



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

**For reporting year  
1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023**

**Published January 2024**



# Contents

<b>Introductory sections 1 – 3</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of establishment	3
3. Key points	5
<b>Evidence sections 4 – 7</b>	
4. Safety	15
5. Fair and humane treatment	18
6. Health and wellbeing	22
7. Progression and resettlement	24
<b>The work of the IMB</b>	
Board Statistics	27
Applications to the IMB	27
<b>Annex A</b>	
List of service providers	28

**All IMB annual reports are published on [www.imb.org.uk](http://www.imb.org.uk)**

# 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, of 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 perform 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 Hewell is a local adult male category B reception prison. It is a purpose-built prison, opened in 1993, with single and double cells and shared showers. The majority of cells designed for one prisoner hold two. The prison is in a rural setting, three miles from Bromsgrove and three miles from Redditch. Public transport is infrequent, and there is a half-mile walk from the main road to the prison buildings. While classified as a local prison, Hewell is obliged to accept from courts beyond its normal geographical area. Men from the local courts may need, in turn, to be accommodated elsewhere.

At the start of the reporting year, the certified maximum capacity was 1,074<sup>1</sup>, which was deemed to be 'crowded conditions', as normal operational capacity was 900. During the reporting year, the maximum increased to 1,094, which was re-defined as normal operational capacity and is 20 more than considered crowded at the start of the year.

---

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

The prison has the following house blocks and specialist units:

- House block 1 (HB): General house block for convicted, remanded, sentenced and un-sentenced prisoners.
- Reception and HB2: Early days and induction unit.
- HB3: Intended to focus on resettlement and locate prisoners reaching the end of their sentences and to provide an incentivised substance-free living unit but pressure on spaces means the focus is diluted and the HB is used for general accommodation.
- HB4: Focuses on wellbeing provision for prisoners who have drug or alcohol dependencies and related conditions including less complex mental health issues.
- HB5: Closed for refurbishment for much of the reporting year but is now open and accommodates men deemed to be vulnerable within the prison.
- HB6: Re-classified and intended to provide accommodation for older (over 40 years old) prisoners, but pressure on spaces means that this focus is diluted and the house block is used for general accommodation.
- Oak unit: A 15-bed therapeutic unit for prisoners who have severe mental health issues or complex social, emotional and psychological needs. Pressure on spaces and lack of adapted cells for prisoners has led to beds in this unit being used purely for reasons of mobility/access.
- Care and Segregation Unit (CSU/segregation) unit: Can house 25 men.
- A multi-faith chaplaincy and worship space.
- A visitors' reception centre is used by families waiting to enter the prison for social visits. Although designed to also serve as a facility for men being released to access information, its use is not an integral part of the support immediately after release.
- A virtual court centre is housed within the prison, which allows prisoners to attend court without leaving the prison, and creates a means for solicitors and other professionals, such as community offender managers, to engage with their clients.
- Facilities exist for prisoners to conduct social video calls with their friends and families without leaving the prison. This facility supplements the in-cell telephony, which is available to all prisoners except those in segregation. Prisoners at Hewell have no access to IT. There are no digital kiosks (a self-service computer system that allows prisoners to manage their daily affairs), so men are not able to be self-directing in respect of making applications and complaints, signing up for prison activities, ordering canteen and resolving day-to-day concerns.

### 3. Key points

#### Overview

It is of concern that the IMB Board at Hewell has to report many of the same key concerns as it did last year, which only Ministers and the Prison Service can address. In the past year, there has been an increasing reliance on the greater use of custodial sentences, without adequate resources to meet the demand it is creating. We have evidenced, first-hand, the impact of these shortfalls on a local prison's ability to deliver a safe and humane regime, and to provide resettlement and rehabilitation activities to reduce re-offending and make communities safer.

On the first day of the reporting year, the number of prisoners actually in the prison was 822. At the end of the reporting year, the equivalent number was 1,060. The proportion of prisoners on remand has increased and, at the end of the reporting year, on average, 60% fell into this category. About 25% of the total population had been convicted but were still awaiting sentencing. About 30% of sentenced prisoners were serving sentences of a year or less. The impact of this high level of churn on the regime, and opportunities for resettlement are significant. The amount of staffing resource given to managing beds detracts from other activities.

Remand and sentenced prisoners are not separated, contrary to Prison Rule 7: 25% of the population is normally categorised as presenting a high risk of harm to others but is often accommodated in shared cells. At the end of the reporting year, 114 such prisoners could not be accommodated in single cells.

The length of time that men spend on remand, with an increasing proportion remanded away from home and family, is detrimental to their chances of effective resettlement. The number of men on remand, serving short sentences or recalled for sometimes very short periods reduces the capacity of the prison to deliver effective resettlement.

Despite reassuring responses from the Minister and HMPPS (HM Prison and Probation Service) to our 2021/22 annual report, overcrowding has become worse. It is not just about those who have been diagnosed with mental health conditions, but the large number of prisoners who have unmet complex social and psychological needs which impact their behaviour in and out of prison. There is increasing evidence of the neurodiversity of the prison population. Low levels of literacy have been known for a long time, but this is not reflected in the resources available for effective education, training and preparation for employment.

A regime that for most means being locked up 22 hours a day, sharing a cell meant for one person and eating and defecating in the same space, is not humane and has a detrimental effect on health and wellbeing. These are not conditions in which people can be supported to turn their lives around and work towards effective resettlement.

Targets for key work sessions, intended to be the cornerstone of staff-prisoner relationships and rehabilitation, cannot be met at the current time in Hewell and other prisons. All prisons completed regime progression plans in April 2023, indicating what regime activity they could deliver, including key work. This led to a reduction in targets for the delivery of key work for 2023/24.

Despite the onslaught of pressures and challenges from outside the prison, the Governor and staff at HMP Hewell have striven to deliver a safe, fair and humane regime. There has been an initiative-taking commitment to improving equality and respecting diversity,

which has exposed the huge gap between the neurodiversity and learning needs of the prison population, and the resources available to address them.

Hewell is being asked to perform a role which it is neither designed, equipped nor resourced to do. That it achieves so much is testimony to the talent and determination of the management and staff.

