



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Channings Wood

**For reporting year
1 September 2022 to 31 August 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 Channings Wood is a category C adult male training and resettlement prison with an operational capacity of 746¹. The prison operates a split site regime across all areas for the two groups of prisoners it holds: mains prisoners and vulnerable prisoners (VPs), which includes prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCOSOs).

The prison opened in 1974 on the extensive site of a former Ministry of Defence base and is in a rural area of south Devon near Newton Abbot. The site is bounded by a high fence and there are several public footpaths around the perimeter. Internal fences separate the two prisoner groups and control prisoners' movement on the site. There are seven permanent Living Blocks (LBs) as well as one that is temporary (LB7) comprising rapid deployment cells. There are also workshops, a kitchen, a care and separation unit (CSU – more commonly known as the segregation unit), a health centre, a well-equipped gym and sports hall, a multifaith place of worship and a separate chapel, plus greenhouses and buildings housing other services. All buildings are either single or two storeys.

The eight LBs are split between main prisoners (LB2, 3, 4, 6 and 8) and PCOSO/VPs (LB1, 5 and 7), with LB2, LB6 and LB7 housing enhanced-status prisoners. (The prison incentive scheme comprises three levels, of which 'enhanced' is the highest and earns the prisoner extra privileges.) New receptions are placed in LB1 and LB8. Five of the LBs have a central entrance area, off which there are offices, classrooms, a servery and two association rooms. Cells in these blocks are on four corridors on each wing, two on each floor, arranged at right angles to each other. Most blocks have single cells with a toilet and communal showers, while LB8 has double cells with ensuite showers. Part of LB1 has been equipped with bunk beds for dual occupancy by new arrivals. Due to overcrowding and the increase of the Operational Capacity to 746, 36 single cells have been adapted for dual occupancy.

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. Key points

3.1 Main findings

The Board is increasingly concerned by the adverse consequences of overcrowding. The efforts of managers to mitigate the impact is recognised, but for the most part effective remedies are beyond their control. While safety and decency are the most obvious risk areas, also affected are:

- new arrivals who have spent only a very brief time in custody at a reception prison following sentencing²
- excessive demand on purposeful activity, offender management and Healthcare facilities
- disruption to education and skills training, offending behaviour programmes and resettlement activity caused by short notice moves from other prisons
- ability to maintain family contact
- general stability of the prison regime

Safety

- After a temporary fall last year, levels of self-harm are increasing and above the average seen at comparator prisons. Assaults have risen by 20% with serious assaults up by 70%, but assaults on staff have remained static at three in the past 12 months.
- Despite measures to intercept illicit items, the Board is concerned that such items, especially drugs, present a risk to discipline and prisoners' safety and wellbeing, by fuelling debt and its consequences.
- Due to an increasingly ageing prison population, more deaths in custody from natural causes have occurred in hospital or a hospice. Despite the challenges of the prison environment though, end of life care (and the contribution made by Buddies, other prisoners who can offer care for those who are terminally ill), has been commendable.

Fair and humane treatment

- The length of time taken to effect repairs (especially those involving roof repairs) on living blocks, workshops and key equipment is having a very significant impact on decency standards and the delivery of purposeful activity.
- The use of the segregation unit as a place of safety for those with acute mental health problems while awaiting transfer to a specialist secure unit is inappropriate.
- The Board observed some isolated but worrying examples of poor relationships between staff and prisoners early in this reporting period. Effective action was taken by managers to address them and they have not been observed again.
- The delivery of key work has been limited and has not met the reduced targets set by senior managers.

² Although, in line with the 2019 HMPPS Offender Management in Custody Model (OMiC), this had not been the case prior to the current acute population pressures.

- Missing or lost property remains the main reason for applications (written representations that prisoners submit to the IMB). It is astonishing that the Prison Service and its contractors are unable to manage the efficient and secure movement and storage of prisoners' property, particularly during transfers. There has been no improvement whatsoever in this area, despite the introduction of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework in August 2022.

Health and wellbeing

- Outside the Box, the offender personality disorder unit, provides an excellent service for challenging prisoners and has been commended by inspectors for notable good practice. Managers have told the Board it will achieve full clinical staffing by September 2023. It is a pity though that the unit has only been able to operate at around 50% capacity for much of the year as NHS providers have been unable to fill key posts.
- There are concerns over the provision of suitable accommodation and regime for older prisoners, especially those with conditions such as dementia or limited mobility. In one case, the Board was told that care fell short of that which could be expected in the community. While recognising that a lack of accessible or specialist accommodation for an ageing population is a national issue which cannot be solved at a local level, it is considered unacceptable, nonetheless.

Progression and resettlement

- Some education classes and workshops have not operated at full capacity due to instructor shortages or delays to repairs by Government Facilities Services Limited (GFSL). Over the winter months many industries' locations had to close due to cold weather. At one point only 196 prisoners (just 52% of industries' capacity) were able to attend work.
- Offender management and the key work that complements it are undermined by staff shortages and high caseloads. Staff vacancies, lack of overtime, detached duty, non profiled tasks and high prisoner churn have contributed to a backlog of offender assessments, with some prisoners arriving without completed assessments.
- Visits are affected by population pressures, as many prisoners have family ties far away from the South West and the Offender Management Unit (OMU) has not been able to support transfers for family reasons³.
- The imbalance in offender flow has put pressure on resettlement services with too many prisoners arriving within their 12 week window. This caused problems for resettlement staff if sending prisons had not begun basic tasks such as applications for bank accounts and identity documents.
- Accommodation on release has improved but remains a concern. Channings Wood is not yet part of the Community Accommodation Services Tier 3 (CAS3) scheme targeted at those at risk of homelessness.

