



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP High Down

**For reporting year
1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023**

Published July 2024



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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release.
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has.
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

HMP High Down is an adult male category C training and resettlement prison (for those whose escape risk is considered low but who cannot be trusted in an open prison) in Surrey. It has only served this function since April 2022, before which it was a category B local prison (for those considered a risk to public safety but not categorised as a maximum security threat). During 2022, the operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) was temporarily reduced to 1,113 to reflect the lack of purposeful activity in the prison, but was increased to 1,180 at the start of 2023 due to the opening of the DHL workshop in April¹. A specialist Psychologically Informed Planned Environments (PIPE) unit (which aims to support the progression of prisoners with complex needs) is due to open in April 2024, providing an additional 23 beds.

The Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) - the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded - is 999, which includes the 23 PIPE beds. During 2023, this meant a working CNA of 976 but an operational capacity of 1,180, resulting in 204 overcrowded cells.

There are six residential houseblocks, as well as a Care, Separation and Reintegration Unit (CSRU), with 22 cells and two special accommodation cells.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- There was a significant increase in assaults - prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff - and a less significant increase in self-harm.
- There was a huge increase in finds of illicit items, especially drugs and mobile phones. It is impossible to know how much was not found, but ingress of illicit items is a major concern.
- Late arrival of vans transferring prisoners into HMP High Down was a regular occurrence. This negatively impacts prisoners' experience in reception, affects processing of property and impacts regime (this is the prison routine, which determines when a prisoner is allowed out of their cell for work, education, exercise, meals, etc) across the prison due to cross- deployment of staff.

Fair and humane treatment

- Prisoners who fail the medical algorithm for segregation are still being held in CSRU. There was an increase in the number of prisoners held in CSRU for over 42 days and in the use of special accommodation (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation have been removed in the interest of prisoner safety).
- There was a lack of key work and too few key workers (a member of staff who supports a prisoner throughout the custodial period).
- Property remained a significant issue, particularly property being lost during transfer between prisons.
- The old showers have still not been refurbished and the condition of the newly refurbished showers is deteriorating due to a lack of ventilation.
- Accessibility for prisoners with mobility issues is a concern, particularly as houseblock lifts remain out of order.

Health and wellbeing

- There was a reduction in the number of healthcare concerns raised, both directly to the NHS and through applications (prisoners' written representations) to the IMB.
- Waiting times for dental appointments remain a concern.
- Full-time workers reported that they often do not have access to regime when they return to the houseblock.
- There was an improvement in the length of time between mental health assessment and transfer to a secure mental health facility, although it was still over the agreed timeline of 28 days.

Progression and resettlement

- There are not enough prison probation workers in the offender management unit (OMU), resulting in huge workloads for those who are in post.
- There have been positive improvements in the provision of visits and encouraging family contact. The introduction of coffee mornings for prisoners who receive no social visits is welcomed by the Board.
- The Board remains concerned about the poor attendance rates for education classes.

- There are not enough education and employment places for each prisoner in High Down. There are very few opportunities for vulnerable prisoners (VPs) with regards to work and education.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Prisoners are still being held in CSRU, despite failing the medical algorithm to say that they are fit for segregation conditions. What does the Minister intend to do about this ongoing problem? (see section 5.2)
- Due to overcrowding in the prison estate, prisoners are being transferred into category C conditions before they are able to comply with the regime. This threatens the stability of the prison and leads to an increase in violence. It also puts enormous pressure on the CSRU. What steps does the Minister intend to take to prevent this from happening? (see section 5.2)
- The lack of prison probation workers in OMU resulted in enormous workloads for remaining probation staff. Recruitment directives, prioritising community probation workers, makes recruitment more difficult. What does the Minister intend to do about the probation staffing issues within prisons? (see section 7.3)

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Despite the implementation of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, loss of property, particularly during transfer between prisons, continues to be a problem. What can the Prison Service do to tackle this issue? (see section 5.8)
- The unrefurbished showers at HMP High Down are in an unacceptable state, but the Board has been told there is insufficient funding for them to be upgraded. What does the Prison Service intend to do to improve the showers? (see section 5.1)
- The number of illicit items coming into HMP High Down is a major concern. What steps can the Prison Service take to ensure the prison is supported in tackling this issue? (see section 4.5)

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Can the prison put measures in place to deliver key work more regularly and ensure there are enough key workers for every prisoner? (see section 5.3)
- How does the prison intend to tackle low attendance rates for education? (see section 7.1)
- How can the prison ensure that all prisoners have access to regime, including full-time workers who do not get back to the houseblock until late in the afternoon? (see section 6.5)
- Can the prison improve the provision of work and education for VPs? (see section 7.2)
- What can the prison do to improve accessibility for prisoners with mobility issues so they are able to access healthcare and exercise? (see section 5.1)
- What steps can be taken to improve cleanliness in the houseblock serveries and improve portion control to ensure all prisoners receive enough food? (see section 5.1)