### **3.1 Main findings**

#### **Safety**

- Self-harm: Incidents (664) increased by 28.4% compared to the previous reporting year. Although an increase is to be expected due to the rise in the prisoner population levels, when measured against the comparator group Hewell ranks second highest. The key work scheme, which would be a cornerstone of reducing self-harm, has been a victim of staff shortages, with maintenance of the regime and security operations taking priority.
- Assaults: A slight increase in assaults reflects the increase in population size. More rigorous investigation and preventive measures are proving fruitful. Concerning prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, Hewell is the lowest in the comparator group and second lowest concerning prisoner-on-staff assaults.
- Reception and Induction: A comprehensive new process for reception, induction and every man having a pathway plan by the end of 14 days in custody is still aspirational. Staffing churn and the number of late arrivals, often late in the evening, can make it difficult to complete essential first-night risk assessments and medical checks.
- Use of force: The Board is broadly satisfied that the prison is diligent in reviewing the use of force incidents, looking for lessons learned and continual improvement. However, we remain concerned about the inconsistent and incomplete use of body-worn video cameras (BWVCs) and want to see the push for completed and timely documentation continue. We are monitoring the introduction of rigid bar handcuffs and PAVA spray (a form of pepper spray used to restrain prisoners) to the prison to monitor a possible risk of moving the culture towards control and enforcement, over de-escalation and talking men down from incidents.

#### **Fair and humane treatment**

- Accommodation: Men still share cells meant for one person and overcrowding reduces the potential for safe matching of cell mates. The disgraceful practice of prisoners eating and defecating in the same space continues. We are impressed by the sustained commitment to improving the cleanliness and decency of the accommodation. The impact of overcrowding means that on occasion vulnerable prisoners and those who are not deemed appropriate for cell sharing cannot be as rigorously separated from the rest of the population, compromising general safety and smooth operation of the regime. This should not be allowed to become normal.
- Regime: We are concerned about the persistent lack of time out of cell for the majority of prisoners, with no change in sight. Those who are unable to access (through staffing shortages or because they cannot meet the specific qualifications required) work or activity often remain in their cells for 22 hours a day. The lack of provision of meaningful activity for remand prisoners is a particular concern.
- Staff and prisoner relationships: We witnessed positive staff and prisoner interactions, but key working and pathway planning has not been delivered as intended. When men do not have a consistent key worker, there is a negative impact on arranging

education and work, vocational activity, and planning for release. We noted that senior staff have a good knowledge of men who have a high level of need and risk but we are less confident that this is true of house block staff, particularly new and junior staff.

- Equality and diversity: We have seen an improvement with an injection of energy and commitment from the Equalities Lead, with visible commitment from the Governor and other senior staff. The appointment of prisoner equality advocates has given prisoners a voice and a mechanism to raise concerns. The appointment of a neurodiversity support manager is making a positive difference, both practically and strategically, with staff and prisoners. This has exposed a diversity of needs that cannot possibly be met within existing resources. Despite some physical improvements by way of ramps and additional cells adapted to allow wheelchair access, there is inadequate provision for disabled prisoners and ageing prisoners.
- Segregation: The Board has observed that the segregation unit provides a fair and safe regime, with impressive work done by staff in building relationships with prisoners and adopting a positive and fair problem-solving approach at GOoD (good order or discipline) Boards and adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules). The allocation of a dedicated mental health nurse for the unit is starting to address concerns about getting healthcare assessments done in a timely fashion. We continue to be concerned about men held on the unit for long periods awaiting specialist mental health or other prison facilities. While psychological support, including training for segregation staff, has improved, the investment by the prison service to address severe social, emotional and psychological damage seen in prisoners who cannot cope with an open regime is woefully inadequate.

## **Health and wellbeing**

- General health care: The Board has not been concerned about the wait for GP appointments and dental care. There are sometimes delays in records transferring from the community to the prison, with a negative impact on the continuity of medication and treatment. The introduction of GP2GP (which allows patients' electronic health records to be transferred securely between GP practices) has gone some way to addressing this. There is little utilisation of video consultations and the potential is not fully realised. We have concerns about the lack of appropriate accommodation for men who require social care provision, have restricted mobility or have age-related needs.
- Mental health: We stress again concerns about the wait for transfers to secure mental health establishments, often resulting in admissions to Segregation. The appointment of a dedicated mental health nurse for the Segregation Unit is starting to improve the speed of assessment and continuity of care.
- Regime and soft skills: The regime for most prisoners does not include work, education or activity, but means being locked up for 22 hours per day. The reasons for, and impact, on prisoners of this restricted regime are highlighted throughout this report. In mitigation, the gym functions at maximum capacity and is a release for many men. A dedicated manager has been empowered to initiate a range of diversionary activities, including choir, storybook writing, art, rap and poetry. Take up is good, and the benefits are realised due to a well-run, dedicated team.
- Drugs and alcohol rehabilitation: An incentivised, substance-free living programme (ISFL), aimed at creating a community of support for up to 60 on a specific house block, was initiated. Incentives include fast-track incentives scheme status and gaming/movie nights, and adherence to the programme is measured by regular drug testing. However, accommodation pressures have diluted the focus.

## **Progression and resettlement**

- Vocational work and training: The overall level of constructive activity available to prisoners remains a serious concern. It is frustrating to observe the persistent underuse of the opportunities for activity which are available. This is particularly true of activities which are based on the house blocks. This cannot simply be attributed to staffing levels. Attendance at those purposeful activities offered remained between 75% and 78% during the year.
- Education: Some valuable work is done to address educational needs. The assessed levels of literacy among prisoners newly received make it crucial that this work is expanded and facilitated by residential staff. Attendance at educational courses was at 75% at the start and end of the reporting year.
- Offender management and progression: The prison aims to assign each of its newly sentenced prisoners to one of five custodial pathways, with the ambition of providing the experiences that best fit the needs of each individual. Admirable though this ambition is, it remains largely unfulfilled. The pressures of rising numbers and the lack of sufficient staff are frustrating it.
- Resettlement planning: Men seeking employment on their release are offered an impressive level of information, advice and support. Far too many, however, lack motivation, or skills and confidence to take advantage of these opportunities. Such deep-rooted issues can only be addressed in the longer term and by well-resourced and consistent interventions.

Far too many prisoners complete their sentences only to confront the blunt facts of homelessness. Typically, this is the case for between 25% and 35% of those released. Whilst the prison's responsibility is restricted to identifying and referring such cases, the overall situation of these ex-offenders is a stain on the custodial system. We have observed a failure of agencies to collaborate to ensure that men leaving the prison have the information and resources to get them safely to their geographical destination and on time for release-critical meetings. This is a particular problem for men who do not live in the area; they seem set up to fail.

- Family contact: Despite the strenuous efforts of some committed individuals and the evident benefits of in-cell telephony, the quality of family support is patchy. The availability of staff and the size of the Visits Hall mean that remand prisoners are routinely denied their full entitlement of social visits. The inadequacy and failings of the outsourced booking line is a frequent source of frustration. The reception of so many men from more distant areas inevitably inhibits face-to-face contact with their families. The Children and Families Department has suffered a severe reduction in funding and lacks continuity due to frequent re-tendering exercises.

