



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Ashfield

**For reporting year
1 July 2021 – 30 June 2022**

Published January 2023



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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

2.1 HMP Ashfield is a privately managed prison run by Serco, located in the village of Pucklechurch in South Gloucestershire, around 10 miles from each of Bristol and Bath. It is a specialist training and treatment category C adult male establishment, exclusively for convicted prisoners serving sentences for sexual offences.

2.2 The prison has a baseline certified normal accommodation of 416 with an operational capacity of 400.

2.3 Accommodation consists of two main residential units, Avon and Severn, each with four wings accommodating between 40 and 60 prisoners. Its early days centre (EDC) is a smaller, 16-cell unit which acts as a first night and induction centre. In spring 2020 the EDC became a Covid-19 reverse cohort unit for prisoners requiring regular hospital appointments and any new transfers in, if they had not self-isolated for 14 days before transfer. EDC ceased being a reverse cohort unit on 31 May 2022. There are 260 single cells and 78 double cells in total, all with integral sanitation, and eight shower cubicles on each of the main wings. Seven of the single cells are ground floor cells which are purpose-built for prisoners with disabilities, and there are two gated cells for prisoners requiring constant supervision. There is no separate care and separation unit.

2.4 Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners typically make up around 23% of the population (20% in the last reporting period), and foreign national prisoners 6% (7.8% last reporting period). Prisoners aged over 50 now account for 42.5% (45.8% last reporting period) of the population.

2.5 Services run by organisations other than Serco:

- Healthcare is commissioned by NHS England. The primary contract covers both HMP Ashfield and HMP Leyhill. The lead contractor is Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust (AWP) which provides mental health services. Physical healthcare is run by Hanham Secure Health Limited (HSH), while a dedicated team dispenses medications which are primarily sourced from the pharmacy at HMP Bristol. Specialist contractors provide further services including dentistry, podiatry, audiology and physiotherapy. Social care is organised through South Gloucestershire Council in conjunction with Agincare, a social care provider. Notwithstanding the variety of providers, an overall healthcare approach is presented to prisoners under the single banner of 'Inspire Better Health'.
- Voluntary services operating within the prison are: Changing Tunes, Citizens Advice, faith volunteers, Peace Education Programme (from the Prem Rawat Foundation), official prison visitors, Shannon Trust.

2.6 As a contracted-out prison, Ashfield has a Director and an His Majesty's Prison and Probation service (HMPPS) controller. On 9 January 2022 a new Director was appointed on an interim basis and was successful in securing the role on a permanent basis in June 2022.

2.7 Until the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, when HMPPS suspended prison performance assessments, Ashfield was consistently assessed as a level 4 prison. Performance assessments did not resume in this reporting period.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

During the 12 months of this report, the prison has been subject to a number of regime changes in response to the Covid-19 situation. Levels of restrictions have varied according to the regime. It is thanks to the extensive efforts of the prison that in March 2022 Ashfield returned to stage one, a normal regime with full mixing of house blocks.

Ashfield suffered from its first major Covid-19 outbreak among prisoners in December 2021. At its worst over 100 prisoners were isolating but, through careful management and observance of strict health protocols, the outbreak was contained. There have been times during the reporting year when the Board was unable to visit in person due to Covid-19 restrictions, hindering its ability to gather information. The Board has covered as much ground as it can, but inevitably for those periods there is less detail and supporting evidence than in a normal reporting period.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

It is the Board's view that Ashfield provides a safe environment despite an increase in self-harm and levels of violence. The 12 months of the report have been particularly testing with regime changes in response to the fluctuating Covid-19 situation, outbreaks of Covid-19 among prisoners and staff, the detection of synthetic cannabinoids (Spice) in the summer of 2021 and the arrival of some more challenging prisoners.

Feedback via surveys and key working indicates that generally prisoners feel safe at Ashfield.

- Of concern are the levels of self-harm which have increased 134% (157 incidents compared to 67 in the last reporting period) but there are no identifiable trends. Since the last report a number of prisoners transferred in with a history of frequent self-harm. Only 12 incidents were classified as serious.
- Assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) processes are well managed with a strong multi-disciplinary commitment to supporting individuals.
- With more prisoners arriving with little experience of custody, together with those who have always struggled within the prison environment, targeted individual support has been important. The safer custody team has very effectively deployed the use of personal intervention plans (PIPs) and individual care plans. It has also provided easy access to a network of safer custody resources, together with focused key work.
- This report has seen another annual increase in levels of violence with 18 physical assaults (compared to 13 in the last reporting period), three of which

were against staff (same as the last reporting period). The majority were minor assaults.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

The Board considers that prisoners at Ashfield are treated fairly and humanely.

- The relationship between staff and prisoners has remained good despite changing regimes, an influx of new staff and new prisoners, Covid-19 outbreaks, and increased security activity as a result of Spice being detected in the summer of 2021.
- Weekly key working at Ashfield has continued for vulnerable prisoners throughout the 12 months. During restricted regimes fortnightly key working sessions have been held for other prisoners except during full lockdowns when welfare checks were undertaken by wing staff.
- The catering department has continued to provide a good standard of food despite major resourcing issues arising from Covid-19 restrictions and significant supply shortages.
- Equality and diversity meetings and initiatives were disrupted by the Covid-19 restrictions in the early part of the reporting period but resumed in full once restrictions relaxed. As in previous reports no evidence has been found that there is discrimination but the Board is concerned that the Black, Asian and minority ethnic group continue to perceive they are unfairly treated.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

The Board commends the excellent management of the outbreaks of Covid-19 which is credit to the staff and prisoners to minimise the spread of the virus.

The Board does, however, have concerns about staff shortages in healthcare services during this reporting period. Although access to routine healthcare services in most areas was generally assessed as being equal to that provided in the community, such shortages present, in the Board's view, a risk to the long-term health and wellbeing of prisoners.

It is credit to staff that, even during the most restricted regimes, healthcare provided telephone triage services for both physical and mental health.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

Ashfield's focus on rehabilitation/resettlement activities has been constrained in this reporting period by Covid-19 restrictions but the Board wishes to highlight Ashfield's success in achieving regime stage one in March 2022. Ashfield was one of the few prisons to have returned to a normal routine at that time.

Of concern to the Board, however, are some aspects of the transfer/release process which are outside Ashfield's control:

- As reported last year, concerns persist about the last minute securing of accommodation for prisoners being released.

- Transfers have been disrupted by the prison escort and custody service (PECS), causing additional work for staff and considerable frustration and anxiety for prisoners.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

The continuing problem of last minute securing of approved premises accommodation highlighted in the last two annual reports shows no signs of abating despite the ease of Covid-19 restrictions. The process of release for a prisoner, particularly those who have served long sentences, is already extremely stressful. Failure to confirm accommodation, often only within 48 hours or less of release, is exacerbating the situation.

- Can the Minister provide any tangible evidence of changes that will alleviate this ongoing situation?

The Board fully recognises that currently there is a national shortage of nursing staff and particularly mental health resources. It also acknowledges that Covid-19 sick absences have impacted healthcare services. However, it would be remiss of the Board not to highlight the risk that it perceives Ashfield health service is running with the current shortages. In an environment where self-harm is increasing, mental health support, in particular, is critical.

- Can the Minister raise with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care the Board's concerns that healthcare resource shortages (both physical and mental health) in a prison environment are putting the wellbeing of prisoners at risk?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

During this reporting period there has been frequent disruption to transfers because of late cancellations and delays by the prisoner escort and custody service (PECS) which has impacted both staff and prisoners.

- The Board appreciates that PECS is a contracted-out service but can HMPPS do anything to minimise/alleviate the disruptions being experienced?

TO THE DIRECTOR

In the light of the continuing perceptions of Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners of discrimination (despite statistical evidence to the contrary), further work needs to be undertaken to address this issue. It is the Board's view that it would be helpful to all parties for the prison to investigate thoroughly the matters raised in the survey undertaken by the Black, Asian and minority ethnic forum.

Can the Director:

- share the survey's findings, as well as the official prison statistics, with prisoners for transparency?
- organise general awareness training for prison staff on cultural sensitivities?

