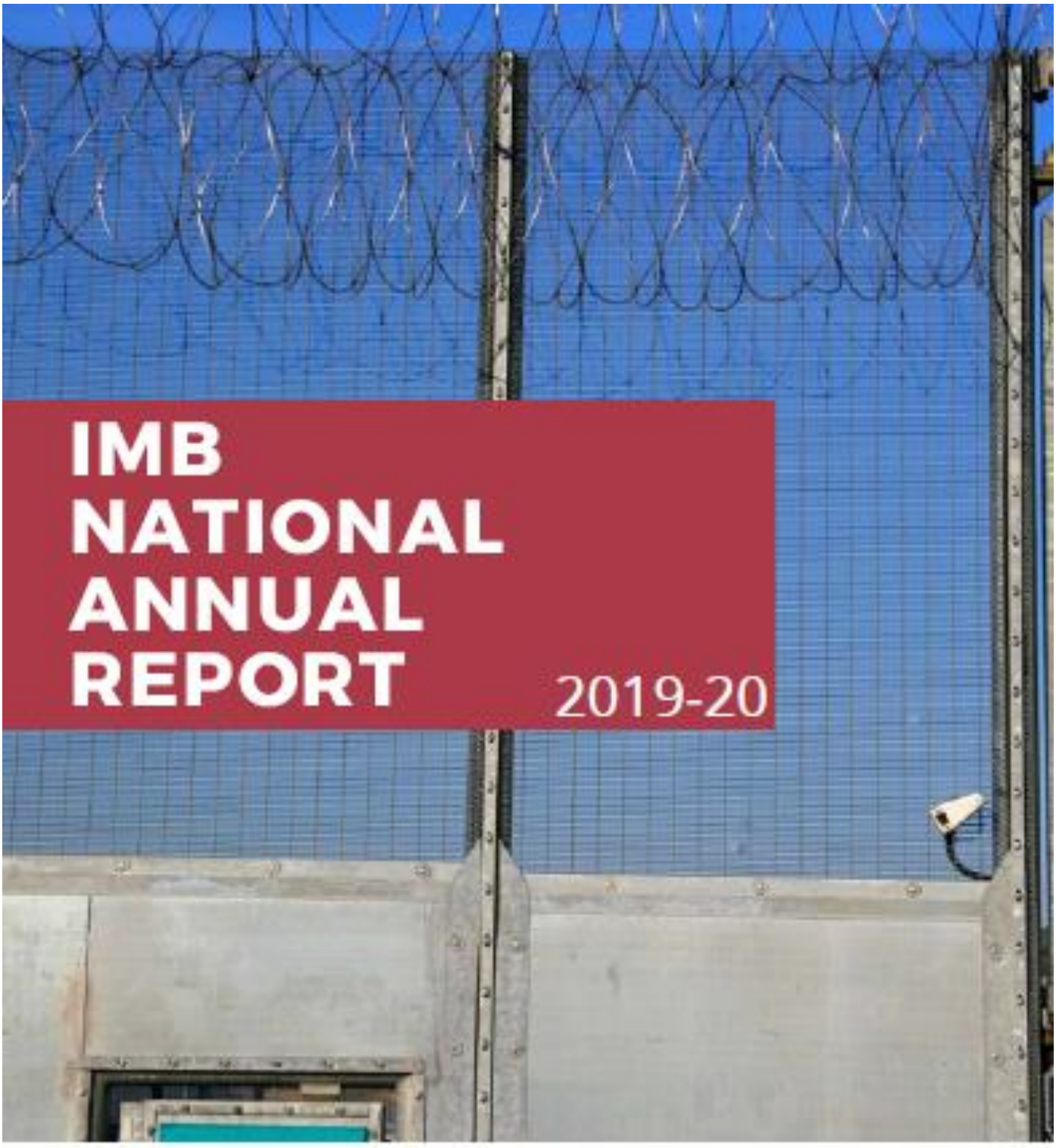


IMB NATIONAL ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARDS

national preventive mechanism

Contents

1. Introduction

Independent Monitoring Boards are an important part of the independent oversight of prisons. IMB members are a regular presence in those closed environments, monitoring the treatment and conditions of prisoners, regularly reporting what they find to those running the prison, and dealing with queries and concerns from individual prisoners. They are unpaid, but have statutory powers to go everywhere, talk to prisoners and see documents. Their findings and activities are captured in their published annual reports.

This report summarises the annual reports of independent monitoring boards in prisons in England and Wales published between July 2019 and March 2020. It supplements the update already issued[1] on reports published in the first quarter of 2019-20. The main body of the report describes boards' findings up to the end of 2019, before the lockdown that followed the Covid-19 pandemic. Section 3 summarises boards' findings during the three months that followed. Though the situation in prisons has changed dramatically since March, the issues that are raised in the main report are just as important and relevant during the recovery period as they were before the pandemic. The lessons from the 'old normal', as well as those learnt during the emergency, should help shape the future.

Last year's national annual report described a prison system in 'slow and sometimes fragile recovery', dealing with the aftermath of a crisis resulting from the 'combined impact of serious staffing shortages and an influx of new psychoactive substances, compounded by inadequate maintenance arrangements'. It also recorded some promising initiatives under the reform programme.

This report tracks that recovery and the progress of those initiatives. There were some positive developments:

- A number of prisons had established better arrangements with maintenance contractors, with the backlog of outstanding jobs being reduced, though this was not universal
- Prisons not specifically designated as resettlement prisons were able to get more support from the local community rehabilitation company (CRC)
- Staff numbers, and therefore regimes, had improved, though there were still concerns about the inexperience and retention of staff
- The Ten Prisons Project had led to an increased focus on ways of preventing drugs getting into prisons
- A number of prisons saw an improvement in healthcare provision, though mental health services continued to be under considerable pressure

There were also, however, some disappointing findings in relation to the improvements expected last year:

- Many boards reported that the key worker system, rolled out with high hopes, had deteriorated after its initial introduction; and it has still not been introduced in the women's estate in spite of the obvious need

[1] https://www.imb.org.uk/summer-2019-quarterly-summary-of-prison-imb-reports-published/

- Though some boards reported a renewed focus on equality and diversity, there was little evidence that this was driving change or was central to delivery
- There continued to be significant concerns about safety, with rises in both self-harm and violence in many prisons, often driven by drugs and debt
- While prisoners were unlocked for longer, there remained serious concerns about the quality and quantity of purposeful activity in many prisons
- Some boards were able to report active moves to reduce the use, and length, of segregation, but overall there remained significant concerns about the number and kind of prisoners who spent prolonged periods in segregation
- There was no demonstrable improvement in the arrangements for transferring or securing prisoners' property, in spite of promises of change: almost every annual report deplored the consequences for prisoners
- There remained concerns about the safety and stability of prisons holding young people under 18, and as yet little progress towards the proposed secure schools alternative.

Overall, the main report shows evidence of stabilisation and indeed some progress. This was most marked in prisons that came under the spotlight of critical public or ministerial attention, where a combination of increased resources, decreased population and new management led to measurable improvements. Yet it also shows that the prison system as a whole remained very tightly stretched, with many establishments struggling to maintain or embed improvements, even before the regime shutdown during the Covid emergency.

There are also two major underlying issues that we raised last year, where little if any improvement can be detected. They cannot be tackled by the Prison Service alone: they require cross-departmental and cross-agency cooperation.

There are far too many prisoners with mental health disorders, and the more severe the mental illness, the more extreme the conditions under which they are held; often for lengthy periods in segregation. While there has been an improvement in mental health services in many prisons, it does not match the scale and complexity of need.

Too many prisoners are released without stable accommodation to go to, and they are often the classic 'revolving door' prisoners; the new homelessness legislation has not significantly improved the situation.

Inter-departmental cooperation on health, housing and benefits has improved considerably during the Covid emergency: it should be a model for future working, not just a temporary crisis response.

The Covid-19 response

The prison service reacted quickly and decisively to Covid-19, recognising that the combination of close confinement, ageing buildings and many prisoners with underlying health conditions posed considerable risks. As a result, up to July 2020, the number of deaths, at 25, was far fewer than predicted.

However, this came at the cost of severely restricted regimes, with most prisoners locked up for 23 hours a day, shut off from direct contact with families and many

support services and from positive rehabilitative work in education, training and offender management. IMBs continued to monitor, maintaining contact with prisons and prisoners through remote and sometimes innovative means such as a newly set up freephone line (see section 2 and Annex B).

Section 3 of this report summarises boards' findings during that period. The prison service was praised for having avoided the predicted high mortality and infection rates. Boards also noted the actions taken by the service and its staff to mitigate the impact of severe lockdown, in maintaining indirect contact with families, trying to protect the most vulnerable and providing some in-cell activities. In spite of the very limited impact of the early release scheme, prisons remained relatively calm and safe places.

Nevertheless, boards also noted the damaging cumulative impact of lockdown on prisoners' mental and physical health and wellbeing and their chances of progression and rehabilitation. There were concerns about the use of sanctions, such as the roll-out of the use of PAVA spray without previously agreed safeguards, and about hidden levels of distress and mental ill-health. There were particular concerns about the impact on children and young people, the withdrawal of rehabilitative work, and evidence of growing frustration and increases in self-harm, particularly in some women's prisons.

As this report is being written, prisons are moving into the recovery phase, with a gradual lifting of restrictions, beginning with the reintroduction of social visits. Moving from a culture of containment back towards one of rehabilitation and purposeful activity, and ensuring prisoners' wellbeing while continuing to control infection, will be both essential and demanding. Boards will continue to monitor this closely, both in terms of the pace and the direction of travel.

Dame Anne Owers IMB National Chair

August 2020

2. Main findings

2.1 Staffing and key work

During the first half of the year, many boards continued to report staffing shortages and regime closures, though usually less extreme than in the previous year, and improving in most prisons towards the year end. There remained a high proportion of inexperienced staff. There had been some delays in implementing the key worker scheme. Where it was operating, in spite of initial optimism, it had started to deteriorate already in many prisons. It had still not been rolled out in the female or open estate.

Staffing

At Chelmsford, prisoners were spending 22 hours in cell at weekends and those without work or education were regularly in cell for over 20 hours a day; the Woodhill board reported that the combination of staff shortfalls, high sickness rates and cross-deployment meant that there was a lack of a consistent regime. Among training prisons, at Buckley Hall, despite a welcome rise at the beginning of the year, sickness and retention were affecting regimes; at Wealstun, even though it was one of the then Prisons Minister's ten priority prisons, there were restricted regimes for most of the board's reporting year, published times were not kept to and there were frequent changes of managers. The board linked this directly to high rates of violence and self-harm, and pointed out that only after they wrote to the Prisons Minister was action taken to strengthen management and provide additional, albeit temporary, staff.

All but one of the public sector women's prisons during the year reported the negative impact of staffing issues. At Foston Hall, staffing shortfalls meant that women were regularly confined to their cells, and the number and scale of regime curtailments was higher than in 2018. The Eastwood Park and New Hall boards also reported inadequate staff cover and more lock-ins (which the New Hall board linked to increased self-harm).

Most boards continued to refer to the inexperience of new staff, which, allied to only 12 weeks training for new recruits and a shortage of experienced mentors, could bring inconsistency, a less safe environment and sometimes an over-use of disciplinary measures: though some boards also noted the positive approach they brought.

