



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Rochester

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

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Contents

Introductory sections 1 – 3	Page
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of establishment	4
3. Executive summary	5
 Evidence sections 4 – 7	
4. Safety	9
5. Humane treatment	12
6. Health and wellbeing	18
7. Progression and resettlement	21
 The work of the IMB	25
Applications to the IMB	26

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

Rochester is a Category C resettlement prison for both adult and young adult men; it has an operational capacity of 706.¹ Prisoners are held in eight residential units: one is a dedicated drug rehabilitation unit, six are general accommodation, and one caters for prisoners with enhanced privilege status and has improved cell facilities. There is a separate care and separation unit (CSU). One wing has been allocated for first night accommodation for all incoming prisoners.

The prison has four Edwardian-built wings and four modern blocks. The older wings are challenging to maintain. The newer wings have continual ventilation and heating problems. Maintenance is provided by Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL). The majority of cells are double occupancy. The grounds are spacious with each wing being a separate standalone location. The open location of the prison gives plenty of opportunity for fresh air and outdoor activity.

As a resettlement prison the regime is intended to give prisoners training through a structured sentence plan in order to prepare them for release and ensure their smooth resettlement in the community. Rochester actively engages with prisoners to address their offending behaviour and offers opportunities to engage in behavioural programmes, training, education and work, linked to employment where possible. Increasing the links to real employment vacancies is a continuing aim.

From 1 April 2022 Oxleas NHS Trust (operating through Change Grow Live) has managed drug recovery at the prison. Healthcare support for prisoners is provided by the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust healthcare team, with an in-reach service for mental health wellbeing. The physical wellbeing of prisoners is catered for through well-run gymnasiums, offering competitive and recreational activities. The chaplaincy provides assistance across all faiths. The family services provider, PACT, is involved with visiting arrangements, and more generally there is community support from various external organisations.

The prison was inspected by HMIP in October 2021 with a follow up inspection in September 2022. There was also an unannounced weekend inspection in January 2023.

¹ *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.*

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

Throughout this reporting period HMP/YOI Rochester has continued to provide a stable and safe environment for prisoners. This was a considerable achievement given there has been a continuing shortage of prison officers and other staff at the prison during this time.

The prison officers deal with prisoners in their care as effectively as resources allow, despite there being some prisoners who are especially demanding and whose needs are increasingly difficult to meet.

For the majority of the reporting period, the shortage of officers has meant that restrictions on association and work (which had been in place due to Covid) continued. This was an extreme arrangement, albeit a necessary one for the safety of prisoners and all staff working at the prison. However, as the staffing situation eased, the prison gradually opened up and by the end of the reporting period it was fully open for work and association.

In the main, the most demanding prisoners are those with mental health issues, including those with an underlying substance abuse issue, which may be exacerbated whilst in prison by the ready availability of illicit drugs. These, together with the illicit entry of mobile phones and tobacco, plus the brewing of fermented liquid (hooch), all impact on the smooth running of the prison, and are the causes of violence, intimidation and self-harming.

Considerable effort is made to stop contraband entering the prison. New full airport style screening of all those coming into the prison has proved an effective deterrent, plus the use of search dogs. Unfortunately the open location of the prison enables contraband to be thrown over the prison walls on a regular basis. Another avenue for drugs entering the prison is via letters, paper and birthday cards, which are now checked for substance impregnation.

Many of the buildings are Edwardian, structurally poor, dilapidated, and difficult to modernise and maintain. There is still a vermin problem at the prison.

As a resettlement prison, preparation for release is a key feature of the regime at Rochester. Activity connected with skills, work, education, and behavioural programmes gradually resumed as the Covid restrictions finally lifted and the staffing position improved, but more activity is required.

The use of social video calls introduced during Covid, has continued, and enables prisoners to keep in contact with family members who are unable to attend social visits. The chaplaincy has assisted with a range of family issues including the facilitation of emergency leave for prisoners on compassionate grounds.

Released on temporary licence (ROTL) has resumed. There is still an ongoing issue of insufficient suitable hostel accommodation being available for prisoners eligible for release on home detention curfew (HDC) licence. A significant number of prisoners

at Rochester are on Recall (ie failing to meet the temporary release conditions). More positively, the Board has noted the numbers awaiting transfer to open conditions had decreased considerably by the end of the reporting period.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

Although there had been an increase in violence as the prison moved away from the restrictive regime, it is still relatively low and reflects the generally good and co-operative relationship there is between staff and prisoners. The Board's view is that Rochester continues to be a safe environment for prisoners. Assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) reviews are carried out within required timescales and provision for safer custody is good.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

Now that the necessary regime restrictions have been lifted, the Board can report that prisoners are being treated fairly. The prison does, however, continue to face ongoing difficulties, especially over deteriorating buildings. The Board's judgement is that prisoners are being treated appropriately, with adjudications conducted correctly, the conclusions reasonable and the outcomes just and fair. Good order or discipline (GOOD) reviews are undertaken within required timescales. The key worker scheme has been working well, and the chaplaincy team works hard to engage with all prisoners, not just those with faith. There is an ongoing vermin problem which continues to be a challenge for all working or living at the prison, in spite of the measures being taken to deal with it.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

Healthcare appointments are commensurate with community NHS provision. However, the Board receives many applications from prisoners expressing dissatisfaction with the service provided by primary healthcare. Mental healthcare and drug recovery arrangements are good. There is good provision for exercise, and opportunity for softer skill activity, such as art, has resumed.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

