



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

**For reporting year
1 October 2022 to 31 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 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

At a baseline level, a maximum of 529¹ sentenced men can be accommodated at HMP/YOI Deerbolt, which is in a semi-rural location near Barnard Castle in County Durham. Operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) was reduced to 387 from June 2019, later to 337 at the last reporting period, and now to 333. The reductions in number are due to refurbishments to prison wings, which have faced lengthy delays and the IMB at Deerbolt has been disappointed with the progression, despite great public investment.

Deerbolt, a category C training and resettlement prison (which holds prisoners whose escape risk is considered to be low but who cannot be trusted in open conditions), was first established as a young offender institution (YOI) for 18- to 21-year-olds on sentences of up to four years, and has education, work training and activities to suit this prisoner group. However, last year this was increased up to the age of 29, but now this age limit has been lifted, meaning that Deerbolt can accept male prisoners of any age. Deerbolt is now home to prisoners as young as 18 years old, with the oldest being 58.

The main providers of services in the prison are Novus (education), Amey (works/maintenance), Spectrum (healthcare) and Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (mental health). Visitor care and support is provided by the voluntary agency the North East Prison Aftercare Society (NEPACS), which also offers provision for family social visits and group work with young fathers. Dental care is provided by Burgess and Hyder.

The purpose-built establishment was opened in 1973. It includes an administration centre, 10 residential wings with exercise yards (including the new K wing and the care and separation unit/CSU), substantial industrial workshops and education classrooms, a gymnasium, reception, chapel, reducing reoffending unit and visitors' centre. The buildings have been maintained over the years and have regularly been refurbished by the prison to meet both the latest regulations for fire safety and general standards.

The prison has recently benefited from a new tarmacked through road, and the removal of asbestos has begun on some wings. Such recent improvements include new windows and better showers. The external CCTV units have been improved, particularly to the public footpaths surrounding the prison, the refurbished gymnasium and the new car park, which offers access for staff and visitors alike. However, since the recent public housing developments have been completed, there is often a shortage of car parking space when Board members visit the establishment.

There are also extensive areas of grass and cultivated plots of flowers and vegetables which are, on the whole, well kept. But certain areas have faced much decline, such as the pond area to the north of the site.

Prisoners are received from a wide national catchment area and not just the north east region.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Background to the report

In the last few reports, the IMB at Deerbolt has outlined the impact of low Board member numbers on the ability to monitor and garner evidence for this annual report. That said, in the past 12 months, volunteer numbers have increased, meaning that the Board believes it has covered as much ground as possible in this reporting period. Our now experienced team has shown tact in facing the challenges presented by monitoring Deerbolt and has brought great enthusiasm to the role. We feel the Board has monitored Deerbolt in an effective and balanced way to provide the maximum value to the role in the interests of maximising the public's investment in the IMB.

The IMB at Deerbolt, again, recognises and reports on the enormous difficulties facing the Prison Service, particularly as it tries to deal with the ever-present staffing recruitment challenges. The Board continues to be concerned about the lack of meaningful rehabilitation for prisoners at a time when staffing numbers have increased to deemed satisfactory levels. The IMB feels this is not the fault of the senior management team at Deerbolt, who are not only aware of the challenges but often go above and beyond to provide activity. During the reporting period, the IMB acknowledges issues with inexperienced staff and regional staffing issues at other establishments. For example, if Deerbolt has a full allocation of staff, it is required to detach staff to other prisons in England, regardless of the experience level of staff in the prison at that time and/or sickness levels. On numerous occasions in the reporting period, this has meant that education services have not been delivered to expectations and we feel this is a concern that needs to be investigated on a national level.

Further, last reporting year, we cited that a previous HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) report found that Deerbolt's management was justifiably criticised about the outcomes for the prisoners at the prison. In this reporting period, it would be fair to suggest that the prison has made strides to increase the time out of cells and provide meaningful activity. This must be commended at a time when Deerbolt now not only houses more prisoners with complex needs and longer sentences than before, but also those of any age. With facilities and courses traditionally tailored to prisoners aged 18-21 (although there are also courses for an older age range), this age increase has made it very difficult for the management team to navigate the ever-changing landscape of prisoner needs in a bid to promote a rehabilitative culture.

3.2 Main findings

Safety

IMB members are often asked the question: 'How safe is Deerbolt?' whether it be at regional/national meetings or simply in the street from folks in the community aware of our role. Our answer is always the same: 'Deerbolt feels very safe, and we have never had any issues while visiting the prison.' This premise is backed up by past data outlining that Deerbolt does have a good safety record relative to comparator prisons. However, due to the nature of gang and prisoner affiliations, violent behaviours are often difficult to predict and understand. As a result, it would be difficult to suggest that Deerbolt is a safe place for all the prisoners at the establishment. This would be backed up by our regular dialogue with the senior management team, who often describe the challenges of dealing with drugs, violence and/or debts. Deerbolt staff should be

commended for their intelligence work, as the Board believes that they have a good understanding of the profiles of the prisoners at their prison. Prisoner allegiances are not always simply due to where the prisoner is from in the country and prisoners' safety is often a complex hierarchical system that needs to be researched.

