



# **Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP The Mount**

**For reporting year  
1 March 2022 – 28 February 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

1. HMP The Mount is built on one side of a disused airfield adjacent to the village of Bovington in Hertfordshire. It is just over a mile from a mainline railway station and is well served by bus routes. This makes it a very open and accessible site for walkers, dog-walkers and of course those who wish to propel packages over the fence, as well as drone activity.
2. HMP The Mount opened in 1987 as a Young Offenders Institution. Initially there were five residential wings: Annexe, Brister, Ellis, Fowler, and Lakes. Most of these wings have their cells configured in a four-spur design on two landings, which creates difficulty in observing prisoner behaviour. The exception being the Annexe, which has 44 rooms with 50 inhabitants, with the recent introduction of bunk beds. There are separate wash, shower and toilet facilities, a lounge and free access to the kitchen.
3. HMP The Mount was re-rolled as a category C adult male training prison in 1989. During the 1990s, two more wings, Howard and Dixon, were built. These are of a two-landing galleried design that allows improved observation of prisoners. In 2007 a further wing, Narey, became operational, housing mainly older prisoners. The construction of Nash Wing was completed in 2015, with 94 double cells and 62 single cells. New kitchen, gymnasium and healthcare units were also constructed at that time. The prison's current operational capacity is around 1,040 prisoners, with an increase in double cells to house the additional numbers.<sup>1</sup>
4. The Mount is a hybrid prison, with the aim of providing training and rehabilitation for 80% of its population and a resettlement service for the remaining 20% during the final 3-4 months of their sentence. The resettlement service is intended for prisoners from Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. There had been an anticipated increase in foreign nationals, but this has been put on hold.
5. There has been considerable lack of flexibility, with residential units being reserved for specific work areas so that those having to move wings for various reasons may well lose their employment as well. During the reporting period this has been eased considerably and it is anticipated that it will soon cease which the IMB would support.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's position at the time of reporting, but may be subject to change following further validation and therefore may not always tally with Official Statistics later published by the Ministry of Justice.

6. Due to the national increased demand for prison places, HMP The Mount has had to take in increasing numbers of prisoners, which not only puts pressure on areas such as reception, but also the residential units, where additional places have needed to be created by introducing bunks or additional beds into single cells. This is unacceptable, not only due to restricted space for possessions, but also because of the lack of privacy for individual prisoners.

#### **Accommodation as at 28 February 2023**

Operational capacity	Current roll	Spaces available	No. of cells out of action
1040	1025	0	5

#### **Prisoners by length of sentence**

<b>Length of sentence</b>	<b>Number of prisoners</b>	
	<b>February 2022</b>	<b>February 2023</b>
Less than 12 months	22	42
12 months to 2 years	41	64
2 – 3 years	105	107
3 – 4 years	116	120
4 – 10 years	386	367
More than 10 years	190	182
Lifers	106	101
Indeterminately sentenced	32	29
Sentence expired detainees	13	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1011</b>	<b>1020</b>

### **3. Executive summary**

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

1. During the year the prison went from a lockdown regime to a more relaxed regime during the summer months when slowly the Covid restrictions were being eased. But when the prison was classified as an 'outbreak site' early in the year, restrictions were reintroduced. Also, due to the shortage of prison officers and other staff, the prisoners were still experiencing limited opportunities for education, programmes and activities.
2. The instructions for managing Covid were given by Gold Command in head office, which nationally directed the regime for prisons during the pandemic and the relaxation of the regime. The Mount was classified a number of times in the early part of the year as an outbreak site, which restricted the regime, particularly time out of cells and the movement of prisoners to education or work. The workshops, education, gym and library were closed intermittently during the outbreak classification. During these times, prisoners were often locked down for up to 23 hours a day, which was damaging to their mental and physical health. There were some offending behaviour programmes, but with limited numbers, so not all prisoners were able to complete their sentence plans. At the end of the year, some programmes had still not fully restarted, particularly drug rehabilitation. For much of the year prisoners have not had adequate time out of their cells, due to the shortage of staff.
3. The current regime is very slowly returning to limited free flow movements, which should allow more prisoners to participate in education workshops and other activities, but this is at a very early stage. The shortage of staff and instructors will still limit the activities available.
4. Social visits were resumed, but with reduced numbers, early in the year. Secure video calls, in-cell telephones and email-a-prisoner are continuing to help prisoners stay in touch with their families. The installation of in-cell technology including tablets has been well received by prisoners. Throughout most of the year no refreshments were available in the visitor centre or visits hall.
5. Staffing levels have not improved through the year despite the national recruitment programme. This has resulted in a lack of access to activities and programmes. Despite the staffing levels, the prison has had its capacity increased, resulting in single cells being converted to double cells.
6. IMB members have been fully active throughout the year. Only during the outbreak site classification did members not visit the wings affected.

### **3.2 Main judgements**

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

The prison is in the midst of a crisis caused by the ready availability of a particularly pernicious form of Spice laced with Fentanyl. Code Blues are common and sadly there were nine deaths in custody, five of which were apparently of drug overdoses.

The problems caused by the drugs are straining staff too. The prison is trying to crack down on the entry of drugs into the establishment. At present drones are the biggest problem to combat.

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

As the measures required during lockdown have been eased there has been an improvement in the treatment of prisoners despite the shortage of staff, which has at times caused limited time out of cells. The morale among staff and prisoners has been low given the very difficult year.

A major concern is the conversion of single-person cells to two-person cells, and the total lack of any form of privacy and storage capacity for personal property.

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

Unfortunately, the cancellation of hospital appointments has got worse during the year. Appointments in healthcare are also now hugely affected by the lack of escorts. While the prison agrees that health should be a priority, they always seem to be asked to cancel escorts because of officer shortages.

Waiting times have increased during the year for appointments to see;

- dentist – 25 weeks
- optician – 12 to 24 weeks
- physiotherapist – 10 to 12 weeks
- psychiatrist – 2 to 3 weeks.

Also, waiting times are still increasing, which is a major concern.

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

There has been little in the way of resettlement programmes during the year except for one-to-one contact, mainly using the in-cell telephone. It was only towards the end of the year that face-to-face appointments were started. This will be the third year in a row that prisoners have been released without having completed the offending behaviour programmes included in their sentence plans.

