



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Stoke Heath

**For reporting year
1 May 2021 – 30 April 2022**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

HMP/YOI Stoke Heath, in Market Drayton, Shropshire, is a closed category C adult male and young adult training and resettlement prison holding adults aged 21 and over and sentenced young adults (aged 18 to 21). The prison has a baseline certified normal accommodation of 662, with an operational capacity for 782 adult men, of whom, at the close of the reporting period, 70.31% were from Staffordshire and the West Midlands area; 15.56% had a release date within three months and 46.96% within 12 months. The average length of stay was 17.47 months; licence recalls accounted for 35% of prisoners and 36 prisoners were foreign nationals.

The prison has a variety of accommodation, much of it added over the years to the older original prison, built in the early 1960s. There are eight residential wings, one designated for drug treatment, one for induction and longer-term prisoners, and one as a progression unit for release on temporary licence (ROTL). The function of some wings changed, temporarily, to meet the needs of control measures during Covid.

Each wing has in-cell sanitation and a shower block. Single-cell accommodation is provided in 446 cells, and two-prisoner accommodation in 168 cells. The segregation and reintegration unit (SRU) has 16 cells, two holding cells and two further cells: one for special accommodation and one to store kit and to hold evidence and property.

The prison has two gyms, a healthcare department, a kitchen, an education department, a library, a chaplaincy centre, a reception and a visits hall. A large manufacturing workshop, other significant workshop spaces, and horticultural and recycling areas provide employment and learning opportunities, and interventions to meet the needs of rehabilitation.

Key service providers are:

- Physical healthcare: Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust
- Mental healthcare: North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust(NSCHT); Mind
- Learning and skills: Novus
- Substance misuse and wellbeing: The Forward Trust; NSCHT; Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact)
- Estates and facilities management: Amey
- Prison escort service: GEOAmey
- Community and Rehabilitation Company (CRC): Wales Probation Services; St Giles Trust
- Library services: Shropshire County Council
- Visitors' centre, children and families' work: Barnardo's
- Samaritans

Charitable organisations and other services provide a wide range of additional training, support and advice, and a number of local businesses provide employment for the category D prisoners who reside in the Clive unit.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

3.1.1 The Covid outbreak affected the Board's ability to gather information, although not as significantly as in the previous year. A blended approach has been taken to gathering evidence, using a mixture of site visits and telephone interviews. The prison has been extremely supportive in ensuring that our requests for access to prison life via phone calls were facilitated, often at short notice.

We have tried to cover as much ground as possible under these circumstances though inevitably there is less detail and supporting evidence in places.

During the final months of the reporting period the Board started to reintroduce full establishment visits and we are confident this will continue into the new reporting year.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

3.2.1 In the Board's view, Stoke Heath has maintained a safe, positive environment during this period, although sadly there were two deaths in custody and one life-changing assault. Prisoners have realised that Covid-related restrictions were needed to ensure the safety of themselves and others and have reacted maturely. Prison staff have worked hard to mitigate the worst effects of the restrictions, to de-escalate confrontations and to prevent access to psychoactive substances and the misuse of medication. Violence is not tolerated, relationships between prisoners and staff are positive and peer group support is fostered. Prisoners have told us that they feel safe at Stoke Heath and are able to progress their sentences.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

3.2.2 The Board continues to be satisfied that prisoners are treated fairly and humanely. The introduction of in-cell telephony has greatly enhanced the atmosphere on the wings.

We do have concerns that key worker provision has not been reintroduced quickly enough since the suspension due to the Covid lockdown regime. This Board considers that the individual regular support that is given by a key worker is critical to a prisoner's general wellbeing, mental health, safety and rehabilitation.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

3.2.3 Little serious illness resulted from the Covid outbreak in early 2022, probably because over 90% of prisoners had been vaccinated.

Healthcare staff have responded to the increase in demand for services following the pandemic. Access to routine GP services is very good but prisoners needing dental treatment face unacceptable delays.

Mental health staff co-ordinate patient care, working with officers and trusted prisoners to support men experiencing mental health difficulties.

Exercise programmes and drug rehabilitation programmes have been adapted to provide continuity of care during the Covid restrictions.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

3.2.4 Education staff produce a personal learning plan for each prisoner, but many men arrive at Stoke Heath toward the end of their sentences and are therefore unable to complete the courses they need. They can build on their previous learning in English, maths and IT but other key courses, such as those addressing violent behaviour or recognised vocational courses, are not available. The prison budget does not support significant vocational training, and it is ironic that at a time when there is a great demand for some types of semi-skilled labour there are no courses available to equip prisoners to apply for these jobs.

Too many prisoners do not have a sentence plan which identifies the support they will need to enable them to cope after their release. The level of help they get has declined since our last report.

3.3 Main areas for development

Most of the main areas for development identified in the Board's annual report last year are either still outstanding or only partially completed. The Board recognises that the Covid pandemic has been an extremely challenging time and that keeping prisoners safe and well has been the priority.

The Board considers, however, that the concerns they identified then are still valid and should be addressed to improve the quality of the prisoners' lived experience and to reduce reoffending.

TO THE MINISTER

Increase funding and prioritise appropriate, high-quality and employer-driven vocational activity, training and qualifications to help reduce reoffending.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

Basic maths and English qualifications should be achieved earlier in prisoners' sentences to allow more focus on vocational training and qualifications at resettlement prisons such as Stoke Heath.

Prisoners coming to Stoke Heath should be accompanied by a completed offender assessment (OASys) which includes sentence plan objectives assessing the risk of harm, risk of reoffending and educational needs.