During the reporting period, there were a couple of notable incidents in the summer when Board members were monitoring the prison. After the post-incident investigations, which we observed, the reasoning was that these incidents were due to a lack of regime and that prisoners were simply 'protesting'. We would argue that this comes back to the very issues the prison faces with low staffing numbers. This resulted in prisoners being locked up for longer periods than hoped for and they believe their catharsis can be achieved through protesting behaviour. However, it must be said that towards the end of the reporting period, the IMB noted that further changes implemented by the senior management team, together with a more stable staffing footprint, has shown great promise in terms of safety in the establishment. For example, the re-introduction of greater purposeful activity has led to a tangible increase in morale evident among prisoners and staff alike.

Fair and humane treatment

As noted from the Board's observations in the last three reporting periods, there is no doubt that the regime and staff, both individually and collectively, do their best to treat the prisoners fairly and humanely. Moreover, the Board believes that prison staff have quality one-to-one communication with the most vulnerable prisoners and those with behavioural issues. However, the Board is concerned about the interaction with the wider population in Deerbolt. The infrequent level of key worker sessions (30%) would highlight this. Although the prison successfully attends to the most vulnerable, we believe that the population would benefit from increased dialogue on a regular basis. The IMB would not like to think that some prisoners feel unsure of what is expected of them while at the establishment and, worse still, that they may feel forgotten by the regime. For example, on several occasions, prisoners told the Board they were confused about where they stood with regard to progressing through their sentence. While there were times when this could be seen as an unfair accusation or highlighted inadequacies in offender management work, the Board feels these outline failures in the delivery of key worker sessions.

The IMB has also been concerned about the slowness of the wing refurbishments and how this has impacted staff and prisoners. For example, delays to the renovation of the showers resulted in staff being diverted to escort groups of prisoners to other wings and the gym for a shower. Also, the IMB has concerns about the updating of the laundry. The process of Deerbolt sending laundry, in some cases, as far north as HMP Northumberland, has led some prisoners to worry about their cherished clothing. This not only wasted the time of important staff members but resulted in some prisoners washing their clothes in their cells, an issue that needs to be rectified. This could explain why applications (written representations prisoners submit to the Board) were mainly property-related in the reporting period.

Once again, the IMB would like to praise prison staff, especially those in the CSU, for their organisation, compassion and commitment in dealing with prisoners who have complex mental health needs, particularly when they have to respond to challenging behaviours. While Deerbolt does not have suitable facilities to deal with many of the needs of these prisoners, the staff have understood the challenges, built relationships

with the prisoners and shown patience. They have also directly communicated with the IMB to keep the Board in the loop about the prisoners' circumstances.

Health and wellbeing

In recent annual reports, healthcare staff (both physical and mental) have been deservedly commended for their high-level service. The Board would like to particularly praise the effective work of the Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Team (DART), who work collaboratively with other teams, including new arrivals, for example. While waiting times for healthcare appointments have increased in the prison, from its observations, the Board believes that health and wellbeing needs are generally being met and there are few issues with this provision during the reporting period. There are also very good relationships between healthcare staff, the wider prison and the IMB. This is evident at healthcare meetings, which are regularly attended by all parties and observed by the Board.

While Deerbolt has excellent facilities for exercise, one of the common issues is that prisoners are still spending too much time in their cells, with little to do. While the prisoners themselves are sometimes to blame for not wanting to adhere to the prison regime, we must not overlook the fact that staffing issues play a negative role in this. In the Board's view, the Governor and staff understand these challenges and we are encouraged by plans to change the core day in order to increase the opportunities for exercise (and meaningful activity) for the population.

Progression towards transfer or release

Since the new acting Governor was appointed in September 2022, there have been improvements in the level and availability of education provision, with a view towards progressive rehabilitation. Improvements have been made in re-establishing normal routines for the provision of education and vocational studies. At times, the external education contractor Novus appears to have sufficient staff to meet contractual requirements. That said, Deerbolt still struggles with short-notice cancellations to classes, due to prison staff shortages or unexpected issues or incidents, which continue to blight the delivery of rehabilitation. From first-hand observations, tuition appears to be of a high standard and the prisoners are, in general, engaged. It is apparent that prisoners are now much more gainfully engaged in some form of activity during the working day. However, the IMB remains concerned about the perception of how frequently provision is cancelled, due to staffing or accommodation issues, and the ability for the provision to suit the ever-increasing ageing demographic of the prison.