The restricted regime had an impact on all aspects of resettlement. However by the end of year, preparation for release was back to full working, and the prison is now delivering its remit in this area. Education, skills training and behavioural programmes offer prisoners an opportunity to gain more life-skills. The Board's view, however, is that more activity for prisoners is required, and it supports the prison in its aim to provide more meaningful occupation.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- a) The Board retains its view that re-offending rates cannot be reduced unless there is suitable accommodation for all prisoners who have completed their sentence or are being released on HDC. Bail accommodation is limited in the south east, and the Board urges the minister to look into this further, to see how more accommodation can be provided.
- b) For the majority of the reporting year, the Rochester Board had just six active members from an establishment of 14. Consequently, the Board found it increasingly challenging to discharge its statutory duties. The minister is asked to note this issue, and assist by expediting delays which occur, such as with security clearances. (*paragraph 8.1. refers*)

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- a) As stated last year, the accommodation at HMP/YOI Rochester is very poor, and in the Board's view, just about providing the minimal standard required. The Edwardian buildings on the old site are dilapidated and challenging to keep maintained; and the newer pre-fabricated buildings have exceeded their original use dates by several years, and are beset by poor ventilation as well as ongoing water supply, structural, and heating issues. A complete refurbishment of the site was proposed, but this appears to have been discounted. The Board strongly supports the redevelopment of the Rochester site.
- b) Property losses on transfer: yet again, there appears to have been no progress in resolving the problems which occur when a prisoner and their property are transferred between establishments, and property goes missing. Volumetric control introduced via the new property guidance is being ignored, as prisoners arrive at Rochester with excessive amounts of property. Lack of ownership over this reoccurring problem is frustrating. There appears to be an ongoing lack of care in regard to prisoners' property, illustrated by the 215 applications related to property which the Board has received this year. (*See paragraph 5.8.1*)

TO THE GOVERNOR

- a) As noted last year, there has been some improvement in cell clearance checks, but it still remains haphazard and many are not conducted properly, particularly when an individual is moved to the CSU. Can this be addressed? (*See paragraph 5.8.c.*)

- b) The number of complaints has increased considerably, and is in line with the increase of applications to the Board. While complaints and applications related to property issues account for most of this increase, the Board will be examining whether there are any underlying issues which are causing the increase in both complaints and applications. It will be working with the complaints team over this.

Progress since the last report

The introduction of enhanced entry search via airport-style body and Xray scanners has added considerably to the preventative security measures at the prison.

Key-working has been very successfully implemented at Rochester, with targets close to being met.

Continuing to hold the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme at the prison has given an opportunity to young offenders, who would not have considered taking up such a scheme, a chance to learn new skills and gain a sense of achievement.

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Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

The Board is satisfied that both functions are working well, with appropriate healthcare checks are being undertaken. R Wing continues to be a dedicated entry wing, providing informative induction briefings and a good first night process.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 There was one death at the prison in the reporting period. The PPO report has been issued, and recommendations for change have been implemented.

4.2.2 ACCT reviews monitored by the Board were, in the main, completed properly. ACCT numbers are around 20 per month, a small decrease from last year. The number of self-harm incidents has fluctuated throughout the year, e.g. 17 in January but much lower at around 9 in March. The fluctuation is due to some individuals being prolific self-harmers. While no doubt some prisoners use self-harming as a coping mechanism, there is evidence that some self-harming is a form of protest and manipulation.

4.2.3 Ligature incidents were about three per month. The Board would like it noted that commendable swift action by prison officers has on many occasions prevented attempts by prisoners at self-inflicted death.

4.2.4 An integrated approach to safeguarding continues, with complex case reviews, which includes working with the psychological team at the prison.

4.2.5 A cadre of Listeners has been trained and granted “red bands” which means they can walk around the prison unescorted to make more regular visits to prisoners in need of their services. A Samaritans pin phone number has been introduced meaning prisoners can use their in-cell telephone to call Samaritans free of charge. Access to a dedicated Samaritans phone continues. This is important; during the year the Board noted that on a couple of occasions prisoners in the CASU were escorted to use the dedicated Samaritans phone on another wing.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 The availability of drugs, especially new psychoactive substances (NPS), at Rochester continues to be the main issue for safety and security management at the prison. Drug-related debt, and the subsequent bullying and intimidation, remain significant elements of life at Rochester. Due to low staffing levels, a managed freeflow system (whereby all prisoners are escorted to places of work, healthcare etc) continued and this in turn has inhibited the flow of drugs (and the related bullying and intimidation) around the prison. Consideration is being given to re-introducing “normal but controlled” freeflow as the staffing position improves.

4.3.2 As anticipated, violence levels have gradually increased as the prison opened up after the lockdown year. For example, from April to January there were 125 recorded incidents of violence compared to a total 133 for the complete previous year. A total of 55 weapons were found during the reporting period, which is a substantial increase of the previous two years of 36 and 32 respectively. Currently favoured weapons are sharpened pieces of plastic cutlery, items in a sock, or items with a razor blade attached. Challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) arrangements are working well, with good analysis of and action being taken from the statistics provided. The Board notes that much of the violence being reported relates to assaults on staff. For example in January there were seven assaults on staff, seven prisoner on prisoner and three fights.

4.3.3 As commented in last year's report, violence at Rochester is not generally gang-related. The principal cause of violence is debt, often due to drugs use, which can in turn follow a prisoner from wing to wing.

4.3.4 In spite of the statistics given above, the Board retains the view that Rochester continues to be a safe environment for those living there. This view was endorsed by the Operational and System Assurance Group (OSAG) who visited during March. When visiting wings the Board has noted the atmospheres are unthreatening, with groups of men chatting amiably with each other and with staff.

4.3.5 The Board visits the few prisoners who are self-isolating, and checks that arrangements to support those who are doing so are appropriate. Access to exercise for those who are self-isolating has resumed.

