imb Independent Monitoring Boards

National Annual Report 2021-22

October 2022

npm national preventive mechanism

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1 Introduction

This annual report is a record of an exceptionally challenging year in prisons, both for prisoners and staff. 2021 was still dominated by impact of the Covid pandemic and the continuing regime restrictions required under the national framework. This report clearly shows how this disrupted every aspect of prison life, across safety, humane treatment, wellbeing and rehabilitation. Self-harm remained high, particularly in women's prisons and among young adults, and violence reduction initiatives stalled. Prisoners' mental health and wellbeing were badly affected: in two prisons, IMBs found that over half of prisoners said this had deteriorated during the lockdowns. Rehabilitative work was extremely limited, with a reliance on in-cell education and essential work rather than vocational training, and a lack of offending behaviour programmes. The handover of resettlement work to the national Probation Service created significant gaps in support, particularly in relation to post-release accommodation and for remand prisoners.

But this is not just a historic record, a 21st century version of Daniel Defoe's 'Journal of the Plague Year'. Though regimes have improved considerably with the loosening of Covid restrictions, the disruptions of 2021 cast a long shadow, and 2022 has brought new problems. The new Justice Secretary therefore faces a daunting in-tray.

- Staffing problems, rather than Covid, are now the principal brake on safe, humane and rehabilitative regimes. Each month, there are more experienced staff leaving than new staff joining. Most prisons, even training prisons, are still running restricted regimes, some only half the planned regime and a few still with 22 hour a day lock-up. Key work, which is the foundation of individual care and offender management, is still struggling. In the medium term, it is hoped that the new pay deal will make it easier to recruit new staff, but in the immediate future there is a deficit in staff experience, as well as numbers. This creates considerable risks to stability, as regimes loosen, built-up frustrations and tensions surface, and staff and prisoners need to learn or re-learn how to engage. Moreover, in many areas there is not just a shortage of uniformed staff, but of the vocational skills instructors and healthcare staff who are essential for rehabilitation and wellbeing.

- It will also mean that instead of a 'new for old' programme of prison building, to replace old and unsuitable prisons, there will be a 'new and old' programme, with some prisoners continuing to live in the kind of cramped and unhygienic environments described in chapter 2.3. It is particularly disappointing that it is proposed to build 500 more prison places for women, rather than investing in small and transitional units as recommended 15 years ago in the Corston Report.

- The chronic problem of the inappropriate use of prison for men and women with severe mental health problems is unlikely to improve, given the pressures on the NHS. In some women's prisons, over half the population was on a mental health caseload in 2021, and mental health services in prisons struggled to cope. Many of those with the most severe mental disorders are to be found in segregation units, and the more severe or complex the condition, the longer the stay, as there are still long delays in transfers to mental health units. Others self-harm, often dangerously by ligature. Some with acute mental illness are still sent to prison by the courts as an alleged 'place of safety' or for their 'own protection'. There is an urgent need for joint action with the Department of Health so that prison is not the default setting for people whose primary problem is mental disorder.

- The transition of resettlement support from community rehabilitation companies (CRCs) to the Probation Service created significant gaps, some of which are still evident. There was a loss of direct support in prisons as well as a loss of experience, particularly in sourcing and supporting prisoners into accommodation. There is currently no provision for support for remand prisoners, a growing and longer-staying component of the prison population due to court delays (which are unlikely to shorten in the near future). The new arrangements for 12-week supported accommodation for some other prisoners are welcome, but this is not settled accommodation. That will rely on local authorities and the private rented sector. Without this, the revolving door between prisons and the community will continue to spin.

- There is still troubling disproportionality in the treatment of Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners. This was evidenced in our joint report with the Criminal Justice Alliance on equality in women's prisons, where women, and in particular Black women, gave telling examples of unequal treatment and opportunity. Similarly, statistics continue to show a disproportionate use of disciplinary measures and of use of force and PAVA. While these statistics are now collated, as required by the Lammy Review, there is less evidence that the underlying reasons are examined and acted on.

- Finally, there is the ongoing saga of the difficulty of ensuring that prisoners are reunited with their property. As Boards have said over many years, this is not just a question of losing a pair of trainers, but of losing precious and irreplaceable mementoes that link an incarcerated person with the life they left behind. If this does not appear to matter to the prison service, then the prisoner may feel that they too do not matter. The new and long-awaited property framework exhorts prisons to do better but provides no concrete solutions. There are two: bar-coding prisoners' items and making property loss a key performance indicator. These are long overdue.

However, the new ministerial team also inherits a Prisons White Paper which focuses on rehabilitation, as well as safety, and recognises the salience of mental

health, substance use and neurodiversity as drivers of offending and reoffending. The White Paper, and subsequent announcements, resurrect some previous arrangements and introduce new initiatives, with a significant investment of £550 million into reducing reoffending and an approach that 'brings the outside in', recognising that successful resettlement cannot be achieved through HMPPS alone, and therefore involving other government departments and local authorities, as well as business leaders in the community. This includes a range of initiatives being rolled out or trialled, some new and some renovated:

- In 17 'accelerator' prisons, multi-disciplinary teams are providing through the gate support on housing, employment, substance abuse and education, to design, implement and test new initiatives aimed at reducing reoffending.

- There will be a national Prisoner Education Service and heads of education and skills in individual prisons: this largely recreates the specialised national and local structures that were in place before 2016.

- In resettlement prisons, there will be prison employment leads, employment hubs to provide employment and welfare support, and employment boards, involving local business leaders.

- There will be additional investment in substance misuse, working with the NHS, and by 2024 it is proposed that there will be health and justice coordinators across all probation regions to link into community provision.

- There will also be housing specialists to work across prisons, probation and local authorities.

- The White Paper promises a 'resettlement passport' to bring together key information and services for prison leavers.

Together with a new senior leadership structure in HMPPS that no longer separates the prison and probation services, these are proposals that re-establish a focus on resettlement and joint work, though some will take time to implement. They will need to be recognised and embedded as central to the role and purpose of prisons, rather than being aspirations or short-lived initiatives that are not given the time and resource to develop. This will not be easy, given the other challenges for the prison service and the pressures on public finances.

Dame Anne Owers

National Chair, Independent Monitoring Boards

September 2022

2 Main findings

2.1 Staff-prisoner relationships

The overall picture during the year was of ongoing recruitment and retention issues, which were exacerbated by Covid-related absences. The influx of newer officers, who were not accustomed to a pre-Covid regime, together with the departure of existing staff, resulted in a lack of experience and knowledge. This has continued, and indeed worsened, in 2022.

Covid and staffing pressures had a particularly negative impact on the recently-introduced key worker scheme, designed to provide active support for each prisoner. For much of the year, this consisted solely of 'welfare checks' on the most vulnerable. Even when the scheme restarted, it was limited in scope.

Staffing

A few Boards, such as Isis, reported on improved staffing levels compared to the previous year. However, there were instances when staff had to be cross-deployed due to operational demands and the Board found that the lengthy HMPPS recruitment process struggled to keep up with the staff attrition rate. Elsewhere, Boards reported on a higher staff turnover rate during the pandemic. At Whitemoor, the Board attributed this to the monotonous daily routine and limited interactions during the protracted lockdowns.

At many establishments, Boards commended the efforts of staff to support prisoners and maintain a safe regime, even though they were overstretched. At Lincoln, the Board reported that staff worked hard to ensure the prison was running smoothly, even when at one point over 65 members of staff were absent (due to Covid-19 sickness or isolation requirements).

Many Boards, such as Full Sutton, Elmley and Wandsworth, reported that Covid-19 outbreaks exacerbated already low staffing levels, and resulted in even more restricted regimes and less time out of cell for prisoners. At Belmarsh, this resulted in prisoners occasionally missing out on daily showers and exercise, and delayed responses to prisoner complaints. At Preston, where staffing was an issue throughout the year, members of staff were offered the opportunity to work overtime with additional pay. However, there was low take-up, as staff were tired after months of working under significant pressure during the pandemic.

'Staffing was under-resourced for most of the year and this had a serious impact on both the mental and physical health of prisoners…The staffing required to unlock the wings for meals, medication, exercise, showers,
work, face-to-face visits, Purple Visits (secure social video calls) and education was

untenable when even the smallest staffing increase was required elsewhere, i.e. external escorts or incidents.' (Eastwood Park)

Across the estate, many Boards raised concerns about the high proportion of inexperienced and junior staff. One in three of the staff at Bedford had less than two years' experience. The Board at Bullingdon reported that, in June 2021, over 7% of the staff were in their first probationary year and nearly one in ten had less than two years' experience. Most recently, the Board at Coldingley found that around 40% of staff had never worked in a normal pre-Covid regime, and this was true of one in five staff at Wormwood Scrubs. At Preston, the Board noted that due to staffing pressures entry level prison officers had to cover for experienced staff, although they had not yet even undertaken the prison officer entry level training.

This was the case even in the high security estate:

'The lack of experience among uniformed staff, together with the restricted regime, meant that staff did not had the opportunity to develop the necessary interpersonal skills with prisoners. At June 2021, almost two-thirds of prison officers and nearly one-third of the supervisory officers had had less than two years' experience.' (Woodhill)

'Inevitably less experienced staff, some of them quite young, lack the jail craft and interpersonal skills of those who have worked in the service for a number of years.' (Whitemoor)

Boards like Wayland called for higher staff remuneration to improve retention rates. Levels of pay have not been competitive with both public and private sector rates, which has prompted staff to look elsewhere, especially given a tight recruitment market. For a number of years, the recommendations of the Pay Review Body for significant uplifts were rejected. However, we note that in mid-2022 their recommendations were accepted, and there will be uplifts in pay for all staff, particularly for those at lower pay band levels.

Key work

The key worker scheme was suspended with the imposition of the first national lockdown in March 2020 and replaced with brief welfare checks, which were predominantly carried out through cell doors or via in-cell telephone.

When restrictions eased during 2020, key worker sessions resumed but not as planned, and limited to the most vulnerable or high-risk prisoners. The Board at Brixton found that there was an emphasis on prisoners with obvious complex needs and issues, while quiet and 'resigned' individuals were not provided with sufficient support. At Swinfen Hall young adult prison, the Board reported that it was only in January 2021 that key worker sessions were also offered to care leavers.[1]

[1] The term 'care leaver' describes any adult who has been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more.

'Key working is the cornerstone of offender management in custody (OMiC) delivery. However, it was a major casualty in the prison's endeavours to keep the establishment clear of Covid. As a base, 30% of prisoners should have been seen per month. The figure was, however, far from that target. Sessions held during the period May to July were encouragingly high; however, given staffing pressures they became regrettably low between July and November.' (Guys Marsh)

The Board at Guys Marsh also noted the potentially tragic implications of a lack of key work, noting that the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman had cited this as a contributory factor of an apparently self-inflicted death in 2020.