However, it must be said that the prison shows promise following the re-profiling in the summer of the reporting period in structuring prisoners' routines. Beginning the core day of activity earlier has freed up more time to allow prisoners to have more time out of cells. This is expected to increase the efficacy of prisoners progressing towards a successful transfer by improving the rehabilitative culture. The Board would also like to commend the high-level work of the library staff, the Offender Management Unit (OMU) and the work of the Resettlement Planning Team. We feel the quality of dialogue between case managers and the resettlement service is of a very high standard, with prisoners often released to suitable accommodation. However, the north east could benefit from more beds for prisoners released without a fixed abode.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Many ageing establishments, including Deerbolt, require significant investment for maintenance and upkeep. How does the Minister plan to secure ample funding for this purpose?
- Despite population pressures, how will the Minister ensure that HMPPS is held accountable for ensuring prisoners are located as close as is reasonably possible to their families to better support and enable family contact, as recommended in Lord Farmer's report²?
- We now have a dozen IPP prisoners at Deerbolt who do not understand what it is they need to do in order to gain release (particularly when they are past their original sentenced detention date) and whether Deerbolt can, in fact, offer the level of service necessary to let them attain their release. May we have clarity from the Minister on how to achieve certainty for each individual prisoner?
- Given the number of services that a prison leaver often needs to access on release, how will the Minister ensure that prisons are adequately equipped to deliver on their designated roles? Also, in cases where establishments operate beyond their standard functions, such as training prisons handling prisoners in their resettlement phase, how will the Minister guarantee sufficient resources and support (as stated in the Prisons Strategy White Paper), ensuring equal attention and expert guidance for those in training prisons nearing release?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- While acknowledging the need to support establishments across the country, how will HMPPS ensure that staffing levels and site-specific demands are considered before assigning staff to other locations? Will the focus be on enabling each site to maintain a full operational regime rather than mandating a percentage of staff to be sent on detached duty, potentially compromising the functioning of the sending establishment?
- Deerbolt's location is in a semi-rural area remote from the main centres. Is this recognised and how will this be factored into holding onto existing staff and further recruitment?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- What oversight does the Governor have over the prioritisation of works within the establishment?
- HMP/YOI Deerbolt is an important employer in the local community: are there further plans to improve the visibility of the prison in the community?

² [Ministry of Justice: The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime by Lord Farmer, 2017.](#)

3.4 Progress since the last report

It is undeniable that since the acting Governor was appointed in September 2022, a wave of energy has coursed through the prison and there has been much improvement. The progression of education provision, the increased opportunities for meaningful activity and the work staff have done to think 'outside the box' have all helped to provide a good regime, despite complex staffing challenges and an ever-changing prisoner demographic profile. The Board believes that prisoners have opportunities for engagement and the ability to partake in structured activity that takes them out of their cells for significant periods of the day. Moreover, the very re-profiling of the core day, at the end of the reporting period, has led to, and is continuing to lead to, improvements at the establishment in this area. By further expanding access to activities, there is optimism that Deerbolt will see a decline in the incidence of violence and disciplinary actions in future reporting periods.

However, for optimal progress to happen at Deerbolt, the Board believes that further financial support and local powers are required to support the management team. While we are aware that this is the case in many public areas, for existing staff to be maintained, outdated facilities to be improved and a rehabilitative culture to be promoted in a bid to reduce recidivism rates in the community, increased funding needs to happen and staff need to be allowed to make their decisions more freely. Moreover, the Board at Deerbolt and other IMBs in the region perceive that Ministerial decision-making with regard to their prison often happens centrally (i.e. in London) without real dialogue with local stakeholders. Therefore, the Board believes that, like other prisons, the HMP Deerbolt management team would benefit from a more localised approach to their many challenges and should not be limited to the Prisons Strategy White Paper³, which we believe is very inflexible in regard to the needs and quantified 'success' of prisons such as at HMP Deerbolt.

Issue raised	Response given	Action taken
To the Minister There are often rumours that Deerbolt is accepting older prisoners and that the prison is 'closing'. What is the long-term plan for Deerbolt's youth offender institution status?	HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) say they have no plans to close Deerbolt and have actually now removed the age uplift, so prisoners of any age (without complex needs) can be accommodated in the prison.	There have been drastic changes in the age of prisoners at Deerbolt during this reporting period.
To the Prison Service We are members of the local community	HMPPS say they have hired an occupational psychologist	The IMB is still concerned with the approach to uniquely address

³ [Ministry of Justice; Prisons Strategy White Paper, December 2021.](#)

<p>and we understand that staffing is difficult in all sectors in our region. As per our response last year, we are aware that there are efforts to discuss recruitment. However, we wonder what has been done uniquely to address the staffing levels at Deerbolt?</p>	<p>to look into the staffing levels at Deerbolt and will do exit interviews with outgoing staff.</p>	<p>staffing levels at Deerbolt, despite this response. Although we would say that recruitment has improved but attrition rates are the key concern.</p>
<p>We understand the challenges for education staff and contractors. However, what is the current success level of the Novus contract and how is it being measured?</p>	<p>HMPPS says prisoner involvement in education is conducted by the Prison Activity Hub. Scores are gained through several mechanisms and the educator is meeting the demands of this contract.</p>	<p>The IMB is happy that the standard of education is improving, but have concerns with regard to the cancellation of such sessions caused by other staffing challenges.</p>
<p>We would like to know what plans the Prison Service has to reduce recidivism levels at Deerbolt.</p>	<p>HMPPS say there is a collaborative approach between the Offender Management Unit (OMU) and several partners to reduce reoffending - although improvements need to happen to employment levels on release.</p>	<p>The IMB continues to monitor this over branching topic, mainly with reference to the challenges Deerbolt has in providing suitable employment, particularly when it is a training prison rather than a settlement prison. This makes the task very difficult, given that prisoners are released in areas out of the jurisdiction of Deerbolt.</p>
<p>In our last reporting period, HMPPS stated that we have access to data from the performance hub. Overall, what are the current key performance indicators of Deerbolt prison and how is it performing?</p>	<p>HMPPS say there is a Prisoner Performance Tool and Dashboard that we can access via the Governor.</p>	<p>The IMB continues to have increased dialogue with the Governor in relation to performance. This is an area we continue to monitor in the interests of providing value to our role.</p>