TO THE GOVERNOR

The prison should continue to furnish prisoners with the skills that are currently in demand in the workplace. This should include working closer with industry to encourage training within the prison and meaningful employment upon release.

A full keyworker scheme should be restored to give the prisoners the best chance of success.

The prison should continue to prioritise the replacement of the heating and hot water system, to start in early 2023.

3.4 Progress since the last report

TO THE MINISTER

1 Issue raised in last year's report

We reported that a 32% cut in the education budget had had a negative effect on vocational training and meaningful activity and called into question the prison's ability to meet its objectives for the rehabilitation of prisoners.

Progress:

Provision for prisoners to engage in meaningful activity and gain recognised vocational qualifications is still inadequate. The Board accepts that Covid-19 has curtailed activity and is keen to see developments over the coming reporting year.

Evaluation:

Still outstanding.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

2 Issue raised in last year's report:

We recommended that maths and English qualifications should be achieved earlier in prisoners' sentences to allow more focus on vocational training at Stoke Heath.

Progress :

There has been no improvement but we accept that Covid has curtailed activity and are keen to see developments over the coming reporting year.

Evaluation:

Still outstanding.

3 *Issue raised in last year's report:*

We recommended that prisoners coming to Stoke Heath should be accompanied by a completed offender assessment (OASys).

Progress :

Initially there did seem to be some improvement during this reporting period. However, prisoners are still coming to Stoke Heath without the correct assessments being carried out.

Evaluation:

Still outstanding.

TO THE GOVERNOR

4 *Issue raised in last year's report:*

We recommended that the heating and hot water systems should be upgraded as a matter of urgency.

Progress :

Work on the new system is not now due to start until March 2023. The Board has, however, noted that effective maintenance work has been carried out to ensure adequate heating and hot water are available.

Evaluation:

Still outstanding.

5 *Issue raised in last year's report:*

We urged that the prison's rehabilitative culture and purposeful activity should not be compromised by the introduction of blended learning, which threatened to lead to prisoners being locked up for longer periods during the working day.

Progress:

The Board welcomes the return to classroom learning and will be looking to see this develop further.

Evaluation:

Partially completed.

6 *Issue raised in last year's report:*

We recommended that the prison should furnish prisoners with the skills that are currently in demand in the workplace, in order to reduce reoffending and increase their chances of meaningful employment on release.

Progress:

The Board is encouraged by the Governor's proactive approach to working with employers to understand their needs and put partnership working in place. Although this initiative is in its early stages, the Board considers this to be a significant step in supporting prisoners to find sustainable employment and reduce reoffending.

Evaluation:

Partially completed.

7 *Issue raised in last year's report:*

We recommended that a full key worker scheme should be introduced as soon as restrictions permitted.

Progress:

Whilst the keyworker scheme has resumed, many prisoners are not receiving the amount of contact time or the quality of support they need.

Evaluation:

Partially completed.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4.Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 The prison has a comprehensive induction process that starts in reception and continues on wings.

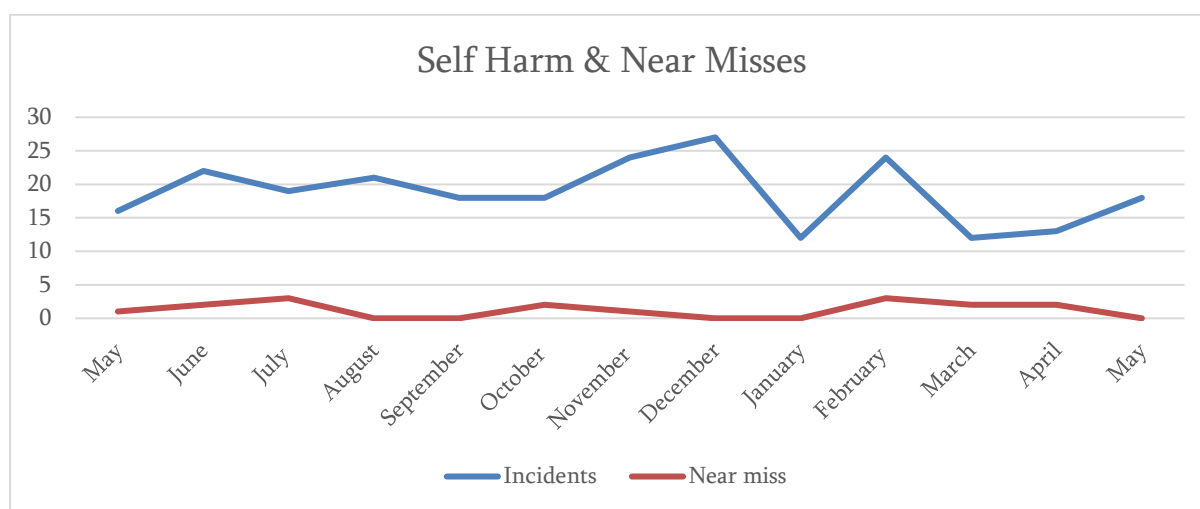
4.1.2 The introduction of a full-body scanner in April 2021 enabled reception staff to identify potentially illicit items more easily. This has helped significantly in reducing the risk throughout the prison.

4.1.3 The Board has produced a one-page information sheet informing prisoners who we are and what we do that is included in the induction booklet given to each prisoner.

