



# **Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Erlestoke**

**For reporting year  
1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023**

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# Contents

<b>Introductory sections 1 - 3</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of establishment	4
3. Executive summary	5
<b>Evidence sections 4 – 7</b>	
4. Safety	10
5. Fair and humane treatment	14
6. Health and wellbeing	18
7. Progression and resettlement	23
<b>The work of the IMB</b>	
Board statistics	29
Applications to the IMB	30

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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 Erlestoke is a category C training and resettlement prison for adult and young adult male prisoners. It is the only prison in Wiltshire and is set in a rural location not far from Devizes. It was built in the grounds of the former Erlestoke Park House.

2.2 Holding 467 prisoners with an operational capacity of 468, over one third are classified as indeterminate sentenced prisoners (ISPs) serving life sentences and indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPP). Most of the remaining population is serving not less than four years. Younger prisoners in the 18 to 24 age group make up nearly 12% of the population.

2.3 The prison offers intervention programmes to address offending behaviours and drug/alcohol issues. Part of the prison's remit is to provide a national resource for offending behaviour programmes. It is one of four prisons delivering the Progression Regime (PR), the aim of which is to help ISP and IPP prisoners provide information and evidence to the Parole Board to support release.

2.4 Currently there are eight residential wings; four are for prisoners with standard privileges with the remaining being for those at enhanced level. There is a separate care and separation unit (CSU).

2.5 One of the eight wings (Silbury B) is used for induction. The wing now known as the Drug Recovery Wing (DRW), dedicated to reducing drug dependence in motivated individuals, was relocated from Marlborough wing to Silbury A in December 2022.

2.6 A rebuild of two further wings which had been either partially demolished (Kennet wing in April 2022) or totally demolished (Avebury wing in June 2021), has not been achieved despite a projected completion date of January 2023.

2.7 Projected replacements of these wings in the coming year will house an additional 66 enhanced prisoners, increasing the operational capacity to 534, and enable those on the PR, currently dispersed among the prison, to be located back into one working community.

2.8 The site also comprises a kitchen, visitors' centre, chaplaincy, gym, sports hall, a farms and gardens section, education department, library, healthcare centre and a number of workshops.

2.9 The prison is part of the public sector and, although His Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) is responsible for the operation of the establishment, the other main service providers are:

- primary healthcare provider:
  - Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership (until 30 September 2022)
  - Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust (from 1 October 2022)
- education: Milton Keynes College
- site maintenance: Government Facilities Services Limited (GFSL)
- escort contractors: Serco

### **3. Executive summary**

#### **3.1 Background to the report**

3.1.1 HMP Erlestoke was subject to some restrictions due to Covid-19 until May 2022, after which there was a controlled and well managed return to a more normal regime.

3.1.2 The prison population reached one place short of its operational capacity at the end of the reporting year, with a notable increase in the number of complex and vulnerable prisoners in residence.

3.1.3 As in the wider community, difficulties in filling staff vacancies have been felt particularly in education, vocational supervision and healthcare.

3.1.4 An Independent Review of Progress by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP)<sup>1</sup> in August 2022 reviewed 16 key recommendations highlighted in their previous inspection report, and found reasonable or good progress against all but two of the recommendations.

#### **3.2 Main judgements**

##### **How safe is the prison?**

3.2.1 Observations by the Board indicate that, in the main, prisoners remain relatively safe. Despite the decrease in violent incidents (see 4.3.1) and self-harm (see 4.2.1), of concern is the number who self-harmed on multiple occasions, which implies an increase in prisoners with mental health issues requiring support.

3.2.2 Improved security measures, such as metal detection arches and x-ray scanning on entering the prison, have been a positive addition (see 4.5.2). However, the ingress and availability of illicit items, and specifically illicit substances, remains a significant problem (see 4.5.4).

##### **How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?**

3.2.3 Continuing delays in replacing residential wings has meant delivery of the PR has again been impacted. PR prisoners have been frustrated by not being given the facilities to demonstrate behavioural change and therefore progression has been hindered (see 5.1.2). Maintenance issues with GFSL persist (see 5.1.4).

3.2.4 The Board has serious concerns that the constant watch cell is not fit for purpose (see 5.2.5). Officers and staff have worked hard to support those with complex needs and more positive staff/prisoner interaction has been observed (see 5.3.2).

3.2.5 The introduction of in-cell telephones and laptops has greatly enhanced prisoners' lives in many ways (see 5.1.6).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspections?location=erlestoke&s&prison-inspection-type=independent-review-of-progress-irp>

## **How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?**

3.2.6 A change in healthcare provider has led to challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff but careful planning has not affected patient appointments (see 6.2.2). The issues of poor IT infrastructure and attendance of healthcare staff at first ACCT reviews continues (see 4.1.1 and 6.1.3). There are still insufficient cells to meet the needs of disabled people (see 6.4.3).

3.2.7 The relocation of the DRW was efficiently managed (see 6.6.2). Preventing the influx of illicit substances has been a constant challenge. However, feedback from those completing the programme has been positive (see 6.6.6).

3.2.8 A return to a more normal regime was welcomed. However, restricted time out of cell at weekends has had a negative impact on prisoners' association (see 6.5.3).

## **How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?**

3.2.9 Staff shortages in both education and vocational training has had considerable impact on providing purposeful activities for prisoners (see 7.1.2 and 7.2.3). PR participants have suffered by not being housed in one location due to delayed building works (see 7.3.9).

3.2.10 National changes introducing more stringent requirements to progress to open conditions has caused anxiety for prisoners (see 7.3.5). Similarly, the recent setback for IPPs has had an adverse impact on prisoners' health and wellbeing (see 7.3.14).

3.2.11 The Employment Hub has become well-established, offers practical help for those prisoners nearing release and is developing networks with employers who are committed to offering jobs to prison leavers (see 7.5.5).

## **3.3 Main areas for development**

### ***TO THE MINISTER***

#### **3.3.1 Parole (see 7.3.5)**

What solutions can be offered to prisoners who have done everything possible to prove eligibility to move to open prisons but who are now being denied this due to a more restrictive approach to parole?

#### **3.3.2 IPPs (see 7.3.14)**

What hope can be given to IPP prisoners, some 10% of Erlestoke's population, now that the recommendation by the Justice Committee for resentencing has been rejected<sup>2</sup>?

#### **3.3.3 Vulnerable and complex prisoners (see 4.3.10)**

What long term strategy is in place to address the chronic shortage of suitable mental health provision?

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<sup>2</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmjust/933/report.html>

### **3.3.4 Daily food budget for prisoners (see 5.1.7)**

When will the non-pay budget be increased to allow the local governor to set a sensible and realistic food budget (despite the slight rise in April 2023), given that food prices have risen more than 20% over the past three years?

### ***TO THE PRISON SERVICE***

### **3.3.5 Maintenance plan (see 5.1.5)**

How will the lack of a long-term maintenance plan and GFSL's performance be addressed?

### **3.3.6 Replacement of residential wings (see 5.1.2 and 7.3.9)**

What reassurance can be given that the revised dates for occupation of the replacement wings will not be delayed yet again, thus impacting the delivery of the PR?

### **3.3.7 Healthcare facilities (see 6.1.4)**

What action is being taken to ensure that additional healthcare facilities and staff will be provided when the prison's operational capacity increases?

### ***TO THE GOVERNOR***

### **3.3.8 Illicit substances (see 4.5.5)**

What additional long term strategies can be put in place to substantially reduce access to illicit substances?

### **3.3.9 Constant watch cell (see 5.2.5)**

What immediate actions will be taken to address the inadequate and potentially dangerously deficient constant watch cell?

### **3.3.10 Job opportunities (see 7.2)**

What steps will be taken to increase the number of meaningful job opportunities for prisoners?

