



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Springhill

**For reporting year
1 January 2023 to 31 December 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 Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

- 2.1 HMP Springhill is jointly managed with HMP Grendon (located next door). A single Board monitors both prisons.
- 2.2 Springhill is an open establishment (category D), with an 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) of 335¹ adult men. In the middle of 2022, the roll was 201 and at the start of the reporting year of 2023, it had risen to 300. It then increased further, to reach 330 by May, following the refurbishment of M Hut. This was a rise of some 64% over a year, sometimes slightly exceeding that level for the rest of the year. Springhill's expansion, which aims to add some 120 more places, is still waiting for planning permission, having been initially rejected by the local council.

Prisoners at Springhill are considered trustworthy in open conditions and include both men coming to the end of long sentences and those serving shorter sentences. There is no segregation unit.

- 2.3 The main purpose of the prison is rehabilitation and resettlement. Subject to the requirements of their sentence plan, men are encouraged to take up courses in education, vocational training and full-time work in the community.
- 2.4 The majority of men live in 10 (old) huts, 22 men to a unit, mostly two to a room. T Hut is the exception: it has a capacity for 17 men and is designated for prisoners working with the drug and alcohol recovery team (DART). The last of the old two-storey units, X Hut, was demolished in the early part of the year. Huts have a communal lounge, kitchen, showers and separate toilets. The rest of the accommodation is made up of newer, single-occupancy, pods (ensuite units with a desk and chair, communal laundry and small day-rooms with fridges and microwave facilities). These are allocated first to men who apply who are in full-time work in the community or who have special needs, and then on the basis of the length of time at Springhill.
- 2.5 Certain facilities are located at HMP Grendon, including the dental suite, the business hub and the security department, which serve both prisons. The Governor's office is also located at Grendon.
- 2.6 The following healthcare services are provided:
- Primary healthcare: Practice Plus Group (PPG) subcontracts with Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. Clinics include well-man, diabetes, asthma and immunisations.
 - Drug and alcohol recovery team (DART): Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust
 - Podiatry and physiotherapy: Practice Plus Group MSK, Buckinghamshire
 - Mental health services: Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust - contracted to the assessment unit

¹ Figures included in this report are largely local management information data. 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.

- Dental: Time for Teeth
- Audiology: Specsavers
- Optician: The Prison Optician Trust
- Pharmacy: outsourced to Sigcare

2.7 Milton Keynes College: education services.

2.8 Gov Facility Services Limited: manages maintenance and facilities.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- Levels of self-harm are low (4.2.2) and assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents (created to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) remain in single figures (4.2.3). Incidents of assaults, though higher than last year, and the use of force, are low (4.3.2; 4.4.1).
- Growth in the roll has come with a rise in men belonging to organised criminal gangs (OCGs) (4.3.1). This is probably a factor in the rise of transfers out (4.3.3).
- The year saw a rise in drug intelligence reports (IRs), but this tailed off towards year-end (4.5.1). Technical issues led to the suspension of voluntary drug testing (VDT) in July; by the year-end, the problems had not been resolved (4.5.3).
- Mobile phones' finds rose broadly in line with the prison roll (4.5.4).
- Adjudication cases (disciplinary hearings for men alleged to have broken prison rules) rose by a third compared with last year (5.2.2).
- Repeated problems with the fire alarm system in at least two of the huts led to an investigation, which raised questions about whether the entire system was fit for purpose and should be replaced: repairs were not an option, as the system is so old that parts are unavailable. The issue was placed on the prison risk register and escalated to the Prison Group Director. New measures, including officer patrols, were rolled out to ensure men were safe (5.1.4).

Fair and humane treatment

- Hut refurbishment continued, but the living conditions for most men remain very poor, with the whole estate suffering from building leaks and equipment breakdowns, including now in some of the new pods (5.1.1 - 5.1.3).
- The prison suffered from a major rat infestation, which persisted for much of the year. With live rats frequently seen in and around the huts in the day and constantly heard at night, the men were understandably distressed (5.1.5).
- In the context of ever-rising prices, there was no pay award this year (7.2.4).
- Although there was a rise in the number of complaints, some men are reluctant to complain, believing it will prejudice them; the prison is adamant this is not the case (5.7.1 and 5.7.2).
- A series of new diversity initiatives was rolled out during the year to move beyond monitoring to taking effective action to address discrimination (5.4).

Health and wellbeing

- The paucity of data continues to hamper the Board's ability to effectively assess the provision of healthcare (6.1.3) and the health complaints system (6.1.10).
- A patient survey recorded most men as saying their healthcare needs are met, but continued staff shortages led to a reduction in some services (6.1.5). More than half of patients rated the GP service as poor/very poor (6.1.4).
- As well as helping the service run more efficiently, communication between the men and the healthcare department has also been improved by the appointment of a

patient engagement lead, the training of a new group of men as health champions and the setting up and running of a popular wellbeing hut (6.1.6).

Progression and resettlement

- The core purpose of the prison - resettlement - and the aim of most men to get out to work in the community - sits in tension against current guidance to have only a third of men in full-time employment (FTE) (7.2.1). In practice this year, numbers in FTE only accounted for about a quarter of the total roll (7.2.2 and 7.2.6). The number of prisoners on Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) rose broadly in line with the increased roll (7.3.2).
- The continuing gap between jobs available and those looking for outside work is caused by the prison's location, staff shortages in Activities, which oversees jobs, and many jobs requiring men to provide and fund their own transport (7.2.6).
- External factors continue to impede the process of men being boarded (the vetting process which, if successful, results in men being approved to leave the prison, most commonly on authorised time-bound day or night release to work or visit family). But staff shortages in the offender management unit (OMU) also contribute to men not boarded within the target date of 8-12 weeks from arrival, with many waiting for considerably longer (7.3.3 – 7.3.5).
- Completion and success rates for on-camp education courses continue to be impressively high (7.1.1). However, places available in education have not kept pace with the rising roll (7.1.1), while continuing staff shortages have meant advertised courses have not run and classes have been cancelled (7.1.3). The library continues to provide a good service, notwithstanding major constraints (7.1.9 – 7.1.12). The effective delivery of both education and library services has been hampered by the prison's crumbling infrastructure (7.1.8 and 7.1.9).
- Men are channelled into on-camp work even when there are not enough available jobs, resulting in underemployment, which is sometimes severe (7.2.3).
- The prison's Employment Advisory Board (EAB), a body that helps to access local employment opportunities, was disbanded in April. It is hoped that it will be revived early in 2024 (7.2.9).
- Post-release: only between 34% and 60% of men were employed or in education six weeks after release, and for most months, the figure was less than 50%. These are low numbers for a prison whose key purpose is resettlement (7.5.2)
- Poor living conditions, rat infestation, low pay, time taken to be boarded, frustrations in accessing suitable outside jobs and staff vacancies have all contributed to an erosion of morale among both the men and the staff, some of whom feel they were better in closed conditions.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The quality of accommodation for the majority of men in the older huts remains very poor (5.1.2): the ability of the prison to function efficiently and to effectively prepare men for life outside is repeatedly hampered by the generally decaying infrastructure, the breakdown of old equipment and low wages (4.1, 5.1, 5.3, 6.1, 6.5, 6.6, 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3). As in our last report, the Board asks again when the Minister plans to make the appropriate investment in Springhill, as opposed to

short-term funding, to ensure the prison is able again to achieve the standards it met in the past and for which it has been justly praised?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- For the last two years, the Board has reported on issues with outside probation that are delaying some men's access to ROTL. The problems have worsened and have spread well beyond the London area (7.3.4). When will they be addressed?
- For men not in full-time work, levels of pay have fallen well behind price increases and the Governor's ability to award meaningful local pay rises (7.2.4). What plans does the Prison Service have to address this issue?
- Men continue to contact the Board about the failure of complaints to be responded to in the requisite time, especially those involving transfers from other prisons (5.8.1). What plans are there to improve (digitise) the current system?

TO THE GOVERNOR

The Board looks forward to:

- Working closely with the new Governor to fulfil its statutory role.
- Keeping abreast of the new Education, Skills and Work initiative to ensure the harmonisation/close integration of education, on-camp and off-site work to enable the prison to deliver on its resettlement goals (7.2.1, 7.2.2 and 7.3.1).
- Less underemployment of men working on camp and an increase in external jobs connected to post-release job opportunities (7.2.3).
- A rise in the numbers of men able to access education and the range of courses offered continuing to meet short-term demand and enhance post-release job opportunities (7.1.1, 7.1.3 and 7.1.5).
- Monitoring the newly formed Education Advisory Board (EAB) to connect men on ROTL with jobs that are sustainable on release (7.2.10) and the capacity of Activities to provide sufficient job opportunities to offer to men seeking FTW (7.2.6).
- Staff training on complaints responses continuing to be a priority area (5.7.1 and 5.7.3 and 7.1.11)
- OMU staffing problems being addressed to enable it to again achieve its 8-12 week targets for sentence plan and offender assessment system (OASys) processes to be completed (7.3.5 and 7.3.7 and 7.3.8).
- Monitoring any new initiatives rolled out to enable the prison to better scrutinise the impact and quality of healthcare delivery and the health complaints system (6.1.3, 6.1.4 and 6.1.10).
- The improvements to the effectiveness of the prison's Diversity and Inclusion D and I) mandate in delivering necessary change being sustained and the re-establishment of the external scrutiny of all discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) (5.4.2 and 5.4.4).

