



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Dovegate

**For reporting year
1 October 2022 to 30 September 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 Dovegate is a category B training prison in Staffordshire holding male prisoners aged 21 or over and is managed by Serco.

The main prison consists of convicted prisoners, mainly serving determinate sentences (a fixed length of time, which includes a period of time in prison and a period of time in the community 'on licence'), a remand facility (that holds people awaiting trial, or those who have been found guilty but are waiting to be sentenced) and local prison places.

There is also a purpose-built therapeutic community (TC), which takes repeat and mainly violent offenders, who come from any prison in the country and volunteer to address their offending behaviour through group and individual therapy. All prisoners go through an assessment before being accepted as suitable for the challenges which come with the therapy on the TC.

The certified normal accommodation of the main prison is 960¹ and that of the TC is 200, giving a combined total of 1,160.

The number of prisoners held in the main prison over the reporting year has been at, or close to, the operational capacity.

The main prison consists of three house blocks. The two original house blocks (1 and 2) each have five wings, built around a central 'bubble'. Each wing has two floors, with each floor having 20 cells and four shared showers. A food-serving area and a laundry are on the ground floor. There are fixed tables and chairs, a pool table and exercise machines in the communal area, plus an outside exercise yard with outdoor gym equipment. Cells in these two house blocks were designed for single occupancy and have an in-cell washbasin and toilet. A further 20 cells per wing are larger and can accommodate two prisoners each.

The most recent house block (3) has four wings built around a control 'bubble'. This block has a dedicated drug treatment wing. The cells are larger, complying with European prison rules standards, and have integral showers. These wings have the same communal facilities as house blocks 1 and 2.

All cells have a telephone installed, and all calls are security monitored. During this reporting year, in-cell IT has been rolled out on all wings, including TC.

The TC, which is separated from the main prison by an internal fence, consists of three house blocks, all having single occupancy cells with in-cell toilets and showers. The fourth block houses the education department and a small TC visits hall with a family room. It shares some of the main prison facilities, such as the health centre and gym, for example.

The care and separation unit (CSU) is a separate block and has 18 cells and two special accommodation cells.

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.

Automated teller machine (ATM) kiosks are installed in all the residential areas, allowing prisoners to check their accounts, order meals, make medical and dental appointments, access the prison complaints system and arrange visits.

The prison has its own kitchen and laundry and the prison kitchen produces all meals in-house for prisoners, as well as for staff in a small bistro.

The health centre has two waiting rooms and a range of treatment and consulting rooms for outpatient clinics. The in-patient facility has accommodation for 11 prisoners. Each room has a toilet and washbasin. There is one bath/shower room in the unit.

The prison has a large education and training facility, Dovegate College, five workshops, a gym and a multifaith centre. The library services are provided by Serco, in partnership with Staffordshire Library Services. The Shannon Trust is active in the prison as an additional support to prisoners with poor reading skills.

Practice Plus Group provides 24-hour healthcare services. Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust provides mental health services.

The prison has a contract with Serco Integrated Services for facilities management.

The prison has well-maintained and attractive gardens, with productive vegetable and flower growing areas. TC grounds also have ponds and ducks cared for by prisoners.

The visits hall is spacious and welcoming, the screens put in place during Covid-19 have been removed and there are both indoor and outdoor play areas for children.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- There has been one serious incident at height (this might involve a prisoner climbing onto the netting or the roof or over landing bars) during the reporting year and four deaths in custody, one, apparently, of natural causes (in hospital), and three, apparently, self-inflicted.
- We observed the wings being calm and settled and prisoners relationships with staff appear to be good.
- The use of body worn video cameras (BWVCs) has continued to increase and has now become the norm, with reviews of footage weekly on uses of force.

Fair and humane treatment

- There was a programme of painting and floor replacement that started in Covid-19 and issues with the drainage of showers was addressed, leaving a better standard of general accommodation at the end of the reporting year.
- The kitchen changed to a single-source supplier in line with new rules from HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and that, with the increase in overall costs of staple items, has, in the Board's view, slightly reduced the overall quality of the food provided.
- New trolleys were purchased at the end of the reporting year, helping to improve the temperature of food being delivered to the wings.

Health and wellbeing

- Delays continued for much of the year for routine secondary healthcare appointments, with at least one prisoner seriously self-harming to get to hospital to have a cast put on a broken wrist.
- Waiting times for transfer to a secure mental health establishment continue to be long and leave seriously mentally ill prisoners in an environment that is not suitable for them or those around them.
- Waiting times for the dentist are worse than for other medical appointments, with emergency appointments pushing the routine ones further behind.
- Prisoners have told IMB members on numerous occasions this year that they believe HMP Dovegate to be a good prison.