### **3.3.11 Weekend regime (see 6.5.3)**

What plans are in place to increase time out of cell at weekends?

### **3.3.12 Reception (see 4.1.3)**

What actions will be taken to improve first night accommodation?

### **3.3.13 Induction (see 4.1.4)**

What steps will be taken to make the induction programme more concise?

### **3.3.14 Adapted cells (see 6.4.3)**

How will the lack of suitably adapted cells for disabled people be addressed?

### ***TO THE GOVERNOR/OXLEAS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST***

### **3.3.15 Healthcare attendance (see 6.1.3)**

Over 40% of first assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) reviews do not have the benefit of healthcare input, which impacts on the safety of prisoners – how will this issue be addressed?

### 3.3.16 IT in healthcare (see 4.1.1)

What is the solution to improve the IT infrastructure so medical records can be accessed by healthcare staff across the estate to ensure prisoners are not put at risk?

### 3.3.17 Mental health (see 6.3.5)

What plans are in place to recruit additional staff to the mental health team?

## 3.4 Progress since the last report

Issue raised in 2022	Response given by	Action taken and status at 31 March 2023
<b>Transfer to Category D prisons:</b> To provide a solution for prisoners long awaiting transfer to open prisons	<b>Minister:</b> Additional 660 category D places to be created. 89% of category D moves from Erlestoke.	Still an issue. More stringent requirements to achieve transfer. All available places are in the north (see 7.3.5).
<b>IPP prisoners:</b> To reduce the number of prisoners long over tariff: issue also raised in 2021	<b>Minister:</b> Commitment to IPP Action Plan. Refurbished Kennet wing to offer more places on the Progression Regime.	Still an issue. Resentencing rejected. Number of IPPs not reduced. Kennet wing - earliest occupancy 1.9.2023 (see 5.1.2)
<b>Specialist hospital places:</b> To provide more places for those with complex mental health needs	<b>Minister:</b> NHS England working to 28-day timeline for transfers.	No noticeable improvement in increase of specialist hospital places.
<b>Food budget:</b> To review the budget given the increase in food costs	<b>Minister:</b> Budget delegated to Governors; sufficient to meet prison rules.	Still an issue despite a slight rise in April 2023. National budget remains unrealistic. (see 5.1.7).
<b>Replacement of residential wings:</b> To identify a revised timetable for completion of Kennet and Avebury Units: issue also raised in 2021	<b>HMPPS:</b> Completion of Kennet by 31 December 2022; no mention of date for Avebury Unit.	Issue not resolved. Avebury flattened June 2021; Kennet partially demolished April 2022. Earliest occupancy of Kennet 1.9.2023 (see 5.1.2).
<b>Prison population increase:</b> To ensure satisfactory infrastructure for replacement wings	<b>HMPPS:</b> Population only increasing by 10 so infrastructure can cope.	Remains a concern (see 6.1.4). Yet to be tested once replacement wings occupied.
<b>Property Loss:</b> To ensure internal cell clearances are efficient on transfer to avoid property loss	<b>Governor:</b> Action noted	Improvement noted. Issue closed.



<b>Issue raised in 2022</b>	<b>Response given by</b>	<b>Action taken and status at 31 March 2023</b>
<b>Key Working:</b> To achieve pre pandemic delivery levels	<b>Governor:</b> Action noted	Issue not resolved due to resourcing (see 5.3.3).
<b>Programme Delivery:</b> To identify targets to increase those on offending behaviour programmes	<b>Governor:</b> Action noted	Improvement noted. Issue closed.
<b>Job opportunities:</b> To increase meaningful job opportunities	<b>Governor:</b> Action noted	Remains an issue (see 7.2).
<b>Workshop resource:</b> To open the dormant textile workshop	<b>Governor:</b> Action noted	Workshop opened. Issue closed.
<b>Staff/prisoner relationships:</b> To increase supervision and confidence so relationships improve	<b>Governor:</b> Action noted	Working in most areas. Issue closed.
<b>Distraction packs:</b> To address the lack and quality of distraction packs	<b>Governor:</b> Action noted	Extra resource provided. Issue closed.
<b>Adapted cells:</b> To address the lack of adapted cells for disabled prisoners	<b>Governor:</b> Action noted	Remains an issue (see 6.4.3).
<b>Healthcare attendance:</b> To improve healthcare attendance at first ACCT reviews; issue also raised in 2021 and 2020	<b>HMPPS:</b> Healthcare attends if not out of hours; SMT to monitor at performance meetings.	Remains an issue (see 6.1.3).
<b>IT in healthcare:</b> To improve IT infrastructure so medical records can be accessed by healthcare across the estate; issue also raised in 2021	<b>HMPPS:</b> Fibre optic connection in May 2022; IT connections in Reception from October 2022	Remains an issue (see 4.1.1).

## Evidence sections 4 – 7

### 4. Safety

The Safer Communities team has benefitted from consistent leadership and experienced staff in place during the year. Comprehensive and meaningful data is now routinely discussed at Safer Custody and Safety Intervention Meetings (SIMs), culminating in actions which have led to improved outcomes for prisoners.

#### 4.1 Reception and induction

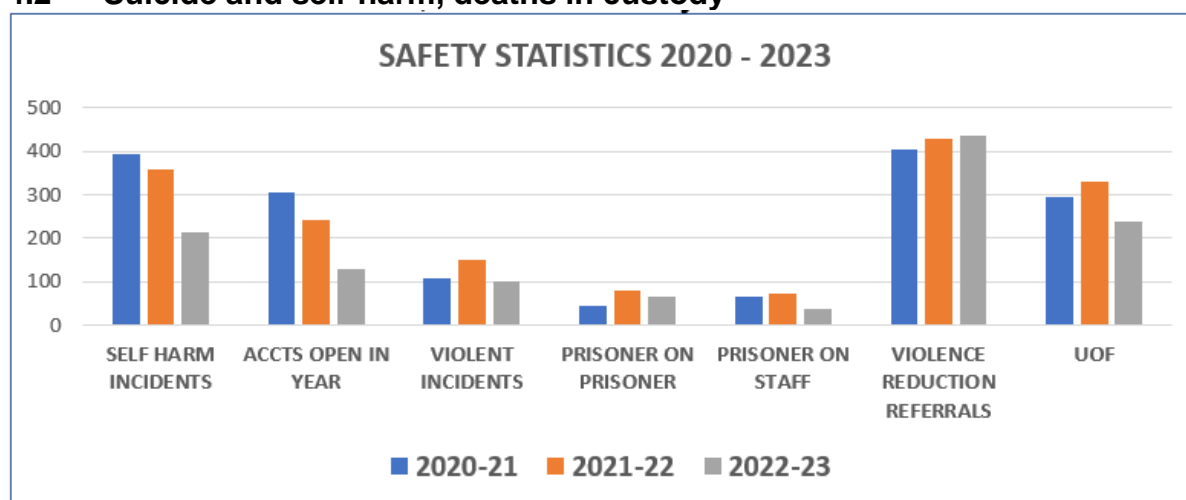
4.1.1 The facilities for reception health screening remain inadequate, with healthcare screens rarely being conducted in the room at reception designated for this purpose. The reason for this is the lack of internet accessibility. This means that the nurse carrying out the first reception health screen usually does so remotely in the healthcare building so as to have access to the prisoner's medical records. The disconnect between the reception nurse and the reception officer carries with it the risk that important information regarding a prisoner may not be communicated.

4.1.2 The reception facilities are cramped which is less than ideal when a number of prisoners arrive at the same time.

4.1.3 The improvement in first night accommodation noted last year has not been maintained. The cells are bare and stark and lacking in storage facilities. Graffiti cover some walls and the state of decoration is very poor. Although the cells are equipped with showers, shower curtains are missing. The mattress in one cell was split and uncomfortable. In the same cell there was evidence of mould on the ceiling. The first few days in a prison are associated with a higher incidence of self-harm and efforts need to be made to improve these facilities and institute a more rigorous regime to maintain the fabric and improve the appearance of the cells.