<p>To the Governor The IMB understands and respects the hard work the management team has put in through difficult circumstances and challenges this reporting year. What are the plans for education with an ever-changing cohort?</p> <p>Who in the prison is directly involved in measuring the effectiveness of Novus?</p>	<p>As per the response from the Prison Service, the Governor has outlined the challenges the prison faces with this ever-changing cohort.</p> <p>The Governor and senior management team say they are looking into the potential to bring in initiatives to utilise the facilities within the prison.</p>	<p>The IMB believes that the prison Governor is aware of our concerns and we continue to monitor these aspects of education.</p> <p>The IMB was redirected to the manager of the Novus contract, and we have, during the reporting period, monitored closely this aspect of rehabilitation.</p>
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Evidence sections 4 – 7

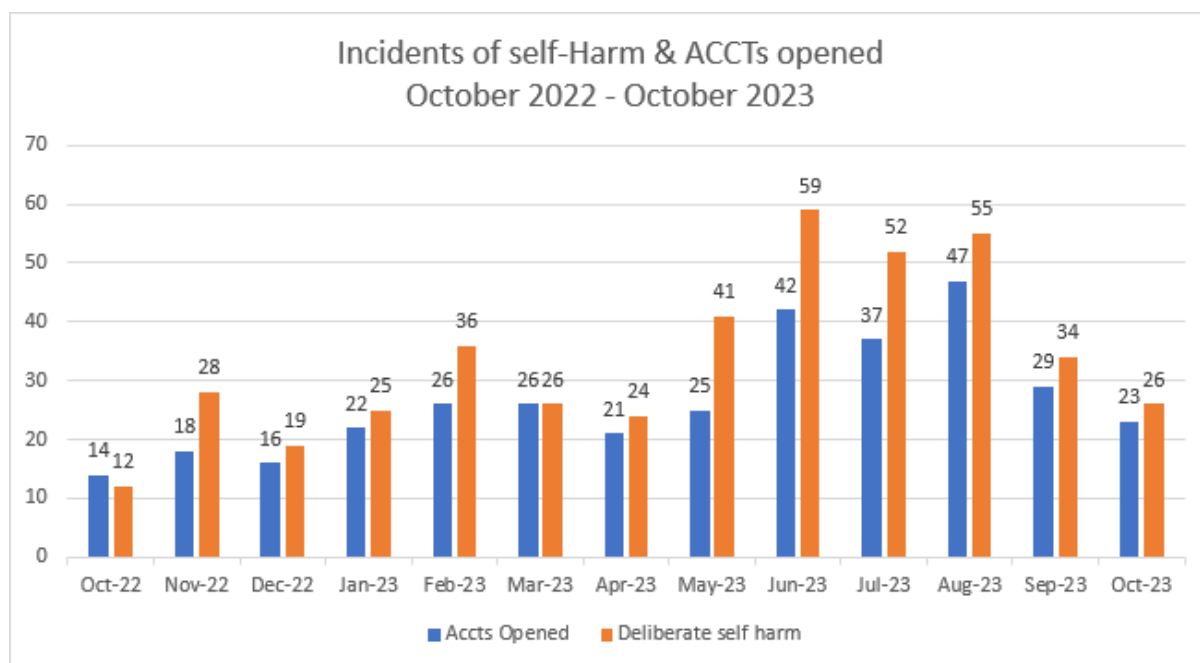
4. Safety

4.1 Reception and Induction

Reception and induction of prisoners on their arrival at Deerbolt is thorough. As observed last year, we continue to see misplaced personal possessions, in that they do not arrive with prisoners. This inevitably incurs additional cost and time for the Prison Service in trying to recover these. Not all instances were satisfactorily resolved in the reporting year, which was frustrating for staff and prisoners alike.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

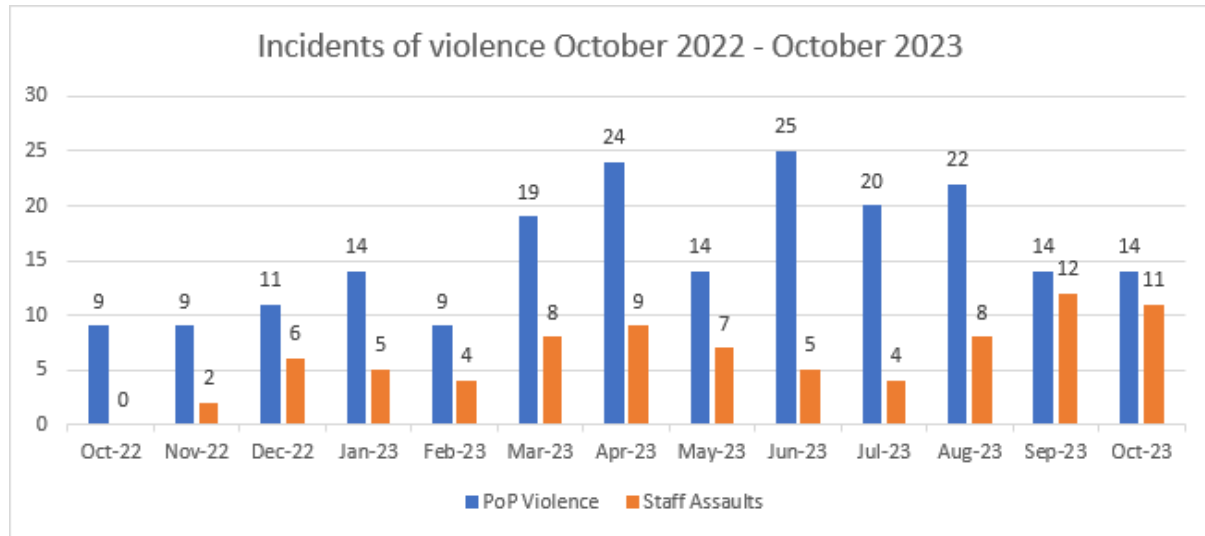
Thankfully, no deaths in custody or self-inflicted deaths happened in the reporting year. The number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans opened, which are used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide, appears to have increased from the last reporting period. While this is a great concern that needs to be actively monitored by the prison, it may well be that Deerbolt staff are now improving in their abilities to assess and report on such incidents. While incidents do happen with individual prisoners, staff are aware of such instances and, from the Board's observations, they are well monitored, with appropriate planned intervention and support. The weekly safety intervention meetings (SIM) are very well run and flag issues and management plans to monitor prisoners.