At Lowdham Grange, over 12% of staff were in their probationary year, and it was rare to find custodial managers available to support them. At Winchester, 39% of staff had less than a year's experience, and 54% less than two years; 11% of new recruits had left in the last 18 months, and 30% of custodial managers were temporarily promoted. At Aylesbury, 42% of staff had been there under a year, the average length of experience was just over five months, and the drop-out rate was 15%. At Brixton, only 20% of officers had more than two years in post.

The Deerbolt board was so concerned about the impact of staff shortages and inexperience on safety in the young adult establishment that they wrote to the Director-General of Prisons; the prison capacity reduced by 20%, experienced

officers were drafted in and the senior management team strengthened. This led to a significant decrease in violent incidents.

Staffing issues also affected regimes in the youth estate, particularly in the early part of the year. The board at Cookham Wood reported that, with too few officers and high levels of sick leave, young people were locked up for long periods, with activities regularly changed or unavailable. The Werrington board also reported significant concern about regime restrictions and unplanned stoppages. Wetherby and Feltham had similar concerns, with poor regimes and inexperienced staff sometimes struggling with young people who might have complex needs or require to be kept apart. All three reported improvements by the end of the reporting year.

Key work

Key working is the first stage of the new system of offender management in custody (OMiC). Key workers are allocated a small group (initially six) prisoners to 'engage, motivate and support' them, and should be allocated an average of 45 minutes a week for each prisoner. In a number of prisons, key work was being introduced more slowly than expected over the course of the reporting year; in some it was only being rolled out towards the end of the year.

Where it was fully functional, initial reports were good: the Stocken board reported that the 74% target for weekly meetings was being met; at Coldingley, as the initiative was introduced, a majority of prisoners surveyed by the board found it beneficial; the Preston and Wandsworth boards noted an initial fall in applications (complaints or requests) to the IMB. The Brixton board found that the scheme was providing meaningful support. At Bullingdon, when the scheme was introduced in a wing with high rates of violence, over the first three months, recorded incidents in that wing dropped from 40% to 10% of the total, but this reduction was not maintained.

When the board at Featherstone followed the journey of five prisoners, it found that their experiences were mixed 'often depending on the enthusiasm, empathy and quality of the key worker intervention'. As the Stocken board noted: 'clearly this will need regular monitoring to prevent a good start from declining into routine mediocrity'.

Indeed, these initial positive effects were too often not sustained. The boards at Bullingdon, Chelmsford, and Hewell reported a significant decline in the impact and delivery of key working over the year; and several other boards noted that key worker time was not sufficiently protected and prisoners reported not seeing their key worker for weeks. When the scheme was first accredited in Durham prison, delivery of sessions was at 60%; by the end of the year it had fallen to 23% as key workers were diverted to other operational tasks. A survey by the board found that only 40% of prisoners had seen their key worker within the last week and 40% had not seen them in the last three weeks (for 17% of prisoners this was over a month). Even at Buckley Hall, where the board considered that key working was a success, it had not been possible to meet the original target of one session a week. Among 30 randomly selected prisoners, the board found that 13 of the 30 had a key worker entry in the previous week and eight not for three weeks or over; however, they did find that the majority of entries recorded by staff were of good quality.

Most disappointing was the fact that key working had still (and has still) not been introduced in in public sector women's prisons or in open prisons, in spite of the obvious and urgent need for individualised and focused support for women and those about the return to the community.

2.2 Safety

Safety remained a major concern in most prisons. There had been some innovative attempts to reduce violence, but it had increased in the majority of prisons, as had use of force; often associated with drugs, debt, bullying and gang affiliations, as well as staff inexperience. There was greater use of technology to try to prevent drugs getting in. Self-harm had risen sharply in many prisons, with particular concerns about women. Young adults[2] and young people[3] were disproportionately involved in both violence and self-harm.

Violence and use of force

A few boards, such as Durham, Altcourse and Channings Wood, reported that violence was down, and some, like Birmingham and Buckley Hall, considered that this was linked to better information and intelligence sharing, such as identifying and focusing on hot spots and patterns. The Brixton report found that the prison had become a much safer place over the last two years, with an active and well-resourced safer custody team. Many boards noted the recent adoption of the challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) approach, to work with a small number of particularly challenging prisoners There were other positive developments: such as the introduction of dispute and conflict resolution processes in Chelmsford, where there had been fewer serious incidents and a decrease in use of force, and multi-disciplinary meetings in Wandsworth, with prisoner violence reduction representatives and greater visibility of violence reduction staff.

In most prisons violent incidents and the use of force had increased. At Woodhill, assaults had increased by 46%, and during the reporting year there was a 64% increase at Wormwood Scrubs (in spite of the additional ten priority prisons funding). At Bedford violence remained 'unacceptably high', and the board noted that officers 'often lack … experience as well as the confidence [and] the ability to defuse a situation'.

Boards at Cardiff, Preston, Bullingdon, Bristol, and Wayland noted higher levels of use of force. Reported incidents of spontaneous use of force had risen by 50% at Lancaster Farms, and overall incidences had risen by 30% at Wandsworth, in spite of the decrease in assaults in the second half of the year. Governance of use of force was improving, but still underdeveloped in some prisons, for example Belmarsh, where there were 296 reports outstanding at the end of the year; a number of boards reported that forms were not fully completed. The Stocken board noted that use of force documentation had improved, just before an HMIP inspection.

[2] Aged 18-21

[3] Aged under 18

Violence was often associated with the availability of drugs and the consequent debt and bullying as well as with gang affiliations. As one board pointed out, success in preventing drugs getting into the prison raised their price and therefore the levels of debt and of 'hooch' (illicitly brewed alcohol). Young adults throughout the prison estate were disproportionately involved in assaults and the use of force, and the Woodhill board also noted the link with the frustration of prisoners unable to progress to an appropriate training prison.

Two long-term training prisons had contrasting experiences: at Dovegate, violence, self-harm and assaults had all significantly reduced; while at Lowdham Grange, with a high incidence of gang membership and a significant number of inexperienced staff, violence and use of force were high, and there had been three instances of concerted indiscipline. The board reported that a newly-opened social responsibility unit was beginning to make an impact, at least initially, on some particularly challenging prisoners.

Prisons holding men convicted of sexual offences, many of them older prisoners, were in general safer and experienced less violence and use of force. However, most of the boards in these prisons reported some increases during the year, associated with the arrival of more younger prisoners.

There was greater use of technology to try to prevent both violence and the underlying causes. This included CCTV cameras (though a number of boards noted that this could simply relocate violence to within cells) and staff body-worn cameras. However, many boards raised concerns about the latter: noting both a reluctance to wear them and a failure to switch them on at the right time when worn. At Wandsworth, though 70% of staff were wearing body cameras, only 49% of assaults were recorded. More prisons had Rapiscan machines to detect drugs coming in through the mail, and some had body scanners. Positive mandatory drug tests reduced by 50% in Wealstun after the installation of netting, a body scanner and toilet traps late in the reporting year; however, others did not have these processes in place and positive tests were often over 30%.

A number of training prisons, such as Guys Marsh and Channings Wood, reported particular concerns about 'self-isolators': prisoners who retreat into their cells and do not engage with the regime because of fears for their safety.

Suicide and self-harm

A number of boards expressed some optimism about the revised assessment in care, custody and teamwork (ACCT) process and training, to identify and support those at risk of suicide or self-harm. At Altcourse, self-harm had decreased: the board attributed this to the introduction of key work and the 'rehabilitative culture' initiative. Similarly, at Buckley Hall, self-harm was significantly lower than at comparator prisons, which the board associated with good communication, key work and better management of ACCTs.

However, most prisons, and in particular local prisons, reported significant increases. For example, self-harm incidents had doubled at Chelmsford, trebled at Bedford, and risen by 60% at Winchester, even with a decreased population. Wealstun, a category C training prison, also had a high rate of self-harm, and its safer custody

team had been reduced, with five different managers in two years. The board at Littlehey noted a rise of 68% in self-harm, mainly among prisoners under 30.

Three boards identified some of the reasons behind this. At Cardiff, 22 of the prisoners on ACCTs referred to a lack of support from staff, many of them young, not visible on the wings, or not responding compassionately. The board was however impressed with the development of safer custody prisoner representatives, who could work towards an NVQ. The Woodhill board was clear that 'many ACCTs were associated with men repeatedly not getting answers to often quite straightforward complaints and then self-harming out of frustration'; the quality of the ACCT process was variable, and Listeners reported little staff understanding of their role; the new procedures and training had not yet been introduced, and were thought to be much needed. At Winchester, there had been four self-inflicted deaths, raising issues about the quality of ACCTs and the provision of mental health support: the board noted that there had been a punitive approach to challenging behaviour rather than making a mental health referral.

Women's prisons

There was evidence of increased concerns about violence in some women's prisons. The Foston Hall board reported a rise in assaults, and of bullying and intimidation not reported to staff. Eastwood Park board also noted a rise in bullying, associated with drugs, but that this was improving following a multi-disciplinary approach. Two women's prisons (Styal and New Hall) reported an increase in reported use of force, which the Styal board associated with the inexperience of new staff.

However, the principal concern in women's prisons remained self-harm, with a high number of women who self-harmed often. At Bronzefield, self-harm had increased from an average of 91 a month to 141; at Eastwood Park there had been a 60% rise in the first nine months of the year. Downview recorded 684 self-harm incidents involving 64 women, with 60 hospitalisations, a death in custody and three 'near misses', and the board considered that the standard of ACCT record keeping was unsatisfactory. At Foston Hall, up to 19% of the population at any one time was on an ACCT, and three women remained on constant supervision for 92, 75 and 56 days respectively. The board noted the connection between self-harm and the regime, with a link between the large number of 'lock-ins', particularly those that occurred with no warning, and incidents of self-harm. Where self-harm had reduced, in Styal, this was attributed to the release of several prolific self-harmers and at Drake Hall there had been an increase in the number of recorded self-harm incidents, though this was reducing towards the end of the reporting year.

Young adults

Prisons holding young adults remained particularly volatile. The Feltham board reported an increase in prisoner-prisoner assaults, and at Deerbolt, though violence had reduced by the third quarter of the year, the board reported that the CSIP process was being used punitively and for those who were vulnerable and bullied. Many young people were said to be transgressing so they could go into the relative safety of segregation. At Aylesbury, self-harm had increased by over 50% and assaults by over 100%. At Swinfen Hall, the board noted that violence was twice as high as in 2015; there had been a significant increase in self-harm, with the under-21

population accounting for over 70% of self-harm incidents and 87% of resulting hospital admissions. The board also noted the connection between violence and a poor regime: as the regime stabilised, violent incidents decreased.

Young people

In the youth estate, boards in general reported significant concerns about safety, in spite of considerable efforts, such as the introduction of conflict resolution processes, more training in suicide prevention, and less reliance on simply keeping young people with gang affiliations apart. There were very serious safety issues at Feltham A (under 18s) during the early part of the year, with a violent incident almost daily and a sharp increase in self-harm. This improved considerably after the inspectorate issued an urgent notification, the population was reduced and the regime improved. At Cookham Wood, violence in general had not increased, but there were more serious injuries, more assaults on staff and more young people seeking safety through self-segregation. All boards expressed concerns about the high and often growing level of self-harm, particularly among young people with severe behavioural difficulties and mental health concerns.