Progression and resettlement

- Although key work had been taking place by summer 2023, the quality of the sessions was found lacking, and since then a focus on quality, as well as quantity, has been led from the management team.
- The Offender Management Unit (OMU) allocates a Prisoner Offender Manager (POM) to remand and sentenced prisoners, although they are not budgeted to do so.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- There are still a number of IPP prisoners at HMP Dovegate and one of the deaths in custody was immediately prior to the IPP prisoner's sentence hearing. A clear strategy on how IPP prisoner can progress to release is much needed.
- The number of secure mental health spaces available is not adequate for the number of seriously mentally ill prisoners. Funding for more spaces is desperately required.
- The number of remand prisoners at HMP Dovegate has increased further since the last reporting period, and some have been on remand over 12 months, with no court date yet given. A focus on clearing the back log of court appearance for remand prisoners would be beneficial.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Prisoners' property continues to be lost in transit on a regular basis. Management of the system from a national lead would have a major impact on reducing this problem.
- Population pressures are increasing the number of incidents, so more community based sentences are needed.

TO THE GOVERNOR

Our thanks to the Director and all the staff at HMP Dovegate for their professionalism and respect of the IMB.

- Ensure there is enough staff to make sure all health care appointments are attended.
- Continuity and stability of staff in the CSU would help to ensure Rule 45 GOoD reviews and paperwork are available on time, and give those prisoners held there the support they need.
- It is important there is a medical prescriber in Reception for out of standard hours arrivals, to ensure prisoners get the medication they need on their first night.
- Focus on improving both education and workshop activities for all prisoners.
- Continue to train and develop the inexperienced staff to maintain a safe and respectful working environment for all.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

- Late arrivals, due to Operation Safeguard (which was activated by HMPPS when total prison estate capacity reached a point that required prisoners to be held in police cells on a temporary basis, as overflow), initially caused issues in reception. This was quickly resolved by extending the operational manning hours.
- It has been reported to the Board that healthcare in reception for late arrivals is not always available, especially if there has been an emergency elsewhere, leaving prisoners too long without medication.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

- There were four deaths in custody: one in hospital, of, apparently, natural causes; and three, apparently, self-inflicted on the wings. Of the latter, one was an IPP (Imprisonment for Public Protection) prisoner and one was on remand.
- A total of 555 Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) plans, which are used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide, were opened during the reporting period.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

- Self-isolation is monitored by the prison, but the Board will also monitor this prisoner group over the coming reporting year.

4.4 Use of force

- PAVA, a type of pepper spray, has been used seven times in the reporting year. The Board viewed the BWVC footage at the weekly meeting with the Director, a member of the controllers' team and security. All uses were deemed appropriate by the Board.
- The Chair of the IMB monitored some weekly meetings where BWVC footage was reviewed and evidence of continuous improvement was observed.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

- The Board notes that there has been an increase in drone and over-the-wall drops of illicit items during this reporting period.
- The body scanner in reception continues to be used to highlight concealed items, such as drugs, in new arrivals, who are then segregated and re-tested until they are clear.
- The Board notes that an increase in searches in the visitors' and staff entrance has become the norm.
- There has been an increase in the number of illicit substances found in incoming mail, including legal correspondence.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

- Many wings have had new floors and the communal showers on house blocks one and two have been revamped.
- The move to a single supplier for the main kitchen has resulted in more substitution of ordered items and less flexibility than previously, and the Board understands that prisoners have become frustrated at the number of substitutions.
- The IMB does not receive many complaints about the food, although it is widely noted that it's not as good as it used to be.
- Repair work to the roof in the kitchen trolley area was undertaken as a temporary fix, which resolved the issue. No permanent work on the roofs or gutters was completed.
- New hot food trolleys were purchased at the end of the reporting year and improved the temperature of food being delivered to the wings.
- One prisoner is given the responsibility for each trolley and it has been reported to the Board that the food arrives on the wings in the same condition as it leaves the kitchen.
- Often the window vents in cells are blocked and a refurbishment programme never seems to reduce the overall number of blocked vents.

5.2 Segregation

- There have been a few long-term prisoners in segregation who required transfer to a secure mental health unit during this reporting year, but it is the Board's view that the process to get them accepted somewhere took too long.
- The IMB monitors most of the Rule 45 (where a prisoner has been kept apart – segregated – from other prisoners due to disruptive behaviour) reviews (at which the prison determines if the prisoner should remain segregated), along with Healthcare and Chaplaincy.
- There have been some issues in the start time of the reviews over the year and paperwork not being available at the designated time.
- Staff know the prisoners in the CSU well and, in the Board's view, work hard to progress them to an exit strategy.
- An increased input from psychology over the last year has improved the management of prisoners with complex issues.
- The increased population pressures have meant the CSU has been busy over the last reporting period, and that many prisoners in the unit are disruptive and have complex mental health needs.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

- The Board has observed an increased focus on key work as the reporting year has progressed, and the quality of the key work undertaken has also continued to improve.
- We see good relationships between staff and prisoners on a regular basis, and very few complaints to the IMB relating to staff.