4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Prisoner violence is an ongoing problem and, as the Governor has reported to the IMB at the monthly meetings, most of the prisoner issues at Deerbolt are associated with drugs, violence or debt. While the number of violent incidents and assaults on staff are comparable to the last reporting period, Deerbolt also suffers from the resulting damage to cells and a gang culture prevalent among certain groups of individuals. The badly delayed refurbishment of prison wings and, thus, cell availability, has impeded the ability

of management to move prisoners to minimise risk and deal with these issues. The Board remains impressed by Deerbolt's management of individual prisoners, awareness of associates and non-associates and co-ordination of intelligence.



4.4 Use of force

The use of force continues to be limited at Deerbolt and is not a concern for the Board. Where incidents occur, or the use of force may be required because of prisoner actions, the Board is quickly made aware of the circumstances. Where there are ongoing incidents, the Board is notified and able to observe and witness control and resolution.

4.5 Substance misuse

Seemingly in common with other UK prisons, substance misuse is an ongoing problem, as is the route of entry into the prison.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing and food

Residential wings

The prison has 10 residential wings and a CSU. Cells are for single occupancy and no prisoners are doubled up apart from those on K wing. K wing is used as a transition unit from the youth estate and has some shared cells. G wing has cells on two levels, with a middle gallery giving officers good lines of sight to all the cells. Seven wings are of an older design and harder to manage, requiring more staff to ensure safety. They are two storey, each with four cell corridors where the cells are only visible from the end of each corridor. The prison is usually up to operational capacity but not overcrowded. The programme to install mesh and render in the cells has reduced the amount of damage. The cells in the CSU have been refurbished, but prisoners have been able to remove wiring, causing a loss of power to other wings while repairs were made.

J wing is not part of the refurbishment programme because it is considered uneconomic to repair. Some cells are occupied and have their own showers. Others are out of action because of water damage. The future of this wing will be decided when the other building work is finished.

The rolling refurbishment continues, although the costs have increased significantly. Three wings re-opened five months later than expected, then three other wings closed. There were problems in the re-opened wings, with drains backing up and showers not working, which took some time to resolve. The delays with the showers resulted in staff being diverted to escort groups of prisoners to other wings and the gym to have a shower. This additional task often led to regime restrictions, such as the closure of workshops and education. The remaining work has been accelerated, with contractors working longer hours, and we understand the prison will be fully re-opened by August 2024.

Laundry

The central laundry has been out of use since February 2023. Prisoner clothing and bedding is taken to another prison, which involves the hire of a van and staff time. The prisoners do not trust the laundry service to properly launder their clothing and return them, with some justification, as property has been lost or returned damp and smelly. The IMB understands the decision to remove the old oil boiler and replace the machines with a laundrette-style service, but the delay is not acceptable. The new laundry should have been up and running by the end of 2023. The electrical work was completed in the spring, but was followed by delays in work to remove the oil system. We have now been told that the Prison Service does not have enough money left in the 2023/2024 budget to fund the purchase and installation of new washers and dryers. The Governor and the staff are disappointed by this situation, not least because it has an impact on the stability of the prison. In the meantime, many prisoners are washing their personal clothing in the small hand basins in their cells or in the showers. Drying frames and fans have been provided, as this is the best the local staff can do until a small laundry unit can be installed in F wing.

The Board has been told that HMPPS intends to restart the work on the central laundry in February 2024, but we have little confidence that it will. Two other prisons have

similar central laundries so we do not understand how the cost of this installation can have come as a surprise. There are obvious implications for the future when the wings undergoing refurbishment are re-opened and the prison returns to full capacity.

Food

A varied menu is circulated each week and includes healthy options and a vegetarian choice. Breakfast is pre-packed cereal or porridge and is delivered to cells with teabags and milk in a carton once a week. Lunch is served at cell doors and is usually a baguette with a sandwich filling, or pasta and a salad, or a pasty. The afternoon meal is served hot at the servery. Other dietary requirements are catered for, such as during Ramadan, for example, when meals are served outside the fasting hours. Vegan and healthy options are available. If dietary intolerance to gluten or lactose products is confirmed by healthcare, appropriate choices are offered. Each wing has a snack station where prisoners can make toast or toasties or heat up items they have bought through the canteen ordering system.