2.4 Segregation

Boards continued to point to the link between mental health, complex needs and long periods of segregation, as well as the number of segregated prisoners at risk of self-harm. There was, however, more evidence of active management and alternatives to segregation, and a clear link between the use of segregation and the safety and effective management of the prison environment as a whole. Some prisons had seen improvements in the physical environment or regime in segregation. There were particular concerns about the segregation of women and young people with complex needs.

As in the previous national annual report, boards continued to commend segregation staff, who were dealing with prisoners who could be both very challenging and vulnerable. There were concerns in units where there were frequent changes of management or staff, but in general boards were conscious of the daily challenges in running these units.

More boards than in the previous year reported that segregation was being reduced, 'halfway houses' developed, or the safety concerns that often led to segregation actively managed. The Erlestoke board noted both a decrease in the number of segregated prisoners on ACCTs, and a 60% decrease in the use of segregation itself. The board at Brixton noted that no prisoner had been segregated for longer than 42 days for over a year. The boards at Stocken, Wealstun, Wandsworth, Bullingdon, Swinfen Hall, Altcourse and Littlehey also reported a reduction. In some cases, this was associated with active management of those segregated; in others there were 'moving on' units to work with challenging prisoners on a phased return to normal location, or to support those who had sought segregation for their own protection.

This was not, however, universal. The Swaleside board earlier reported that once a particular manager left, the use of segregation rose; at Altcourse the board greatly regretted the closure, for funding reasons, of the enhanced support unit which had worked with challenging prisoners with complex needs and had been adopted as a model elsewhere. At Belmarsh, the board reported only a punitive approach: a 'refusal regime' restricting prisoners to three showers a week and no TV or radio if they refused to return to the wing.

Boards remained concerned about the disproportionate use of segregation for prisoners with mental health issues, as well as those at risk of suicide or self-harm. Those spending longest in segregation often had severe mental health concerns or complex needs, or were afraid to return to normal location. Though the use of segregation had fallen at Stocken, there were still long-staying mentally ill prisoners. The Ranby board described the segregation unit as 'too often a holding facility for mental health'. At Thameside and at Hewell, the boards reported a stand-off between healthcare and prison staff about whether prisoners should be in segregation or the in-patient unit, which appeared to relate at least in part to who would bear the cost, or to the lack of sufficient space in the in-patient unit (which in most of these prisons was largely an acute mental health facility: *see also healthcare section*). Non-attendance of healthcare staff at segregation reviews was again raised by a number of boards: at Durham and Bedford they attended fewer than half of GOOD reviews.

Boards continued to report some lengthy stays in segregation and, as last year, these could be highest in the long-term and high security estate (LTHSE), with four prisoners at Woodhill segregated for over 200 days, awaiting transfer; stays of over 100 days at Lowdham Grange, with one prisoner still awaiting a mental health placement after 191 days of segregation; and two segregated for over 100 days at Whitemoor, though the number had decreased since the previous year. Outside the LTHSE, at Littlehey, a prisoner with serious mental health concerns spent 120 days in segregation before being moved to a secure mental health unit.

Boards also continued to report the over-use or lengthy use of segregation for other reasons. At Aylesbury, young adults could be segregated for up to three months awaiting transfer to an appropriate adult prison. A number of boards noted the over-use of adjudications for minor issues that could have been dealt with through the IEP system.

The total length of time in segregation could also be disguised when prisoners were returned to the wings for only short periods: the Stocken board described this as a 'revolving door', and at Deerbolt, though only two young adults were reported as segregated for lengthy periods, the board noted that a number of young men were sent back to the wings for only a short period, which 'zeroed' their stay when they returned to segregation.

There were many segregated prisoners at risk of suicide or self-harm, which could be aggravated by isolation; the Whitemoor board reported that at one point nine out of 28 prisoners in segregation were on ACCTs and 25% of ACCTs in the whole prison during the year were for segregated prisoners. At Wealstun, up to a third of

prisoners in segregation were on ACCTs. At Stafford, by contrast, no prisoner on an ACCT stayed in segregation for more than 24 hours.

The segregation unit could also be a place of safety, signifying underlying safety problems in the prison as a whole, as the board reported at Guys Marsh. At Channings Wood, prisoners refusing to relocate because of debt or bullying were often in the majority in the segregation unit. The Coldingley board reported an increase of 33% in the use of segregation, including prisoners there for their own protection; similarly, at Lancaster Farms, where the segregation unit was full to capacity and often overflowed, a significant proportion were there for their own protection. There were similar reports at Featherstone and Rochester.

Women

The same differential patterns were reported in women's prisons. Some, like Eastwood Park and Downview, reported a decrease in the use of segregation, although there was a high number of segregated women on open ACCTs. The use of segregation and adjudications had also reduced at Drake Hall: the board believed this was because of better staff-prisoner communications. However, the board at Foston Hall noted an increase in the use of segregation, as well as of those on ACCTs, rising to 29% at one point: adjudications had also risen and the board considered there was too little use of the incentives scheme.

In most women's prisons, there was serious concern about the small number of women with complex needs who could spend lengthy periods in segregation: almost one in three of those in Downview had complex mental health needs and one woman with significant brain trauma had spent nine months there (she was later transferred to segregation in another prison). At Peterborough, some very complex women were segregated for long periods, with a very limited regime, and at Styal one woman was in segregation for over 260 days before going to a mental health unit.

Young people

There were particular concerns about segregation (separation) in the youth estate. The Cookham Wood board noted that, though most young people were held there for only a short time before transferring to the Bridge unit (a progression regime), the block itself was 'a depressing and inhumane environment'. Some young people were segregated for many weeks, even when they had serious mental health conditions; two for over 90 days and two others for more than six weeks. This included a young man who was so severely traumatised that he was unfit to attend court. At Wetherby, stays were also usually short, and the unit was well run, but some young people returned frequently, and there had been an increase of those on ACCTs.

Werrington had closed its CSU and Feltham had been required to stop young people being held in the same segregation unit as young adults. They had both set up special units to provide one-to-one support for young people with complex needs. However, the 'enhanced support unit' at Feltham was little used and had little purposeful activity. Meanwhile, at both establishments, most segregated young people were held on normal location, making it difficult to provide a full regime or to

ensure face-to-face contact with board members and support staff. Towards the end of the year, Feltham opened a separate unit designed to provide short-stay support and reintegration for young people with violent and disruptive behaviour.

Conditions and regimes

A number of boards, including Liverpool and Preston, reported improvements in the physical condition of segregation units, some of which had attracted considerable criticism in earlier and inspection reports. However, elsewhere there were still concerns, with units being referred to as cold, damp and bleak. Repairs and maintenance at Woodhill were 'woefully inadequate', and the Winchester board repeated its view that the unit there was an 'unpleasant, bleak Victorian dungeon'. The units at Wayland and Featherstone needed total refurbishment or rebuilding. There was criticism of exercise yards in Durham, Feltham ('disgusting…covered in pigeon droppings for over a year') and Chelmsford, where the dirty and untidy yard was cleared just before an HMIP Independent Review of Progress but returned to its previous state afterwards.

Some Boards also noted poor regimes, due to staff shortage: at Belmarsh, prisoners requiring multiple staff to unlock them could go for a week without showers, which the board considered 'inhumane'. While some segregation units were able to facilitate in-cell activity and even in some cases in-reach education, in others there was very little purposeful activity. Conditions in segregation at Foston Hall were a major concern: the unit was bleak and the facilities and regime limited.

There was concern in some adult prisons about segregation on the wings, when the segregation unit was full: the Winchester board noted that they had a much poorer regime, as the CSU staff who were supposed to facilitate showers and exercise had no time to do so. At Coldingley, the board noted that there was no separate record of prisoners segregated on the wings. Eastwood Park did not have a segregation unit, though a 'behaviour management unit' had been promised: as a result, there was considerable disruption on the wings as other women were locked up while segregated prisoners had exercise.

2.5 Accommodation

Some, but not all, boards were reporting improvements in both reactive and preventive maintenance and in regular 'decency' checks. Improvements were most noticeable in prisons that had had an urgent notification from HMIP or were part of the then Prisons Minister's ten prisons project. In general, prisons still suffered from historic underfunding and the legacy of previous contracts. There were some positive schemes to train and employ prisoners.

Physical environment

A number of boards reported that prisons had recognised that in order to keep on top of basic cleanliness, cell furniture and kit, it was necessary to do regular decency and fabric checks. These had been restarted at Durham and were taking place at many other prisons, including Wandsworth, Ford, Wormwood Scrubs, Dovegate, Birmingham and Preston. At Swinfen Hall, the board reported a 'cell standards' initiative: replacing missing or broken furniture and curtains, allowing prisoners to

paint their cells, providing cleaning equipment, improving health and safety training, embedding regular cell inspections and wing checks and reporting at prisoner focus groups. At Featherstone, two residential governors had taken the lead and all areas were being repainted, using teams of prisoners. At some other prisons, however, where leadership was inconsistent, so was cleanliness: including in the kitchen at Altcourse, where a routine IMB visit found 'a state of chaos, with food and dirty cloths … and mouse droppings': the prison immediately instituted an action plan.

Some aspects of the physical environment could not be remedied by regular checks. A number of boards, such as Lancaster Farms, Preston, Bure, Ranby and Buckley Hall noted the lack of decency when two prisoners had to share a single cell: at Bullingdon about 80% of single cells were 'doubled' in this way, and there and at Bure and Preston the board considered that this was inhumane. In some cases, as at Whatton and Lancaster Farms, some prisoners were eating meals alongside unscreened toilets. The Brixton board referred to the 'cramped and undignified conditions' for most men there 'sharing small cells, with bunk beds within arm's reach of a toilet shielded only by a flimsy curtain'. Belmarsh still had triple occupancy cells, which the minister agreed was unacceptable. Finally, once again, the board at Coldingley drew the minister's attention to the 'degrading' consequences of the lack of in-cell sanitation, which resulted in some prisoners having to use receptacles in their cells during the night and 'slop out' the next morning. As the previous IMB national annual report noted, these are conditions that would not be tolerated in any other public building.

Maintenance and repairs

In last year's national annual report, there were numerous examples, throughout the public sector prison estate, of serious and repeated failures to maintain buildings and equipment, resulting in unacceptable and sometimes unsafe living and working conditions and the closure of cells and workshops. This year, there had been some improvement, particularly in those prisons contracted to Government Facility Services Limited, the successor to Carillion – though this was not universal and often seemed to depend on good local management teams spotting problems early and effectively liaising with the contracted-out service. In some cases, prisons that were in the spotlight of a very critical inspection report or part of the last Prisons Minister's ten prisons project were able to benefit from significant additional resource and/or fewer prisoners.

At Standford Hill, Ford and Winchester, with a committed on-site team, repairs were more timely and planned maintenance more efficient. The Wandsworth board recorded good progress to reverse previous failings, with 4,200 preventive and 11,977 reactive maintenance jobs in the year, and some major refurbishment. At Feltham, there was a more direct system for reporting faults and up to 900 reactive maintenance jobs a month. The backlog of repairs at Chelmsford had reduced from 850 to 70, and staff had increased from one to 31, though they were mostly temporary.