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
<p>To the Minister</p> <p>1. The quality of accommodation for the majority of men in the older huts remains very poor and the Board, again, emphasises the need for appropriate investment as opposed to short-term funding to patch the generally decaying infrastructure of the whole site. Using men's skills on camp to refurbish older huts and buildings is an obvious opportunity.</p>	<p>1. Recognition that more needs to be done to improve accommodation but demands for maintenance are higher than funds available.</p>	<p>1. Though M Hut was refurbished, the problems of decaying infrastructure remain as acute as they were and, therefore, there has been little progress.</p>
<p>To the Prison Service</p> <p>1. The Board reported on issues with outside probation that are affecting some men's access to ROTL. The situation has not improved and delays in communication are now not just affecting London.</p> <p>2. The Board commented last year on access to appropriate accommodation for some men on release. This year, access to Approved Premises, notably for restricted prisoners on resettlement overnight releases (RORs), has become especially difficult.</p> <p>3. For men not in full-time work, levels of pay have fallen well behind price increases and the Governor's ability to award meaningful local pay rises.</p> <p>4. Property complaints, especially those involving transfers, do not appear to have reduced as a</p>	<p>1. The problem is caused by resourcing pressures; it is a nationwide issue and HMPPS (HM Prison and Probation Service) is working hard to resolve these pressures.</p> <p>2. There has been an expansion in the number of Approved Premises and plans to introduce a new digitalised approach to referrals to be rolled out in the autumn.</p> <p>3. HMPPS acknowledges inflationary pressures affecting canteen items. While the Governor of HMP Springhill has made adjustments to some local pay scales, the overall prisoner pay budget remains the same.</p> <p>4. Under the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, introduced in September 2022, it is the role of</p>	<p>1. If anything, the problem worsened during the reporting year, with more areas/regions affected.</p> <p>2. The roll out does not seem to have happened. The problem persists of beds in Approved Premises not on offer in many regions.</p> <p>3. Following the Governors' 50p-a-week pay award last year, there was no rise this year, in spite of continuing price rises.</p> <p>4. Property complaints have risen, and complaints involving transfers</p>

result of the new policy framework.	Governors to ensure management checks are undertaken to ensure prisoners' property is handled correctly.	have widened to include monies owed.
<p>To the Governor The Board looks forward to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ongoing work with the EAB to connect men on ROTL with jobs that are sustainable on release. 2. More full-time work on camp connected to post-release job opportunities, as well as improving learning opportunities for those on camp. 3. The link with HMP Winchester is an opportunity to improve property transfers and reduce complaints. There are also opportunities for benefits from improved communication between the two prisons' OMUs and healthcare departments. 4. Staff training on complaints' responses and suicide and self-harm (SASH). 5. Delivery of health champions and the wellbeing hub, as well as improved access to healthcare data. 6. Improvements to diversity and inclusion being sustained. 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The EAB was disbanded in April. 2. Positively, a new post of Head of Education, Skills and Work was created mid-year to address these concerns, but it's too early to assess its impact. 3. The link was discontinued in March. 4. More SASH training taking place. There are some staff shortages in the Business Hub, which deals with complaints. 5. Partially achieved. Still no access to healthcare data. 6. Major advances made, but external monitoring of DIRFs not continued.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

- 4.1.1 Last year's plan to take in men only from HMP Winchester was abandoned in March this year. In the first three months of the year, Springhill received an average of some 32 new arrivals a month, peaking at 43 in March, before falling back to about 27 a month (see 2.2.). All new arrivals are seen by healthcare and screened to ensure that if they require a Personal Escape and Evaluation Plan (PEEP), which provides details of the assistance needed for those who cannot get themselves out of the prison unaided in an emergency, it is immediately put into place. However, in May, the IMB spoke to a man who had been at Springhill for eight weeks and needed a PEEP, but it had not been drawn up for him.

During the year, the IMB heard no criticism from any man of the way they were treated on arrival. In the first quarter of the year, the healthcare department reported on the poor state of cleanliness of the room for interviewing arrivals, but the issue was not raised again.

- 4.1.2 Each week, Springhill runs a two-day mandatory induction program for all new arrivals, where Governors introduce themselves and each department explains its role and function and how men can make use of their services. Over many weeks, the presentation by the OMU alerted men to the effect staff shortages were likely to have on the process of being boarded. Feedback from course participants was universally positive. The IMB sat in on a number of these sessions, and was impressed with the quality of the presentations, especially the introductory sessions given by long-serving and experienced officers who explained the nature of the open estate, and the evident rapport created with the men. On the very few occasions when staff shortages meant less skilled staff were commandeered to run these sessions at short notice, these high standards were not achieved.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

- 4.2.1 There were no deaths in custody (DIC) during the reporting year.
- 4.2.2 **Self-harm and ACCTs** Incidents of self-harm were low, with two cases reported, both early in the year, the same number as the whole of the last reporting year. Four intelligence reports (IR) were raised in the year under the category 'suicide risk/harm', compared with an average of over five a year in the previous three years; and only four assessment care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans, used to support prisoners who are at risk of suicide and self-harm, were opened in the year compared with six in 2022 and eight in 2021. Men on ACCTs are now offered the option of having a Listener (a prisoner trained by the Samaritans to provide confidential emotional support to fellow prisoners) attend the first review (when staff discuss whether the individual's risk of self-harm has reduced enough for his ACCT plan to be closed (see 4.2.5).
- 4.2.3 On a night visit in November, the Board noted that three out of four staff on duty were in-date SASH trained, an improvement on 2022, when the figure was one in

four. End of year data (combined for HMP Grendon and Springhill) show that some 76% of relevant officers had been SASH trained.

4.2.4 From November, concerned family members were able to access a safer custody 24/7 hotline.

4.2.5 **Listeners** Listeners are trained in 'postvention response', which is designed to address the effects that a death by suicide can have on other prisoners. At the November community council meeting, it was noted that more Listeners were needed. After some delay, from April Listeners were able to access the Listeners' suite, a dedicated room where prisoners could drop in to chat to a Listener.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 **Rise in gang-affiliated men** The number of gang-affiliated or gang-linked prisoners rose significantly during the year. In January, 21 men were connected to organised crime groups (OCGs), 7% of the total roll, but by December the numbers totalled 70, accounting for 22% of the total roll. In addition, some men (27 in December) had known gang affiliations and some (also 27 in December) were connected to County Lines (illegal drug networks usually linked to mobile phone lines). Negative outcomes across the prison are hard to measure, especially as they could be spread across multiple illegal activities. However, in the last few months of the year, following the return to closed conditions of a number of high-profile individuals, the Board felt the atmosphere on camp had become more settled.

4.3.2 **Assaults and CSIPs** Recorded assaults amongst men were higher this year, totalling nine in 2023 compared with one in 2022. There were two assaults on staff, the same number as in each of the previous two years. There were 14 challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) referrals made in the year (used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence), more than twice as many (six) in the whole of 2022, although only one was progressed, the same number as last year. In 2023, there were 10 IRs concerning threats to staff, compared with 14 in 2022, and 30 bullying-related IRs, up from 22 in 2022, with surprisingly (see 4.3.1) only nine gang-related incidents compared with 10 in 2022. However, 18 IRs categorised as 'assaults staff/prisoner' were recorded this year compared with seven last year, with 11 of these recorded in November.

4.3.3 **Transfers.** The number of men transferred out rose from 70 in 2022 to 106 this year, with the 50% increase most likely attributable to the swelling of the prison's roll (2.2) and the increase in the proportion of OCGs (4.3.1). In December, 17 men were transferred out, seven for assaults on other men. The number transferred out who were sentenced to life or were IPPs (imprisoned for public protection) totalled five – almost 5% - in comparison with a figure of 21% in 2022, although this may well be reflective of a reduction in these categories of men on camp following changes and reviews to the parole board recommendations.

4.3.3 **Absconds and Failures to Return.** In the entire year, there were two absconds and two failures to return – the lowest figures for six years.

4.4 Use of Force

- 4.4.1 **Use of Force (UoF)** instances totalled four in the year compared with two last year. One was classified as an assault on staff but the definition embraces all events, ranging from verbal assault to violent physical assault with serious injuries. In this case, the assault resulted in the officer having a small cut that required a small Steri-Strip. Over the year, there were no 'violence' IRs recorded, compared with three in 2022.
- 4.4.2 **SPEAR/PAVA** Practically every officer has now had spontaneous protection enabling accelerated response (SPEAR) training. Although pelargonic acid vanillylamide (PAVA) incapacitant spray is issued to relevant officers on night duty, it has not been used since it was introduced in May this year.
- 4.4.3 **BWVCs (body worn video cameras)** are now regularly worn, although not often used. When used, recordings are taped and retained. Men who are filmed are able to view the tape if they put in a Comp 1 (an ordinary complaint) and are automatically asked if they wish to see a video recording prior to any adjudication. The Board watched the replay of one taped use of a BWVC where a man who was upset that he had been deselected was calmed by four officers; no excessive violence appeared to have been used.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

- 4.5.1 **Drugs.** This year, there were 254 IRs for drugs, an 18% rise compared with last year's figure of 215, although the numbers were well down on two years ago, when 456 drug-related IRs were recorded. Drugs' finds for 2023 totalled 42, slightly higher than the 39 recorded in 2022, although there was a marked drop in the first quarter of the year, with eight finds, compared with 19 in the first quarter of 2022. The decrease enabled the prison to downgrade the threat for drugs/other illicit items from September to the end of the year from 'significant risk' to 'manageable risk'. Pregabalin, Viagra, steroids, herbal cannabis, opiates and cocaine were among the drugs found, with most probably brought into camp from ROTL.
- 4.5.2 **Alcohol.** Over the entire year, 1,544 alcohol tests were conducted, with just three positives. This suggests that there is either little alcohol on camp or that the testing regime might need to be re-assessed.
- 4.5.3 **Drugs testing.** Staff undertake mandatory drug testing (MDT) on men each month. A total of 390 tests were carried out over the year, of which 27 were positive. For some time, the testing regime has also included voluntary drug testing (VDT), based on a compact that men are encouraged to sign, where positive results do not lead to an adjudication but can affect a prisoner's risk profile and access to ROTL. However, by mid-year, after several men approached the Board, adamant that their positive tests were wrong, it was evident that there were problems with VDTs. The prison conducted an investigation, which resulted in all VDT being suspended in mid-July, and men who had recently failed the test had any negative reports removed from their OASys. The Board thought this was fair and understands that other open prisons have suspended testing. By year end, VDTs remained suspended.