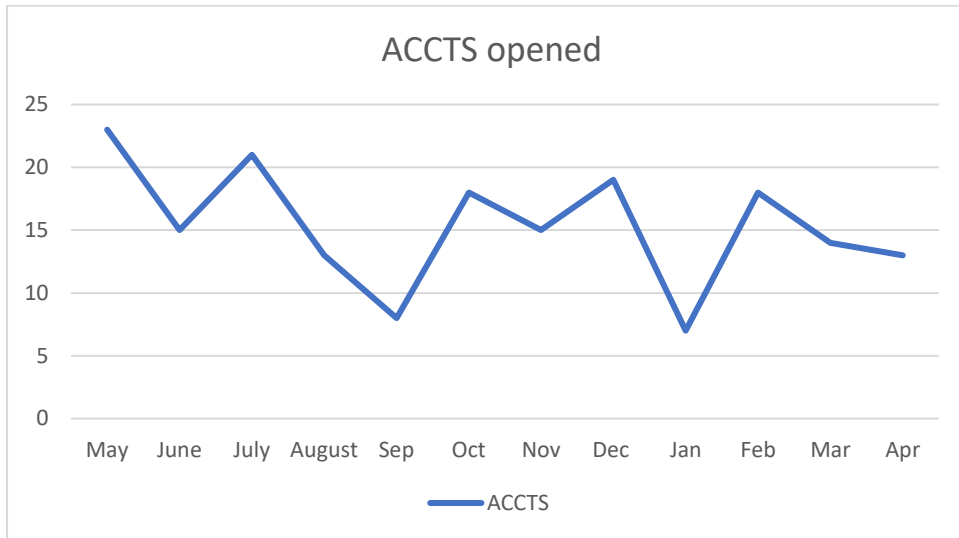
4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1. The Board notes with sadness two deaths in custody during this reporting year. Although not as yet confirmed through Coroner inquests, one was apparently from natural causes in the local hospital; the other apparently self-inflicted at Stoke Heath. All deaths in custody are subject to a full independent investigation by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. We are awaiting their reports so that inquests can take place. The Board extends its condolences to family and friends.

4.2.2 Self-harm has stayed at a relatively low level with a seasonal rise over the winter (see chart below.) The Board is satisfied that those at risk are proactively identified and actively supported through informal contacts and the structured assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) process. Analysis of incidents by the safer custody team is ongoing to provide insights, identify trends and develop action plans.



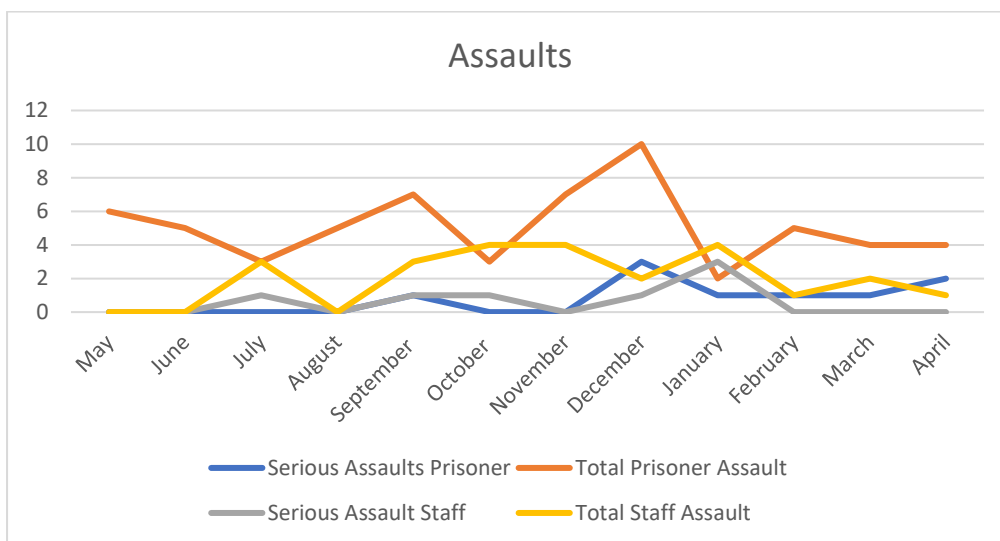
Source: Safer Prisons Meeting Presentation May 2022



Source: Head of Function Report May 2022

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

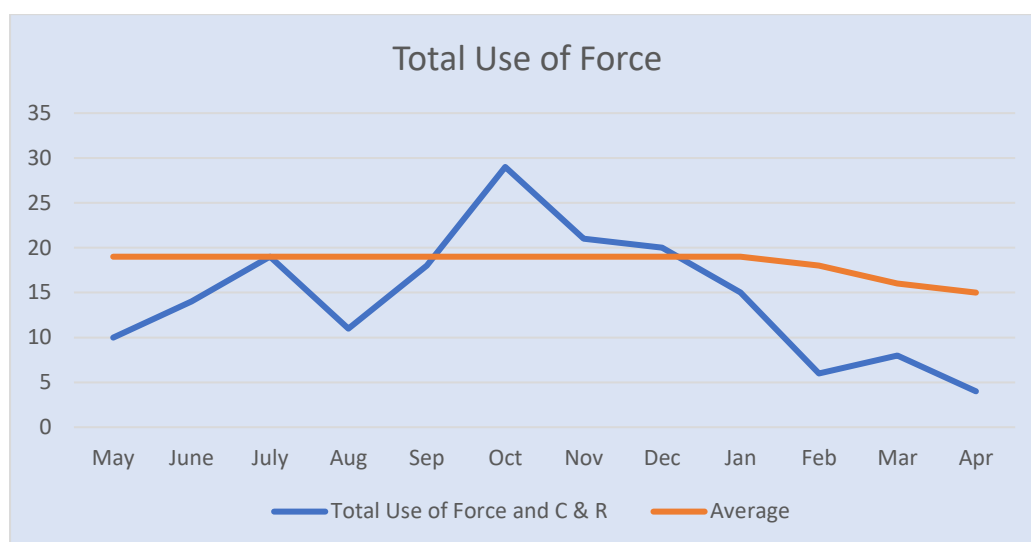
4.3.1 Sixteen serious assaults, nine on prisoners and seven on staff, are sixteen too many. One assault on a prisoner in early February has led to life-changing injuries. However, the overall level of violence evidenced through assaults, as shown on the chart below, is considered by the Board to be low and to reflect the positive, safe environment promoted in the prison. The prison is currently averaging 4 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and 0.67 assaults on staff per month. Regular reviews of incidents, trends and action plans are undertaken. Prisoner representatives are consulted and encouraged to assist in spreading the 'no violence' message.