4.4 Use of force

4.4.1 As anticipated, as the prison opened up there was a corresponding increase in the number of Use of Force (UOF) incidents. During the reporting period a total of 342 spontaneous use of force incidents took place (cf 316 last year), and force was used for a further 67 planned incidents (cf 39) last year. However, this is still less than the figure for the last full pre-Covid year of 2019, with 488 recorded incidents. There were no incidents involving the use of PAVA in the reporting period. Batons were drawn on six occasions, but not used.

4.4.2 The majority of incidents of UOF are for those aged between 22-29. In general the UOF is commensurate with the ethnic mix of the prison. For example in the last three months of the reporting year, 64% of all incidents were from the white group. While this figure may fluctuate, the Board is reassured that UOF usage is fair and not disproportional towards non-white ethnic groups at the prison. All figures for UOF are monitored consistently by the Diversity and Inclusion team.

4.4.3 The monthly review of UOF, in which a percentage of incidents are assessed, has worked well. A weekly review of UOF incidents has recently been introduced as well, and this follows best practice. Training points and praise are passed on from both reviews. The Board attends as an independent observer, and our general conclusion is that UOF appears to be proportionate and well managed. The Board notes there is still a continuing issue about body-worn cameras not being turned on sufficiently early during a potential incident.

4.4.4 The National Team were called to the prison five times during the year, compared with four last year and six the year before. All five were for incidents at height, three externally in the grounds and two internally on the wings.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

4.5.1 The openness of the Rochester site presents the greatest challenge for the security team in its effort to stop illicit substances and mobile phones coming into the prison. Parcel throw-overs into the prison across the fencing increased during the reporting year, in part caused by the heavy snow fall in December which damaged netting on wing yards. Of the 27 parcels thrown over this year, 23 occurred while the netting was damaged. The number has improved since March 2023, when the netting was repaired. All throw-overs are referred to the police for further investigation.

4.5.2 The amount of drug-impregnated paper coming into the prison via fake Rule 39 solicitors' letters continues to be of concern. Hopefully a new barcode system will help to disrupt this, and has already had an impact on the number of finds. Solicitors' letters are swabbed, and any which appear suspicious or fake are opened in accordance with regulations. The Board has monitored this function and it is working appropriately.

4.5.3 An airport-style entrance pod, together with an Xray baggage scanner is now in place for all those entering the prison. This year there has been an increase in the number of indications of contraband by search dogs on prisoners' visitors. Since August 2022 there were 33 incidents. Offending visitors are issued with warning letters, and depending on the circumstances, have a closed visit.

4.5.4 All personal mail is photocopied before it reaches a prisoner, in order to limit the amount of drug-impregnated paper entering the prison. Birthday cards etc have to be sent via a mail company such as Moon Pig. Items of clothing such as labels, socks and underwear are also scanned as these can be sources of drugs. The Board has received applications from prisoners about the delay in forwarding post, but on looking into this, the Board's view is that the delay is minimal and commensurate with the necessary security requirements.

4.5.5 Intelligence-led searching of wings and cells has again produced good results in finding contraband, and has been disruptive to the "illicit trades" which are carried out within the prison. Fermenting liquid ('hooch') brewed by prisoners continues to be a significant issue, as it causes drunkenness and associated violence. There is an average of 11 finds per month, and each find is of a significant quantity, sometimes 60 litres plus. On occasion distillery equipment is found, such as a modified bucket with a kettle heating element attached. This hooch has a higher value, due to the higher alcohol content. There are currently three dog search officers located at the prison, but none of these are currently trained to detect hooch. Searches on the wings by trained "hooch" dogs, provided by prison area team, have been particularly successful.

4.5.6 Mandatory drug testing (MDT) did not take place at Rochester due to staffing shortages, but suspicion testing did continue. Prisoners who are found to be diverting their prescribed medication (particularly methodone) are immediately reviewed by the IDTS Prescribing Nurse. Random MDT testing resumed in April 2023.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 The Board retains its view that, in general, the accommodation buildings at Rochester are meeting a minimal standard of acceptable accommodation. The older blocks require constant physical maintenance, while newer wings are significantly past their intended occupation dates. Consequently, all the wing buildings have an infrastructure which is failing and requires almost continuous maintenance interventions.

5.1.2. A specific problem this year is the mould growing on several A Wing cells, which puts them out of use. Across the prison many windows are broken or jammed open. On B Wing (which has the worse problem) the windows are gradually being replaced following the introduction of the windows workshop, which is a work activity for prisoners. Ventilation problems persist on the newer wings, and there are often water supply issues.

5.1.3 Washing of clothing on most wings had been replaced by a laundry, which, in the Board's view, has been a good innovation and is working well.

5.1.4 The last HMIP report flagged up issues around privacy in relation to toilets in cells. The Board believes it will be a difficult logistical issue to be resolved, and progress has been limited. More positively, the Board has noted that cleanliness is good on all wings, as evidenced during its weekly wing visits.

5.1.5 Vermin continues to be an ongoing challenge at Rochester, with many prisoners opting to make barriers across their cell thresholds to keep the mice out. While containers can be provided, prisoners leaving out food, which in turn attracts vermin, continues as a problem to be overcome.

5.1.6 Five cells on the single occupancy H Wing have been converted to double cells. The Board noted with concern this was taking place, and were pleased to note no further conversions are planned. New accommodation providing single occupancy PODs have been under construction for most of the reporting period, which will increase the prison headcount by 50. Corresponding increases in staffing have been agreed.

5.1.7. *Catering*: The Board's view is that the kitchen produces quality meals given the daily budget is £2.70 per prisoner. It notes that food is hygienically prepared with health, religious and cultural needs being met. The Board has received only five applications about food this year. Much of the kitchen equipment is old, and there

are continuous breakdowns. The Board has noted that GFSL responds to repair requests from the Catering Manager speedily.