The menu aims to achieve 2,500 calories per day for each person and a food file is available on each wing so prisoners can check the calorie content of their meal choices. However, the budget to provide three meals a day is less than the price of a take-out coffee on the high street. There is no additional funding for special diets. The budget has increased slightly during the reporting year to cover some of the price rises caused by inflation.

The catering team put a lot of effort into the menus but often hear complaints about the portion size and food quality during wing forum meetings. Likewise, the Board hears a lot of complaints about portion size. As an example, the porridge portions look to be about 40g, which is the portion size on a typical box of supermarket porridge but is less than the amount most people would eat.

The Industries unit, which organises workshops where prisoners are paid for making products, has been using polytunnels to grow food to provide some variety to the meals and over the summer months it was easy to grow salad items such as tomatoes. Overall, around 30% of the food is fresh.

Food is ordered from Bidfood UK under a national food contract for HMPPS, so the prison cannot shop elsewhere even though some items can be purchased more cheaply locally.

We have noted some concerns about hygiene in the food preparation areas in the kitchen and have heard from prisoners that the hot meal is not always hot. We will focus attention on this during 2024.

5.2 Segregation

There are 13 cells and two special accommodation cells, where certain items, such as furniture and bedding, are removed for safety reasons, in the CSU. The wing is in good condition and the cells are comfortable enough. During the reporting year eight prisoners have been held for more than 42 days each. All could have left earlier but refused to do so for a variety of reasons. The Board noted that some prisoners seemed to view the CSU as a refuge from debt incurred on the wings or as leverage for a transfer to another prison. One of the prisoners was recategorised to category B (when prisoners for whom the very highest conditions of security are not necessary but for

whom escape must be made very difficult) and transferred. All CSU prisoners have re-integration plans in place to help and support them to return to the residential wings. These plans address their individual needs, via liaison with the mental health team, psychology, activities, key worker sessions and engagement with the Prison Offender Manager (POM), as required under the incentives scheme.

The reviews (where the prison determines if the prisoner should remain segregated) we have observed have been fair and supportive, with reasonable outcomes.

CSU has a stable staff team and the Board has observed that they build good relationships with most of the prisoners in their care. The unit is usually calm. Occasional concerted disruption subsides quickly.

5.3 Staff-prisoner relationships, key workers

From the Board's observations, staff-prisoner relationships are reasonable and better on wings with a stable staff cohort. Many staff members are inexperienced and yet to gain jail craft skills. The standards coaching team was brought in to coach individual prison officers in areas where they lacked confidence and competence.

Key worker sessions are still at 30%. This is the third year in a row that the Board has expressed concern about the low level of sessions. The HMPPS target is 74%. Each key worker is allocated six prisoners. The prison has moved to a full regime of gym, association, education and work, but the staffing levels are still tight and are affected by any same-day staff absences. The regime can only run if key workers are moved to duty to support it. Prisoners who are a priority for key worker sessions are identified on the daily stability report. The priorities are self-harm; violence; behaviour problems; complex behaviour issues; IPP (imprisonment for public protection) prisoners; and new arrivals. Self-harm incidents are decreasing and prisoner-on-prisoner assaults are reducing. Information on priority prisoners is shared at weekly meetings of the safer custody team. The Board has been impressed by the depth of knowledge about vulnerable prisoners. However, many prisoners still tell us that they have difficulty contacting their POMs, key workers and probation officers.

The Board understands the approach taken by prison management but remains concerned that key worker sessions haven't increased since our last reporting year. Regular wing forum meetings are held so prisoners do have opportunities to raise issues, but these are not a substitute for one-to-one conversations. There have been issues with the incentives scheme (see 5.6), which could have been addressed through regular discussions with a key worker who could set short-term goals.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Equality and diversity management meetings have continued regularly throughout the reporting year. A total of 31 discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs) were received. Most were about race, religion or belief, while five concerned sexual orientation. The total was almost evenly split between prisoner v prisoner and prisoner v staff. The number of incidents is low and no statistical trends have been identified. Training about gender identity has been delivered and toolkits are available.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Deerbolt has a multi-faith chaplaincy team supplemented by visiting Buddhist and Jewish chaplains, so all prisoners can see a chaplain from their faith, although the

chaplains team provide pastoral care to prisoners of all faiths and none. A managing chaplain has recently been appointed, leaving one vacancy, which has been advertised. If filled, Deerbolt will have a full team for the first time in four years.

The prison gradually moved to a more open regime in the early months of 2023. The chaplaincy was tasked with reducing Muslim Friday prayers to one service: two had been the norm, but this was reduced due to the high number of prisoners with 'keep apart' markers (prisoners who cannot come in to contact with each other in case they fight). A programme of mediation sessions proved successful and only a small number of prisoners remain barred from the service until they have had mediation. Most Muslim prisoners have a shower before the Friday service. A small area where wudu takes place (the washing and cleansing ritual before prayers) is available for use outside the chapel for prisoners who miss their shower, but it can only accommodate one person at a time.