Source: Head of Function Report May 2022

4.4 Use of force

4.4.1 Use of force has declined over the year and is reflected in the chart below. The Board has a standing invitation to the monthly use of force committee meetings and attends about half over the year. From October 2021 a prisoner representative joined the group. This has been a positive development which provides valuable additional insights.



Source: Head of Function Report May 2022

4.4.2 It is encouraging that statistics collected during the period show a year-on-year decrease in non-compliant incidents and also a reduction in incidents involving PAVA, batons, handcuffs or SPEAR (spontaneous protection enabling accelerated response – a personal protection technique). The use of batons and incapacitant spray (PAVA) is minimal: over twelve months there have been only two instances of use of a baton and one where PAVA was drawn but not used. Body-worn camera (BWC) usage has increased over the year due to strong encouragement from the leadership team and since January 2022 80% of incidents have been captured. The Board has been able to view recordings when necessary.

4.4.3 Covid brought many restrictions to prisoners' normal regime and there was concern that this might result in more unrest in the prison. However, both staff and prisoners are to be congratulated for adapting to a very challenging situation. The positive relationships between staff and prisoners have helped significantly in the transition from Covid restrictions back to full regime. The Board has expressed this view at the use of force committee and to the Governor at Board meetings.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

4.5.1 The impact of the scanner in reception has been mentioned above. Staff also monitor and intercept suspect post, prevent the misuse of medication and prevent attempts to throw prohibited items over the perimeter fence. Now that restrictions on

visits have, thankfully, eased, there is a renewed risk of prohibited items being brought in via this route. The Board is briefed regularly by the security governor on measures being adopted.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 Stoke Heath accommodation is typical of concrete buildings of the 1960s. Its gardens however are beautiful, colourful spaces which bring comfort and peace to the prisoners and provide home-grown food to supplement the menu.

5.1.2 In-cell telephony has been introduced to all cells and has significantly improved the lived experience of the prisoners. It has not been without its teething issues, but the prison has stepped up well to the challenge. A senior member of staff has been appointed to manage the expanding additional technology roll out, which will further improve services to prisoners. For example, they will be able to order meals on their personal iPad.

5.1.3 The ageing hot water and heating system continues to be very temperamental and problematic. It is not due to be replaced until spring 2023. However, the Board has been impressed by the proactive response of the maintenance contractor's managers. They appear committed to maintaining a safe, decent environment on the wings this winter and to ensuring a smooth transition to the new system.

5.1.4 Leaks in some of the 1960s roofs have been a cause for concern for the Board but repairs and planned maintenance seem to have brought this problem under control.

5.1.5 The catering department staff have been very accommodating to ensure that the needs of groups and individual prisoners are met. The Board has observed some good practice. Prisoners have been invited into the kitchens to cook or oversee the preparation of food for groups with particular dietary requirements. This has worked exceptionally well during feasts and festivals.

5.1.6 Board members make frequent informal visits to the kitchens. We have been impressed by their cleanliness. There has not been an inspection visit from Shropshire Council's environmental health team since our last report, but one is expected shortly.

5.1.7 When prisoners are consulted informally they always comment that the food at Stoke Heath is tastier and more plentiful than at their previous establishments.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 Over the reporting period there have been on average six men in the segregation and reintegration unit (SRU) for either rule 45, rule 53 or cellular confinement. Most men were held on rule 53 pending adjudications and so their stay in the SRU was extremely limited. Adjudications have mainly been concerned with alleged threatening behaviour, possession of unauthorised items, and causing damage.

5.2.2 Reintegration is at the heart of the SRU's work and officers encourage wing staff to keep in contact with men spending time in the unit. Any interventions

identified by partner agencies are facilitated and encouraged by the SRU staff, who work closely with secondary mental health staff to care for more challenging individuals with severe mental health needs. The structured regime in the unit and the support on offer assist them in returning to normal prison life once settled on the correct medication.

5.2.3 The prison intends to refurbish the holding cells to create calm-down rooms with calming visual effects and soft furnishings. These will be used to support distressed or confused prisoners who simply need a brief period to reflect before returning to their normal location. The exercise yards have been upgraded to include circuit training routines and possibly a fixed exercise bike, as physical exercise has been shown to benefit both body and mind and to encourage individuals to engage with the regime and reflect on their behaviour.

5.3 Staff-prisoner relationships, keyworkers

5.3.1 As a consequence of the Covid outbreak, prisoners had to remain in their cells for far longer – often for 23 hours each day. Staff and governors patiently explained why this was necessary and prisoners responded maturely to the restrictions, realising that they were for the common good. All sections of the prison community are to be commended on the way Stoke Heath reacted to this challenge.

5.3.2 There were year-on-year reductions in the number of prisoners held in the SRU and in the average length of stay in the unit.

5.3.3 Debriefs conducted when men leave Stoke Heath suggest that men feel safe here to progress their sentences, and Board members' own perceptions have tended to corroborate this: we have experienced a generally calm and purposeful atmosphere on the wings.