Liverpool had new window grilles and outstanding repairs had reduced from 2000 to 120, helped by a reduction of 500 in its population, and additional resources for its maintenance team. Wormwood Scrubs, too, had benefited from additional resource

as one of the ten priority prisons, as well as a decrease in population, to refurbish a landing at a time. Birmingham had closed or refurbished all but one of its Victorian wings. The Aylesbury board reported improvements under GFSL: for example much-needed repairs to a dangerous parapet and blocked drains. Some prisons serviced by Amey also noticed an improvement: the Cardiff board reported noticeable and commendable changes, at Buckley Hall, the Amey team was fully staffed, with a significant drop in failed repairs and backlog and at Lincoln, which last year reported a death from legionella, outstanding repairs had reduced from 2000 to 120, with a reduced population.

A number of boards, including Wormwood Scrubs, commended the fact that teams of prisoners were working, and sometimes being trained, under the contractor's supervision. At Drake Hall there was an accredited painting programme, Ford had a team of prisoners employed and supervised by GFSL, qualified prisoners at Sudbury were carrying out shower refurbishment, and at Wealstun and Ranby prisoner teams were carrying out small repairs, including training in specialist cell cleaning. This was described as a 'win-win' situation, for prisoners and the prison.

However, this was far from universal. Many boards in other prisons, with the same contractors, reported the same significant failings as previously: boiler breakdowns, unhygienic or broken showers, broken gutters and windows, lifts out of action, inoperable call bells, shortages of kit, equipment and cell furniture, slow or poor maintenance, delayed refurbishment even when funding had been agreed, and arguments over responsibility for faulty machinery and descaling toilets.

The report of the Pentonville board showed the scale of the challenge inherited from Carillion. The new contractor, GFSL, was understaffed and compliant with only six out of 46 audit baselines: urgent repairs were needed to fire safety equipment, electrical testing and water hygiene; there were repeated heating failures, significant vermin infestation, 'squalid' toilets, unreliable hot water and failing lighting. Some improvements took place during the year.

The board at Littlehey reported a continuing backlog of outstanding jobs, such as showers out of action for three years, boilers for eight months and the need expensively to hire kitchen equipment. At Whatton, there was also an increasing backlog, and the Board reported that 'Amey consistently failed to deliver the maintenance and repair contract in a timely manner'. At Foston Hall, there were 930 maintenance jobs outstanding, including 160 repairs, for example to washing machines, and some classrooms were out of action due to water damage because there had been no routine drain clearing; here and in other prisons, delays sometimes meant that essential work that had been budgeted for could not be completed in the financial year and therefore fell away.

The Bristol and Eastwood Park boards included telling pictures in their annual reports, showing the poor and degraded environments, often the result of poor maintenance or investment. At Chelmsford, there were significant delays in kitchen equipment repair and some of the pipework was being held together by clingfilm. The Styal board recorded little improvement since its very critical report the previous year. There had been three site managers, the quality of accommodation was

continuing to deteriorate, and a ceiling had collapsed in the education building. The board struggled to understand why repairing a bell push cost £850.

2.6 Health

In some prisons, there were noticeable improvements in healthcare provision, and evidence of action taken after critical inspection reports. In others, there were still staffing issues and a lack of liaison with the rest of the prison. The extent and severity of mental ill-health, and the speed of transfer to secure mental health facilities, remained significant concerns, in spite of some additional resource. Social care support had improved in some prisons, but not in others.

Some boards during this year reported notable improvement in healthcare provision, sometimes after the Care Quality Commission had inspected and issued a notice requiring improvement. At Whatton, for example, under a new provider there were significant improvements, though the healthcare building itself was so poor that the board wrote to the Minister. The Chelmsford board also looked forward to improvement under a new provider. Similarly, at Channings Wood, where primary care had been stretched and reactive, supervision, nurse staffing and waiting times all improved after a requirement notice; as did the provision at Thameside, where the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman had on four occasions found that healthcare was not equivalent to that provided in the community.

At other prisons, boards reported an improving or good service, and good collaboration between healthcare and the prison: for example at Haverigg, at Foston Hall (where there was impressive joint work for women with complex needs) and at Swinfen Hall (where there were health and wellbeing champions and an integrated service). Staffing had improved at Preston and Bure, with triage clinics, better communication and fewer complaints and requests (‘applications’) to the board. Two London prisons – Wandsworth and Pentonville – had reversed staffing shortages and at Pentonville there was an ‘outstanding’ wellbeing centre, daily meetings coordinating primary care, mental health and wellbeing, and more psychological support. Healthcare at Buckley Hall was rated excellent by NHS England, and there had been improvements at Coldingley, particularly in relation to mental health assessments.

This was not always the case. Some boards, for example Huntercombe and Bronzefield, continued to report staffing shortages, and others, like Hewell and Elmley, an unwelcoming environment; the Elmley board also reported that prisoners on constant watch had nevertheless managed to self-harm. In a board survey at Featherstone, 77% of prisoners found healthcare ‘poor’, mainly due to problems of access and delay in getting appointments. At Rochester there had been a strained relationship between healthcare and the prison, though the board believed that this was improving.

At some prisons, there was still a high level of missed appointments (‘did not attend’ or DNA). A significant contributory factor, as at Elmley, Chelmsford and Winchester, was poor liaison between healthcare and the rest of the prison, including a failure to

provide officer escorts: failed escorts accounted for nearly a third of DNAs for dental services at Winchester. On one day at Belmarsh, prisoners attended only 17 out of 42 appointments, which was described as fairly standard, because of a shortage of officers to escort prisoners both to and from appointments. At Foston Hall, the board reported that appointment slips often arrived late, sometimes after the appointment itself. Bristol and Bullingdon reported high levels of cancellations. Some prisons were, however, tackling these problems creatively: Brinsford and Parc had instituted a system of 'runners' between healthcare and the wings and units, and at Parc there were also prisoner healthcare champions.

Mental health

Mental health remained a major issue, both because of the high prevalence in the prison population and its impact on prisoners and staff. There were some improvements recorded during the year: at Cardiff, where there had been serious concerns in the previous year, the service was fully staffed, dealing with a high rate of referrals and attending induction on a trial basis to assess even prisoners with short sentences. A number of prisons – such as Stocken, Erlestoke, Buckley Hall, Ranby, Wayland and Woodhill – reported improved or good mental health staffing and provision; though some, like Wealstun and Lancaster Farms, noted that demand had also increased. Ford open prison was able to provide support for the increased number of men with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and at Buckley Hall, the Manchester Survivors scheme had dealt with over 200 victims of trauma in two years.

These prisons were not, however, the majority. Elsewhere, boards reported mental health teams struggling and failing to meet need. At Durham, referrals had risen from 140 to 250 a month, and waiting times for the small number of spaces in the prison's integrated support unit (ISU) could be months; a similar unit at Altcourse had been closed, for funding reasons. At Thameside, around 10% of prisoners were diagnosed with severe mental health problem and 20% with severe depression, though there had been an improvement in psychological and psychiatric support.

The Whitemoor board had major concerns about a service that was consistently understaffed, as did the boards at Onley, Chelmsford and Wymott. The Swinfen Hall board had been promised by the then minister that the new integrated mental health specification would be fully implemented by April 2019; yet only the on-call service was in place by then. At Hewell, where resources were limited, the board noted that prisoners sometimes self-harmed to get treatment and were then accused of 'just attention seeking'. A young prisoner at Bristol who had just received a 30-year prison sentence was told that he would have to wait 12 months for any psychological support on the grounds that this was the 'normal' wait in the community.

The need was particularly high in women's prisons. A third of the women at Drake Hall had complex needs, as did nearly all those in the inpatient unit at Peterborough, where there was a limited regime and lack of therapeutic activities. In Styal prison, around a third of the women were using mental health services at any one time. There was a new support system for women with complex needs, instead of the previous Dove unit, which had not been a success, but its purpose was still not wholly clear. There was also a complex needs unit at New Hall, but the prison

officers there had no medical training, and the mental health team was understaffed. There had been a significant increase, to over 3,000, in mental health referrals at Eastwood Park during the year, and its complex case unit, for very challenging and multiply self-harming women, was not able to accommodate all those who needed this level of care. The board noted a rise in the number and complexity of cases; in some cases, very ill women had been sent to prison as a place of safety because of the lack of community provision. The work of the psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE) unit was, however, commended.

Transfers to more suitable mental hospital accommodation remained problematic and frequently slow, often involving a stay in segregation. They were described as excessive or lengthy at Whitemoor, Chelmsford, Wandsworth and Belmarsh (where the board reported delays of up to nine months, and the inpatient unit was so full that prisoners had to be nursed on the wings). Only two out of 23 patients were transferred in the target time of 14 days at Thameside, and only nine out of 25 at Bronzefield, where the number of women with severe and enduring mental health concerns in the healthcare unit had increased. The Stocken board reported that during the lengthy delays awaiting transfer there was a revolving door between the wings and the segregation unit. At Pentonville, prisoners from nearby secure mental hospitals were regularly discharged into the prison, placing huge strain on its mental health services. However, delays from assessment to transfer had improved at Lincoln and Dovegate.

Boards in the youth estate continued to report severe problems and delays in transferring seriously mentally ill young people, because of the lack of sufficient alternative provision, particularly for those approaching 18. This led to lengthy stays in segregation at Cookham Wood: the board described their situation as ‘bleak and inhumane’. The health and wellbeing team carried a caseload of 80 to 90, including young people with ADHD and other learning difficulties and disabilities; almost all the cases involved previous trauma. The board looked forward to the implementation of the SECURE STAIRS integrated care project, which had only just been funded. At Wetherby, SECURE STAIRS was starting and the merger of healthcare teams had improved the service, but there were staffing problems and long waits for admission to secure mental health facilities.

Social care

There continued to be gaps in social care provision for older and disabled prisoners. The Hewell board reported a lack of coordination about referrals to the local authority and a reliance on unofficial carers, raising safeguarding and welfare concerns. Similarly at Wymott there was inconsistency and over-reliance on ‘buddy’ systems and, on the wing holding high dependency elderly and disabled men, the board considered that prisoners were held in ‘situations that were neither dignified nor humane’, in spite of the support of untrained officers.

Some prisons were taking a more proactive approach. Social care at Littlehey was described as a ’very positive story’, with the local authority providing full-time carers on site between 8am and 9.30pm and an extension of social care to provide support to those with learning disabilities. Because of Haverigg’s re-role to an open prison for men convicted of sexual offences, the prison had established good links with the

local authority, with two social workers and two occupational therapists. At Lowdham Grange, Stafford and Coldingley, care plans and engagement with the local authority and other agencies were in place; however, the Stafford board still noted that prisoners who would have had 24/7 care in the community were getting only basic social care.

2.7 Equality and diversity

This remained an area in need of development and direction, particularly in relation to race and ethnicity. More boards reported that structures were in place, but in other prisons it was underdeveloped. Even where there were structures and data showing disproportionality, this rarely appeared to drive change. There were some positive developments in relation to age, disability and foreign nationals, as well as some continuing concerns.

During the first quarter of the year, we reported that it was rare to find boards that were confident that equality issues were being tackled robustly: with only four out of 23 confident that there was embedded good practice, seven reporting recent improvements or plans, and 12 expressing considerable concern. This pattern did not change markedly in the remainder of the year.