The Board has observed good compassionate care, with particular attention to men who are grieving and those in the CSU. The annual collaboration with the Angel Tree organisation is underway to enable men with children to send them an age-appropriate gift at Christmas. The chaplaincy has noted an increase in men with children, perhaps attributable to the increase in the age of the population.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The incentives scheme was reviewed during the reporting year, although the new version wasn't issued until October 2023. Deerbolt moved to a normal prison regime and rules that had been relaxed during Covid have been applied more consistently. The number of prisoners on a Basic incentive regime fluctuates but is generally higher than in recent years. (There are three incentive levels: Basic, Standard and Enhanced, which earn a prisoner degrees of privilege.) Prisoners have expressed confusion about the application of the scheme, which is understandable given that there is little or nothing on display in the wings about the policy. This is particularly noticeable in the refurbished wings. The Board understands that prisoners are informed about changes via wing forums and leaflets. The new incentives scheme document is 26 pages long and the related facilities list is 48 pages – they are detailed but take some digesting. We recommend that the prison makes these documents readily available on each wing.

5.7 Complaints

In the six months to the end of September 2023, there were no complaints about adjudications (disciplinary hearings held by the Governor when a prisoner is suspected of having broken prison rules), bullying, release or reception. Property issues raised the most complaints, followed by work and finance.

There were noticeable increases in complaints during August and September. Some prisoners put in multiple complaints, but the prison has not identified any other trends.

5.8 Property

Property complaints, mostly about missing property, have increased during the reporting year. These include complaints about property that does not transfer with a prisoner arriving at Deerbolt and property that goes astray when prisoners move between wings in Deerbolt. This is an ongoing problem and the sums paid by the compensation scheme can be much lower than the cost of the lost items.

HMPPS does not seem to have robust procedures in place for logging property and ensuring that it arrives with, or soon after, a prisoner. The Board has had applications where prisoners have been told that their items have been sent and are no longer at the sending prison when, on further investigation, the property is found some months later. The Board has observed bags of property in wing offices that do not appear to be properly labelled or have a contents' list with them.

Most prisoners in Deerbolt wear their own clothing but seem confused about when they can receive clothing parcels. The Board knows the prison service will always ensure that prisoners have something to wear. However, we believe that HMPPS needs to improve the property-handling process and access to the facilities' list, which sets out when clothing parcels can be applied for and the process for an application.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

A local healthcare delivery board, chaired by the Governor, meets monthly, and to which the Board is invited and regularly observes.

There has been a common theme during this reporting period of staff vacancies, with healthcare suffering staffing pressures. It is pleasing to note, however, that the service provided by healthcare has not been compromised by such pressures and medication and care has always been provided in a timely manner.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Non-attendance at appointments has been managed throughout the reporting period, which has improved the situation. Any patients who do not attend an appointment are initially followed up by the nurse and issued a letter.

The increase in the age range at the establishment has led to issues and a need to adapt the delivery of healthcare, but services do not appear to have been compromised.

During the reporting period, there has been a theme of patients expressing an interest in moving over to Buvidal (a medicine used to treat dependence on opioid drugs such as heroin or morphine) from Methadone (a medication used in the treatment of those with an opioid addiction). The increase in age range at the establishment has led to an increase in patients who are prescribed Methadone. The primary healthcare team and HumanKind (a charity offering support for prisoners with alcohol, drugs, housing and mental health issues) are working together on clinics to allow patients to move over.

From the Board's observations, there are very few issues with physical healthcare at the time of this report, and the healthcare team should be commended for their work, efforts and success rates given, the staff shortages. There seems to be a very good working relationship with the various healthcare team members and the wider prison, which appears key to its current success.

6.3 Mental healthcare

There have been issues during the reporting period of access by the mental health care team to prisoners when they are booked onto work and finding suitable locations and rooms on site to meet. This has led to delivery problems.

There are group work sessions, such as a trauma group, acupuncture group, book group, therapeutic art group and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) group for insomnia, but staffing issues during the reporting period have led to difficulties in delivery.

Peer mentors are included with the positive delivery of health promotion in the wings.

Waiting times for healthcare appointments have increased, due to both the growth in the population and staff shortages.

6.4 Social care

Very few prisoners still have social care needs, but local authority social care assistance can be delivered where there are individual needs.

6.5 Exercise and regime

The limited regime at Deerbolt during the reporting period, due to staff shortages, has had implications for prisoners' time out of their cell each day.

Deerbolt has the benefit of some excellent exercise facilities, including a gym and playing fields.

A common theme noted by the Board during the reporting period is that despite Covid restrictions being lifted, prisoners are still spending too much time in their cells, with too little to do. The Governor and staff appear to appreciate this and are trying to fill vacancies left by staff shortage which, in turn, should help get prisoners back to a full regime.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The drug and alcohol recovery team (DART) regularly attends healthcare board meetings, and there appears to be good collaboration with the other healthcare teams.

In addition to structured face-to-face work, there are group sessions, although staff shortages can affect delivery.

DART has worked very closely with the team on the induction wing to make sure that new inductees are able to get harm reduction advice in a face-to-face session.

6.7 Soft skills

Covid regimes generally affected most activities, although group activities restarted (referred to above) towards the end of the reporting period.