5.3.4 The prison has launched several initiatives which may have contributed to this:

- Officers now complete a new, more open-ended, debrief form following incidents, which encourages them to reflect on what has happened and what lessons might be learned.
- Staff have increasingly adopted body-worn video cameras (BWVCs), which have been shown to lead to a reduction in incidents by increasing transparency and the accountability of both officers and prisoners.
- Officers have completed training to equip them with the skills to deliver five-minute interventions (FMIs): informal one-to-one conversations with individual prisoners to build relationships, address their issues and explore alternative ways of dealing with frustration and conflict.
- Prisoners can volunteer to train as health and wellbeing champions (HAWCs). Their role is to support vulnerable prisoners and to identify men who are at risk, help them access specialist help, and if necessary to bring them to the attention of wing staff.

- Focus groups have been used to enable staff to gain an understanding of how prisoners experience life in custody. Prisoner consultation meetings and the presence of prisoner representatives at use of force meetings are further examples of the prison's positive engagement with prisoners.

5.3.5 All prisoners in the male closed estate must be allocated a key worker: a prison officer whose responsibility is to engage, motivate and support them through their time in prison. Key workers should spend an average of 45 minutes per prisoner per week for delivery of the key worker role. Meetings with key workers were suspended during lockdown and have now been resumed. However, as reported elsewhere, many prisoners are still not receiving the amount of contact time and quality intervention deemed essential if this initiative is to achieve its aims.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 The Board is satisfied that the prison management and staff are committed to making the prison an inclusive, respectful environment. Discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation is not tolerated.

5.4.2 Where prisoners have submitted discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRF), the subsequent investigations have been thorough and transparent, bearing out the prison's policy of zero tolerance of discrimination.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 The use of the chaplaincy centre was restricted during Covid, although the chaplaincy team was active on the wings throughout this period. The centre was brought back into use at the end of May. Group sessions were restarted, although only one wing at a time could be involved. All faith worship services began again in August, though a rota system was set up to keep numbers to safe levels.

From December 2021 to February 2022 services and meetings were again suspended to comply with Covid restrictions.

5.5.2 Activity packs with messages specific to various faith groups were distributed each week to support the different faith communities. Some of these have been produced in-house, while others have been provided by voluntary organisations and local churches, who have also donated funds to support religious festivals.

Celebrations have been observed wherever possible for a range of faiths.

5.5.3 Members of the team have continued to offer bereavement support for prisoners and staff and have provided links with prisoners' families, for example in cases of serious illness or other crises. Bereaved prisoners have been helped to attend a loved one's funeral via a live webcast.

A six-week course, 'Living with Loss', has been arranged to help prisoners explore and resolve bereavement issues, whether recent or long-standing.

5.6 Complaints

5.6.1 Following concerns identified last year about the quality of the prison's response to complaints, a small IMB group has monitored random samples of these. Overall, it was found that responses were of a high quality and answered the prisoners' concerns.

5.6.2 A senior governor has ownership of the prisoner complaints process. The Board witnessed good practice where staff have been challenged over the standard of their responses to complaints and the time taken to reply to them.

5.7 Property

5.7.1 During Covid, many activities were necessarily curtailed or suspended. Prisoners' property became even more important to them and staff have generally responded with understanding.

5.7.2 Covid restrictions have meant that it has been more difficult to give men extended access to belongings, such as legal papers, held in store.

5.7.3 Concerns about property have often been related to transfers from other prisons:

- In some cases, men arrive with belongings which were permitted in their former prison but are not allowed at Stoke Heath for security reasons. These items are kept safely in store, but it is hard for prisoners to understand why they are not allowed access to them.
- At times, there is also confusion about the rules. In one case it took several months to reunite a prisoner with his property because reception staff were not clear which items could be used in Stoke Heath and which had to be stored securely until release.
- Prisoners serving longer sentences will understandably gather more possessions than can be transported with them when they are transferred from other prisons. These belongings should be forwarded to Stoke Heath within a reasonable time, but they regularly fail to arrive. Some prisons have a habit of sending prisoners' property instead to a central warehouse, from which they can only be recovered under exceptional circumstances.
- Staff at Stoke Heath have gone to some length to chase up these items and reunite them with their owners.

- They have made similar efforts to ensure that all property is sent on to men who transfer out of Stoke Heath.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

6.1.1 The Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust holds the contract for integrated healthcare, with subcontracts/partnerships with North Staffordshire Combined NHS Trust, Forward Trust, Time for Teeth, Axis Counselling and other small contracts and services from the wider Trust. Moving away from silo working that historically resulted in poorer outcomes for patients, the contract integrates services which enhance healthcare provision with a whole prison/healthcare approach.

6.1.2 Following the dramatic impact that Covid had on healthcare services last year, this year the focus has been on recovery and restoration.

6.1.3 Subsequent to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) remotely conducting an emergency support framework inspection during Covid – from which Stoke Heath was deemed to be dealing efficiently with the provision of health services within the constraints – the prison is due an unannounced inspection that will include CQC/His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.

6.1.4 In line with community transmission, early in 2022 the prison experienced another significant outbreak of Covid. Fortunately, more than likely owing to the high uptake of vaccination (90% of those eligible agreeing to be vaccinated), no prisoners were hospitalised and, in partnership with the prison, the outbreak was managed well.

6.1.5 The IMB and the head of healthcare maintained regular contact during the year. The partnership/relationship between the wider prison senior management team and healthcare continues to be developed beneficially and the head of healthcare is an active member of the prison senior management team across all areas that impact on prisoner wellbeing or healthcare provision in the custodial environment.