### **3.3 Main areas for development**

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

The Board is concerned that, as a training and resettlement prison, the prison is failing to provide meaningful education, employment and training. This is made worse by the prison having a number of short-term prisoners arriving. Too many prisoners are released before completing their offending behaviour programmes and with no accommodation on release.

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

As last year, staffing levels are a major concern, particularly as the number of prisoners increases. The continued loss of experienced officers means that there are fewer opportunities for mentoring when new recruits arrive, and too often they have to go straight into the front line, due to staff shortages.

Education programmes have not improved during the reporting period, due to the lack of investment. Too few prisoners are enabled to access programmes to help them on release. During the year 50% of workshops stood empty due to the lack of instructors or any meaningful activities leading to qualifications to improve employment opportunities on release.

There needs to be a complete overhaul of the use of the workshops and how they can better serve the needs of prisoners in terms of training and future employment.

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

Some free flow movement throughout the prison must be introduced to enable prisoners to access education, workshops and other activities. The use of prisoners in helping to maintain the estate, like the decoration of some wings, was very successful and should be employed much more. The conversion of single cells to doubles needs to be monitored to ensure that prisoners' health and wellbeing are not adversely affected.

It is disappointing that, with the number of prisoners waiting for category D transfer, the prison still fails to provide release on temporary license (ROTL) opportunities, despite a number of local companies being interested.

### **3.4 Progress since the last report**

Little progress has been made in opening up the prison to many prisoners who throughout the year were locked up for long periods. The lack of education, work and other activities, including the gym and library, has had a damaging effect on the physical and mental health of prisoners. During the classification as a Covid outbreak site, prisoners have not had adequate time out of cells for exercise and domestics, as whole wings/spurs were closed down.

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

#### **4.1 Reception and induction**

As previously, all prisoners should be received into reception before 4.30pm, as the stated latest arrival time. If transport is expected to arrive after that time, the prison should be informed in advance. This frequently does not happen and arriving prisoners cannot be processed properly, which is unsatisfactory.

Incoming prisoners have a healthcare assessment, property management, a cell-sharing risk assessment that goes with them to their residential unit, and an x-ray body scan. If a prisoner is suspected of secreting an illicit item, they are given a 24-hour amnesty in the Care and Separation unit (CSU) and then re-scanned. If this does not produce the item, they are kept in the CSU until cleared by body scan.

Prisoners go on to the induction unit, where they get first-night support and are issued with bedding and personal items which move with them. Following this, they are offered an initial induction given by fellow prisoners, with pertinent information, where they are encouraged to ask questions. They then go to education, where they get an educational assessment and interview with Forward Trust Information and Guidance, which produces a plan for the prisoner's development whilst in prison.

The prison officers work hard to ensure that this programme is maintained, but there has been a huge increase in the number of prisoners entering the establishment, particularly those on short sentences. All prisoners have the same programme, which puts considerable pressure on reception staff and induction wing staff.

Previously, the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) development plan was seldom followed through, due to restrictions on employment in the prison, lack of employment or the limited number of courses being offered. However, these restrictions are being lifted slowly, and hopefully next year there will be better news.

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

Last year nine prisoners died while in custody at The Mount. This is an historically high figure.

Two prisoners died from natural causes. One died in hospital after a short final illness. The other prisoner died in the prison after a final illness lasting several months. IMB members visited him regularly and he was as comfortable as could be expected in a prison environment thanks to the efforts of healthcare and wing staff and many small kindnesses from prisoners. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) has confirmed also that his treatment was on a par with that which he could have expected in the community.

Two prisoners apparently died at their own hands (though this has yet to be confirmed by the coroner). Neither prisoner was on an assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) document or otherwise known to the prison's safer custody team.

Five prisoners apparently died from accidental drug overdoses. The Mount has been plagued by a particularly noxious form of Spice, where the base of synthetic cannabis has been mixed with other substances, including Fentanyl.

### **Support for troubled prisoners**

The prison opened 298 ACCTs in the year, an average of 25 a month. The numbers opened varied somewhat from month to month, with a high of 33 in October and a low of 18 in November. There is no apparent pattern in the month-to-month variation. IMB members review the majority of open ACCT documents and talk with prisoners who are being cared for. Generally, the standard of care is good, with the ACCT documents evidencing that prisoners' problems are understood, that the prisoners are receiving the support they need, that healthcare is involved appropriately and that there is proper case management.

At any time the prison will have up to 10 prisoners who are not covered by the ACCT protocol but who have chosen to isolate themselves from the prison regime. These self-isolators are known to and managed by the prison's safer custody team and are visited from time to time by IMB members on rota duty. Prisoners typically put themselves behind their doors to try to force a transfer to another prison because they are in debt and are being threatened, because they fear rival gang members in the prison or simply because they want to be nearer to their families. The safer custody team monitors these prisoners, try to ensure that they have at least a basic regime and try to resolve their issues by moves to different wings. But some prisoners are intractable and prison transfers are hard to arrange so that, as at the end of March, one prisoner had been in self-isolation for over five months trying to get a transfer to a prison near Merseyside.

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

There were 77 assaults on staff during the year, of which 10 were classed as serious. The number of assaults varied from month to month, with a peak of 11 assaults (one serious) and a low of two assaults (one serious). There is no pattern or trend to the month-to-month variation.

There were 90 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, of which again 10 were classed as serious. The number of assaults varied from month to month, with a peak of 13 (two serious) and a low of three (none serious). Again there is no pattern or trend to the month-to-month variation.

The safer custody team is well led and staffed by dedicated, hard-working people. Almost always when members raise concerns about individual prisoners we find that they are already known to and being managed by the safer custody team.

#### **4.4 Use of force**

Use of force is very carefully monitored in the prison, with weekly meetings, when staff are available, with the use of force coordinator and deputy governor, as well as other interested parties including the IMB. Footage from body-worn cameras is reviewed for incidents of concern and used for feedback and training purposes.

All staff involved in an incident get a debrief and can feed back into the debrief on lessons learned. Prisoners who are in the CSU following an incident will be spoken to by the duty governor. A process is being put in place whereby prisoners located in the CSU may have the opportunity to view the video footage of the event. Other than that, it is only viewed by prisoners on application.

