



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at Woodhill

**For reporting year
1 June 2022 – 31 May 2023**

Published October 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

HMP Woodhill is a category B training prison holding adult male prisoners.

The prison's operational capacity is 504 housed in six wings, one of which is currently closed. Each house unit has two wings. House Unit Six consists of a Separation Centre and a Discrete Unit.

HMP Woodhill was first opened in 1992. All cells are single occupancy and have in-cell telephony.

The prison is situated on a large site in the densely populated area within the city of Milton Keynes. Prison walls are closely located to exercise areas, enabling banned

substances to be thrown over the walls although over the year significant progress has been made in reducing this, through working with the local police.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- Prisoner on prisoner assaults remain among the highest in the Long-Term High Security Estate.
- The number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork documents (ACCTs) remains high, and the Board is concerned that reviews are not regularly carried out by the case co-ordinator.
- The levels of violence on the wings have led to a significant increase in the use of segregation during the year.

Fair and humane treatment

- Due to lack of consistency of staffing, developing positive relationships between prisoners and staff has been challenging. The Board has noted many occasions where inexperienced staff are unable to provide the support individual prisoners need, even at a basic transactional level. Examples of excellent practice have also been observed.
- The fabric of the building is beginning to show wear and tear. The showers in the majority of House Units are of an unacceptable standard and the flooring in some of the ground floor cells is breaking up making it impossible to clean.
- The Board has noticed a focus on cleanliness at various times during the year, but it has been difficult to maintain this with the current regime.
- On the whole, the Segregation Unit provided a fair and safe regime. However, concerns are increasing about the use of segregation for those with complex and severe mental health needs.

Health and wellbeing

- The health and wellbeing requirements of prisoners were generally being met, although the Board believes caring for prisoners with physical illness alongside the severely mentally ill is not appropriate.
- Time out of cell increased during the year, however staff shortages meant that regime was inconsistent with too many men having to spend too long in their cells.
- Mental health services were unable to cope with the demand, and prisoners requiring secure mental health care waited too long for assessment and transfer.

- The number of older prisoners is increasing and there is insufficient suitable accommodation across the LTHSE to meet these men's needs.
- Across the prison service the pathway to secondary care is challenging. Particularly where a prisoner moves prison part way through assessment or treatment. This then requires a referral to be made to a new secondary care provider, often causing significant delays.

Progression and resettlement

- Access to education, library services and workshops have been severely impacted by prison staff shortages.
- There are insufficient jobs and education opportunities for the number of men, resulting in long waiting times.
- Prisoners are concerned about sentence progression and said there was a lack of access to suitable programmes.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- a) To work with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to consider how the pathway through secondary care could be streamlined for prisoners who are transferred after their referral.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- a) To develop a meaningful plan for the recruitment and retention of prison staff.
- b) To review the daily spend for prisoners in the light of the current rise in the cost of living.
- c) To review how capital budgets can more effectively be used to maintain the fabric of the prison estate.
- d) To radically overhaul the property system within the prison service.

TO THE GOVERNOR

- a) To ensure practical plans are in place to increase the access to meaningful activity for all prisoners within the current resources.
- b) To work with partners to improve the access to suitable programmes for long term prisoners.

3.3 Response to last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To Minister		
To work with colleagues across government departments to develop a meaningful plan for the recruitment and retention of prison staff.	Prison staff pay was increased by at least 4% in Jul 2022. Apprenticeships were launched in Aug 2022.	There has been little progress in the recruitment of staffing and the current trajectory shows a likely staffing level of 50% by Dec 2024.
To review the funding provided to prisons for food in the light of the current rise in the cost of living.	Funding for food is part of the local budgetary allocation to the prison and is at the Governor's discretion.	Food budget was increased to allow portion sizes to increase.
To prison service		
To review the impact of the current staffing levels on prisoners' lives and develop innovative responses to mitigate these.	Staffing levels and the redeployment cap are discussed monthly at a regional level.	The redeployment cap is consistently met.
To increase the recruitment and retention of uniformed and non-uniformed staff.	Active recruitment campaigns are in place. A pay rise has been awarded.	The leaving rate has fallen; however the recruitment rate is not currently keeping pace.
To redesign the property system, bringing it in line with 21 st century distribution practices.	A prison property framework was issued in Aug 2022	There appears to be little improvement in the management of property across the service. Locally there have been initiatives to clear property more quickly but this does not happen consistently.
To Governor		
To continue to expand the capacity of education and work placements at HMP Woodhill.	The education and work placements will be expanded as staffing allows.	There has been little improvement in year, however a new wing staffing allocation may allow progress in 2023.
To continue to support the development of operational staff to increase confidence and consistency of behaviour	Staff training will be a priority in 2023.	A staff training day is now held once a month to allow all staff to learn together.
To work with operational staff to stabilise the amount of predictable time prisoners have out of cell.	Time out of cell will increase as staffing allows.	Time out of cell has increased to 3 hours per day, with those working or in education receiving 6 hours a day.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Board members have observed prisoners in reception and during induction. All the relevant checks, processes and assessments were in place, and the Board saw a high level of professionalism and care from staff. Prisoners interviewed in their first few weeks spoke highly of the induction process and the support given, although men regularly complain about delays in accessing their personal phone numbers and property.