5.1.8 *Canteen*: In the main, this is delivered correctly by DHL, and the Board receives relatively few applications about canteen. Most applications relate to a delay over a refund occurring when a prisoner transfers between prisons. While the price of items has increased, there has been no corresponding increase in the money that can be earned via activity at the prison. This is a source of anxiety for those prisoners without private means. There is a continuing link between self-harm/violence occurring on canteen delivery days, with debts being settled and pressure to give up items.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 Throughout the year the number of prisoners held in the Care and Segregation Unit (CASU) varied considerably. As noted previously by the Board, the CASU is still being used by prisoners as an opportunity to escape from the drug and debt culture of the prison, with some committing an offence to gain access to the CASU. More recently this behaviour is being managed via pro-active internal prison moves, and the Board continues to monitor this closely.

5.2.2. With few exceptions, the Board always attends good order and discipline reviews. The Board has raised with the Governor and Healthcare Managers that attendance by a representative from healthcare continues to be erratic. The Board has pointed out that attendance is required for the review to be valid, and in theory should not go ahead unless a healthcare representative is present. Board members are noting on documentation when a Healthcare representative does not attend. While written submissions have been provided by Healthcare on occasions, attendance is required to be compliant with the relevant PSI. There has been some improvement in recent weeks, and the Board will continue to monitor this important function very carefully.

5.2.3 The Board continues to be informed within 24 hours of new CASU arrivals. The Board's view is that adjudications and reviews are conducted carefully, fairly and appropriately.

5.2.4 Many prisoners in the CASU are exceptionally difficult to manage, and having a settled cadre of officers working in CASU facilitates a skilled and experienced approach to dealing with them. There have been some changes of personnel this year, but in the Board's view, standards have been maintained. The Board commends past and present CASU teams for their professionalism and patience.

5.2.5 Once again, on several occasions the 42-day time limit for segregation was exceeded when a prisoner's status was changed to Category B. The Board's view is that this delay is unacceptable. This is not the fault of the staff at Rochester, but an unwillingness by receiving prisons to accept the individual. This is unfair on the prisoner and frustrating for those at Rochester who are trying to make the transfer happen.

5.2.6 The Board is pleased to note there has been an improvement to the issue raised last year of prisoners transferring back to Rochester from open conditions without the supporting paperwork. The Board will continue to check that natural justice for these removals is being followed.

5.2.7 Independent adjudicators (IAs) continued to virtually attend hearings for the reporting period. Adjudicating governors have been attempting to keep the number of adjudications being referred to the IA down to a manageable level, depending on the circumstances of the offence being considered.

5.3 Staff-prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 Key-working at Rochester has been successful; it has become a priority activity for officers to undertake. The Board is pleased to report that targets are close to being met. The prisoner experience however of key-working is rather mixed, depending on how effectively the role is carried out.

5.3.2 In general there is a positive atmosphere across the prison, with interaction between prisoners and staff at Rochester working well. This was noted by the HMIP inspections and also by the OSAG team in March. The Prisoner Council meetings have resumed, with the Board attending. Issues are raised by the prisoners' representatives in a full and frank way, and listened to and acted upon by prison managers, where it is possible to do so. It is an example of good practice.

5.3.3 A shortage of staff adversely impacted on what the prison could deliver for the majority of the reporting period. However, staffing levels across all areas have improved since January 2023. Unfortunately there is still a high level of sickness and other kinds of absence. While a lack of experienced officers remains a key issue, more recently the Board has noted that newer officers are becoming more confident about working in a fully "unlocked" wing environment.

5.3.4 The knock-on effect of staff shortages and inexperience, is around the management of escorts. As freeflow has not resumed, prisoners are escorted every time they leave a wing, albeit for work, gym, medical appointments, visits. While this has reduced the movement of drugs around the prison, in turn it causes delays and frustrations for both prisoners and staff. Ideally, the Board would wish to see freeflow returned, but appreciates the security issues associated with such a decision.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 Changes of personnel in the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) team has led to irregular reporting during this year. A new lead was appointed in February 2023, and all aspects of the D&I function and reporting process is under review. The chart below based on March 2023 figures, outlines the current ethnicity and mix of adults and young adults at the prison.

	No. of residents	% of residents	White British	BAME	%White British	% BAME
Total Population	696	100.00%	467	229	67.00%	32.90%
Adults	637	91.53%	434	203	68.13%	31.86%
YO's	59	8.47%	33	26	55.9%	44.06%

The mix of ethnicity at the prison remains roughly the same as last year, although the number of prisoners has increased. Interestingly the ratio of BAME young adults at Rochester has fallen - 44% this year compared to 55% last year. The number of young adults at the prison continues to fall - 59 this year compared to 65 and 78 for the preceding years. This may be related to the length of sentencing young adults receive; the Board will look into this more closely.

5.4.2 Adjudication hearings: The Board continues to monitor whether a higher proportion of BAME prisoners appear at adjudication hearings. Unfortunately statistics are not available, but from our own observations, the Board's view is that ethnicity is not impacting on adjudication outcomes.

5.4.3 There appears to be a rise in the number of discrimination incident reports (DIRFs) being received by the D&I team. For example it had increased by 13 in March 2023 to 19. Overwhelmingly these relate to race. Lack of data means the Board is unable to see if this is an ongoing trend, and will monitor more closely this year as the D&I team's profile in the prison increases. The Board received 11 applications related to diversity this year.

