via the internal telephone during lockdown in order to assess their needs and make the necessary referrals in the run-up to their release.

During the pandemic, steps were taken to try to ensure that no prisoner was homeless on release. Prison leavers without secure accommodation were found temporary hotel or bed and breakfast places, with funding from the Ministry of Justice, delivered through HMPPS's homelessness prevention teams. However, some Boards continued to raise concerns. At Wealstun, the Board found that, at times, up to 50% of prisoners were referred to the emergency housing service on release. This continued to be a major issue, with some prisoners still not securing accommodation. The Board at Bullingdon reported worse settled accommodation outcomes for prisoners during the pandemic. In February 2020, of the 125 releases, 51% had settled accommodation, 16% had transient accommodation and 12% were released homeless. Of the 122 releases in June, only 47% had settled accommodation, 36% had transient accommodation and 17% were homeless.

In May 2021, the Board at East Sutton Park open prison reported that there was a lack of local authority engagement with some prisoners, leading to last-minute arrangements. As a result, the establishment encouraged women to save their ROTL employment earnings so that they could be more independent on release.

There were also growing concerns about the emerging gaps in housing support following the end of CRC contracts in June 2021. At Bronzefield, there were no longer specialist staff based in the prison to help secure accommodation for women released to London, and in London men's prisons, the contracts no longer covered those on remand. This is something Boards will monitor closely this year.

3 The IMB year

The year 2020-1 was dominated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting changes needed to monitor conditions for prisoners and detainees. This necessitated rapid changes to business planning and support for Boards.

The work of IMBs

Throughout the pandemic, Boards did not stop monitoring: though necessarily at times, and for some Boards, this had to be done remotely. At the same time, Secretariat staff were also mainly working and communicating remotely.

This involved some innovative approaches, in particular the **0800 freephone line**, set up by the Secretariat within five weeks of the announcement of the national lockdown. Over 150 IMB volunteers were trained and supported in answering these calls and transmitting them to the relevant local IMB, supported by Secretariat staff. The line received over 9,300 calls during the year (8,537 phone-calls and 801 voicemails) directly from prisoners. These applications showed different trends during this period, with nearly one in five raising healthcare concerns, and a rise in allegations of staff or prisoner bullying, sometimes relating to claims of informal punishment (see Annexes A and B). In addition, some Boards carried out prisoner surveys, or were able to phone in directly to randomly selected prisoners, in prisons that had in-cell phones.

Nevertheless, during the year, the **1,168** prison IMB members carried out **11,768 visits** to prisons. They also dealt with **28,499** individual applications from prisoners; property and healthcare issues continued to be the largest categories. Boards were provided with training on how to monitor remotely, or partially remotely, as well as with regularly updated guidance on the changing situation in relation to direct monitoring.

All this activity meant that IMBs could produce regular and current independent information for the Prison Service, Ministers and Parliament about conditions and treatment during this exceptional period. This alerted them to many of the issues captured elsewhere in this report, and in particular the impact on wellbeing and progression of the lengthy lockdowns. The National Chair provided six Covid-19 briefings to the Prisons Minister⁵, and similar information was sent to the parliamentary Justice Committee.

Annual reports produced during this unprecedented time show that Boards were continuing, in spite of the challenges, to provide regular independent oversight of conditions in prisons.

The **IMB training programme** had to be wholly revised and re-launched, to provide modular remote training via Zoom for the mandatory new members' and board

⁵ Between April 2020 and May 2021.

leaders' courses. During the year there were 106 training sessions, amounting to 265 hours of training. Four bespoke webinars were also held on running Boards, monitoring and supporting members during Covid-19. A monthly **members' bulletin**, with up-to-date information on current issues and changes, was produced, along with a bi-monthly **board support newsletter**, with advice and help and information about events and good practice.

In addition to rising to the unexpected and major Covid-19 challenge, progress in other areas continued during the year:

- A new **National Monitoring Framework** was consulted on and published, along with three monitoring toolkits to assist Boards in monitoring safety, equality and segregation.
- A revised **annual report template** was launched, with guidance and training for Boards.
- **Monitoring guidance** was refreshed and updated on the members' website, which is in the process of being redesigned.
- There were **56 recruitment** campaigns, resulting in **189 new members**. Work was done to diversify and improve recruitment reach, including a project with Leaders Unlocked, an online member application portal, new publicity materials, use of social media and some cross-Board recruitment campaigns.
- Work continued on the proposed **legislative change** to provide statutory underpinning for the national governance structure, and on a new **database**.
- The first annual report for the **youth custody estate** in England was published.