The library in a prison is a valuable resource and provides many opportunities for enhancing learning. The Board fully appreciates that the Covid-19 restrictions necessarily reduced the activities sponsored by the library, but has concerns that, since the resumption of normal activities, there are no signs of plans to extend beyond the core service of the library.

Can the Director consider:

- the resumption of the prisoner advice and liaison service (PALS)?
- literacy related activities such as poetry reading, book club, etc?
- reviving the prison magazine?
- reviving the highly successful AshFest?

The prisoner trust fund (PTF) holds excess funds generated from prisoner-based retail activities and can be used to purchase items and support initiatives which benefit prisoners and their families. Routine information about the fund and its use has not been available throughout the reporting year.

- Can the Director ensure such information is available to the Board in accordance with the fund's local operating procedure?

3.4 Progress since the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Action taken
<p>To the Minister The accommodation challenges facing prisoners convicted of sexual offences continue unabated. Can the Minister confirm how many of the 200 approved premises new placements can be used for prisoners convicted of sexual offences and the timescale for delivery of these placements?</p>	<p>The intention is to maintain flexibility across the Approved Premises estate to accommodate all categories of offences where there is a need for a public protection placement. It is therefore not possible at this stage to give precise figures about specific categories of offenders.</p> <p>I [the Minister] would like to reassure the Board that all eligible cases will receive support to find accommodation prior to release and this will be delivered by commissioned rehabilitative service (CRS) suppliers based in the areas to which they will be returned.</p>	<p>Unfortunately the situation highlighted in last year's report is unchanged.</p>
<p>To the Prison Service In the light of the backlog of prisoners awaiting places on offender behaviour programmes (OBP), are there any plans for HMPPS to increase further, beyond current strategies, the number of OBP places to address the problem?</p>	<p>HMPPS is focused on restoring OBP delivery to pre-pandemic levels and is committed to maximising resources to meet priority demand for OBPs. The capacity to deliver OBPs is kept under regular review with new data gathering systems established and regular site updates to inform recovery and future strategic delivery planning. Although there are no immediate plans to increase the number of OBPs delivered at HMP Ashfield, a system has been established to aid the transfer of prisoners to relevant sites where capacity is available. Delivery remains under constant review and opportunities to increase capacity are being explored. During the pandemic, additional programme management resource has been provided to support delivery sites to explore opportunities to maximise delivery and to better meet the priority needs of the population.</p>	<p>The response was welcomed, and it has been noted that Ashfield achieved its target delivery of OBPs adopting the criteria and guidance from HMPPS. Also, three prisoners who had been fully assessed a priority for an OBP were transferred to another prison, to ensure that they could complete the programme in accordance with their identified priority. No prisoner was released from Ashfield without completing the programmes stipulated on their sentence plan.</p>

<p>Does HMPPS have plans to create further category D places for prisoners convicted of sex offences in the south of the country or the Midlands?</p>	<p>HMPPS plans on delivering 660 additional places through the expansion of the Category D estate, 600 of which are at prisons in the South and Midlands. The expansions will be delivered through adding one or two 60-bed units at each site, based on those establishments with the highest demand. The size of each expansion was determined using site surveys and what was feasible operationally and based on land available. The expansions will not change the profile of offenders accommodated by these prisons and there will be no change to which sites currently accommodate men convicted of sexual offences. The six Category D prison sites selected for expansion/new units are as follows: HMP/YOI Standford Hill – 120 places (South) HMP Springhill – 120 places (South) HMP Leyhill – 120 places (South) HMP Ford – 120 places (South) HMP & YOI Sudbury – 120 places (Midlands) HMP/YOI Hatfield - 60 places (Yorkshire)</p>	<p>The only prison listed that Ashfield can send prisoners to is Leyhill. So while the increase in category D capacity is welcomed, the original issue continues to be a problem, particularly as additional spaces at Leyhill will not materialise in the short term.</p>
<p>To the Director Incentive warnings data captured does not hold ethnic information. As there was a view from the survey of black, Asian, and minority ethnic prisoners that they received more warnings proportionately than white prisoners, this view ought to be investigated. Can consideration be given to identifying ethnicity when reviewing incentive warnings?</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>A system for recording incentive scheme warnings by ethnicity was instituted in early 2022, but the size of the database is not yet sufficient for robust and reliable conclusions to be drawn, though preliminary analysis does not indicate any adverse ethnic bias.</p>

<p>The scheduling of diversity and equality action team (DEAT) meetings four to five weeks after the quarter to be reviewed is, in the Board's view, not conducive to timely action to address emerging issues and the brevity of the minutes is not helpful to record the work being undertaken in this area. Can action be taken to improve the DEAT meetings?</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>There has not yet been an appreciable improvement in the time elapsed between the end of a quarterly reporting period and the scheduling of a DEAT meeting to discuss it, but the overall quality of the data presented for discussion is very comprehensive. As yet data (suitably redacted) are not shared with prisoner representatives at DEAT meetings and this may be a missed opportunity for aiding understanding and dispelling concerns, particularly among the Black, Asian and minority ethnic community.</p>
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Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

HMP Ashfield has, over the reporting period, continued to provide a safe and supportive environment despite challenging circumstances. These include continuing Covid-19 outbreaks affecting both staff and prisoners, restrictive regimes, turnover of both prisoners and prison officers, and in the summer of 2021 the presence of synthetic cannabinoids (Spice).

The Board notes a very strong focus at Ashfield on safer custody which has meant a proactive approach to emerging issues. Information is collated, analysed and regularly reviewed by multi-disciplinary forums. This has been key in providing a well-informed and coordinated approach to providing an environment where the majority of prisoners feel safe.

The weekly safety intervention meetings (SIMs) have been particularly effective in securing a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing issues, identifying additional support for prisoners and ensuring relevant information is shared. Discussion focuses on prisoners on ACCTs, self-harm, complex needs, new arrivals, cell sharing risk assessments, challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) referrals, mental health support, PIPs, men due for release and intelligence reports. This forum is a very important factor in providing a safe environment at Ashfield.

A safety survey conducted by the safer custody team in April 2022 found that, out of 148 respondents, 78.3% agreed/strongly agreed that they feel safe at Ashfield.

4.1 Reception and induction

The number of late arrivals and cancellations of prisoner escort and custody service (PECS) transport has increased since the last report. For example, in the three months April-June 2022 there were 29 cancellations of the PECS transport on the day before it was due or even on the due date. This is very frustrating for both prisoners and staff and often necessitates property having to be completely unpacked and re-recorded.

Several arrivals were later than expected, after healthcare had left, so health screening could not be carried out. When this happens, early days centre (EDC) staff have to conduct hourly checks throughout the night because frequency of observation has not been determined by health assessments.

The first night induction form given to each new arrival has been designed to help identify the need for more detailed assessments and support from safer custody, mental health, education, probation and the offender management unit (OMU). Questions include:

- Is English the first language?
- Has the individual ever been in care?
- Are they vulnerable?

- Do they have any mental health issues, physical or learning difficulties – such as dyslexia, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) etc?

More detailed education assessments are conducted once men move on to house blocks.

The good support provided by EDC staff, orderlies and Insiders (prisoners on each wing assigned to help new arrivals settle in) has resulted in a very positive view of the whole induction experience, based on comments made to Board members and a recent survey of new arrivals. Of 99 new arrivals between January and June 2022, 62% scored the experience as a 10 where one was low and 10 was high. Only one response scored below seven.

Comments included: 'Very welcoming staff and a very informed induction especially when compared to other establishments I have been in', 'Really helpful group of insiders who were always happy to help with a wealth of knowledge', 'Very thorough', 'All staff and Insiders were friendly courteous and helpful'.

With changes brought about through the offender management in custody (OMiC) model (offender flows), there have been more prisoners arriving this year at Ashfield with little experience of prison (three to six months). Many are understandably apprehensive. Survey responses from this group also support the positive experience of induction which is reassuring.