5.4 Equality and diversity

- Additional events such as International Men's Day and Great Britain Day have been added to the diversity yearly calendar.
- There are jobs for equality reps on each wing, although not all wings currently have a rep in place.
- There are four RET Reps (equality taskforce), who work across the house blocks. The training they receive is similar to the staff training.
- Discrimination Incident Report Forms (DIRFs) have fallen to 65, which is much lower than in previous years.
- The reps and equality staff meet with new staff interns on week 10 of their training and have an open discussion session around equality and diversity, to ensure that new staff understand how what they say and do can be interpreted.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

- The Board notes that the multifaith team has continued to be proactive in its delivery of support to all prisoners.
- They attend most of the Rule 45 reviews in CSU and actively offer support to prisoners at that time, if appropriate.
- They also conduct a round in CSU every day.
- There was a short period, unfortunately at Christmas, when there was a shortage of Anglican coverage for the festive services.
- There are chaplains for all the main faiths and the managing chaplain works hard to recruit more faith leaders.

5.6 Incentives schemes

- Introduced by Serco, the inspire incentive scheme rewards good behaviour – i.e. attending education, work, etc – with increased phone credit.
- With negatives warnings being issued for failure of mandatory drugs tests or being found with illicit items.
- The HMPPS incentives system appears less effective in promoting good behaviour and adherence to the rules than the Serco inspire system.

5.7 Complaints

- The HMP Dovegate complaints system is efficiently run and, for the most part, timely. The Board has not observed any complaint that was unfairly handled.
- The IMB has seen a very slight increase in the number of Applications (prisoners' written submissions to the Board): 178 in the reporting year compared with 175 in the 2021-2022 reporting period.
- The HMP Dovegate complaints process has seen a reduction in the reporting year: 3,217 this year compared with 3,518 in the previous year.

5.8 Property

- Prisoners trying to access items from their stored property suffered significant waiting times for most of the year. However, resource was deployed towards the end of the summer and the wait is now less than a month.
- The Board notes that poor staff practice in effectively managing cell clearance has resulted in the loss of some property.

- Property going missing when being transferred from one establishment to another continues to be a source of concern. In some cases, when complaints are investigated by the Dovegate complaints team with no success, they are only resolved when the IMB escalates them to prison management.
- It has been reported to the Board that poor staff practice in effectively managing cell clearance has resulted in the loss of some property.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

- The Board understands that all in-person healthcare appointments are taking place and, with the exception of the dental service, internal waiting times seem reasonable.
- Since Covid-19, the number of prisoners allowed in the waiting room is 12 - previously 35 - which has impacted on the waiting times.
- The waiting room toilet has been refurbished.
- There is an intention to relocate the pharmacy so it can be converted into another waiting room.
- There is no overnight mental health provision, although most of the admissions to the healthcare unit are for mental health reasons.
- All in-patients are discussed at a weekly meeting with a GP, nurse practitioner, clinical staff, the patient experience lead (PEL), a psychiatrist and the mental health team.
- Healthcare-specific complaint forms are available on all house blocks and are dealt with by the PEL.
- Health champions are trained to Level 2 Royal Society for Public Health understanding health improvement and work on the wings and in healthcare to support prisoners.
- Bi-weekly meetings take place with the health champions and patient forums take place on a monthly basis.
- Generally, waiting times for healthcare appointments, both internal and external, are the key theme from the forums.
- A monthly newsletter is distributed to patients with key updates from healthcare.
- Two health champions won awards in the national annual peer award scheme.
- Partnership working has taken place with a Time to Talk event, aimed at encouraging prisoners to talk openly about their mental health. The event was attended by more than 30 prisoners, including VPs, as well as staff from healthcare, mental health and safer custody, plus the neurodiversity support manager.

6.2 Physical healthcare

- Hospital escorts have increased from four to six a day; however, it has been reported to the Board that waiting times at hospitals and appointments cancelled by hospitals are a frustration to prisoners.
- Nursing staff provide 24-hour provision and run daily clinics and outreach on the wings. A proportion of consultations take place by phone.
- Health champions are available on each house block to provide wellbeing advice and support.
- The Board notes that healthcare staff work with the kitchen staff to ensure all clinically recognised dietary requirements are met.

6.3 Mental health

- The mental health team consists of a team leader, a clinical lead, mental health nurses (agency), two healthcare assistants, a psychologist, a psychiatrist and a social worker.