To date, PAVA has not been issued in the prison except for one control and restraint instructor who has it for training purposes.

There were 333 uses of force in our reporting year, of which 46 (around 15%) were planned and 287 (around 85%) were unplanned. The number of incidents varied from month to month, with a low of 18 incidents and a high of 46. There are signs that the number of times force is being used is rising as the prison is reopened, with very nearly twice as many uses of force in January and February 2023 as in the same months in 2022.

The prison monitors uses of force by ethnicity and there are no significant differences between the ethnicity of the prisoners against whom force is used and the make-up of the prison, except that prisoners self-identifying as Travellers account for 7% of the uses of force but only 2% of the prison's population.

The use of force is reviewed by the prison weekly, with CCTV and body-worn video camera (BWVC) footage of incidents being scrutinised. Members of the IMB are invited to all of these meetings and attend from time to time. No IMB member has ever reported that a use of force was unwarranted. The use of force meetings ensure that good practices are followed and encouraged.

#### **4.5 Preventing Illicit Items**

The trafficking of illicit items into the prison is a huge problem, despite all efforts to prevent it. Mobile phones are endemic, as is contaminated Spice sadly leading to five drug-related deaths in custody during the year. An anti-corruption unit in the prison has recently been set up to tackle this, as it has been concluded that the majority of illicit items are trafficked by staff and visitors.

Currently there is airport-style searching (with a scanner) for all staff and visitors at all times of the day. There is a one-way system, with exit through different systems

of doors. At entry point, everyone passes through a scanner and bag and body searches are carried out. A list of prohibited items has been distributed and search dogs are in frequent attendance. Visitors to prisoners are all searched in this way and dogs have had some finds.

Measures have been taken to stop impregnated paper entering the prison by the copying of all personal mail and a code system for S39 mail and all incoming letters are subject to dog scrutiny and Rapiscan drug detection screening, correspondence are indeed not so. There is a team of dogs with a variety of specialities who carry out passive searches on visitors and active searches for drugs and alcohol on the residential units and cells.

The other major area for access of illicit items is throwovers. The position of the prison, surrounded by a housing estate, film studios and a disused airfield, allows for easy movement of individuals who wish to throw over. Throwovers from the area surrounding the prison, using tennis balls, fruit and pipes have been discovered despite the physical barriers surrounding the prison. Netting and the vigilance of staff are the only prevention for these. Drones are also in use. Using mobile phone technology, they can be accurately directed to cell windows; the glass is levered out by the prisoner and the packages received. New windows or grilles would assist in preventing this method.

Staff shortages have led to a reduction in mandatory drug testing, programmes of random cell searches and programmes to tackle drug and alcohol dependence or abuse.

The abuse of drugs, especially adulterated spice, is the biggest threat to safety at The Mount. The deaths from drug abuse, shocking though they are, are only the tip of the iceberg, with Code Blues, where a prisoner falls unconscious and struggles to breathe, being an everyday event. New psychoactive substance (NPS) use is particularly concerning and has resulted in high levels of Code Blues being called. Despite this, and the danger of the current version of NPS, demand remains high.

Stopping the abuse of drugs is a whole prison problem. Much focus is placed on reducing the supply of drugs by tightening security but while this is necessary it is not sufficient (and in any case as one route is closed another opens). It is equally important to reduce the demand for drugs and here the prison has much to do. Too many prisoners are confined to their cells for extended periods without access to purposeful activity and turn to drugs to beat the boredom. Moreover, there has been next to no provision of services that could help prisoners give up drugs. On the day that one prisoner died from an overdose, the Forward Trust, which holds the contract to provide substance abuse services at The Mount, employed only one case worker, and they were only able to triage new arrivals at the prison and secure continuing support in the community for prisoners on drug maintenance programmes who were about to be released.

There is a high demand for fermenting liquid (hooch) as well, but efforts have been made to reduce the production by removing sugar from the canteen list and returning excess fruit from the wings. This does seem to be having some positive results.

Prisoners arriving from other establishments pass through the body scanner. The number being scanned has increased significantly from just under 20% earlier in the period to 91% in December.

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

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

The overall estate was generally clean and tidy, with occasional littering being a feature at times. Recent painting improved the environment, and the addition of colourful murals (by the prisoners) in some wings has brightened up entrance areas. Farms and gardens provide year-round colour in the grounds through a range of flowers and plants. The ongoing problem with rats seemed to have been abated by the use of feral cats, though the rats' obvious return recently has necessitated pest control methods.

On the wings there is continuing concern over doubling up of cells, especially those designed for single occupancy. The lack of space available for extra furniture means individual prisoners do not have space for their personal possessions let alone personal space. Privacy was further compromised by a shortage of curtains around some in-cell toilets, though the prison management has an objective to rectify this. It was regrettable that prisoners needed to use blankets etc as makeshift solutions. Similarly, it was discovered that some newly arrived prisoners did not have pillows on their beds, hardly ideal given the stress that such prisoners might have at the time. Prisoners also complained of 'sagging' mattresses.

Heating during the unusually cold weather was mostly managed satisfactorily, but on Ellis wing it regrettably took some time to provide supplementary heaters and to mend the system.

The poor condition of some showers was noted throughout the year and although there is a programme of refurbishment, it is too slow to keep up with the usual wear and tear. Periodic problems with provision of hot water were noted a couple of times during December.

The kitchen, despite rising costs and the small allocation of funds, provides several choices of food with due consideration of the religious and dietary requirements of prisoners. The main contention, as previously, is the early time at which the hot meal is provided. On most days this is around 11am. As the year progressed it was agreed that the hot meal could be provided in the early evening but regime changes caused by staffing shortages meant this could not be sustained. A hybrid system of 50% having an evening hot meal, alternating weekly, was designed and still operates.

Quality of the food is good given the numbers being catered for. On several occasions, the food was complimented by individual prisoners, though a few grumbles prevailed. Portion size seemed appropriate and there was opportunity for extra servings when requested. Individual prisoner menu choices could not always be fulfilled due to shortages of certain ingredients. However, farms and gardens did a sterling job in donating a significant amount of fresh fare, including: 150 kilos of

onions, 256 kilos of tomatoes and over 1,000 cucumbers – with the added benefit of prisoners managing the growing process.