## **3.2 Main areas for development**

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

- What is being done to address or influence the backlogs in the court system which mean prison beds are taken up with men on remand or awaiting sentencing?
- Will the Minister advise on the progress of the Mental Health Bill which offered remedies for concerns raised in our annual report last year? Our concerns about the lack of appropriate services for prisoners with complex mental health needs remain and are growing.
- What review mechanisms/safeguards will be in place to monitor the impact of introducing rigid bar handcuffs and PAVA spray to prisons, with a consequent risk of



moving to a culture focusing on control/enforcement rather than built on transformative inputs and effective relationships between staff and prisoners?

- Is the Minister recognising the growing awareness of the neurodiversity of the prison population and what additional resources can HMP Hewell expect to implement the new Prisoner Education Service announced at the end of September, bearing in mind low literacy levels?
- We repeat our call for IPP (imprisonment for public protection) cessation and reparations.

### **TO THE PRISON SERVICE**

- When will Hewell have access to IT for prisoners? This would be time-saving for staff and will empower prisoners to take responsibility for organising their prison life and activities. It will reduce frustration, delay, and lack of trust inherent in paper-based systems.
- What is the Prison Service doing to improve the effectiveness of agencies working together to achieve effective release and resettlement? Despite good work being done by individual agencies, we see men being released without the dots having been joined; this negates in-prison work done to achieve positive resettlement and may increase the chances of homelessness, unemployment and re-offending.
- Is the Prison Service satisfied that training for new officers prepares them for the roles and tasks that will be expected of them? We are concerned about the length and content of training for new officers, outside aspects relating to security and control. Key work is deemed central *'to develop constructive, motivational relationships with individual prisoners, to support them to make appropriate choices and give them hope and responsibility for their own development'*<sup>2</sup>. This is a skilled, interpersonal task to which 1.5 days training is allocated on the initial training for new recruits and six hours a year is the aim for all staff members. It is woefully inadequate, especially when compared to training received by professionals delivering one-to-one key work in less challenging settings.
- What is the prison service doing to ensure that the introduction of PAVA and rigid bar handcuff training is tempered with an increase in key working and a rehabilitation focus?

### **TO THE GOVERNOR**

- Improve the core regime, increasing time out of cell and maximising access to meaningful occupation of time, whether in work, vocational activity or education.
- Protect staff time to deliver key work and push for national resources, including training, to make this central to the regime and culture at Hewell.
- Effectively monitor the introduction of rigid bar handcuffs/PAVA spray, ensuring that it does not shift the balance towards control and containment.
- Address significant shortcomings in the immediate practical resettlement needs of men leaving Hewell, including improvement of inter-agency working, so that no man is found wandering up the drive without the means of reaching a safe destination or ability to meet release conditions.
- Insist that the use of BWVCs is fully enforced alongside timely completion of use of force paperwork.

---

<sup>2</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation Effective Practice Guide, Nov 22, page 5. [Effective practice guide OMiC \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/omi/).

- Monitor complaints by prisoners more rigorously, note the wide variation and quality of responses from staff, in particular the tone, an indicator of whether the desired culture change is being achieved throughout the prison. Improve the thoroughness of recording and responding to complaints about staff behaviour.
- Continue to improve the take up of work/education and vocational activity and expand the opportunities available for meaningful activity on house blocks.
- Continue to develop a culture of inclusion and respect, keeping up the momentum on neurodiversity, equality and communication across the prison.
- Ensure efficient succession planning and continue to empower and encourage senior staff to use their initiative and creativity to find solutions in their areas of responsibility.

### 3.3 Response to last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
<b>To the Minister</b>		
There should be a more concerted effort to reduce the number of IPP prisoners	The IPP Action Plan will continue to focus on ensuring that individuals have a progression plan appropriate to their current needs.	On 30 September there were 10 IPP prisoners on recall but none who had not been released at all.
There should be increased services and levels of provision for prisoners who have severe mental health, psychological or social needs many of whom are held in Segregation for their own safety; this would free up prison resources to work with other prisoners.	The solutions in the draft Mental Health Bill will improve the situation, including measures to speed up access to specialist inpatient care and treatment and will introduce a statutory 28-day time limit for transfers from prison to hospital. Other comments by the Minister refer to local solutions being put in place at Hewell.	The Bill has not progressed. There are no tangible changes at the national level in respect of Mental Health for prisoners, including those who need specialist inpatient care. Hewell has continued to make progress internally to improve partnership working, and with local NHS providers.
There should be capital investment to end the practice of cell sharing, with an open toilet in the space where they are expected to sleep, eat and live; this would reduce friction between prisoners and increase prisoner respect and engagement with the regime. This is an inhumane practice.	New prisons are being built to provide 20,000 additional, modern, uncrowded prison places. This may enable a targeted reduction of the least suitable prison places, including those that are crowded IF prison population growth slows.	Prison population growth has not slowed down across the country, it has increased. It has increased at Hewell. The normal operational capacity was 900 at the start of the year, at the end, it was 1094.
Ministers should use their influence to reduce the number of remanded prisoners, and the length	It is not appropriate for the Government or its representatives to direct court matters including the decision to remand. The MOJ	Were a significant number of judges appointed? In our view, the Government's strategy

<p>of time for cases to be heard in Courts.</p>	<p>is recruiting up to 1,000 judges in 22/23 and has taken steps to enable courts to sit at maximum capacity. The MOJ monitors the level of the remanded population across the reception estate and is taking steps to ensure that reception prisons can continue to serve the courts and make the best possible use of the available capacity.</p> <p>At Hewell people on remand can access all available visit sessions which will be increasing from 250 – 275 a week.</p> <p>The Prison Advice Care Trust will be conducting a survey to analyse those who do not access visits to gain a greater understanding of the needs of the population at Hewell.</p>	<p>and policy to reducing re-offending is over-dependent on custodial sentences. Courts have few alternatives available. We see no tangible evidence of this monitoring influencing day-to-day operations.</p> <p>This is still an aspiration, not achievable due to staffing numbers.</p> <p>This did not get underway in the past year as systems did not exist in prisons to capture the data. Nomis (internal computer system) has now been amended so it can commence.</p>
<p><b>To the Prison Service</b></p>		
<p>The prison service must recognise the gap between rhetoric and reality in respect of their national aspirations for re-settlement and reducing re-offending. However good the education, vocational training and employment support in prison, homelessness, poverty and the current economic situation make many of the stated aspirations unrealistic; targets set for prisons and the probation service should reflect this state of affairs. This is exacerbated by the high number of remand</p>	<p>The HMPPS response was to re-iterate Government strategy and policy as outlined in the Prisons Strategy White Paper; the reductions quoted in re-offending between 2010/2021 seem meaningless in the context of our point about pressures on the prison service in our reporting year</p>	<p>No progress – see section above in respect of further overcrowding in prisons, high numbers on remand and prisoners placed away from home.</p>