³ Although in line with the 2019 HMPPS Offender Management in Custody Model, this had not been the case prior to the current acute population pressures.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

The Board has noted its concerns over the provision of adequate care for an increasingly ageing population. For those with health and/or mobility conditions, results within a prison environment lean towards less favourable outcomes. The much trailed and delayed older offenders or ageing population strategy is still awaited. When will it be published and what assurances can the Minister provide that the strategy will be properly resourced to ensure adequate provision for older prisoners across the prison estate?

The Board has observed the steady and detrimental impact of acute population pressures across a range of prison services. The planned expansion at Channings Wood is part of the national programme intended to address this. Can the Minister assure the Board that the provision of new infrastructure will not be at the expense of maintaining the current and ageing estate? The annual report has noted the excessive time taken to carry out some repairs to key buildings and equipment. This adversely affects not just living conditions for prisoners but also access to many of the activities which help prepare them for release. Over the next few years, will an equal priority be given to maintaining the current old estate as to funding the new?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

For many years the Board has reported on the apparent inability of the prison service to move prisoners' property from one prison to another without loss. This is consistently the single biggest issue that prisoners bring to the Board's attention. It is an ongoing source of frustration, takes an inordinate amount of staff time to investigate (let alone resolve) and represents an avoidable expense in compensation paid. In the Board's opinion, the implementation of Prisoners' Property Policy Framework has done nothing to improve the situation. What does the prison service intend to do next to try to resolve this longstanding failure?

TO THE GOVERNOR

After a welcome and sustained downward trend in many safety indicators, the Board has noted an increase in serious assaults, the number of prisoners self-isolating and above average levels of self-harm. Given the belief that the main underlying cause is the availability of drugs, what further measures can be taken to intercept them? Are there further technological solutions which would assist if they were made available at Channings Wood?

As one manager told the Board in 2021, 'You can't achieve OMiC if you can't achieve key work'. Last year, HM Inspectorate of Prisons stated: 'The absence of a functioning key worker scheme exacerbated the problems that prisoners told us they faced in getting things done.' For several reasons (and even under the delivery to priority groups only model) key work is not being achieved. Early evidence had suggested that good key work could have a range of positive effects:

- on safety
- a reduction in the number of adjudications

- improved communication to address prisoners' concerns before they became complaints, cited in the Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) survey (a questionnaire for prisoners) as the ability to 'get things done'.

Can the Governor tell the Board when he plans to return to full key work delivery and how he hopes to achieve this?

3.3 Response to last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
<p>To the Minister</p> <p>With the increasing levels of concern expressed over the provision of mental health services, what will the Minister do to help the Prison Service deal with the growing number of prisoners with complex mental health conditions, especially those requiring placements in specialist secure accommodation?</p>	<p>Minister referenced the draft Mental Health Bill published in June 2022 setting out measures to speed up access to specialist inpatient care and treatment as well as introducing a statutory 28-day time limit for transfers from prison to hospital.</p>	<p>The Board wrote to Minister in July 2023 expressing concern over a prisoner who had spent 74 days in segregation following difficulties in accessing specialist secure mental health accommodation.</p> <p>The Minister's response agreed that the CSU (Care and Segregation Unit, also known as 'segregation') should only be used as a last resort, and prisoners awaiting transfer to a secure NHS facility should not normally be kept in the segregation unit. Referred again to draft Mental Health Bill and MoJ working with the Department of Health and Social Care to consider recommendations. Government will publish its response in due course.</p> <p>Also noted National Partnership Agreement for Health and Social Care in England published 23 February 2023 which 'sets out a shared priority workplan to deliver safe, decent and effective care that improves health outcomes of people in prison and those subject to statutory supervision by the probation service in the community.'</p>

<p>To the Prison Service Prisoners arriving late on a Friday report a significantly poorer induction experience than those arriving during the core working week. What will the Prison Service do to minimise the number of routine, planned transfers taking place on a Friday?</p>	<p>HMPPS (HM Prison and Probation Service) stated that due to current population pressures it is not possible to avoid making transfers on Fridays. Referred to a trial at Channings Wood where prisoners' PIN accounts (allows prisoners to make phone calls) would be 'mapped over' to receiving prison once prisoner had left the sending establishment.</p>	<p>The Board is now receiving fewer applications concerning PIN accounts on arrival.</p>
<p>To the Governor Given current resource levels, what plans does the Governor have to implement an effective key worker system over the coming 12 months?</p>	<p>Staff shortages have resulted in managers taking a revised approach. Selected officers are detailed with delivery of key work to high risk prisoners on the Safety Intervention Meeting (SIM) register or those self-isolating being prioritised. The intention has been to detail four officers to keywork each day when staffing levels permit to provide a minimum of two sessions per month for prisoners identified by OMU (Offender Management Unit) or referred by the SIM.</p>	<p>It has proved difficult to achieve even this very limited approach. Figures seen by the Board show that April 2023 was best month with 72% of planned sessions delivered, but in May this dropped to 55% before returning to 71% in June. It is unclear when the delivery of key work to all prisoners will be possible.</p>

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

The prison has an effective Safer Custody Team, led at Governor level. This meets monthly and issues comprehensive reports, analyses, and guidance to staff. The weekly Safety Intervention Meeting (SIM) regularly monitors those prisoners most at risk and provides quality assurance of the assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) process, which is used to support prisoners at risk of self-harm or suicide.

4.1 Reception and induction

There were 1109 prisoners received during the reporting year. Members regularly monitor Reception which is seen to be well run. Staff and orderlies treat prisoners with respect. Healthcare have always been present and Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide peer support) are made available to new arrivals. Care is taken with the elderly and vulnerable. All prisoners spoken to by the Board report favourably on their experience of Reception and the induction process. There are signs that because of population pressures, some new arrivals will have spent very little time in their reception prison after sentencing and consequently take longer to settle in their new environment.