4.1.4 With the end of reverse cohorting in place under the Covid-19 regime, the induction programme for newly arrived prisoners has been resumed. For the most part, the programme has value although spreading the programme over two weeks is felt unnecessary. Prisoners were of the view that confining the programme to one week would be better and reduce long periods of enforced idleness.

#### 4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody



4.2.1 Self-harm incidents reduced from 358 in 2021-2022 to 215 in 2022-23 involving 62 prisoners. This represents a drop of 40% and is the lowest recorded since 2019-2020.

4.2.2 Of the 62 individuals, 35 were prolific self-harmers and accounted for multiple incidents which implies an increase in the number of complex and vulnerable prisoners in residence. The continued use of the constant watch cell during the second half of the reporting year was clearly an indication of individuals transferring to the prison with significant problems (see 5.2.5).

4.2.3 The most prevalent form of self-harm was cutting, followed by attempts to ligature. Those in the 30-39 age group self-harmed the most. The white population was significantly more likely to self-harm, which mirrors incidents in the community. There were various reasons for self-harm ranging from mental health issues and stressful events, to situational motives such as wanting vapes or cell moves.

4.2.4 There were 128 ACCTs opened during 2022-23 which is a 47% decrease from the previous year when 241 were initiated; this decrease reflects the reduction in self-harm incidents. Twenty-two prisoners or 17% had more than one ACCT opened. At the end of the reporting year, 13 were on open ACCTs, two prisoners being located in the CSU and one on constant watch.

4.2.5 Over half the ACCTs were initiated due to thoughts of self-harm or low mood with the intention of staff being more pro-active and getting help to prisoners at the earliest opportunity.

4.2.6 ACCT paperwork varied in quality. Comprehensive recording of case reviews was evident. However, monitoring revealed a number of documents not recording the first ACCT review, some conversations lacked sufficient detail to be meaningful, and there were not always sufficient specific, measurable objectives in care plans. Some ACCT documents inspected had muddled and/or missing paperwork and ACCT reviews were sometimes unnumbered and out of order making it difficult to track an individual's progress. The ACCT reviews attended by the Board were conducted in a professional manner, giving prisoners the opportunity to fully engage. Lack of healthcare participation in first ACCT reviews remains a concern (see 6.1.3).

4.2.7 Listeners, a peer support scheme backed by the Samaritans, has been consistently and diligently delivered by 15 dedicated prisoners who provide much valued confidential and emotional support. Accessing the service has not been easy on a number of occasions, although this appeared to improve during the year as both the Listeners and the Samaritans worked actively to inform staff of the benefits of enabling the service for prisoners.

4.2.8 No deaths in custody occurred during 2022-23. Action plans were in place as a result of reports from the Prison and Probations Ombudsman (PPO) into two deaths in previous reporting years with recommendations either having been implemented or work in progress.

### **4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation**

4.3.1 Violent incidents reduced from 149 in 2021-22 to 102 in 2022-23, a 32% decrease, in direct contrast to latest national statistics where incidents have risen. Of

the 102 incidents, 65 were prisoner on prisoner (10 recorded as serious) and 37 prisoner on staff (6 recorded as serious).

4.3.2 Peaks have often occurred throughout previous years, notably in the summer months when cells get unbearably hot and tensions rise. Learning lessons from the past, fans were ordered and issued in anticipation of what was the hottest summer on record.

4.3.3 Those aged between 30-39 were responsible for most incidents. However, young adults were disproportionately involved in acts of violence with 39% of the offences committed by those aged between 18 to 24, yet this group only accounts for 11% of the prisoner population. In response, a programme called Breaking Chains was developed and delivered by prison mentors to 47 young adults; focus groups were facilitated to give young adults the opportunity to discuss issues and a session which concentrated on knife crime and dealing with conflict was held.

4.3.4 Non-compliance was the highest reason for staff assaults and debt the highest for prisoner assaults. Evidence gathered from monitoring showed several prisoners who were in debt were either self-isolating or in segregation for their own protection as they felt unable to cope and were consequently reluctant to return to normal location.

4.3.5 Violence reduction referrals totalled 437, which is an increase of 2% from 428 in 2021-2022. Of these referrals, 58 Challenge, Support and Intervention Plans (CSIPs) were initiated; these plans aim to support victims and help perpetrators manage anger. A comprehensive CSIP policy was launched in May 2022. Delivering the outcomes of this policy remains work in progress; while quality assurance checks occur, some CSIP plans remain generic and investigations lack detail.

4.3.6 With the ever-changing prison population, there has been a noticeable increase in gang activity leading to some violent incidents as a result. Intelligence identifies incoming prisoners of specific gangs with every attempt to ensure prisoners belonging to different gangs are not housed on the same wings.

4.3.7 Key working sessions, which increase staff-prisoner interaction, reduced in delivery. This was mainly due to officers being detached to prisons experiencing staff shortages and thus creating shortages locally (see 5.3.3).

4.3.8 Two serious incidents of violence were observed by Board members. Both were managed in a professional manner with the IMB being allowed full access.

4.3.9 As of 31 March 2023, there were five self-isolators with an average of three prisoners per month opting to self-isolate – a slight decrease from last year. Board members were satisfied that these prisoners had a safe regime. The main and concerning reason for self-isolation was being in debt and therefore under threat from others.

4.3.10 Weekly multidisciplinary SIMs plan for each self-isolator's re-integration. Other complex prisoners are also reviewed at SIMs to assess the best management for those with identified mental, emotional and behavioural needs. There is understandable frustration in trying to implement such plans required to support these prisoners. This clearly highlights a serious national shortage of suitable mental health provision, which shows no improvement.

## **4.4 Use of force**

4.4.1 Use of force (UOF) decreased by 27% from 330 occasions in 2021-22 to 240 in 2022-23; the highest number of incidents involved the 22-29 age group.

4.4.2 Batons were drawn on two occasions. Work to introduce PAVA<sup>3</sup> concluded and culminated in ratification for its deployment as of 31 March 2023.

4.4.3 Body worn cameras were activated only 89 times or 37% of the 240 UOF incidents and when they were in operation, cameras were often not turned on early enough during an incident and so failed to capture any attempts of de-escalation. However, focus has been targeted towards better usage now that the ageing kit has been replaced.

4.4.4 The Board attends the monthly UOF meeting as an independent observer. This meeting analyses incidents, trends and the management of the UOF. Overall, UOF appears to be proportionate and controlled. CCTV and body worn camera footage is routinely reviewed to ensure lessons learned are fed back to staff; for example, the need for better communication between staff and prisoners during incidents so that the safety of both parties is not compromised. Analysis of those officers using force most frequently is a valuable addition as it enables any obvious patterns to be detected early and appropriately managed.

## **4.5 Preventing illicit items**

4.5.1 The security department was fully manned and supported by the regional dedicated search team and dog unit which visited on a regular basis, covering visit days and conducting other dedicated and often intelligence led searches.

4.5.2 The enhanced gate security (EGS) system was fully embedded with metal detection arches and x-ray scanning of possessions in place. All staff were prevented from entering the prison before the EGS team started in the morning.

4.5.3 A considerable number of items were found, yet there continues to be a highly detrimental amount of drug use, demonstrating successful pipelines for illicit items remain.

4.5.4 Methods of obtaining illicit items included parcels thrown over the extensive perimeter fence; impregnated letters; false Rule 39 letters such as counterfeit solicitors' mail as well as concealment via parcels, visitors, staff, laundry and occasional drones. The use of drugs, especially cannabis/herbals and various types of psychoactive substances (PS) colloquially known as 'spice', remains at a high level. The number of incidents when a prisoner is incapacitated and in danger as well as the levels of debt and bullying (see 4.3.9) demonstrate that the problem continues to have a significant impact.