- Recruitment for nurses and admin staff continues.
- There are 4.5 visiting psychiatry sessions per week.
- There is a mental health screening assessment on arrival in reception and a referral is made to the mental health team if concerns arise.
- Any member of staff can make a referral to the mental health team.
- In the Board's view, staffing shortages have led to longer wait times for routine referrals and recruitment continues to be focused on.
- The team does outreach work with patients on the wings, in healthcare and in CSU, where they are offered self-help materials and distraction tools.
- Group work on a weekly basis has restarted for anxiety and empower.
- Work has been undertaken on the criteria that make a prisoner a patient of the mental health team and the other support available.

6.4 Social care

- Staffordshire County Council social care provides the assessments for social care.
- The healthcare team manages and delivers the care packages to the patients.
- Social care staff include a social work and occupational therapists, who outreach patients to assess their needs. Equipment is provided where necessary.
- Healthcare assistants are qualified to level 2.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime.

- In the Board's view, time out of cell continues to be good, with consistent staffing levels facilitating exercise and movements for purposeful activity, gym and healthcare.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

- Substance-misuse treatment is managed by Midland Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. The clinical team remains under Practice Plus.
- Any prisoners arriving in reception who are identified as needing detoxification or stabilisation are placed on the first-night wing for continuous monitoring.
- Patients are assessed by the substance misuse prescriber and appropriate medication is given when required.
- Psychosocial support is given, and healthcare assistants attend the wing twice daily to check the residents' general health.
- Group sessions include acupuncture, AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and Smart Recovery.
- There is a hotline phone number specific to substance misuse.
- There is a peer support scheme in place called Recovery Champions to support others with addictions. The Champions attend groups and provide one to one support.

6.7 Soft skills

- The HMP Dovegate choir remains a key evening activity, along with many other initiatives.
- A strong focus on key working and management of the quality of key work has, in the Board's view, improved staff-prisoner relationships.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

- HMP Dovegate has struggled to recruit the educational lead it needs to take this area forward.
- Education restarted on the vulnerable prisoners' (VP) wing and in the therapeutic community (TC) unit during the course of the reporting year.
- In the Board's view, there are not enough staff with educational qualifications to deliver everything that HMP Dovegate would hope to deliver.
- The increasing numbers of remand and category C and D prisoners means that the standard six-weeks courses have lost pupils due to movement and court attendance.

7.2 Vocational training, work

- A review of the purposeful activities on offer took place early in the reporting year and progress has been made to improve the number and quality of work placements on offer.
- The VP workshop has been changed to allow more spaces.
- Discussion have been ongoing with 20 companies, although the process is complex with the security, external commercial, economic and internal facility limitations.
- There are plenty of companies offering packing and uninspiring work, but fewer companies that could provide quality work, who wish to work with prisons.

7.3 Offender management, progression

- The number of remand and short-sentence prisoners has remained higher than usual throughout the reporting year, remand at 266 at the end of September and 124 serving under 4 years.
- Population pressures throughout the prison estate have caused challenges in progressing Cat C and D prisoners to other establishments.
- We have observed good management in the use of phone monitoring for public protection issues.

7.4 Family contact

- Social visits and social video calls are available to prisoners and the take up is good.
- Family days are offered regularly.
- In cell IT has increased the ways in which family contact can be maintained.
- The IMB brought a prisoner case to the attention of the senior management when he had been denied attendance to his father's funeral. On re-examination of the case, he was allowed to attend.

7.5 Resettlement planning

- There are delays in the production of sentence-planning documents due, in the Board's view, to the lack of staff.
- A significant number of remand prisoners have been released direct from court, which doesn't allow for resettlement planning.

- There continues to be limited spaces for certain types of prisoners in suitable accommodation on release, specifically those with personality disorders.
- Despite the low staffing levels and the pressures that have come with increased population, out-of-area prisoners and high levels of remand and foreign national prisoners, the department appears to be committed to providing the best results it can.

7.6 Therapeutic community (TC)

- From the Board's observations, the TC continues to be a calm and progressive place for prisoners to address their behaviour and work on the causes that brought them into prison.
- There have been a number of illicit finds on the TC, but these have been dealt with quickly and fairly.
- Afternoon education has returned to the TC during the year, after being stopped during Covid.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	5
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	5
Total number of visits to the establishment	254
Number of Rule 45 GOoD reviews attended	111

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	6	12
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	1	5
C	Equality	3	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	7	5
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	12	19
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	10	15
F	Food and kitchens	4	3
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	45	34
H1	Property within the establishment	18	28
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	28	21
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	6	1
I	Sentence management, including HDC (Home Detention Curfew), ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	5	16
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	6	14
K	Transfers	3	1
L	Miscellaneous	21	2
	Total number of applications	175	178



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