Late arrivals often occur and staff do their utmost to mitigate the effects by starting preparatory administrative work as soon as they are informed of prisoners' details. Members continue to note that late arrivals on a Friday often result in prisoners not receiving PIN account access until the following Monday. Last year HMPPS told the Board that a trial was underway to allow PIN accounts to be 'mapped over' once a prisoner departed the sending establishment: 'This will ensure telephone access is available (to) late arrivals'⁴.

Lack of toilet facilities in one of the holding cells in Reception has been observed to cause problems for new arrivals at times when staff are unable to provide access to a separate toilet. Volumetric control of property is often exceeded leading to delays while property is searched and recorded. Staff consider that this is usually because of catalogue purchases and enforcement issues caused by staffing shortages across the prison estate. On one occasion a member observed a prisoner being placed in an unclean cell on LB1, the reception wing for vulnerable prisoners.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Board members periodically review ACCT documents. Those checked almost always show up to date entries and the involvement of the prisoner in the process. Members also note that record keeping in areas such as constant supervision logs is also accurate. The number of open ACCTs has fluctuated from a low of 13 in April 2023 to a high of 35 in June 2023, with 24 in place at the end of the reporting year. Self-harm, or the threat of, remains the main reason for opening ACCTs. The Board is concerned that because of population pressures, prisoners on open ACCTs are being transferred in. During this 12 month period, 147 individuals self-harmed, 31 for the first time and the remainder on more than one occasion. The significant reduction

⁴ HMPPS response to IMB Channings Wood Annual Report 2021-22, dated 15 February 2023.

in self-harm incidents noted last year has not been sustained, with the 509 recorded incidents more in line with previous years, when the Board registered concerns.

There were six deaths in custody over the reporting period, an increase from four the previous year. Five were apparently from natural causes (three occurred in hospital or a local hospice). The death of a very newly arrived prisoner from HMP Exeter was apparently self-inflicted. Appropriate follow up actions were taken by prison managers so that any possible shortcomings could be identified. Good levels of support are in place for staff and prisoners.

The Board notes with concern that at times the Listener service could not always provide cover across all living blocks. An additional peer support service, Trust. Hope. Resilience. Empathy. Action. Direction. Strength (THREADS) has been trialled since the summer of 2022. The team running the initiative has indicated that the training of new peer supporters is slow, meaning that at one point there was only one trained peer supporter working with vulnerable prisoners. However, the success of the trial period should lead to a more comprehensive roll out. In-cell telephones now also provide prisoners with access to outside agencies, such as the Samaritans, should they require their support.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

During the reporting period there were 123 recorded incidents of violence which is an increase of 20% on the previous year. Several of these incidents involved the same prisoners. The Safer Custody Team maintains detailed, rigorously analysed data which provides staff with information on likely location, days, and times when violence may occur and the reasons prisoners offer when explaining their behaviour. These patterns are almost identical to previous years with two standard mains blocks and the VP induction block recording the highest number of assaults. The number of violent assaults is above the target set out in the prison's service delivery requirement, but lower than the number of similar assaults seen in comparator prisons.

The Board is kept informed of the measures taken to address violent incidents and their likelihood. Challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs) are drawn up to support and manage prisoners who present behavioural challenges and reviewed on a weekly basis at the SIM. Ten were open at the end of the reporting period.

The number of men self-isolating varies monthly from the high teens to the low 20s with debt and fears over safety as the main reasons cited by prisoners. Other reasons given include avoiding trouble pending release or hoping to influence a request for transfer. Board members monitor conditions for self-isolating prisoners on a weekly basis, although occasionally the information available has not been up to date. Self-isolators seen by Board members generally report some satisfaction with the support they are offered by staff, with most eventually reintegrated into wing life during the year.

The MQPL survey, carried out in February 2023, found that prisoners' perceptions regarding their personal safety had improved compared with the previous survey in 2020. The Board noted there were no significant variations between the views on safety of PCOSO and mains prisoners.

4.4 Use of force

Board members witnessed three serious incidents during the year, all at height, and two of which required the presence of National Tactical Response Group (NTRG), which helps prison staff deal with serious incidents. They were safely resolved through negotiation enhanced by the visible presence of the NTRG. Restraint techniques were used to move the prisoners involved to the segregation unit where their treatment was monitored by members. None of the three prisoners involved made complaints to the Board and the Board has no grounds for concern over the management of serious incidents or the way in which they were resolved.

The monthly average for use of force incidents has increased compared with last year, largely because of spikes in April, May, and July where incidents were significantly higher than the average for all other months. The total number of incidents rose by 13%, which the Board believes can be partly explained by the increase in population and the fact that some challenging prisoners were involved in multiple incidents. In those of which the Board is aware, a proportionate amount of force in combination with soft skills were used to resolve the situation. Records show that batons were only drawn twice during the reporting year but not used. The use of pelargonic acid vanillyl amide (PAVA, a type of pepper spray) was very rare, with just one incident reported during the year (also when a baton was drawn). This occurred in the segregation unit and involved a very challenging prisoner who was awaiting transfer to a secure mental health unit. A Board member viewed the body worn camera (BWVC) footage and felt that the use of PAVA was justified in the circumstances.

Overall, the Board's view remains that force is not overused at Channings Wood, and is used proportionately. Members regularly observe that staff deploy soft skills effectively on wings at potentially difficult times, such as lock-up or mealtimes. The Board has seen no evidence in the records of bias against any group, though 25-34 year olds have been over-represented.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Almost 90% of new arrivals are routinely scanned for illicit items with about 25% found positive. All social visitors are checked by passive drug detection dogs and prisoners are searched at random when returning to the wings. All incoming mail is copied with the prisoner receiving the copy. Selected mail (including legal mail) is checked for drugs and any positive indications then scanned through specialist equipment.