prisoners in local prisons.		
While the prison service cannot replace all prison buildings that are unfit for purpose, it should allocate increased funding for improvements, particularly in respect of men who have a disability, accessibility or social care need.	<p>The response pointed us to planned works at Hewell but admitted that demands for maintenance were much greater than available funding.</p> <p>It was stated that wheelchairs were available for all who needed them and additional chairs were ordered.</p>	<p>Ramps have been installed, improving access to exercise yards on 4 HB's, Gym, Industries, Visits. Internal ramps installed on two HB's allowing prisoners to collect their own food. Plans to install lifts in three HB's have stalled. Four cells have been adapted to allow wheelchair access.</p> <p>By the end of the current reporting year, sufficient wheelchairs were available; only one remaining that is too large for cell doors.</p>
The prison service, working with the probation service, should place more emphasis on therapeutic interventions to address longstanding trauma, neurodiversity and social/psychological problems of prisoners. Too many come into the prison and leave without any intervention; this mitigates against successful re-settlement and reduction in re-offending. It is not enough to pin change on the introduction of key work delivered by officers with minimal training in this skilled area.	<p>It was acknowledged that Hewell did not offer accredited offending-behaviour programmes (OBP).</p> <p>It was suggested that prisoners who needed an OBP could be transferred. Those who screen for OPD (personality disorder) could access a national service offer and that support was available to offender managers.</p> <p>We were advised (but already knew) that Hewell had appointed a neurodiversity support manager.</p>	<p>The neurodiversity support manager has achieved a great deal in a short space of time, but the demand is overwhelming for a single role. There is evidence of better coordination across the West Midlands region, meaning that records and assessments follow the prisoner and Neurodiversity Support Managers share best practices. However, knowing is not doing, resources must follow.</p>
Linked to the comments above, the prison services should lobby for sufficient resources to staff prisons appropriately and ensure that staff conditions of	The response quoted commitments to investment as outlined in the Prisons Strategy White Paper and the setting up of a Transforming Delivery Directorate.	There is evidence that the Governor seeks out opportunities for funding, and to be part of pilot schemes/ innovations that will bring additional resources to Hewell.

service attract and retain the right people to prison roles.		
Healthcare contracts should be reviewed to ensure that there is safe out-of-hours cover; this will improve the health, safety and wellbeing of prisoners, reduce the number of staff hours needed to escort men to outside provision, and reduce the pressure on already overstretched ambulance and NHS resources.	The response acknowledged that Health care staffing/cover at Hewell 'in exceptional circumstances such as unplanned absences staffing levels may not meet this requirement'.	Staffing levels, especially out of normal working hours, continue to be a challenge. Health care for new arrivals is sometimes compromised due to a lack of suitably qualified healthcare staff at night, and exacerbated by late arrivals of prisoners, often in large numbers.
<b>To the Governor</b>		
Maintain the integrity of the Oak Unit, build on its success and continue to support and enhance its development; reduce the use of this unit for men who do not meet the criteria but are housed there due to lack of other accommodation.	The Governor accepted this recommendation, pointing out that the Oak Unit is only used when there is no other safe option for accommodating some prisoners, including those with some specific disability/ accessibility needs.	The position remains more or less the same, despite the efforts of managers to avoid using the unit because there is no other accommodation available.
Increase momentum on culture change to ensure staff are curious, proactive and engaged and do not accept the unacceptable; identify and decisively address people or process issues that are blocking change. Pathway planning and key working is core to the change and should be given priority in all but the direst of staffing situations.	The Governor was able to evidence plans to achieve this change and how it was being rolled out across the prison.	The IMB has witnessed some good practice, but it is delivered to few men. We note the difference in skills and confidence of new staff and the capacity of experienced staff to instil good practice and to provide guidance and monitoring.
Continue to seek investment/funding opportunities to improve the physical building, in particular facilities for prisoners who have	This was accepted and was reinforced as a priority following an HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) inspection.	Improvements in respect of ramps and access to exercise yards. Ongoing delays in installing additional lifts. Evidence of determination to

disabilities and accessibility needs.		achieve these improvements.
Implement the findings of the Security audit to improve the safety of the prison to reduce the potential for illicit items and the impact of this on prisoner behaviour and the effective running of the regime.	This was accepted and was reinforced as a priority following an HMIP inspection.	IRMT (inter-departmental risk management team) meetings have been established to ensure that prisoners who present the greatest risk, inside and outside the prison, are identified.
Remove the seeming paralysis around embedding a focus on equality issues within the prison.	This was accepted.	There has been progress in respect of analysis, attitude and engagement. There is evidence of action being taken but much more to be done to embed the change.

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

#### **4.1 Reception and Induction**

The impact of population pressures and the high level of 'churn' among prisoners creates particular challenges for this part of the prison. For the period between 1 January 2023 and 18 September 2023, a total of 3,420 prisoners were received into HMP Hewell and 3,286 were released or transferred. These figures exclude those leaving and returning for court appearances or to attend outside hospital appointments.

This negatively impacted the implementation of a new reception and induction process intended to ensure that prisoners had a pathway plan, based on rigorous assessment and identification of needs after 14 days.

Late arrivals, often late into the evening, militate against effective and thorough health and welfare screening, despite the best efforts of staff, who regularly volunteer to stay on beyond their shift to help out. Early opportunities to collect basic demographic data and relevant information about new arrivals are hard to replace once the prisoner is moved into the prison. It is difficult to ensure that prisoners' immediate worries and concerns, often about contact with family, can be alleviated. The availability of translators and time to address the cultural needs of prisoners, or to take account of their neurodiversity is compromised. All of these factors impact on the engagement of the prisoner in the regime. The neurodiversity support manager has helped to improve signage and information in reception.

Prison orderlies in reception provide a meal and friendly face for new arrivals but we judge that it is inhumane to locate prisoners on a house block very late at night, and it is disruptive to other prisoners, especially when cell sharing.

The body scanner in reception has been a deterrent to illicit items getting into the prison.

Accommodation pressures lead to men remaining in the induction unit for longer than 14 days and reduce the options for moving them to a suitable house block. There have been examples of mainstream prisoners located on the Vulnerable Prisoner HB for short periods due to lack of space.

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

Suicide and deaths in custody: There were two apparent self-inflicted deaths in the reporting year.

Self-harm: There was an increase of 28.4% compared to the previous reporting year, in respect of which 517 self-harm incidents were recorded. Although an increase is to be expected, given the rise in the prisoner population, levels of self-harm, when measured against the comparator group are above average. Hewell ranks second highest in the comparator group for the incidence of self-harm incidents per 1,000 men. Repeated self-harm offenders appear to drive a large percentage of the self-harm numbers each month. Cutting with razors is the most common method of self-harm.