Many Boards, like Eastwood Park, Brinsford and Channings Wood, reported that there was stop-start progress due to lockdowns. At Manchester, the Board reported that, while 71% of projected key worker sessions were delivered in November 2020, the scheme was again restricted to vulnerable prisoners in January 2021, due to an outbreak and staff shortages. At Peterborough women's prison, where the delivery of sessions fluctuated during the reporting period, the Board found that many prisoners remained unaware of the scheme.

Overall, Boards across the prison estate reported that there was only a limited number of sessions during the reporting year. At Chelmsford, for example, the Board raised serious concerns that the key work delivery rate had not risen to above 11% of the prison population by August 2021, meaning that the majority of prisoners had no key work support. The Board at Isis described key work as '*minimal*' even by the end of 2021, while at Frankland, where fewer than half the planned sessions were delivered, the Board raised with the Governor that some sessions did not '*reflect positive, meaningful discussions'.*

A number of other Boards, such as Swaleside, Bristol, Long Lartin and Frankland, reported on the variable quality of key worker sessions, depending on the member of staff with whom the prisoner engaged. Some officers tailored sessions to an individual prisoner's needs, while others did not engage in meaningful conversations. Due to staffing shortages, key worker sessions were not always delivered by the same officer, as set out in the policy. This lack of continuity hindered the impact of the scheme, which is centred around building trust and staff developing a better understanding of a prisoner's individual needs.

'Despite the initiatives to meet key work targets, the Board has yet to see much evidence of the quality and positive outcomes of that key work on prisoners. In particular, there have been several examples of the Board witnessing inconsistent engagement and use of coping strategies by staff dealing with particularly "difficult" prisoners.' (Bristol)

In the women's prison estate, key work and case management were introduced from April 2021, with mixed results (see chapter 2.5). Key work had still not been rolled out to the open estate by the end of the year.

2.2 Safety

While there was a considerable reduction in both violence and self-harm in some men's prisons, others experienced a rise, as protracted restrictions took a toll on the mental health and wellbeing of prisoners. Measures to tackle violence where it occurred were less effective. Women's prisons experienced spikes in self-harm associated with periods of greatest restriction.

The use of body-worn video cameras remained inconsistent. PAVA spray continued to be used disproportionately on Black, mixed ethnicity and Muslim prisoners in the men's estate.

There were improved security measures to prevent the entry of drugs, though there was less testing and an increase in brewing 'hooch' as an alternative.

Reception and induction

At the start of the pandemic, all prisons had introduced a 14-day quarantine for newly arrived prisoners in order to prevent the spread of Covid-19. This inevitably affected induction procedures, as well as imposing isolation on newly arrived prisoners.

A number of Boards, like Norwich and Durham, reported that the truncated induction processes were '*inadequate*' and confusing. Some prisons did make extra efforts, such as an induction booklet, and at Haverigg open prison this was forwarded to closed prisons sending men there, to aid the transition.

Self-harm

Overall, particularly at the beginning of the reporting year, Boards in men's prisons reported a decline in self-harm incidents, sometimes significant (for example a decrease of 25% in Cardiff and of 22% at Channings Wood by mid-2021). Some associated this with a reduction in opportunities for intimidation – through bullying and debt – by other prisoners; others noted that prisoners recognised that the regime restrictions, like those in the community, were to protect them. There were, however, significant rises in some prisons, such as Erlestoke (86% rise) and Bullingdon (53% rise), which the Boards associated with continuing regime restrictions as well as some prisoners who repeatedly self-harmed. At Wakefield, where there had been a 20% rise, the Board noted the connection between serious self-harm (including self-mutilation) and severe mental health problems.

Self-harm rates differed for different prison populations. At Isis and Hindley training prisons, self-harm was associated with younger prisoners, who found it harder to cope. Conversely, the Board at Manchester noted a significant drop in self-harm incidents after the prison transitioned from a local prison to a category B training prison, with a stable population. Boards at open prisons continued to report on very

low levels of self-harm; for example at Springhill there were only two self-harm incidents, compared to four in 2020.

The average number of prisoners in a month who were supported by assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) processes, because they were at risk of suicide or self-harm, remained as high as 60 or 80 in some large prisons; and at Aylesbury, which holds young adults, the Board reported that just under 12% of the population spent some time on an ACCT plan.

There was mixed feedback about the ACCT processes. In some prisons, like Onley, the Board found that ACCT documents were consistently completed to a high standard. However in others, such as Bedford, where there had been three apparently self-inflicted deaths, the Board identified ongoing failings in the ACCT process, including unclear assignment of responsibility, delayed reviews and poor multidisciplinary attendance at reviews.

The Wandsworth Board noted the absence of some key personnel at ACCT reviews:

'The absence of a representative from InReach (the mental health unit) was an issue in a number of reviews with many prisoners saying they had not been seen by healthcare staff or had struggled to secure mental health appointments. The Board was particularly concerned that Home Office immigration enforcement staff did not attend any ACCT reviews, as some 14% of cases involved immigration, repatriation or extradition issues.'

It was too soon for most Boards to comment on the impact of the new ACCT process that was rolled out by July 2021. There was, however, some concern that it was more complex than the previous version, and also that it might result in fewer being opened: High Down noted a 35% rise in self-harm but a 14% decrease in ACCTs. These are issues Boards will be examining further this year.

The picture in women's prisons was more complicated, because a number of prisons had significantly reduced populations. In spite of that, some Boards recorded rises in self-harm, particularly towards the end of the year, as well as rises in relation to population. At Bronzefield, the Board noted the previous vulnerability of many women:

'In a survey of new reception prisoners in December 2020, 51% declared a history of self-harm. The incidence of self-harm…has increased from a monthly average of 175 incidents in 2019/20 to 220 in the current reporting year. Much of this is attributed to several prolific self-harmers. The monthly average number of self-harmers has increased from 42 in 2019/20 to 44 in the current reporting year.'

There were also spikes associated with the periods of greatest restriction: at Eastwood Park this peaked at 202 incidents in a month, while Send noted an increase in severity in the middle of the reporting year, with more prisoners requiring hospitalisation. Boards also continued to express concern about the Prison Service's decision no longer to record ligature making as a self-harm incident, which depressed the statistics but increased the risk.

As reported last year, there was a small number of prisoners with complex needs who regularly self-harmed. At Foston Hall, these prisoners accounted for nearly 80% of all self-harm incidents at the establishment. At Styal, on average, between nine and 12 prisoners frequently self-harmed (five or more times in a month) and accounted for 78% of the self-harm incidents.

Violence

As with self-harm, Boards in general reported on a reduction in prisoner-on-prisoner violence, with less opportunity for bullying and intimidation. This was particularly marked among Boards reporting in the early part of 2021. However, as restrictions eased in the middle of the year, violent incidents tended to go up, especially in local prisons. Some Boards reported spikes in violence after prolonged restrictions: at Swaleside, for example, a rise in April 2021 was associated with prisoners' increased frustration at being locked up for 22.5 hours a day and limited opportunities for progression.

A number of Boards noted the prevalence of violence among younger prisoners: at Isis, as it increasingly held prisoners under 25, violence increased by 44%; at Hindley, where young adults constituted 31% of the population, they were involved in 69% of violent incidents. There were some attempts to deal with this by dispersing younger prisoners, and the Norwich Board reported that the psychology team had been developing specific advice and guidance, using maturity screening tools. The Board at Channings Wood commended the introduction of the innovative Lifting the Lid scheme to tackle debt-related violence.

In general, IMB reports showed that prisons were less well equipped to tackle violence when it occurred. As well as the very limited key work scheme and the inexperience of many staff (see above and below) the new challenge support and intervention plan (CSIP) process was ineffective or struggling in many prisons. The Board at Exeter carried out some focused monitoring and found that both referrals and reviews were late:

'The Board did speak to one CSIP prisoner who claimed he had only just been told about it and 'did not know what it was all about'. It was very difficult for the Board to speak to prisoners about their experience and perceptions of CSIP because we did not have confidence that prisoners on the CSIP list were aware that they were on CSIP and/or had been reviewed, despite their review date having passed.'

Some Boards reported an increase in the number of assaults on staff, especially in local prisons: a rise of over 50% at Chelmsford, and 17% at Winchester. The Winchester Board pointed to the limited regime, a backlog in staff training and the availability of illicit items as key causal factors; other Boards noted the prevalence of mental health issues.

In open prisons, violence continued to be rare; however there were rises in some prisons, like Sudbury, which the Board associated with frustration at the limited activity and lack of opportunities for release on temporary licence (ROTL).

Some Boards in women's prisons recorded a decrease in violence (though this sometimes coincided with a decrease in population), while others noted rises when restrictions eased and underlying issues such as debt and bullying resurfaced. At Low Newton, the Board found that prisoners with mental health issues accounted for approximately half of all assaults on staff, and at Foston Hall there was a marked increase in prisoner-on-staff assaults, even though the population had declined. Here and at most other prisons, the CSIP process was ineffective, with over half of referrals resulting in no action.

Use of force

Many Boards reported a decrease in the use of force, but equally many noted an increase, even when levels of violence had decreased, as at Erlestoke and Lancaster Farms. Use of force, which included 'guiding holds' as well as full control and restraint, was often as a result of 'non-compliance' – usually a refusal or reluctance to return to cell.

There was a reduction in the use of PAVA spray at a number of training prisons, and also in the two specialist young adult prisons by the end of 2021, after the intervention of the national training team. However, Boards were concerned about a lack of training and refresher training, and the absence of key work, which was supposed to be a prerequisite for PAVA use.

At Aylesbury, the Board raised particular concerns about a disturbing incident where officers deployed PAVA on a prisoner:

'His father was dying at the time, and died three days later. The incident triggered a bout of severe mental health problems in the prisoner concerned. He spent over 12 weeks in a bare cell on the segregation unit, waiting for a bed to be available in a secure psychiatric hospital. Looking after a grieving prisoner, with such severe psychological problems, strained the staff on the unit.'

The national picture continued to show a troubling and persistent disproportionality of PAVA use on Black, mixed race and Muslim prisoners, which is so far unexplained.

Most women's prisons reported less use of force, though there had also been reductions in the population. The Styal Board noted a 28% reduction in the last quarter of the year, associated with a new multi-disciplinary approach to those involved in multiple incidents.

'A weekly review process of all use of force is conducted by a multi-disciplinary team including a senior manager, an advocate for the prisoner, a member of the safety team and a UOF co-ordinator…Prisoners identified as being involved in multiple UOF incidents or violence are referred to the weekly SIM meeting for consideration with regard to interventions through other support mechanisms. This approach is now starting to achieve results with a 28% reduction in the UOF in the last quarter of the reporting period.'

Eastwood Park and Foston Hall prisons continued to show high use of force figures: the IMB at Eastwood Park noted the high prevalence of mental health issues, and the Foston Hall Board was concerned that the healthcare documentation was not always completed.

Use of force was low in open prisons, and had decreased since a change in policy meant that prisoners being returned to closed conditions were not automatically handcuffed: at Hollesley Bay, for example, the use of handcuffs had decreased by two-thirds.