New arrivals are seen by Healthcare and Chaplaincy. All are body scanned and searched and about 30% were found to have proscribed items secreted on their person.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There were 3 deaths in custody, 2 occurred in June and July 2022 and a third was of natural causes and took place in a local hospice in March 2023. At the time of writing the Board is awaiting confirmed cause of death and the PPO reports on these deaths have not been published.

Evidence from rota visits indicates that ACCT documents are by and large up to date although the quality of the comments and interactions with the men varies widely. Some comments show a clear understanding and concern for the men in care whilst others can best be described as 'satisfying' the requirements to fill in the paperwork. The Board is concerned that too often there is no consistency of staff attending the ACCT reviews. An exception to this is the Close Supervision Centre. In January 2023 more case co-ordinators were trained to spread the workload, however this seems to have little impact on consistency of delivery of reviews.

Board members have reported as many as five ACCTs open simultaneously on a single wing, each with high observation levels. This reduces the amount of time staff have for routine management on the wing and have meaningful conversation with those in need.

The number of ACCTs during the year ranged from 16 to 27 (3.2-5.4% of the prison population) which is similar to last year, the peak occurring in January 2023.

Cell cards identifying the men were generally poorly maintained, with one or two notable exceptions. Some rota visits reported as many as 75% of cell cards missing or inaccurate. This is a significant risk if men in individual cells cannot be quickly identified in an emergency.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

HMP Woodhill currently relies on the redeployment of staff from other establishments to maintain safe staffing levels. This limits the ability of the men to develop trusting relationships. Prisoners tell us that whilst they understand the difficulties they are often left without answers or resolution of problems of everyday prison life. Frustration then builds and can result in violence against prisoners and staff.

The number of assaults, both on staff and other prisoners, remains one of the highest in the Long-Term High Security estate. The majority of assaults are carried out by men who have been at Woodhill for more than one year. From Jan to Mar 2023, 31 incidents of violence against staff were recorded and 55 incidents of violence against other prisoners. Of these incidents one of the staff assaults was recorded as serious and 11 of the prisoner assaults.

Prisoners gave the reasons for their violence as bullying or debt (17%); gang related (17%); non-compliance with regime (18%). In April 35% of attacks involved a punch; 23% a weapon and 12% spitting.

Challenge, support and interventions plans (CSIPs) are used to support men who are violent or pose a heightened risk, however most plans are reactive with few proactive plans in place.

The Board is concerned at the number of prisoners who are choosing to self-isolate. The reasons given to Board members during rota visits vary from debt, bullying and a wish to stay out of trouble. A self-isolation policy was put in place during the year to try and support men choosing to isolate. The Board has noted during rota visits that this policy is poorly implemented and often not used. Those self-isolating receive regime where staffing allows for it.

4.4 Use of force

Monthly meetings continue to monitor use of force and learn lessons from incidents that have occurred. Analysis of the reasons shows that refusing to follow a lawful order, e.g. to locate back to the cell, is the most common reason for the use of force. There was a small but noticeable increase in the number of incidents where two or three men worked together to refuse an order e.g. to leave the exercise yard; these resulted in the opening of the Command Suite. All were resolved voluntarily through negotiation. The Board will continue to monitor this.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

This continues to be a challenging area for the prison. Throw overs or visitors visiting prisoners are the main access points although there were a small number of incidents of staff corruption. The introduction of measures to reduce throw overs have had some impact, including working with the local police force.

With the reduction in access to other illicit substances, hooch was a growing issue during the early part of the year. To combat this sugar was removed from the canteen.

The DST (Drug Strategy Team) carry out searches both of the men and areas of the prison resulting in finds of drugs, phones, electronic storage equipment, weapons. The discovery of metal weapons made from pieces scavenged from the back of televisions is a concerning development that the prison is working to resolve.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Overall the fabric of the wings is starting to show its age and the Board is concerned that sufficient planned, preventative maintenance is not in place.