The Board has seen good use of data around self-harm to identify and manage those at risk, but too little time to work preventatively or engage in focused long-term work with persistent self-harmers or to identify the reasons behind it. The Safety and Violence Committee has identified that mental health issues remain the top reason for self-harm,

and this requires complex solutions. Of concern, and within the gift of the prison to resolve, are the small incidents that are attributed to self-harm, such as boredom/lack of purposeful activity, frustration with the delay in prisoners getting phone pins so they can contact their family, or issues relating to their canteen. To quote two prisoners: *'I have been here for nearly two weeks and I still don't have everything in place to contact family';* and *'I have tolerated this for long enough and it is the last resort (self-harm) to get heard.'*

We commend the impressive and frequent use of Samaritan-trained Listeners. There is impressively swift intervention by the Safer Custody Team when concerns are raised about a prisoner's welfare, either within the prison or by ensuring family and friends contact. There is evidence that staff, including senior staff, have a good knowledge of those at risk. Full implementation of the key work scheme would further help in identifying those at risk of self-harm.

There has been an increase in the use of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans (used to support prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide) following additional training for all staff and a push to make reviews more multi-disciplinary. Our observation is that while these are dutifully completed, they often lack depth and analysis. Almost without exception, the opportunity for prisoners to contribute is not taken and the page for their views is blank. It was in search of the prisoners' perspectives that the Board examined 13 cases that had recently been closed. Bound into the ACCT paperwork is section 7.3, an invitation to the prisoner to comment on the support he has been receiving. It is an integral part of the process. In eight of these cases the section was entirely blank and in two others, staff had declined the opportunity, apparently on the prisoners' behalf. Those are missed opportunities. There could be much to be learned from the figures at the centre of this highly individual process. It is also one of the rare occasions when a prisoner has ownership of the processes affecting him.

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

A slight increase in assaults is to be expected once scaled to the increase in population size. It should be noted that concerning both prisoner-prisoner assaults and prisoner-staff assaults, Hewell records considerably fewer incidents than what is considered average in its comparator group. In particular, the establishment records the lowest incidence of prisoner-prisoner assaults in the group, and the second lowest incidence of prisoner-staff assaults. More rigorous investigation and preventative measures in respect of violent incidents are proving fruitful. Nearly half (45%) of staff assaults were committed by prisoners with mental health issues. Debt is identified as a key driver of violence.

There is good knowledge of those at risk of bullying but still a huge reluctance to divulge concerns by those directly affected, which suggests insufficient trust in 'the system'. Gang-related activity and issues being brought into the prison from the community exist, but are not a regular occurrence or a source of disruption.

Too many high-risk prisoners have to share a cell (114, as of mid-September), which increases the safety risk. We regularly hear of incidents related to cell sharing and prisoners exacerbating conflicts to strengthen their case to be accommodated in a single cell, or even to be removed to Segregation. Remand prisoners have to share with convicted prisoners, contrary to prison rules.

The fact that violence has not increased significantly, despite the population pressures and the fact that men are behind their doors for 22 hours a day, is a testament to the work done by staff and the increasingly effective use of challenge, support and



intervention plans (CSIPs), which identify and manage those at risk of engaging in violence. We have witnessed impressive interventions to deal with issues arising from adjudications to protect those at risk, for example by moving them from the prison. There is an effective weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM) to discuss complex cases.

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

There is little evidence of excessive use of force. There are regular meetings to review and analyse data and to consider individual cases. We have seen diligent and honest reviews of incidents and issues arising, leading to lessons learned and action. We are not yet fully assured that the prison captures or records every incident of force.

It is still a concern that there is lack of focus on de-escalation prior to use of force incidents to avoid its use.

We remain concerned at the stubborn minority of cases for which the appropriate paperwork/records are not completed or submitted in a timely fashion.

There are issues around the introduction of rigid bar handcuffs and PAVA (at the end of the reporting year), with some concerns at the tone of the training on these tools, which appeared in some cases to accept their use as inevitable rather than as a last resort. The Board has concerns about the cultural impact of these tools, i.e. a move towards an atmosphere of enforcement/control rather than engagement and good relationships.

There are also some issues regarding the disproportionality of the use of force affecting particular groups of prisoners, but there is evidence of genuine efforts to get behind the data for a better understanding.

The Board has observed that, too often, challenging behaviour is automatically treated as wilful non-compliance, with insufficient acknowledgement that some of this behaviour is arising from emotional distress and an inability to cope. The use of force on people with learning difficulties without sufficient use of other de-escalation techniques is a concern.

There is increasing use of BWVCs but still some reported issues around the technology and a reluctance on the part of staff to use them routinely or to activate them sufficiently promptly at the start of an incident. We are concerned that for whatever reason a significant minority of incidents are not captured on either handheld or BWVCs. This limits the scrutiny the prison and others can apply to such incidents and limits the confidence that can be had in the system operating in the prison.

#### **4.5 Preventing illicit items**

This has not been a significant concern in the past year, although we noted a rise towards the end of the year.

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

The IMB has witnessed very few incidents of individual officers or staff failing to treat prisoners fairly and humanely. We have already commented on our concerns about the structural and systemic problems that cause the prison system to be unfair and inhumane.

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

We remain concerned at the inadequately designed accommodation, with cells being poorly ventilated and routinely becoming too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. The age of the buildings, budgetary and contractual pressures and the pressure of numbers mean that the frequent electrical problems (including power cuts) and plumbing problems (including leaks) or failure of the hot water system cannot be mitigated by moving prisoners but by permanently solving the issues.

Superficially minor problems such as the almost daily incidence of keys breaking, together with more significant problems such as electrical doors failing, cause distraction to staff and interfere with the smooth running of the prison.

Overcrowding leads to people sharing cells not being well-matched, this in turn can lead to conflict and misery. For those with specific mental health, or neurodiverse needs, sharing can bring additional stress and pressure. It is not surprising that some men prefer to be segregated, or that they exaggerate behaviours to try and get single-cell status.

There has been improved provision of bedding/laundry and fewer applications to the IMB about clothing going missing. We have seen a dramatic reduction in the complaints about food over the past year. Despite a still inadequate budget, the kitchen manager and staff have worked hard to get the most from every penny spent, including making more on the premises, and less buying in of food.

### **5.2 Segregation**

We have given priority to monitoring segregation and have evidenced impressive work by staff in building relationships with prisoners and a constructive, solution-focused attitude at GOoD Boards and adjudications. At times segregation is the least harmful option, but it does not meet the needs of the prisoner. We repeat our concerns about men who have mental health, or severe psychological problems, being held in the segregation unit due to a lack of resources nationally.