Mandatory Drugs Tests (MDT) were resumed at end of July 2023 with 5% of the population tested every month in line with national guidelines. The Board is concerned to understand that in most cases staff are not able to access laboratory results soon enough for positives to be taken to adjudication (a disciplinary hearing when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules), as the DIS1 (a form detailing the offence the prison officer believes has been committed) must be served within 48hrs of the results being received.

There have been four reported incidents of attempted delivery of illicit items by drone. Intelligence led searches of prisoners' cells regularly result in finds and while the Board applauds these successes, this evidence of illicit items being present in the prison despite preventive measures, is concerning. It is understood that

intelligence cooperation between other prisons in the region has been limited, but cooperation with local police is said to be good. The Board has been told that a new forum to enhance cooperation with other prisons will be established, which is welcomed.

Despite evidence that illicit substances are present and continue to drive debt and its associated effects, the MQPL survey found that Channings Wood was one of the prisons where perceptions regarding 'Prisoner Conflict, Drugs and Exploitation' had improved the most. The prison was also one of 13 where perceptions of 'Policing/ Supervision' and 'Personal Safety' had also improved.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The quality of accommodation varies between living blocks. Many are clean with cells well kept, but a third of prisoners' complaints were about residential issues, the largest category, a 14% increase from the previous year. A programme of remedial work to the showers on LB4, flooring on LB2 and pharmacy areas has been ongoing, though it is disappointing that the problem of water ingress in LB6 has worsened.

The revised decency audits carried out by supervising officers are monitored by members and the MQPL survey found that personal hygiene was the most positive dimension at Channings Wood. Some 80% of prisoners felt they had adequate opportunities and 47% agreed they had adequate facilities. However, black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners were more negative on this subject.

Feedback on access to laundry facilities has been mixed. Members frequently observe washing drying on landing radiators. The MQPL reported that some prisoners felt that they had to wash their clothes in the shower or in buckets as they did not trust the laundry system to return their clothes correctly. Only two LBs have washing machines and driers and prisoners would welcome these on all wings.

The installation of in cell telephones did not result in a significant increase in 0800 applications to the Board, but high use during the first three months necessitated a temporary uplift of telephone credits – see paragraph 7.4.

Due to prison population pressures, 72 prisoners (just under 10%) are doubled up in 36 single cells. Prisoners, especially many on LB5 have commented on the negative aspects of sharing cells which are designed for 'one person, with only one table and one chair'.

Good use is made of the considerable outdoor space (especially in the better weather) for exercise, association and to provide an older prisoners' meeting area and a fruit and vegetable patch.

Prisoners' views on the quality and quantity of the food vary, noting 'small' breakfast packs and the need to 'carb load' their plates. Despite this, members have noted the inconsistent use of food comments' books and the 39 complaints about food (4% of the total number) were slightly down on the previous year. The Board received nine applications about food, a similar percentage. The MQPL survey stated 'numerous prisoners from the mains population cited food as one of the three most negative aspects of their life at Channings Wood, in that they didn't trust PCOSOs to prepare their food'. Reference was also made to meals being served early which penalised those engaged in purposeful activity. This view was shared by some instructors and supported by the Board's monitoring.

Canteen price rises leading to reduced purchasing power of prison wages has frequently been raised with the members and in the MQPL which said that 'low wages, rising costs and a £20 weekly spend cap made it difficult to budget as they had to choose between purchasing phone credit, toiletries, cleaning products or other items from the canteen'.

5.2 Segregation

Segregation occupancy over the year has mostly been short term stays. Only three exceeded 42 days, including one prisoner on long term dirty protest, totalling 164 days by the end of August. On visits, members observe most prisoners speak positively about relationships with staff whilst they are held in segregation.

Communal areas in Segregation are generally satisfactory but the shower area whilst clean requires improvement. The office suffers from a leaking roof and frequent but temporary repairs have been required over many months. Given the demanding nature of the environment (including the prisoner on long-term dirty protest) the Board feels substandard office conditions can only present an additional unnecessary challenge to staff.

For many years members have voiced concern over the small number of prisoners who have been detained in Segregation with severe mental health problems while awaiting secure mental health placements. In April and May the Board wrote to the Prison Group Director (PGD) expressing its concern for one such prisoner and in July escalated this to the Prisons Minister. This very challenging prisoner spent a total of 74 days in Segregation before a place could be found for him at Wellesley Park. While acknowledging the difficulties for management and staff and commending their supportive and empathetic care, the ongoing use of Segregation as a place of safety is considered unacceptable.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

During its visits, the Board has generally observed positive relations between prisoners and staff. The MQPL supported this with prisoners commenting that ‘good officers were polite, approachable, non-judgemental, helpful and fair.’ But in some cases prisoners reported ‘it was more common to have bad staff’ with ‘poor communication, a perceived lack of care, compassion and understanding.’ Members of the young people’s forum suggested that ‘there is a bias against the under 25s and that staff stereotype their behaviour which leads to unfairly being blamed’.

In October and November 2022 members received a high number of applications from prisoners on LB1 complaining about the behaviour of a small number of officers. Such concerted reporting over a short time involving the same staff was unusual and the Board raised its concerns with the Governor. Effective action was taken which included closer supervision of new staff, placing some more experienced officers on the wings, and additional training in de-escalation and management of challenging prisoners.

An incident on an enhanced block (LB2) in October 2022 was also brought to the Board’s attention. Prisoners had overheard what they claimed was the use of derogatory language about them after a microphone in the wing office had been left live. The Deputy Governor conducted a formal investigation and found that the events described by prisoners were largely substantiated. Disciplinary action followed against four officers.