5.4.4 The majority of prisoners are below the age of 39, with very few aged 60 and over. The Board has noted that issues affecting elderly prisoners or those with impaired mobility are considered appropriately. At present, 37% of prisoners have a self-declared disability, a small decrease from last year (NB: many prisoners declare more than one disability). As at March 2023, 139 prisoners self-declared a mental illness (cf 150 last year). 70 self-declared a learning difficulty including dyslexia, and 15 declared a learning disability, such as autism; both small increases from last year. Once again the Board has noted that the majority of incidents this year at the prison involved a prisoner with a mental health or learning issue of some kind. The Board has monitored those prisoners who need special accommodation because of disabilities, and is satisfied this requirement is being properly addressed.

5.4.5 Care experienced prisoners: The focus on identifying and assisting those prisoners who are 'care experienced' has continued, and as with last year, just over 10% of prisoners have self-declared they come into this category, with the majority being in the 22-29 age range. Care experienced prisoners do seem to feature more prominently in incidents of self-harm and violence, but not to any disproportionate degree. More recently there has been an initiative to hold a care-experienced group of prisoners to meet informally. The Board will be interested to see how this develops.

5.4.6 Foreign nationals: Once again there are 33 foreign national prisoners at Rochester (the same as last year), although from 23 different countries. There is

some slight fluctuation during the year, but numbers are steady. At present there are three prisoners requiring language assistance. The Board received just one application from a foreign national prisoner, and retains the view that foreign national prisoners are treated fairly and given appropriate assistance where necessary.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Religious services resumed as Covid restrictions were lifted. Unfortunately, the prison has been without a Moslem Chaplain for most of the year. It is frustrating to report that while an individual has been recruited, the appointment is delayed due to vetting, even though the candidate is already working at a prison. Friday prayers etc have been covered by a local Iman, and the other chaplains have stood in on a pastoral basis. The prison has also not had the assistance of a Pagan chaplain either for a number of months, affecting a few individuals. Sycamore Restorative Justice courses have been running throughout the year, and are rewarding and beneficial to those prisoners who complete the course. The Board notes the one-to-one care provided by the Chaplaincy is of a high standard, and commends their work and the care they show in dealing with some troublesome and troubled individuals.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The current system continues to be effective. It is understood by prisoners and staff. The Board has sample checked some of the IEP warning and negative entries, and these are being managed correctly. The Board very rarely receives an application relating to the incentive scheme.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 The Complaints team have seen a big rise in the number of complaints submitted. In the 2022 calendar year they received 3177 complaints. This is compared to 1356 and 2103 for the previous two years. In the main, reply timescales are met, although some are interim replies while further work is being undertaken. As with applications to the IMB, most complaints relate to missing property. The Board notes that for the first time there is available data on ethnicity, which show complaints are in line with the ethnic population mix at the prison. These figures do not include Healthcare complaints which are handled separately.

5.7.2 The huge increase in Complaints is commensurate with the increase of applications to the Board, at 660 this year compared to 372 last year. The Board has raised this with the Governor and is undertaking further research into the figures and the reasons for the increase. .

5.7.3 The Complaints team works efficiently and has coped with this increase within their current staffing complement. The Board has regular dealings with the team, who are always helpful to us.

5.8 Property

5.8.1 Yet again, property continues to be one of the major issues the Board deals with. This year the Board received 215 property related applications, compared to 112 last year. The Board is looking into the reasons for the increase. A disproportionate amount of the Board's time is spent at the property office dealing with the applications, in spite of efforts to encourage prisoners to use the complaints system. Many of the applications relate to items which go missing following transfer from another prison.

5.8.2 The Board acknowledges that during the year staffing changes have enabled a pro-active management of the property office, and it has been manned more regularly. But the amount of property owned by the prisoners makes it a difficult task to manage. In addition, the storage of all these bags creates a difficult working environment. For example, one prisoner returning from open conditions had 12 bags of property with him. This has to be sorted by the prisoner with an officer present, and in turn takes up unnecessary room in the storage area. Given, under the new regulations, the allowance is for three bags of property, the Board's view is that volumetric control is continuously ignored and broken.

5.8.3 Prisoners are being encouraged to hand out extra property to their visitors thus assisting with storage, and items not taken home by prisoners on release can be forwarded to a charity. On occasions, during the year, additional effort was allocated into clearing the build-up of items, and this is happening again in May 2023.

5.8.4 The Board is again flagging up the following:

- a) Too many transferring prisoners arrive without their possessions, including family photographs (the loss of which is detrimental to their wellbeing). It takes an unacceptable length of time for these to arrive and items are often lost. It is a source of needless frustration for prisoners, and hard-pressed wing staff who are left to deal with the consequences.
- b) Loss of property within the prison usually arises from the lack of a cell check following a disciplinary incident and the individual's removal to the segregation unit. The possessions belonging to the prisoner who is being removed become 'available' to other prisoners, especially when a prisoner is removed from a double cell, and the cell is not closed down. The Board has not seen any significant improvement in this area, and there continues to be a lack of care around securing personal items in these circumstances.

Those working in the property office are always helpful to the Board when making enquiries. The Board notes that, in general, prisoners are treated with consideration and understanding when asking about their missing property.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Physical healthcare

6.1.1 Primary healthcare is provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. There can be no doubt that managing healthcare at Rochester is a challenge. The healthcare board (which includes representatives from all departments concerned with healthcare at the prison and the relevant governors) meets monthly and the Board attends this as an observer. Healthcare forums, with prisoner representatives from all wings, were not held during the reporting period. The Board notes plans are in place to resume the forum soon, with the prisoner representatives as “red bands” (ie with the ability to move freely between wings etc.)

6.1.2 There is nearly always a healthcare staffing shortage, and this reporting period has been no exception. However the Board notes that core nursing responsibilities remained covered, with managers stepping in as necessary. The healthcare staff work closely with the prison to ensure medical emergencies and hospital appointments receive the necessary escorts, but this can be frustrating to arrange. As noted in previous years, some appointments continue to be missed through poor communication, lack of escort availability, and registered taxis not being available.