4.5.5 To reduce the availability of illicit drugs, it is questioned why letters are not photocopied rather than originals being provided, even though this may result in complaints from some prisoners. The provision of a confidential whistleblowing system together with improved policies and procedures may enable management to deal more swiftly with staff who are suspected of collusion.

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<sup>3</sup> Pelargonic Acid Vanillylamide (PAVA) – a synthetic pepper spray

## **5. Fair and humane treatment**

### **5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food**

5.1.1 The prison still has many ageing and, in some cases, poor quality wings with major investment required to upgrade the standard of accommodation. Cleanliness has improved with less litter outside the wings and better recycling provision, although the latter has not always been consistent.

5.1.2 Two wings, Kennet and Avebury, had been deemed not fit for purpose in 2020. Avebury was not demolished until May 2021 and although work commenced on the rebuild, September 2023 is now the anticipated occupation date – a delay of 16 months from the date of June 2022 indicated by HMPPS<sup>4</sup>. It took until March 2022 before the demolition of Kennet started and its replacement is not expected to open until September 2023 – a delay of some nine months from the date given by HMPPS<sup>5</sup>. Kennet previously housed PR prisoners and, with its closure, participants were unable to benefit from facilities and a sense of community in one dedicated location – a fundamental concept of PR.

5.1.3 Little evidence was found of collaborative working between the many external agencies and contractors working to replace buildings; co-ordination has been largely left to project management at a local level.

5.1.4 At the start of the year GFSL employed extra staff and enhanced work systems improved some aspects of maintenance. However, staff resignations, a shortage of trades and absence (including that of the site manager) now require urgent GFSL attention. During the year, there were significant lapses in GFSL's performance. For example, gas supplies to the kitchen cut out due to a failure to order new supplies and resulted in kitchen staff having to use outside barbecues for prisoners' meals.

5.1.5 There appears to be a lack of a long-term maintenance plan which is concerning considering the state of some of the wings. GFSL appear to be focusing only on statutory compliance with reactive maintenance being carried out by contractors used for other work.

5.1.6 In-cell telephones were installed in April and laptops were made available to every prisoner in September 2022, both of which have greatly enhanced prisoners' lives. Food ordering, access to accounts, canteen requests and contact with other services such as healthcare are all now managed via laptops.

5.1.7 Food supplies were maintained during the year. The kitchen has delivered varied menus whilst looking at innovative ways of making funds go further. However, given rapidly increasing food prices and local budgets having to be used to supplement funds, the allocated non-pay budget devolved to each prison has not realistically increased for at least six years (despite the slight rise in April 2023) and needs ministerial review. Furthermore, prisoners have concerns that canteen prices have significantly increased but this has not been reflected in their pay.

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Victoria Atkins, Minister of State for Justice, 22 November 2021 to Chair, IMB Erlestoke

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Rob Butler, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice, 24 October 2022 to Chair, IMB Erlestoke

## **5.2 Segregation**

5.2.1 The CSU has 8 segregation cells, a constant watch cell and a special accommodation cell. The cleanliness of the unit is ensured by two effective orderlies.

5.2.2 During the year, 197 prisoners were accommodated in the CSU, an increase of 49 from the previous year. Twenty-six of these were repeat admissions and 13 were held over 42 days.

5.2.3 Thirty-seven prisoners arrived in the CSU with an open ACCT and a further 17 had one opened while there; while this remains a high number given that this should only occur in exceptional circumstances, it does represent a very significant drop on the previous year.

5.2.4 The Board remains concerned about the high incidence of mental health issues in the CSU population (and self-harm while there) and the frequent accommodation of those who are under threat on normal location. That said, it is also recognised that staff work hard to support these prisoners, often taking a highly individualised, compassionate and solution focussed approach. For example, a long-term CSU prisoner was enabled to engage in constructive conversations with healthcare, eventually allowing him to access appropriate support for his significant health needs. Another prisoner, who had previously been self-isolating for over a year, was gradually encouraged to shower, exercise and interact with others.

5.2.5 The constant watch cell was used on 17 separate occasions by 14 individuals; five prisoners were on constant watch for more than a week (17, 25, 35, 36 and 41 days respectively). The Board has very serious concerns about the suitability of the cell, as visibility is poor with little natural light, a hidden corner, various ligature points and a scratched plastic covering over the door impeding vision into the cell. There were 13 incidents of self-harm while on constant watch, including one while the prisoner was having a conversation with the constant watch officer, who could not see him attempting to ligature at the same time.

5.2.6 Special accommodation was used on 14 occasions and always for under 24 hours. The Board was not always informed of the use of Special Accommodation and the paperwork was often not readily available to check that processes had been followed.

5.2.7 Those in the CSU may have their laptops 48 hours after arrival. This has been much appreciated and is highly beneficial in terms of enabling men to be occupied in a positive manner. Property is now stored more effectively within the CSU, allowing prisoners to access their belongings with fewer issues than previously.

5.2.8 Separation, monitoring and review group (SMARG) meetings have not been held regularly; consequently, there has been limited review and analysis to improve conditions for prisoners in the CSU, and monitor adherence to prison regulations.

5.2.9 It has been challenging at times to visit prisoners self-isolating on wings as detailed information has not always been readily available.

5.2.10 Scrutiny of CSU review paperwork has shown that exit plans are not always robust and, in particular, the targets to be achieved to leave the CSU have not always been precise, timebound and sometimes not within the remit of the prisoner.

5.2.11 As the numbers in the prison grow over the next few years, and as its population continues to increase in complexity, the existing eight cells of the CSU – which have often been fully occupied - are likely to be placed under significant pressure.

### **5.3 Staff-prisoner/detainee relationships, key workers**

5.3.1 Staffing has been maintained at reasonable levels through the year and turnover has been more stable. However, the need to deploy officers to other prisons with staff shortages has had an impact across the prison. Transition from the last stage of Covid-19 lock down in May 2022 was carefully planned and successful in spite of some staff not having experienced ‘a normal prison regime’.

5.3.2 The Board has found wings to be calmer and more disciplined on their visits, with prisoners not entering the wing offices unattended and more positive conversations between staff and prisoners. However, on one enhanced wing, a review of staffing was necessary after officers became too blasé over relationships with prisoners who were found to be breaking many security and drug related rules.

5.3.3 Senior managers have endeavoured to ensure that key working has been prioritised over the year. However, the requirement to second officers to other establishments has inevitably had an impact on its delivery.

5.3.4 Key working has been made more transparent on the duty manager’s daily report with officers detailed to complete key working named and the number of sessions completed against those targeted have been recorded. The duty manager follows up any discrepancies.

5.3.5 The standards of key work delivery came under more scrutiny as the year progressed and work is in hand to improve the quality of meetings and written entries against prisoner records. Prisoners have been generally very positive about key working when sessions have taken place and it has been appreciated that key workers can be contacted via laptops.

### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

5.4.1 The sound infrastructure for monitoring and promoting equality and diversity which was noted last year has been maintained. Relevant equality and diversity data is now captured each month on a bespoke database and, on a rotating cycle, different figures and statistics are discussed at the monthly equality and diversity meetings.

5.4.2 However, although senior managers act as protected characteristics<sup>6</sup> leads, only about half of the senior management team show interest and the monthly meetings are often poorly attended. In general terms, there is a very good system for capturing relevant data but little is done to analyse the reasons for discrepancies in the figures. This means that where a skew in the figures in relation to a particular group of prisoners is shown, the reason for the skew is not investigated which raises

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>



the possibility of unrecognised discrimination. There are eight trained prisoner equality representatives.