- 4.5.4 **Phones.** There were slightly fewer phone IRs this year – 298 – compared with 299 last year. Over the year, 133 illegal phones were found compared with 82 in 2022, a rise of 62%. A total of 27 SIM cards were found this year compared with 18 last year, a rise of 50%.
- 4.5.5 **Key/lock compromises.** In the year, there were 23 key/lock compromises and 14 incidents where keys had been taken off site. Although Springhill is an open prison and the number of key/lock compromises were far lower than last year (37), any such incident represents a threat to safety and security.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 **Accommodation** Following delays, in March, men returned to M Hut after it had been refurbished, in part by residents, including a qualified plumber; it provides two-person cell accommodation for some 22 men. Soon afterwards, X Hut was demolished and in the final months of the year the contractor (Wates) started the rebuild: 40 single 'rapid deployment units' on two floors, all with ensuite facilities and individual heating controls, similar to those erected at HMP Norwich. Wates expects to complete the work in late spring 2024.

5.1.2 However, as the Board has highlighted in previous annual reports, the general state of the accommodation remains very poor and in need of investment, as was acknowledged by HMPPS's regional Executive Director when he visited Springhill in December 2023. Most men live in huts that are old and in continual need of repair: their communal toilets, showers and kitchens are shoddy; their community rooms uninviting and too small to comfortably accommodate all the huts' residents at one time. As the roll has risen, more men have been squeezed in, and in most huts there are now two men to a cell which, with the men's belongings, are cramped.

During the year, there were repeated instances of heating failures, showers and toilets not working, old furniture breaking and needing replacing, damaged/crumbling floor-surfaces needing to be fixed, as well as the need to be on the watch for the appearance of mould. Sometimes, huts had to wait weeks, occasionally months, before repairs of basic facilities were made good; in one hut a man tripped on a damaged floor and broke his wrist.

5.1.3 The new pods (W, Y and Z), commissioned over the past two years, are far better, providing single accommodation with ensuite facilities and individually controlled heating. However, the communal rooms are small and can only accommodate, at most, up to 10 men at a time. To socialise, men mostly congregate outside their pods, so they need to wrap up warm in the winter. Although the prison has transparent criteria for the way it allocates men to these new pods – priority is given to men who go out to work or who have special needs, and then on the basis of the length of time they have been at SH – men repeatedly tell The Board that either they do not understand the allocation system or cite examples where they perceive it to be unfair.

Although still relatively new, these pods are already beginning to show signs of wear and tear. Towards the end of the year, external contractors were called in to fix the side-panelling and drains on some showers, expressing their view that the problems might be systemic.

5.1.4 **Fire alarm problems** Mid-year, P Hut started to have problems with the fire alarm: a fault meant it went off when it shouldn't have done and there were technical difficulties with resetting the alarm. (IMB monitoring reports highlighted alarm problems in at least one other hut.) One professional view was that the problems were even more extensive and that the whole fire alarm system needed replacing across the estate at a cost of approximately £200,000 (2022 prices). Ad hoc measures, including officer patrols, were put in place while discussions took place

about what to do; assurances were given to Governors that P Hut could continue to be occupied without contravening fire regulations, with the alarm having to be reset when the fault recurred. The issue was considered serious enough to be placed on the prison risk register and to be escalated to the level of Prison Group Director.

- 5.1.5 **Rat infestation** During the year, the problem with rats, also highlighted in last year's report, grew increasingly worse. By mid-year, sightings of rats were commonplace between huts and were also being reported inside some huts during the day. In the worst cases, rats were regularly entering the kitchens through holes in the walls, and rat droppings were having to be removed on a daily basis. Many men heard rats running around in hut ceilings and under floorboards. In May, one man told the IMB that a rat had defecated on his bed when he was asleep; and in November, men reported the odour of decaying rats extending across a number of cells in one hut.

Over the summer months and into early autumn, it was rare for IMB members not to see live rats during weekly monitoring visits. They were also found in the area of the new pods where their presence caused a further problem: because of a design fault in the construction of the pods, dead rats could not be retrieved from underneath the pods and men reported having to live with the stench of rotting carcasses for weeks. The builder, Wates (5.1.1), was well aware of this problem and has said the units currently under construction will not give rats access to the underside of the new buildings.

After an in-depth review in early autumn, the prison's contract with Rentokil was upgraded. This resulted in more traps being installed with stronger bait, twice weekly visits (up from one a week begun in February) and the baiting of nests. By December, although dead rats continued to be found and most disposed of, Rentokil operatives said they believed that the worst was over. Many men who spoke to the IMB during the year, most notably new arrivals, said that in their view, having to live with so many rats at such close quarters was inhumane, a view with which the IMB could not disagree.

- 5.1.6 **Cleaning products and bathroom supplies** In the autumn, as part of an economy drive, supplies of cleaning products to the huts were drastically cut back. Many men complained to the IMB, but the prison was adamant that this was necessary to return supplies to pre-Covid levels and to encourage, wherever possible, the switch back to using re-usable rather than throw-away items. Blue bands were told that if they were suffering shortages of key products such as toilet paper, they should request additional supplies, which would be scrutinised by the relevant custodial manager (CM).
- 5.1.7 **Kitchen/food** The practice, started during Covid, of men picking up food and eating it in their huts/rooms, has continued and today very few men regularly choose to eat in the dining hall. There are no plans to require the men to eat in the dining hall. Bringing food back into the huts has likely contributed to the problems with rat infestation.

Mid-year, the kitchen's daily food budget was raised to £2.70 per prisoner, and in October, new menus were rolled out, providing six choices for lunch (up from five) and seven for supper (two more than now). With an emphasis on healthier eating, a

salad option is now offered at both lunch and dinner. There were few supply problems but there were no eggs for a few weeks in the spring and prices of basic food stuffs continued to rise. Following an external assessment, the Spring Hill and Grendon kitchens (judged as one unit) were ranked first in the South Central Region for Budget Control and Food Quality.

During the year, the ability of the kitchen to provide an effective service was repeatedly challenged by a succession of problems, almost all of which were caused by the failure of (old) equipment or the poor state of the building. For example, only in March the large fridge, which had broken six months earlier, was repaired and working again. In June, the kitchen was not able to provide hot food (except boiled vegetables), because the motor supplying the gas to the ovens had broken. Although two temporary electric ovens were rented, they took some time to arrive. In the interim, a limited range of hot food was prepared in the staff mess kitchen, and repairs were completed within the month. In August, the large, external walk-in freezer broke; a few weeks later, a hired temporary one was in place, and a new one was ordered. And in October, heavy rain caused water to leak from the roof into the kitchen; a few days later, temporary repairs were made before the roof was finally fixed.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 There is no segregation unit at Springhill.

5.2.2 **Adjudications** The number of men charged during the year totalled 298, some 30% more than the 228 charged in 2022; of these, 178 (33%) were proven, some 60% of the total, about the same proportion as last year. The Board sat in on two or three adjudications over the year and was satisfied with the processes it monitored. In one case observed, a man admitted he was guilty but did not want his written submission altered in which he had pleaded not guilty.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 Casual observations by IMB members during the year suggest that most staff have a good relationship with most men. However, a number of men have raised complaints about two or three particular staff members, which have been followed up. In the annual analysis of complaints (5.7.1), there were eight complaints made against staff in 2023, compared with five in 2022, but these accounted for less than 2% of all complaints compared with 2.5% in 2022, in spite of the rise in the roll and the number of gang members (2.2 and 4.3.1).

5.3.2 With a high turnover of staff, the continuing retirement of long-serving officers and an increase in the recruitment of younger staff members, experienced officers sometimes express concerns about what they perceive as the erosion of a culture and tradition of interactive support for the men.

5.3.3 The Community Council is the forum where men and senior staff, including senior Governors, meet, and meetings have been taking place fairly regularly this year. Exchanges are open: men raise the issues that concern them most and the (widely circulated) minutes of the meetings usually provide full answers to questions/issues raised, at times offering information to counter rumours circulating. In addition, the Governor sends out notices to prisoners (NTPs) regularly throughout the year.