6.1.6 In the West Midlands, there are two prison in-patient units (Birmingham and Dovegate) operating a 'regional rota' and an over-50s in-patient unit for prisoners convicted of sexual offences at Stafford. However, access to these beds, due to insufficient spaces and reduction of available beds across the area, is exceptionally difficult and this often compromises the prisoners' mental or physical health. A source of frustration is that the healthcare building at Stoke Heath has a decommissioned in-patient facility and if this was refurbished and reinstated it would be of substantial benefit as a regional resource.

6.1.7 Overall, complaints were minimal: 110 complaints were received during the year, including 39 relating to medication and 24 to dentistry. Where a prisoner complains twice, he is given the opportunity to discuss his concerns with the head of

healthcare. After investigation, none of the complainants remained dissatisfied and none subsequently made a formal complaint.

6.1.8 Significant work has been undertaken to ensure continuity of care for prisoners arriving at Stoke Heath and upon release, using GP to GP transfers. The planning for this has been ongoing throughout the last 12 months with the system due to go live in May 2022.

6.1.9 Work has been commenced by the prison to install in-cell technology at HMP Stoke Heath. This will make a significant difference to prisoners accessing all healthcare services, taking responsibility for managing their interactions, appointments and feedback to healthcare.

6.1.10 Recruitment and retention at Stoke Heath continue to be a challenge, mainly due to the location of the prison and the constraints on NHS pay when compared to the private sector.

6.1.11 Prior to Covid, a bid was made for a crisis suite at Stoke Heath but, unfortunately, due to the pandemic, this did not proceed. Consideration is being given to resubmission of this proposal.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 The recovery and restoration of clinical activity has been excellent with average waiting times reduced to reasonable levels: two days' wait for a routine GP appointment and 0.75 days for an urgent GP appointment. Waiting times increased greatly due to Covid restrictions but healthcare continues to provide extra clinical sessions to improve outcomes and reduce waiting lists to acceptable levels.

6.2.2 However, it is fair to say that in spite of additional resources the wait for dental services is still unacceptable –the average wait for a routine appointment was 36days and the average wait for an urgent appointment was four days – but this is to be expected given that prisoners are arriving at Stoke Heath without being seen at the local prisons as they were pre-Covid. An additional two sessions are being held per week in an attempt to reduce these waiting times.

6.2.3 Telemedicine continues to be developed and this year this should bear greater benefits given that Attend Anywhere has now been accepted as a viable alternative to Visionable, which was creating problems with local hospitals.

6.2.4 Secondary services provided from local hospitals continue to struggle with the backlog, meaning that prisoners are often unhappy about wait times. However, the head of healthcare and the deputy governor have a robust agreement that no hospital appointments will be cancelled because of prison staffing levels and this has been helpful for prisoner outcomes in the majority of cases.

6.2.5 So that patients do not have to wait for hospital appointments (which can take up to six months), regular on-site diagnostics, such as ultrasounds and X-rays, continue to be performed. From a decency perspective the experience for prisoners is greatly enhanced by avoiding unnecessary attendance at outside hospitals.

6.2.6 Reception screening has been maintained, facilitating early identification of healthcare needs. Long-term conditions care and care planning are being re-established post-Covid. A practice nurse has been appointed to assist the excellent GP services and focus on long-term condition clinics and care planning.

6.2.7 Pharmacy services are structured and medicines reconciliation is standard.

6.3 Mental health

6.3.1 Healthcare has continued to provide mental health services. During the year, 961 new referrals were made and the average wait for a new assessment was 6.5 days; the average wait for an urgent new assessment was 1.25 days and 140 patients at risk or presenting with self-harm injuries or suicidal ideations received a complete mental health assessment within 24 hours.

6.3.2 Unfortunately, the Trust providing secondary mental healthcare has been unable to replace the occupational therapist. Learning disability work has been led successfully by one of the mental health team who has worked well with discipline staff to ensure care plans are communicated.

6.3.3 Mental health staff continue to work with prison staff. A weekly multi-disciplinary team meeting for mental health services includes a health and wellbeing champion (HAWC) for the first part of the meeting to raise any issues with prisoners receiving peer support and any who are causing concern on the wings. Axis attends to assist with counselling sessions and waiting times post-Covid are in keeping with the wider community.

6.3.4 There are recovery and restoration of services and primary and secondary mental health work well with the prison to manage those at risk.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1 As last year, there has been little requirement for social care during the last 12 months. A memorandum of understanding written jointly by the prison, healthcare and the local authority ensures that the social care needs of prisoners are met.

6.4.2 Safeguarding has continued to receive a real focus during the year. Procedures are robust and healthcare staff are reminded constantly of the importance of safeguarding and the critical part they play in it. Staff are supported to raise any concerns with the prison safer custody governor.

6.5 Exercise regime

6.5.1 Prior to Covid there was an excellent exercise programme, including a park run for up to 30 prisoners, a football league, wellbeing man, remedial fitness, exercise on referral (a form of social prescribing, e.g. targeted gym activities to improve health) and various clubs such as volleyball, weights and cardio-vascular work. However, Covid had a radical effect and the restrictions necessitated closure of the gyms. Staff worked hard to put support networks in place and provide additional services such as in-cell workouts and in-cell distraction packs. As restrictions have eased and activities started to open up, gym sessions have recommenced, albeit in a more limited manner.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

6.6.1 Drug services are run jointly by the Forward Trust, which manages psychosocial group work, and the North Staffordshire Combined NHS Trust, which manages clinical support. The work continued throughout the reporting year but with a revised level of service in response to the restrictions of the pandemic. Prioritised according to the need of the individual, face-to-face support continued throughout but on a more limited basis.