Some Boards noted an improvement in the accurate and timely completion of use of force paperwork and commended the digital use of force reporting tool. However, at Eastwood Park, with one of the highest uses of force in the women's estate, the Board raised concerns about late reporting of incidents.

Most Boards continued to report on the inconsistent use of body-worn video cameras, both in relation to drawing cameras and switching them on, and in some cases the equipment was faulty or out of date. At Wormwood Scrubs, many cameras remained unclaimed every day, even though they were located next to the keys that officers needed to draw. At Foston Hall, with some of the highest use of force in the women's estate, body-worn footage was available in fewer than half the incidents in some months. The Board at Manchester reported that staff only activated body-worn video cameras in one in five spontaneous incidents over a three-month period. At Guys Marsh, the Board reported:

'The use of body-worn cameras reduced to below 60% despite efforts to overcome the apprehensions of inexperienced officers. Lessons taken from footage when used in evidence revealed poor language in addressing prisoners, inappropriate staff laughter and chat as background noise.'

Preventing illicit items

The availability of illicit items gives rise to violence, bullying and debt in prison. During the reporting period, a number of supply reduction initiatives, such as the installation of body scanners, the use of Rapiscan to detect drug impregnated mail, and sniffer dogs, reduced the ingress of drugs and mobile phones - though in the absence of random mandatory testing for much of the year it was not possible to be conclusive about the reduction, and some Boards reported that illicit substances were still available. More commonly, many Boards also reported a rise in the brewing of 'hooch' (fermented liquor), and in some cases the trading of medications, as a replacement for illicit drugs.

2.3 Fair and humane treatment

Maintenance issues and overcrowded conditions in cells were even more challenging during extensive Covid lockdowns. Delays in transfers to appropriate secure hospitals could lead to acutely ill prisoners spending a long time in segregation. Equalities work in some prisons suffered from staff redeployment, and there continued to be evidence of disproportionality. There was very limited Home Office engagement with foreign national prisoners. Disability access and support for neurodiverse prisoners remained problematic. There continued to be systemic property loss across the prison estate, in spite of fewer transfers.

Accommodation

IMBs have repeatedly drawn attention to the problems associated with maintenance contracts. Some prisons reported notably improved performance by contractors, but in others it remained slow and poor quality. This directly affected prisoners, who during the long periods of Covid lockdown spent up to 23 hours a day in cells that were too hot, too cold, or insanitary, or who were unable to use laundry equipment.

At Feltham B, the Board reported on conditions for the young adults there:

'The state of disrepair is particularly disturbing in the cells where prisoners have spent almost all of their time over the past year. Cells are poorly ventilated and often damp. Mould can be seen on many walls. Rooms are too hot in summer and too cold in the winter.'

A number of Boards reported breakdowns in heating and hot water systems, sometimes for days at a time, with the need to supply emergency blankets or fans, depending on the season. This was often due to old antiquated systems, but not always: five years after opening, the heating and hot water systems at HMP Berwyn remained unreliable.

Cell sharing, in cells meant for one prisoner, was even less acceptable during the pandemic. In older local prisons, this was endemic: in Durham and Chelmsford 90% and 70% respectively of prisoners were sharing cells meant for one. In a survey carried out by the Bedford IMB, prisoners expressed what it felt like:

'Sharing a cell with somebody 23 hours a day is very hard...you cannot move anywhere and are constantly in each other's way. It's not very healthy, especially mentally.'

'I, for one, found this quite hard going; you never have any privacy, which is something you need, and having to use a toilet in such a small space I find dehumanising and depressing.'

This was echoed by the Pentonville Board:

'Most men had to share a 12 x 8 feet cell with another prisoner. This cell has been for the last year their shared bedroom, toilet, dining room and living room, in which many often spent 23 hours a day having to tolerate an unimaginable lack of privacy. It is no surprise that applications to the IMB about accommodation almost tripled compared to last year.'

The Board at Long Lartin continued to report on the 'degrading and inhumane' night sanitation system, with prisoners sometimes reduced to using buckets.

Many Boards reported improvements in cell cleanliness due to regular 'decency checks' and cell checks before new occupants: though this was not the case at Norwich, where over half the prisoners said cell conditions were 'poor' or 'very poor'. A number of Boards commended the CRED (clean, rehabilitative enabling and decent) projects set up jointly with the maintenance contractors, which allowed prisoners to acquire employability skills: however, central funding for this was apparently withdrawn during the year.

There continued to be problems with rodent infestations in some prisons: at Chelmsford, for example, this was a longstanding and apparently intractable issue:

'There is still an infestation of rats...rats run freely in the wings, even climbing the stairs. Live and dead rats have been found in serveries, and dead rats have been found in exercise yards. The rodents also chewed through cabling, disabling phone systems in the process. This situation is clearly unacceptable.'

Boards continued to raise the issue of the very limited food budget: £2.02 per prisoner per day at the beginning of the year, and up to £2.20 in some prisons at the end of the year. This has remained static since 2014, and, in inflationary times, is an even greater challenge.

One notable improvement was that in a majority of prisons there were now in-cell phones, which to some extent ameliorated the long hours spent there, and allowed contact not just with families, but with safer custody and education staff,

Temporary accommodation units ('pods') were introduced in some training and open during the Covid-19 pandemic, for prisoners with lower security levels. They were a considerable improvement on normal accommodation. However, at Ford there had been an 'ill-conceived' plan to convert them into double occupancy, without enough space.

Segregation

The major issue reported by Boards during this period continued to be the segregation of prisoners with mental health conditions: and in many cases the more serious the condition, the longer the segregation. In general, Boards commended segregation staff who, often without specific training, dealt with some extremely challenging prisoners and situations.

There continued to be long delays in transfers to secure mental health hospitals for prisoners with acute mental health issues. Prisons struggled to meet their needs. In some cases, as at Norwich, a very ill man was sent to a secure mental health unit but then transferred back to the prison, where he was unable to receive the right level of care. At Preston, the Board reported that mentally ill prisoners were transferred from the prison's in-patient unit to gated cells in segregation.

Segregation units were unable to meet their needs, in spite of some supportive work from staff. Boards called for an expedited transfer process to be introduced as a matter of urgency. At Dartmoor, two prisoners spent up to 92 days in segregation awaiting transfer, which the Board described as an 'inhumane situation'. At Whatton, a prisoner with several mental health issues was held in segregation for 98 days.

> *At Featherstone, a prisoner in segregation self-harmed so severely he needed hospitalisation and an operation. There were several prisoners with mental health issues so severe that they were sectioned either directly from segregation or shortly after being there. One prisoner was received from another prison after a serious self-harm attempt. This information was unknown on transfer, and he self-harmed again by cutting his neck open after arrival. This was followed by other incidents of self-harm. The Board commended the staff, and quoted a letter from one prisoner's relative to 'commend the work, dedication and commitment required by the teams involved…[we] cannot over state our heartfelt appreciation.'*

All Boards reported a number of prisoners who stayed in segregation for more than 42 days, and even for over a hundred days. The Wandsworth Board noted that the real length of segregation was sometimes disguised because some prisoners returned repeatedly: one man's seven separate stays meant a cumulative total of 277 days in segregation.

> *The Board at Eastwood Park women's prison continued to raise concerns about the 'inhumane treatment' of a prisoner with an acquired brain injury who had continuously been segregated for 1,202 days at the end of the Board's reporting year. This case was escalated to both senior officials and the prisons minister, but a solution is yet to be found: she has now been in solitary confinement for nearly three years.*

Boards in the long-term high security estate reported some of the longest periods of segregation. Though there were sometimes fewer prisoners in segregation, they tended to spend longer there, partly because of the difficulty of transferring them to other prisons. All the high security prisons had prisoners who had been segregated over 300 days; the Board at Wakefield was concerned about a prisoner who might be released into the community directly from segregation, having spent over 1,300 days there; a prisoner at Long Lartin had been segregated for three years. Boards however commended the staff teams for their work in these units, as well as the interventions by psychologists and healthcare, and the use of 'bridge' units to try to move prisoners on.

Boards also noted the high number of segregated prisoners who were on open ACCT documents, or were put on them while segregated: this had risen significantly in Long Lartin and accounted for 33% of those segregated at Exeter.

Physical conditions continued to be poor in some segregation units, such as Bedford, Exeter and Winchester, which were below ground, sometimes cold, and with very little natural light.

A few Boards reported that re-categorised prisoners were held in the segregation unit awaiting transfer to a more suitable establishment. At Stocken category C prison, the Board called for a more proactive approach to moving category B prisoners to an appropriate prison within the 72-hour target, as some frequently spent over 42 days in the segregation unit pre-transfer.

Equality and diversity

Work in this area was very variable between prisons. Some Boards, like Chelmsford, Channings Wood and Bullingdon, reported that there was insufficient focus, resource or data collection. At others, like Norwich and Ford, in spite of Covid restrictions, there was a continuing or renewed focus on this area.

> *At Bedford, there were regular meetings, a well-used monitoring tool with regular reports on key areas, regular prisoner forums and good feedback to prisoners, external assurance of DIRFs. At Birmingham, after data showed disproportionality for mixed race prisoners in relation to use of force, adjudications and complaints, there was face to face work with those prisoners; similarly, a dip sample was carried out when possible ethnic discrimination in work allocation was raised.*
>
> *At Belmarsh, the equalities team was not operative, there was little analysis, no focus groups, and the Board was unable even to get a breakdown of use of force or call search data in usable form: improvements were hoped for. At Erlestoke, the Board reported 'scant attention' from function heads to equalities meetings, and, though data was collected, there was no analysis, making this a 'sterile exercise'.*

A growing number of Boards reported that there was external scrutiny of DIRFs, sometimes by the Zahid Mubarek Trust or by a local race equality group; however in a number of cases this had lapsed during Covid. Some scrutinised DIRFs themselves: the Dartmoor Board found that responses were inconsistent and frequently poorly documented, with no clarity in some cases as to how they had been processed or resolved. Similarly, the Send Board found inconsistency in the sanctions imposed, often simply moving the complainant to another cell. Late completion of DIRFs was a common finding, with only three of the 15 at Kirkham being completed in time, and one remaining incomplete at Send after eight months.

Boards like Cardiff and Wormwood Scrubs raised concerns about the disproportionate use of force on Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners. At Aylesbury, more Black and Muslim prisoners were involved in disciplinary

procedures than their proportion in the prison population. At Dovegate, in May and July 2021, Black prisoners accounted for 50% and 28.6% of prisoners segregated under rule 45, while only making up 12.5% of the prison population. However, the Board also reported that the incentives scheme had been overhauled, with an awareness of unconscious bias, and at Hollesley Bay there was comparative analysis of access to ROTL by race, with action taken if needed.

As part of a joint project with the Criminal Justice Alliance, Boards across the women's estate surveyed over 260 Black, Asian, minority ethnic and foreign national prisoners about their experiences in prison, including indirect and direct discrimination, access to culturally appropriate hair and skin care products and language accessibility.[2] Prisoners recounted numerous instances of both staff-prisoner and prisoner-prisoner discrimination.