During the most restricted Covid-19 regimes, induction was conducted via printed material given. Questions were fielded by induction orderlies and, if any new prisoners had reading difficulties, the orderlies would provide verbal dissemination of the material through cell doors. Although this was not ideal, all men were catered for.

The Board noted that in the reporting period four prisoners arrived at Ashfield on an open ACCT.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

In this reporting period a total of 93 ACCTs were opened compared to 82 last year. The highest in a single month was 11 in November. The lowest, five, was recorded in each of the months of December, February and May.

Version six of the ACCT was introduced in July 2021. This took a little time to embed fully but it was helped by Ashfield's strong assurance system on the quality and completeness of documents.

Attendance at and participation in ACCT reviews by relevant departments has been good although the mental health team at times has found it difficult to attend due to staff shortages and absences. Board members do, when feasible, see prisoners on ACCTs, review ACCT documentation and attend ACCT reviews. The Board is satisfied that the process is generally thorough and professionally conducted.

Of concern to the Board is the number of self-harm incidents in this reporting period: 157 compared to 67 in the last report and 68 in 2019-2020. The highest in a single

month was 22 in May 2022 and the lowest was four in October 2021. Of the self-harm incidents, only 12 were classified as serious, requiring hospital treatment or constant supervision, or serious due to the risk presented rather than extent of injury.

This is a marked increase in self-harm incidents from last year's reporting period but this is still low compared to other similar establishments.

In reviewing the data, it should be noted that for much of last year's reporting period prisoners were in very restricted regimes due to Covid-19. This report covers the gradual return to normal regimes, the resumption of association and purposeful activity (except for December 2021 when a further outbreak of Covid-19 necessitated a return to restricted regimes). Regime changes did present more of a challenge for those who were known not to cope well with any form of change so safer custody did ensure that all alterations to the regime were explained fully on a one-to-one basis to those prisoners.

In terms of other possible causes for the increase, the monthly analysis does not indicate any particular trends. Causes were varied ranging from personal issues relating to family/partners, concerns about parole/release, bereavement, general low mood, to being new to custody/new to Ashfield.

One observation of the safer custody team was that, when illegal substances were detected in the prison (summer 2021), prison officers had to focus more on that problem and less on helping prisoners with their day-to-day issues. This led to small issues escalating.

Another factor to explain the increase is the number of men with a history of self-harm coming to Ashfield, and some are repeat harmers. For example, one prisoner accounts for 29 of the self-harm incidents, one for 18 and another for 12, thus three prisoners account for 59 incidents.

The safer custody team actively work to good effect with prisoners who self-harm. For example, the prisoner who accounted for 32 self-harm incidents in four months in his previous establishment, only had 29 incidents recorded in a 12-month period in Ashfield.

All prisoners have access to a network of prisoner-staffed safer custody resources, including the 'here to hear' service, safer custody representatives and Insiders, as well as externally, via phone, the Samaritans.

For those requiring additional support, personal intervention plans (PIPs) are set up (nine were the most open in a month and six the lowest).

All prisoners regarded as vulnerable received weekly key work sessions throughout the reporting period. Since March 2022, prisoners have also been able to participate in additional activities organised by the safer custody team such as art sessions, walks for life, special gym sessions, access to the safer custody garden and one-to-one sessions.

The services provided for prisoners with neurodiverse conditions, learning difficulties or disabilities are detailed in 5.4 Equality and diversity.

Safer custody, in the absence of formal assessments, formulates individual care plans. Based on discussions with the prisoner, these identify the issues they have and provide advice on what approaches work best. These plans are made available to staff who have dealings with such prisoners to provide individualised support.

In the reporting period there have been two deaths in custody. The final Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) report has been received for one which confirmed it was natural causes. The final report for the other death is awaited. Recent PPO death in custody reports have criticised the monitoring of prisoners with long-term health conditions; healthcare completed a review in 2022 to address this, the results of which are discussed in 6.2 Physical healthcare.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

There were 18 physical assaults during the reporting period compared with 13 in the last report. November 2021 saw the highest number in a single month, with six, but five months had no assaults. Three were assaults on staff and the remainder were prisoner on prisoner. This is another annual increase. Prior to 2020-2021 and only three in 2017-2018.

The majority were minor assaults. It is difficult to identify causes but it should be noted that in the reporting period there were a lot of regime changes in response to the changing Covid-19 situation. Prisoners had some lengthy periods without vocational activities and experienced limited time out of cell.

There have been changes in both the prisoner population (turnover of half the prisoner population in two years) and prison staff in that time, which can be an unsettling factor. However, there is no doubt that the presence of Spice in the summer of 2021 heightened tensions and debt issues began to emerge. Also some more challenging prisoners transferred in during this period.

There were four fights (exchange of blows between two prisoners) reported in this period. It should be noted that each fight was recorded under the national offender management information system (NOMIS) as one assault. If fights were included in the number of assaults the total would be 22.

Challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs) are used to help address aggressive behaviour. Referrals are investigated and, where appropriate, progressed to a plan, or support is provided outside of the CSIP process, usually through key workers. In this reporting period 63 referrals were made, with nine progressing to a plan. The use and quality of CSIP referrals are regularly reviewed and learning points fed back to residence officers. The level and severity of violence at Ashfield is low in comparison to many establishments.

4.5 Use of force

There were 12 occasions where control and restraint was deployed.

Training in the use of pelargonic acid vanillylamide (PAVA), a synthetic pepper spray, commenced at the start of April 2022 and by the end of June there were only eight members of staff left to be trained. To date PAVA has not been deployed.

4.6 Preventing illicit items

Routine cell searches were suspended during the Covid-19 restricted regimes and only resumed in April 2022. Since then 72 searches have been conducted. Intelligence-led cell searches continued throughout the 12-month period with a total of 34 having been undertaken. Found were 47 items of contraband including inappropriate materials, several wraps testing positive for buprethenol, cable ties, items not registered on property records and improvised weapons.

The presence of synthetic cannabinoids (Spice) was detected at Ashfield at the end of the last reporting period. As a result there was a continuing period of increased security activity to identify the source of supply and those involved at the start of this reporting year. By the autumn enhanced security measures appeared to have been successful with no further evidence of Spice.

Mandatory drug tests (MDTs) have largely continued with some disruption due to Covid-19, with 5% of prisoners randomly selected each month. A total of 181 MDTs have been conducted, plus 37 suspicion-led drug tests during the reporting period. There were 10 positive tests in total with eight proven. Ketamine was included in the list of drugs categorised as illicit over a certain threshold in April 2022. This can be problematical because prisoners receiving hospital treatment are sometimes given ketamine as part of their treatment, so the prisoner's recent medical history has to be taken into account during any subsequent adjudications. Other substances detected have included cannabinoids and opiates.

Another key measure to prevent illicit items coming into the prison has been the body scanner. First deployed in July 2021, it is used to screen all new arrivals and prisoners suspected of harbouring illicit items. In the 12-month period there was one positive find.

In terms of drug detection, the Rapiscan system is another important method of preventing the import of illegal substances. During the period of heightened security activity all mail was scanned, rather than routine random sampling. Scrutiny of rule 39 mail, in accordance with prison regulations, is conducted to ensure that it is from a genuine authorised source. Overall in the 12-month period there were 64 positive detections from the Rapiscan system.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Ashfield has continued to maintain very high standards of cleanliness and maintenance throughout the prison despite Covid-19 restrictions. Wing cleaners and industrial cleaners continued to operate fully in the communal areas in house blocks throughout, which was particularly important in managing Covid-19 outbreaks. Regular cleaning of elderly prisoners' cells by industrial cleaners had to be suspended during the height of Covid-19 outbreaks but was quickly resumed as soon as deemed safe to do so.

Laundry facilities at Ashfield comprise a main laundry for bedding and prison-issue clothing, and house block laundries for prisoners' personal clothing. The main laundry operates very efficiently and, new in this reporting period, prisoners have been offered a prisoner-run minor clothing repair service.

During the early part of the reporting period the house block washing and drying machines regularly broke down, with no spare machines available. Whenever this happened a repair had to be attempted with spares by the prisoner electrical workshop. If this was not possible a new machine had to be ordered which often took some time to be delivered. Consequently, the house block laundry service was not operating as efficiently as it might, but Ashfield has now ordered spare machines, which means there is always a spare to swap if repair is not possible.