While concerning, the Board notes such cases are rare and that effective remedial action was taken. It may be that staff shortages and frequent redeployments of wing staff to other locations make it harder to establish and maintain relationships. This also applies to key work.

The Board remains concerned that the key worker scheme continues to fall short of its targets. Staff shortages have resulted in managers taking a revised approach. When staffing levels permit, selected officers are now tasked with delivery to priority groups only, such as high risk prisoners on the SIM register or those self-isolating. The intention was to detail four officers for key work daily to provide a minimum of two sessions per month for prisoners identified by OMU or referred by the SIM. Figures seen by the Board show that April 2023 was best month, with 72% of planned sessions delivered, but in May this had fallen to 55%, before returning to 71% in June. The findings from a survey conducted by two members provide more detail in Annex B.

5.4 Equality and diversity

An equality action plan is in place and is reviewed by the Equality Action Team/Diversity and Inclusion Action Team EAT/DIAT when it meets, though this is not always monthly. Dedicated staffing has remained fluid with changes at all levels and officers' time is still not protected from other duties. The Board has seen evidence that 71 Discrimination Incident Report Forms (DIRFs) have been submitted this year, a 29% increase on the last. Several were submitted by the same individuals and generally the monthly numbers have been low. The Board has only received one application on equality.

Prisoner equality representatives and forums have been less active than expected, though at a young person forum observed by a member there was much discussion about inadequate purposeful activity for under 25 year olds. Those present claimed a lack of work opportunities, difficulty accessing more popular courses and the desire for 'more gym time, sport activities, competitions to help burn off extra energy'.

There are some 174 prisoners aged over 50, just under 25% of the prison roll, and 25 are over 70. The oldest prisoner is now 88 years old. They mostly live on LB5, where social care packages are provided for four prisoners. The Board has registered concern over appropriate accommodation, regime and resources for older prisoners, see paragraph 6.4 below.

Figures seen by the Board show that approximately 31% of prisoners have self-disclosed learning difficulties so the recently appointed neurodiversity support manager is welcomed.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy has continued to deliver an effective service responding to the needs of the prisoners of all faith groups, though very occasionally chaplaincy staff shortages have affected the provision of some planned services. Their reassuring and compassionate presence on the wings offering support to prisoners and staff following deaths in custody has been witnessed by members. A newly introduced 'Inside Out' initiative connecting prisoners to faith groups who provide support during the early days of release is welcomed.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The current incentives scheme policy is due to be reissued in September following consultation with prisoners as part of the annual incentives forum. Prisoners on the basic level have remained consistent at 2% of the population, with 36% on standard and 62% enhanced (prisoners earn more privileges as they progress through the

incentives scheme levels). The Board will monitor the impact of the new policy over the coming year to see if it addresses the key concerns raised – largely about fairness and inconsistency of application.

5.7 Complaints

Evidence seen by the Board shows that there were 1028 complaints, a drop of 207 or 17% from last year's total. In the MQPL some prisoners expressed a lack of faith in the system, claiming there was no point in submitting complaints because of a lack of action. Similar assertions are made to members when dealing with IMB applications. The Board actively monitors the use of the prison's complaint system and the timeliness and effectiveness of responses. Property complaints involving another establishment are the most likely to suffer significant delays and the Board is aware of one such complaint that is still unresolved after 15 months. It also notes that the top categories concerned residential issues (one third of all complaints) with 84 about property and 82 concerning reception issues. 79 were about access to work, 53 concerned letters/censor but only 21 or 2% were about staff. Of these many related to the issues on LB1 and LB2 reported at paragraph 5.3.

5.8 Property

There were 47 IMB applications about property issues, at 21% the highest by subject. Of these, 25 followed a transfer and 22 were while at Channings Wood. This is almost identical to the previous year, when property was also the top category of those submitted. The Board has regularly raised property lost on transfer to Governor level as this provides the best chance of resolution, but in many cases the prisoner has had to complain to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO). It is astonishing that the Prison Service and its contractors are unable to manage the efficient and secure movement and storage of prisoners' property, particularly during transfers. The loss of personal items causes a great deal of frustration and unhappiness for these individuals that often affects their ability to settle in. The costs to the Prison Service in replacing lost items must be significant. It is very disappointing that the Board has seen no improvement whatsoever in this area, despite the introduction of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework in August 2022.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Early in the year the provision of healthcare services was awarded to Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, which took over from Practice Plus. Shortly after this change the MQPL survey found prisoners mainly complained about waiting times for appointments and alleged inconsistencies in issuing prescribed medication, reflecting the applications made to the Board in relation to healthcare. On average Oxleas receives between 20 and 30 complaints each month, again mostly about changes to medication⁵ or waiting times. The Board accepts though that waiting times are largely in line with those seen in the wider community.

Notwithstanding these issues, care at Channings Wood was viewed more positively than at the 26 other prisons visited by the MQPL team, and IMB applications on health fell significantly from 39 last year to 15, a reduction of 62%. This has partly been attributed by the Board to the work of the patient engagement coordinator. Healthcare managers also attend the monthly wing representatives' meetings and try to answer questions and concerns on the spot.

As already noted at paragraph 4.2 there have been six deaths in custody (five apparently from natural causes) at Channings Wood during this period. Final PPO reports are not yet available, but during the year the Board has seen reports from two deaths that occurred in the previous period (when Oxleas was not the provider), which found that the care provided was not up to, or partly not up, to expected standards.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Staff turnover following the change of provider has stabilised with just a few unfilled posts by the end of the reporting year. Oxleas intend to increase the number of staff working in healthcare, to provide cover until 11pm as contracted. Hours of operation until then are from 0730 until 1830 on weekdays and 0730-1730 at weekends. Devon Doctors provide out of hours cover. An optician attends only one day a month and appointment waiting times of up to three months have been reported. There is no audiology service at present. Approximately 60 prisoners attend hospital appointments each month.