During the year, Boards consistently reported a lack of Home Office presence in prisons that held foreign nationals liable to deportation. At Wandsworth, foreign national prisoners had to rely on prison officers and the charity Befriending and Support Team (BEST) to answer queries and resolve issues. At Risley, where foreign national prisoners made up nearly a quarter of the population, monthly immigration surgeries were held on wings, but legal advice was not always accessible. Both Boards linked the rising number of self-harm incidents among foreign national prisoners to the high levels of frustration among this cohort (see chapter 2.2). This lack of engagement was evident even in specialist foreign national prisons (see chapter 2.5).

There was variable language accessibility for foreign national prisoners. While some prisons, like Peterborough, had translated induction material, this was not the case at others, like Aylesbury, where the Board also knew of no occasion when the interpretation service was used. Similarly, at Hewell, the Board reported that the interpretation service was inconsistent and difficult to use, and that there were few translated materials. Sometimes there were good local initiatives, such as the use of flash cards at Brinsford, and an officer learning some basic Vietnamese words to engage with a Vietnamese prisoner.

Accessibility for older and less mobile prisoners remained an issue in many prisons, with a lack of adapted cells and restrictions on movement.

> *At Hewell, with a single lift often out of service, prisoners using wheelchairs were unable to access fresh air, exercise or the servery to collect their food for several months. On at least one occasion a prisoner could not attend an outside hospital appointment because the staff trained to use the evacuation chair, an undignified solution, were unavailable. Such situations have obvious and unacceptable implications for safety.*

A number of Boards, like Peterborough (women's prison), Wandsworth and Warren Hill, raised concerns about the lack of adapted cells for prisoners with disabilities. The Bullingdon Board expressed concern that in 40% of prisoner records, disability

[2] https://www.imb.org.uk/towards-race-equality/

was described as ‘not known’, and the Durham Board had similar concerns about the collection of information at reception. However, at Dovegate, the Board noted that the prison had organised a ‘disability tour’ with the help of outside agencies to identify shortcomings in provision and the needs of sensory deprived prisoners.

There has been a recent focus on neurodiversity within the Prison Service. However, Boards who looked at this issue usually found that there was little or no actual support. The High Down Board pointed out that the distraction packs supplied during lockdown were of little use to those with learning disabilities. Boards at Dartmoor, Bristol and Ashfield raised concerns about the support provided to neurodivergent prisoners. At the last of these prisons, this was largely due to the lack of access to specialists. At Hewell, the Board was not convinced that there was adequate screening for neurodiversity and pointed out that such undiagnosed disabilities led to behavioural challenges and consequent disciplinary issues. However, at Eastwood Park:

‘The [mental health] team recruited a neurodevelopmental practitioner…they can provide information and guidance to everyone in the prison by way of a support plan with reasonable adjustments. The IMB observed this in action when reviewing one ACCT record, where there was very helpful and comprehensive advice on how to communicate with a prisoner with autism. They worked closely with education staff to assist women to engage in courses.’

Property

Once again, every Board that reported on the issue raised serious concerns about the management of property, both within and between prisons, and noted that the long-promised new property framework had not yet appeared.[3] This caused frustration, anger and anxiety for prisoners whose property was lost or misplaced; in some cases these were items of sentimental value that could not be replaced with monetary compensation.

> *At Chelmsford, the Governor took control, acknowledging that the number of complaints was ‘way too high’, and that the accountability and response to complaints was ‘poor, with little or no investigation’.*
>
> *At Eastwood Park, the management of property was extremely poor, with parcels going missing, a nine-month backlog of property swaps and at one period so many parcels backed up in reception that they were transferred to storage in shipping containers. The mental and physical impact on prisoners was huge and in some cases led directly to incidents of self-harm.*

Some attempts were made to deal with this: a dedicated property officer in reception at Birmingham, and a similar approach at Belmarsh. However, the former was redeployed due to staffing pressures and the latter was found to be ineffective.

[3] The new HMPPS prisoners’ property policy framework was finally published in August 2022.

Inter-prison transfers were less common during the year, due to Covid, but where they occurred they still often resulted in loss or delay of property. Boards at Wymott and Littlehey found that other prisons frequently failed to respond to prisoners' complaints, either in a timely manner or at all. At High Down, 15 prisoners were waiting for property from one sending prison: six for over two months and one for over six months. A Board survey in Eastwood Park's first night centre in September 2021 found that over half of the women there had problems in accessing their property.

The other main source of property loss was cell clearances: when a prisoner was moved, sometimes for disciplinary reasons. Boards remained concerned about insufficient efforts to ensure their property was secured. The Buckley Hall Board pointed to the lack of use of body-worn cameras and poor record-keeping when officers conducted cell clearances. However, a few Boards noted an improvement in the management of property within establishments. At Long Lartin, while issues persisted, staff promptly escalated property complaints and found short-term solutions to specific property issues.

2.4 Health and wellbeing

Covid prevention, treatment and vaccination continued to be prioritised. There were some improvements in healthcare services, but a lack of preventive work, some staffing issues and long dental waiting lists. There continued to be a high level of mental health need, particularly in women's prisons, exacerbated by prolonged cellular confinement. Mental health services were often overstretched, and there remained problems and delays in moving seriously unwell prisoners to appropriate mental health settings. Boards pointed to the serious impact on prisoners' wellbeing of spending up to 23 hours a day locked in cell for many months during the pandemic, with little social contact or purposeful activity.

Healthcare: general

For much of this period, Covid-19 continued to dominate healthcare in prisons, as in the community: not just in terms of restricting and coping with outbreaks, but also because of the impact of restrictions on the delivery of healthcare in general. At the peak of restrictions, only critical appointments were fulfilled. Some consultations were conducted via in-cell telephones; where this was not possible, GPs and nurses did wing rounds. However, access, particularly to doctors, was limited, and there was a significant deficit in preventive care, with the cancellation of many clinics for some of the year.

This reflected the disruption to the delivery of healthcare services in the community, but among a population with less access to alternatives and in general poorer underlying health.

> *In a survey by the Board at Erlestoke, 64% of prisoners said that it was difficult to see a doctor. At Norwich, a Board survey found that 62% of prisoners rated healthcare as 'poor' or 'very poor', mostly in relation to GP services. At Cardiff, a prisoner with an infected foot had waited four weeks for it to be treated.*

However, there were some more positive reports: the Board at Stoke Heath praised the collaborative working between the prison senior management and healthcare team and the prioritisation of healthcare services.

Dentistry waiting times remained extremely high in most prisons, with a 12-month wait for routine care at Berwyn, 49 weeks at Wandsworth and 26 weeks at Bullingdon and Erlestoke, due partly to the limitations on aerosol-generating procedures, but nevertheless significantly higher than the community. However, at Bedford, the Board reported that the dental team had managed to reduce waiting times from 26 weeks to four weeks over a five-month period to February 2021.

Levels of uptake of the Covid vaccination varied, with relatively high levels among older prisoners and women, but considerable vaccine hesitancy among younger prisoners and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

> *At Bedford, significant numbers declined the Covid vaccine, and this also led to lower uptake of hepatitis C because of fear that Covid vaccine would be added. There were high levels of refusal at Brixton (30%) and Wandsworth (44%) and the Board at Guys Marsh reported that 'conspiracy theories were rife'.*

However, at some other prisons there were more positive outcomes where there was a concerted effort. At Askham Grange and Eastwood Park women's prisons, there was high take-up, and at Ashfield, with many older prisoners, 90% of those eligible were vaccinated.

> *At Cardiff, there were only 21% of refusals, due to a concentrated publicity effort involving healthcare staff, Public Health Wales and the prison's education department to ensure that prisoners had the facts about vaccinations. By September 2021, 70% of prisoners had had at least one vaccination and 44% were fully vaccinated.*

Many Boards reported problems with medications distribution, and this remained one of the main sources of healthcare complaints they received. At Styal, the Board found that this process was better controlled in smaller groups, as prisoners were escorted to all appointments. However, the Board at Stafford was so concerned about prisoners not receiving the medication they urgently needed that concerns were escalated to the Director of Health and Justice at NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I).

Some Boards, like Cardiff, New Hall, Lindholme and Whitemoor, reported on improved staffing levels. At Whatton, despite reduced staffing levels, the healthcare team continued to provide an 'outstanding service'. Similarly, while the healthcare team at Brixton was overstretched, the Board found that there was not any disruption in provision on the wings, including GP visits.

However, staffing issues resulted in patchy healthcare provision at a number of prisons, including Elmley, Bullingdon and Bristol. At Durham, the Board reported that prisoners told them it was the worst provision they had experienced.

> *The Board at Foston Hall was so concerned about the impact of staffing pressures on healthcare provision that it escalated concerns to the East Midlands Health and Justice Commission. There was no qualified nurse on duty at night, resulting in the head of healthcare providing emergency cover. In May 2021, five nights were not covered; in June, seven nights and in July, eight nights.*

Mental healthcare

Many Boards commented on the high number of prisoners with mental health issues. Some should not have been in prison at all:

> *At Bronzefield, during the reporting year, there were 35 receptions who were acutely mentally unwell, nearly all of whom were subsequently moved on to secure hospitals. In addition, there were seven recalls who were returned to prison because it was deemed to be a place of safety for them, and 28 prisoners required a place of safety as referenced on their arrest warrants.*

At Lincoln, the Board found that an estimated 40% of the prison population was affected by mental ill health. A survey at Buckley Hall found that 30% of prisoners were on the depression spectrum. At Bristol, there was a heavy mental health caseload of approximately 52 cases, which equated to just under 10% of the prison population. This did not include those with low-level depression and anxiety.

Many Boards found that the mental health of many prisoners had deteriorated during the pandemic. At Ford, the Board reported on an increase in prisoners presenting with anxiety issues, with a monthly average caseload of around 70 individuals. At Moorland, the Board conducted a survey which revealed that 52 out of 96 respondents felt that their mental health had deteriorated since the start of Covid-19 restrictions, and this was also the case for 69% of prisoners surveyed at Cardiff.

'During lockdown, I myself struggled being locked up for 24 hours a day. it was affecting mental health and I watched my peers' mental health deteriorate. There was no one to help, no one asking if people was OK. It was absolutely horrible'. (Prisoner to the IMB at Bedford)

Some Boards, like Wandsworth and Swinfen Hall, therefore raised concerns about a significant increase in the number of mental health referrals. At Wandsworth, monthly referrals averaged 510, compared to 425 the previous year. This meant that, while all emergency and urgent referrals were seen within the recommended timeframes, routine referral waiting times were up to four weeks.

A few Boards noted an improvement in mental health provision. The Board at Cardiff reported that, from July 2021, members of the mental health team were on site six days a week, but even here some prisoners were released before their booked appointment could take place.