6.1.3 The average wait to see the GP is approximately 17 days, and therefore commensurate to that in the community. In addition the Board is aware the GP can sometimes arrive late, which in turn can mean those prisoners with appointments are returned to their wings. Anxiousness about the waiting time to see the GP remains a key issue for prisoners. In addition, all prisoners need to be escorted to Healthcare for a long-awaited appointment. Consequently, the lateness of a GP and the wait to see him, plus a delay of an escort, exacerbates a potentially difficult situation at the Healthcare Centre. Frustratingly, there are still a number of “no shows” for appointments (ie when a prisoner decides not to attend), which is annoying given the waiting time for appointments. The Board regularly raises these points with healthcare managers and relevant governors.

6.1.4 Segregation:

- The Board has become aware that at times during the year the Segregation prisoners were not being visited by the GP three times a week, as required. The Board took this forward with Governors and the position improved.
- The Board was concerned about the lack of healthcare representation at GOOD reviews – paragraph 5.2.2 refers

6.1.5 Various clinics which had stopped due to Covid restrictions resumed this year, and there is a nurse focusing on those with long-term conditions. Outside providers come in for pain clinics, physiotherapy, podiatry, and diabetic eye screening. Visits by the optician have continued throughout the year. Two dental clinics are held each week, with plans for an additional triage clinic on Wednesdays. There is still a significant backlog of dental appointments.

6.1.6 The Board received 103 applications about Healthcare, compared with 85 last year. It is worth noting that applications in the pre-Covid years were at 58 and 56. There was a significant rise in applications during November and December 2022. The overwhelming majority of applications relate to pain relief medication issues or perceived delays in seeing the GP. It is hoped the appointment of a pain management nurse consultant will mitigate this large number.

6.1.7 About half the number of ambulances called to the prison are stood down – interestingly the Board notes it continues to be at around 50% irrespective of the number called out. The ambulance call-outs relate mainly to the NPS problem, and are called about 28 times per month. Towards the end of the reporting year, out of hours healthcare cover until 9pm was introduced, which the Board considers is a welcome addition, and will hopefully reduce the number of ambulance call outs.

6.1.8 The Board recognises it continues to be a challenging time for those providing primary healthcare to a very difficult group of clients. During the year, the Board has witnessed healthcare staff deal with anxious and sometimes very rude prisoners with care and politeness. However the significant increase in the number of healthcare-related applications to the Board is concerning, and it will continue to monitor the position closely during the next year.

6.2 Mental healthcare

6.2.1 The mental health service is provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust In Reach team. At time of writing staff vacancies are at about 50% of their establishment of 5.5 staff. They have a considerable workload given they are at half strength. There are circa 34 prisoners on their books either receiving treatment or waiting for review. If necessary, prisoners are referred to the inpatient service at Elmley.

6.2.2. There are currently 19 prisoners diagnosed with ADHD. However a new approach to diagnosis is beginning, as it is believed there is an over-diagnosis of ADHD at the prison (and the provision of associated drugs). A new process is being developed for diagnosis of ADHD, which will include a referral for diagnostic interview with the psychiatrist.

6.2.3. The March 2023 Diversity and Inclusion report notes that 139 prisoners at Rochester have self-identified as having a mental illness, plus 15 with a learning disability such as autism.

6.2.4. Working with In Reach is the psychological therapy team, which provides a range of interventions and counselling services. They restarted group workshops as soon as restrictions permitted and the team see individual prisoners on the wings. Workbooks and activity packs were provided during the lockdown period and these have continued as appropriate. The team is fully staffed and have about 18 prisoners on their books at present. .

6.2.5 A key benefit this year has been the co-location of In Reach and the psychology teams. They now work in the same room, as opposed to other ends of

the prison. As well as regular daily meetings, cases can also be discussed between the two teams as needed. This has proved beneficial to both teams in how they work and how cases are managed.

6.2.6 The Board's concerns about attendance by a healthcare representative (usually from Mental Health) at GOOD reviews are referred to at paragraph 5.2.2. The Board retains its view that the provision of mental healthcare at the prison is good and, in particular, has worked very well in the challenging circumstances of the past couple of years.

6.3 Exercise, regime

6.3.1 Regular gym sessions resumed as the prison opened up. It is managed via a wing by wing basis. There is outdoor gym equipment on all wing yards and indoor gym sessions resumed from April 2022. In addition football has returned and is a popular activity.

6.3.2 Physical activity sessions at Rochester are run by enthusiastic staff and are popular with prisoners. The two gymnasiums are well-equipped, and there is facility for indoor sports, such as badminton and indoor tennis. Sessions are offered to older prisoners and there is remedial gym-work for those with medical conditions.

6.3.3 In addition, the extensive open layout of Rochester means there is opportunity for fresh air and exercise when walking to activities. The grounds are very well maintained. Evening association continues for those prisoners on Standard and Enhanced incentive levels.

6.4 Drug rehabilitation

6.4.1 This has been the first year with a new provider Change Grow Live (CGL), who replaced Forward Trust. It has taken a while to settle in, mainly due to staffing shortages, and the fact that CGL worked in a different way to Forward Trust. The Board is pleased to note that by the end of reporting year, CGL is providing effective drug rehabilitation services. Rochester has a dedicated drug/alcohol recovery wing (A wing) and it works closely with CGL staff.