All cells are single occupancy with in-cell telephony. In-cell computers are not in place but are planned to be introduced in the next 12 months.

HU1 was refurbished in 2021 with all flooring and the showers being replaced. Due to the unavailability of funding the remaining Units have not been upgraded. The showers on the remaining locations are in a very poor condition and provide no personal screen or privacy curtain for the men. On House Unit 3A the floor of the cells on the ground floor is breaking up making it impossible to keep clean and, in some cases, presenting a significant trip risk.

Furniture remains in short supply and cells sometimes have items missing.

In the latter part of the year cleaners were allowed out of their cells during the locked part of the day. On some wing units this has made a significant improvement on the general cleanliness and allowed, for example, scrubbing the floors on the landings.

Members have noted that often items are stored at the bottom of stairwells pending removal, blocking the fire exits.

The Board received a number of applications complaining about the distribution of clean prison issue laundry and the serving of food on the wings. On investigation it appears that this is down to lack of supervision of these tasks by wing staff, resulting in more vulnerable men being at the back of the queue for clothing, bed linen and food.

Serveries on the wings again fell below standard. Items reported are slow to be fixed which affected the quality of the food served on each wing. The food consists of a breakfast pack, cold sandwich/snack and one hot meal a day. The hot meal is timed to coincide with the end of the unlock period. The meals are often made with frozen economy ingredients rather than fresh and this has increased as costs rise nationally.

In the last year prisoners have complained about the amount of money they can spend on canteen to supplement their diet. They report that the prices of canteen items has increased significantly, while the amount they can spend has not.

5.2 Segregation

The Segregation Unit is a 12-bed unit with one special accommodation cell. It also has an attached extension which was used during the year as an overflow to the main unit. As many as 18 men were held in segregation at one time. During the year men were held on Rule 45 on the Clinical Assessment Unit (CAU). At least one CAU patient was housed in segregation for some months because no cell suitable for his disability was available on CAU. The Board is concerned that this is not an appropriate use of Segregation.

Many of the men arriving in segregation reported that they had created a disturbance on the wing in order to be segregated in the belief this would speed up transfer to another establishment. Due to a national shortage of space this is not the case and men become stuck, often refusing to relocate back to the main House Units.

The reporting year saw a reduction of men held in segregation for very long periods with the Unit now only housing one very long-term prisoner. However, there are still many men held for over 42 days or transferred from one Segregation Unit to another. The ability to transfer men, particularly those with severe mental health issues or complex needs, to a more appropriate setting remains limited.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

The lack of experience among uniformed staff, together with the restricted regime and the number of cross deployed staff meant that staff did not have the opportunity to develop the necessary interpersonal relationships with prisoners. In May 2023, almost two-thirds of prison officers and nearly one-third of the Supervisory Officers had less than two years' experience. Long-term prisoners told us that on occasion, they take advantage of this to create disorder. To balance this, IMB members have noted individuals maturing from nervous new recruits to take on more challenging roles.

House Unit 6, containing the Separation Centre and Discrete Unit, has more stable staffing which the Board has observed is able to develop supportive relationships with the men. Members have observed individuals working with extremely challenging prisoners over time to support them in managing their behaviour. However, at times of significant staff shortages, this can be compromised by staff being redeployed to other Units.

Currently, there is insufficient capacity for every prisoner to have a key worker. Key workers are only allocated to prisoners with immediate needs.

Prisoners either meet their prison offender manager (POM) or receive a written communication from them within the first three months of their sentence. The

offender management unit focus their efforts on those cases which are active, including those in the parole window or coming up for release and those on an ACCT or CSIP.

The wing clinics are held monthly on each wing to enable men to discuss their needs and sentence progression. These meetings are documented and issues raised are dealt with by the POM or Offender Manager. When the Board spoke to a sample of men across the wings they said they were unaware of these sessions.

Wing fora are not in place, and it was decided to replace these with a monthly Prison Council, chaired by the Governor or the Deputy. The Board will monitor the implementation of this.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Equality and diversity requires development at HMP Woodhill. It has been announced that a new Diversity and Inclusion Lead will be joining in June 2023 with ambitious plans for improving D&I at Woodhill, including LGBT+, care leavers, veterans, and Gypsy, Roma and Travellers. The Board will monitor how these progress to fruition during the year.