However, as reported last year, there was insufficient mental health support to meet the high demand in many prisons. At Norwich, 50% of prisoners surveyed said there was insufficient support and this rose to 74% of those over 40. The Board at Ashfield attributed the limited service there to restrictions and staffing shortages. The Board at Pentonville noted that '*the care has moved from therapeutic (helping prisoners to improve) to basic monitoring (trying to ensure that patients don't get worse)*.' Other Boards, like Erlestoke and Norwich, considered that even the full complement of staff was insufficient to meet need.

A number of Boards reported on struggles to recruit and retain high-quality staff. The Board at Wormwood Scrubs lamented the departure of both the head of psychology and her deputy, which resulted in a '*huge gap in provision'* and very long waiting times for prisoners who required support.

In general, with few exceptions, Boards continued to report on lengthy delays in transfers to secure mental health hospitals.

> *At Cardiff, where 32 transfers took place during the reporting period, up from 19 the previous year, one prisoner waited for six months from diagnosis to the point of transfer, spending time in both segregation and subsequently in the healthcare unit, and at Wandsworth, where the average wait was 27 days, one man had waited for over a year. At Long Lartin, where transfers were never achieved within the 28-day timeframe, one prisoner waited for 200 days before being transferred to a hospital due to insufficient hospital beds. At Thameside, only 30% of transfers were within the NHS England guidelines of 14 days from the second external medical assessment.*

In many women's prisons, mental ill health continued to be a major issue. At Low Newton, around 40% of prisoners had mental health issues. The Board noted that there was in fact a rise in mental health referrals as the restrictions eased. At Downview, the Board found that, on average, 58% of prisoners were on mental health caseloads. During the reporting year, 70% of prisoners were prescribed antidepressants, 22% were prescribed anti-psychotic medication and 38% anxiolytics (although there was some crossover with antidepressant prescriptions).

Many Boards at women's prisons raised concerns that services were overstretched and that there was a large volume of unmet mental health need. At Peterborough women's prison, the Board continued to raise concerns about the limited on-site, full-time psychologist support. While the Board at Downview found that there were fewer mental health referrals during the reporting year, this was attributed to the limited provision, the local NHS foundation trust's decision to not hold prisoners on waiting lists for services that were not readily available, and the reduced prison population. At Foston Hall, the closure of the mental health office due to building works resulted in disruption to the delivery of mental health services.

A few Boards reported on an improvement in the timeliness of moves to secure mental health hospitals. At Eastwood Park, there were 32 transfers to mental health hospitals, compared to 28 the previous reporting year. However, seven referrals were declined by secure mental hospitals. At Bronzefield, 46 transfers took place, up from 39 the previous year. Of this total, 57% (36% in 2019/20) were transferred within the target of 14 days from the second external assessment. The Board credited this to the appointment of the psychiatrist in July 2020 who was successful in securing places. However, there were still six prisoners waiting for over 30 days, as well as women with complex mental health needs who did not meet the threshold for a secure mental health hospital placement but could not effectively be managed on the houseblocks by staff who were not mental health professionals.

Time out of cell, regime

Regimes remained extremely restricted throughout the reporting period in nearly all closed prisons, with some relaxations of regime punctuated by renewed lockdowns due to local or national restrictions.

For most of the reporting period, prisoners were unlocked in small groups in order to abide by social distancing requirements. Some Boards, like Nottingham and Wormwood Scrubs, found that access to showers was occasionally restricted for prisoners who had to self-isolate due to a suspected or actual Covid-19 infection.

Some establishments found local solutions to allow more time out of cell even at the peak of lockdown. At Coldingley, for example, prisoners were out of cell from January 2021 for over five hours a day as a result of the 'household bubble' scheme on each landing.

However, the great majority of Boards reported that these extreme restrictions were prolonged, sometimes unnecessarily. At Birmingham, for example, for 16 months prisoners only spent one and a half hours out of cell a day. At Wandsworth, the Board reported that 'time out of cell was always extremely limited, often less than one hour a day'. At Winchester, a significant number of prisoners spent only 45 minutes a day out of cell for just three days a week as a result of the restrictions. At Lincoln, the Board found that prisoners spent up to 40 minutes per day out of cell for exercise and showers, apart from those carrying out essential jobs such as cleaning or kitchen work. The Board at Risley training prison reported that prisoners spent an average of one hour a day out of cell, which was also the case at Featherstone well into 2021.

At Pentonville, the Board provided a telling insight into the toll of prolonged cellular confinement on prisoners' mental health and wellbeing:

'It would be difficult to overestimate the boredom and sense of isolation and anxiety generated by conditions in Pentonville over the past year. To hold two men in a 12 x 8 feet cell with a bunk bed, a television, a badly screened toilet and a sink with precious little time out of cell is bad enough. Not to let them out at all for 10 days when isolating is inhumane, given the conditions inside cells. However, the IMB believes that the management team could not have safely provided the men with a better regime given the infection risks, the staffing numbers, the infrastructure, and the number of prisoners at Pentonville.'

Unsurprisingly, prisoners engaged in very little physical exercise, which affected both their physical and mental health. The Board at Send women's prison raised concerns about the increase in obesity among prisoners partly due to the lack of exercise.

2.5 Progression and resettlement

This was significantly compromised during the reporting period. There were very limited, and sometimes minimal, opportunities for education and training, progression and rehabilitation. Family contact remained problematic, in spite of secure social video calls, though in-cell phones were welcomed. The transfer of resettlement support in mid-2021 to the National Probation Service led to significant gaps and weaknesses in provision, though some positive new initiatives were being rolled out by the end of the year.

Education

Prisoners' progress was severely disrupted by the suspension of face-to-face education for many months. Initially, only basic distraction packs were delivered to cells in some prisons, though later in the year they were tailored to prisoners' needs, with some feedback provided. However, this did not compensate for the lack of face-to-face learning and tuition, and the motivation that could provide, especially with the limited IT options available. Covid restrictions also limited in-cell assessments of functional numeracy and literacy.

The take-up of in-cell education was variable. Many Boards reported limited engagement with in-cell packs: at Wandsworth there was only a 50% return rate, and at Pentonville the number of course completions in the year was around 200, compared with a previous average of 1,700. This was the case even in some training prisons. At Lancaster Farms fewer than one in five prisoners engaged with education, and at Stoke Heath prisoners raised concerns about the poor quality of in-cell education packs, which did not meet the needs of prisoners with poor literacy levels.

There were some innovative approaches: for example, at Hull, there were educational tutorials on prison TV and a telephone helpline to support in-cell education, which received 157 calls in one month and appeared to improve course completion rates. The Board at Coldingley commended the head of learning and skills for distributing in-cell education packs and organising competitions to improve prisoner engagement in the absence of the education provider.

> *In Bullingdon, the Board reported that initially the packs and feedback on learning were delivered to prisoners at the cell door by tutors who then had no access to the wings until the end of March 2021, and communication was limited to the internal post. A 'blended' model, combining socially distanced small classes with in-cell guided learning, was gradually implemented from the end of May 2021.*

Boards reported that prisoners struggled to maintain learning enthusiasm over a prolonged period of in-cell solitary learning. At Guys Marsh, for example, the popularity of in-cell packs gradually declined and by June 2021, only between 18% to 20% of education packs were completed. Boards like Dartmoor and Downview

referred to ‘pack fatigue’ and ‘lethargy’ as the lockdowns progressed; though at some prisons, like Norwich, Winchester, Buckley Hall and Northumberland, a more proactive approach and improved materials resulted in increased engagement.

For young adults, the slow return to direct face-to-face provision was particularly problematic, especially as their counterparts in the community were experiencing better provision.

> *From September to December, schools and colleges outside the prison were giving face-to-face lessons, with some restrictions, such as bubbles. We could not understand why this did not happen in the prison, with suitable restrictions. The prisoners in Aylesbury are young, and most have not had a smooth educational journey to this point. Education in the prison, when operating at its best, can help them catch up on lost years. However, this year gave almost no opportunity at all to gain a recognised qualification, so compounding their education deficits. (Aylesbury YOI)*

The Aylesbury Board also noted that even in practical subjects like horticulture, education consisted solely of workbook learning. The Deerbolt IMB found that the curtailment of face-to-face teaching and accredited programmes ‘*have undoubtedly had a significant impact on the welfare and educational advancement of prisoners. Of particular concern has been the deterioration of basic skills provision, namely literacy and numeracy targeted at the prisoners arguably in most need.’*

The situation was similar in women’s prisons, with IT access and staffing difficulties compounding the problem:

> *At Foston Hall, the Board noted that between April and September some learners reported frustration with the paper workbooks: ‘too thin’; ‘I finish them too easily and then have to wait ages for the next one’. Another commented ‘the CV writing course (paper based) was good but I needed more support for maths and English’. Others were more positive and spoke of ‘enjoying’ functional skills, maths and entry-level English, particularly once tutors were able to come on to the wings (although group learning was still suspended).*

At Peterborough women’s prison, though education staff remained on site and over 25,000 activity packs were delivered to cells, the prison did not record the take-up rate. As a result, the figure was ‘*almost meaningless’*.

The Board at Maidstone, which holds only foreign national prisoners, was particularly critical of the education provider there: ‘*The failure to develop translated materials despite repeated requests by the prison has had a detrimental effect on the uptake of packs and progression’.*

In general, Boards reported improvements when face-to-face learning resumed, though some noted that there were still low attendance rates: only 57% at Chelmsford and 60% at Elmley. Many Boards associated this with staff shortages, problems in unlocking prisoners and lost motivation.

Vocational training

In reception and resettlement prisons, Boards raised major concerns that opportunities to gain vocational skills were severely curtailed across the estate for much of the reporting period. On the whole, the only work available, for a few prisoners, was essential prison work. For example, at Chelmsford, this amounted to rubbish removal in the exercise yards, 10 prisoners in the kitchen, three in recycling, two cleaners on each landing, and those helping serve food. There were no external courses and even the prison laundry was run by staff, not prisoners. Low attendance at workshops remained a problem even after restrictions were lifted. However, at Pentonville, the joint work with Liberty Kitchen was able to continue, albeit with a reduced service: prisoners worked with the outside team to deliver over 3,000 lunch boxes in two months to medics on the frontline at the Royal Free Hospital.

During the year, though they had been re-badged as 'reception and resettlement prisons', vocational opportunities often did not meet resettlement needs.

'The [Exeter] Board is concerned about the current lack of workshop space and limited opportunities for full-time work. Consideration is being given to development of further courses, especially of a vocational nature, to support the prison's enhanced resettlement role. The construction industry and waste management have been identified as possible areas...While it is acknowledged that safety and security and a cramped site and ancient buildings have an impact on possibilities for work and industries, opportunities for prisoners to engage in the kind of work to support resettlement in the community are certainly inadequate at present.'