5.4.3 Discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) are investigated by a team of thirty trained case managers, ten of whom are non-operational members of staff. The investigations are often completed late but not by any great margin. Efforts are now made to ensure that each investigation of a prisoner's complaint is not undertaken by an officer connected with that prisoner's wing and the introduction of non-operational staff has added a further safeguard towards independence which was not present before. DIRFs are quality assured by the Zahid Mubarek Trust and members of the senior management team audit 10% of the reports. During the year 72 DIRFs were lodged but only four were upheld. This is a very low figure. Although the lack of appeals from the findings may indicate satisfaction with the outcome, the possibility arises that the process of investigation is in some instances flawed. During the coming year, the Board will review documentation and interview prisoners who have had their DIRF complaint rejected in order to determine the validity of the investigation process.

5.4.4 In terms of religion, 180 prisoners (39% of the population) report Christianity as their defining religion through a variety of qualifying denominations, while 94 (20%) report their faith to be Muslim and 122 (26%) indicate no religion. In terms of age, 279 prisoners are under 40 (60%), of which 53 (11%) are between 18-24 years old. There are 136 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic prisoners making up 29% of the population and 33 prisoners who identify themselves as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller.

5.4.5 Monthly focus groups have been held. There has been a recent concentration on the needs of young adults with a football league emerging as an outcome and contact with Bath Rugby. Young adults reserve their judgement pending consistency in outcomes but the initiatives are to be welcomed. In addition, there were a number of events held during the year including those covering Black History and LGBT. Members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have been favourably impressed with their treatment at Erlestoke as opposed to other prisons. An attempt to promote cultural diversity has led to one menu option a month offering a different ethnic or national meal.

## **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

5.5.1 The chaplaincy continues to provide a very high standard of faith and pastoral support through its 11 chaplains (there are currently two vacancies). In any week there are around 18 services or activities. Not all activities are faith based and include such things as a bereavement group which is open to all. Prisoners of minority faiths are offered monthly services and additional weekly services in other faith traditions if they wish to attend.

5.5.2 It is much easier for prisoners to access services or one to one support due to the provision of in-cell laptops. Staff are able to advertise these services through posters and podcasts electronically which has been a considerable improvement in communication.

5.5.3 Chaplaincy staff ensure all new prisoners have an induction meeting and visit all vulnerable prisoners regularly. Communication with the safety team is very good and enables them to visit any prisoner on an ACCT at least once a week. Those over

70 and under 21 are visited on a monthly basis. Prisoners are helped to apply to attend outside funerals or the chaplaincy ensure that a prisoner can participate by watching a funeral service live when it is streamed.

## **5.6 Incentive schemes**

5.6.1 Under the Incentives Policy Framework, 62% of prisoners were at enhanced level, 32% were at standard level and 6% at basic level at the end of the year. The number of prisoners at basic level has increased compared to last year, mainly due to the end of Covid-19 restrictions as well as a change in dynamic of the population.

## **5.7 Complaints**

5.7.1 During the reporting year, 1,005 complaints were received, slightly lower than the previous reporting year of 1,156, a decrease of 13%.

5.7.2 Over 90% of complaints were responded to within the time frame driven by efficient administration of the process. In-cell laptops meant communication of updates and queries on prisoner applications has been much improved, as has the ability to request further information.

5.7.3 Residential complaints and those regarding property were among the highest categories. Just under half the property complaints relate to other establishments where property is not accompanying prisoners at the point of transfer. However, the remainder of these related to property going missing during internal cells moves. Additionally, parcels being signed for at the gate and then lost within the establishment resulted in prisoner frustration as well as in house compensation claims.

5.7.4 Quality assurance has been observed as effective with 10% of the complaints being assessed; all staff related complaints are reviewed by the deputy governor.

## **5.8 Property**

5.8.1 Despite the number of complaints relating to property lost within the prison when a prisoner moves cell (see 5.7.3), this issue appears to have improved as does the transfer and storage of property when prisoners have relocated to the CSU.

5.8.2 Applications to the Board demonstrate property lost between establishments remains a persistent problem and significantly detrimental to prisoners' wellbeing, particularly when personal possessions have been lost.

# **6. Health and wellbeing**

## **6.1 Healthcare: general**

6.1.1 A change in healthcare provider on 1 October 2022 has led to some disruption in the provision of healthcare. In the run up to the change, a number of healthcare staff resigned and, after the change, remaining staff felt unsettled while the new provider, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, designated and clarified roles.

6.1.2 Lack of staff has also had an effect on occasions on medicine management and, in particular, on the timely ordering of supplies.

6.1.3 Last year the Board reported healthcare attendance at the first ACCT review as occurring in 60% of cases, a considerable improvement over the previous two years. In the current reporting year, the figure has slipped to 57.5%. The majority of reviews missed by healthcare occurred out of hours in the week or at weekends when healthcare personnel were not on duty, but there still remained a number of occasions when healthcare staff were not invited to reviews. It continues to be of great concern to the Board that, in over 40% of cases, a first ACCT review does not have the benefit of medical input and thus loses the advantage to be gained from a multidisciplinary approach in keeping a vulnerable prisoner safe. Last year the Board wondered whether, with 24 hours to hold the first review, a review can be delayed in some cases until healthcare staff are on duty; there have been no initiatives apparent to implement such a change in practice.

6.1.4 The healthcare building still remains less than fully fit for purpose with inadequate facilities for clinics and consulting rooms. The roof of the healthcare building leaks and urgently requires replacement but there are currently no plans in place to effect repairs, let alone replace the fabric. If existing forecasts are maintained, the prison's current operational capacity of 468 will increase in September when building works to provide additional prisoner accommodation come on line. No action has been taken either to provide additional healthcare facilities or the additional healthcare staff that will be needed. With staffing already at a critically low level, the Board is very concerned for the future.

6.1.5 On a positive note morale within healthcare has now improved, although both immediately before and after the change in healthcare provision, this was not the case.

## **6.2 Physical healthcare**

6.2.1 Another year has gone by with never a time when there was a full complement of directly employed nursing and ancillary staff.

6.2.2 Recruitment continues to prove difficult and, although for the most part vacancies have been covered by bank staff, it is not unusual for an insufficiency of staff to force healthcare to invoke contingency plans leading to a curtailment of some healthcare activities, including clinics. The postponement of clinics will have an increasing and cumulative effect on the general effectiveness of healthcare delivery. However, with good advance planning, acute staff shortages due to leave and sickness have been anticipated and the invoking of contingency arrangements have not led to patient appointments being cancelled.

6.2.3 For the most part the prison has been able to supply escorts for routine hospital visits although, on a few occasions, difficult clinical decisions have had to be made to determine priorities in the face of a lack of sufficient escorts.

6.2.4 The waiting time to see GPs for routine appointments is usually around the two-week mark which compares very favourably with the situation in the community. There are three GP sessions a week and an additional two sessions a month were introduced during the year.

6.2.5 There were 127 complaints in the year. Heading the list of internal complaints has been perceived failure to deliver requested treatment. Most prominent among these complaints has been denials of pain-killing medication clinically not warranted.

Of significance is the fact that no complaint to an external independent body has been upheld during the year.

6.2.6 The dental service has been under extreme pressure during the year due to defects with the suction machine. During an eight month period, the suction machine worked for only a handful of days. Frequently the subject of repairs which brought the machine only momentarily into service, eventually the decision was made to finance a replacement. While the machine was non-operational, treatment could not be undertaken. As a result, there has been an ever-growing waiting list with patients waiting months for treatment. With the machine now functional, the dentist comes to the prison one extra day a week and will continue to do so until the backlog has been cleared.

6.2.7 Healthcare appointments can now be made online via prisoners' laptops. Unfortunately, healthcare was overlooked when it came to the provision of telephone access to prisoners and, although funding has been promised to make up this deficiency, nothing has been done to date.