7. Progression and Resettlement

The report identifies that education and work have been cancelled due to restricted regimes. However, it should be noted that since the introduction of a new profile on 8 October 2023, there has been a significant reduction in the cancellation of education, training and work.

7.1 Education, library

Education, library and work continued to be the principal casualties of restricted regimes due to staff shortages during the reporting period. Novus appears to have sufficient staff to meet contractual requirements, but short-notice cancellations, due to prison staff shortages or unexpected issues or incidents, continued to place a strain on the delivery of education. Notwithstanding the negative impact on all prisoners and teaching staff in general, this is particularly acute in the continuation of studies for English and Maths instruction. That said, when observed first hand, tuition appears to be of a high standard and the prisoners are, in general, engaged. There are 12 prisoners (plus one peer support worker) in each of Maths and English classes, working towards Entry Level 1 to Level 2. There is no waiting list.

The variety of educational opportunities for the increasingly older population remains a concern to the Board. That said, for prisoners up to the age of 25, the contract has been adjusted within its existing boundaries to accommodate this with, for example, the introduction of the Digital Skills programme after the cessation of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. The contract will be renewed in 2025 and the Board will closely follow developments. A further change is due in March 2024, with the planned introduction of a CSCS (construction skills certification scheme) Health and Safety Level 1 course (not run by Novus).

Following the introduction of the new Prison Education Service in September 2023, Deerbolt has been quick to fill the posts of Head of Education, Skills and Work and the Neurodiversity Support Manager, and the benefits have been immediate.

The library is well-used and a comfortable, welcoming space for prisoners. The end of the reporting period saw a monthly record for library use, with 1,029 books issued in September and 417 visits. Wing visits are conducted when prisoners are unable to attend in person. With the older cohort, there has been a corresponding increase in demand for the 'Storybook Dads' (where prisoners record bedtime stories on DVD or CD for their children) and Raising Readers (which offers parents the chance to choose a book to be sent home to their child) programmes, although the numbers remain quite low (11 for the former, 17 for the latter, in the period January to September 2023). Both are excellent for allowing engagement between fathers and children, and the library manager is actively encouraging further participation.

7.2 Vocational training, work

As reported last year, the arrival of the new acting Governor in September 2022 brought a range of new initiatives. Although suffering from the same regime restrictions as Education, the prison staff in vocational training have worked hard to maintain access to these activities. All appear well run and popular, but special mention should go to the initiative shown in the Art (Deerbolt Designs) and Joinery Enterprise sections, where links have been developed with the local museum and another prison respectively, to sell products made by the prisoners. However, the aim of these activities, to introduce

prisoners to a working environment, has been hampered by maintenance issues, which continue to plague these departments. There are significant, unresolved power, water and heating issues that have left prisoners frustrated, thirsty and cold. Other areas include Barbering, Joinery, Painting and Decorating, and Light Engineering in the Bike Shop, which have all seen prisoners gaining worthwhile qualifications. It is aimed to introduce Levels 1 and 2 City & Guilds qualifications in Horticulture in the new year.

A frequent complaint by prisoners, although never formally raised in applications to the Board, is the comparison of salaries between Deerbolt and other establishments, which appear to be below the levels seen elsewhere.

7.3 Offender management, progression

In general, progression of sentence plans has not been highlighted as a particular issue in Deerbolt and the Board enjoys an open dialogue with the offender management unit (OMU). The Thinking Skills Programme appears to be well run and course allocation correctly prioritised. However, the lack of an in-house Kaizen Course (an offender management programme for men who have been convicted of violent or sexual offences) has been a concern, with constraints over the whole prison estate preventing the transfer of prisoners to facilities where the course is provided. That said, four personnel are currently training to deliver a first course commencing in January 2024. At present, there are 25 prisoners awaiting the course as part of their sentence plans. However, this will not cover those prisoners requiring the domestic abuse variant of the programme and the Board is aware of at least one individual who will be released next year without completing the Kaizen requirement.

7.4 Family contact

The relative remoteness of Deerbolt continues to be an issue for visitors, particularly those from further afield, who may rely on public transport. Social video calls alleviate this problem but do not replace personal contact, particularly for those with children. The team from the North East Prison Aftercare Society (NEPACS) charity continues to provide a superb service to visitors, particularly those with young children. An external centre offers a comfortable, welcoming first impression, although this has also suffered from delays to resolving maintenance issues, including health and safety priority tasks. The visiting area inside the prison fence is itself well-maintained and enhanced by a creche and a canteen.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Deerbolt now has a Prison Employment Lead on a one-day-a-week loan from HMP Durham, with an aspiration to create a full-time position in due course. The Jobs Unlocked initiative has closed down but is expected to be replaced. Meanwhile, Ingeus and People Plus staff are very proactive in identifying prisoner career options and setting goals. The Board can report that there have been no applications regarding a lack of support in this area.

The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	198
Total number of shifts on the 0800 telephone line*	N/A
Total number of segregation reviews attended	40

*if relevant

Applications to the IMB (including via the 0800 telephone line, if relevant)

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	0	2
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	2	0
C	Equality	0	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	7	7
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	3	4
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	0	2
F	Food and kitchens	0	4
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	2	3
H1	Property within the establishment	0	7
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	1	2
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	1	1
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	1	7
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	4	6
K	Transfers	3	5
L	Miscellaneous	0	1
	Total number of applications	24	51



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