During the year, however, some of these prisons were exploring new opportunities. At Norwich, where the Board's survey had shown the positive impact on mental health for those prisoners able to access purposeful activity during the Covid restrictions, the Board reported some progress:

'Although the range of vocational training and work spaces are limited at HMP/YOI Norwich, new opportunities are being created: an electrical workshop has been fitted out in the education block together with an independent living skills classroom (washing, cooking, cleaning etc) and a new range of courses has been commissioned for the annual delivery plan of 2021/2022 to increase vocational delivery including fork lift driving, industrial cleaning and additional construction skills certificate scheme (CSCS) courses.'

Similarly, at Wormwood Scrubs, the Board welcomed the opening of a new café that enabled 12 prisoners to undertake a 12-week catering and hospitality training course. A number of prisons, like Wandsworth, were able to benefit from the new accelerator prison project, with additional staff to advise on post-release employment; the prison had already appointed an employment coordinator to help identify job opportunities and assist with job applications.

Links with external employers and the opportunities for release on temporary licence - vital resettlement tools - were inevitably impacted by the pandemic. However, at Hull the Board was able to report that though only 17 prisoners had been placed into

work or training that year, the prison had maintained contact with major employers and training providers and continued to track prisoners' progress on release.

Boards in training prisons that reported towards the beginning of the year described a depressing picture, with all but essential work having ceased during the various lockdowns and infections. At Moorland, by February, between 80% and 96% of prisoners had withdrawn from workshops and were unable to gain work experience, employability skills or accreditations. At Stoke Heath, this was compounded by a 32% cut in funding which resulted in the loss of 102 full-time equivalent activity spaces, with the loss of prisoner qualifications in key areas, including the barista course. The Board reported:

'All these issues which impact on the learning environment – cuts in funding, Novus's notice to improve, actions to minimise the impact of the pandemic, the move to deliver more courses by blended learning – result in more prisoners being locked up for longer periods in residential units during the working day. This makes it even more difficult to develop an effective rehabilitative culture which develops the skills needed by prisoners when released. We question whether Stoke Heath can deliver a key prison objective of rehabilitation with the resources at its disposal.'

Gradually, in the second half of the year, more work and courses became available, but were still limited, as the Brixton Board reported in August:

'Apart from the Clink and the kitchens, and some industrial cleaning, no practical training had been available since March 2020. Men could access in-cell learning packs covering the theoretical parts of some vocational training …In July men were able to start returning to the Bounce Back workshops, doing painting and decorating, dry lining, and scaffolding. As they had to keep to their wing bubbles, this had to be restricted to two days a week…The barbering workshop, that had always been popular with men, sadly permanently closed its doors. There were on average about 120 prison jobs for men on the wings and about 70 off the wings (not during outbreak), over 25% of the reduced population.'

Coldingley had always prided itself on the amount and range of employment available, and by July the Board reported that a new range of practical courses were ready to begin and would '*address the need for practical and useful courses which could directly lead to employment'*. At Guys Marsh, courses were also being reinstated by November, though the Board noted that additional vocational courses like cleaning, forklift truck operation, bricklaying and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) took longer to reinstate than functional courses and even by November the range was limited.

A concern for the future was that a number of Boards noted that the long lockdowns had affected prisoners' motivation. The Guys Marsh Board noted that '*the culture of work attendance had been diminished*' and attendance rates on most wings were around 60% or lower. At Isis, there were unfilled spaces due to '*a perceived reduction in motivation among the population to engage in learning or roles of responsibility*'. At Featherstone, the Board noted that course uptake was very low, as

attendance conflicted with association and there were timekeeping problems: the prison was therefore bringing in a new policy to incentivise work.

Covid restrictions affected open prisons very badly, with greatly reduced or no opportunities for work outside the prison: though over 50 prisoners at Hatfield continued to work in the community as essential workers. Existing relationships with outside employers were disrupted and at Thorn Cross the Board reported that by the end of the year some had not returned or had significantly reduced the number of prisoners taken on. At Ford, though only 14 prisoners were working outside the prison in January, this increased to 96 in paid work, as well as 17 in unpaid community work and work experience by the end of October. The Board was, however, concerned that the reduced population meant that a higher proportion of prisoners was needed for essential in-prison tasks.

There was a similar picture in women's prisons, and the restricted regimes in the first half of the year affected wellbeing as well as skills training, as the Eastwood Park Board found:

'Many vocational activities were curtailed early in 2021 by the pandemic. During this time, the IMB conducted a wellbeing survey in February/March 2021. Among the prisoners' responses were references to being unable to work, missing activities and courses, with some noting distraction packs were available.'

Call centres, Clink restaurants and hairdressing salons closed. Other workshops were significantly reduced, and the Downview Board noted that instead of early assessments to tailor opportunities to career plans, women simply had to accept any of the limited opportunities on offer. However, the London College of Fashion workshop switched operations so that prisoners supplied 1,000 scrubs and 1,000 face masks to local hospitals.

Gradually, activities reopened, but often at a lower level: at Bronzefield the reopening of hair and beauty salon with limited numbers still helped '*improve the women's self-esteem*'. The Clink hospitality course reopened at Eastwood Park in July: three women were able to gain employment in hospitality as release on ROTL opportunities opened up.

Restrictions on ROTL also affected women prisoners: at Send, no women were released on ROTL during the year to work outside or on home release, and at Styal ROTLs reduced from 2,936 in 2019/20 to 30 in 2020/21, particularly affecting the 25 women living in the 'community house' specifically for that purpose.

Offender management, progression

Opportunities for progression were seriously curtailed during this period, both because of the limited contact with staff and lack of offending behaviour programmes and also because of the difficulties in moving prisoners to the right prison at the right time, particularly to open prisons. Offender management was also hindered by the absence of planned key work (see chapter 2.1) which should be the foundation for effective sentence planning and management.

The delivery of offending behaviour programmes was curtailed for much of the reporting period, limiting the ability of prisoners to show that they had addressed offending behaviour and were ready for parole.

> *Completion of an intervention programme was a key element of the sentence plans of those coming to Ashfield. The Board reported major concern at the inability to deliver these programmes due to Covid restrictions. For example, only eight men started and completed the Horizon programme: in a normal year, this would have been 54-60.*

Similarly, at Highpoint, the Board reported that 11 prisoners had been waiting two to three years for a Kaizen programme, and seven had been waiting for three to four years. The Board at Buckley Hall reported that, by the end of July 2021, two offending behaviour programmes had been reintroduced but for smaller groups. The Board raised concerns that, unless numbers could be increased, this could '*become a significant pinch point*' for prisoners who were unable to work through their sentence plans.

Also of concern was the interruption of therapy in specialist therapeutic units or prisons, like Grendon. Though therapeutic work restarted in early 2021, it was interrupted by subsequent lockdowns: the Board reported on 'the risk of regressing to previous behaviour/thoughts in the extended lockdown and periods of isolation'. At Dovegate, in-cell phone therapy was introduced, and limited group work recommenced by September.

Many Boards, particularly in the early part of the year, reported significant staffing shortages in offender management units. Prison offender managers were often redeployed to cover for staff absences on the wings; there were shortages of probation offender managers and those in post were usually working remotely. The Buckley Hall Board reported that prison officers were 'besieged with questions' from prisoners unable to contact offender managers. Shortage of staff often meant caseloads that were too high: at Highpoint, these were 75-100, instead of the agreed level of 50-60 despite the best efforts of staff.

> *At Channings Wood, both managers and staff told the Board that the system was not working. By August, 69 men had not had an offender assessment system (OASys) assessment. Despite face-to-face work restarting in May, in June some wing staff told the Board that the offender management unit (OMU) had not been visiting prisoners and in their opinion this was causing anxiety and frustration. In a Board survey, 69% of prisoners said that they did not have a sentence plan. Regular staff shortages, due to the need to self-isolate, saw operational prison offender managers (POMs) from the OMU frequently assigned to backfill on the wings, so the OMU's strength was routinely cut by a third.*

For prisons holding foreign nationals, this was compounded by the inability to move prisoners to immigration removal centres and the lack of Home Office presence. Some Boards reported that not only were Home Office staff not on-site, but it was virtually impossible to reach them by phone (see also chapter 2.3). The Board at

Maidstone noted '*a lack of engagement by local Home Office managers'* partly due to a stand-off between the Prison Service and the Home Office on whether or not masks should be worn. The Huntercombe Board noted that, even by the end of 2021, delays in Home Office casework led to men whose sentences had expired continuing to be held in closed prison conditions rather than in immigration detention.

Backlogs and delays in completing the initial OASys assessments have been a feature of previous IMB reports. In some prisons, this reduced considerably during the year, with Wealstun's backlog reducing from 200 to 45. A temporary agency worker at Long Lartin was reducing the backlog there, completing four to five assessments a week. But in others, like High Down, Highpoint, Channings Wood, Hindley and Brixton, it remained a significant problem: at High Down, by the end of the year the backlog had increased from 60 to 100, and over a third of prisoners arrived at Hindley without an OASys. The Board there reported that:

'The uncompleted paperwork, delays in completing it and demands on staff time, many new in post, meant that there was frustration amongst the men and the staff, unfinished release plans and uncertainty, which caused friction. Many applications to the Board related to prisoners' frustration at delays and inability to meet resettlement services face to face. Supervision meetings with individuals have slipped to once every two months, which is insufficient to meet their needs in many cases.'

Elsewhere, the quality of OASys plans was a cause for concern. The Board at Usk reported that up to half of the OASys plans received at the establishment upon a prisoner's arrival either contained poor-quality recordkeeping or a blank 'start custody' section.

Many Boards reported delays in moving recategorised prisoners to the right prison. Transfers to open prisons were often problematic, partly because of a shortage of space as well as Covid restrictions. The Board at Swinfen Hall was unusual in reporting an improved flow of young adults to open prisons in the early part of the year. Other Boards, such as Berwyn, Brinsford and Buckley Hall, reported frustrations from prisoners unable to benefit from open conditions. At Onley, 74 recategorised men were awaiting transfer, and the Humber Board reported that in July 2021 there were only 63 category D places available in the whole prison estate. The situation appeared to improve slightly towards the end of the year, with the backlog at Isis reduced to 29.

During 2021, both elements of offender management in custody (OMiC) – key work and case management – were introduced in the women's estate. The Foston Hall Board reported that initial responses to key work were very positive, with meetings every two weeks and women appreciating the consistence of having the same person to talk to. However, at Eastwood Park, low staffing levels impacted both on key work and case management, with long delays in recruiting prison offender managers.

As in men's prisons, there were limited interventions available. At Eastwood Park, which had begun to receive more women on longer sentences, the Board criticised

the absence of accredited programmes. At Styal, no programmes were running, and at Foston Hall, only seven prisoners were able to complete the thinking skills programme.

IPP prisoners

As in all previous years, Boards across the prison estate continued to raise serious concerns about the inhumanity of the indeterminate sentence for public protection (IPP), abolished ten years ago. Towards the end of 2021 there were still nearly 1,700 IPP prisoners in prison, 96% of them over tariff (the minimum term set by the court), and nearly half over nine years beyond tariff. The Board at Erlestoke reported that these prisoners '*are left without hope and are in danger of becoming institutionalised and dehumanised*'. At The Mount, the Board considered that the 46 IPP prisoners held there were essentially '*warehoused*'.