The unit is clean and orderly and rarely seems noisy or chaotic, a change that has been sustained over several years now. There has been a slight improvement in staff from other house blocks working alongside segregation staff to support exit plans and successful transition. We have seen this appreciated by prisoners.

For much of the year, there was an inadequate response from healthcare to assess new arrivals to the unit, particularly where there were mental health concerns. This militated against swift and effective decision-making for the benefit and safety of all those involved. The assignment of a specialist mental health nurse to the unit at the end of the reporting year achieved improvement immediately. The review and analysis of data around adjudications and segregation was not robust: there were some discussions in other forums but no consolidated review from which to learn lessons in the unit.

### **5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers**

While we witnessed positive staff and prisoner interactions, key working and pathway planning has not been delivered as intended. Staff shortages and overcrowding are key factors, but so too are the number of men who are in a state of flux at Hewell. High numbers are waiting a long time on remand and for sentencing, an increasing number are serving very short sentences, and men not local to the area are waiting to be relocated and do not identify with Hewell. All this inhibits staff from forming effective relationships and providing continuity for prisoners. The impact is seen in arranging education, work and other activities, responding to prisoner concerns and complaints, and being able to consistently apply the incentives scheme. As a consequence, prisoners report frustration, anger, and disengagement from the regime.

We are concerned about the high proportion of new and inexperienced staff, some of whom have little work experience in a related field. It is a tough challenge to build and sustain effective key working relationships at any time, and the challenge of doing this while maintaining discipline, order and safety is immense. The training is wholly inadequate: one and a half days on the initial training for new officers, and six hours a year for all staff (if there are resources available to deliver it). Compared to other professions, in which one-to-one relationships are the key tool in effecting change, this is woeful. It would be interesting to have this training evaluated by relevant professional bodies and training organisations.

At the end of January, 25% of prison officers and support grades had less than two years' service. At the end of September, the figure was 30%. At the other end of the scale, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of staff at all levels with significant experience – from 38% at the end of January to 28% at the end of the year.

Total vacancies reduced from 50 at the end of January to 33 at the end of September. In the same period, long-term sick numbers reduced from 17 to 9.

Despite these shortcomings, we have seen key work having a positive effect on some vulnerable groups, such as young adults.

We have also seen resolute and committed staff who will work over hours and stay late to support their colleagues and maintain the safety and wellbeing of the prisoners.

### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

There has been a sustained commitment to turning rhetoric into reality in the past year, with exemplary leadership from the governing team. However, much remains to be done to raise awareness across the whole staff team, to robustly challenge where behaviours fall short, and to proactively identify and address the needs of minority and potentially vulnerable groups. Prisoners lack confidence in the DIRF process, which is not helped by the fact that systems are paper-based and not electronic. There is disproportionality on race grounds in areas such as the use of force and incentives scheme status. There is improved but still unrealistic disclosure of protected characteristics by prisoners, e.g. LGBTQ+ and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, who do not have sufficient trust in the system.

Working with the Zahid Mubarek Trust, the Equalities lead has established and trained two cohorts of prisoners as equality advocates, which is helping to promote issues of fairness and equality around the prison. These equality advocates are gaining the trust and confidence of other prisoners and they are encouraging open and frank exchanges in equality meetings. Monthly equality meetings consider not just the data but reflect on any

concerns identified and consider ways towards improvements. The meetings are attended but not led or dominated by the Governing Governor and other senior staff. Equality advocates speak positively about the role: how it has been of personal benefit, and how they have been able to assist other prisoners.

The Neurodiversity Support Manager has had an immediate impact within the prison in terms of supporting individual prisoners, advancing a strategic approach to these issues and beginning a programme of awareness raising among both staff and prisoners. That said, the task is enormous and the needs of the population in this regard are almost insatiable. At the end of the year, a conservative estimate put the proportion of prisoners with needs of this type at about 40%. This has significantly increased from the last reported estimate to the MoJ, which was 24%. Identifying the increase exposes the gap between the resources available and needed. The prison environment, culture and regime could not be less well designed to cater for the needs of such people.

Induction leaflets are now in an easy-read format but low levels of literacy reduce the ability of some prisoners to engage in the regime and to take advantage of programmes available. Of the 1,428 who completed an initial English assessment, fewer than 40% had Levels 1 or 2, with less than 10% being Level 2, which equates to a GSCE pass. This means that 60% are at Entry Level 2, roughly equivalent to early secondary school age or below. There has been a drive to improve information in languages other than English, but insufficient help is available for foreign national prisoners.

Provision for prisoners with mobility issues remain inadequate. The scarcity of wheelchair-accessible cells on the mainstream house blocks mean that some prisoners are accommodated on the specialist Oak Unit purely for reasons of mobility or access. There has been real progress in installing access ramps and the welcome commissioning of a lift has ameliorated the situation to a degree.

A survey by the Board midway through the year of the Personal Emergency Evacuation Procedure (PEEP) documentation relating to prisoners who would need help to evacuate highlighted inadequacies, errors and gaps. There were 28 prisoners subject to PEEP records and eight wheelchair users. There was some evidence of improved processes at the end of the year.

We noted improved support for young adults. An attempt to designate a specific house for older adults has been hampered by population pressures.

## **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

Despite not having a full staff complement, the team has maintained a visible and valued presence in the prison and is knowledgeable about the needs of individual prisoners who have a high level of need and complexity. Their visits to prisoners in segregation and attendance at GOoD boards and ACCT reviews are valued by men of all denominations and none. There has been a separate Christian service for vulnerable prisoners, contrary to prison rules, which is something they are working to address.

## **5.6 Incentives schemes**

Attempts to refloat schemes have not been successful and prisoners have told us that they are irrelevant or a joke. They are not central to motivating and engaging prisoners. This may be because to maintain a fair and consistent approach there needs to be continuity of staffing and key working taking place for all men, something that is not

achievable at present. There was some success in applying incentives in the house block dedicated to drug and alcohol recovery.

## **5.7 Complaints**

The Board could not rigorously sample responses to prison complaints in the past year. However, we were able to establish that while due process is followed, the paper-based system is slow and is not trusted by the prisoners. We also noted that the breadth and depth of responses to complaints varied widely. Some are cursory leading to insulting, while others are comprehensive and written in language intended to explain and to resolve the prisoners' feelings as well as providing facts.

We are yet to be satisfied as to the prison's systems for handling confidential complaints.