Age

There are plans to raise awareness of the different needs of under 40s and over 40s, in activities aimed at both prisoners and staff. 23% of the population at HMP Woodhill is 26-30 years old.

Disability

78 prisoners (31.2% of the population) have a mental illness, 48 men (19.2%) have learning difficulties (Dyslexia etc) and 42 men (16.8%) have 'Other' disabilities. The Board is concerned that there is no single accurate record of current personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) although each wing identifies those housed there. Several prisoners volunteered to be Peer Assistants to help those who need immediate assistance.

The Board is concerned at the lack of suitable accommodation for disabled prisoners across the LTHSE. One disabled prisoner was held in the Segregation Unit instead of Healthcare due to lack of suitable facilities for wheelchair users in healthcare as was another who required a bariatric bed. This required daily transfer between CAU and Segregation, which was time-consuming for staff and distressing for the patients. When there was a shortage of staff able to transfer the prisoner healthcare visits and association was prevented.

Ethnicity

45% of the population is white, 10% is black Caribbean and 9% black African. In February 2023, a weekly podcast was introduced to address and tackle issues in response to the HMIP thematic review of *The experiences of adult black male*

prisoners and black prison staff. The podcast was created and led by a small group of prisoners with staff from various ethnic backgrounds contributing to the conversation each week.

Prisoners tell the IMB it takes a long time for discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) to be answered and on some occasions no reply is ever received. For example, on 17 February 2023 there were 13 DIRFs outstanding, on 15 March all 13 were still outstanding, and there were another two. At the end of the reporting year the DIRF process was undergoing a complete over-haul with plans to train all Band 5 and 6 Officers (op and non-op) and a clear process to scrutinise DIRFs and report quarterly. The IMB will monitor the progress of these plans.

There was insufficient support for Foreign National Prisoners. Of the small number of prisoners the IMB spoke to, none had received visits from the Home Office in the last 3 years, increasing their frustration, uncertainty and vulnerability.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

For much of the year, the four largest faiths were only able to meet fortnightly, due to delays in relaxing the Covid restrictions and staffing shortages in the wider prison. Since Easter, the Chaplaincy have worked hard to ensure most faiths can meet weekly, however Friday prayers at present can only accommodate two House Units at a time.

The Chaplaincy service has good contact across all the parts of the prison, with the Chaplains supported by volunteers who provide pastoral and bereavement support.

38% of prisoners identify as Muslim, with Roman Catholic at 17% and no religion making up 14%. Those with no faith gain limited benefit from the Chaplaincy which is a concern to the Chaplaincy team.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The number of prisoners held on Basic regime remained fairly constant throughout the year at 40. This is approximately 8% of the population. For comparison an average of 230 (46%) were on Enhanced status.

5.7 Complaints

HMP Woodhill received 4,883 complaints in the reporting year, with a further 879 confidential complaints being received. This is an increase of 10% over last year. The main issue raised remained property during transfers between prisons. These complaints are difficult to resolve as they involve three parties – the prison left, the courier and HMP Woodhill.

The key performance targets were reached across the year. A daily email showing outstanding complaints is circulated, including to the IMB. This has increased the

IMB's ability to monitor complaint performance, improved response times and ensures where appropriate a holding letter sent.

5.8 Property

Prisoners continue to arrive at HMP Woodhill with large amounts of property from other establishments, more than the three 15kg bags they are allowed with some often left behind. About 30% of all IMB applications relate to property, especially whilst in transit, which ultimately leads to compensation claims which are time consuming and lengthy as it can involve more than one prison. During the year the IMB has been contacted by an increasing number of Boards about property issues resulting from transfer out of HMP Woodhill. The new Property Framework has been introduced across the prison service but appears to have made little difference to the lives of prisoners. A radical overhaul of the system is needed if it is to be made to run efficiently.

All men arriving are body scanned and searched and many were found to have items secreted on their person. This begs the question of how thoroughly they were checked on leaving their previous establishment.

Staff shortages in Reception were persistent throughout the reporting year impacting on the timely access of property by prisoners. The prison implemented a scheme where a wing is given a date when property will be available on a two-weekly cycle. This reduced complaints about the waiting time as prisoners and staff are now aware when items will be available for collection.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

In April 2023 a new contract was awarded to Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, who sub-contact with Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL) for the delivery of the healthcare service in the prison. A new dental contract is in place with Time for Teeth.

A service development proposal to provide separate facilities for the management of mental health and physical health prisoners within the Clinical Assessment Unit has not progressed.