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised in 2022 annual report	Response given	Progress
To the Minister: lack of support for prisoners serving indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPP).	See letter from the Minister of State for Justice, published on 3 August 2023 ² (also available on the IMB website).	In February 2023, the Government rejected recommendations by the Justice Committee to resentence IPP prisoners ³ , although license reviews are set to be reduced from 10 to 3 years ⁴ .
To the Minister: length of time it takes for prisoners who require transfer to an outside secure mental health unit to be assessed and transferred.	See letter from the Minister of State for Justice (as above).	There has been some improvement in this regard (see section 5.2).
To the Minister: lack of accommodation for all prisoners on release.	See letter from the Minister of State for Justice (as above).	In 2023, 76 prisoners were still released from HMP High Down without accommodation (see section 7.5).
To HMPPS: loss of property for prisoners being transferred to or from High Down.	See letter from the Minister of State for Justice (as above).	No notable improvement (see section 5.8).
To HMPPS: issues with canteen (the weekly delivery of items a prisoner buys from the prison shop); supply and refunds.	See letter from the Minister of State for Justice (as above).	There has been an improvement in this area.
To the Governor: improve provision of good quality and full-time employment and training.	The Governor shares these concerns.	The Board remains concerned about this issue (see section 7.2).
To the Governor: racially disproportionate application of the incentives scheme.	The situation continued to be monitored by the	There has been an improvement in this area (see section 5.6).

² [Response-to-IMB-Annual-Report-HMP-High-Down-2022.pdf \(cloud-platform-e218f50a4812967ba1215eaecede923f.s3.amazonaws.com\)](https://cloud-platform-e218f50a4812967ba1215eaecede923f.s3.amazonaws.com/Response-to-IMB-Annual-Report-HMP-High-Down-2022.pdf)

³ [IPP sentences: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/ippsentences/government-response-to-the-committees-third-report)

⁴ [Reforms bring hope to rehabilitated people still serving abolished indefinite sentences - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/reforms-bring-hope-to-rehabilitated-people-still-serving-abolished-indefinite-sentences)

	diversity and inclusion (D&I) department.	
To the Governor: lack of regular and effective key work.	The Governor is aware of this issue.	The Board remains concerned about this issue (see section 5.3).
To the Governor: more efficient handling of property during cell clearances.	No formal response received.	Property remains an issue, but cell clearances are less of a concern.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

The safer custody team monitors the safeguarding of prisoners. Multi-disciplinary meetings focus on current areas of concern and provide oversight on individual prisoners of concern. The security team works to secure the safety and stability of the establishment.

4.1 Reception and induction

Reception manages the arrival and departure of prisoners transferring between establishments, attending outside hospital, escorts to court appearances and releases. There were 1,535 transfers in during 2023 compared with 1,646 in 2022; and there were 1,479 hospital escorts.

As reported in our 2022 annual report, a significant number of transfer-in vans continue to arrive late in the afternoon/early evening. Reception is manned until 18:00 and processing arrivals after this time requires cross-deployment of staff, which has a detrimental impact on evening regime for other prisoners. Late arrivals also mean a delay in processing property, which causes frustration for prisoners and staff.

New arrivals are processed in reception, after which they should be taken to the induction wing, where they ordinarily remain for three to seven days to complete their induction. Discussions with prisoners suggest the majority do receive a basic level of induction within the first few days of arrival. Prisoners with specific vulnerabilities go directly to the vulnerable prisoner (VP) houseblock or the detoxification unit.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Deaths in custody: The Board expresses condolences for the four deaths in custody during 2023 and the death of an individual shortly after release. Three were due to natural causes. The Prisons & Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reports for two have yet to be published.

Self-harm incidents: A total of 325 prisoners were reported as having self-harmed during 2023 (304 in 2022). However, the number of incidents reduced from 1,151 to 651, suggesting a significant reduction in repeat self-harming. White British and IPP prisoners were heavily over-represented compared with the rest of the prison population. The single largest reason given for self-harming was mental health issues, although debt, bullying and regime, when combined, outweighed mental health as reasons for self-harm.

The Board is encouraged that the safety team has introduced strategies to reduce self-harm, such as employing a safety peer (prisoners who are trained for a specific role) on each houseblock to highlight available support such as Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide confidential emotional support to fellow prisoners) and Samaritans. The safety team works closely with mental health professionals to develop pathways for mentally unwell prisoners. Visits by therapy dogs for IPP, lifer and care-experienced prisoners proved to be popular.

Assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans: Prisoners who self-harm, are at risk of harming themselves or have suicidal thoughts are supported through the ACCT system. In 2023, 542 ACCT documents were opened, compared with 456 in 2022. Staff training to recognise triggers may, in part, account for the increase in ACCTs in the reporting year.

ACCT quality assurance processes are in place, highlighting examples of good practice and areas for development. Overdue reviews are listed daily for follow up. Board members periodically observe reviews and are encouraged by the quality of the conversations and pathways discussed. Where a prisoner refuses to engage, this is noted for follow-up. The Board's occasional sampling of written ACCT documents shows some good-quality records and care plans, with areas for development picked up in quality-assurance audits.