This work was supported by a full-time equivalent secretariat staff of 22.6 by the end of the reporting year and expenditure of **£1,517,789**.

The IMBs are part of the UK's **National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)**, set up under the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), and we attend regular meetings of the NPM.

IMB policy work

Boards escalated a number of significant issues of concern direct to ministers. These included the case of a prisoner with a brain injury who had spent 1000+ days in segregation, concern about night sanitation leading to prisoners having to use buckets as toilets in their cells, lack of heating and hot water in winter, and leaking and poorly maintained healthcare buildings.

In addition, Board findings were fed into a number of consultations and parliamentary hearings:

Consultations

- HMPPS use of force operational guidance (April 2020)

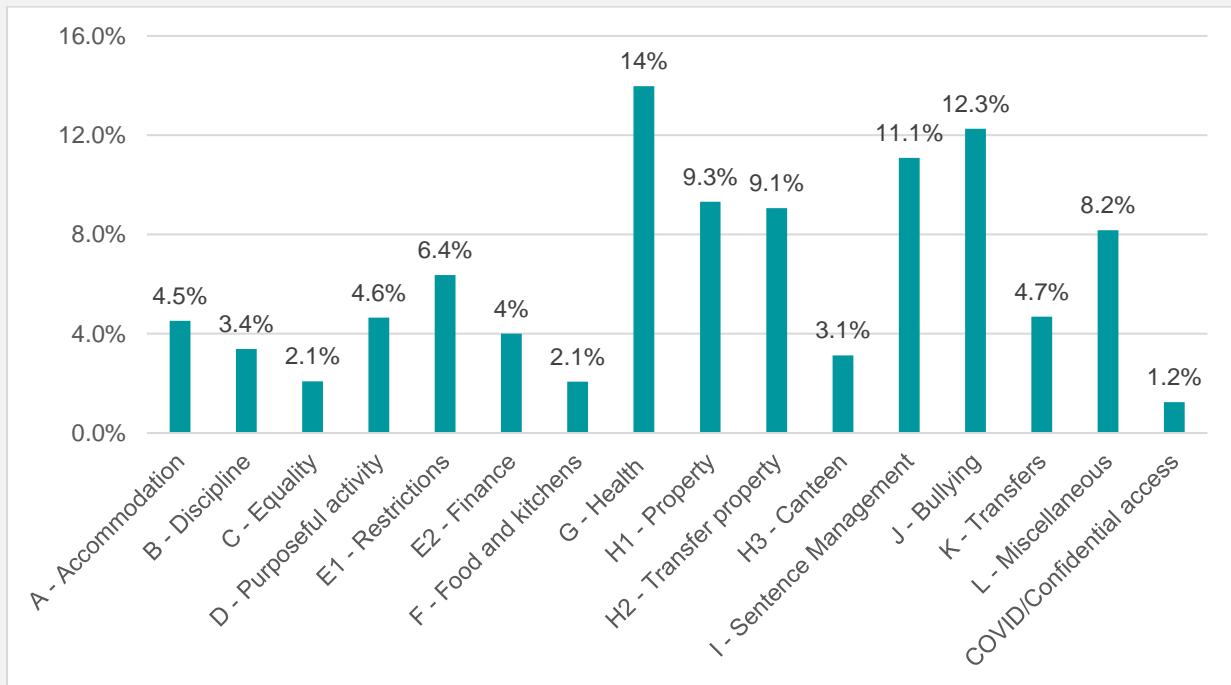
- HMPPS prisoners' property policy framework: policy development input via member focus group, pre-consultation on draft policy framework (March 2021)
- NHS England/Centre for Mental Health review, *The future of prison mental health care in England* (September 2020)
- Ministry of Justice *Strengthening the independent scrutiny bodies through legislation* consultation (September 2020)
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) *Expectations for women in prison* (December 2020)
- HMPPS *Pregnancy, mother and baby units and maternal separation from children under 2 in prison* (January 2021)
- HMPPS *Security at Visits* policy framework (January 2021)
- Independent Commission into the Experience of Victims and Long-term Prisoners (January 2021)

Parliamentary select committee submissions

- Justice Select Committee, *Coronavirus (COVID-19): The impact on prison, probation and court systems* – joint submission with HMIP (October 2020)
- Justice Select Committee, *Ageing prison population* (oral evidence session in April 2020)
- Education Select Committee, *Prison education* (February 2021)

Annex A: Applications to IMBs

Figure 1: Applications to IMBs across the prison estate in England and Wales, 2020/21⁶ by nature of application



- A total of **28,499** applications were made to IMBs.
- **Food and kitchens** (F) received the fewest applications overall – 2.1%.
- The highest number of applications concerned **Property** (H1, H2, H3), amounting to 21.5% of the total number of applications. This was followed by **Health** (G), with 14% of total applications.