Throughout the year there were numerous occasions of cells in the CAU and Compass Unit, which provides specialist programmes for men who find it difficult to cope on the main wings, being put out of action by the occupants resulting in considerable operational difficulties and admission delays.

Occupational Therapy is provided by the Mental Health Team. Physiotherapy is subcontracted and an out-patient service is provided twice a month.

A healthcare meeting takes place every two months between the Governor and the Head of Healthcare. Healthcare report that issues can be raised outside this schedule at any time and usually readily addressed. A healthcare forum with prisoners shares health promotion strategies.

6.2 Physical healthcare

In general, the waiting times for all appointments are comparable with the wider community but prisoners complain about delays in accessing medical and dental and mental health care.

A small, randomised survey of prisoners' experience of healthcare found that the men had good experiences of accessing help and advice, often during distribution of meds, but were frustrated by delays in getting appointments and accessing secondary care services. Data from Healthcare shows GP appointments are usually arranged within 1-2 days but dental care has a long waiting list. At the time of writing the waiting list for dental care is 84 men with a waiting time of 12 weeks, although the new provider has plans in place to reduce this.

Across the prison service the pathway to secondary care is challenging. Particularly where a prisoner moves prison part way through assessment or treatment. This then requires a referral to be made to a new secondary care provider, often causing significant delays.

6.3 Mental health

Men say their experience of mental health support is good but they say it takes a long time 'to get the ball rolling'.

The service is divided into Psycho-social team and Addictions team. The maximum waiting times for mental health services, according to the contract, are 48 hours for urgent referrals and five working days for those that are non-urgent. In practice, the mental health team reviews all referrals every morning and most prisoners are assessed on the same day subject to all staff working.

Group work (Talking Therapies) is perceived to be beneficial but there is only one group room available in the prison. Prisoners' access to the group is restricted by the men's own acceptance of the need to mix with men from other wings. Prisoners speak positively about the support they receive from the mental health nurses, although there is often frustration over the length of time they have to wait for psychiatrist appointments.

There remains an unmet need for the specialist care provided by both the Clinical Assessment Unit and the Compass Unit. The Segregation Unit in particular, at any time houses a number of men whose needs have been identified as being better met by the CAU or the Compass Unit. They are not able to access group work which might be beneficial to them. Individual work is done with men on the Compass Unit, but staff express concern about a lack of coherent pathway when they are ready to

move on. Ultimately this has an impact on the throughput of prisoners in the Compass Unit and their waiting list.

There are contingency measures for men on the wings awaiting a place in the Compass Unit so that those identified get a two-weekly review from a psychiatrist and a mental health nurse but this is not the same level of input as provided by CAU.

6.4 Social care

Social care assessments for specialist equipment for prisoners with disabilities are carried out by Milton Keynes City Council occupational therapists.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

The regime has been assessed as amber/red for most of the year. Time out of cells remains a significant issue, specifically due to inadequate staffing levels. A revised regime commenced in January 2023. Men are unlocked for three hours each day. They remain in their cell for the rest of the day. While the wing is unlocked prisoners have access to domestics, chess and cards, pool tables and table football but there is little stimulating activity. Work, education and gym are accessed during the closed part of the day meaning these men have six hours a day out of their cells. This regime has a significant impact on the ability to earn money through work or education. The men complain about lack of exercise.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The rehabilitation service is managed by the addictions team within the healthcare department. Complex cases, often involving prisoners dependent on prescribed painkillers, are reviewed in a fortnightly complex case meeting. Referrals to the service are made from House Units or can be by self-referral.

The service recognises that not all drug users in the prison have any interest or motivation to change their behaviour. The success rate for complete detoxification is only about 3%. Currently there is a high use of vaping across the prison with little or no demand for smoking cessation courses.

6.7 Soft skills

Wellbeing resources are signposted on notice boards. Wings have appointed Listeners, who work with the Samaritans, and Insiders who provide support to their peers. Listeners, however, tells us that they sometimes are not unlocked to support men in need, which they find very frustrating.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

In May 2023 a total of 166 men were allocated to work or education in the mornings, Monday to Friday and 148 in the afternoons. This included those allocated to wing

work. While this appears to be a major step forward from last year, looking below those figures only 30 prisoners a day are attending classroom-based education. There is only one paid workshop open which employs ten men at a time.

There are plans to open up more education places, including skills workshops and a market garden, but these plans have been in place for some months and have yet to be implemented. The reason for the delay that the Board received was lack of staff to supervise prisoners. The Board is pleased to note that a way forward appears to have been found but this has been very slow in coming online even though lockdown, for pandemic reasons, finished well over a year ago. The Board will continue to monitor progress.