The Board is supportive of ongoing work to develop family input regarding ACCTs and self-harm, subject to robust safeguarding considerations.

Welfare checks: The violence-reduction team carried out 382 welfare checks between January and November. These are triggered by family members or people in the prison registering concern about a particular prisoner. Weekly checks by houseblock staff, introduced during the pandemic, were stopped in March 2023.

Listeners and Samaritans: There were 11,278 phone calls to the Samaritans in 2023, a decrease from 15,652 in 2022. Fewer than 500 phone calls were made between May and December. Free PIN credit (which allows prisoners to call landline and mobile phone numbers) is made available and there is no obvious reason for the dramatic fall in usage; however, it coincided with a significant increase in requests to speak with a Listener face to face.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Violent incidents

Reported assaults	2023	2022	2021
Total prisoner-on-prisoner assaults	247	157	182
Serious assaults on prisoners	36	29	37
Total prisoner-on-staff assaults	98	85	97
Serious assaults on staff	6	21	22

The significant increase in assaults, of both prisoners and staff, raises serious concerns over prison stability. The Board was pleased to see a reduction in serious assaults on staff. The prison advised the Board that the main causes of assaults on prisoners were related to gangs, NPS (new psychoactive substances, which are compounds designed to mimic established recreational drugs), vapes or debt. It was suggested that assaults on staff were linked to a disruption to regime and, to a lesser extent, challenging non-attendance at work.

Challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs): Over 100 prisoners were put on CSIPs, which are used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence, during 2023. Around 15 prisoners a month are managed through CSIPs, rising to 25 during September and October. Some are gang or debt specific. All CSIP prisoners are discussed at the weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM) and case-managed by a custodial manager. Prisoners on CSIPs are escorted around the establishment and are identifiable to staff in the visits' hall.

Violence reduction (VR) initiatives: There are eight VR peers across the establishment, providing support on gang conflict/violence and reporting concerns to the safety team, who view them as a valuable avenue of support. The VR team facilitate 'mediation Monday' sessions, aimed at reducing non-associate conflicts and promoting community living. Eight prisoners graduated from the 'Changing the Game' course, covering gang-violence history and addressing trauma.

Self-isolators/prisoners on separate regimes: If a prisoner feels under threat from other prisoners, they can be designated as a self-isolator. Self-isolators and those on separate regime are managed under SIM and allocated a welfare case manager. Board members also encounter prisoners who are too scared to engage in normal activities but have not been designated as self-isolators and it is unclear whether staff are fully aware of these individuals. VPs and PCoSOs (prisoners convicted of a sexual offence) are managed on a dedicated houseblock. Occasionally, due to the lack of available space, VP prisoners must be managed under separate regimes on other houseblocks, which is challenging for residential staff and impacts regime for other prisoners. It can also have a detrimental effect on the regime of the VPs themselves.

4.4 Use of force

Use of force	2023	2022	2021
Unplanned	545	358	505
Planned	142	167	87
Total	687	525	592

The number of unplanned use of force (UoF) incidents increased substantially during 2023. Regime issues, refusal to return to their cell, relocations and assaults are the main reasons given for restraint. Around half of restraints are guided holds/handcuffs and half are full control and restraint. There were at least 18 recorded incidents at height⁵. Batons were drawn 12 times and used twice; PAVA (an incapacitant spray) was drawn six times and used on five occasions. In 2022, batons and PAVA were each only drawn once, but not used. A total of 233 members of staff were trained in the use of PAVA/SPEAR (spontaneous protection enabling accelerated response) by the end of the year, following its roll out at the end of March.

A total of 14 members of staff and one prisoner required hospital treatment following restraint incidents. Restraint debrief returns are the result of a post-restraint conversation between the VR team and the prisoner about the use of force and whether the prisoner feels it was justified: 338 of these were completed in 2023 (205 in 2022). Less than one-third of the debriefs stated staff acted reasonably and attempted de-escalation.

Body worn video cameras (BWVCs) are now mandatory for all operational staff. The Board was told that there was video footage of approximately 90% of incidents involving restraint. CCTV/BWVC footage should be reviewed weekly by senior management, with examples of good practice and areas in need of improvement, such as de-escalation, highlighted.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Security intelligence indicates an overwhelming presence of illicit items across the establishment. Prisoners tell us that illicit substances are easy to obtain (see below) and there were a worrying number of recorded incidents of prisoners being 'under the influence' in 2023. Some batches of NPS can cause serious illness and we are told that usage is heavily linked to debt, violence and mental health issues.

- 'There is a major drug problem here'
- 'Easier to get hold of drugs here than anywhere'

⁵ In HMP High Down, this is generally when a prisoner gets on the netting between house block levels.

'Finds' increased dramatically in 2023, as seen in the table below. It is not possible to quantify the volume of illicit items getting into the prison undetected.