There is still an issue with Severn house block where three of the four drying machines used are condenser type machines, purchased when there was an issue with the ducting of the room. The ducting is now operational and cleaned regularly but the machines have still not been swapped over. Condenser dryers collect moisture within the machine requiring manually emptying rather than extracting to the ducting. This makes the room very warm and uncomfortable for the laundry workers, particularly during the summer and especially during the heatwave. Workers applied to have fans installed but were told that they had to buy their own.

Significant improvements carried out this reporting period include replacement of air conditioning units in education and other locations, replacement of house block windows (continuing) and cell observations panels, various replacement flooring and an extensive painting programme covering diverse areas in the prison.

It is disappointing to note that the recycling centre project has still not been completed (ongoing since 2018-2019). The roof algae build-up has still not been cleaned. This adversely affects natural daylight on the wings. The roof work is due to commence in January/February 2023.

It has been another challenging period for the catering department, with Covid-19 restrictions for much of the report year limiting kitchen shifts to house block cohorts. This proved at times to be a major constraint when a number of kitchen staff (prisoners) were absent through Covid-19 resulting in a resource imbalance on shifts. Also throughout the period there were frequent supply shortages making planning of menus difficult and replacement products necessary.

Together with the additional workload associated with implementing Natasha's Law (which necessitates that menus contain a full list of ingredients), staff must be congratulated for maintaining a good service throughout a difficult period.

For the reporting period there were 60 positive comments received from prisoners (64 in the last reporting period), in particular praising certain meals, portion sizes and the quality of dishes (mainly the curries and stews). Negative comments decreased in this period to 123 (142 in the last reporting period). They were mainly about missing items/shortage of items, lack of taste/flavour, undercooked food, too much spice in meals, lack of variety and small portion sizes. Of note though is that half of the negative comments (61) related to vegan product shortages.

The prisoner trust fund (PTF) at Ashfield holds any excess of funds generated from prisoner-based retail activities such as shop sales or PIN phone charges. Funds held can be used to purchase items and support initiatives which benefit prisoners and their families, providing such funding has not been allocated and is unavailable from other sources. Typical expenditure has included:

- the purchase of leisure and sport equipment
- items for the library
- support for the prisoner savings scheme
- during Covid-19 lockdowns, considerable extra phone credit and extension of time allowed for remote visits to enable prisoners to maintain good contact with their families

While to the best of its knowledge the Board supports the way the PTF has been used, it has concerns that, for the entire reporting year, routine information concerning PTF balances and expenditure has not been available from the prison despite monthly requests.

5.2 Segregation

Ashfield does not have a separate care and separation unit. When there is a need to segregate prisoners, they are:

- either confined to their own cell
- or, in exceptional circumstances, transferred to the EDC
- or, in the cases of constant supervision, transferred to a gated cell of which there are two

During this reporting period seven prisoners were placed on good order or discipline (GOoD) compared to two in the last report. Eighteen were placed on cellular confinement (CC) compared to two last year. All of the GOoDs and 12 of the CCs took place in the first half of the reporting period. For much of last year's reporting period prisoners were under very restricted Covid-19 regimes with limited association which is likely to have influenced last year's low numbers.

Board members have, when they could, visited prisoners placed on GOoD and CC and attended four GOoD reviews. Members were satisfied that the process was fair and the outcomes equitable.

The number of new adjudications conducted in the 12-month period was 150 (94 in the last report). Adjudications attended by Board members were all found to be fair and professionally conducted.

The increase in the number of GOoDs, CCs and adjudications reflect mostly the outcome of security activities related to the detection of Spice in the summer of 2021, and the impact of regime changes on behaviour. A couple of prisoners with a history of behavioural issues transferred into Ashfield (one set fire to his cell) in the first half of the reporting period.

5.3 Staff/prisoner relationships, key workers

The gradual relaxation of Covid-19 regime restrictions has meant a staged return to activities. Opening up has provided greater opportunity for increased engagement between prisoners and staff and their fellow prisoners.

Staff/prisoner relationships remain good. Of 148 respondents to a recent survey 49.6% agreed/strongly agreed they can confide in staff. Only 20.4% disagreed/strongly disagreed, and 29.9% gave no indication either way.

In this reporting period, of the 60 prison custodial officers (PCOs), 24 (40.1%) have two years or less experience. Considering that the past two years have, for the most part, been disrupted by Covid-19 restrictions, this is a significant proportion of officers who have not had extensive experience of a normal regime.

Generally, prisoners have appreciated the way lockdown and Covid-19 outbreaks have been managed, but at times changes in arrangements for time out of cell have caused frustration for some prisoners. Concerns and views are presented by representatives from each house block in the prisoner information and advisory committee (PIAC) meeting held with Ashfield management, which mostly continued even when Covid-19 restrictions prevented mixing of house blocks (one meeting was held per house block on a monthly basis). PIACs have provided a constructive means of communication between managers and prisoners, particularly about the changing regime.

Key work at Ashfield is very well managed and the prison has an impressive record of meeting targets in this area. During periods of restricted regime vulnerable prisoners and those due for release were seen every week (including those on live and post-closure ACCTs, those on CSIPs, assault perpetrators and victims and those on PIPs). All other prisoners were seen by their key worker every fortnight unless there was a complete lockdown, when welfare checks were conducted by wing staff. Once the regime returned to stage one, weekly key worker sessions resumed for all prisoners.

When a key worker is off, sessions are covered by a secondary. Providing secondaries has sometimes proved challenging with sick absence and bed watches

but key work is seen as an important factor in providing a safe and secure environment and assuring the wellbeing of prisoners.

Every key worker record for vulnerable prisoners is checked on a weekly basis and others are randomly selected for checking. All checks are against published criteria. In total 80 records are checked weekly, forwarded to the HMPPS controller, who selects from the 80 to undertake his checks. This ensures a continuous improvement process as the quality of entries can vary. It also addresses a criticism in a previous PPO report which identified an example of 'copying and pasting' from one week to another.

During a rota visit 16 prisoners were asked about key work. There was overwhelming support from 14 prisoners who almost unanimously felt that their interactions with their key worker were regular, positive and helpful. Some knew when their key worker was on leave and others the day of their next meeting.

Only two men were less than complimentary. In both cases they said that they had not spoken to their key worker for 'ages'.

Despite these two, it was apparent that key work was a routine, regular part of life at Ashfield. Even those that were not as complimentary said that they knew they could talk to their key worker if they needed to. In the safer custody survey of 148 respondents, a total of 67.5% agreed/strongly agreed their key worker was helpful.

5.4 Equality and diversity

After all the unavoidable disruptions caused by Covid-19 restrictions, which impacted the prison's ability to run face-to-face equality related meetings with prisoners, plans for resumption of full, normal attendance in February 2022 were delayed again because of short-term surges in Covid-19. Parts of the action plan to kick-start new initiatives were held up until May/June 2022.

There are now, however, signs of a growing momentum. The Board is in no doubt about the seriousness with which the prison takes its responsibilities in relation to equality and diversity and its resolve to address the ongoing issues and concerns expressed by prisoners.

The PIAC, and the few equality related meetings that did take place before the full meeting schedule resumed, recorded few burning issues that had accumulated during the restricted regime. The main concerns were about the limited range of the prison shop's products specific for diabetics and for Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners. These are long-standing and ongoing issues.

In May 2022 meetings attended by the Board showed that most forums were beginning to re-establish their purpose. Not only were they planning future events and drop-in clinics to provide greater awareness, but they were starting to identify concerns to be addressed in the coming months. It is the Board's view that the prison still needs to focus more attention on its Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners, who typically make up about 20% of the prison's population.