6.4.2 As of March 2023 CGL had 224 prisoners on structured treatment (with care plan objectives, one-to-one and group sessions, and clinical treatment) and of these 54 were on clinical treatment. Group work resumed after the pandemic and one-to-one sessions continue, not just on A Wing but across the prison. A new aspect is that within the 224 individuals who are on structured treatment, are those who come within the scope of the Connecting Communities Team. This covers all prisoners on CGL's books who are leaving prison within 3 months, giving them preparation for life outside prison given their addiction, and then support is continued for their first 3 months back in the community.

6.4.3 Most prisoners are referred to CGL during induction, or through self-referral via their wing. In addition the team chase up prisoners who were found to be 'under

the influence', but all departments such as OMU can refer prisoners to them. The lack of MDT did have an impact for CGL as the team did not receive information on what drugs the prisoners were using illicitly. Fortunately this has changed as full MDT testing resumes.

6.4.4 To assist with drug rehabilitation, A wing prisoners work at the Ministry of Defence (MoD) workshop (where they do not mix with prisoners from other wings), and, also a roofing workshop was held during lockdown which proved very successful.

6.4.5 CGL have noted there are more drugs within the prison as it has opened up, but fears about repercussions from "lock down" referred to in last year's report have not materialised. Key issue is the use of NPS at the prison, as it is a substance which changes regularly and can be difficult to identify.

6.4.6 CGL has been involved with the development of the proposed Incentivised Substance Free Living initiative which is planned for next year, and is supportive of the venture. It will include those individuals who are maintaining and working with CGL about their addictions, but are not engaging in illicit drug use.

6.5 Soft skills

6.5.1 As the prison opened up, softer skill activity made a welcome return. The choir resumed and art classes are again being held once a week. Some very interesting art work is being produced, including that celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the prison. There has been a film and media course for higher level learners.

6.5.2 Bee-keeping has continued as a hobby activity for over-50s prisoners. The aspiration is to eventually sell honey from the Rochester prison bees.

6.5.3 The Duke of Edinburgh scheme has again been very successful. Several of the younger prisoners and prison officers have achieved a bronze award.

6.5.4 In early January a rock band called Hardwicke Circus gave a very successful concert to Rochester prisoners. They had previously played at 15 prisons. The IMB attended and noted their good engagement with the audience.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 Classroom-based sessions resumed as Covid restrictions lifted. The education department provided in-cell work packs, particularly on maths and English, during the lockdown periods. Unfortunately, the Board notes that attendance at Education is only around 70%, and has not recovered to its pre-Covid level. Incentive warnings are being issued to those who refuse to attend Education. A more positive incentive is a ROTL eligibility requirement for educational involvement from those individuals who lack minimal literacy and numeracy skill levels.

7.1.2 A new supplier, Milton Keynes College, took over as the provider from April 2023. It has a fresh approach to all forms of educational activity, and a re-designed curriculum is now in place. The Board will continue to monitor this with interest – it is significantly different to what has been delivered by education providers in the past.

7.1.3 **Library:** The library, provided by Kent Library Services, has gradually resumed full operation, after providing a limited service during the lockdown period. The Board notes that the staff working there are amongst the most long-servicing at the prison. Unfortunately, the flat roof of the library has had a rain water leak for most of the year, which impacts on those working there, and affects the condition of the books. The Board has constantly raised this with the Governors, and it is due to be repaired in the summer.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 While restrictions were in place only limited work was available, such as waste management, industrial cleaning (for wings etc), gym/segregation orderlies and in the kitchen, as well as the special arrangements for A wing prisoners to work on the MoD camouflage netting and training in roofing. As the new laundry came into operation there were opportunities for work there too.

7.2.2 When the prison opened up, vocational training resumed subject to the availability of trainers. Courses are currently offered in Brickwork, Painting and Decorating, Tiling, Railtrack, Industrial Cleaning. New opportunities this year include campervan conversion, and the windows workshop (referred to last year) is up and running. The Stonemasonry workshop continues to produce excellent work and training in this craft. More generally a shortage of trainers remains a significant problem with Welding, Plastering and Carpentry facilities available but unable to be used.

7.2.3 The Board's view is that the prison has endeavoured to keep activity levels going, through a very difficult year.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 The Board's view is that the Offender Management Unit (OMU) at Rochester has maintained the good level of performance it has achieved in previous years. While ROTL resumed, it has not taken off as anticipated. In spite of notices being issued to prisoners, there has been minimal take up.

7.3.2 Process changes last year meant prisoners arrived at Rochester without an OASys assessment, as they can be moved to Rochester within 28 days of sentencing. A tracker system identifies the 10-week point from sentencing, by which an OASys and other information should be in place. This has produced an increase in OASys work, as all men have their OASys reviewed to demonstrate and record their suitability for progression to open conditions. The backlog for OASys remains around 30, and prison offender managers work hard to keep the backlog down to a manageable level. The Board's view is that the system works well, indicated by the very few applications it receives about OASys completion.

7.3.3. **HDC:** The introduction of a digital HDC system has helped to speed up processes, with community probation completing their reports in a more timely way. The new system has also improved communication with the community officers. The hostel accommodation provider changed from BASS to CAS, however sufficient provision is still not there and this in turn impacts on the timeliness of HDC release. For those hoping for HDC, this is frustrating and difficult to cope with at times.

7.3.4 **Category D and transfer to open conditions:** For much of the year the lack of Category D (open conditions) places in the South East, remained a significant problem. Many of the applications to the IMB concerning categorisation related to the frustration felt by prisoners who have worked towards getting Category D status, only to find they remain at Rochester in Category C conditions.

7.3.5. However, more recently, the position has improved significantly. This is due to a new system, whereby better use is being made of prisons with open conditions in the North of England. There are more vacancies in this area than in the South. Men who now gain Category D status are asked to consider a quicker transfer to the North, and if not, they have to remain in Category C closed conditions in the South, until a vacancy occurs. Interestingly, only a small number have agreed to go North, with most opting to remain on the waiting list for open conditions in the South. In addition, there are some men who meet the criteria but choose not to engage with the scheme.