Foston Hall, East Sutton Park and Drake Hall women's prisons were among the most positive. Both boards reported more ownership and commitment from senior managers and designated staff, though they were sometimes cross-deployed. At Drake Hall, an independent external scrutiny panel examined discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs); at Foston Hall, action was taken when data showed disproportionality in women put on report or on the basic level of the incentives scheme. East Sutton Park was carrying out work to support women from the Traveller community. However, at New Hall and Styal, boards reported that equalities work had been underdeveloped.

The picture in men's prisons was more mixed. There were some positive developments, with good work reported at Hatfield open prison and at The Verne, which was able to rely on structures set up in its previous role as an immigration removal centre. The Haverigg board noted that there were specialist key workers and staff training in autism, disability and cultural awareness, with 97% staff participation. At Stafford, there were trained equality representatives and a survey by Nottingham University had found that BAME prisoners were positive and felt safe. The board at Buckley Hall noted that there was a good equality officer, little difference between BAME and white prisoners' responses to an MQPL (measuring the quality of prison life) survey, and independent and in-depth scrutiny of DIRFs. In conjunction with healthcare, all prisoners were invited to an equality and wellbeing clinic two months after arrival; and the board had interviewed all Travellers, who responded positively.

Some prisons reported that, during the year, equality structures were being re-energised, or 're-branded' and statistics were being examined: though a number expressed concerns about both the quality and the timeliness of the data provided. At Pentonville, the equality committee was restarted and produced an action plan;

before that the board considered that the area had been ‘unacceptably neglected’, with no monitoring of data. It was less clear how extensively it was scrutinised or what was done when the data showed evidence of disproportionality. The Coldingley board noted that data was being collected, but not analysed, and at Lancaster Farms, though there were regular equality action team (EAT) meetings, reports had become less detailed over the year and there was little evidence of actual action, as opposed to action points, in response to the recommendations of the Lammy report.

Many boards reported disappointing progress. At Guys Marsh, there was inconsistency and a lack of priority, with few meetings, often rearranged at short notice, and no analysis of needs, though an equality and diversity lead and a DIRF investigator had recently been appointed. Channings Wood, Woodhill, Stocken, Wealstun, Chelmsford, Durham, Wayland, Deerbolt and Downview reported little progress, with meetings cancelled and staffing under-resourced or inconsistent. The Wayland board, for example, reported that equality was spread over too many managers, there were delays in responding to DIRFs, difficulty accessing forms and no envelopes to ensure confidentiality. At Deerbolt, nearly half the diversity and equality action team (DEAT) meetings had been cancelled, there were too few forum meetings and little training, and yet racism was a recurring theme in DIRFs, with disproportionality in the incentives scheme, adjudications and jobs. Ashfield was particularly disappointing: the board reported that the previous drive and innovation in equality had waned, there was no full-time manager, fewer DEAT meetings, no longer chaired by the Director or deputy, reduced staff training and prisoner frustration. Only after this was featured in the HMIP report were staffing and oversight restored.

Race and ethnicity

At Dovegate, there were monthly DEAT meetings, prisoner equality orderlies, representatives and forums. However, there was significant disproportionality of black and mixed-race prisoners in segregation (34.2% of those segregated, compared to 21.5% in the population) which had been collected, but not presented to the DEAT. Similarly, at Cardiff, there had been progress in setting up monthly DEAT meetings, a full-time diversity officer and focus groups, but the board expressed concerns about implementation: black and mixed-race prisoners accounted for 14.6% of adjudications, but were only 3.4% of the population. No segregation data had been analysed by the prison; when the board did so, they found that 35% of those segregated were from BAME communities, though they were only 20% of the population.

At Littlehey, 21% of adjudications were for BAME prisoners, 10% of the population. The board at Bedford reported that equality was still not embedded, the EAT lacked continuity and attendance, a disproportionate number of black Caribbean prisoners (21%; 5% of the population) faced adjudications, and a higher proportion had been segregated. Similarly, at Wormwood Scrubs 64% of uses of force were on black and mixed-race prisoners, who were 41% of the population, while 16% were on white prisoners, 40% of the population; 71% of prisoners in segregation were black.

It was rare to see this data actually driving change. The Swinfen Hall board, in its previous year's report, had analysed data on adjudications, employment, the incentives scheme and segregation, all of which showed disproportionality. The same imbalance continued in this year's report. However, there had been some changes at Standford Hill, which last year recorded that BAME men were under-represented on stage two of the working out scheme (paid employment). The prison had employed a BAME peer adviser and set up monthly focus groups: the proportion of BAME prisoners in stage two had increased from 8% to 16%, though the board considered that it was still not completely equitable. At Whatton, where BAME prisoners had believed that they were excluded from trusted jobs, job availability was now more transparent, with monthly statistics posted in the library, and a higher proportion of BAME prisoners than other ethnic groups were in education, employment or programmes.

Age and disability

As in previous reports, many boards continued to point out the significant accessibility problems for older prisoners and those with disabilities: lifts non-existent or out of action and a lack of wheelchair adapted cells. At Hull, suitable adapted cells were mainly in the wing holding men convicted of sexual offences, while at Winchester some prisoners requiring adapted cells had to be accommodated in the inpatient healthcare unit.

The board at Littlehey was disappointed to report that opportunities and facilities for older prisoners, in a prison where nearly half the men were over 50, had decreased. There was no specialist third sector involvement, and access to a day care room, as well as a number of work and wellbeing initiatives, had all ceased. At Whatton, however, there was good work with Age UK and an older prisoner activities and learning group to support older prisoners and armed forces veterans, with 13 social care advocates, and the prison had received National Autism Society accreditation (see also *social care* section in Healthcare)

A number of boards reported a greater focus on prisoners with learning disabilities or difficulty, with autism or dementia awareness training for staff. When prisoners were asked to identify their own disability or special educational needs, the real extent of need was apparent, often significantly more than the prison itself had recognised. At Dovegate, 293 prisoners self-identified as having special educational needs and at Littlehey this was a third of the population, with little evidence that the regime was adapted for them or staff sufficiently trained. At Guys Marsh, between 33% and 50% of prisoners declared they had a disability, often a mental health or learning disability or difficulty, whereas the data on NOMIS showed there were only 8% of such prisoners.

Foreign nationals

A number of prisons reported concerns about the support for foreign national prisoners, both from the prison itself and the Home Office. Durham and Cardiff boards both criticised the lack of active Home Office contact: the Cardiff board noted that there were no monthly updates, no Home Office visits or responses to emails for long periods, and appeal forms available only in English for those threatened with

deportation. At Channings Wood, some immigration surgeries were cancelled at short notice because of regime problems.

There were some positive initiatives: at Wandsworth, where 44% of prisoners were foreign nationals, there was a 12-week intensive language course and at Rochester, contact had been made with a voluntary sector organisation. Pentonville had regular Home Office contact, but the board reported that deportation orders were sometimes served without prior warning only a day before release, and for others there was minimal release preparation. The Huntercombe board noted that, in a prison exclusively holding foreign nationals, some qualifications now offered were not internationally recognised.

2.8 Property

Almost every board deplored the inability to reunite prisoners with their property, both between and within prisons. This is a longstanding issue, which affects a large number of prisoners, but which appears to have little priority.

This is a short section with a very long history. It has been, and remains, a fundamental problem that the prison service as a whole, as well as individual prisons, cannot reliably transfer or secure prisoners' property. Nearly a quarter of all applications received by IMBs from prisoners related to concerns about property. As we pointed out last year, this does not just mean that prisoners lose possessions that can be replaced through compensation; they also lose irreplaceable personal letters and photographs, legal correspondence and items of great sentimental value. Moreover, the inability or unwillingness to fix this perennial problem signals to prisoners that they, like their possessions, have little value. As the board at Ford remarked 'the loss of valuable and sometimes very sentimental personal property or critical paperwork cannot be considered humane or fair'.

This year, all but a handful of boards raised property as a significant concern, and it is likely that others did not do so only because they had become tired of repeating the same problem year after year. Many noted that the promise of a new property framework within HMPPS, promised last year in response to their concerns, had failed to materialise. It is still not in place, and HMPPS consultation on new arrangements is due to resume in summer 2020.

Some boards, for example at Bedford, did report that individual prisons were playing closer attention to securing property within the establishment: setting up systems and allocating responsibilities. But at others there remained a lack of ownership; for example, at Birmingham applications to the board from prisoners about property had almost doubled.

One of the priorities of the last Prisons Minister was investment in security measures, including the use of technology, to prevent prisoners acquiring illicit items. So far there is no evidence of any similar priority or investment to ensure that prisoners can retain possession of permitted, and often treasured, items.

2.9 Education and work

This year, regimes in general had improved and there were fewer reports of excessive restrictions significantly damaging access to purposeful activity. The new education contracts had caused some uncertainty, but appeared to be bedding down in many prisons. However, there was still too little purposeful activity in many prisons, including training prisons and some prisons holding young adults: either due to lack of space, lack of staff or poor management and liaison.

During the year, most prison education contracts were re-let. A number of boards, such as Woodhill and Stoke Heath, expressed concern about a reduction in budgets, and the ending of some training and education courses. Durham's reduced funding meant the loss of nine staff and training opportunities both for short- and longer-stay prisoners. Others reported problems in transition, with some courses stopped halfway through and instability of staffing and management, though there were improvements towards the end of the year. The Buckley Hall board, for example, reported uncertainty about provision for much of the year, and an over-focus on allocation, rather than completions and results; but attendance improved over the year and there was a new property maintenance workshop (which also benefited the prison) and more vocational qualifications.

Other boards, such as Belmarsh and Winchester, recorded positive changes, including in some cases provision for prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties, as at Hatfield. The Wymott board thought that the new contract offered opportunities as well as challenges: some courses were withdrawn, but there were improvements, such as a family pathway and the introduction of functional skills into the IT workshop. Action had been taken on the board's concern about too many men remaining on the wings, and attendance in industries began to reach the 80% target.

Local prisons[4]

Availability and access to purposeful activity, however, remained very variable, particularly in prisons taking prisoners directly from court. The Woodhill board reported an average cancellation rate of 25% (though this was a significant improvement to the 70% in 2017). Belmarsh had fewer lost days, but only 200 education and work spaces for 800 prisoners; fewer than half the education spaces were taken up and there were few vocational qualifications. Boards at Chelmsford, Hewell, Thameside, Wormwood Scrubs and Pentonville also reported poor attendance, in some cases around 50%, and the Hewell board noted the large number of cleaners, who were scarcely 'active'. Regime restrictions, late unlocking, and insufficient provision continued to affect access to purposeful activity at Winchester. At Thameside only one in three of those surveyed by the board said they had done an education course and, though there was a wide range of

[4] These include all prisons that take prisoners directly from court, including those in the long-term high security estate.

vocational training, 81% of prisoners in a board survey said they had done no training.

By contrast, Hull, another local prison, offered purposeful activity to 85% of the population, with 83% attendance, and had created links to at least 13 external companies, some of which had offered prisoners employment. Parc, too, recorded only 66 unemployed prisoners. At Bullingdon, education attendance had improved, with an 81% success rate, and flexible provision that recognised that three-quarters of prisoners were there for less than six months and half for less than three. At Cardiff there was high retention and attainment, with 70% of those attending courses getting qualifications, and all courses accredited. Men had a personal development plan that stayed with them in prison. Wandsworth, Altcourse and Bedford also recorded improvements.