Healthcare professionals now manage programmes including Hepatitis C screening and smoking cessation courses. There are also specialist nurses to provide advice on hypertension, sexual health, and diabetes. Effective drug treatment and assessment programmes are in place.

6.3 Mental health

There are 14 staff dedicated to the provision of mental health services and they have seen a steady increase in their workload. Provision of mental healthcare has been enhanced recently by specialist staff to address neurodiversity needs with a particular focus on those prisoners who are subject to ACCTs. A psychiatrist attends the prison on a weekly basis and a range of supportive therapies are in place to treat severe, acute, and chronic conditions. Mental health referrals are usually responded

⁵ Significant changes were introduced to prison medication prescribing policy in January 2023 to reduce addiction and misuse of prescribed medications.

to on the same day or the next. Given the increased demand for mental health care, the Board supports the need expressed for more treatment space so that staff can provide therapy and counselling with a greater degree of privacy.

Outside the Box, highlighted for notable positive practice in last year's inspection report, continues to provide an excellent service for prisoners with challenging personality disorders. When fully staffed they can accommodate 36 clients, but clinical staff shortages mean that there is typically a long waiting list, with delivery limited to only 20 or so prisoners. Noting the successes being achieved and the evidence of engagement demonstrated by those able to access it, the Board would welcome a higher priority placed on recruitment by NHS providers.

The Board remains concerned that the segregation unit continues to be used to accommodate prisoners with severe mental health needs. As noted in paragraph 5.2, above, these concerns have been raised to both the PGD and the Minister. With a lack of capacity at secure units, time limits have not always been met for assessing and transferring prisoners who need secure mental healthcare. This had added to the already significant workload of mental health staff on site.

6.4 Social care

Social care packages are provided for four prisoners. These are complemented by the excellent work of Buddies, frequently observed by members, assisting some 20 to 30 prisoners. While this has helped to deliver more independent living the Board has heard concerns that recruitment could suffer because of the pay review which downgraded the Buddy role, effectively cutting the pay for new starters. Access to resources to improve independent living has also come to the Board's attention, with reports of a shortage of wheelchairs for those prisoners with reduced mobility. While managers have referred to differing funding arrangements for the provision of wheelchairs, they have assured the Board that they have enough.

It is most unfortunate that the Board has had to write to the Governor and PGD about the inadequate care of one prisoner with severe dementia. He was allocated to the prison when a specialist unit at another establishment closed. While acknowledging the efforts of officers, healthcare staff and Buddies in trying to meet his growing needs, the care the prisoner was receiving fell short of expectations. The Board recognises the chronic national shortage of adequate accommodation for an ageing population, but it is deeply unsatisfactory that despite being accepted by a specialist unit at HMP The Verne, this prisoner remains at Channings Wood with the delay due to staffing issues at The Verne. His condition is only likely to deteriorate in the interim.

Members have also observed the considerate and sympathetic arrangements that were put in place for those few prisoners who have required palliative care. The compassionate and caring efforts of two Buddies were recognised at an award ceremony in August. Prison staff communication with families and friends has also been supportive and sensitive and the Board commends the work done in this difficult area.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

As would be expected in a training and resettlement prison, time out of cell for those prisoners who engage in purposeful activity is good with places for almost 75% of

the population when operating at full capacity. Almost 80% of prisoners surveyed as part of the MQPL reported that they were in an activity such as work, education or programmes, for at least three hours a day most days of the week. However, 66% of the same group also felt that 'Prisoners spend too long locked up in their cells'. This view is also expressed to members on rota visits, often from prisoners unfit or unwilling to work. Members also note that the regime provides a reasonable level of association time and time out of cell for exercise, enhanced by the amount of open space available to prisoners.

Regular access to the gym and library is provided and members have observed that both are well used. Staff told the Board that use of the gym stands at over 1000 hours each month and that they ensure facilities address the needs of all prisoners, including the increasing number of elderly prisoners. The incentives policy includes additional (or reduced) gym time depending on the incentives status of the prisoner. 'Standard' prisoners receive three sessions per week with four for enhanced. 'Basic' and unemployed prisoners have one gym session a week. Library provision is also valued by prisoners as are other 'soft skills' activities which offer further opportunities for time out of cell – see paragraph 6.7.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Early in this period the service provider changed from the Exeter and Devon Partnership Drug and Alcohol Services to Change, Grow, Live, a national service. The caseload for drug rehabilitation services is high, averaging around 200 prisoners which is 27% of the prison population. Recruitment challenges have meant that the service has not always been fully staffed and shortfalls have sometimes been covered by loan staff from other prisons. In April the service was short of six recovery workers which severely affected delivery of programmes.

When the Board has been able to observe, all newly arrived prisoners are seen and assessed by a recovery worker within five days and any with known needs are added to the team's caseload. The Board understands that while there was a gap in the provision of group sessions for alcohol problems, because Alcoholics Anonymous was unable to support them, these have resumed. Monthly gambling intervention clinics, led by an external case worker and helped by a prisoner peer supporter, are also held, with priority for those prisoners in their resettlement window.

6.7 Soft skills

The Board considers that prison managers do well encouraging prisoners to develop soft skills during their time at Channings Wood. Use of the dynamic purchasing scheme (DPS) has secured additional funding to provide some impressive initiatives and take up has been very good. The Board has observed some excellent examples:

- 'Changing Tunes' uses music and mentoring to encourage participants to lead meaningful, crime free lives by developing their creativity. The charity visits the prison once a week to run 'jam' sessions on the wings in the morning and then holds an afternoon session in the Library.
- 'Our Space' (a partnership with Theatre Royal Plymouth) offers weekly drama workshops where creativity and communication skills are developed.
- Art therapy classes in the Library are also in place and have been very popular with prisoners.