5.4 Equality and diversity

- 5.4.1 **Ethnicity** In spite of substantial population movements in and out of the prison, Springhill's black, Asian and minority ethnic makeup has remained broadly the same as in previous years: 49-53% men are classified as white, some 23-26% as black/black British, 15-18% as Asian/black Asian and some 7% mixed. Some 5% of men are under the age of 25, while 9% are over the age of 56. About 8% of men are recorded as having some form of disability.
- 5.4.2 **Diversity and equal treatment** The year began with an oversight of the prison's diversity and inclusion work being raised to Governor level. One of the first actions of the new head of the diversity and equality team was to rename it as the Diversity, Inclusion and Action Team, to stress the need to go beyond monitoring discrimination to addressing it: 'Do what is right and not what is comfortable.' Various forums were run where men could raise issues: the forum for those over the age of 55 asked for additional gym sessions to be provided for their age group, which was done. Among issues raised by the men and investigated by the team during the year were the following: in March, why 38 (49%) of the 78 random drugs tests were conducted on black, Asian and minority ethnic men; and mid-year, why more black men seemed to have more accompanied ROTLs than white men.
- 5.4.3 Another cluster of initiatives involved the appointment of a named CM to be responsible for running forums on different themes/protected characteristics, including race, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion/belief and age (one forum for the under 25s and another for the over 60s). The sort of questions discussed included: 'Do you feel you are treated fairly at HMP Springhill? If so, why, and what can we do about this?' 'Do you feel you are discriminated against because of your protective characteristic? If so, why, and what can we do about this?' At one meeting, a resident asked if training could be provided to address the problem of 'language' to address the problem of men unknowingly using words, expressions or terms that others find offensive.
- 5.4.4 **DIRFs** Over the year, Springhill received eight DIRFs: five in relation to race, and one each in relation to disability, religion and sexual orientation. The prison's response to three were late and most were dismissed, usually with the agreement of the prisoner. From April, all DIRFs were sent to an external agency, the Zahid Mubarek Trust (ZMT) charity, for external scrutiny. The system seemed to work well, but in late autumn the ZMT withdrew, not only from Springhill but from other prisons where it was doing similar work. The ZMT examined three cases and agreed with the prison's judgement in two of these, but not in the third: the ZMT viewed the incident as a case of racism. but the prison disagreed.
- 5.4.5 In March, the co-director of the ZMT facilitated a focus group discussion with the men. The feedback suggested that negativity around DIRF processes was based largely on men's experiences in previous establishments.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

- 5.5.1 At the end of the year, it was reported that Christians accounted for 42% of the prison's residents, of which just over half were either Roman Catholic (30%) or Church of England/Anglican (30%). Muslims made up the second largest group, accounting for 31% of Springhill's roll, with 21% of men saying they had no religion

(were atheists or agnostics). Of the remaining 6%, 3% were Buddhist and Sikh, 2% were Hindu, Rastafarian and Pagan, and 1% were Jewish. Muslim, Catholic and Anglican prayers/services were held weekly: some 41% of Muslims regularly attended prayers/corporate worship and about 13% of Catholics attended Mass, with attendance of other Christians at services around 4%. Over the year, religious feasts and special days were celebrated, with the kitchen preparing special meals for major events.

5.5.2 There is a team of chaplains encompassing the main faiths/denominations: Anglican, Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and Pagan, as well as Quaker and Free Church. In spite of trying to recruit, there is still no Rastafarian chaplain and since Covid, the Buddhist chaplain has chosen not to visit the prison. After three years of Covid restrictions, Ramadhan Taraweeh prayers were once again performed. Following refurbishment works, in September, the Buddha grove (a Buddhist shrine set within a small clump of trees in the prison's grounds) was rededicated, with some 20 men and 70 visitors attending, followed by a special meal. In October, the (Christian) Alpha course started up again. The work of the chaplains is clearly very much appreciated and the IMB received no complaints about pastoral support.

5.5.3 In spite of repeated efforts, no specialist bereavement counselling organisation comes to the prison if needed. However, one of the chaplains who is a trained bereavement counsellor helps out when he's available.

5.6 Incentives schemes

5.6.1 No analysis was undertaken this year to carry forward, develop or analyse the prison's behaviour management scheme. The 2022 HMIP survey reported that 48% of responses judged this to be fairly administered, suggesting little urgency for such work to be undertaken.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 **Complaints data** The table, below, summarises the annual data on complaints, although the data do not include complaints about health (see 6.1.10).

Selected complaints	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Property	136	92	92	97	126
Canteen	56	10	21	34	90
Food	1	2	10	21	9
Confidential access	19	6	14	6	14
OMU/ROTL	41	15	21	13	45
Staff	8	5	10	9	10
Other	151	64	89	178	145
All complaints	412	194	257	358	439

In the reporting year, there were more than twice as many complaints as in the whole of last year, with the numbers returning to pre-Covid levels. This is likely explained, at least in part, by the rising roll (2.2). Property complaints continued to dominate, although as a share of total complaints, these dropped from 47% last year to 33% this year. The five-fold rise in complaints about canteen was likely due in part to staff shortages in the Business Hub, with 21 specific complaints recorded this year compared to just eight last year. OMU staff shortages (7.3.5) will likely have contributed to the rise in complaints about OMU/ROTL, which returned to levels not seen since pre-Covid days. About a third of complaints were made by black, Asian and minority ethnic men, the same proportion as last year.

5.7.2. Questions about the complaints process Like last year, there has been some disquiet about the whole complaints process, with some men telling the Board that they are reluctant to lodge formal complaints about a perceived problem or injustice, believing this will 'mark' them and prejudice their being boarded and being released on licence. The prison is aware of such concerns, and the new head of residence (in post since the autumn) has tried to address these perceptions by, for example, increasing the visits of staff to huts to interact with men and listen to what they have to say. When the IMB raised the issue with the prison again this year, we were told there continues to be no evidence to support the view that if men complain they will be 'marked', and an analysis of prisoners who have been returned to close conditions shows that none was among those who had recently submitted a complaint.

5.7.3 Over the year, the Board sampled 44 complaints and RAG-rated (red, amber, green) the responses in relation to timeliness, tone and whether/how the problem was resolved. The Board's assessment was not scientific, but results were as follows: green, 66%; orange, 23%; and red, 11%. Although this was an improvement on last year's figures (green, 51%; amber, 35%; and red, 14%), the fact that questions were raised by the Board in 34% of the complaints reviewed indicates that there is still room for improvement. The Board examined some complaints where the person responding was the subject of the complaint, so the process was not independent.

5.8 Property

5.8.1 Two years ago, we wrote about the 'deeply unsatisfactory arrangements for recording and transferring property between establishments', and failure to transfer property (including money) when men move to Springhill continues to be a problem. Two of the applications – or Apps (written representations prisoners submit to the IMB over the year) – concerned property transfers and two related to money owed by previous prisons (8.2). In one case, we contacted the IMB in the sending prison and they succeeded in expediting the long-awaited transfer of items.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

- 6.1.1 **The Policy Practice Group (PPG)** This is the prison's main healthcare provider, under contract to the NHS. It has overall responsibility for ensuring Springhill's healthcare needs are met, with other organisations subcontracted for the delivery of mental health service, podiatry, optometry, audiology, drug rehabilitation, social care and the running of the pharmacy (2.6, 6.4.1 and 6.4.3). It also refers for secondary care to Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust or a specialist unit if needed.
- 6.1.2 **Equivalence** NHS England health and justice teams adhere to the principle of equivalence, which means that prisoners can expect to receive an equivalent level of service as that offered in the community. This is even more important, as people in prison experience a disproportionately higher burden of illness. There is also a link between health issues and the prospect of reducing offending and reoffending rates.
- 6.1.3 **Data and information limitations** As we also reported last year, the IMB has not had regular access to the data required to effectively monitor the provision of healthcare. Local delivery quality board (LDQB) meetings were often cancelled and the minutes, if recorded, rarely circulated; the monthly Springhill senior management team (SMT) meeting minutes regularly reported that no healthcare representative attended and no report was tabled or sent. As a result, the Board (and the prison) has not been able to assess the quality and impact of healthcare provision, nor the performance of subcontracted clinics, DNAs (did not attend) for appointments, breaches of waiting lists and analysis of complaints. It has had to rely predominantly on qualitative judgements, reports from monitoring visits, survey data (see below) and anecdotal rather than empirical, evidence.
- 6.1.4 **Patient perspectives on healthcare** Early in the reporting year, almost 50 men participated in a survey on the perspectives of Springhill's residents on healthcare services conducted by Epic Consultants. The following summarises some of the main conclusions:
- 39% of patients reported that waiting times to see a healthcare professional were acceptable; 31% that wait times were too long.
 - 55% of patients felt their healthcare needs were being met.
 - 29% said it was easy to obtain medication; 34% reported experiencing difficulties; 48% said they receive their medication at the right time.
 - 51% said healthcare communicated well with them about their health; 49% felt listened to by healthcare.
- Views on the quality of healthcare services provided varied:
- 57% rated nurses positively as good or excellent, but 48% rated the GP service as poor or very poor.
 - 60% of patients rated drug and alcohol services as good or excellent.
- 6.1.5 **Staffing issues and healthcare delivery** The April LDQB meeting drew attention to on-going staff sickness, staffing shortages and the low level of responses to job

vacancy advertisements which, on some days, had resulted in the need to prioritise healthcare delivery to essential care only. On a June monitoring visit, the IMB was told that agency staff were having to be brought in to ensure basic services were running. The September LDQB reported three full-time vacancies and one part-time vacancy, for a senior nurse, a pharmacy technician, a staff nurse and a health administrator and the continued low response to advertisements for healthcare posts. However, significant reductions were reported in subcontractor waiting lists for physio, audiology, dental and optician appointments.