The wing food serveries were staffed by the prisoners, who, occasionally, did not wear appropriate clothes. Prisoners continued to ‘cook’ their own food on unsuitable equipment such as toasters, so it is hoped that the prison will address this issue by providing cooking facilities that facilitate safe food preparation on the wings.

## **5.2 Segregation**

The CSU continued to house some very difficult prisoners – many with behavioural issues. It is also seen by prisoners as the place to get to in order to transfer out to another prison.

In the recent period, many prisoners have come into the CSU due to the effects of taking spice. Some of them ended up in special accommodation. Of the six put in special accommodation over the period, five had assaulted staff or damaged cells while under the influence.

There were six reported dirty protests, of which three were by one prisoner and two by another.

One prisoner was sectioned while at The Mount, but is now back in mainstream prison.

There were 21 prisoners held in the CSU for 42 days and over – the longest being 143 days.

At the time of writing this report, one prisoner had been held in the CSU for over six months. He is serving an imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentence and has a record of poor behaviour in prison. He wants to move to a prison nearer to his family in the north of England and where he can access the offending behaviour programmes on his sentence plan. Staff at The Mount have tried without success to find a prison willing to accept him. The IMB are at a loss to understand why the prison service is unable or unwilling to direct a suitable prison to take him.

Every effort is made to send prisoners back to the residential units, but this is not possible in certain cases where transfer out is the only solution.

The care and attention received by the prisoners in the CSU is very good – noted by the IMB in several weekly rota reports and also by the prisoners themselves.

Regarding the physical state of the unit, the shower that was reported out of commission in the last report is still out of commission and the heating in part of the CSU is still problematic.

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

There is, for the most part, a high level of professionalism and respect between most staff and prisoners. However, there has also been a considerable increase in the number of assaults on staff, from 56 last year to 77 this reporting year, of which 10

have been serious. This could be attributed to the high level of drugs in the establishment, which affect the prisoners' behaviour.

The key worker scheme is an important part of HM Prison and Probation Service's (HMPPS) response to self-inflicted deaths, self-harm and violence in the prison. It is intended to improve safety by engaging with prisoners, building better relationships between prison officers and prisoners and helping prisoners settle into life in prison. Prison officers are allocated up to eight prisoners, on a one-on-one basis, for the officers to spend an average of 90 minutes per prisoner every other week for delivery of the key worker role. All prisoners at The Mount have been allocated a key worker.

However, it is worth noting that the prison has suffered significant problems in staffing levels and staff turnover in the last 12 months and currently the level of key work delivered averages 20% of that scheduled to be delivered. This is insufficient to achieve the aims outlined above.

#### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

A programme of inspirational speakers ran over the period and these speakers were well received by those that attended.

Representatives are appointed on each wing, where they are available to help/advise those with issues. These representatives attend monthly meetings with governors where issues can be fed back and hopefully addressed.

This year, 127 discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) were submitted – down from 137 in the 2021/22 reporting period. Of those, 36 were not considered to be DIRFs, as against 23 last period. Six were upheld, as against none last period.

All six upheld DIRFs were incidents involving another prisoner not a staff member. No DIRFs related to staff discrimination were upheld.

Upheld resolutions included:

- prisoner who is the perpetrator in the incident being moved wings
- negative incentive findings being removed from NOMIS

#### **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

There has been a resumption of full congregational services in the chapel after the long period of holding separate faith services on the wings, the practice since the start of Covid. The restoration of services was slower than desired but, nevertheless, has been greeted with enthusiasm by all.

This year, 86% of prisoners reported having a faith, with approximately 50% of those broadly aligning to Christianity, making it the largest faith group. The second largest was Muslims. These were much the same proportions as previous years.

The chaplaincy team has a new half-time member, though it still requires a Church of England chaplain. The pastoral service, which is very much appreciated, continues to serve individual prisoners well.

## **5.6 Incentives schemes**

The current incentives policy at The Mount dates from January 2020 and is undergoing a process of revision, as the pandemic instigated a directive from HMPPS that, in the spirit of fairness and prisoner wellbeing, all prisoners on basic should be progressed to standard.

While the 2020 policy is felt to be particularly comprehensive and appears to be fair and even-handed in its application, the provisions do not allow for putting the prison back to a position where enhanced levels are awarded only to those residents who made exceptional contributions to the prison community (as defined in the policy).

As a consequence, coming out of the pandemic has not been addressed in a policy review and this may have led to some inequalities in the application of incentive levels.

However, the IMB received few complaints about the application of the policy, there being 13 complaints last year in the category, which covers adjudications as well. The main complaint is that an incentives warning cannot be removed from NOMIS, which seems unfair, even if counterbalanced by another entry. This leads to concerns about the effects on applications for enhanced level and category D status.

One area of concern to some prisoners is how the incentive processes are being applied with equality in respect of race. Examination of records show this not to be a valid concern.

## **5.7 Complaints**

Complaint forms are available on all wings, which prisoners can use to make a complaint: for ordinary complaints (form COMP1), appeals (form COMP1A) and confidential access (form COMP2).

These should be collected each week day from the secure mailbox, but frequently are not, leading to delays in processing. Prisoners should receive a response to their complaint within five working days of the complaint being logged. The complaint should be answered by someone who is capable of providing an adequate and meaningful reply and is not the focus of the complaint. If a complaint is still not resolved after an appeal, the PPO can be asked to look into it by the prisoner or an application to the IMB.

The number of complaints has increased compared to last year's figures, from 3,312 in 2021/22 to 3,974 in 2022/23, which could be partly explained by the increased prison population or a lack of satisfaction in the responses received. Below is a chart

showing the main categories of complaint being residential, finance, OASys (offender management unit) and reception/property.