### **6.3 Mental healthcare**

6.3.1 The mental health team has had to be rebuilt after several staff left during the changeover to the new provider and it is only recently that a head of mental health has been appointed, relieving the previous head to focus on the Drug Recovery Wing (DRW). Several vacancies remain unfilled with recruitment proving difficult given the remote location of the prison.

6.3.2 The team includes psychological and psychiatric support which, even on a part time basis, has been positive. Additionally, four wellbeing mentors from among the prisoner community have been a valued resource with their ability to relate to prisoners on a peer to peer level.

6.3.3 At the end of the year, the team had a case load of 208 prisoners, representing 40% of the total population. Of these, there were 54 on opiate substitute treatment (OST), 95 on other mental health drugs and 59 on a variety of substance misuse programmes. There has been a higher number of complex vulnerable prisoners which have taken up a large proportion of time. These prisoners are often not suitable to be on a wing in a category C prison but a lack of specialist places nationally has forced this to occur. With the absence of specialist places, a number of such prisoners have been resident in the CSU for long periods of time (see 5.2.4).

6.3.4 The mental health team, together with the drug recovery team, have placed significant focus on resettlement, rehabilitation and recovery housing to try to ensure continuity as prisoners move towards release; not an easy task given the multiple agencies involved (see 7.5).

6.3.5 Although the mental health team offers a dedicated and professional service, it is under resourced to meet the challenges posed by the large number of prisoners suffering from mental health disorders. The recruitment of additional personnel is long overdue.

## **6.4 Social care**

6.4.1 The buddy system whereby prisoners provide help to disabled prisoners, excluding personal care, has continued, with funding in place for four prisoners to provide this service.

6.4.2 There are good relations with Wiltshire Council with a monthly meeting taking place to discuss current requirements. The Board is aware of cases of prisoners who receive care packages which result in the attendance of outside care, but if the prisoner fails to use this care appropriately then carers can withdraw their services; it may take time for replacement services to be put in place.

6.4.3 There are insufficient cells adapted to meet the needs of disabled people and although new accommodation scheduled for introduction later on in the year will provide four additional disability cells, these are unlikely to meet needs fully. Of particular concern is the lack of suitable accommodation for prisoners with paraplegia.

## **6.5 Exercise, regime**

6.5.1 Prisoners have the opportunity to attend the gym or sports hall for one hour during the week and a further hour in the gym at the weekend. There are separate weekday sessions for over-50s, for young adults and those who are unemployed. Additional sessions in the sports hall take place for an hour on Friday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons which are promoted via laptops. The department has four physical education instructors (PEIs) and six orderlies.

6.5.2 The multi-use games area (MUGA), for which the Friends of Erlestoke has raised £250,000, has not yet been installed. Its anticipated completion will now be late 2024/early 2025.

6.5.3 Since restrictions eased in May 2022, the prison moved in stages to a more normal regime during the week, with the one exception being the removal of two hours' evening association from October 2022. From December 2022, the weekend regime was reduced, largely due to the requirement to supply officers to other establishments with staff shortages. Consequently, with the exception of the enhanced units, standard wings have only been open for three hours on alternate weekend mornings or afternoons meaning prisoners have been in their cells for up to 21 hours.

## **6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

6.6.1 Two changes relating to drug rehabilitation have taken place in the reporting year. Firstly, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust took over the running of healthcare, subcontracting drug recovery to a non-statutory charity Change, Grow, Live (CGL) whose focus is entirely on running courses in the DRW. Continuity during this change has been provided by the previous manager who has years of drug recovery experience both at Erlestoke and elsewhere.

6.6.2 The second change was a move of the DRW from Marlborough wing to the ground floor of Silbury A in December 2022. The purpose of this move was to allow more room for programme delivery and, as Silbury A has only single cells, to overcome the difficulties presented by the previous wing's double cells.

6.6.3 The influx of drugs throughout the estate has continued to cause difficulties (see 4.5.4) and, worryingly, drugs found their way in quantity to the DRW. Located at the far end of the estate, the movement of prisoners to work and education has allowed opportunities for illicit substances to be passed, undermining the work of the drug recovery programmes.

6.6.4 While prisoners are pleased to have single cells and an improved sense of community, there is some discontent that they spend too long behind their doors and there is little to do on the wing (exercise, for example, is restricted to half an hour in the morning); there is thus little incentive to join the programme. Drug recovery mentors and others who have completed the course consider they have few privileges.

6.6.5 Thirty-six prisoners started the drug recovery programme while still on Marlborough, with the vast majority completing it. Since the move to Silbury A the concept is abstinence based, which has advantages of discipline, clear boundaries and clarity, with three warnings for transgressions leading to ultimate dismissal from the programme. Since January 2023, of the 15 participants who embarked on the programme, nine have left (six deselected due to breach of compact, two self-discharged and one moved wing). Managers consider that the comparatively lower completion numbers are due to the more stringent requirements together with an increased availability of illicit substances.

6.6.6 Among those who participated successfully in the programme, the feedback has been positive: 'I feel very privileged', said one. Also cited is the high level of support, the skill of the facilitators, the cohesion of the group and the lack of negative judgements and assumptions from staff.

## **6.7 Soft skills**

6.7.1 In-cell laptops have greatly enhanced prisoners' lives. The digital team create and upload relevant material which includes recordings of ex-prisoners giving motivational talks; information about vocational employment; access to education, films and TV series plus a calendar of topical content which includes features on topics such as Ramadan, neurodiversity and wellbeing. This technology has provided welcome distraction, minimises boredom and provides prisoners with improved IT skills.

6.7.2 The literary festival 'Penned Up at Erlestoke' ran between May and August with 17 motivational speakers addressing prisoner audiences. A Wiltshire School of Music project called Visible Voices enabled prisoners to compose and record music. The Changing Tunes charity offered music sessions with 24 prisoners taking advantage of the scheme. Eight prisoners participated in an Unlocking Criminology module alongside students from Bath Spa University and there was a collaboration with Bristol University called the Great Logic Experiment.

6.7.3 The prison promoted the charity Rift which investigates if prisoners who were in paid employment or self-employed are owed tax refunds and negotiates the removal of late payment fees. In the past four years, over £6,000 in refunds have been achieved and over £7,500 of debt to HMRC has been cleared.

6.7.4 The Koestler awards attracted 23 entries for which three bronze and three commended awards were achieved; five items were included in the Koestler annual

exhibition at the Southbank Centre. Prisoners have also created paintings for the walls of the visitors' centre, the recording studio and the Listeners' room. A group of prisoners has continued to participate in origami sessions, creating cards and other items to raise money for the Friends of Erlestoke.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

7.1.1 The education department delivers a range of accredited functional skills, vocational and professional and social development courses. Enrolments were restricted in the period until the end of June due to Covid-19 measures, as the classrooms could only operate at 50% capacity. When operating at full capacity there is an average of 45 prisoners in education at any one time.

7.1.2 The department has been beset by staffing issues, with recruitment and retention of suitable tutors creating a significant challenge. Maths teaching suffered in particular due to the resignation of three tutors in succession. Erlestoke's learning and skills manager is to be commended for the positive and purposeful atmosphere which has prevailed despite these operational difficulties.

7.1.3 As a result of Covid-19 restrictions and tutor issues, there were only 61 enrolments on Maths (Entry-level 3/Level 2/Level 1) courses and 71 enrolments on English courses against a planned delivery of 122 for each subject. Non-completion stood at 24% for both subjects; there was an overall success rate of 52% in Maths and 79% in English among those completing their courses.

7.1.4 In addition to classroom-based teaching, a member of staff does outreach work with prisoners working towards Entry-level 2 English. Furthermore, a part-time member of staff was appointed in January to promote learning through the Shannon Trust. There are nine Shannon Trust mentors and a mentor coordinator among the prison population.