- 6.1.6 **Promoting health** During the year, a wellbeing hut was opened, led by the newly appointed patient engagement lead and run by men specially trained as healthcare champions. They take blood pressure readings and do weight and height measurements, but seem to be particularly valued for providing a drop-in and signposting service for men to chat or take part in wellbeing activities. The new facility has proved very popular with the men, but on at least two occasions the IMB found it closed at times when it was advertised as being open.
- 6.1.7 **Evening clinics** From January onwards, evening clinics were held, enabling at least some men out on ROTL to be seen by a medical professional.
- 6.1.8 **Pharmacist** The qualified pharmacist post, covering both Grendon and Springhill on a part-time basis, fell vacant in September. Though the prison's pharmacy-technician was able to continue to dispense/distribute most required medications, more complex cases required higher-level input. This was provided remotely, but only on a part-time basis. The IMB was not able to judge what difference this made in practice to the timely delivery of medicines.
- 6.1.9 **Appointment cancellations** The April LDQB reported concerns with the high number of secondary care hospital appointments being cancelled and the long waiting lists for men to be seen. In the three months to July, 11 hospital appointments were cancelled by the hospital, and in July, a man was sent to the wrong hospital.
- 6.1.10 **Healthcare complaints** If a man has a complaint about healthcare, then (confusingly for many men), instead of completing a Comp1 form, which is then processed by the Business Hub, he needs to fill out a confidential healthcare (HC) form, which is sent straight to the healthcare department to respond to and is not recorded in the prison's complaints system. HC makes a distinction between 'concerns' and 'complaints' but the data on both are partial and incomplete, although for four months of the year (January to March and in July), there were six healthcare complaints, six concerns and one compliment. If a man is not satisfied with the response he receives to an initial healthcare complaint or concern, his next course of action is to fill in a Stage 1 appeal form, which goes directly back to healthcare and not to any independent adjudicator. Only if he is dissatisfied with the response to his Stage 1 appeal can he then raise a Stage 2 appeal, the response to which has to be reviewed by the PPG's governance team. The Board has no data for either Stage 1 or Stage 2 appeals for the year.

On a number of monitoring visits, men told us their health complaints were not answered or answered late, but, partly because of (understandable) confidentiality issues, we were unable to verify these assertions.

6.2 Physical healthcare

- 6.2.1 **Transfers in** Early in the year, three men with complex health needs were transferred in from HMP Winchester but with no accompanying documentation. Fortunately, their healthcare needs were picked up during the initial healthcare meeting held at the gate, though there was a delay in providing urgent medication. In April, following both the initial meeting and the more in-depth one 24 hours later, healthcare failed to advise the kitchen about a new arrival with a peanut allergy. Fortunately, a fellow prisoner alerted kitchen staff before the man with the allergy had consumed any food containing peanuts.
- 6.2.2 **Covid** Before the requirement ended to report cases, Springhill saw three positive Covid cases to early March. In the middle of the year, one man was exposed to Covid on ROTL work and tested positive.
- 6.2.3 **Vaccine roll-out** By mid-November, all men qualifying for and wishing to have the seasonal flu vaccine had received it, and by early December this was also true for the Covid vaccine booster.
- 6.2.4 **Supplementary/subcontracted services and waiting times** In the patient survey (see 6.1.4), men rated the quality of the main supplementary services. As can be seen from the table, optical services are ranked the most positively, followed by dentistry, podiatry the poorest by a good margin.

Service	% of patients rating the services as good or excellent	% of patients rating the service as poor or very poor
Podiatry	51%	41%
Physiotherapy	51%	24%
Optical	72%	18%
Dental	67%	28%

Appointments data for the year show that almost most men referred for podiatry and optical care were seen within six weeks. However, on average, 36% of those waiting for physiotherapy appointments had to wait for more than six weeks, with the figure rising to 65% in December. A total of 27% of men waiting for dental appointments had to wait, on average, for more than six weeks before they were seen; the figure for December was 33%.

6.3 Mental healthcare

- 6.3.1 **Support pathways** There are a number of pathways open to men who need mental health support. As in the community, the first port of call is one-to-one meetings with the GP, though at Springhill this can often require an initial meeting with a nurse. Those whose issues are drug-related will usually be steered to the drug and rehabilitation team (DART) (see 6.6.1 – 6.6.3). Men with more complex issues are steered to the pathways enhanced resettlement service (PERS) team (see 7.5.5). If neither of these avenues is appropriate, men can be referred to specialists at the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. The IMB has no data on the numbers referred to these different services during the year.

6.3.2 Satisfaction rating of mental health services The patient survey (6.1.4) reported that 58% of patients rated mental health services positively, though a large number – 41% – rated mental health services either poor or very poor. In the previous reporting year, a similar survey reported that it was hard to see mental health staff and men were having to wait up to a month for appointments. However, in April this year, healthcare reported that all mental health and DART referrals were being seen within five days.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1 Individual social care cases are handled initially by safer custody (located at HMP Grendon). Where professional input is needed and with some exceptions (6.4.3), cases are referred to Buckinghamshire Council's Adult Social Care (ASC), which is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the prisoner's eligible social care needs are met.

6.4.2 The Board continued to monitor social care cases and when there were problems or delays in follow-up, tried to visit the man concerned. Over the year, there were only about half a dozen social care cases, fewer than last year. Most were related to mobility and sleep issues. In one case, a new mattress requested was approved and provided, while in another it was refused. One man's mobility issues were resolved when he was transferred to a single cell.

6.4.3 During the year, a new system was rolled out requiring all walking-aid requests to be referred, in the first instance, to the physiotherapist (rather than the ASC). Any approved equipment is then sourced from and delivered by Healthcare Pro (formerly NRS Healthcare). There was one instance during the year when equipment had arrived at the prison but safer custody was not informed; this delayed delivery for a few weeks to the man who needed it.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

Springhill is an open prison so men are free to wander around the grounds all day and to leave if authorised, though at night they are confined to their huts/pods (5.1.1 and 5.1.3).

6.5.1 The gym The gym and indoor sports hall continue to be very popular, with many men aiming to visit the gym 4-5 times a week. New equipment, including rowing machines, has been provided. However, gym sessions, gym-based courses (6.5.2) and sports hall activities had to be cancelled periodically, especially during the winter months, because of repeated failure of the heating system. In late November, the heating broke down again during a cold spell and gym sessions had to be cancelled, despite the efforts of gym staff to raise the temperature using 4-5 portable, standalone heaters. Following this, it was agreed that the large external heating unit should be replaced and the problems seemed to have been fixed. However, Springhill's football pitch has not been functioning since 2019.

6.5.2 New courses Early in the year, the PE Department facilitated a Football Association Level 1 ten-week football coaching course working with The Twinning Project and run by MK Dons Football Club. A total of 13 men took part and many more applied to join. The 100% pass rate was the best achieved in all UK prisons. Three more courses were run later in the year, with nine men qualifying in July, though the last was less successful (men dropped out), largely because the

selection process was less rigorous. In April, a rowing course, Boats not Bars, was run in the gym for eight men in conjunction with Fulham Reach Boat Club, aided by the new rowing machines. All eight men finished the course, which also proved popular. In September, a further indoor rowing course began, with those successfully completing the course receiving a Go Row qualification.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

- 6.6.1 **Numbers of men supported** Over the year, DART (2.6) dealt with some 9-15 referrals a month and had an average monthly caseload of around 30-35 men. Surprisingly, perhaps, alcohol continued to be the drug of choice for men referred to DART, followed by cannabis, heroin and cocaine.
- 6.6.2 **Constraints** As with many other on-camp services, DART suffered from staff shortages for much of the year. In April for instance, out of a frontline complement of six, two staff members were on sick leave (including the manager, who was off work for some six months) and two others only worked part-time. In addition, for some six months from February, the dedicated group room, located at the end of the DART building, was closed, condemned as unsafe; this meant that group work had to be held elsewhere while investigations of, and approval for, alternate accommodation were pursued.
- 6.6.3 **Services provided** In spite of these setbacks, DART managed to run a wide range of courses, ranging from drop-in services to one-to-one to group sessions and relapse-prevention courses. Alcohol-awareness courses have been well attended, with 15 men signing up for the September course. Acupuncture courses ran for most of the year; in August, as many as nine men attended, though numbers were usually lower, with just three attending in December. Recovery group/stories' events also took place from January onwards, with outside speakers; these proved very popular with the men, with at times more than 30 men attending. In the autumn, a new course 'Learn Groupwork 3, ISFPP' was rolled out, tailored to meet residents' needs. In addition, service user forums were held regularly throughout the year.
- 6.6.4 **Peer supporters** To aid the work of the professional team, throughout the year, between two and four men, who had trained as peer supporters, worked as part of the DART, contributing, for example, to DART's presentation at the weekly induction sessions (4.1.2).
- 6.6.5 **New dangerous drug alert** Halfway through the year, DART issued a drug alert to inform men about a lethal cocktail of contaminated heroin that was causing deaths in the community. Information posters were prominently displayed and peer supporters engaged with men to alert them to the dangers.