The prison survey at the start of 2021 suggested that these prisoners felt they were treated less leniently than their White counterparts for disciplinary offences. They also believed that officers were quicker to issue behaviour warnings to them. Critically, however, statistics gathered for the three diversity and equality action team (DEAT) meetings covering the period July 2021 to March 2022 (namely for incentive status changes, adjudications, use of force etc) did not show up any patterns indicating any discrimination on grounds of race/ethnicity, religion or age. Similarly, there was no disproportionate percentage of Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners on basic regime or on any form of cellular confinement.

The IMB 2021 annual report recommended that behaviour warnings should be monitored for any pattern of unintended racial or other bias. The prison responded positively and the first results, covering the first quarter of 2022, were discussed at the DEAT meeting in May 2022. Again the percentage of Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners receiving warnings was proportionate to their overall representation in the prison.

Currently none of these important statistics are shared with the forums. Greater transparency would be of benefit to all concerned and might go some way to address the ongoing, persistent perceptions of the group of being treated differently.

The root cause of these perceptions remained puzzling until a survey was conducted in early 2022 with Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners. It was designed and administered by a member of the race forum in the prison, and generated some thought-provoking results. In a prison where there are few non-White staff, it must be stressed that there was absolutely no suggestion or evidence of a culture of institutional racism. Members of staff, on the whole, were regarded as generally respectful and fair in their management of prisoners. However, the survey highlighted that Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners thought that:

- The racist language prisoners occasionally experienced from other prisoners could be misinterpreted or trivialised by staff as mere 'banter'. It was not always challenged rigorously enough.
- A handful of staff were themselves disrespectful.
- White prisoners were likely to be more successful in receiving incentive rewards or being admitted to certain programmes, educational and vocational courses, or being appointed to orderly posts (again, official prison statistics collected do not bear this out). They were also more likely to progress to category D open conditions.

The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community has also suggested on a few occasions that further staff training on cultural knowledge and understanding would be helpful. The Board understands that the provision of such training is under consideration.

Another issue the survey revealed was a lack of confidence in the discrimination incident reporting form (DIRF) system. In the period covered by this annual report, 38 DIRFs were submitted. This was double the number of previous years, but still low for a prison of about 400. Of the 38:

- two-thirds were about instances of being allegedly disadvantaged or subjected to verbal abuse as a result of ethnicity
- five involved religious issues
- seven concerned physical disability or neurodiverse conditions such as ADHD or autism
- one involved sexual identity or orientation

The Board inspected all 38 DIRFs submitted and found no suggestion of any lack of care, commitment or thoroughness by the prison in investigating them.

A more general concern raised in three different forums has been the higher cost of telephone calls at Ashfield than elsewhere. Although PIN credit was more generous during Covid-19 lockdowns, this was particularly hard for foreign nationals phoning abroad. It was also difficult for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities whose families rely on mobile phones. This is not unique to this community as many prisoners' permitted contacts only have mobiles. Any surplus from the income from telephones is put back into the prisoner trust fund (PTF) to provide additional resources for the benefit of prisoners as a whole.

Foreign national prisoners have had additional issues. Between July and September 2021, 12 prisoners were served with deportation papers, although Covid-19 was causing last-minute cancellations to departures. For part of the period of restricted regimes, visits by the UK Border Agency/Home Office staff were suspended. This meant that prisoners facing potential repatriation could not discuss their situation or raise any queries. In early 2022 such visits resumed and the length of each interview was extended in response to a request from the foreign national prisoner forum.

The needs of older prisoners and those with physical disabilities were generally addressed well by a combination of Serco prison staff, the healthcare provider and, when assessed as appropriate, the South Gloucestershire social care team. To provide a voice for those supporting prisoners with disabilities, the buddies forum was set up in August 2021 and chaired by the prison's equalities officer. A member of the South Gloucestershire social care team visits the prison the first Tuesday of every month and buddies can ask, via the touch screen kiosk on the wings, to see them if they wish to raise any issues. Buddies are now housed on the same unit as those they support (see also 6.4 Social care).

In common with the majority of prisons across the wider estate, Ashfield has the challenge of how best to support prisoners with a variety of neurodiverse conditions such as autism, ADHD and other learning difficulties or disabilities. A lead practitioner of the neurodevelopmental disorder service was appointed last year and more recently four more practitioners were recruited, covering five prisons. These practitioners will offer assessments and help to formulate reasonable adjustment plans but it is still early days so the impact of the service has been difficult to assess at this point.

The psychologists in interventions, the education department staff and the safer custody team have all expressed an interest in a collaborative approach with this service but, through no fault on their part, this has yet to materialise. For now,

everyone is doing their best individually to identify and support prisoners who self-declare conditions on arrival.

In October 2021, as a result of a request from the disability forum, it was agreed that the gym would run specific monthly sessions for those with physical disabilities. It was already running exclusive weekly sessions for older prisoners.

Other positive developments are:

- The replacement of electric radiators with new ones, which are allocated to vulnerable prisoners requiring extra heating in the colder months.
- The purchase of eight more wheelchairs, one per wing.

Unresolved remaining issues are:

- Lack of body-worn emergency alarms for prisoners with mobility issues who might not be able to reach their cell emergency button in a medical crisis.
- Lack of clarity on whether the prison or healthcare is responsible for providing alternative or additional mattresses to prisoners whose medical conditions mean they find the current thin mattresses inadequate.

It is the Board's view that there is a genuine will and commitment on the part of the prison to address all the ongoing issues, and further necessary progress will be made.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Throughout the Covid-19 restrictions the chaplaincy team went above and beyond in maintaining and extending its services in difficult circumstances. The chaplaincy team was restructured following the lead chaplain's move to outside the region, partway through this reporting period. The lead role is now shared by a Christian and a Muslim chaplain. This provided the opportunity for the part-time Pagan chaplain to be appointed on a full-time basis to support the growing number of Pagan prisoners.

It should be noted that all chaplains, irrespective of faith, will support any prisoner who requests support.

Meetings for Hindus and for Sikhs have been organised by the Sikh chaplain. Buddhist and Rastafarian prisoners had previously lacked specialist chaplaincy support but more recently a Buddhist chaplain has joined the team.

The chaplaincy has continued routinely to contribute to ACCT reviews and to visit all prisoners in any form of cellular confinement. For prisoners needing mental health support during this time, the chaplaincy has developed closer teamwork with safer custody, key workers, Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust (AWP) and healthcare to provide wrap-around pastoral care.

The team was actively involved in the prison's comprehensive new strategy for strengthening family links for prisoners. This included:

- continuing to support Storybook Dads to enable prisoners to record bedtime stories for their children.
- taking the lead in planning a family visits day for Christmas 2021 with Santa, activities and gifts for children provided by the local Quaker community. This had to be cancelled because of Covid-19, but a similar day went ahead successfully in the spring.
- driving the initiative to provide free books to give to children during family visits

The extensive support provided to prisoners experiencing loss or serious illness of loved ones has been much appreciated. Through the use of an iPad, the chaplaincy team could, where appropriate, facilitate video calls to seriously ill relatives in hospital, and enable prisoners to access streamed services from crematoria and to view deceased relatives in chapels of rest. The team has also conducted a number of Living With Loss courses to support those bereaved.

With the support of HMPPS faith advisors, the chaplaincy delivered faith-based materials to cells during lockdown periods. Many prisoners valued these, as well as the broadcasting of Christian services on the prison's dedicated TV channel. Even when it was possible for prisoners to attend services in person, some preferred to watch in their cells, so a hybrid model was made available temporarily. Regrettably, shortly before Christmas the chapel services could no longer be broadcast due to technical issues.

Muslim calls to prayer, sermons and Islamic songs were broadcast via the prison radio. In-person Friday prayers were held when restrictions were relaxed but initially were confined to house blocks alternating each week. Since then the Muslim chaplain has twice delivered a new HMPPS-designed faith course for Muslims, with a positive reception.

The chaplaincy has kept up its close liaison with the catering department to ensure that special food is on the menu to mark Eid and other religious festivals including Sikh, Hindu and Pagan. Communal events for different faith festivals and Black History Month could not be held because of regime restrictions, but the return to normal regime from the spring enabled International Holocaust Day and Eid to be celebrated.