Training and resettlement prisons

Even training and resettlement prisons sometimes struggled to provide enough, or good enough quality, education and training. Boards identified three principal problems: not enough genuine training or education spaces; shortage of staff; poor management and liaison with operational staff. Brixton, a category C resettlement prison, had insufficient activity places; only around half of them offered education or vocational training, much of it part-time, and when the board checked, there were usually around one in seven of the population unemployed. At Erlestoke, there was concern about the lack of courses geared to employability and a shortage of staff meant that several courses were not running. At Onley, a significant proportion of prisoners were on the wings during the day, and there were staff shortages. Rochester, Coldingley and Wealstun suffered from recruitment problems and/or staff absences; only three of the five vocational training courses were running at Wealstun.

Where there was sufficient provision, it was not always fully utilised. Lancaster Farms had enough activity spaces, but too many were unoccupied during the day: the ‘virtual campus’ (secure ICT education network) was moribund, and there were too few qualifications or functional skills training in workshops. At Guys Marsh the board reported on a ‘lack of motivation from wing staff to get men off the wing’ and a decline in the quality of education, which the board attributed to changes and gaps in management. Low attendance rates at Wayland were linked to poor interface between operational and educational staff. Even in Stocken, where education provision was said to be very good, and nearly all workshops offered qualifications, there were issues of punctuality and attendance.

There was a more positive picture among prisons holding men convicted of sexual offences. Education at Whatton was excellent, with more vocational qualifications under the new provider. There was more purposeful activity at Stafford, though all but two workshops offered only ‘simple, repetitive and routine’ work. The boards at Ashfield and Bure reported good progress, with virtually full employment and a range of qualifications; though more support was needed for prisoners with learning difficulties and there was some repetitive work.

Young adults

Education and training are particularly important for young adults, both to reduce educational deficits and to keep a potentially volatile population occupied. Deerbolt was trying to integrate literacy and numeracy into workshops, but staff shortages and regime closures severely affected delivery: at one point only around half the courses were delivered. The Swinfen Hall board reported that there had been a substantial improvement in the regime, with 10,000 fewer lost learning hours, but, in spite of some excellent work in some of the workshops, it was difficult to recruit and retain tutors. The same was true at Aylesbury, where only 40% of prisoners were in theory in full employment, and in practice this was often even less.

Women

Among women's prisons, there was usually a wide variety of provision, though sometimes insufficient for the population. Education at Eastwood Park was good, but there was not enough classroom and workshop space, which limited the opportunity for vocational qualification, and regime closures due to staff shortages. Styal too did not have enough spaces for all the population; under the new contract, there had been a reduction in vocational training, though more workshops were planned. Downview had significant staff recruitment problems and was making slow progress.

However, at Bronzefield, between 80% and 90% of women were in education or employment. There were two full-time special educational needs trained staff, linking with mental health and education. Foston Hall had a wide range of education and training pathways, including provision for women with learning difficulties, and an effective peer mentoring scheme, though regime restrictions had badly affected attendance. The board commended the sequencing board, matching women to suitable work, education and training and the proposed retail unit which would enhance employability. Drake Hall also provided a wide range of activities and education, with 88% of women in activities and high success rates, though the increase in women with only a short period left to serve was a challenge.

Young people

Education should be central to the work of establishments holding young people under 18. Attendance had been poor in Feltham A, due to regime shutdowns following violent incidents; young people were allowed to drop afternoon education in favour of association and exercise. This improved considerably during the year, with earlier assessments and better allocation procedures, so that attendance and average time in education doubled to 74% and 17.5 hours respectively. Cookham Wood reported high levels of educational attainment, but access to education was restricted due to slow movements off the wings and lockdowns caused by staff shortages. Young people also had the chance to achieve construction skills and barista qualifications: the new café was described as an 'outstanding success story'. The Werrington board also reported that cancellations were fewer during the year, but noted a lack of engagement by young people in some education classes, compared to those that also offered vocational skills. At Wetherby, too, the board noted that engagement in education was often more successful when embedded in practical workshops, and therefore regretted the loss of the bike workshop.

2.10 Resettlement

There had been some improvements in the provision of 'through the gate support', offender management, and support for employment and family links, but not everywhere. Provision of housing on release remained a significant problem, with little impact of the new homelessness legislation. There remained concerns about prisoners' progression through the prison system and the continuing issue of IPP prisoners long over tariff.

Resettlement services and CRCs

A number of boards, such as Durham, Liverpool and Lincoln, reported improvements in 'through the gate' (TTG) resettlement services, with a 'departure lounge' in some for those about to leave. Some local prisons, such as Cardiff, Chelmsford and Wormwood Scrubs, reported significantly increased staffing in staff contracted to the community rehabilitation company (CRC); at Cardiff there were better links with job and careers services and at Chelmsford a post-release mentoring service.

There were also improvements in some training prisons. At Guys Marsh, Catch 22 were much more visible and the service better than in the previous year. It was noticeable that community rehabilitation companies (CRCs) were providing some, even if limited, services in prisons not designated as resettlement prisons, such as Warren Hill, Wymott, Stafford and Bure. The Drake Hall board reported that there was good liaison between probation and the CRC, with coordinated planning for women on release; almost all had resettlement plans and most had accommodation. At Brixton, the CRC was fully staffed, and holding workshops on the wings.

This was not always the case. Four local prisons, Belmarsh, Pentonville, Birmingham and Wandsworth, reported staffing difficulties, fragmentation of responsibilities between different agencies and/or poor pre-release contact. Prisoners should be seen within two weeks of release. This was not the case for over 50% of Wandsworth prisoners, and for the majority of Pentonville prisoners the board spoke to: prison managers agreed that it was 'hit and miss', and nearly one in five of prisoners' applications to the board related to offender management. The board at Eastwood Park carried out a survey and found that women often did not know what was happening until a day or two before release. The Littlehey board found the TTG service 'woefully inadequate', with little involvement of partner organisations or support with finances.

Sentence management

Last year, very many boards reported the backlog of OASys assessments, that should establish prisoners' needs and allow effective sentence planning. This year, there had been improvements in some prisons, such as Wandsworth. Guys Marsh, Elmley, Birmingham and Belmarsh. However, many boards, including Swinfen Hall, Wormwood Scrubs and Onley continued to report problems. At Erlestoke, over half of prisoners were arriving with no or incomplete OASys and there was a backlog of

50-60; the backlog at Bullingdon remained at around 300 throughout the year; 20% of prisoners at Wymott had no up-to-date OASys.

The second stage of the offender management in custody (OMiC) process was getting under way: the introduction of prison offender managers (POMs), including probation officers for higher-risk prisoners. At Bedford, Warren Hill and Wealstun the offender management unit (OMU) was fully staffed, and there were reduced sentence management backlogs at a number of other prisons. At Bedford POMs were holding surgeries on the wings. Other boards, however, still reported problems: there were backlogs at Channings Wood, cross-deployment at Belmarsh, Chelmsford and Deerbolt because of staff shortages elsewhere; at Rochester, Buckley Hall and Erlestoke there were not enough POMs, and at Erlestoke around half the high-risk prisoners were being managed by prison rather than probation officers.

Accommodation

Two of the key elements in successful resettlement are housing and employment. As last year, housing after release remained a significant problem in the majority of prisons. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 requires prisons to inform local authorities if someone is to be released homeless; however, it only requires the local authority to provide advice, not accommodation. Most boards reported that it had made no, or only marginal, difference: indeed, one board said that it had simply increased the paperwork and bureaucracy for the prison and CRC. Without secure housing, the other elements of successful resettlement – employment, family reunion, support for mental health or substance misuse – can fall away or become much more difficult. As the Thameside board reported: 'the chronic lack of affordable accommodation in London… is the most compellingly important factor standing in the way of successful reintegration'.

In men's local prisons, with two exceptions, the CRCs were recording that around 30% of men who approached them were released to no fixed abode (NFA); the problem was particularly acute in London and the south-east. However, when two boards in local prisons did their own surveys of men about to be released, this proved to be a considerable underestimate of the problem. The Cardiff board, for the second year running, found that 44% of the men they surveyed did not know where they would be sleeping on the night of their release, and some of the remainder were staying with friends or 'sofa surfing'. The board at Thameside surveyed 116 men: 60% had no accommodation and many of them said that getting a bed for the night was their main concern; as the board pointed out '[we] regularly see these individuals back in the prison not long after their release'. Yet information provided by the contracted housing service was that two-thirds of prisoners had either permanent or temporary accommodation to go to. A survey by the Brixton board, a London resettlement prison, found that 32% of men had no address on release, higher than in the previous year.

The Bronzefield board surveyed 116 women just before release and found that 64% said that they would be homeless. In February 2020, most of the boards in women's prisons did a joint resettlement survey[5]. They found that nearly 60% of the women

[5] https://www.imb.org.uk/more-than-half-of-women-prisoners-have-no-settled-home-on-release-reveals-new-report-from-independent-prison-monitors/

surveyed did not have settled accommodation on release[6], yet this overall finding did not seem to be reflected in figures provided by the prisons themselves.[7]

Figures provided in male training prisons for those leaving without settled accommodation were in general better than this, but a number still recorded over one in five men leaving NFA. In prisons holding men convicted of sexual offences, prisoners were almost always released into some form of accommodation, often approved premises, but because of the scarcity of this kind of housing they often did not know where they were going until a day or two before release, which made it virtually impossible to find employment.

The same was true of children and young adults. Boards in these establishments reported that it was rare for them to leave without accommodation, and some form of accommodation was always found for young people under 18, but for those not able to return to families, and dependent on approved accommodation, this was usually arranged at the last minute, causing great anxiety. The board at Cookham Wood pointed out that some looked after children had had little or no contact from their local authority social worker, and one, who had passed 18, was released without an address and had to present as homeless. There was some more positive reintegration work: the board at Wetherby praised the work of a charity, In 2 Out, which provides mentors for young people in prison and for 12 months after release, and the Werrington board noted that all released young people's mobile phones were pre-loaded with sources of physical and mental health support.

Employment

The number of prisoners released into employment remains low. The Thameside board reported good links with external employers, with job fairs and referrals to community support organisations, which led to 63 prisoners joining training courses and 86 securing employment on release. Nevertheless, when the board surveyed men being released, only 17% had work arranged. The Wandsworth board had great difficulty in extracting figures from the CRC, and eventually established that on average they were reporting only 23% of prisoners leaving to work, education or training. At Dovegate, a category B training prison, only 7% of men were recorded as going into employment, a reduction since the previous year. Figures provided to other boards usually ranged between 60% and 20%, but it was far from clear how reliable they were, or whether they represented sustainable employment or training. The Chelmsford board noted that the number of men still in employment six weeks after leaving prison had reduced from 17% to 9%.

A number of boards reported that prisons were seeking to improve links with local employers, to improve prisoners' chances of employment on release, with regular 'employment fairs'. At Wymott, links had been made with the local chamber of commerce to check that qualifications being offered were relevant to the local job market; there were employer engagement months, and the prison was building a database of work placements on release. Some had in-house employment support or 'job centres'. However, a number of boards, including Winchester, Erlestoke,

[6] Less than a half (41%) said they had housing to go to upon release, with 45% saying they had no address to go to, and the remaining 14% saying they had only a temporary address.