7.3.6 Generally there has been more momentum from HMPPS to move men to open conditions (such as described above). In turn, for Rochester, this has led to a reduction in waiting times from months to weeks. At present there are 15 prisoners who have only recently been given Cat D, and who are awaiting acceptance to open conditions. This is a significant improvement to the position recorded in last year's report.

7.3.7 A new scheme was launched at the end of March called Temporary Presumptive Re-categorisation Scheme (TORS), whereby those prisoners who met a strict criteria can be considered for transfer to open conditions for the last 12 weeks of their sentence. This is a very new and different approach to transfer to open conditions, and it is quite possible that some of those transferring are unable to meet the change of lifestyle required for open conditions without the usual preparation. The Board has noted this could mean more work for OMU, and the prison generally in managing the returners. The Board will monitor closely how successful this new initiative will be.

7.3.8. **Probation:** The work delivered by the Probation team has continued to be of a high standard. While there are still one full-time and a part-time senior probation officers working at the prison, more probation staff are required.

7.3.9 **Offender behaviour programmes:** Due to staffing vacancies, the availability of running behaviour programmes has been very limited, although one-to-one work has taken place. The Board's view is that as Rochester is a resettlement prison, the delivery of these programmes is an important function. The absence of these programmes was disappointing for prisoners, who are unable to complete the progression required on their sentence plans. The Board understands the staffing

position is likely to improve during the next reporting year. Consequently, the Board will be monitoring there is an improvement in the number of courses being delivered.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 Prison visits returned to pre-pandemic levels. Recent analysis of visits has shown that around 500 prisoners do not receive any social visits, however all visit slots are booked. Further work is being undertaken to identify why this is the case, and the Board will be interested to see how this progresses. In the meantime the Board is pleased to note the “Official Prison Visiting” scheme which is run by the Chaplaincy has returned. Social video calls have continued, and have been a welcome innovation emerging from lockdown arrangements.

7.4.2 The new booking system introduced from April 2022 has worked successfully, after some initial teething problems. Feedback from prisoners’ families is that the centralised booking system is working well.

7.4.3 The visits facility is run efficiently by PACT. The Board is pleased to report that family days, a welcome visit arrangement whereby fathers are able to meet their children in a less formal setting, returned as soon as staffing levels allowed.

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 Personal contact with prisoners resumed from April 2022, and all prisoners are approached 12 weeks before release with the offer of assistance with employment, bank accounts, driving licences, identification documents etc. There is an ongoing problem for those prisoners with a lack of an approved address. While contact with employers continues, the lack of knowledge about where a departing prisoner is to be located hampers the job seeking process.

7.5.2 CXK are the employment advisers, who run courses as part of the induction process to identify skill needs and progression plans. Those with reading difficulties are referred onto the Shannon Trust. (The Board has attended several Shannon Trust achievement sessions – a most impressive organisation). There is also PACT CF03, which has two staff covering the “life-skills” aspect connected with a prisoner’s sentence plan, such as dealing with a situation assertively rather than aggressively. They offer group work and one-to-one sessions.

7.5.3 The housing officer makes every effort to find suitable accommodation for all those leaving, especially when trying to link this up to a job opportunity. However, a significant number of prisoners are released without any accommodation, and are consequently homeless and vulnerable. The Board continues to monitor the preparation for release closely, and retains the view that too many prisoners are released to become homeless, for example 25 prisoners were released between from July 22-23 to be rough sleepers.

8. The work of the IMB

8.1 For the majority of the year there were six working members of the Board, increasing to seven from January onwards. Given the Board was working with half the number of its establishment of 14, it decided to continue working on its adjusted rota system introduced during the pandemic. This enabled the Board to discharge its statutory duties as effectively as it could in the circumstances. However, an increase of applications to the Board of 77% over last year has diverted attention from some of the wider monitoring the Board would wish to undertake. At times the number of applications has been almost overwhelming, and some monitoring takes place in the process of handling applications. The Board remains concerned its current members may feel increasingly stressed, and resign due to the workload.

8.2 The Board continues to enjoy a constructive working relationship with the management of Rochester prison. Either the Governor or his deputy attended all Board meetings this year. Action points are regularly followed up. The Board wishes to express its gratitude to the senior management team and all staff at Rochester for their openness and willing support to the Board during the year.

8.3 All statutory visits and those relating to individual members' areas of special interest have been undertaken. The Board regularly attends GOOD reviews and has a positive working relationship with the segregation unit staff. It is informed promptly of incidents requiring attendance. There is a regular training session held before the monthly Board meeting, with speakers from across the prison.

8.4 As referred to above, a total of 660 applications during the reporting period has been difficult to manage. In the main these relate to Property (see paragraph 5.8.1) and Healthcare (see paragraph 6.2.6), both areas which the Board monitors regularly and takes forward emerging issues with relevant Governors. More concerning is that total figure is considerably higher than in pre-covid times – when the total of applications was 258 – 273 per annum was usual. The Board is undertaking review into why such a considerable increase in applications has occurred.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	6
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	343
Total number of segregation reviews Attended	Data unavailable

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	8	14
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	11	12
C	Equality	4	11
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	20	27
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	29	59
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	Included E1 above	Included E1 above
F	Food and kitchens	2	5
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	85	103
H1	Property within this establishment	112	215
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	Included H1 above	Included H1 above
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	Included in H1 above	Included H1 above
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	37	84
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	19	26
K	Transfers	10	25
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	35	70
	Total number of applications	372	660



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