The veterans in prison association (VIPA) accepted that the usual Armistice Day event and service in November had to be scaled down. Their request that an additional wreath be laid for NHS and other frontline workers who had lost their lives to Covid-19 was granted.

5.6 Incentives schemes

Ashfield's incentives scheme is specifically designed to encourage and reward good behaviour; poor and anti-social conduct is challenged but prisoners are particularly supported to recognise and change their attitudes. The scheme is based around three levels; basic, standard and enhanced, with various entitlements associated to each. The scheme was extensively reviewed in January 2022 involving consultation with both prisoners and staff. Prisoners were placed on basic on 72 occasions during

the reporting year (61 in the previous year). There were 13 appeals against incentive level change decisions during the year of which five were upheld.

A behaviour warning system is also in place with 233 warnings issued during the year. This is a major increase from the 138 in 2020-21 (which had significant periods of pandemic restrictions) but very similar to the 221 in 2019-2020. The major reasons cited for warnings were for disobeying rules and regulations (52), being rude or disrespectful (44) and possessing unauthorised items (32).

The Board is pleased to note that ethnicity data is now captured both for changes in incentive levels and for warnings issued, and notes that these statistics are broadly in line with the ethnic breakdown of the whole prison population.

The voucher scheme (a £2 PIN phone credit) was reintroduced, under which prisoners can be rewarded for behaviours consistently well above those expected under the scheme.

5.7 Complaints

A total of 822 complaints (COMP1,1A and 2) were received in this reporting period compared to 800 in the last reporting period. Of those 68 were for other prisons (usually property related). The highest received in any month was 115 and the lowest 51. The most complaints received from a single prisoner in a month was 10.

Residential continues to be the category attracting the most complaints (325), but the complaints submitted vary considerably so no particular trend has been identified. The second highest category is governance (catering, canteen, finance and the complaints process) with 111.

The monthly target for responses to complaints within the stipulated timescale is 95%. Only in two months was this not met. In five months 100% was achieved. The monthly average achieved is 97.7%. There were 70 interim responses (a holding response until a full response can be sent) out of a total of 768. Interim responses should be used sparingly.

To keep prisoners informed, a new process was introduced in January 2022 whereby a member of the complaints department contacts managers if the due date for a complaint approaches and a response has yet to be received. Managers are asked for a reason for the delay and an idea of when a reply can be expected. This is then forwarded to the prisoner for information via the touch screen displays on the wings.

Board members periodically review complaint responses and have found the standard of response generally to be good in terms of addressing the issues raised.

5.8 Property

Ashfield property continues to be a very well managed and an extremely efficient operation. The use of the electronic system to record and manage property has greatly facilitated the whole process and the output is consistently clear and comprehensive.

Property management in establishments transferring men to Ashfield, however, continues to cause problems and results in a number of complaints and IMB applications (13, the second highest category). The Board has on a couple of occasions had to call on the support of other IMBs to help track down missing property where formal complaints either have not been answered or the response has been unsatisfactory. Whenever help from other IMBs has been sought it has always resulted in far more information about the issue than has been forthcoming through official channels.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The Board is concerned by the number of vacancies among nursing staff. This shortage was particularly acute in the final quarter of the reporting period with five positions unfilled across the physical (four) and mental (one) health teams.

The number of frontline healthcare appointments, however, appears to have been little affected. In that April-June 2022 quarter the number held was down only 1.6% from the previous period despite a band 5 nursing vacancy rate of over 30%. There was, however, a noticeable impact in other areas:

- frequent reduced hours of on-site nursing presence from those contracted for
- health screening of transfers into Ashfield was not always possible on the day of arrival
- attendance at ACCT reviews (particularly from the mental health team) and other pan-departmental initiatives was curtailed.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that recruitment for such vacancies was suspended before the end of the reporting period pending the award of a new healthcare contract which is not due to commence until October 2022. The Board considers this unacceptable.

Complaints to healthcare, while higher than last year, remain at pre-pandemic levels with 64 in total. The main areas of contention were delivery/omission of care (40 complaints, two upheld) and medication (17 complaints, two upheld). No complaints were escalated beyond an initial stage.

There have been two significant outbreaks of Covid-19:

- December 2021 (over 100 prisoners)
- April 2022 (over 80 prisoners)

These were very effectively contained. Numbers of prisoners vaccinated remain high with approximately 90% of the population having received two doses by the end of the reporting period, and the take-up for boosters exceeding 60%.

Traka medication distribution lockers were installed during 2021 but have been beset with IT issues and none were used for some months. This is still a work in progress with not all yet commissioned. Informal prisoner feedback to the Board for those in use has been positive.

While non-attendance by prisoners at medical appointments is low (approximately 2%) there are plans to introduce a reminder service using the in-cell telephone network.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Patient triage is undertaken both in-person and via the in-cell telephone system. For urgent cases, on the day appointments with nursing staff are available, while GP clinics are held three times a week. Waiting times to see a doctor or nurse appear to be comparable to similar services in the community.

An NHS healthcheck is offered to men in the 35-74 age range every five years and is designed to identify early signs of stroke, kidney disease, heart disease, type two diabetes and dementia. At the end of the reporting period over 80% of eligible men had been assessed.

Routine clinics are held for dentistry/dental health, physiotherapy, audiology, optometry and podiatry. The only significant backlog is with dental services; extra funding has recently been awarded to facilitate Saturday clinics in an attempt to alleviate this waiting list.

There has been criticism in recent PPO death in custody reports concerning the monitoring of prisoners with long-term health conditions. A review was completed early in 2022 and healthcare plans are now in place for prisoners with long-term health conditions. A specialist long-term conditions nurse, operating across several establishments, was recently appointed to lead efforts in this area and provide staff training. Reviews of prisoners with such conditions are now closely monitored.

Various related initiatives are also being developed. For example, a pulmonary rehabilitation group was set up, working closely with gym staff.

6.3 Mental health

The mental health team is based across both HMP Ashfield and HMP Leyhill. Sessions can be organised by referral from other prison departments or by direct application from individual prisoners. Initial consultations are due within 28 days although the majority are held within two weeks.

Psychiatrist services were impacted by the lack of a clinician. One has now been appointed and is scheduled to hold monthly clinics as well as being available on request.

The gradual relaxation of Covid-19 regimes has allowed a variety of 'wellman' clinics to be reintroduced. These include: alcohol awareness, anxiety, emotional wellbeing, low mood, relapse prevention, relaxation, self-esteem, sleep, Spice awareness, stabilisation and stress. Group sizes are back to pre-Covid-19 levels.

A neurodevelopmental disorder service (working across five prisons) has been funded. As part of this team a nurse was recruited in May 2022 to operate between Ashfield and HMP Leyhill. They work closely with the mental health team and provide specialist support such as reasonable adjustment plans for prisoners with conditions including learning disabilities, autism, hyperactivity disorders and brain injuries.

6.4 Social care

A social care contract is in place through South Gloucestershire Council and weekly meetings are held between the social care team, healthcare and residence staff to assess need. Ashfield's 'buddy' system, where able prisoners support those who require help in various non-personal situations (wheelchair pushing, cell cleaning) continues to provide invaluable support and significantly reduce any need for external intervention.

6.5 Exercise, regime

Throughout the reporting year, the prison has worked hard to maximise the amount of time prisoners have been out of their cells. Covid-19 led to a number of changes in regime in response to both the national and the local situation at Ashfield, with a significant Covid-19 outbreak in December 2021 and lesser outbreaks at other times.

At its worst, during the national return to stage three in late December 2021, prisoners were still able to exercise on their wing yards and socialise out of their cells on their wings and landings for short periods of time. As the prison moved to stage one they were permitted greater freedom to return to education, training and work and to use the gym and astroturf in house block cohorts.

Ashfield was one of the first prisons to return to being fully operational in late March 2022, with unrestricted access to all areas of the prison for all prisoners (except any who displayed Covid-19 symptoms), for which the Board congratulates both prison staff and prisoners.

Ashfield meets its mandatory obligation to give all prisoners the opportunity to participate in physical activity for at least one hour per week. The varied activities offered include team sports such as football and rugby, badminton and tennis, circuit training, yoga, and activities like bowls targeted at less active prisoners. Sixty-four percent of prisoners engage regularly in these sessions.