	2023	2022
Finds		
Drugs	1,641	195
Mobiles	537	133
Weapons	183	122
Fermenting liquid	161 finds/1,180 litres	128 finds/705 litres
Cell searches and finds	354 searches/591 finds	161 searches/452 finds

Drones and 'throwovers' (where people from outside the prison throw parcels over the walls containing illicit items, which are then picked up by prisoners) appear to be the main source of illicit items in the prison, as well as items being passed by visitors. Towards the end of 2023, extra perimeter patrols were deployed, and external partners became involved in helping with the prevention of drones. During 2023, CCTV cameras around the prison were often broken and areas of the prison not covered.

Initiatives planned for 2024 include perimeter CCTV/signage and motion-sensor lighting to deter throwovers.

All incoming social mail continues to be photocopied and R39/official mail has been tested locally since the end of 2023.

Illicit items can be brought in when prisoners arrive from other establishments or return from hospital. A total of 2,520 (2,036 in 2022) X-ray body scans were conducted during the year, resulting in 374 (245 in 2022) positive indications.

All staff, volunteers and visitors pass through a metal detector and are subject to searches. Bag scanners and a ban on unopened liquids were introduced early in the year. Social visitors are checked by the passive drug detection dogs and the visits' hall is monitored by CCTV. During the year, 50 attempts by visitors to pass items were intercepted, compared with 14 in 2022.

Mandatory drug testing (MDT) re-started in March 2023, resulting in 393 positive tests out of a total of 1,080 (random and suspicion- and risk-based). A total of 58 prisoners refused to be tested. This exceeds the target of testing 5% of the prison population. A local policy around a frequent testing programme (FTP) is to be introduced in 2024.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Cells: Room-ready representatives prepare cells for new arrivals although, from our observations, cells are often not ready. In an end-of-year snapshot survey, 64% (of 58 prisoners) told us that their cells were not ready when they arrived and many had missing items, including TVs, kettles, pillows and phones. On some occasions, it was several days before a phone or pillow were received.

Showers: The majority of showers in High Down have now been replaced and are a great improvement on the old ones. Unfortunately, some of the new shower rooms are already in a bad state. When they were installed, the windows were replaced with solid Perspex, sealing the opening. With insufficient ventilation, many showers have crumbling plaster, peeling paint and black mould. Some of the new shower doors have broken, compromising decency.



Mould and peeling paint in a refurbished shower room

The old showers, which are waiting to be replaced, are in an unacceptable, shocking state. They are dirty and have no privacy. Prisoners tell us they prefer to go without a shower, as they are so awful.



One of the un-refurbished shower rooms, with no privacy screening

Kitchens and food: The 2023 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) inspection report (July-August 2023) of HMP High Down noted, '*...just 26% said they usually got enough to eat.*

Supervision during the meal service was weak on some houseblocks and the lack of portion control led to wide disparities in how much prisoners got to eat'. The Board has observed the same and is concerned that when staff are in attendance, they do not always challenge behaviour or portion control. Prisoners tell us that popular items run out and some staff 'turn a blind eye', whilst others ensure things are 'done properly', which makes a big difference.

- 'It's a roll of the dice as to what you get. Portion size is inconsistent. There have been a few days with no vegetables.'
- 'Servery workers look after their friends; no one does anything about it.'

Our observations of the servery areas suggest that most are generally not clean, apart from houseblock one. They are frequently found to not have been cleaned after the meal service and old food trays are often left discarded in sinks full of dirty water. Some food is thrown out of servery windows, where rats and birds eat it, defecating on the windows and ground nearby. From our observations and speaking to prisoners, it seems that staff do not regularly oversee the cleaning.

The Board is pleased to report, however, that the central kitchen appears clean and is well run, despite staff shortages. There are clear notices on the walls to explain what needs to be done and we have observed all workers wearing PPE (personal protective equipment). Kitchen staff report that they continually remind houseblock staff that all trays and dishes must be cleaned before they are returned, although this does not always happen.

Lifts: The only working lifts were in education and the gym. Two of the houseblocks have lifts and the Board has been reporting for several years that these are usually broken. The other four houseblocks, including one that holds a considerable proportion of older prisoners, do not have lifts. Staff report that for those with limited mobility to access certain areas, they must be taken on a long route around the prison. Optician and dental appointments have been missed, as there is no step-free access to healthcare outpatients. On the older houseblocks, there is no step-free access to outside exercise areas and no ramps.



Lifts out of order on the house blocks

5.2 Segregation

The CSRU at HMP High Down has 22 cells. There is a new photochromatic door (which allows staff to observe a prisoner while allowing privacy when required) on one of the cells to house prisoners in need of constant round-the-clock support. Prisoners continue to tell us that they receive a lot of support from staff and often say they feel safer in the CSRU than they do on the houseblocks.

It is of concern that there has been an increase in the number of prisoners spending over 42 days in CSRU; 43 in 2023, compared with 30 in 2022. Staff conduct regular reviews with these prisoners and appear to offer as much support as they can.