## **5.8 Property**

This has not been a significant concern in the past year. Where the Board has followed up on applications (prisoners' written representations to the IMB), we have found a wide range of responses. Some officers are keen to problem solve, recognising the impact on the prisoner, while others find it a nuisance and fob off prisoners' concerns. We raise this when we find it.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare general**

The IMB has only received 25 applications from prisoners about healthcare and most of these were about a discrepancy between what medication the prisoner is prescribed and what they think they should have prescribed. Other concerns were around continuity of medication during induction and settlement on a house block.

Healthcare at Hewell is provided by Practice Plus and the Board notes:

- To access medical records, the GP2GP platform is used to link between establishments, provided prisoners consent to this.
- Video call appointments are not well utilised.
- Waiting times for GP appointments in Hewell are, at best, just a day and, at longest, a week.
- In terms of health screening and monitoring of long-term health conditions, the quality outcome framework (QOF) has a target of 80% set in the community, while Hewell has achieved 86%.
- Training records for registered general nurses (RGNs) show 94% compliance overall, 91% for NEWS (national early warning score) training. This was an action identified from the NHS England Quality visit.
- Psychology training is still outstanding.
- A major concern has been the lack of an RGN at night, which means that arriving prisoners cannot have medication prescribed. Paramedics do not operate at night either, with impact on the resources needed for external medical appointments.

### **6.2 Physical healthcare**

Each week there are approximately 800 appointments available across GP, podiatry, dental and nurse-led clinics. Escorts are allocated to attend on average six external appointments each day. Vaccines are offered in line with community vaccine criteria, the flu vaccine uptake was 35.2% for those over 65, and 27% for those identified as at risk (in the community 81% of those over 65 received the vaccine).

### **6.3 Mental health**

The time from referral to treatment in urgent cases is 48 hours, while a routine appointment is 5 days. Those in early days in custody are seen the next day, triaged and then referred. The psychology vacancy was filled in August. In August 2023, the mental health caseload was 187 (62 needing primary care and 125 secondary care).

### **6.4 Social care**

Social care is provided by Worcestershire Adult Social Care. Recruitment to these roles has been difficult. Hewell replicated the approach taken at Long Lartin prison by hosting an open day for carers in a bid to address some of the nervousness surrounding these appointments. In January eight men required social care services. We noted a case where a prisoner required four care sessions a day, but there was insufficient staffing for social care to cover. As such, the tasks fell to prison staff or peers, which is undignified/inappropriate.

## **6.5 Time out of cell and regime**

This has been addressed throughout the report, under most sections. We have identified valid reasons for the men being locked in their cells for 22 hours a day. Our question is whether the unacceptable has become the norm.

The COVID-19 lockdowns caused many men to be confined to their cells for long periods of each day. That was entirely understandable, but the Board is concerned by the persistence of such regimes in the experience of many prisoners. There is a danger that it becomes normalised rather than exceptional. An illustration of this is the failure of many residential units to take full advantage of the opportunities for employment and engagement open to them. When the Board surveyed the situation in July, there were 161 opportunities across the residential units. Only 93 of them were taken up, leaving 68 men behind their doors when a more vigorous approach would have had them out and engaged.

It is probably significant that nearly 40% of officers and operational support grades (OSGs) have had less than two years in their jobs. They have only known a regime that is severely restricted; they should not be left to take it as normality.

## **6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

In March 2023, Hewell launched its incentivised substance-free living programme (ISFL), which aims to create a community of support where up to 60 prisoners have incentives to live and remain substance-free. Any prisoner displaying good behaviour is eligible. Incentives are integral to the programme, fast-track incentives scheme status and gaming/movie nights. Adherence to the programme is measured by regular drug testing. Accommodation pressures have hampered the delivery of this programme. To have enhanced status means having a job, but currently only 7 of the 60 are working.

## **6.7 Soft skills**

There has been significant development in this area, championed by a specific activity lead. The range and diversity of activities offered and creative solutions to getting them delivered in as wide a range of settings as possible are impressive. For example:

- creating in outdoor spaces (drawing, murals, photography, poetry)
- unchained melody choir in the chapel, including a recording
- Oak Unit rap recording
- white water writing: a group of men work together for a week to write a children's story, with the aim being to publish and sell it
- poetry
- chess, to international level.

We remain concerned that staffing levels prevent there being time to accompany prisoners to these activities and occasionally the attitude of some staff members to the value and relevance of these activities.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

The library is a conveniently located facility able to accommodate up to 13 men at a time. The addition of three evening sessions has taken the total available to 23, meaning that around 300 men are able to visit the library each week, which, in broad terms, is around 30% of the prison roll. The industrial workers from HB6 are an example of those obliged to rely on access to a trolley of books brought to their unit.

This is a concern in itself, but men unable to visit the library are missing more than an opportunity to browse shelves and exchange books and, in the case of enhanced status prisoners (in the incentives scheme, enhanced status gives prisoners more privileges), DVDs. No trolley can deliver the warmth, vitality and personal commitment which is such a feature of the library. The work of its staff to discover and encourage opportunities goes far beyond their contractual obligations.

The population of HMP Hewell, receiving as it does new members almost every working day, many of them drawn from the local area, typically displays an urgent need for interventions from Education. Of the 1,428 men whose literacy in English had been assessed in the first eight months of 2023, for example, fewer than 10% worked at a level equivalent to a GCSE pass, which is roughly one-sixth of the proportion in the wider population. The work of over 60% was of, or below, the standard normally expected of a school pupil in Year 7 or 8.

Many opportunities, within prison as well as without, will remain closed while such limitations are allowed to persist. Addressing them is of the utmost importance. Yet the high turnover characteristic of a local prison makes it all the more difficult to address them in ways which are settled and sustained.

Three recent measures represent a considerable step towards addressing this situation. The most far reaching is tackling the disruption and frustration caused by transferring a man whilst his course is still in progress. Although formal holds can no longer be applied in these cases, a routine of timely local liaison between the department and the prison offender managers has allowed sensible short-term adjustments to be made. Whereas in May and June there was a total of 60 cases where a man did not complete his course, overwhelmingly because of his transfer, in July and August the equivalent figure was only 23. This means that more men are moving on with a tangible and significant achievement to show for their time at Hewell.

The opening of some classrooms out on two of the house blocks is another welcome development. This reduces the disadvantage that could come with a location on house blocks 4 and 5.

The third advance is in the vigour and thoroughness which now marks the work of the Shannon Trust, a charity that helps people learn to read. This is one more demonstration of the contribution which can be made by prisoners who are well chosen, well briefed and well trained. In all but a few cases, they are able to offer support to men who would be loath to accept it from a professional. Their limitation, as it appears from the Board's informal sampling, is persuading all officers on residential units that it is worth unlocking the man concerned for his session with them.