In order to encourage wider participation, the department continues to extend and modify the range of activities it offers in consultation with prisoners, the gym orderlies and PIAC representatives. In addition the department has, in collaboration with healthcare, introduced specific physical activity sessions for those with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It is also offering specific sessions, in partnership with AWP, as part of the tackling drugs through physical education programme.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

Education, training and work continued to be victims of changing Covid-19 restrictions, particularly during the first half of the reporting year when partial and full lockdowns were intermittently in place. Reduced class sizes, shorter face-to-face sessions and the creative use of house block cohorts kept some education, training and work going, until the end of March 2022 when all lessons, training and work re-opened and began operating at pre-pandemic levels.

The vast majority of prisoners were eager to return to their studies, training and work. At the end of the reporting year the prison was meeting its contractual performance target of all prisoners engaged in an average of 20 hours purposeful activity per week. The Board applauds this rapid return to normal reflected in the number of qualifications gained during the reporting year in Maths, English and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

Ashfield College, run by in-house staff, delivers a core curriculum of English, maths, information and communication technology (ICT) and ESOL. In addition, it offers a wide range of courses leading to level 1 and 2 qualifications.

Ashfield currently has, relative to many prisons, a well-educated population with 80% working towards or at level 1 (equivalent to GCSE grades 3-1). Education and training are embedded within the culture of the prison. Particular emphasis is given to competency in literacy and numeracy, both of which are viewed as essential in today's workplace. All prisoners are required to be at or above level 1 in these two subjects. On arrival at Ashfield those prisoners assessed at below level 1 are expected to attend functional skill sessions.

Prisoners' engagement and attitudes to education, training and work have been generally excellent. During the reporting year the Board only received two applications relating to education and very few prisoners made any comments formally or informally, positively or negatively, about this aspect of prison life.

Although closed for much of the reporting year, the library remained a vital lifeline for prisoners who were able to make requests. When under enforced lockdowns, it has delivered books, games and DVDs to their cells. Fully operational at the end of the reporting period, prisoners have access to at least 1.5 hours a week in the library where they are able to browse, read, and play board/card games.

The Board would like to see more creative use being made of the library so that prisoners are able to develop, broaden and embed fledgling and developing literacy skills through such things as creative writing and poetry workshops, as well as activities that encourage reading for pleasure.

The staff in the library previously had an impressive record for innovative activities including the Ash festival (which was organised on behalf of Ashfield College) and the Ash magazine (created by prisoners), but these have not been running since

Covid-19. Likewise, the prisoner advice and liaison service (PALS) formerly operated from the library has ceased.

Formal educational assessments were disrupted by Covid-19 regime restrictions during a significant part of this reporting period. These have now resumed and there are plans underway to build in more assessment tools via the virtual campus (HMPPS system).

Practical support for prisoners with dyslexia is currently limited to providing basics such as coloured acetates as there is no qualified special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) on the staff (a national issue).

Regime restrictions also meant that Shannon Trust buddy support for those with limited literacy skills was stopped but it is now beginning to resume.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) is highly rated amongst prisoners. Personal learning plan (PLP) targets are reviewed every 16 weeks. At this point prisoners are able to request a change of course, work or education in order to meet their aspirations and better support them to reduce their reoffending and prepare them for life beyond prison.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Covid-19 restrictions continued to disrupt vocational training and work until the end of March 2022. During lockdowns work was limited to small working parties involved in the delivery of essential services including kitchens, industrial cleaning, laundry, waste management, portable appliance testing, painting and decorating around the establishment, and horticulture. Since returning to level 1, all work and vocational workshops have reopened fully and, as with education, prisoners quickly returned to attending sessions, studying for and completing qualifications.

During the reporting year the number of prisoners unemployed never rose above four (1% or below of the prison population) and attendance across all vocational training and work, from March 2022, was maintained at or above 97%.

Towards the end of the reporting period, in late June 2022, light industries was unable to secure sufficient work from its supplier to keep the prisoners occupied. While out of the prison's control, it has meant that the large numbers of prisoners involved in this work have been sitting around somewhat bored and frustrated. The Board is aware that the prison is in the process of securing a new contract with a local firm and looks forward to hearing that this workshop is fully operational at the earliest opportunity.

Managers provide reports on education, training and work data on a quarterly basis. This includes the number of qualifications gained, attendance data, staff absences and the number of cancelled sessions as well as a scrutiny of the breakdown of courses, training and work by ethnicity and age which generally reflects the ethnicity and age profile of the prison.

7.3 Offender management, progression

During this reporting period, Ashfield was able to deliver both Horizon and Kaizen programmes. Under normal circumstances, the target for Horizon would result in a total of 60 men completing a programme, with three cycles of two groups – each group consisting of 10 participants. However, for the first half of the year, the maximum size of a group had to be limited to four prisoners because of the need to socially distance. Normal group size delivery was expected to start in December, but this was delayed by a month until January 2022 as a result of a Covid-19 outbreak.

In view of the situation Ashfield faced, it is a creditable achievement that the total number of men who completed the course during this reporting period was 28.

Kaizen is delivered on a rolling programme basis (some leaving and others joining). As with Horizon, social distancing requirements resulted in smaller groups for Kaizen and consequently Ashfield was only able to deliver eight completions during this period.

As noted in last year's report, it was expected that Ashfield would start delivery of the Healthy Sex Programme (HSP). As the course is run on a one-to-one basis, it was not affected by any Covid-19 restrictions, and Ashfield achieved the target of delivering seven courses.

Also in this 12-month period, Ashfield introduced the medication to manage sexual arousal (MMSA) programme. Initially this service was made available to those considered and professionally assessed as needing support during the HSP. Its potential use has now been offered, where appropriate, to those also undertaking other offending behaviour programmes (OBPs) and has been prescribed to a total of eight participants.

At the end of each OBP, a review takes place of the progress that a participant has achieved. At this review he can request the support of someone from outside of the interventions team, such as chaplaincy or other prison staff. A family member could potentially attend, but this has not as yet materialised. One possible restriction might be that the family member lives too far away. For this reason, Ashfield has now set up a post-programme review suite to hold virtual reviews with family members using conferencing software.

With Covid-19 restrictions lifted, in April 2022 Ashfield arranged a post-programmes ceremony, for those who had successfully completed their programme. The intention was to acknowledge and celebrate the successful completion of a programme. As well as other key staff attending, some family members also attended – an effective way to involve family members in the prisoner's sentence plan.

It is credit to the prison that, despite the disruptions to OBPs, no prisoner was released from Ashfield who failed to get access to the OBP for which they had been assessed. Priority for attendance was assessed by a multi-disciplinary team, comprising a programme and treatment manager from interventions, the OMU manager and a senior probation officer. The criteria used are set out in HMPPS's

exceptional delivery model and the principles contained in advice issued by the HMPPS OBP recovery team.

In last year's report the Board reported on the benefits of having the probation and offender management teams co-located, including the cross-pollination of ideas, and an improved knowledge and experience base. Staffing levels have continued to stabilise, with both teams achieving near to target staffing levels.

However, the Board has concerns about the potential impact of HMPPS's proposals to reduce staffing levels significantly within the offender management unit. Doing this would affect the level of support that can be offered to prisoners and put extra pressures on staff.

At the end of June 2022, there were three (one last report) offender assessment system (OASys) records out of date (using the HMPPS definition of what constitutes an out-of-date record). Although this is a slight increase, it represents a considerable improvement compared to the 2019 HMIP inspection report findings. Also, at any point in time the number of outstanding cases will fluctuate.

Although nearly all new transfers are now required to have an in-date OASys before Ashfield will accept them, this does not apply if a prisoner transfers from a reception prison at start of custody.

Ashfield is now receiving a greater number of prisoners from reception prisons and is therefore experiencing an increased workload in creating OASys records.