With no inpatient healthcare, some prisoners are held in CSRU despite failing the medical assessment to say they are fit to be held in segregation conditions. A total of 25 prisoners failed this algorithm in 2023 (27 in 2022). The Board's previous annual report mentioned concerns regarding prisoners with what appear to be serious mental health issues being held in segregation conditions. These concerns were also expressed in writing to the prison Group Director in November 2022. The Board is extremely disappointed that this is an ongoing issue. It is both disruptive and unfair for the routine of others held in CSRU and distressing and difficult for staff to manage.

CSRU has two dedicated special accommodation (SA) cells. These are cells with items such as furniture and bedding removed in the interests of safety. SA should only be used when a prisoner cannot be managed safely in standard CSRU cells, in order to prevent injury to themselves, others or when threatening the good order of the prison⁶. In 2023, SA was used 11 times, for seven different prisoners, representing a significant rise, despite High Down now being a category C prison. The increase seems to be due to prisoners whose behaviour is not conducive to a category C regime being transferred into High Down. They must be managed in CSRU until they are re-categorised and transferred. This creates additional pressure on staff and disruption for other prisoners. We commend staff in their efforts to keep all prisoners in CSRU safe.

The last HMIP inspection noted reintegration plans, *'did not outline any steps to encourage or support the individual in their move out of the unit'*. The Board has observed greater emphasis on reintegration towards the end of 2023 and has been pleased that more prisoners are encouraged to spend a few hours at a time on normal location to get used to it before relocating completely off the CSRU.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Complaints against staff: Prisoners submitted 100 applications to the IMB expressing issues with staff. In our 2023 survey of 58 prisoners, we asked if staff treated them with respect and if any member of staff had asked them how they were doing during the last week. We were pleased to hear that 40 prisoners felt that most staff treated them with respect, but only 28 reported any member of staff had recently asked them how they were.

- 'Some are dismissive, under too much pressure, don't know what they are doing.'
- 'Never have time for a conversation.'
- 'Depends on how you treat them.'

⁶ [HMP Prison and Probation Service Reviewing and Authorising Continuing Segregation & Temporary Confinement in Special Accommodation: Amendment to Policy set out in PSO 1700.](#)

Communication: In our survey, we also asked about communication within HMP High Down. Only 10 prisoners felt it was good.

- 'You only find out at the last minute if you are getting out.'
- 'Can miss things that are only communicated very quickly and not on the kiosk, like signing up for courses.'

Key work: Key workers have six prisoners on their caseload and are expected to support and help with their personal development through weekly meetings. The last HMIP inspection noted that key work was, '*... not being delivered effectively... that less than a fifth of scheduled sessions had taken place...*'. Unfortunately, this remains the case and key work is the first activity to be cancelled when there is not a full staff complement, which is often.

In our survey, we asked prisoners when their last key work session was. Only 22 had a session in the last week and, disappointingly, 36 did not know who their key worker was or if they had one. At the end of 2023, there were only 177 key workers and 139 prisoners who had not been allocated one.

Number of completed key work sessions in 2023

	No. of completed sessions	% of expected sessions completed
January	902	26%
February	862	30%
March	1185	49%
April	753	30%
May	894	25%
June	781	24%
July	207	7%
August	606	18%
September	664	21%
October	729	22%
November	1356	22%
December	805	23%

5.4 Equality and diversity

Discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs): There was a substantial increase in the number of DIRFs received by the diversity and inclusion (D&I) department during 2023. This may, in part, be due to the fact that they are more widely available, and the D&I department is seen as approachable by many prisoners. However, of the 158 DIRFS received, only seven were upheld. The protected characteristic of race made up 34% of the DIRFs, while religion accounted for 14%.

The D&I department continues to organise events for black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, which prisoners tell us they appreciate. Some events arranged during the year included:

- George the Poet workshop, which was very well attended and, according to some of the attendees, 'inspirational'.

- Hair workshop for prisoners and their children with Afro hair.
- Consultation with prisoners about products to be made available on the minority ethnic products' list for purchase through canteen. This has since been acted on.

Prisoners who have been in the care of a local authority have been well supported with cookery lessons and regular lunches organised away from the houseblock. We have observed some of these and the prisoners tell us they appreciate the chance to chat to those with similar experiences and the feeling of normality this brings.

Personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP): The 2021 HMIP inspection report recommended that *'Every prisoner requiring assistance during an evacuation should have an up-to-date personal emergency evacuation plan which describes the support they need. These plans should be accessible to residential staff, who should be familiar with these prisoners and their needs and locations'*. In the 2023 HMIP inspection report, it was noted that this had not been achieved.