6.7 Soft skills

- 6.7.1 From February, the weekly evening music session with the musician in residence resumed, with men using the music studio to play or compose music. On another evening, men from beginners upward could come and play with a group.
- 6.7.2 Springhill men continued to participate in the Saturday park runs, with sometimes as many as 30 men or more participating. In November, a 1.5 mile running event took place over three days for the Springhill Poppy Appeal. Over 430 men took part

and there were high levels of participation from staff; just under £1,000 was raised for the Helen & Douglas House charity.

- 6.7.3 Also in November, the Kestrel Theatre company came to Springhill to start rehearsals for Wizzo's First Christmas, performed with some eight Springhill residents over four days, for men, staff and invited guests, with one performance for children. Men also contributed to the music, led by The Irene Taylor Trust.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 Education Reflecting the fluctuations in the roll, the numbers in education vary month to month. Over the year, between 45 and 65 men were studying on courses run by the prison's education provider, Milton Keynes College (MKC), and accounting for up to 20% of the prison's total roll of 330 (2.2). In the middle of the previous year, much the same number of men – about 65 – were studying on courses run by MKC. Then, however, as the total roll stood at around 202, some 32% of men were studying on MKC's courses, indicating that the number of men on courses run by MKC has not kept pace with Springhill's rising roll. End-of-year estimates suggest that MKC currently has the capacity to teach between 78 and 80 students at any one time.

7.1.2 In the year to March, the number of starters in all education courses dropped by 15% compared with the previous year, and by 31% compared with two years ago. Over the rest of the year, some 15 men began courses with MKC each month. Attendance levels for the year stood at 93%. The overall success rates remain high, as the table, below, records.

All courses, year April-March	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Starters	411	484	598
Completed	375	449	583
Achieved	363	443	583
Success overall	97%	99%	100%

7.1.3 Courses and staff shortages At different times over the year, MKC's prospectus included 16 AIM-accredited courses. These were:

- English (Entry to Level 2)
- Maths (Entry to Level 2)
- ICT (Level 1 to Level 3)
- Business (Level 1 to Level 2)
- Bookkeeping (Level 1 to Level 3)
- Customer Service (CS) with embedded barista skills (Level 2)
- Carpentry (Levels 2-3)
- Plumbing (Levels 1-3)
- Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) (Level 1)
- Mentoring (Level 1 to Level 2)
- Kitchen Services (Level 2)
- Health and Hygiene (Level 2)
- Pâtisserie (Level 2)
- Diet and Nutrition (Level 2)
- Retrofit (Level 2)
- Environmental Sustainability (Level 1)

However, not all of these courses ran, as the following examples illustrate. At the start of the year, the CS course couldn't run because there was no tutor. By the end of the year, largely because of staff shortages and unfilled vacancies, three courses

were not running: carpentry, bookkeeping and business. For many weeks during the year, CSCS courses didn't run because the tutor was sick; and, towards the end of the year, there was a gap in teaching between one course tutor resigning and his replacement arriving. Because of staff shortages, the ICT course took twice as long as it should have done. For most of the year, staff vacancies ran at almost 20%, which was between three and four full-time equivalent posts out of 16. In October, 39% of planned lessons could not be provided because of staff shortages.

- 7.1.4 The results of MKC's surveys on the quality of the education continue to be very positive: the satisfaction rate for those who completed AIM-accredited courses is consistently above 90%. These figures are consistent with feedback from students spoken to during the Board's monitoring visits.

The carpentry courses that began in January were over-subscribed and recorded a 100% pass rate, before the tutor resigned in October and everything was put on hold. Plumbing also continued to be very popular. After much delay, this year saw the commencement of the Level 3 course. However, at the end of the year, the plumbing tutor had also resigned. Replacements for both carpentry and plumbing were expected to start early in 2024. Uncompetitive salaries are a contributing factor to the vacancies and a high turnover of staff. Feedback during the Board's monitoring visits from men attending these and the other more vocationally oriented courses, such as the kitchen and barista courses, was extremely positive. The Board repeatedly sensed that if a wider range of these types of courses was offered, far more men would want to enrol.

- 7.1.5 **Literacy/numeracy** However, about half of men starting in education take functional skills (maths and English) and ICT courses. This is not surprising given the levels of illiteracy and innumeracy of those arriving at Springhill. For example, in their initial assessment tests, of those arriving at Springhill in the first nine months of the year, 28% scored below the entry level for literacy and 37% for numeracy. That men arriving at Springhill, often after many years in other prisons in which there are high levels of illiteracy and innumeracy, is a dire reflection on the failure of education provision in prisons.

- 7.1.6 **Distance learning** A significant number of men are enrolled in higher education courses, with the largest group involving those studying for Open University (OU) degrees. In March, 15 men were studying with the OU, with many completing courses by the end of the academic year; one man was awarded a first class degree. For the new academic year and into 2024, early indications are that some 14 men will be enrolled on OU courses. In addition, in the middle of the year, three men were studying at Aylesbury College (a new initiative) and three in London.

Springhill's long-running relationship with Oxford Brookes University continues, providing one year's free tuition, plus transport and a monthly stipend, which enables successful students to go on to study for a degree in two instead of three years. Mid-year, eight men were enrolled in this scheme.

- 7.1.7 **Open borders and studying constraints** Some ten men were able to access the internet (suitably controlled) for their studies using the Open Border facilities. However, there are still too few computers available for those who want/need to access them; the prison recognises this and is trying to address the issue. A linked

problem is that these computers can only be accessed during work hours, which excludes evenings and weekends. During one visit, a Board member met a recently arrived man studying for a master's degree in business frustratingly wandering from hut to hut trying to find a free computer. Another major impediment to learning is that the old huts are often noisy and with men having to share cells means there is no room for a desk. Requests to move to a single cell for study purposes are invariably turned down.

- 7.1.8 **Equipment and facility problems** The ability of MKC to deliver high-quality education was hampered by a succession of equipment failures and facility problems. Thus, from almost the start of the year, the toilets in the PICTA building (the prison's information and communications technology unit) have been closed because of a roof leak that has not been repaired. Then for many weeks mid-year, phone connection problems meant that the internet in the main education administration building could not be accessed and staff had to relocate to other locations. In August, a main electrical cable was damaged by on-site contractors and education, as well as six or seven other service units across Springhill, were without electricity, which severely disrupted work. In October, the roof of the carpentry workshop started leaking, and in the last quarter of the year, a wall in the FS English classroom was leaking and the fire door in the education admin building needing replacing. By Christmas, these problems remained unresolved.
- 7.1.9 **Library** The library continues to provide a good service, though its ability to provide a better service continues to be constrained. For the entire year, the library had no phone, which meant it had no internet access. This severely reduced its computer-based operations, requiring the librarian to manage the library card system manually and to input loan information by hand. The inter-library loan system was only able to function by the librarian visiting the Winslow library twice-weekly to pick up and return books, hand-writing partial details of each prisoner so as not to violate security rules.
- 7.1.10 Early in the year, X Hut, located in the same building block as the library, was demolished. As part of the ongoing works, a new external library door was constructed, which necessitated a number of the library's radiators to be (permanently) disconnected from the mains. Although a standalone heater was provided, the library remains cold and, therefore, uninviting in the winter months.
- 7.1.11 **Book and DVD loans** Book loans have not returned to pre-Covid levels. However, some 500 books are borrowed each month, with non-fiction rising in popularity. Additions have been made to the growing LGBTQ+ and black, Asian and minority ethnic books' sections. Early in the year, the library's creative DVD revolving lending system – whereby men can rent DVDs for 50 pence a week and the funds accumulated are used to purchase new DVDs – collapsed. This was due to the Business Hub not processing the payments and crediting the library with the funds accrued. As a result, instead of men being able to rent new DVDs, they were only able to borrow from old stock for which they were not charged.
- 7.1.12 In spite of these problems, the year has been marked by a range of regular and one-off events. Events such as Black History Month and Travellers' Month were recognised with informative displays. The weekly quiz night (with a prize) remained popular, attracting a dozen men or more. Towards the end of the year, the library

was able to display, again, current issues of some 10 magazines, the subscriptions to which were halted during Covid. In the first half of the year, the librarian ran a creative writing course involving eight men each writing a chapter in turn, the next person following on from the previous author's chapter. The outcome was a 10,000-word book, which was printed and distributed. A twice-weekly, teach-yourself Spanish course began in the autumn, with seven men regularly attending, although the launch of a book club was not successful.

7.1.13 Shannon Trust A March visit report noted that the Shannon Trust had not been seen since the previous November. By the middle of the year, the charity had effectively ceased to play a role at Springhill, even though its presence was still sorely needed: there was one resident with the requisite skills who had been Trust-trained in another prison. In the autumn, a Shannon Trust member told the Board how disappointed they were that they had next to no engagement with men with learning difficulties (see 7.1.5), expressing the hope that with more support from the prison, they would become more active again. As the prison seems keen, this should happen in the new year.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 Arrival and purpose For the first two weeks after arrival, men are assigned work on camp – most jobs are in the kitchen, farms and gardens and waste management. After that, they can choose to continue to work on camp in the area of their choice, or pursue full-time education (see 7.1.2). The aim of most men is to obtain a Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) to go out to work (and visit home), but the process of obtaining the licence takes time (see 7.3). However, current prison guidance aims to have a third of all men in full-time education, a third working on camp and a third working outside on either day or night release. The IMB has continued to question how this guidance is consistent with the most men's wish to go out to work on ROTL.