## **7.2 Vocational training, work**

The overall level of constructive activity available to prisoners remains a serious concern. It is therefore frustrating to observe the persistent under-use of the opportunities for activity which are available. This is particularly true of activities which are based in the house blocks. This cannot simply be attributed to staffing levels. An illustration of this is the failure of many residential units to take full advantage of the opportunities for employment and engagement open to them. When the Board surveyed the situation in July, there were 161 opportunities across the residential units. Only 93 of them were taken up, leaving 68 men behind their doors when a more vigorous approach would have had them out and engaged.

## **7.3 Offender management, progression**

While classified as a local prison, Hewell is required to accept men from courts across a wide geographic area when local provision is not available for them. The spaces they take results in local men being diverted to prisons outside the area. In August 2023, 129 prisoners were received at Hewell from out-of-area courts. Especially concerning are the instances of men being moved far from their home areas. In January and February, for example, Hewell received a total of 40 prisoners with homes well to the north of the West Midlands area, typically from Manchester and Merseyside. The spaces which they occupied were created by diverting men from local courts away from Hewell to places such as HMPs Bristol and Cardiff. The implications of all this for family contact and eventual resettlement can only be adverse.

We support the United Nations special rapporteur for torture in her recent assessment that IPP sentences have '*for many become cruel, inhuman and degrading*' and agree with her call for the Government to '*step up its efforts to ensure rehabilitation opportunities for all those affected, as well as access to adequate and appropriate reparations.*'

At the end of the year, 10 prisoners were held in Hewell who had been recalled for breaches of the life-long licences that are part of the IPP system.

## **7.4 Family contact**

During the early part of the year the Children and Families Department maintained its record of providing sensitively appropriate support to prisoners and their families, whether through its work in the Visits Hall, through schemes such as Storybook Dads (in which parents in prison record bedtime stories on CD or DVD for their children) or individual casework. This record deservedly received national recognition in the 2023 Butler Trust Awards.

A new funding arrangement, however, has called much of that fine work into question. The Board has been dismayed to see the department forced to shed staff and contract its activities. One of the pillars of a successful resettlement has been severely weakened.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

Resettlement planning and activity are effective for a small number of prisoners who are motivated and qualified to work on release. Large numbers of men would require longer-term and intensively resourced work to position them for work. A factor here may be literacy levels. At Hewell, of the 1,428 who have undertaken their initial English assessment so far in 2023, fewer than 40% have Levels 1 or 2, with less than 10% being at Level 2, which equates to a GCSE pass. This means that over 60% are at Entry Level 2 (roughly equivalent to early secondary school age, i.e. 11 or 12 years old) or below.

The Employment Hub is open to prisoners who are in the final 12 weeks of their sentence. It is typically a busy and purposeful place, with men using it to seek information, refine their plans, construct their CVs or meet prospective employers. Impressive contributions are made by the prisoners engaged in support roles and also by a charity that establishes relationships within prison which can be drawn upon beyond the Gate.

The Board would be confident of the service available to a man who was focused and realistic in preparing for his release. Its concern relates to the very many who do not fall into that category. The task of identifying the barriers which each of individual confronts is specialised work. Addressing them suitably will generally involve a commitment in the longer term. Fundamentally important though that work is, it is usually beyond the means of an under-resourced local prison.

Monthly summaries of these Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) interviews reveal that at least 40% of the men involved declare that they are not seeking work. Amongst these there will be some pensioners and others who are disabled, but they would typically be only a small proportion. The majority are expecting to pass through the gate and into unemployment. Added to them will be those whose hopes of work remain unfulfilled.

Adjacent to the Employment Hub is the office of the DWP. Its staff interview every sentenced man during his final weeks of imprisonment. They aim to smooth the transition between prison and the forms of support available to the population at large. Their thoroughness must surely help to prepare men who will need to take up their entitlements in their first day or two of liberty. It may become more difficult to achieve this once the newly announced policy prevents staff from informing prisoners of their National Insurance number.

In respect of accommodation, it has to be accepted that it is all but impossible to maintain a record of accommodation upon release that is comprehensive and accurate. Nevertheless, the monthly returns are sufficient to provoke acute concern. Over a recent eight-week period, for example, around 40% of the men released from HMP Hewell are believed to have lacked accommodation. This equates, in broad terms, to at least one man being released into homelessness every working day. That certainly accords with the Board's own informal sampling of men awaiting transport after their release. The Solace packs, containing warm clothing, toiletries and a notepad, are an admirable attempt to ease these situations, but the fact that they are necessary is a disgrace.

Several factors combine to create this situation, most of them beyond the prison's control. Provided the Duty to Refer (whereby a prison must refer a person in prison to a local authority if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness) has been discharged in a timely manner, responsibility passes to agencies operating beyond or through the gate. These complexities tend to be magnified when men are being released far away from their home area. It has also to be accepted that some providers have had experiences with certain individuals which they do not wish to repeat.

The Board has to record its shock that men who have received a high level of support from the prison, sometimes including an open ACCT, are confronted by a cliff edge on their release, beyond which lies homelessness.

## 8. The work of the IMB

### Board Statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6
Total number of visits to the establishment	363

### Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
A	Accommodation including laundry, clothing, ablutions	15	21	22
B	Discipline including adjudications, incentives, sanctions	9	1	3
C	Equality	7	6	6
D	Purposeful activity including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	5	17	4
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	9	26	25
E2	Finance including pay, private monies, spends	9	13	7
F	Food and kitchens	24	32	2
G	Health including physical, mental and social care	53	42	25
H1	Property within this establishment	16	31	13
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	7	17	9
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	8	14	1
I	Sentence management including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	12	22	18
J	Staff/prisoner concerns including bullying	66	65	37
K	Transfers	3	6	5
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints	23	25	17
	COVID-19	4	0	N/A
U	Unknown	N/A	N/A	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>270</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>200</b>

Note: While prison responses to complaints were usually within expected timescales, the depth of investigation and the quality of responses to prisoners were variable. Prisoners lack confidence in paper-based systems at Hewell for complaints (to the prison), IMB applications and DIRF (discrimination and incident report forms), particularly those who have been in other prisons where there is access to IT.

## **Annex A**

### **List of service providers**

- Physical health: Practice Plus Group
- Mental health: Practice Plus Group
- Substance misuse treatment: Practice Plus Group
- Social care support: Worcestershire County Council
- Learning and skills: Novus
- Library: Novus
- Community rehabilitation: the Probation Service
- Careers information and advice: Inside Job/IAG
- Benefits information and advice: JobCentre Plus
- Children and family support services: PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust), YMCA and Mothers' Union
- Escort contractor: GEOAmey



This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3)

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at [imb@justice.gov.uk](mailto:imb@justice.gov.uk)