The Board is pleased to report that things are, very gradually, improving with PEEPs. Support plans are more accessible to staff in the office and are regularly reviewed, but the information about what assistance is required is neither comprehensive nor sufficient. Each prisoner with a PEEP should have a notice on their door so that they can be easily identified in case of an emergency evacuation. Unfortunately, they are extremely small notices and not easy to see, with some not being in place at all.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy offers services to all faith groups and employs chaplains for most faith groups represented in the prison. Three Sycamore Tree courses were run in 2023 year and many weekly activities ran in the chapel and chaplaincy rooms. Healthcare runs a weekly singing therapy session in the chapel, which is very popular. Chaplains meet prisoners at induction and before release and visit prisoners in CSRU daily. The chapel and a chaplain are always available after a death or a serious incident for both staff and prisoners.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The Board has previously raised concerns about racially disproportionate application of incentives amongst prisoners. The prison reviews all incentives and negative entries against age, race and religion and has worked hard to ensure that no group of prisoners are discriminated against.

In 2023, of an average annual population of 1,148 prisoners, 55.4% were white and 44.6% were non-white. A total of 56% of the average annual population were on Enhanced status (the highest level of the incentive scheme), 39.1% were on Standard and 7.3% were on Basic. Of prisoners on the Enhanced level, 59.2% were white and 40.8% were non-white. Of prisoners on Standard, 50.6% were non-white and 49.4% were white. Of those on Basic, 59.5% were white and 40.5% were non-white.

5.7 Complaints

Many prisoners tell us that they do not use the complaints system, as they do not feel that it works. The 2023 HMIP Inspection report noted that *'The number of complaints was much higher than at similar prisons and had steadily increased over the previous 12 months'*. The total number of complaints received by the prison during 2023 was 3,813, of which 1,287 (34%) were upheld. This is a slight increase on 2022, when they received 3,746, of which 1,409 (38%) were upheld.

Issues with property, either lost during transfer from another prison or within HMP High Down itself, remains the biggest concern for prisoners. Over 1,000 of the 3,813 complaints received in 2023 related to property and reception issues.

5.8 Property

Of the many property complaints, most concerned missing property that is never found. Having gone through the relevant process, prisoners are entitled to compensation. During 2023, High Down paid slightly over £6,000 in compensation for property lost within the prison. Loss of property causes prisoners unnecessary frustration and distress, with many lost items unable to be replaced.

Property-related applications made up over 20% of the total received by the IMB in 2023 (an increase from 2022), with the biggest rise being issues with property being lost or delayed when transferring from other prisons. The Prisoners' Property Policy Framework has not resolved historic property issues and there remains a lack of consistency between prisons, both in terms of volume of property permitted and items that prisoners are allowed in possession. When property does arrive at reception or the gate, it can take weeks to reach prisoners.



Container used to store prisoner property until it is processed

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

In last year's annual report, the Board noted that the space vacated when the inpatients unit was closed at High Down was to be repurposed into a specialist personality disorder unit during 2023. The work on this unit remains ongoing.

Healthcare-related applications to the IMB fell in 2023, comprising just under 9.8% of the total received, compared with 13.8% in 2022.

Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL) concerns and HMPPS healthcare complaints: CNWL operates a prisoner concerns system separately from the prison complaints system. Prisoners are required to complete a separate form to submit their concerns. There has been a decrease in the overall number of concerns submitted to healthcare in 2023. Although lower than 2022, the highest number of concerns relate to medication and there has been a substantial increase in the number relating to care quality and the dentist. Accessing care, which saw a significant increase in 2022, has fallen steeply (see Annex B).

6.2 Physical healthcare

Outpatients: A comprehensive range of primary healthcare services is available in the prison. In addition to GP, dentistry and optical services, more specialised services are offered by external consultants visiting the prison.

Waiting times (weeks)	2023	2022	2021
GP	1.6	2	12
Dentist	12	12	13
Optician	9	15	7
Physiotherapy	5	9	6
Podiatry	20	15	18

The Board is pleased about the reduction in waiting times for physiotherapy and optician appointments. However, we remain concerned about the waiting times for dental treatment: any prisoners we spoke to expressed frustration around difficulties in getting access to dental care.

- 'Taking months to get a dental appointment, will wait until I get out.'
- 'Still waiting after 3 months.'
- 'The wait is ridiculous, been waiting months for an emergency dental appointment.'

6.3 Mental health

The mental health in-reach (MHIR) service comprises a team of psychiatrists and clinical psychologists. There is a separate small team of forensic psychologists. Prisoners with

behavioural problems are not managed by MHIR. This means that their issues can go unaddressed, resulting in disruptive behaviour that takes up a disproportionate amount of staff time. The Board welcomes the addition of the PIPE unit, due to open in April 2024.

Prisoners with serious mental health concerns are referred for external assessment, with a view to transferring to an outside secure mental health facility. The Board is pleased to note an improvement in the average length of time between assessment and transfer, from 50 days in 2022 to 31.5 days in 2023. Although this is still longer than the agreed time limit of 28 days, we recognise that it is a significant improvement. It is of concern that one prisoner waited 93 days for transfer. In 2023, 1,421 prisoners were referred for mental health services, a significant increase from the 1,034 referred in 2022.