- A successful partnership has been established with Plymouth Argyl FC where two members of the coaching staff are ex-offenders. An eight week course offers a level 2 football coaching qualification and is jointly run by Gym staff and trainers from the club. As well as developing leadership and teamwork it includes mental health and first aid at work. On successful completion students receive their certificates and an awards ceremony.
- Sponsored by the charity Resettlement and Care for Older Ex Offenders and Prisoners (RECOOP) who also provide the Buddy support training programme, the peer support programme THREADS helps to develop emotional intelligence and awareness with aiming to reduce thoughts of self-harm. Channings Wood has taken part in a two year pilot and the Board is hopeful that following a formal evaluation it will become an established programme.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

One of the main criticisms from the last OFSTED report has been addressed by managers. The Activities team continues to stress to residential staff the importance of education to ensure that prisoners enrolled on education or vocational skills are the first to be unlocked. Attendances are scrutinised daily and challenged when appropriate, leading to good attendance levels, which typically have risen from around 90% at the start of the reporting period to 97%.

At any given time, some 120 prisoners have been in education (including around 36 distance-course learners). Overall success rates for courses were reported as 93%, and functional skills recorded a completion rate of 82%. The MQPL survey found that numerous prisoners cited education or vocational training as one of the three most positive aspects of life at Channings Wood. This was matched however, by many who expressed frustration at the time taken to access activities, a subject frequently raised with Board members. The provider, Weston College, accept that some classes and workshops have not operated at full capacity, due to staff shortages or delays to repairs, see paragraph 7.2.

The emphasis on improving peer support to prisoners with poor levels of literacy and/or numeracy (some 52% of receptions) has also been evident. DPS funding has allowed the Shannon Trust, a charity that helps people learn to read, to be present four days a week and to train more peer supporters. In March Board members attended an event celebrating the achievements of over 50 prisoners. Many spoke of an environment where they felt confident enough to ask for help. In recognition, the Head of Reducing Reoffending received the Tom Shannon Award for Outstanding Contribution.

The Library remains an example of good practice. Provision has been impressive with staff reporting a doubling of footfall over this period from around 500 a month to over 1100. Members have observed an inclusive environment, with committed orderlies and staff. Prisoners have taken part in art workshops, produced Christmas cards for sale at charity fairs and achieved some highly commended entries in the national Koestler Awards (for arts in criminal justice).

7.2 Vocational training, work

Members have observed that when fully functional the atmosphere is positive and purposeful. Instructors provide well delivered training to engaged prisoners. One recalled prisoner spoke positively about the qualification he had acquired which led directly to employment on release. Often though this is undermined by factors such as staff shortages, failing equipment or a lack of work. Over the winter months members noted that many locations were closed due to cold weather. In February only 196 prisoners (from a capacity of 380) were able to attend work in prison industries. Initially the Governor's request for industrial heaters and associated generators to replace the broken heating system was not met. Noting the impact on prisoners, the Board wrote to the PGD to register concern over the state of repairs to parts of the estate and equipment and the lack of urgency shown by GFSL in addressing them. Heaters were subsequently provided. The Board will monitor any improvements this winter.

The effects of pressure on the national prison population have seen a significant increase in the number of prisoners arriving at Channings Wood with little time remaining before release. Education providers have had to increase the number of short, employability related courses such as First Aid at Work, Food Hygiene and Asbestos Awareness. Equally problematic has been the transfer of prisoners at short notice, with many being withdrawn from their courses as a result. This prompted managers to ask the OMU to delay transfers until key courses had been completed, but rarely was this possible. One prisoner spoken to claimed that he had been transferred between several prisons, often having to restart courses already partially completed.

Release on temporary licence (ROTL) opportunities have not returned to pre-Covid-19 levels. One reason has been that many of those prisoners who had been approved for local ROTL were then moved more quickly to the Category D estate. Of 53 moves, 50 were for progression (a system in which eligible prisoners move to a less secure prison to monitor their levels of responsibility and safety) and the other three were under the temporary presumptive recategorisation scheme (TPRS) to relieve pressure on the closed estate. Staff shortages and lack of transport to move prisoners to and from work was another reason. Over this reporting period only two prisoners have been able to undertake ROTL for paid work experience, though some 40 prisoners have had access to ROTL for other reasons such as maintaining family ties or other outside prison activities.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The Board has previously noted frustration with the OMU, expressed by prisoners, concerning difficulties in being able to see offender managers (though applications about this have reduced slightly and this may be due to the provision of OMU clinics across the living blocks). Despite this, the MQPL revealed that lack of progression was one of the three most negative aspects of life at Channings Wood. Prisoners cited poor communication and contact with OMU staff and limited availability of offending behaviour programmes.

Managers gave several reasons for such negative perceptions. For some time, the offender flow has been out of balance, with 78% of prisoners within the resettlement cohort (higher than the 55% planned figure - see also paragraph 7.5). Managers concede this has affected the quality of offender management and the key work that complements it as described in paragraph 5.3. Staff shortages and high caseloads within OMU also affected delivery. At a meeting observed by the Board in July 2023, managers reported that by June some 50 offender assessments were overdue. A total of 164 had been completed since January 2023 (an average of 27 a month), but even allowing for staff vacancies and high prisoner churn, the backlog was not being cleared fast enough.