There was a slight reduction in the number of IPP prisoners at some prisons, such as Full Sutton, Lindholme and Coldingley, but an increase in others, such as Gartree, mainly due to recalls. IPP prisoners accounted for nearly a third of those held at Haverigg. Some prisoners were decades beyond their minimum term: two of those at Coldingley were 11 years above tariff, one woman at Send was 10 years over her original 2.5 year tariff, and 17 of the 37 IPP prisoners at Buckley Hall were ten years or more above tariff. The Board there noted that '*the uncertainty and powerlessness this creates among prisoners and their family is hard to imagine*.'

There were some positive moves to try to progress these prisoners: the Aspire unit at Buckley Hall, the Hope unit at Humber, a joint IPP and lifers working group at Hollesley Bay and a relapse prevention course at Hewell. However, at Warren Hill, which specifically caters for indeterminate-sentenced prisoners, the Board noted that key elements of the progression regime had not been able to function due to Covid.

One Board shared an anonymised account of an IPP prisoner who struggled to progress and demonstrate a reduced risk despite completing a number of programmes, highlighting the despair experienced by many IPP prisoners:

'Mr A was sentenced to an IPP with a minimum term of four years six months. It was his first custodial sentence and he was 16 years old at the time. He has been in prison ever since - 14 years. He has undertaken a plethora of courses since his imprisonment: enhanced thinking skills (ETS), thinking skills programme (TSP), cognitive skills booster (CSB) and additionally the same or similar courses when they have been renamed. He has also undertaken numerous drug-related courses. He believes that advancement through the system via different prisons just relocates the problem and is not progression.'

Family contact

This remained difficult throughout the period. In-cell phones and secure social video calls helped mitigate the isolation of prisoners during prolonged and repeated

lockdowns, but this was not a replacement for face-to-face contact, or for some of the proactive work previously done with prisoners and their families.

At Pentonville, in-cell phones were described by the Board as a '*lifeline*' for prisoners, especially for those who were struggling with their mental health and were able to call the Samaritans at any time. At Hewell the Board pointed out that this also gave increased flexibility, so that prisoners could contact families when they were most likely to be around. By contrast at Norwich, where prisoners were reliant on temporary mobile or wing phones, the Board reported the frustrations caused by limited access and little privacy, and at Whitemoor 40% of prisoners surveyed by the Board had difficulties accessing a phone.

Secure social video calls, provided at this time by Purple Visits, were for much of the year the only alternative to face-to-face visits. This could be beneficial for families at a long distance when travel was difficult and for foreign national prisoners. Take-up at Huntercombe, a foreign national prison, was five times higher than the national average. Some of the initial teething problems were sorted out during the year, but in many prisons there were still technical issues and limited take-up – often less than 50% - and some prisoners, like the young adults at Brinsford, found it very hard to 'see and not touch' close relatives. However, Elmley, where the service was actively promoted, had the highest take-up in the region.

At times when social visits were possible, some Boards reported that there was low uptake. Concerns about travel and restrictions on close contact and numbers acted as disincentives. At Forest Bank, for example, prisoners were restricted to one visit a month, and on one day in October there was only one visitor to the young adults at Feltham.

Regular family contact is essential for many women in prison, so the restrictions had a significant impact. This could be particularly difficult in the early days in prison, as there were delays in assigning the required PIN numbers:

'The first five days were traumatic, not being able to speak to family when I needed them.' (prisoner response to Eastwood Park IMB survey)

At Send women's prison, where in-cell phones were made available in November 2020, prisoners welcomed their arrival:

'I get more privacy. I can call my family at a good time. It's safer and in my control' and 'If I feel down, I can just ring somebody.'

As in men's prisons, most Boards reported limited take-up of secure social video calls, with only about half of the slots taken up at Downview, and many cancelled at short notice because of staffing problems at Eastwood Park. A survey of ten prisoners at Foston Hall who were not using the service cited the same issues as in men's prisons, including technological issues for families and lack of flexibility of time slots. The Styal Board commented on the social exclusionary aspects, freezing out those in 'digital poverty'. There were improvements during the year, and some innovative approaches, for example the playpacks sent out at Low Newton, so that the women and their children could engage in joint activity. One woman at Foston

Hall reported '*I planted sunflowers with my grandson. He showed me ladybirds on his plants.*'

The limitations on social visits, when they returned, inhibited face-to-face contact. At Peterborough women's prison, visits were not available at weekends due to staffing issues. At Foston Hall, even though visits had been extended to two hours, there were only 11 visits in late September, and at Drake Hall, though the number increased to 24 a month, this did not compare with pre-Covid numbers of around 230 a month.

There were particular problems for women whose children were in local authority or foster care, or had been adopted: Foston Hall's family engagement team organised secure social video calls, letters and social visits; however, the Board noted that the family bonding unit and family days had ceased to exist.

Resettlement planning

For the first half of the year, Covid restrictions continued to severely limit resettlement support. There was limited face-to-face support for prisoners, with staff using in-cell phones to contact prisoners or delivering sheets under cell doors. At many prisons, external agencies were not on site to offer advice for many months.

During the second half of the year, the transition from community rehabilitation companies (CRCs) to the national probation service further destabilised resettlement work. The CRC system had been far from perfect, but most IMBs had begun to report improvements as providers changed or gained more experience. Many Boards immediately noticed the gaps and inadequacies of service in the transition to the new system, especially in accommodation provision, and pointed out the increased risk of reoffending if crucial 'through the gate' support was not there.

The withdrawal of in-prison specialist accommodation provision also, crucially, coincided with the May 2021 withdrawal of the exceptional Covid funding to prevent homelessness in England (this was extended to April 2022 in Wales). Among women's prisons, the Board at Styal had reported that an average of 85% of prison leavers were in secure accommodation in the year to April 2021, partly due to the homelessness prevention taskforces and additional funding for local authorities; but the Board at Foston Hall noted that after the end of these arrangements the number of women released homeless rose from 5% to an average of 19%. However, even under the homelessness prevention arrangements, there could be limited success. At Winchester, over a nine-month period, nearly two-thirds of prisoners were categorised as having no fixed abode, and half were actually homeless, while at Wayland, though two-thirds of released prisoners had accommodation to go to, nearly one in five of those were going to transient or short-term housing.

The new probation service resettlement contracts did not cover remand prisoners: a growing number, due to court backlogs. At Birmingham, for example, eight out of ten prisoners were on remand and therefore not entitled to resettlement support. Some of the new providers lacked experience or relevant contacts – the Board at

Thameside referred to a '*loss of corporate knowledge*', though some staff did transfer over to the probation service. Instead of a single organisation offering a 'one-stop shop', signposting prisoners to the various services they might need, the resettlement 'pathways' were diffused. Some (particularly finance and debt) were not covered, some (like accommodation support) were based outside the prison, so that referrals were made indirectly, without direct contact with prisoners or regular feedback to prisons.

> *At Guys Marsh, the CRC had been responsible for all seven resettlement pathways, and prisoners were seen 12 weeks before release. Accommodation support was then devolved to an outside community offender manager, and prisoners were frustrated at the difficulty of contacting them. Delivery of the six remaining pathways was devolved to the reducing reoffending team without it having been allocated extra staffing resources to deal with the added workload.*

'Previously the Catch22 team, on identifying that a prisoner would need accommodation on release, would contact the relevant housing department or other providers. Now the resettlement team are required to flag up that a referral for accommodation needs to be made to commissioned rehabilitation services (CRS), but they then have no way of checking or monitoring the progress of any referral. This arrangement is frustrating to both resettlement team staff and to prisoners. Communication problems and delays are inevitable.' (Exeter Board)

'The number of prisoners being released without safe and secure accommodation…has increased since the reorganisation of probation services resulted in the withdrawal of the in-prison accommodation service. Until July, all homeless prisoners were seen before release. If no accommodation could be found, they were provided with contact details of their relevant housing officer and/or probation office. Since June 2021 the provision of holistic release services is provided by the probation service, outsourced to three charities none of whom provide bespoke accommodation support. 77% of sentenced prisoners were released without safe and secure accommodation in July 2021.' (Bronzefield IMB)

Problems continued until the end of the year:

'After the CRC arrangement ended, the contract for the provision of housing was taken over by Seetec…They are covering the local releases and are only undertaking the work if a prisoner has been allocated through the 'refer and monitor' system. In addition, they do not include remand prisoners. Currently, there is no contract in place for finance, benefit and debt. We understand that this is likely to be tendered for at the end of 2021.' (Bedford IMB)

'Prior to reunification, the prison had six full-time-equivalent staff as part of the enhanced through-the-gate team. At the end of the reporting period [December 2021] this had reduced to one part-time person, who deals only with bank

accounts…the overall preparation for the release process has been greatly affected. Issues with the 'refer and monitor' process mean that staff in custody cannot see how the commissioned rehabilitative services referrals are progressing. POMs have to complete a referral to COMs, who then deal with accommodation for prisoners on release…There is a new outreach service based in the community [but] there is only a minimal amount of mentoring available for those actually in custody. In December 2021, the finance and debt contract had not yet been awarded.' (Humber IMB)

Some Boards reported that a significant number of prisoners were released directly into the community instead of being first transferred to a resettlement prison. This was at a time when staff were even less able to support prisoners for release in an unsuitable establishment and with prolonged periods spent locked in cell. The Boards at Dartmoor and Stocken reported that 220 and 245 prisoners respectively were directly released.

There was a particular problem for men who needed to be released under supervision to approved premises. The limited amount of such accommodation during Covid could mean that on the day of release men still did not know where they would be living, as the Boards at Ashfield, Leyhill and Thorn Cross reported.

There were some more positive stories. The Board at Bristol noted that, even after the Covid homelessness funding ended:

'Good partnership working has continued. A new project, Ready for Release, is part of the weekly or fortnightly meetings to discuss accommodation referrals and outcome for people approaching release and going to the largest release areas from HMP Bristol. These meetings are attended by probation, local authority and prison pre-release practitioners. Ready for Release is also working with the pre-release team to monitor the number of 'duty to refer' referrals being completed for prisoners at risk of being homeless…The Ready for Release team aims to improve outcomes by preparing for release from the day of reception. Prisoners at risk are identified in the first night centre…and are discussed at a multi-agency release board 10 weeks and then one week away from release, to prepare a release plan.'

By the end of the year, there were also a number of promising new initiatives under the reducing reoffending programme and the New Futures Network. A number of Boards in reception and resettlement prisons, including Bristol, Bedford and Elmley, noted the establishment of 'departure hubs' or 'lounges' at the prison gate, run jointly with the Department for Work and Pensions, where released prisoners could be signposted to the services and appointments they needed, get travel warrants, charge their phones, and even access clothing: though this could not compensate for the lack of prior planning or support. Conversely, though, the Board at Foston Hall women's prison reported that the discharge lounge there had ended with the end of the CRC contract.