	2023	2022	2021
Identified for external assessment	18	32	28
Actual transfers	12	27	16
Average time between assessment and transfer (days)	31.5	50	21
Longest wait time (days)	93	241	60

6.4 Social care

At the end of 2023, 32 prisoners were receiving social care. Services include cell cleaning, change of bedding and provision of specialised equipment. Social care representatives also provide peer support.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

Use of gym: The prison has a large gym with plenty of exercise equipment. It is detailed to have ten physical education (PE) staff; however, at the end of the year, there were only three. Five sports and games officers, who are trained but unable to independently run sessions, were deployed to assist the PE staff. Prisoners attend gym on a rota system which, generally, works well, although prisoners reported to us that sessions are missed due to regime restrictions and staffing issues. We have been told that VPs have been disproportionately impacted by these.

Core day regime: 2023 saw a continuation of an 'uptime/downtime' regime, in which prisoners in part-time work go to employment for either the morning or the afternoon, with the other session being used for exercise, kiosk (a self-service computer terminal that allows prisoners to manage their daily affairs), showers, etc. Full-time workers often reported to the Board that they do not get access to regime when they return to the houseblock before afternoon lock-up.

Evening association (the time a prisoner is allowed out of his cell) is run on a rotation basis. The aim is for each houseblock to get two sessions per week, apart from the Enhanced living houseblock, which should get a session every evening. Cross deployment of staff to cover essential duties often means that some evening association is cancelled. The Board has also noted that equipment on the houseblock, such as table tennis tables, snooker tables and exercise equipment, is regularly broken or has missing parts.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The Forward Trust (FT) charity offers clinical and social support services to prisoners, based on an assessment of their needs. During 2023, up to a third of prisoners received support from FT at any one time. Every month, approximately 100 prisoners received

clinical support to manage and reduce their drug dependence and an average of 350 received social support, including group work and one-to-one and in-cell work.

Incentivised substance free living (ISFL) unit: The ISFL unit, which was established in 2022, continued to provide enhanced living conditions for prisoners willing to sign a compact committing to regular drug testing and accepting community support. It is very popular among prisoners, which has resulted in long waiting lists of those wishing to join the unit.

7. Progression and resettlement

The latest HMIP inspection report stated that, *'The regime did not yet match what we see in other category C prisons... we found a quarter of prisoners locked in their cells during the working day... Workshops we visited were almost all operating well under capacity or not at all...'* The Board shares these concerns, with a lack of purposeful activity remaining a challenge in 2023.



Empty workshop, previously used as a call centre

From the beginning of the reporting year, there was a renewed focus on increasing purposeful activity across the prison, aiming to get more prisoners into work and education. It was hoped that attendance would improve through staff encouragement, pay incentives and use of the incentives scheme. Unfortunately, attendance at both education and employment remained low, apart from vocational training, such as the rail track courses.

- 'I've already been contacted by a firm in connection with Railtrack and am hopeful of getting employment on release next week.'

A neurodiversity support manager has been employed to encourage participation by prisoners who fit this profile and the Board welcomes this development.

7.1 Education, library

There are ongoing concerns about the educational provision at HMP High Down, particularly in relation to poor attendance rates for education classes. The overall attendance rate of 50% represents an improvement on the 2022 figure of 40%. The target for 2024 is 55% attendance.

Discussions with prisoners suggest they are unclear about why they were allocated certain courses they did not feel were appropriate to their educational background or sentence progression. The Board was advised that certain courses must be completed before others can be taken, but this is not always adequately communicated. Other vocational courses are more popular and can be oversubscribed. VPs have fewer education opportunities available to them compared to the rest of the prison population.

Recruitment and retention of tutors improved in 2023 but remains an ongoing challenge. The Essential Digital Skills course was started in September, following the appointment of a new IT tutor. This course uses simulation platforms to equip prisoners with essential

online skills, such as banking, email and social media, which are important for when they are released.

Library

Library staffing was showing improvement until the most experienced librarian left in September. A replacement, who was shared with HMP Downview, was appointed, but this proved problematic and the librarian resigned. A new team was recruited in late 2023, solely for HMP High Down, and it is hoped this will result in improvements in the provision of activities. The Storybook Dads programme, which allows men to record stories for their children, was stopped in September due to the staffing issues.

7.2 Vocational training, work

There are some full-time jobs in the prison, such as kitchens, the DHL warehouse, recycling and farms and gardens, but most work is still part-time. There are about 970 job places in education and employment combined, which is not enough to cater for every prisoner of working age and ability. There are still very few employment opportunities for VPs, who are restricted to working in the textiles workshop. They were previously able to be employed in the laundry and staff have reported that since this stopped, the laundry has become less productive.