Offending behaviour programmes were also affected by this high churn rate, often with those prisoners on shorter sentences most disadvantaged. Despite staff shortages in the earlier parts of the reporting period, Programmes have latterly begun to run at full capacity. A prioritisation process based on time left to serve and risk levels determined the allocation of prisoners to Thinking Skills, Horizon and Healthy Sex programmes. Head of Programmes has told the Board that by the end of August delivery capacity was in line with HMPPS targets.

7.4 Family contact

A major improvement in maintaining contact was the installation of in-cell telephones in July 2022. While this provided better access to telephones, it also led to affordability issues. Many prisoners felt that low wages and rising canteen costs forced them to make difficult choices on what to spend their limited funds on.

The charity, Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), took over provision of family services at the start of this reporting period. After some issues with staffing levels and budgets (which affected the provision of refreshments in the visits hall) by time of the Children's Christmas party these had been largely resolved. Despite their relocation to HMP Dartmoor, Storybook Dads (a charity that helps prisoners to record bedtime stories on CD or DVD for their children) continue to provide an excellent service at Channings Wood and remains an example of best practice, much valued by prisoners and families.

Given the prison's remote location, prisoners and families often raised the issue of travel time and the cost of social visits. Families spoke of the effect of train strikes and the high taxi fares from Newton Abbot station to Channings Wood. PACT has been able to provide some assistance through the provision of food vouchers, allowing money not spent on a prisoner's weekly shop to help offset some of the cost of social visits. Prison staff have also publicised the Prisoner Assisted Visits scheme and have tried (without success) to identify a 'preferred' taxi provider to offer lower fares. Social visits too have been affected by population pressures, as many prisoners have family ties far away from the South West. Omu has not been able to support transfers for family reasons, with TPRS and progression given priority.

Where family social visits are made, Board members invariably noted the courteous and helpful approach from staff. Visitors almost always report a positive experience. Improvements in the booking process have also been commented on. Occasionally issues related to security measures are brought to the Board's attention and both visitors and prisoners sometimes raise concerns over social visit days when both mains and PCOSO prisoners are present. Sometimes this has led to tension and in February 2023 staff had to restrain a mains prisoner who spat at and verbally abused a PCOSO.

7.5 Resettlement planning

A total of 204 prisoners were discharged during this reporting period.

The imbalance in offender flow noted in paragraph 7.3 put resettlement services under pressure. Managers reported too many prisoners arriving within their 12-week window of preparation for release, causing problems for resettlement staff if sending prisons had not begun tasks, including applying for bank accounts and identity documents. This undermined the Governor's '5 Point Pledge' that all prisoners on discharge would have a bank account; a usable form of ID; a CV; suitable accommodation; and a referral to health services. This gap in provision has been mitigated with additional DPS funding for resettlement provision for 20 such prisoners per month.

Some of the employment initiatives anticipated in previous reports are now in place. The Employment Advisory Board (EAB) has met twice. Their priorities included linking the prison with potential employers and advising Education, Skills and

Training staff on the key skills required by the local jobs market. One early success has been a partnership with Plymouth City College, which provides a free six-week course to prisoners resettling in the Plymouth area. It will focus on sectors urgently needing employees and the final week will be a work placement. The employment hub, working with the EAB, has begun to run a series of 'myth busting' visits to the prison for potential employers, and road shows to local Chambers of Commerce are also planned. A satellite hub for the main employment hub has also been established in the Library, with laptops funded by the New Futures Network.

Board Members have observed two employers' days in February and June. Many of the employers spoke of the positive attitude shown by the 80 or so prisoners, and those who took part were enthusiastic and felt the events gave them more hope of employment on release. This feeling may be justified, as managers have told the Board that an average of 25% of prisoners were in work within six weeks of release.

Accommodation on release remains a concern. Channings Wood is not yet part of the Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) scheme (which provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers). This is expected in 2024. However, figures seen by the Board show improvements in this key area. In December 2022, 95.6% of those released were in accommodation on their first night (compared to 86% the previous year) and this figure has been steady, with 97% reported in July 2023. The Board hopes the CAS3 scheme will further improve these numbers.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	283

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	7	11
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	6	19
C	Equality	7	1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	4	9
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	24	13
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	13	9
F	Food and kitchens	4	9
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	39	15
H1	Property within the establishment	18	22
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	30	25
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	11	10
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	18	27
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	34	26
K	Transfers	8	10
L	Miscellaneous	4	11
	Total number of applications	227	217

Annex A

List of service providers

- Family Services: Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)
- Educational and vocational courses: Weston College
- Careers guidance: JobCentre Plus and Prospects (Shaw Trust)
- Literacy and numeracy support: Shannon Trust
- Healthcare: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. GP service provided by Devon Doctors and most acute care is provided by Torbay Hospital. Dental health services are provided by Time for Teeth
- Drug recovery services: Change Grow Live
- Buddy Support Training: Resettlement and Care for Older Ex Offenders and Prisoners (RECOOP)

Annex B

IMB survey on key work

An IMB survey undertaken in July and August 2023 captured feedback on the key-worker experience from 75 prisoners (10%) across seven living blocks. A total of 63% of these were in the mains accommodation and 37% in the VP wings. Of those surveyed, 22 (29%) had been at Channings Wood less than three months:

- 85% reported that they had a key worker and 60% knew their name. However, 6% did not know if they had a key worker and 8% said they did not have one.
- 36% reported they had had a meeting with their key worker. 18% said that they had met them regularly. Of those, two-thirds had met their key worker the previous month.
- 50% of those who had met their key worker described the experience as good, or better, with just two stating it was less than satisfactory.

The Board noted that prisoners under 25 years old commented that more key working sessions would benefit their age group, as it would provide more support and 'keep them on the right track'. They also wanted 'more involvement from the senior officer on the wing' with their step-up plans.



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