	Overall	Residential	Residential %	Finance	Finance %	OASys	OASys %	Property/ Reception	Property/ Reception %
Mar-22	372	25	6.72%	63	16.94%	72	19.35%	26	6.99%
Apr-22	316	54	17.09%	44	13.92%	41	12.97%	29	9.18%
May-22	427	94	22.01%	61	14.29%	49	11.48%	29	6.79%
Jun-22	425	86	20.24%	58	13.65%	40	9.41%	40	9.41%
Jul-22	367	74	20.16%	49	13.35%	34	9.26%	21	5.72%
Aug-22	381	90	23.62%	41	10.76%	40	10.50%	20	5.25%
Sep-22	439	76	17.31%	118	26.88%	24	5.47%	32	7.29%
Oct-22	287	39	13.59%	38	13.24%	11	3.83%	21	7.32%
Nov-22	213	31	14.55%	15	7.04%	20	9.39%	15	7.04%
Dec-22	204	39	19.12%	21	10.29%	17	8.33%	13	6.37%
Jan-23	248	70	28.23%	23	9.27%	16	6.45%	19	7.66%
Feb-23	295	67	22.71%	22	7.46%	21	7.12%	33	11.19%

The following chart shows the number of complaints answered within the prescribed period of five days, which would show that on average only three-quarters of complaints are answered on time:

	Overall	Answered within 5 days	Answered within 5 days
Mar-22	372	317	85.22%
Apr-22	316	262	82.91%
May-22	427	345	80.80%
Jun-22	425	332	78.12%
Jul-22	367	299	81.47%
Aug-22	381	263	69.03%
Sep-22	439	338	76.99%
Oct-22	287	206	71.78%
Nov-22	213	145	68.08%

Dec-22	204	140	68.63%
Jan-23	248	184	74.19%
Feb-23	295	217	73.56%

The number of IMB applications for the period is 481 compared with 410 last year. This is a considerable increase which could be an indication of the lack of satisfaction with the prison's formal complaints procedure or due to the increased prison population.

It was noted that pre-pandemic, when key workers were operating effectively, the number of complaints reduced considerably, so hopefully they will be introduced again.

## 5.8 Property

The Board is not aware of any changes to the handling of property associated with the emergency regime that continued following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Applications from prisoners indicate that the management of prisoners' property continues to be a cause for concern among prisoners and hence for the Board. A significant percentage of applications – more than 25% – received by the Board during the reporting period related to property, an increase of nearly 10% on the previous reporting year. Of these, almost one-third of applications related to property during transfer or held within another establishment.

Complaints from prisoners to previous prisons regarding missing property, in general, go unanswered by the prison concerned and the Board is forced to ask its chair to contact the chair of the prisoner's previous prison to see if they can help expedite the missing property. The success rate of such correspondence is well short of where it should be.

The Board raised a number of issues relating to individual prisoners' difficulties in receiving property not contained within the three bags initially accepted. The impact on some prisoners, in terms of access to important and personal property, is considerable.

Additionally and importantly there are frequent delays with the transfer of monies to the prisoner from the transferring prison, with complaints going unanswered and often money never being transferred. This is unacceptable, with the privately managed prisons being the worst offenders.

The Board continues to be disappointed by the delays in resolving some instances of prisoners arriving without property. In some cases, prisoners have arrived with little or no property and it has taken more than three months to locate and return property to the prisoner. In quite a number of instances numerous requests to previous prisons to locate their property go unanswered. The Board also had a number of

instances where, often after a significant delay, property arrives at HMP The Mount but remains at reception. There does not seem to be a system whereby reception informs the prisoner, and it is not until after the prisoner submits an application that the prisoner is reunited with their possessions.

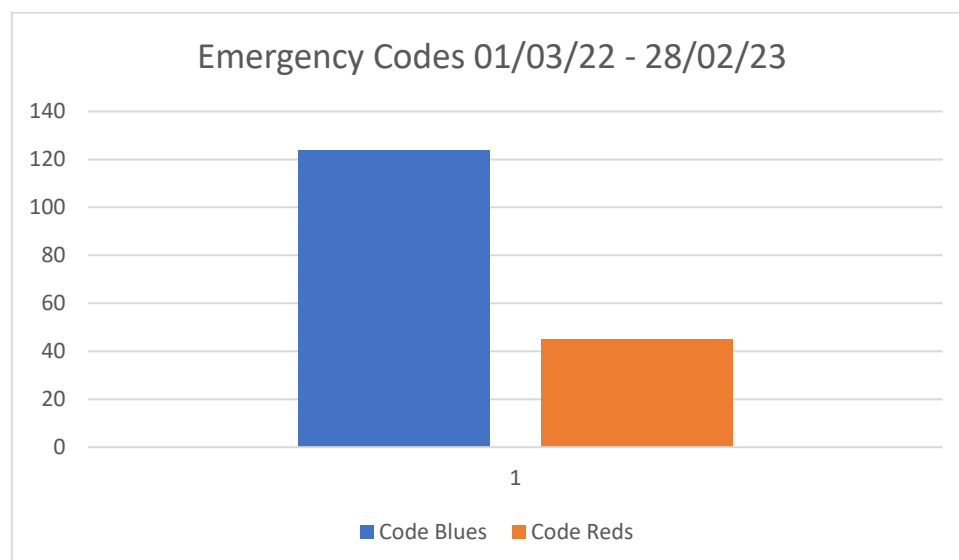
The Board hopes that a new national policy regarding the management of transfers of prisoners' property is being developed and would welcome a system where all prisoners' property travels with them when they are transferred. This would also benefit from a greater degree of tracking, tracing and handing over responsibility for prisoners' property.

## 6. Health and wellbeing

### 6.1 Healthcare general

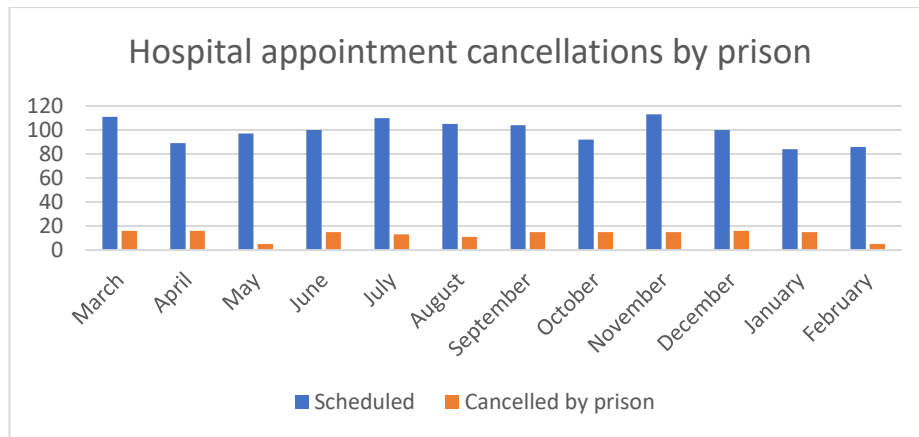
Healthcare services are still being provided by Practice Plus Group (PPG). They have their own complaints system, but prisoners can and do complain to the IMB. However, relatively few complaints are received and these are mostly concerned with delays to hospital appointments, consequent treatment and changes in medication.