6.6.2 The stage3 regime saw small groups of four men and two staff being able to work together on F wing, which is the dedicated rehabilitation wing. The focus was on resilience, self-care and wellbeing. Proper group work commenced towards the end of the period in March and a broad range of psychosocial work was made available.

6.6.3 Drug rehabilitation services and support continued, albeit in a more limited way dependent on the exceptional delivery model level that the prison was operating within and any outbreaks.

6.7 Soft skills

6.7.1 HAWCs have continued as an exceptionally successful innovation, driven largely by the co-ordinator in post working effectively across the whole prison. They have been critical to prisoners' wellbeing during such difficult times and in communicating with healthcare and the wider prison population.

7. Progression and resettlement

Of the prisoners at Stoke Heath:
(Figures are approximate)

- 70% were from Staffordshire and the West Midlands
- 15% had a release date within three months
- 47% prisoners were due to be released within 12 months
- 7% were foreign nationals
- 7% were veterans
- 11% were care leavers
- The average length of stay was 17.5 months

Stoke Heath has a diverse population with many different needs for progression, release and resettlement. Care-experienced prisoners represent 11% of the population¹ and veteran prisoners 7%². The offender management unit (OMU) seeks to co-ordinate organisations to assist these vulnerable groups whilst in custody.

Although the average stay in Stoke Heath rose over this period from 13 months to 17.5 months, 15%³ of prisoners were due for release within three months, and 47%⁴ within 12 months, which is a challenging timeframe for education and resettlement courses to improve resettlement outcomes.

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 All prisoners have their maths and English levels tested on induction. They are placed on a waiting list to have the opportunity to achieve level 1 if they do not already have these qualifications. All prisoners are encouraged to reach level 2 if time allows before moving onto the limited number of vocational places.

7.1.2 The use of the library was severely curtailed because of Covid restrictions. However, demand for books was high and librarians ensured that books were available to prisoners on wing throughout, using a book delivery service. At one time over 100 book bags per week were delivered to 26% of prisoners. The library now offers the same service it did pre-pandemic. As the normal prison regime has resumed, the library has teamed up with the Shannon Trust to improve basic reading skills using the 'Turning Pages' reading approach. Plans are in place for various activities in the library, including the Human Library initiative, whereby volunteers visit the prison carrying 'titles' referring to some aspect of their life experience. Prisoners can choose their book and listen to what the volunteer has to say. We understand Stoke Heath is one of the first prisons to offer this.

¹HOF April 2022 report

²HOF November 2021 report

³HOF April 2022 report

⁴HOF April 2022 report

7.1.3 Face-to-face education took place for the whole year covered by this report, but with reduced class sizes to allow appropriate distancing, and in wing cohorts. This reduced the number of prisoners involved in education and achieving accreditation, as compared with pre-pandemic numbers.

7.1.4 The actions to address the notice to improve (NTI) for Novus have all been signed off as satisfactory. The educational contract is due to go out to tender in 2023.

7.1.5 The report on the Ofsted monitoring visit was published in July 2021 and included the following recommendations:

- increasing the number of face-to-face places in education, skills and work
- improving the provision and coordination of induction and careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) when a prisoner joins the prison
- ensuring prompt and effective initial assessment of prisoners, so they can be offered the appropriate support for their individual learning needs
- sharing prisoner information about any learning difficulties/disabilities with the relevant prison staff so that prisoners are better supported

7.1.6 All the recommendations from the monitoring visit are being addressed. The actions include:

- A part-time IAG worker has been recruited who, with the member of the education staff who assesses learning skills level, will meet with each prisoner on his arrival at the prison to update the prisoner's personal learning plan (if they have one) or write one (if they do not).
- Prisoners identified as likely to have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia are provided with in-class support from a tutor or learning assistant.
- Learning pathways are being identified to enable prisoners to see a logical path from their individual starting points to employment and give them motivation to complete courses.
- A new personal and social development course has been introduced. This will help prisoners to develop and appreciate the softer skills relating to employment.

7.1.7 The barriers to making progress are:

- the information that can be shared with staff concerning prisoners' individual learning difficulties and disabilities, and which staff should be provided with this information in addition to tutors and instructors
- the difficulties of recruiting staff
- the nature of the accommodation available, as delivery is less financially efficient if group sizes are limited by space

7.1.8 IMB members have received several comments from prisoners about the difficulties of maintaining education and work when transferring from one prison to another. The educational transition is relatively easy for English, maths and IT

courses, as all prisons use common awarding bodies. However, provision of other courses (e.g. vocational, violence reduction) varies from one prison to another.

7.1.9 The IMB is pleased to note that the proposed move towards more in-cell learning, about which we raised concerns in our last annual report, has now taken place.

7.1.10 The curriculum includes functional skills (literacy, numeracy, and IT), English as a second language, mentoring and learning support (so men can offer learning support in gym and recycling courses), art, radio production, food preparation, barista skills, customer service, health and safety (in construction and traffic management), new warehousing (introduced because there are good job opportunities locally) and car valeting/wrapping/industrial cleaning. However, some of these courses are not being delivered due to the difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff.

7.1.11 There are 16 learners currently following courses through the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET), which facilitates distance learning. Stoke Heath acts as a facilitator for these courses (e.g. giving access to a phone to enable the learner to speak with their tutor), which extend to degree level.

7.1.12 In the past year there have been reports published by the Education Select Committee, the Association of Colleges and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons highlighting the importance of, and inadequacy of, prisoner education nationally. It is to be hoped that as a result of these reports there will be an increase in resources for the development of education in prisons.