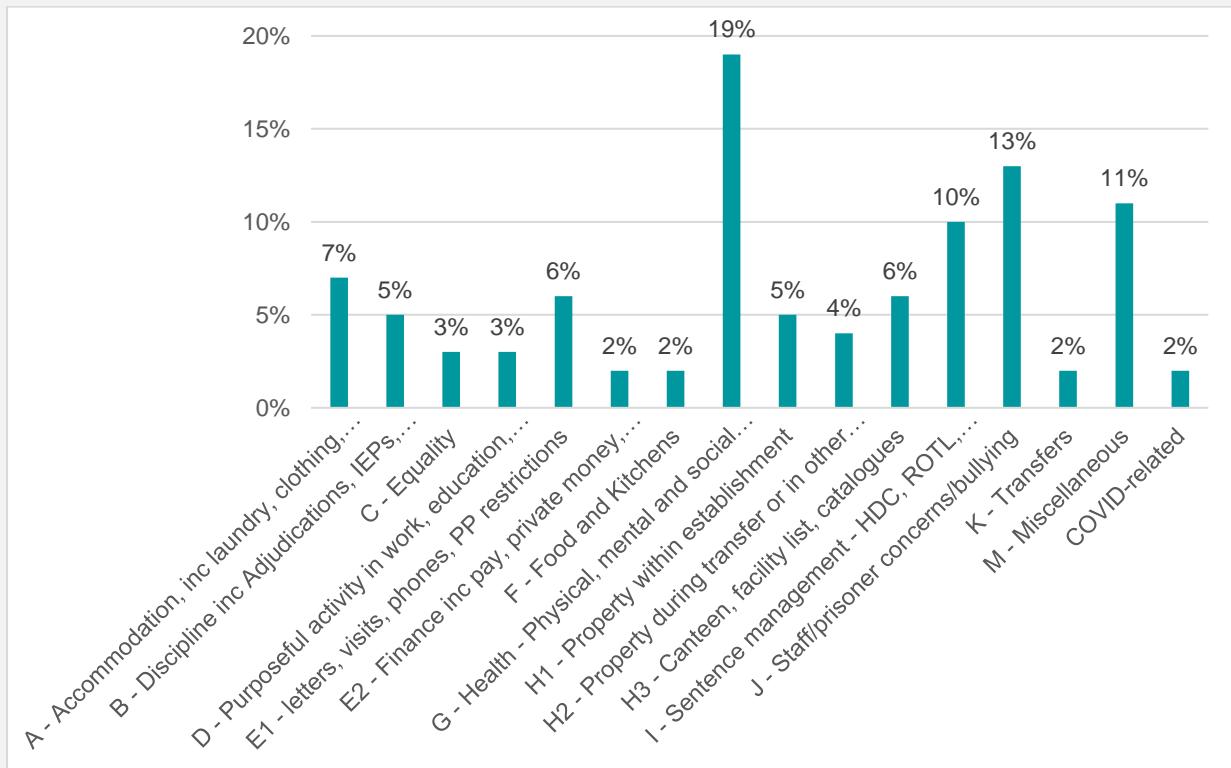
Key

- A – Accommodation including laundry, clothing, ablutions
- B – Discipline including adjudications, IEP, sanctions
- C – Equality
- D – Purposeful activity including education, work, library, regime, time out of cell
- E1 – Letters, visits, phones, public protection restrictions
- E2 – Finance including pay, private monies, spends
- F – Food and kitchens
- G – Health including physical, mental and social care
- H1 – Property within this establishment
- H2 – Property during transfer or in another establishment or location
- H3 – Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)
- I – Sentence management including Home Detention Curfew (HDC), ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation
- J – Staff/prisoner concerns including bullying
- K – Transfers
- L - Miscellaneous

⁶ This graph uses data from 123 IMB annual reports published between April 2020 and April 2021.

Annex B: Applications made via the IMB Covid freephone line

Figure 2: Applications made via the IMB Covid freephone line by category type, between its launch on 27 April 2020 and April 2021.



Total: 10,678⁷

⁷ Some applications may have been allocated more than one category type. For example, one application may cover both property and accommodation, so will be shown twice in the above chart.