The following chart depicts the number of Code Reds (where there is blood) and Blues (no blood) called over the period. Many of the Code Reds are caused by a small number of regular self-harmers, and there was a considerable decrease, from 90 in 2021/22 to 45 in 2022/23. The increase in Code Blues, from 117 in 2021/22 to 128 in 2022/23, is due to the amount of contaminated Spice that has infiltrated the establishment, with dangerous consequences, resulting in five deaths in custody.



### Hospital appointments

Outpatients' appointments have gone ahead as much as possible as per the following chart, but there have been regular cancellations due to lack of escort staff.



## 6.2 Physical healthcare

Healthcare has been set up for both platforms of telemedicine (Attend Anywhere and Visionable); however, the hospitals are having trouble with software and logistics. Healthcare is in active talks with the providers to try and make this a permanent implementation. This would have huge benefits for the prisoners, as it would reduce the need for hospital attendance.

Further services that are available for prisoners according to need and application are:

- Nurse triage
- GP
- Long-term conditions
- Ultrasound
- Sexual health
- Optician
- Physiotherapy
- NHS health checks
- Medications
- Mental health
- Psychology
- Psychiatry

## Dentistry

Dentistry is commissioned to Community Dental Services, but healthcare works in collaboration with them. Access during the year has been very restricted due to the regime and also due to the lack of appropriate ventilation in the dentistry department. However, recently access has been better and the dentistry offer has been increased, with the happy consequence of the waiting lists reducing.

## 6.3 Mental health

The service has continued to be available seven days a week with good effect.

Face-to-face consultations now take place.

The use of the in-cell telephone continues to allow mental health staff to keep in touch with clients.

The number of referrals last year was 841. This has increased to 985 in the current reporting period.

#### **6.4 Social care**

The Mount uses the local authority if a needs assessment is required. Aids can be provided to assist a prisoner. There is no specialist support or special unit in the prison. Palliative care is very limited within healthcare, and any end-of-life-care would have to be provided outside the prison.

The prison has few facilities for disabled prisoners, particularly in the residential unit for older prisoners. Wheelchair access to this residential unit is not catered for at all, including access to showers.

#### **6.5 Exercise, regime**

Recently the regime has relaxed considerably, but prisoners still have very little time out of cell unless they are in work, and work place numbers are limited.

All prisoners have TVs in their cells, in-cell telephones for restricted telephone numbers and internal calls, and access to social video calls. All residential units have their own small outdoor exercise areas, some with outdoor gym equipment. Recently, personal laptops have been rolled out to all prisoners, where they have access to make applications such as to healthcare, and receive responses to applications, and access to education courses and recreational content.

It has been yet another frustrating year for the PE department, due to PE staff shortages restricting their offer to the prisoners, and general staff shortages meaning that PE staff are redeployed across the establishment. The PE department is three members of staff short, but recruitment is underway, which will hopefully ease this.

The recent relaxation of the regime has meant that more prisoners have access to the gym, with standard prisoners offered three sessions a week and enhanced prisoners four sessions. However, this programme is subject to change at short notice.

Saracens (the Premiership Rugby Club) have continued to run their rugby/personal development courses twice a year. These are very popular and appreciated by the prisoners.

Tottenham Hotspur were due to come to the prison to run a similar course focusing on football last year, but this did not start. A new date is planned for them in the near future, so hopefully this will prove to be a popular and worthwhile option for the prisoners as well.

## **6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

While addressing the supply of drugs is essential, it is not sufficient; demand for drugs also needs to be tackled.

The Forward Trust (FT) continues to have the contract to support prisoners who have been identified as having a drug or alcohol problem. Referrals can be made in several ways:

- Through a healthcare triage to determine if the prisoner needs support and details passed to FT
- At Induction – health and wellbeing champions can refer individuals
- Prisoners found under the influence will automatically be referred
- Prison officers can refer
- Positive result from mandatory drug test (MDT)

FT have an intensive abstinence programme (The Bridge) and Stepping Stones, which is a low-medium programme. However, neither of these are currently being offered. There have been insufficient FT staff available. Also, the high numbers of prisoners currently being referred has meant FT can only triage new referrals for the moment. It is hoped this situation will not persist.

A drug strategy was formulated in January and work listed has been commenced, which will hopefully come to fruition. However, despite attempts to create a wellbeing wing over some time, as reported in the last Annual Report, it has still not been possible to do so. Therefore there is no safe place for those with drug issues to be isolated from the general population, where unfortunately drugs appear to be readily available.

## **6.7 Soft skills**

Staff shortages have again affected support and wellbeing sessions. Things have improved since last year, despite a Covid outbreak and emergency regime. People Plus is now running courses on social skills, developing relationships, wellbeing and family links. The therapy dogs continue to visit and Pact (Prison Advice and Care Trust) delivers support, maintaining links and courses to develop parenting skills. Prisoners can request sewing packs from an outside charity. The prisoners can gain skills in creative needlework and finished items e.g. cushion covers are sold with the money going to charity.

Prisoner-led support groups, such as health and wellbeing representatives and Listeners, are now up and running again.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

The contract provider for education is People Plus and the accommodation consists of a main block, small additional skills centre and three vocational workshops.

This has been another challenging year. The restricted regime, staff shortages and the division of the prison have meant that access to education has only been available to half the prison. This was most unsatisfactory and unfair. Fortunately, this method of allocation has now stopped and education is open to all. Lack of prison staff resulted in low numbers of attendees or closure of the department. This year there were more than four months when education was suspended. There also appeared to be a general malaise after Covid.