7.1.13 In-cell technology is being installed at Stoke Heath. Stoke Heath will be in a good position to implement access to online education materials through the development of a virtual campus. Online education will also help remedy the 'digital deficit' which men experience on release from prison. Digital skills are now essential in all jobs.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 The prison budget does not support significant vocational training and instead has prioritised limited resources on maths and English. The aim is to get as many prisoners as possible to levels 1 and 2 in these subjects, as this is seen as a minimum educational requirement for most employment opportunities.

7.2.2 There are limited places for catering, welding and fabrication, and sewing clothing for prisoners in the estate. Other work experience is provided by the gardens and waste recycling. Employment places within the prison are relatively scarce.

7.2.3 The prison needs to provide targeted work experience such as seen in other resettlement prisons – i.e. purposeful activity, particularly in employment sectors that are currently desperately short of semi-skilled labour. The prison should be

resourced to have meaningful education or employment for all prisoners and reduce the time they spend in cells.

7.3 Offender management and progression

7.3.1 There are still too many uncompleted offender assessment system (OASys) assessments that should not be the responsibility of Stoke Heath. OASys is a risk and needs assessment which identifies why a prisoner offends. This assessment should be made early in a prisoner's sentence, as it is used to develop an individual sentence plan detailing what provision and support he will need to reduce his risk of reoffending. In March, the backlog of uncompleted OASys assessments at Stoke Heath was 52, down from 72 in January. The backlog is compounded by staff training, leave and Covid. The prison continues to report and contact establishments that are sending prisoners to Stoke Heath without completed OASys assessments. Early assessment of prisoners would help potential rehabilitation and allow POMs more time to have valuable contact with prisoners. This was an issue reported by the Board last year and continues to be unresolved.

7.3.2 The key worker scheme was suspended during Covid and has been slow to restart whilst staff need to be retrained for the role. Key workers are a vital link to prison offender managers (POMs). Prisoners can only have access to their POMs via written application and, because the number of POMs is limited, they can have little one-to-one contact with their prisoners. The Board has received many complaints relating to sentence and release that could easily have been addressed by an active key worker and an appropriately staffed OMU.

7.3.3 Parole hearings were largely carried out by telephone conference and video link during Covid lockdowns, although the prison encouraged face-to-face hearings as soon as was practicable.

7.3.4 Most prisoners serving imprisonment for public protection sentences and life sentences are accommodated in one wing. However, there is no specialised treatment or rehabilitation programme to help them. Accredited offending behaviour courses such as Kaizen have been developed to support men who are assessed as high or very high risk. These programmes aim to enable participants to strengthen and develop successes in their lives, to practise new skills and to gain hope. However, such courses are not available at Stoke Heath.

7.3.5 Care leavers are those prisoners who have been in social care at some point in their lives. They are an especially vulnerable group who make up 11% of the prison population.

7.3.6 The Clive unit sits outside the main prison perimeter and accommodates up to 15 prisoners who are able to access release on temporary licence (ROTL) to go to work or receive additional training before release. There is always a positive atmosphere in the unit but there is a lack of contact with prison staff and of access to

support with resettlement, such as access to employment advisers or guidance on accessing help with banking and future accommodation. Prisoners feel that it would be helpful to have limited access to computers and the internet to help them find employment or online courses.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 As in many prisons, family visits were severely restricted during Covid. This was partly because of staff shortages but also to protect the prison from a severe outbreak.

7.4.2 Barnardo's have tried to arrange several family days in the prison but these had to be cancelled because of Covid outbreaks. Like all voluntary organisations in the prison, Barnardo's have been largely absent until normal regime was re-established in March.

7.4.3 Despite the changing conditions of prison regime because of Covid outbreaks, Barnardo's facilitated Storybook Dads and they were able to be sent out in time for Christmas.

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 The Stoke Heath resettlement team work with prisoners through the seven 'pathways' of resettlement: accommodation; education, employment and training; health; drugs and alcohol; finance, benefit and debt; children and families; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. Prison, education and charitable organisations are involved in this process. While communication and partnership working appear to be good, Covid has been especially challenging for the many prison and other agencies that work to resettle prisoners.

7.5.2 A change of regional service providers from St Giles to NACRO has resulted in particularly poor outcomes. Previously, 95% of prisoners were found accommodation on release and had access to a bank account, but in April 2022 only 75% of prisoners had accommodation on release. The poor performance is partly because NACRO do not have appropriate staff in place, but also because they act on referrals from community offender managers (COMs) which are often inadequate or incomplete. The NACRO contract will only find accommodation for prisoners in the West Midlands. However, 30% of prisoners at Stoke Heath come from other areas.

7.5.3 The focus for the next reporting year should be to ensure that all prisoners have access to a bank account and accommodation when leaving Stoke Heath and that their time in prison is spent productively with access to education and meaningful employment.

7.5.4 The prison is in the process of employing a new employment hub manager and already has a new employment board established with an independent chair. It is hoped that Stoke Heath can encourage more businesses to run recruitment events

in the prison and that private finance will become available to train prisoners for worthwhile employment in future.

The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	296
Total number of shifts on the 0800 telephone line*	30
Total number of segregation reviews attended	79 rule 45 reviews

*if relevant

Applications to the IMB (including via the 0800 telephone line)

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	2	7
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	1	10
C	Equality	17	11
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	2	11
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	10	7
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	23	20
F	Food and kitchens	4	5
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	46	54
H1	Property within this establishment	34	25
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	24	36
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	0	2
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	46	57
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	50	49
K	Transfers	20	31
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	33	33
	Total number of applications	312	358



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