7.4 Family contact

Maintaining family contact can be an important element for a prisoner in achieving or working towards rehabilitation and ensuring effective resettlement on release. Unfortunately, Ashfield's innovative scheme of family/friends at the centre of throughcare (FACT) continued to be severely affected by Covid-19 restrictions. During this reporting period, it was not possible to hold any FACT days, which would have allowed up to six families opportunities to visit the prison. As well as meeting the prisoner, they would have met relevant staff and, as part of the scheme, received regular updates.

During the most restricted Covid-19 regimes, it has only been possible for those family members where the prisoner has already been 'signed up' to the scheme to receive a newsletter and have a point of contact (the key worker hub) if they have any queries or concerns. At the end of June 2022, the number participating had reduced to six (due to transfers out/release). However, there are 46 men who have expressed a wish for their family member to participate in the scheme, including attending a FACT day. Ashfield is now intending to further promote the scheme with the prisoners (the first post Covid-19 FACT day was held on 19 July 2022).

Social video calls were a popular form of contact during periods of lockdown, and they are still in use following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. Ashfield has continued to subsidise the cost of an additional half hour on the standard half hour

call.

Maintaining links between prisoners and their families can help reduce reoffending but it can also help tackle intergenerational offending by addressing the poor outcomes faced by children of prisoners. To support this, Ashfield launched its initiative 'children affected by parental offending' (CAPO) service. Families can now contact a trained champion at Ashfield who can either offer advice or signpost them to an appropriate local service.

The first post-Covid-19 restrictions family day took place on 31 May 2022. Nine families, with a total of 20 children, attended and there were a number of children's activities taking place.

Ashfield has been working very closely with the Children's Book Project. This scheme invites men to choose a free book for their children, and helps them maintain contact with their children. An event took place in June 2022 at which 15 prisoners attended. The books, together with an accompanying letter written by the prisoner, are then posted by the Prison Service directly to families. In addition, a similar provision is available for children visiting Ashfield, whereby they can choose a book, read it with their father, or take it home.

In return for the support of the Children's Book Project, Ashfield helped to transform a van into a mobile library, fitted out with help from the prisoners.

To develop strategies and monitor progress on issues relating to prisoner's families, Ashfield also holds regular family and significant others meetings (FASO) to ensure a coordinated approach across all relevant services.

In addition, five staff have been trained to deliver a training programme across Ashfield to raise awareness of the important role that prisoners' contact with their families plays. This programme will be delivered in the coming year. HMPPS have already developed key performance targets for implementation in January 2023. These will be used to measure performance. Further details will be provided in the next report, but Ashfield has already carried out a self-assessment and meets nearly all of these performance targets.

Of concern to the Board, and an issue that has been raised in previous annual reports, is the continuing problem of prisoners arriving at Ashfield with incomplete/incorrect details relating to permitted access to children. Ashfield, quite rightly, thoroughly checks contact arrangements when prisoners arrive. Although this can lead to a delay in re-establishing the contact arrangements that a prisoner has had at a previous establishment, it is very necessary for the protection of the public.

7.5 Resettlement planning

As a category C specialist training prison, the number of prisoners released directly from Ashfield should be low, and moving forward the numbers are expected to decrease as the offender flow model is implemented (part of the OMiC framework).

During this reporting period there were 43 prisoners released from Ashfield. This represents a considerable reduction from 72, as reported in the last reporting period.

The majority were released to approved premises (AP). The Board recognises the impact that Covid-19 had on the availability of APs because of the need to reduce occupancy levels. However, now that such restrictions have been lifted, the Board continues to have concerns about the last-minute nature of accommodation being confirmed, sometimes only within 48 hours of release. This clearly impacts on the anxiety levels of prisoners who already have concerns about returning to the community.

Transferring prisoners to open conditions (category D prisons) can be considered to be an important step in preparing them for release. Fifty-four men transferred to category D prisons during this reporting period: 40 to Leyhill, six to Haverigg and eight to Hollesley Bay.

In many past Board reports Ashfield's high waiting lists for category D places has been a major concern but currently they are at an all-time low. This is primarily due to fewer prisoners getting awarded category D status, having not been able to complete the OBP courses on their sentence plans. As normal delivery of OBP courses resumes the expectation is that waiting lists will grow and will once again be a concern.

Very recent changes to the parole process are already impacting prisoners' progression/release decisions, as higher thresholds are applied. Report writers are no longer allowed to provide a recommendation, and a couple of cases where report writers would have previously anticipated a progression/release decision have resulted in prisoners staying in closed conditions. The Board will be closely monitoring this over the coming 12 months.

In the last report it was noted that no workshops providing advice to prisoners on issues surrounding resettlement (such as approved premises, open prisons, etc) had been held, primarily because of Covid-19 restrictions. However, as Ashfield managed to achieve an early transition to the more relaxed regime in June 2021, the first workshop took place in September 2021 on 'understanding release licence conditions and supervision requirements'. Following a major outbreak of Covid-19 among the prisoners, the second workshop on 'preparation for open conditions' was delayed until April 2022.

Ashfield is also setting up workshops, aimed specifically at indeterminate prisoners, for which an update will be provided in next year's report.

The work of the IMB

Visits to HMP Ashfield by members of the Board have been disrupted by Covid-19. This time it was a result of outbreaks in the prison rather than national lockdowns so visits were suspended for a much shorter period.

At times wings were locked down which meant members did not enter those wings in the interests of personal health and the health of both prisoners and staff. Irrespective of this, monitoring and responding to applications continued uninterrupted, albeit by phone and secure email if members were unable to visit in person.

Routine rota visits include visiting all accommodation units, the kitchen/bistro and the healthcare department. For practical monitoring purposes, prison functions, services and departments are divided into seven themed areas (safer custody/pastoral care; sentence management and resettlement; prisoner employment and vocational training; prisoner education; prisoner services and facilities; dynamic security; and central services), to ensure that each theme is monitored in depth approximately every eight weeks.

The weekly collection of applications from IMB boxes on the wings by members only resumed in July 2021. Wherever possible, a rota or applications visit is combined with attendance at a prison meeting, such as the PIAC, an equalities forum, an adjudication, a GOoD review or an ACCT review, but the scheduling of these often necessitates a separate visit.

One new member was recruited in 2022.

The Chair has continued to attend south west Chairs' meetings and a member of the Board attends the meetings of the IMB working group of establishments holding men convicted of sexual offences. Both have been conducted by teleconference/video conference in the reporting period.

The Board would once again like to thank most sincerely all the managers and staff at every level at HMP Ashfield for their cooperation and help. Always responsive to requests for information and questions, the positive and constructive attitude by the staff towards the Board greatly facilitates the monitoring role.

Of particular note is the support provided by the IMB clerks whose dissemination of information is critical to the IMB's role. The Board welcomed a new clerk in January 2022 and thanks go to her, and the member of staff who covers for her when she is away, for their invaluable help.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	6
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	209
Total number of shifts on the 0800 telephone line*	1
Total number of segregation reviews attended	4

*if relevant

Applications to the IMB

In this reporting period there was little change in the overall number of applications received (decrease of four) but there was a variation in the numbers in particular categories. Compared with other prisons, the figures continue to be low.

The categories attracting the two largest number of applications were I (15) covering sentence management and H2 (13) covering property issues.

I - Sentence management, including home detention curfew, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation. Of the 15 received, six were from one prisoner relating to the same issue. Otherwise there were concerns about delays getting on to programmes, the priority system used for programmes and the new risk assessment which replaced the risk management system RM2000.

H2 - Property during transfer or in another establishment or location. Compared to the last reporting period when there were 31, the total of 13 would appear to be a significant decrease. However, last year's figure included 24 submitted by the same prisoner relating to only two issues. Discounting that would mean last year's total was nearer nine. Thus this year was an increase of four.

Code	Subject	Current reporting year	Previous reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	4	2
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	10	5
C	Equality	3	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	2	5
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	8	7
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	5	1
F	Food and kitchens	3	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	5	15
H1	Property within this establishment	1	1
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	13	31
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	2	1
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	15	12
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	10	5
K	Transfers	1	0
L/M	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	4	1
	Total number of applications	86 (including 3 confidential apps)	90 (including 1 confidential app)



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