At the end of August a new manager was appointed.

There are 850 full- or part-time places available, but, currently, the actual uptake is 454. Attendance over the year was 80%, and 88.1% of courses were completed. If the students finish their course, they generally achieve and gain accreditation. Most courses are accredited, but the courses in employability and outreach music are not.

On arrival at HMP The Mount, prisoners' English level is assessed. Literacy appears to be an issue, and since 2020, 53.9% of prisoners were at English entry level 3 or below. In order to support and facilitate this range of literacy, the education department has developed a reading strategy. In line with HM Inspectorate of Prisons' prison education report of March 2022, services and agencies in The Mount will work together to implement the strategy to improve prisoners' reading skills.

Staffing continues to be a problem, as salaries are below those offered outside the prison service. Currently, bricklaying, plastering, multi-skills and warehousing have vacancies for instructors.

During the year, in-cell packs were available and were especially important when the education department was closed. By May, Open University (OU) students were back in the library and were able to transfer in-cell work on to the PCs in the library.

#### **Library**

About 608 of the prison capacity of 1,000 plus (60.8%) have joined the library. Numbers using the library have varied month to month, as there have been days when it has been closed. Prison staff shortages have led to a lack of escorts. This has impacted on the total number of hours open to users. According to the statistics, at the end of 2022, the library was only open 22 hours per week.

The emergency regime meant that evening sessions were stopped. The morning session runs from 8.15am to 11.15am and the afternoon session from 1.45pm to

4.15pm. These sessions are for OU students, library orderlies and appointments for legal research. Things are improving, and there is more opportunity for all prisoners to have library time. What had a big impact on the users was the prison being divided into two, with only half the prisoners having access to the library at a time.

The library holds about 11,000 books and subscribes to a number of magazines. Stock is calculated annually and any losses above 4% per annum result in a compensation claim by the library service.

At Christmas 2022, the library introduced a Write to the North Pole project. This allowed fathers to help their children write a Christmas list. The list was sent to the Royal Mail, who then sent a letter to the child from Santa.

Activities also include Storybook Dads. This enables prisoners to record a bedtime story. This is sometimes not able to run, owing to IT problems.

The Shannon Trust currently has a team of eight mentors to help prisoners learn to read. Sessions are one to one, and there are not enough mentors for every spur on every wing.

The book group and creative writing have again been affected by the shutdown of the library when there are staff shortages.

During the year the library arranged for children's packs to be available to have during visits and to take home.

## **7.2 Vocational training, work**

At the beginning of the reporting period Covid was still having some impact on the ability of activities to commence to any meaningful extent. Staffing levels were not sufficient to allow prisoners to be taken/collected and prisoners and workshop staff were also impacted by infections. Even by July staff absences were making the running of a regime where more workers could be moved unsatisfactory.

The decision by the previous Governor to divide the wings into two areas had also resulted in prisoners not attending work easily. Those in employment were required to reside in certain wings nearer the workshops, kitchen etc and those in education within others. This meant a considerable number of prisoners needing to move, which was very unsettling, with some declining to do so, thus making themselves unemployed. This was still an ongoing issue six months into the reporting period, resulting in prisoners missing out on education courses, purposeful work and the possibility of gaining qualifications. This has now been abandoned.

People Plus have had difficulties recruiting staff to instructor roles in the workshops. Some workshops have also closed, as providers could no longer source the necessary work to make it viable. It is very disappointing to see facilities remaining empty or if open very underused.

On a more positive note, in January an employment and courses forum was held over two Tuesdays. Prisoners were able to sign up for a variety of courses which were on display and it was very positively received.

In November the activities team carried out a survey via in-cell technology with a view to seeking opinions on how the variety of activities could be improved and their overall delivery. Activity attendance rates, although improved, are still too low, and the proportion of unemployed prisoners, although reduced, was still too high.

This is an area of the prison that concerns the Board greatly. Despite particular successes in some areas, for example the bike shop and barbering, there is still a serious lack of purposeful employment within The Mount. We are aware of discussions that have taken place throughout the year with many outside employers and organisations, but these result in little, if any, long-term work.

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

The OMU at The Mount has been a hectic place to work. The crisis in the criminal justice system has meant that the category B local prisons have filled up with prisoners on remand, so that prisoners with short sentences who would normally have served their time in local prisons are being sent to category C prisons like The Mount, adding significantly to the offender management and custody workloads. The effort needed to process someone serving a 12-week sentence is not much less than that needed to process someone serving a 12-year sentence. Moreover, while in theory prisoners should be given an OASys assessment that forms the basis of their sentence plan in a category B local prison that is supposedly resourced to do this work, in practice it is common for prisoners to arrive at The Mount without an OASys report.

It would have been challenging to deal with this workload had the OMU been fully staffed but it has rather experienced a high turnover of staff and been chronically understaffed. Indeed, at the end of our reporting year the OMU was short of four probation-trained prison offender managers (POMs) to deal with the most serious offenders, and four prison-trained POMs to deal with less serious offenders (four prison-trained POMs had been recruited but were yet to start). Adding to these problems, key work in the prison has more or less ceased, so that prisoners look to their POMs to deal with matters that could and should have been handled by their key worker.

The consequence is that prisoners are dissatisfied with their POMs. They complain that they rarely meet their POMs face to face or have any opportunity to discuss their sentence plans, but that instead their contact with their POMs is over the in-cell phones and transactional, when a particular issue has to be resolved. This is particularly so for the less serious offenders managed by prison-trained POMs.

The other side of the coin is that the POMs are pressured and carrying very high caseloads. They are often frustrated that they cannot support individual prisoners in the way that they would like, and it is not at all surprising that there is a high turnover, with POMs leaving for less stressful and better paid jobs.

In this environment it is very much to the credit of the OMU team that it consistently meets deadlines for re-categorisation reviews and for Parole Board hearings. It is also only fair to add that some lifers, IPP prisoners and other long-term prisoners express their satisfaction with the support they have had from their POMs.