During the pandemic restrictions in-cell learning packs were introduced for all prisoners. Since the removal of the restrictions and the opening up of face-to-face delivery these packs have been restricted to prisoners on the waiting list for education. Prisoners report that due to insufficient prison staff to provide escorts and supervision they find that face-to-face sessions are often cancelled making it difficult to maintain momentum. Prisoners report finding it quite or very difficult to access education or work opportunities.

Courses included Maths, Information Technology, English at entry level (delivered part-time) and level 1 and 2 (full-time). The course completion rate was 76.84% and the success rate (those who passed) was 99.05%. However prisoners with long sentences still to serve report that there is little stimulating education available to them.

Prisoners also participate in artwork. Prisoners speak highly of the art team and the support it gives them. Pieces of art and literature have been entered for the Koestler Awards.

The library building was closed to prisoners throughout the year, although it has about 300 registered borrowers. To access books prisoners must request them through the wing staff. There are Shannon Trust volunteers available on each of the wings to support men in learning to read. Obtaining suitable books for adults learning to read has been a priority during the year.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Woodhill is a Category B training prison holding long term and high security prisoners. Men serving long sentences, including life and Imprisonment for Public Protection sentences, told the Board that they feel forgotten. Release is many years away so there is no focus on delivering a sentence plan and they have been in prison long enough to complete the basic literacy and mathematics programmes. Access to suitable education, skills training or work is not available for sufficient numbers of men. This applies to both the main prison and the Close Supervision Centre.

There was a lack of vocational courses and those taking place can only accommodate small numbers e.g. tiling workshop - three men. On occasion prisoners were able to paint wings and stairwells but this work was inconsistent.

Throughout the year prisoners working in the gardens made significant progress by building a wildlife pond, planting trees and growing vegetables. Those spoken to talk with pride about what they have achieved.

The Board received many applications concerning lack of work and meaningful activity in the prison. It is also raised with Board members on nearly every rota visit.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The Board carried out a survey asking men about their access to their Offender Manager and their understanding of their sentence plan. A majority of men reported that they either did not know what was in their sentence plan or that it was out of date. Men reported difficulties in accessing their Offender Manager, however those who were able to, spoke highly of the support they received.

Access to offending behaviour programmes for sentence progression is very limited at Woodhill. The Board has received many applications requesting transfers because men are frustrated at the lack of opportunity to progress.

7.4 Family contact

Face-to-face-visits were reintroduced during the week in 2021. However weekend visits did not restart until Jan 2023, leading to men complaining it was difficult to maintain links with family, particularly with school age children and those who had long distances to travel.

All cells now have in-cell phones, which makes family contact easier; however, there were significant delays in allocating PIN numbers. Foreign national prisoners can access PIN numbers to contact family in their home countries.

7.5 Resettlement planning

As a Category B training prison relatively low numbers of prisoners are released directly into the community.

The IMB contacted several men close to the end of their sentence. All confirmed that they were getting support for example to set up bank accounts etc. before release. Those being released to an area at some distance reported that it was difficult to access their probation officer, particularly in London where there are significant staffing shortages.

The IMB surveyed a sample of men within six months of their release. Some these men had been proactive in seeking help and reported they had been well supported by Offender Managers and Psychology. Others who had been less proactive reported that they were very anxious and didn't know or understand what would happen to them. One man, awaiting release from the Separation Centre was

reluctant to talk to the IMB, but when he did open up he expressed concern about how he would cope after so long in an isolated community.

One prisoner was directly released from the Segregation Unit. The IMB observed that he was well supported and that communication between the prison health team and the local health team was good.

The Board is concerned that support is not adequate for most prisoners. Many have requested help with varying success, and rather than easing transition into the community, a lack of support increases the risk of reoffending.

8. The work of the IMB

In September 2022 the Board wrote to the Minister expressing their concern about the impact low staffing levels were having on prisoners.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	18
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	6
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6
Total number of visits to the establishment	280

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	6	19
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	10	8
C	Equality	8	
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	10	4
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	6	13
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	2	6
F	Food and kitchens	20*	6
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	23	13
H1	Property within the establishment	12	25
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	21	27
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	3	3
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	6	10
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	14	35
K	Transfers	0	2
L	Miscellaneous	9	37
	Total	150	208

Note: * includes a campaign from one wing.

There were 94 calls to the 0800 number during the year. This service was discontinued in June 2023.



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