7.2.2 Data on the number of men involved in different activities is reported monthly. As can be seen from the table, numbers fluctuate both because men move from activity to activity and because of the constant flow of men coming into and leaving the prison. In October, out of the 333 on Springhill's total roll, 83 (25%) were in full-time work (FTW), while a year earlier (in November 2022), 75 out of a total roll of 280 men were in FTW (27%), a higher ratio and an indicator of FTW places struggling to keep pace with the rising roll.

Month (2023)	Full-time work	Retired	External education	Drivers	On-camp education	On-camp employment	Other/not recorded	Total Roll
May	78	3	8	5	72	155	5	326
September	80	3	7	6	58	176	-	330
October	83	2	17	2	58	161	10	333

7.2.3 On-camp employment As the table above shows, around half of men at Springhill are engaged in camp employment, far higher than the prison's own target of around 30% (7.2.1). On the Board's monitoring visits, many men tell us that they enjoy the work they do, though many say they would rather be out on ROTL. When asked,

most are critical of the remuneration they receive. One man told us, bitterly, that he was doing meaningless work, effectively as slave labour. Thus, for many, prison employment is seen more as something to do rather than as part of a clear career pathway to post-prison life. We have seen little evidence this year to contradict the findings of the 2022 HMIP survey in which 51% of men said they did not think a prison job would help them on release.

A key problem, recognised by the prison, is that there is often not enough work to do: a growing number of men are clearly underemployed, made more acute with the rise in the roll. For example, towards the second half of the year, waste management said that they had to find work for 37 men when there was really only enough for 20. In August, 40 men were assigned to farms and gardens when, effectively, there were only 25 (full-time) jobs; and in November, the kitchen said there was only really enough work for 12 men, even though they had 30 men on their books. Staff shortages - major ones in the land based team (farms, gardens and waste management) which, at the end of the year, had numerous vacancies and were down to just one hands-on staff member instead of six - only exacerbate the issue of underemployment.

7.2.4 Wages Following a 50p rise in the weekly wage last year, there was no further increase this year. Given prevailing rates of inflation, this meant a significant fall in real wages. We spoke to one man who worked on camp in the health sector, and although he enjoyed his work, his take home pay was £11 a week. To visit his family once a month costs him £40 in taxi and train fares which, after accounting for expenditures on basics, he said he could only afford if his daughter paid his return fare.

7.2.5 Vocational training The prison provides or facilitates several training courses in addition to those listed above (7.1.3). Always popular have been heavy goods vehicle (HGV) and forklift training courses, which continued to be run this year, although the main HGV courses were suspended for a number of months because of funding issues. One man completed the HGV course in January, passed the test and by April was in full-time work. In the autumn, a driving simulator was installed in the PICTA building, and was regularly used by over a dozen men.

During the year, a range of other courses, some accredited, some not, were run or offered. Throughout the year, first aid courses were run (in the gym) over six days for up to ten men to meet ongoing demand as these proved popular. In April, six men completed a basic introduction to beekeeping course, but a second course in the autumn had to be cancelled because of staff shortages. A three-day course in orchard management in September was offered/advertised but was also not run, as only one person applied.

7.2.6 Full-time work (FTW) is the activity that most men strive to have. It offers substantially higher wages than prison work, and for some the prospect of employment on release. Most jobs are in construction and warehousing (60%), though jobs in hospitality have been rising this year, in part due to the courses offered at Springhill (7.1.3). Bookers, Clipper, DHL and Waddesdon Manor, which continued to be major and/or reliable employers, and the Tap Room and Greene King, have shown interest in employing those who have completed their hospitality training. Some firms, such as Waitrose, have changed their policies on prison

recruitment and now only employ men who live locally and so will be available for work post-release.

One constant complaint we hear is that not enough jobs are advertised: two men we spoke to had only had one job interview in the six months after they had been boarded. Another is that many, if not most, jobs require men to have their own transport. On an October monitoring visit to the employment hub, the Board noted that of the nine jobs advertised, all required own transport, with one based was in Reading, a 90-mile round trip. If men have jobs that they can get to using prison/public transport, journey times can often be long. For example, we spoke to one man who had a job as a barista in Oxford. He loved the job, but his daily travel time was three-and-a half hours: prison bus to Bicester, train to Oxford, then a long bus ride. In July, 88 men had FTW distributed across the following sectors:

Sector	Numbers	Percentage of total
Construction	26	30%
Warehousing	26	30%
Hospitality	9	10%
Driver	5	6%
Recycling	5	6%
Transportation	5	6%
Rail track	2	2%
Hairdressing/Barber	2	2%
Manufacturing/industry	2	2%
Communications	1	1%
Own job/Other	5	5%
Total	88	100%

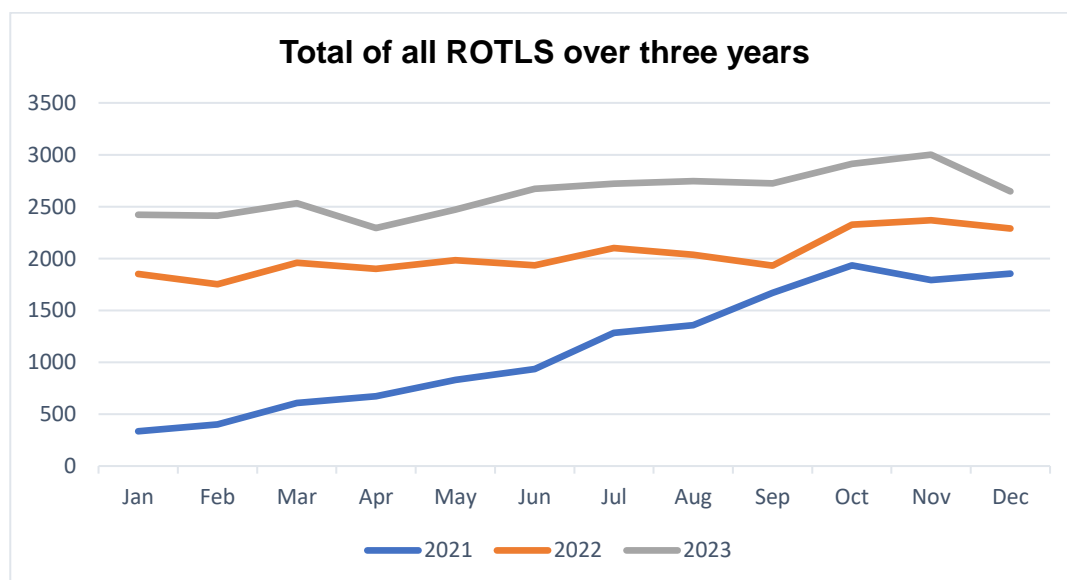
- 7.2.7 The employment and activities hubs** The employment hub continues to support men trying to access external work. It acts like a job centre, matching jobs to men's skills and needs post-release, and providing interview and CV- writing support. However, the process is slow, due to the limited number of jobs available, the time it takes for employer vetting and staff shortages. For example, in March, the activities hub asked the employment hub to stop sending across completed job application forms until early April because of processing backlogs; by then, these restrictions had been in place for a number of weeks.
- 7.2.8** In December, an employment fair was held, with some 25 companies present, a larger number than in the previous reporting year. The IMB visited and spoke to a number of men who were keen to be employed but disheartened by the length of time it can take new firms offering jobs to go through the prison's vetting process.
- 7.2.9 Employment Advisory Board (EAB)** Springhill is one of several prisons which has had an EAB, helping to find and work with local employers to support men on ROTL and into post-release work. However, in April, by mutual agreement between the Governor and its Chair, it was decided to disband the EAB. Following the appointment of the new acting Governor in October, work has begun to try to resuscitate the EAB.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 Prisoner employment plan (PEP)/Personal learning plan (PLP) A new system of each man having a dedicated PEP/PLP, which records education, training and work data and links this with their sentence plan in a single document, commenced in September 2022. At the start of the reporting year, PEPs still had to be created for some 65 men. But, by early December, the number had dropped to around 30 – most of these are men are out at work so difficult to contact during the working week. For new arrivals, a small backlog in the processing of the PEP forms started to develop mid-year, worsening considerably from August onwards, when the key data-inputter went on maternity leave. By late November, the backlog had dropped to eight and the system is expected to run smoothly from January, when a new staff member arrives.

Each man's PEP/PLP should be updated after three months, then six months, then annually. Limited staff capacity resulted in delays in the updating process, with updates not been happening as regularly as they should. This probably helps to explain why, anecdotally, a number of men told the IMB either that they didn't really understand what the PEP/PLP was or how it could/would help them.

7.3.2 Release on temporary licence (ROTL) The figures for men going out on ROTL showed a steady rise over the year. As the graph, below, shows, the total month-by-month numbers were higher than in the previous year: in the reporting year, there were 31,559 total ROTLs compared with 24,430 last year, a rise of 29%. There was a significant rise in men visiting family overnight and at weekends: from February to September, the number of resettlement overnight releases (RORs) each month rose from 106 to 153, a 45% increase. The overwhelming majority of ROTLs were successful: there were 63 ROTL failures in the year compared with 48 last year, comprising just 0.2% of the total.