By summer 2021, 'accelerator' projects had started in some prisons, setting up partnerships between prisons and organisations in the community focusing on one or two of the three key areas: education; accommodation and employment; substance use. At Bullingdon, the Board reported that the prison had acquired two new

temporary staff members, an employment lead and an accommodation specialist, as part of the programme.

Securing education, training or employment (ETE) after release is also critical: the Wandsworth Board noted that only a quarter of released prisoners, as compared with nearly a third the previous year were going into ETE. Boards welcomed the plans for employment hubs for prisoners approaching their release date, which were being rolled out further in 202. The Board at Elmley noted that this would provide CV writing support and job interview preparation. At Kirkham open prison, the Board noted the welcome turnaround from the situation in mid-2020, both in relation to accommodation and employment.

'[As part of the accelerator project] the prison was fortunate in securing the services of the former Shelter officer who brought with them not only the genuine experience of issues in an open prison but also numerous contacts built up over the years. Since the appointment in October the perilous
situation with a number of prisoners having been released under SeeTec without accommodation was resolved. In total, thanks to their professionalism and experience, only six prisoners were released in 2021 who were designated as homeless. Also…the prison has secured the appointment of an employment specialist whose role it is to secure awareness of employment opportunities, develop relationships with local employers and secure prisoner engagement. An employer engagement group has been set up and a number of initiatives have taken place, including a farm to fork event.'

During this year, Boards will continue to monitor the roll-out and outcomes under these programmes.

3 The IMB year

The Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions continued to impact on IMB monitoring during the 2021-22 year.[4] Boards adopted innovative practices, including a direct phone-line for prisoners, and blended in-person and remote monitoring, in order to carry on the essential independent scrutiny of prisons.

The work of IMBs

During the year, as well as remote monitoring, IMB members were gradually able to return to direct visits. They carried out 31,860 visits to prisons and dealt with 23,773 individual applications from prisoners. As in previous years, property and healthcare issues continued to be the largest categories (see Annex A).

Over 60 trained IMB members, supported by the Secretariat, continued to run the 0800 freephone line, taking calls from prisoners and passing on applications to respective Boards. The freephone line received 5,903 calls and 1,358 voicemails during the year. Most applications received by the line related to health (including physical, mental and social care) and staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying (see Annex B).

By the end of the year, there were 1,076 prison IMB members in post. Annex C gives a breakdown of members by region, alongside the complement (the number of members a Board can have). During the pandemic, like other voluntary organisations, many Boards lost members, and it was more difficult to publicise and organise the recruitment of new members; though there were 114 recruitment campaigns, resulting in 233 new members. It is a credit to members that, in spite of the Covid restrictions in place for much of the year, they were able to carry out all the work and monitoring evidenced in this report. This year, a number of new initiatives are under way aimed at increasing and diversifying Board membership**.**

The IMB training programme continued to be delivered remotely, although in-person training was gradually reintroduced. Core training was revamped, including the relaunch of the new members' course. During the year, the training team delivered 65 sessions, which amounted to 164.5 hours of training. In addition, 450 members completed 527 hours of e-learning, including on anti-corruption and equality and diversity. The Secretariat also organised 12 member engagement sessions to ensure Boards were kept abreast of key policy development, such as the roll-out of in-cell technology, the new HMPPS diversity and inclusion policy framework and the national young adults strategy.

There was progress in a number of other areas:

- Two new IMBs were set up at HMP Morton Hall and HMP Five Wells by early 2022.

[4] This chapter covers the 2021/22 financial year, April 2021 to April 2022.

- IMB recruitment material was reviewed and updated to attract a more diverse pool of applicants. Virtual recruitment open evenings were held and feedback collected.
- Annual report drop-in sessions were held for Board chairs, covering the revised annual report template and style guide.
- A virtual document storage and communication facility for Boards was piloted in 29 Boards, prior to being rolled out more generally.
- The members' website was updated.
- Work continued on securing statutory underpinning for the national IMB governance structure.

This work was supported by a full-time equivalent secretariat staff of 21.5 by the end of the reporting period and expenditure of £1,595,294.

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), contributing to its annual report and attending regular meetings of the NPM.

IMB policy work

Boards continued to escalate concerns to senior officials and ministers on a range of topics, including concerns about the lengthy segregation of prisoners with mental disorder, the limited support for foreign national prisoners, and the gaps in resettlement support following the transfer of responsibility to the national probation service. Many of the concerns raised in this report were discussed at regular meetings with the Director General of the Prison Service.

Boards across the women's prison estate undertook a joint research project with the Criminal Justice Alliance, *Towards race equality*, surveying over 260 Black, Asian, minority ethnic and foreign women prisoners. The report made a number of recommendations for HMPPS and MOJ to improve resources in prisons for equalities work, recruitment processes to increase staff diversity, language accessibility and the collection and analysis of equalities data.

The IMB responded to the consultation on the *Prisons Strategy White Paper*, commending the focus on rehabilitation but also pointing out some of the gaps and challenges.

Board findings also fed into a number of other consultations and parliamentary select committee inquiries:

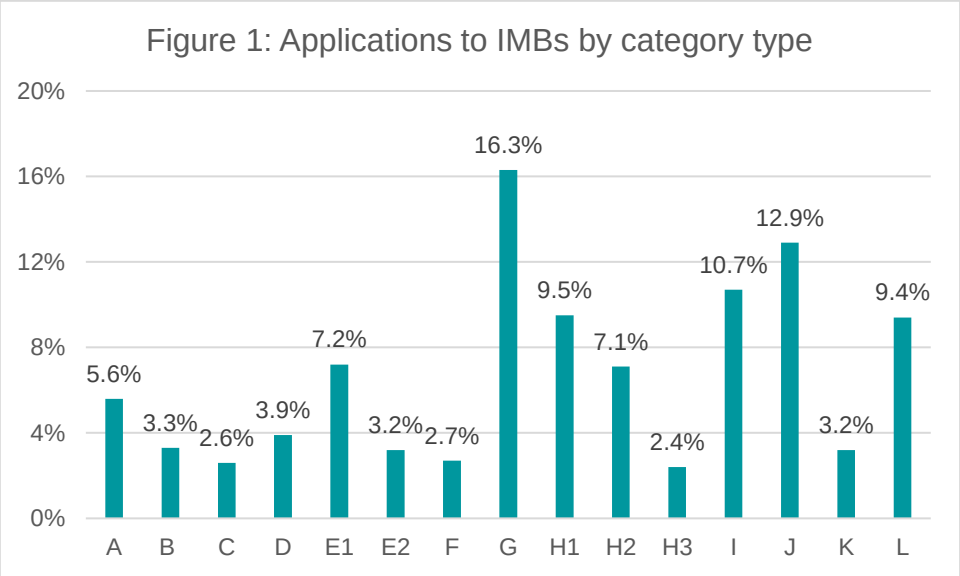
Consultations

HMPPS, *Prisoners' Property Policy Framework* formal consultation (May 2021)
HMPPS, *Certified Prisoner Accommodation* (August 2021)
HMI Prisons (HMIP), *Expectations for Separation Centres* (December 2021)
Youth Custody Service (YCS), *Behaviour Management and Restraint Framework* (September 2021)
HMPPS, *National Young Adults Strategy* (December 2021)

Parliamentary select committee submissions

Justice Select Committee, *Women in prison (June 2021)*
Justice Select Committee, *Mental health in prisons (oral and written evidence in June 2021)*
Justice Select Committee, *Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) prisoners (November 2021)*
Public Accounts Committee, *Outcomes for women in the criminal justice system (January 2022)*

Annex A: Breakdown of applications to IMBs

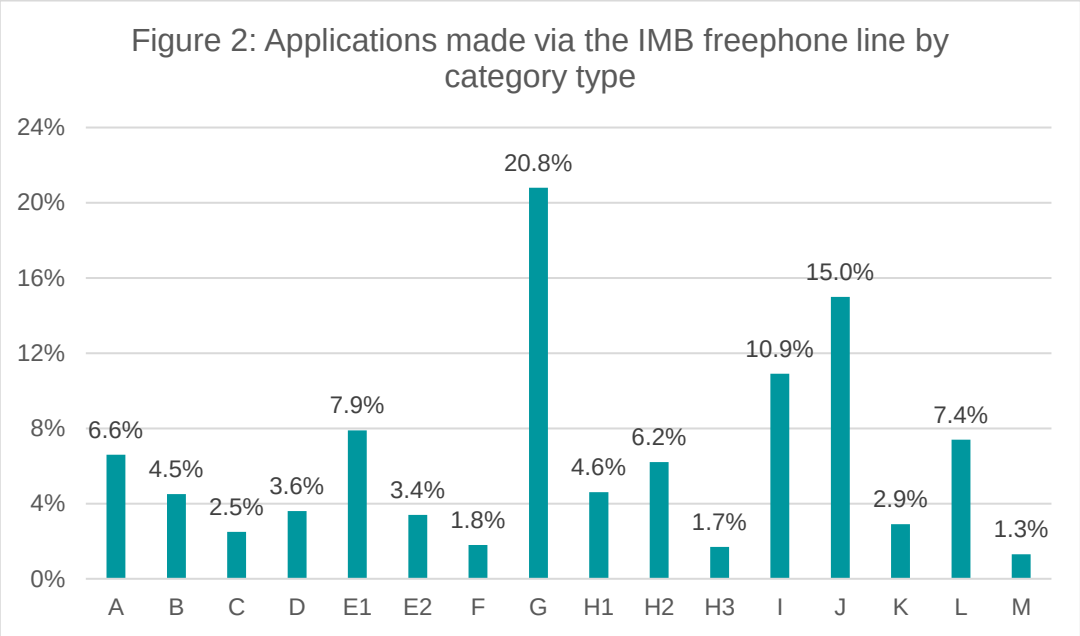


Key

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

- A total of **23,773** applications were made to IMBs.
- **Equality** (C) received the fewest applications overall – 2.6 %.
- The highest number of applications concerned **Property**, including property within the establishment, property during transfer and canteen (H1, H2 and H3), amounting to 19% of the total number of applications. This was followed by **Health**, including physical, mental and social care (G), with 16.3% of total applications.

Annex B: Applications made via the freephone line



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
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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
M – Covid related

- A total of 4,869[5] applications were made via the freephone line.
- **Covid-related** (M) concerns received the fewest applications – 1.3%.
- **Health** (G) received the highest number of applications, followed by **Staff/prisoner concerns**, including bullying (J).

[5] 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.

Annex C: Members in post and complement by region

Region	Members in post[6]	Complement
East	119	176
East Midlands	128	189
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	88	126
London	147	180
North East	60	97
North West	120	212
South Central	73	112
South West	90	129
Wales	46	74
West Midlands	111	175
Yorkshire and Humber	94	186
TOTAL	**1,076**	1,656

[6] Number of prison IMB members as at 1 April 2022.