[7] In the six prisons that were able to provide data; of those, one open prison reported that the percentage was 0-1% and the rest ranged from 15% to over 60%.

Stocken and Wayland, greatly regretted the loss of the National Careers Service, and did not believe that there was an equivalent alternative. At Chelmsford, for example, useful links with outside employers had been allowed to lapse.

Open prisons had the most positive employment outcomes. All made extensive use of release on temporary licence (ROTL) to allow prisoners to take up paid and unpaid employment in the community. At Hatfield, there were 1500 ROTLs issued each month, and the board reported better communication between the prison, the probation service and the CRC, as did the board at Sudbury. Over two-thirds of those released from Sudbury went into education, training or work, as did 37% of those at Hatfield and Askham Grange and 54% of those released from Standford Hill. The reoffending rate of men from Standford Hill was strikingly low, at 4.7%, an improvement from the previous year's 9.7%.

Family contact

There were indications of more work being done to support family links, following the 2017 Farmer review[8] and the follow-up 2019 report on women[9]. At Thameside, the Family First team had engaged with 800 prisoners, and was reaching out to the schools attended by their children and encouraging teachers to come into the prison to get a better understanding of how they could support them. The Buckley Hall and Lancaster Farms boards were among many reporting good work by voluntary sector organisations in organising family days and programmes, such as Storybook Dads. At Hull, the prison was working closely with Clinks (the umbrella organisation for voluntary sector organisations working in criminal justice) to improve its strategy and practice. Other boards, however, continued to report difficulties in booking visits, with long delays in contacting the booking line: 70% of visitors at Cardiff found it hard to book a visit.

One positive move was the pilot project, jointly with the Department for Work and Pensions, reported at Belmarsh, to allow prisoners to apply for universal credit while in prison so that they could access it immediately on release, thus avoiding the considerable delays that have been a repeated problem since its inception. However, most released prisoners still depended at first on the discharge grant, which has remained at £46 for at least three decades.

Progression

Transferring prisoners to the most appropriate prison and programmes remained an issue throughout the year, with boards pointing in particular to the shortage of category B training and open prison places, leading to a number of prisoners being 'stuck'. A number of boards called for more directive and central control over transfers to allow prisoners to progress effectively through their sentence. As the Altcourse board noted, this could affect prisoners' eligibility for parole; the Wymott board recorded that some prisoners arrived there for programmes that were either not on offer, or for which they were assessed as unsuitable. Transfer to open prisons was often slow after prisoners had been re-categorised as suitable for this move: there were 52 such prisoners in Brixton, one waiting for over six months; the Swinfen Hall board noted that the delay for men convicted of sexual offences between

[8] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642244/farmer-review-report.pdf
[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farmer-review-for-women

recategorisation and transfer averaged 178 days, and there was no open provision for young adults.

The transition to an open prison, and to release back into the community, could be difficult for prisoners who had become accustomed to closed conditions. Some boards in closed prisons, for example at Whatton and Ashfield, reported that the prison had set up a preparatory course, or a progression wing, to prepare prisoners for the move to open conditions. The board at Ford open prison, however, regretted that the independent living unit opened in 2018 to help long-term prisoners transition to release had lost its focus, and the planned shopping, cooking and budgeting work had stopped.

In the youth estate, the Cookham Wood board was particularly concerned that young people who reached the age of 18, and had lengthy sentences, could spend several months waiting for transfer; there is no central mechanism for this, and some, for safeguarding reasons, were held in segregation. They raised this with the Minister and it was partially addressed after the end of the reporting year.

Boards continued to raise the issue of prisoners serving indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPPs) who were well over their original tariff. The board at Hewell pointed out that 17 IPP prisoners ended up in segregation, because of their frustration and the feeling that they had nothing to lose. At Foston Hall, there were nine women over tariff, one 12 years and four 9 years past their potential release date; at Coldingley, there were 19 such prisoners, who between them had served an additional 158 years; all the 12 IPPS at Chelmsford were beyond tariff. There were some positive attempts to work with these prisoners. At Stafford, there was a counselling service, which an increasing proportion of IPP prisoners accessed and found positive. The ASPIRE unit at Buckley Hall was providing a mutually supportive community for complex life- and indeterminate-sentenced prisoners.

Warren Hill continued to do excellent work with a number of long-serving IPP prisoners, but the board once again drew attention to the need for better transitional support on release. The individualised and positive support provided in the prison dropped away when a prisoner was released. Almost all of the 38% who were recalled to prison after release had broken the terms of their licence, rather than committing a further offence.

3. Prisons during Covid

At the beginning of the Covid emergency, the priority for the prison service was to minimise the spread of infection. New arrivals, those who were vulnerable and those potentially infected were placed in separate 'cohorts'. Other prisoners were confined to their cells for around 23 hours a day, and social visits and face to face education and training stopped altogether. Time out of cell could be as little as 30 minutes in adult prisons and 40 minutes in under-18 establishments. This succeeded in reducing the mortality and infection rate to a small fraction of what had been feared, but inevitably had consequences for the wellbeing and rehabilitation of prisoners.

Boards reported the extremely limited impact of the early release scheme, which some noted had simply added to bureaucracy without any noticeable effect. The initial decline in the prison population was due to limited court activity, though boards nevertheless reported concerns about the number of short-sentenced and remanded prisoners: such as 14-day sentences at one women's prison. There are concerns about the impact of increased court activity on population pressure, particularly in local prisons.

The IMBs provided regular updates to the minister and the Justice Committee during the first three months of lockdown, as well as providing information to HMIP as it carried out short scrutiny visits: drawing on boards' monitoring activities and the themes and issues emerging from the IMB freephone telephone applications line.

Updates during April and May commended the work of prison staff, themselves exposed to risk, and noted positive steps being taken to support prisoners and communicate with them: for example, additional phone credits, supervised access to mobile phones and video links, welfare checks by safer custody staff and the chaplaincy, the provision of distraction material and innovative activities, and regular communication with prisoners. Prisons largely remained calm and safe, as restrictions were understood and accepted, and there were fewer opportunities for violence, bullying and access to drugs. Some boards noted that there was more interaction between staff and prisoners, when prisoners were unlocked in small groups. During the period, video visits were rolled out in a number of prisons, allowing some form of family contact.

As the period of lockdown progressed, Board also, however, pointed out the impact of continued lockdown on mental health and wellbeing, with very limited psychological and mental health support, often restricted to crisis interventions; as well as the initial abandonment of the key working scheme. Self-harm rose in some prisons; on a number of occasions those at risk of serious self-harm rang the IMB freephone applications line and the prison was immediately alerted to the risk. Healthcare was the most frequent issue raised on the freephone line: not principally Covid-related but the inability to access other treatment and medication.

By July, these concerns were increasing, as the cumulative effect of months of isolation became more apparent. Boards in some women's prisons in particular reported high and rising levels of self-harm. Boards also noted that there were signs of increasing frustration with the continued lockdown, as prisoners observed restrictions being lifted in the community.

Board findings and the applications line also showed the impact of lockdown on prisoners' progression and rehabilitation. In many prisons, education provision and work towards prisoners' progression towards parole had simply been withdrawn, as had independent advocacy in the youth estate, and work on resettlement and substance abuse. Concerns about sentence management and progression were the second most common category of calls to the freephone applications line. Housing provision was even more problematic than usual in many areas, with a shortage of approved premises and local authority provision. At Bronzefield women's prison, the board reported that 40% of women were released to no fixed abode. However, in Wales all prisoners were released to accommodation.

As time went on, key working was restored, though principally as a welfare rather than offender management service. However, boards continued to report very limited and patchy education provision in many prisons throughout this period, with only occasional evidence of proactive and innovative practice. There was particular concern about the impact of isolation and lack of purposeful activity in most establishments holding young people under 18.

The importance of independent monitoring during such exceptional times was shown when boards' monitoring or the freephone applications line revealed unpublicised or questionable practices. The prison service had authorised the wider use of PAVA spray, without previously agreed safeguards and in contradiction to earlier announcements that the roll-out had been suspended.

As this report was being written, the prison service was beginning the process of recovery, with a return to social visits, more offender management work and face-to-face education in under-18 establishments. As we said in our June report to the Justice Committee:

> *'We do have concerns about the pace of change proposed for the adult prison population. While it is clearly important to ensure that robust infection control measures remain in place, we are aware of frustrations building up, which could create a different set of serious risks. In addition, purposeful activity and rehabilitative work are central to the successful rehabilitation of prisoners and therefore the protection of the public. We will therefore be monitoring the impact and outcomes of the framework as it is rolled out.'*

4. The IMB year

This was the first full year of the new governance structure agreed by Ministers: consisting of the national chair, management board and regional representatives. At the beginning of the year, the management board agreed a business plan and oversaw work towards its implementation; by the end of the reporting year, all resources were diverted to ensuring that IMBs could continue to carry out their role as effectively as possible during the Covid pandemic. This was an unexpected and challenging test for the new structures, and the speed with which new methods were devised and implemented is a credit to all involved: secretariat, members, management board and regional representatives.

Business plan 2019/20

The management board agreed a business plan for 2019-20:

- *National monitoring framework, annual report template*: new annual report template and guidance rolled out; national annual report published; revised national monitoring framework agreed for consultation.
- *Training strategy and plan:* training strategy agreed; clerks' e-learning course developed; 12 training courses delivered
- *Knowledge and information management*: information working group set up; review of all on-line materials and regular posting of new material
- *Conduct and performance*: new code of conduct, procedures and members' compact launched and implemented; conflict of interest processes and database developed
- *Recruitment and retention*: redrafting of application form, publicity material and recruitment processes; interview training revised; beginning work with Leaders Unlocked on diversity
- *IMB performance and budget*: revision of boards' complements and visits allocation; budget bid for 2020/1 gained increased resources.
- *Protocols and SLAs*: new protocol with Ministry of Justice, SLA with Home Office Immigration Enforcement; SLA with HMPPS
- *Policy and impact*: written and oral evidence to six parliamentary committees and UN sub-committee on prevention of torture; regular reporting to ministers, HMPPS and Home Office Immigration and Enforcement.
- *Profile, publicity and communications*: regular members' bulletin; new social media policy; media links and coverage of national and individual annual reports
- *Organisational design work*: revised structure of secretariat, outsourcing of some tasks; work on change management and ICT with arm's length body team in MOJ

Applications to boards

Part of IMBs' statutory role is to receive 'applications' (requests and complaints) from prisoners. This is important as it allows prisoners to raise individual concerns, and boards to follow them up with the prison management. The themes and patterns coming out of applications also provide a picture of the main issues of concern to

prisoners. Annex A provides details of applications received during the reporting year, both in total and by different kinds of prisons. In all closed prisons, as last year, concerns about property and healthcare dominated, accounting for around 24% and 13% of total applications respectively. There was also a significant number in relation to sentence management and progression (particularly among foreign nationals and in training and open prisons) and staff/prisoner concerns including bullying (particularly in the youth estate and in women's and high security prisons).

The Covid emergency

Towards the end of the reporting year, priorities had to be swiftly reordered and new and innovative processes developed to meet the Covid emergency. Within a matter of weeks, a new business and operating model was developed to ensure effective monitoring during the pandemic.