### **Life and IPP prisoners**

The Secretary of State has decided to review all cases where the Parole Board directs the release of a prisoner serving a life sentence. Here is one such case. 'A' was convicted of a murder committed while he was abusing alcohol and other drugs. He deservedly received a life sentence with a long tariff. He is now a different man from the one who was sentenced: he has an exemplary prison record, has been sober for over 10 years and helps other prisoners as a Listener and peer support worker for those trying to stop substance abuse. When he was reviewed by the Parole Board, everybody – his community offender manager (COM), his POM, prison psychologists and the Parole Board members themselves – thought he should be released on licence. But the Secretary of State blocked the release, apparently because he gave more weight to the index offence than to A's prison record. A has served the punitive part of the sentence, his tariff, and it is hard to see what else he could have done to demonstrate that he has reduced the risk to the community were he to be released.

There are a number of IPP prisoners at The Mount. All are considerably over their tariffs. They were given hope by the Justice Committee's recommendation that IPP prisoners should be re-sentenced as they would have been sentenced had the IPP sentence not been available. All were disappointed when the Secretary of State rejected this recommendation. In his reply to the Justice Committee, the Secretary of State promised that the prison service would work 'with individual IPP prisoners to identify the most appropriate pathway and to provide bespoke sentence planning'. The reality at the moment is far from this ideal, and we will monitor what if any success there is in providing IPP prisoners with the support they need to progress.

### **Programmes**

The Mount offers some offending behaviour programmes – Thinking Skills (TSP) for relatively low-risk offenders, Building Better Relationships (BBR) for prisoners convicted of intimate partner violence and Identity Matters for gang members. Prisoners speak well of these programmes. There is though a significant backlog, and prisoners are being released without having done programmes that were on their sentence plans.

## **Prison transfers**

Covid and a shortage of prison transport drivers after Brexit has left many men in the wrong prisons. Prisoners want to move to other prisons for a variety of reasons, including because they want to be closer to their families, because they want to do courses and programmes only available at other prisons, because they are under threat at The Mount or simply because they are serving long sentences and need a change of environment. The IMB receives many complaints from prisoners about their frustration at not being able to transfer.

### **7.4 Family contact**

The introduction of in-cell telephones means that families can have more private time with the prisoner rather than the public phones which were the only means of contact previously.

The visitors' centre was opened again after Covid. This allows family members to check in and wait to be called across to the visits' hall. Lockers are available for belongings to be stored.

Bookings for visits can be made either online or by telephoning the prison between 10.30am and 4.00pm, Monday to Friday.

There are four types of visits available:

Open – social visits within the visits' hall.

Closed – social visits with a clear screen between prisoner and visitor.

Social Video Calls – by video call to family and friends at home. This method was introduced during Covid and is continuing. One prisoner spoken to said how beneficial they are for him with his autistic son, who finds visiting in person extremely stressful.

Family days – smaller numbers within the hall allow for families to visit more informally.

Refreshments are no longer available directly in the visits' hall, but snacks and drinks can be pre-ordered and are delivered during visits to each table. It is to be hoped that there can be a return to the previous method in time.

New seating was fitted during lockdown and during the last year this has been added to by introducing an area with sofas, giving a more family feel.

A family links course, which runs for 10 weeks, was concluded in February, and family members attended the final day for certificates to be handed out. Sadly only a small number of prisoners got to attend this time, through lack of communication. Some families were only informed at short notice, resulting in disappointment for all.

These events have been a huge success in the past, so hopefully lessons will have been learnt and the next one will return to normal.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

This area has been expanded during the report period. Resettlement falls under probation now, and a new full-time staff member (probation service officer) has been taken on, working together with a current staff member who is part time.

Also working here is a representative of SEETEC, who covers resettlement for prisoners who will be resident in the East of England. This is an ongoing source of frustration and very limiting, as the establishment houses prisoners from many areas, particularly London, given The Mount's geographical position, and she is unable to assist them except to signpost to their area. This is a contractual matter with SEETEC.

In-cell technology has assisted with contacting prisoners, but most work is now, since the increase in staff, carried out in person. This in turn has improved the take-up and quality of assistance available.

Prisoners are seen on the wings by both agencies 12 weeks prior to release to assess their needs and formulate a release plan. SEETEC continues to work with prisoners on release for a period but no longer collects data on how successful reintegration has been.

Prisoners are assisted to open bank accounts from six months prior to release. The Mount is paired with Barclays. Staff cannot assist with prisoners who already have accounts with any bank; they can only provide a contact number.

The employment hub became officially operational from 23 January, which is very encouraging.

All the above agencies work within the same building and link to assist prisoners with resettlement issues.

## **ROTL (Release on temporary licence)**

For several years, the prison has had the ambition of releasing men on temporary licence so that they can work in the community. There are ample opportunities with local employers, and letting men out to work on ROTL would be good for the men themselves, helping them to integrate into society before their release, and would lift the mood of the whole prison. It is hoped that the prison will eventually overcome the process barriers that have stopped this from happening.

## The work of the IMB

During the reporting period the work of the IMB has normalised following the difficulties of the pandemic, with a full rota timetable in place and members conducting duties in line with this. The rota consists of one member on duty, including attending CSU reviews every week, and two members dealing with applications weekly. There have been two or three small Covid outbreaks, when members have been advised not to visit certain residential units, but currently there are no reported cases.

CSU reviews have been attended in person on all but a few occasions.

Three members of the Board have resigned – two for health reasons and one for personal reasons. However, there has been a successful recruitment process, with four new members appointed, two of whom are already on rota and two more to be added shortly.

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	18
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11
Total number of visits to the establishment	272
Total number of segregation reviews attended	226

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

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year 2021/2022		Current reporting year 2022/2023	
		Paper apps	0800 Tel.	Paper apps	0800 Tel.
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	8	6	10	3
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	3	7	6	7
C	Equality	11	0	8	1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	7	10	7	10
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	4	8	9	3
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	1	0	13	5
F	Food and kitchens	6	2	2	1
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	32	23	46	19
H1	Property within this establishment	45	12	46	39
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	8	1	25	19
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	4	5	21	1
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	21	27	51	35
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	5	18	12	8
K	Transfers	2	4	12	6
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	109	21	27	29
	Total number of applications	<b>266</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>186</b>



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