7.1.5 The new Essential Digital skills qualification for which the prison is an early adopter, was introduced to replace former IT qualifications. Unfortunately, a tutor vacancy has disrupted course delivery. Non-accredited courses were offered in subjects such as money management, art, art enrichment, ceramics and sculpture.

7.1.6 Twelve prisoners were enrolled with the Open University on degree-level study in courses including criminology, business studies, health and fitness, history of art and astrology.

7.1.7 Laptops meant that WayoutTV was less attractive; the contract for this service is not being continued in 2023/24. The Way2learn element, enabling prisoners to self-study in-cell, has not had many course enrolments. However, a notable success was one prisoner who had been self-isolating for a number of months and who completed two modules. This element of the contract will be continued.

7.1.8 The contract for the library sits with Wiltshire County Council until 2025 but the cost of delivering services has caused difficulties for the provider. The prison has had to subsidise the contract and, in particular, the replenishment of the book stock. In the most recent library annual report, 80% of prisoners said they use the library

and 54% said they visit the library once a week; this is a high percentage compared to the usage of public libraries which is nationally reported as 34% of the population.

7.1.9 Storybook Dads is an initiative where a prisoner is recorded reading a story for his child/children. It has benefitted since November from the services of a volunteer who comes to the prison to film the recordings. Eighteen recordings have taken place to date. A Book Bag initiative provides prisoners with the opportunity to select a book to give to his child on a visit.

## 7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 The problem of recruiting and retaining staff has been an on-going issue for the provision of vocational training.

7.2.2 It was encouraging to see the textile workshop finally open in October 2022. However, the bricks and plastering workshop remains dormant and attempts to recruit a tutor have been abandoned. Research took place to assess the cost to switch this facility so that plumbing training could be delivered but the funding needed was considered prohibitive.

7.2.3 Qualifications and outcomes achieved were as follows:

Sector	Awarding body	Achievements	Comments
Carpentry	City & Guilds	10 Level 1 Certificates 11 Level 2 Diplomas	
Fork-lift truck/ Warehousing	AITT	115 individual modules 8 Certificates	Tutor absence since March 2023
Horticulture	City & Guilds	43 Level 1 Certificates	
Textiles	NCFE	30 Level 1 Awards 22 Level 2 Certificates	
Catering	City & Guilds	5 Level 1 Diplomas	Staff absence impacted delivery
Cleaning	NCFE	43 Level 2 Certificates	Tutor vacancy since October 2022
Education/learning support	City & Guilds	30 Level 2/3 Awards 2 Level 3 Certificates	

7.2.4 As of 31 March 2023, 117 prisoners were in vocational employment. Work opportunities were offered in bike maintenance, textiles, packaging goods for retail companies, recycling and farms and gardens. These prisoners have a 'Progress in Workshops' record completed by their supervisors to record achievements in soft skills such as problem solving, adaptability and initiative.

7.2.5 Seven prisoners working in the main prison kitchen were under the supervision of the Clink charity, six of whom are working towards a City & Guilds qualification in food preparation and cookery and one who has completed the certificate and working towards the diploma. A Clink supervisor spends two days a week at Erlestoke and works with employers to create interviews and opportunities for prisoners on release.



7.2.6 In addition to vocational employment, there were 85 wing workers including cleaners/serverly workers, garden guardians, green champions, barbers, laundry workers and painters. A further 58 prisoners were employed as orderlies or peer mentors in the gym, kitchen, chapel, education, healthcare, reception, staff canteen, digital skills and the DRW.

7.2.7 There were 118 prisoners, or 25% of the population, who were unemployed as of 31 March 2023. Some of these were due to enrol on courses starting at the beginning of April but there were approximately 80 prisoners who were not in work, education or on drug/rehabilitation programmes at any one time during the year.

### **7.3 Offender management, progression**

7.3.1 The understaffing seen last year in the offender management unit (OMU) has been addressed and for most of the year the department has had a full complement. Regrettably in March this year, two probation officers left and the current OMU lead also left to join the probation service in the community.

7.3.2 Prison offender managers (POMs) and probation offender managers all have very high caseloads as do the case administrators, which by their admission, is stressful and has had a negative impact on contact time with prisoners. Key working is cited as critical to the running of the offender management in custody (OMiC) model<sup>7</sup> but the prison has not been able to address this thoroughly due to under resourcing of staff (see 5.3.3).

7.3.3 The outstanding backlog of 50-60 offender assessment system (OASys) plans has been cleared (having been outsourced to an agency), with just eight outstanding cases; newly arrived prisoners in the main have their OASys completed within 12 weeks. Completion of these plans has been a source of frustration for several years and the improvement is to be commended.

7.3.4 Digital advances in the form of in-cell telephones and laptops have greatly improved communication and prisoners are allowed one application to the OMU per fortnight. There are time constraints for a reply and open communication if necessary for further questioning.

7.3.5 The new Ministry of Justice directive<sup>8</sup> regarding progress to open conditions has caused alarm among the prison population since it was introduced in June 2022. It has led to a sharp increase in knockbacks for those applying for category D status with many asking 'how do I prove I am not now a risk to the public'? This is clearly unsatisfactory for prisoners, many of whom have completed all the required courses and programmes requested of them and feel frustrated at becoming stuck in the system. Despite the fact there are now more places available in open prisons, these are mostly full in the south of the country, so prisoners are being sent north, far from family and support networks.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspections/omic-thematic/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/offenders-to-face-toughest-test-yet-for-open-prison-moves#full-publication-update-history>

7.3.6 Erlestoke continues to be a national resource providing courses for prisoners who require their completion for resettlement, to assist in their parole board hearings, or to apply for early release. Outcomes were as follows:

- Kaizen IPV strand (which at Erlestoke only deals with behaviours around intimate partner violence offences): 16 prisoners started with 13 completions
- Be New ME Plus (BNM+ Mixed Cohort) (which at Erlestoke pilots a mixed group of prisoners with intimate partner violence and general violence offences and is tailored to prisoners with learning difficulties): 7 prisoners started with 4 completions
- Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) (which deals with general offending which can include but is not limited to acquisitive, violence, intimate partner violence): 58 prisoners started with 47 completions

7.3.7 Prisoners are prioritised for eligibility for these courses through a national process and those who qualify are moved to Erlestoke for a personal needs assessment (PNA). However, after arrival, prisoners often wait months for a PNA which results in frustration with some then not willing to engage. The newly appointed programmes manager is hoping that an initial filtering process could be completed prior to arrival at Erlestoke. Prisoners felt that addressing the PNA in their original prison prior to transfer would be beneficial.

7.3.8 **Progression Regime:** As of March 2023, there were 47 prisoners on the PR. This fluctuated during the year as prisoners are released, go on to open conditions, are deselected or resign from the PR.

7.3.9 The prison is resourced to include a total of 80 prisoners for the PR but until Kennet wing is refurbished, this has not been viable. Currently, prisoners are housed mainly on Imber wing with others spread around the estate which is unsatisfactory. About half of the PR population are IPPs, some of whom are many years over tariff and who have become stuck in the system. IPPs are therefore prioritised within the selection process. Lifers, extended determinate sentences (EDS), recalls and those not suitable for open conditions make up the rest of the PR community.

7.3.10 Until Kennet wing is completed the PR struggles to provide sufficient resources to enable prisoners to progress through their sentence and prove to parole boards they are fit for release. Prisoners invited to join PR with the intention of demonstrating ways in which they have changed and reduced their risk are being denied this opportunity and their progression consequently hindered.