7.3.3 Throughout the year, ROTL was the issue most men were keen to talk to the IMB about, often without prompting. The two topics most frequently raised were the length of time it took to be boarded (usually too long) and men's access to their prison offender manager – or POMs (invariably, not often enough).

- 7.3.4 During the year, both staff in the OMU and men reported long delays with responses from both police checks and community offender managers (COMs). In August, the OMU reported that the Metropolitan Police were unable to provide checks at all, except for high risk of serious harm (ROSH) cases and that some probation areas were not providing ROTL offender management feedback because they were unable to obtain checks from the police. By December, OMU reported that, if anything, these problems were worse.
- 7.3.5 Delays were also exacerbated by OMU staff shortages, leading to documentation not being completed or delayed and some limitations being placed on men meeting with their POM. This only added to the frustrations many men felt with the time it was taking to get boarded. On two or three different occasions during the year, the OMU alerted and apologised to the men for the staffing problems they were experiencing.
- 7.3.6 Against this backdrop, we heard a number of positive comments about the whole boarding process and the support men had had from particular POMs. On one monitoring visit, a man told us it had taken 12 weeks to be boarded but he understood why and was full of praise for the way his POM had managed the process, keeping regularly in touch with him.
- 7.3.7 However, most men were critical of the delays. The IMB spoke to three men in June who had been waiting some seven months to be boarded, and to one man who failed to get home at the weekend on a special person licence (SPL) because the paperwork approving his visit had not been given to him. Another man was allocated a temporary POM (as his original POM had gone on extended leave), who told him he didn't have time to update his offender assessment system (OASys) plan (progressing the individual's risk and needs-assessment), which had already been outstanding for eight weeks. He said the whole process had affected his mental health. The Board has also been dealing with an application relating to serious errors on OASys, which have not been rectified.
- 7.3.8 **Offender assessment system (OASys)** The surge of new arrivals in the first half of the year (see 2.2 and 4.1.1) resulted in the backlog of completed OASys paperwork, with the number rising from 19 in December 2022 to 52 in April 2023, before beginning to start to fall. A notice to prisoners (NTP) issued in February said: 'The OMU team are aware of the current OASys backlog in HMP Springhill and to assist in rectifying this matter we have decided to take the unwanted step of closing the department to all prisoners on the following dates. We plan to concentrate on the numbers of backlogged OASys, in date order, so that we are able to assist all of you waiting to gain access to ROTL.' That month, the OMU was trying to process 110 new arrivals in 12 weeks with two staff off long term sick and two vacancies in the unit. The Board was also dealing with an App from a man claiming that serious historical errors on his OASys had not been rectified.

7.4 Family contact

- 7.4.1 **Visits** From early in the year, the pre-Covid routine of weekend social visits was reinstated without having to wear face masks or carry out a lateral flow test. All men not eligible for town visits are allowed one social visit a week, with a maximum of three adults but any number of related children under the age of 18. It is possible

(for those who apply) for funds to be accessed to help with the travel costs of those visiting who need such support.

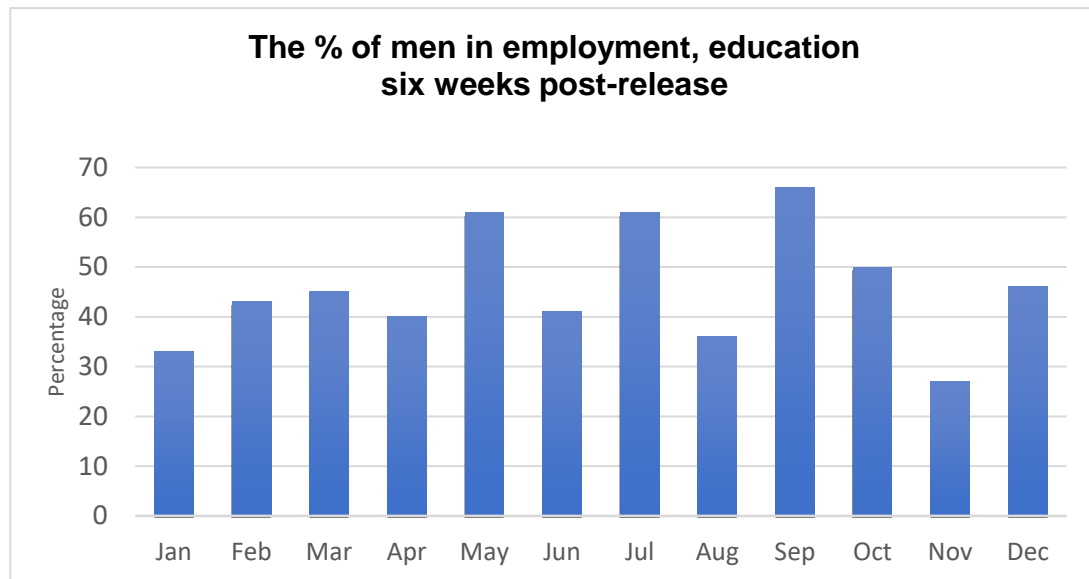
Over the year, there were, on average, 169 social visits per month, with an average of 228 adult visitors. The number of children visiting varied month by month, with a low of 57 in (cold) March, but in September, 187 children visited, over three times more, and in December, 139 children came to Springhill on visits.

- 7.4.2 While refreshment packs for visitors have been reintroduced, the pre-Covid practice of providing hot food for visitors has not been revived. As some families (including those with young children) have to travel long distances, it's not surprising that a number of men have told the IMB that they would like hot food provided once again as it had been before.
- 7.4.3 The ambience of the visitors' area, located on one side of the large dining hall, remains rather dour in appearance, and often felt cold during winter visits, though by the final weekend of the year the heating problems had been fixed. In October/November, the roof above the visitors' area suffered severe leaks following excessive rain storms, and parts of the area were not usable until repairs had been made, a week or so later. Self-evidently, the repairs made to the same roof last year had not fixed the problem. However, in March, £1,000 was spent buying new items to encourage more interaction between men and their children: some of the old tables and chairs have been replaced, which has helped to freshen up the appearance of the area.
- 7.4.4 In April, the IMB spoke to families, some visiting Springhill for the first time, and they spoke positively of their experience. They said the booking system (online with email confirmation) was easy to use and the atmosphere was good; one said 'it feels different from other prisons'. Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) volunteers were on hand with packs/colouring books for children.
- 7.4.5 **Social video calls** (also still referred to by staff, men and family members as 'purple visits') continue to be facilitated for those who request them. However, the numbers using this facility have been low, with only 12 men booking social video calls in the last three months of the year, even though from April, a new Friday slot was introduced. As not all men seem to know about them - on one of our visits, five men in J Hut said they had no idea that this facility was available - a forum is to be facilitated by the prison to try to find out why take up is so low. At least one session had to be cancelled because of staff shortages.

7.5 Resettlement planning

- 7.5.1 **Monitoring a discharge** An IMB member monitored a discharge in October. The man had no job to go to and some of his property was missing, including his birth certificate and National Insurance number, which would have prevented him from signing on at the Job Centre. There seemed to have been gaps in the signatures in his property file.
- 7.5.2 **Post-release employment** The chart records the percentage of men in employment, training or education six weeks after their release. Over the year, the average was 45.8, and in only three months did the numbers exceed 50%. Although Springhill data compare favourably with other establishments – national statistics for

year to March 2023 record a figure of 19.4% – these are remarkably low numbers for a key resettlement pathway; they are marginally lower than the delivery requirement of 46.53% .



- 7.5.3 Of 50 men released over four months between April and October, a little over half (27) were employed in work they had done when on ROTL. Of these, 13 men, just under half, continued to work with the same employer post-release.
- 7.5.4 **Accommodation on-release figures** Of the 168 released from Springhill over the year, only two had nowhere to stay on their first night after release.
- 7.5.5 **Pathways enhanced resettlement service (PERS)** The GABLE at Springhill - one of five PERS enterprises in open prisons, run by HMPPS but funded by the NHS - supports men likely to find the move to open conditions particularly challenging or be more likely to reoffend. During the year, PERS lowered the criteria for accepting men into its programmes (from two red flags to one), enabling it to increase numbers. In spite of staffing vacancies and the retirement of its long-serving custodial manager, PERS continues to provide an invaluable service and now provides a drop-in facility in the evening to enable those out on ROTL to access its services. In the last few months of the year, PERS was actively assisting between 12 and 14 men. Feedback from men who use PERS, albeit largely anecdotal, continues to be very positive. In June, out of the blue, a man a year out of Springhill called PERS just to thank them for the support they had given him.

8. The work of the IMB

- 8.1 The Board maintained a full year of weekly monitoring visits and covered prison meetings. A few IMB board meetings were held remotely.

Three Board members were appointed during the year. Current numbers are eight, although one is on sabbatical.

8.2 Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	5
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8 (including 1 on sabbatical)
Total number of visits to the establishment	123

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Current year	Previous year
A	Accommodation: laundry, clothing, ablutions	1	0
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	3	0
C	Equality	0	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	1	3
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	0	0
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	6	1
F	Food and kitchens	0	0
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	2	0
H1	Property within this establishment	0	0
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	4	6
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	3	0
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew (HDC), release on temporary licence (ROTL), parole, release dates, recategorisation	6	1
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	0	2
K	Transfers	0	0
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	0	0
	Total number of applications	26	13



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