- *Remote monitoring*: guidance was produced on effective mechanisms for monitoring remotely in the early months of the crisis, including means of contacting prisoners and detainees directly
- *Freephone lines*: by April, an 0800 number for prisoners and detainees to make applications was authorised and set up, and training delivered to over 150 IMB members as call handlers. Between the launch in April and early August, over 3,080 calls were received; this resulted in 1200 prisoner applications being sent to and followed up by boards at local level. By August, the scheme had been rolled out to over 60 prisons; see the graph at Annex B.
- *Remote training*: there was rapid development of web-based training for 0800 number, remote monitoring and other monitoring guidance, and new members' training
- *Direct monitoring guidance*: guidance was produced for members returning to visiting prisons to comply with health and safety requirements
- *Remote meetings*: more frequent meetings at national, regional and board level were carried out remotely to keep members updated and receive regular information
- *Information for members*: a Covid section was set up and regularly updated on the members website, supplemented by regular bulletins
- *Policy and impact*: regular updates were provided to ministers, HMPPS, Home Office and the Justice Committee on outcomes for prisoners and detainees during the lockdown.

Some planned work has not been able to take place, either because of the crisis itself or because of the need to divert resources to meet new needs. Recruitment has been suspended until autumn 2020, the national conference has been postponed, and the consultation on the new national monitoring framework delayed.

The work of IMBs

Meanwhile, for most of the year, the work of IMBs throughout the prison and immigration detention systems continued.

At the end of the year, there were **1398** Board members. They carried out **51,802 visits**: 49,469 to prisons and 2,333 in the immigration detention estate. In addition, prison boards dealt with **33,177** individual applications from prisoners.

There were **116 recruitment campaigns**, with 705 applicants and **360 new members** appointed. During the year 11 residential training courses took place for new members and board leaders, and an e-learning course for board clerks was rolled out. The information working group also refreshed and updated the information and guidance on the website.

This work was supported by an effective full-time equivalent secretariat staff of **14**[10] and expenditure of **£2,132,759**. These are, as reported last year, very slender resources to support the amount of work being carried out and ensure its maximum impact. This was reinforced in the findings of an external organisational development review.

The IMBs are part of the UK's **National Preventive Mechanism** (NPM)**,** set up under the UN Optional Protocol for the Prevention of Torture, and we attend regular meetings of the NPM.

Ministers have agreed to hold a formal consultation about putting the new governance structure, as set out in the current Protocol with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), on a statutory footing; there are plans to put this process in place and, depending on the outcome, legislate over the coming months.

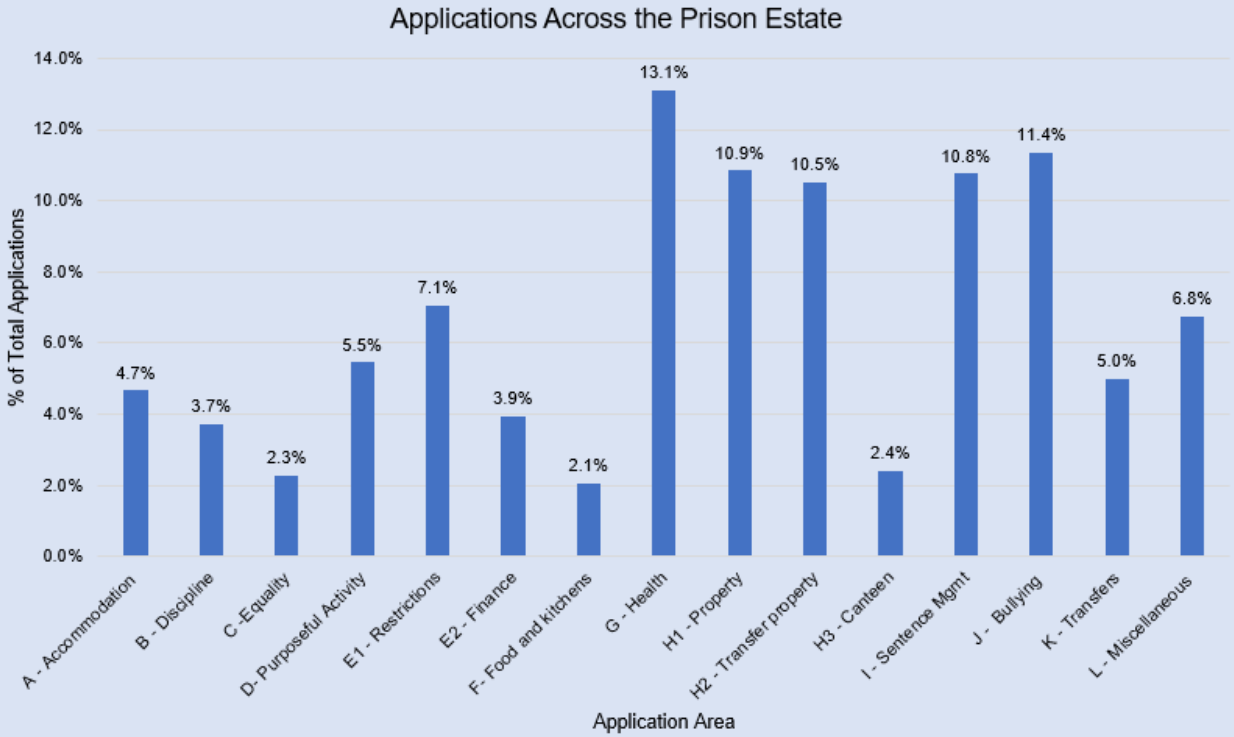
[10] 18 total staff posts, 16 of which directly support IMBs

Annex A: Applications to IMBs

Figure 1: Applications to IMBs in England and Wales, 2019/20[11] by nature of application

Applications Across the Estate (by Application Area)

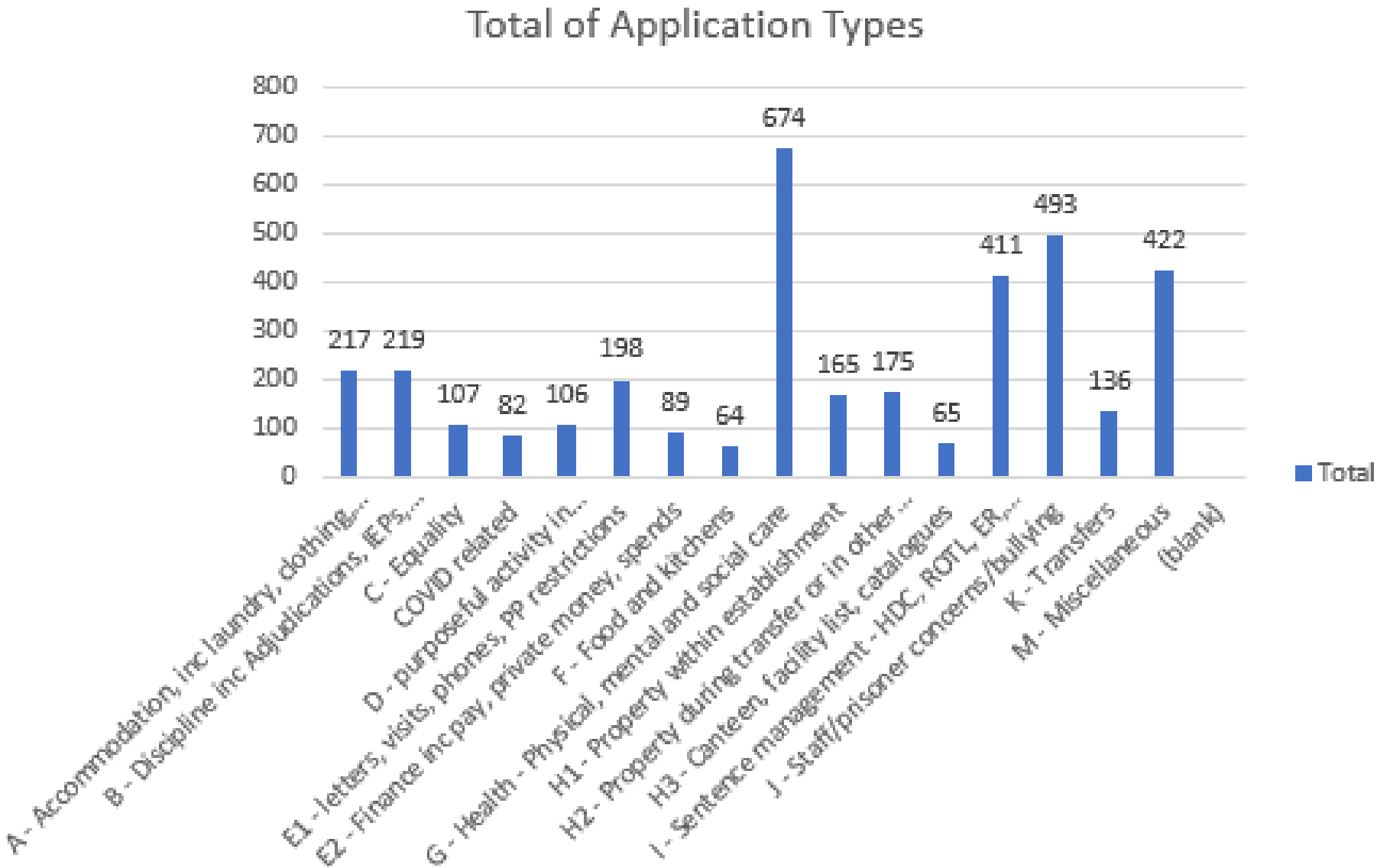
- A total of **29,958** applications were made to the Board across the prison estate.
- **Food and Kitchens** received the least amount of applications overall – **2.1%.**
- The highest proportion of applications were concerning **Property** (H1, H2, H3) which made up **23.8%** of the total number of applications. This is followed by **Health** (G) , which includes physical, social and mental health, with **13.1%** of complaints.



Key	
A	Accommodation including laundry, clothing, ablutions
B	Discipline including adjudications, IEP, sanctions
C	Equality
D	Purposeful Activity including education, work, training, 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, 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 HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation
J	Staff/prisoner concerns including bullying
K	Transfers
L	Miscellaneous
X	Confidential

[11] All graphs for figures 1-9 use data from 112 IMB annual reports published April 2019 – April 2020. Figures in brackets just above each bar chart indicate number of prison IMBs from which data was drawn; a small number of boards cover two prisons in close proximity. *Acknowledgements:* analysis carried out by Katie Chase and Carl Melia of the Ministry of Justice, to a brief from the IMB National Chair.

Annex B: Applications made via the IMB Covid freephone line



About Independent Monitoring Boards

Members of an IMB are from the local community, appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice under the Prison Act 1952. Each IMB has a duty to satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its establishment and (for prisons and YOIs) the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release; to inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom s/he has delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has; to report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the establishment has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner or detainee, every part of the establishment and all its records (except for personal medical records).

Interested in becoming an IMB member?

IMB members are independent, unpaid and work an average of 3-4 visits per month. Their role is to monitor the day-to-day life in their local prison or immigration removal centre and ensure that proper standards of care and decency are maintained.

A typical monitoring visit, for example, might include time spent in the kitchens, workshops, accommodation blocks, recreation areas, healthcare centre and chaplaincy. For more information and for details about how to apply, visit www.imb.org.uk

Note: At the time of publication, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IMB visiting arrangements vary and some monitoring is done remotely, with prisoners' feedback being gathered in other ways.

This publication is available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at imb@justice.gov.uk.