7.3.11 Outcomes during the reporting year for PR prisoners were as follows:

- 17 prisoners were released into the community
- 2 prisoners went on to open prisons
- 3 prisoners did not succeed at parole hearings

7.3.12 At the end of the reporting year, there were 155 prisoners serving indeterminate sentences, 46 of whom were IPP prisoners. Several prisoners sentenced to eight years have been incarcerated for 17 years; one prisoner with an original tariff of two years has been in prison for 14 years. Many others tell similar stories.

### 7.3.13 During the reporting year

- 11 IPP prisoners were released
- 1 IPP prisoner went on to an open prison
- 3 IPP prisoners were recalled
- 2 IPP prisoners were refused parole
- 2 IPP prisoners were granted category D status by the Parole Board but then refused permission from the Secretary of State

7.3.14 The recent decision to reject the recommendation that IPP prisoners should be resentenced<sup>9</sup> was relayed to prisoners in a letter which caused dismay and arguably a final loss of hope of ever being released. The indefinite nature of detention for IPP prisoners has adversely impacted prisoners' health and wellbeing. IPP prisoners spoken to during the year expressed resignation and desperation. One prisoner suggested 'why not create a category D establishment specifically for IPPs so we can be given full attention and concentration to our needs for release to be granted'. Discussions with those who were willing to engage have said:

*'It has become a recall merry-go-round'*

*'We are being recalled for minor breaches unrelated to the original offence'*

*'I have lost all meaning in life'*

*'I will never be free'*

*'The system is cruel and de-humanising'*

*'I do everything they ask you to do, and then they ask you to do more'*

*'There is no light at the end of the tunnel'*

## 7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 Social visits resumed during the year. At one stage, frequency of visits returned to pre Covid-19 levels. However, due mainly to the lack of uptake by visitors, Saturday and Sunday morning visits were cancelled. Unfortunately, the national website was not amended accordingly. The Rehabilitation and Care Services Group manage the visit booking system and staffing issues have affected service delivery. Both prisoners and visitors have complained that the system has been frustrating to use. If booking by telephone, visitors have frequently had to wait in excess of two hours for calls to be answered by the call centre. The website often has not confirmed a booking until two days after it had been made, making it difficult for visitors to plan visits and arrange travel.

7.4.2 There have been occasions when the visits centre outside the prison gate has been shut and frustratingly visitors have either not been collected or have been late for their visit due to a breakdown in internal communications.

7.4.3 Social video calls have continued to be popular for prisoners whose families live further away or cannot afford the time and expense of travel. In-cell telephones have allowed more privacy for prisoners when making family contact. Restoring family days has been welcomed; five days were held attended by 43 prisoners and their families.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmjust/933/report.html#heading-2>

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

### **7.5.1 During the reporting year:**

- 172 prisoners were released back into the community
- 42 prisoners went on to category D establishments
- 91 prisoners were transferred to other category C prisons
- 8 were re-categorised to B status

7.5.2 The Resettlement Hub was renamed the Employment Hub (EH) during the year, reflecting the importance of finding work for newly released prisoners. Once within the 12 week release window, the EH will contact prisoners and provide help with obtaining bank accounts, a citizen card and birth certificates. An Employer Needs Assessment Form is given to all prisoners detailing all work and education opportunities taken and completed in prison with additional information about their release accommodation, financial support and work preferences.

7.5.3 A Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) representative provides advice on benefits. A housing specialist has been appointed to assist prisoners in finding somewhere to live on release. It is widely acknowledged that those who leave with no fixed address will find it extremely difficult to secure a job without accommodation.

7.5.4 It is noted, regrettably, that for all the hard work undertaken for prison leavers, major barriers to success include the following:

- Accommodation is often only confirmed in the final week or two before release and may not be located near a secured or potential job.
- Other barriers include disengagement, substance abuse, mental health issues, exclusion zones (where past crimes were committed) and homelessness (which results in many going to an approved hostel with no employment in the pipeline).

7.5.5 Job opportunities available in the community are introduced by the New Futures Network (NFN). During the year, the EH has accessed help with employment for prisoner leavers which has included staging events such as 'Unlocking Construction'; fifteen prisoners attended. Most referrals have been to O'Neill and Brennan, a construction company. Cidori, a training company, helps prisoners acquire CSCS (construction skills certification scheme) cards which are mandatory for working in the construction industry. An employment advertisement board provides information on all job vacancies.

7.5.6 The newly formed Employment Advisory Board forms links with companies who are committed to employing prison leavers. Additionally, the prison has tapped into a 'broker' based at HMP Leyhill, who is tasked with carrying out a similar networking role. Construction companies and national hospitality chains, such as Greene King and Wagamama, are both researched and approached for jobs.

## The work of the IMB

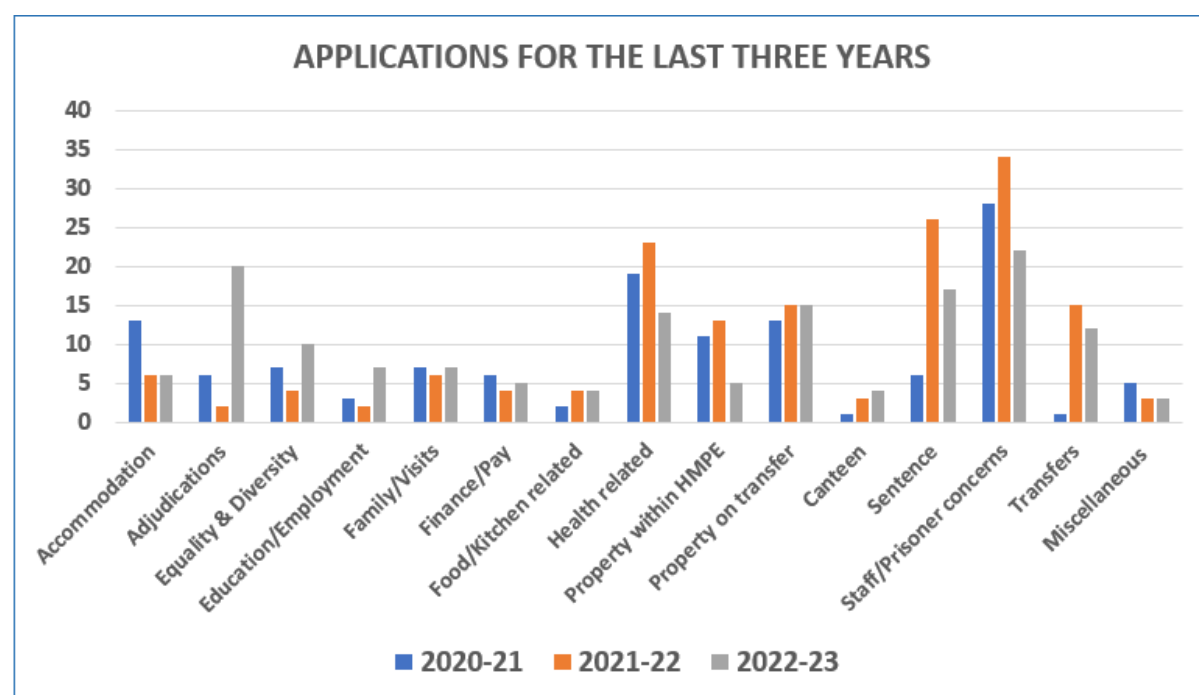
The Board carried out a full year of visits and attended several meetings and training activities. Visits increased to 358 compared to 289 in the last reporting year.

Regular meetings with the Governor provided useful updates on the prison status.

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	13
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	358
Total number of segregation reviews attended	12

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



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

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	6	6
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	2	20
C	Equality	4	10
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	2	7
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	6	7
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	4	5
F	Food and kitchens	4	4
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	23	14
H1	Property within this establishment	13	5
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	15	15
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	3	4
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	26	17
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	34	22
K	Transfers	15	12
L	Miscellaneous	3	3
	Total number of applications	160	151



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