The new DHL warehouse opened in April, but there were some significant setbacks, including initial DHL staffing and IT problems, which meant the warehouse was closed from the beginning of November 2023 to mid-January 2024.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The IMB continues to receive applications and comments from prisoners about HMP High Down not being a 'proper' category C prison. Due to overcrowding in the prison estate in 2023, transfers to other prisons were very limited, yet not all courses required by sentence plans are available at High Down. Prisoners expressed frustration at their perceived lack of progression, which is exacerbated by some courses only being available in the last year of sentence.

The offender management unit (OMU) faced staffing issues in 2023. HMP High Down should have 10.8 probation officers (probation POMs) but only three of these posts were filled at the end of the year. Probation staff are supported by temporarily promoted prison officers, who can assist but not manage cases. These staff shortages mean that in-post probation staff had enormous caseloads. As a result, there was a lack of face-to-face contact between prisoners and staff, which caused frustration. There were OMU surgeries and peers operating on the houseblocks. Directives on recruitment meant that, at times, vacancies could not be advertised, due to community-based probation posts taking priority over those in prisons. The situation was better regarding the 14 prison POMs, who are mostly permanent and trained.

When it was a category B local prison, HMP High Down had to complete OASyS assessments (used to evaluate the risks and needs of a prisoner) for about two-thirds of its population, but as a re-roled category C resettlement prison, the entire population now needs a completed OASyS. The prison continues to complete large numbers of assessments, about 600 annually, without being allocated extra POMs to assist with the increased caseload of a resettlement prison. Each form takes between six and eight hours to complete. The backlog remains around 100 outstanding cases, despite the efforts of staff. Category C prisoners continue to arrive from other prisons without a completed OASyS form. To help reduce this backlog, assessments were being outsourced to a remote worker for some of 2023.

HMP High Down was one of 21 prisons that trialled the Government's new early release scheme, allowing certain groups of prisoners to be released 18 days early. We are told that the scheme is very time consuming to implement and has large number of restrictions, meaning that by December only 46 prisoners had been released as a result.

In 2023, 162 prisoners had their OASyS successfully reviewed, allowing them to move to open conditions.

7.4 Family contact

HMP High Down provides various opportunities for prisoners to maintain family relationships. Social visits and social video calls take place in the visits' hall five days a week, including Saturdays and Sundays. There has been an increase in the number of places available and visitors have suggested that they can generally get the day they request. During 2023, the prison ran six family days (which bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement, usually in more informal settings), which were held in the gym during school holidays, with places allocated through a lottery system. In September, a new initiative began where prisoners can invite a friend or relative to lunch in the Clink restaurant. The prisoner pays for his lunch, whilst the prison covers the cost of their guest.

The prison has identified approximately 400 prisoners who are not receiving social visits or social video calls and invited them to coffee mornings, where information was available to encourage them to have visits. This included explaining how video technology works for those who have family living further away and about the official prison visitors scheme, which enables prisoners without family to receive a visit. Time Out for Dads is a five session parenting course that started in the autumn and is funded by the London Borough of Sutton. It has been very well received by the prisoners who took part.

There is a core team of visits' staff who are generally courteous and kind to visitors and feedback to the IMB from visitors in 2023 was largely positive. Arrangements can be made for neurodiverse visitors to use a separate, quieter room off the main visits' hall. The work of the prison in maintaining family relationships has been recognised by HMPPS with an award to the visits custodial manager.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Prisoners can make an appointment at the resettlement hub in the last 12 weeks of their sentence. Here they can look for work, seek advice from Department for Work and Pensions' staff about benefits and open a bank account with HSBC.

It is very difficult for prisoners to get a job without a permanent address, and housing is in short supply. Those returning to the London area are supported in their housing by the charity, St Mungos. The Board is concerned that although the vast majority of the 732 prisoners released from HMP High Down in 2023 had positive housing outcomes, such as being released to live with friends, to supported housing or into approved accommodation, 76 were released as homeless, with 55 leaving as rough sleepers.

Approximately 25% of those released from HMP High Down are recalled to custody.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	12
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	12
Total number of visits to the establishment	317
Total number of CSRU reviews observed	138

Applications to the IMB

Code	Category	2023			2022		Change 2022 to 2023 (%)
		Total	% of Total	% +/-	All Media	% of Total	
A	Accommodation	56	6.0%	81%	31	2.9%	▲
B	Adjudications	21	2.3%	0%	21	2.0%	▲
C	Equality and Diversity (inc. religion)	27	2.9%	29%	21	2.0%	▲
D	Education/Employment/Training inc. IEP	32	3.5%	-42%	55	5.1%	▼
E1	Family/visits inc. mail & phone	36	3.9%	-32%	53	5.0%	▼
E2	Finance/pay	45	4.9%	-2%	46	4.3%	▲
F	Food/Kitchen related	25	2.7%	19%	21	2.0%	▲
G	Health related	91	9.8%	-38%	147	13.8%	▼
H1	Property (within current establishment)	82	8.9%	-10%	91	8.5%	▲
H2	Property during transfer /in another establishment)	114	12.3%	-2%	116	10.9%	▲
H3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping, Argos	23	2.5%	-23%	30	2.8%	▼
I	Sentence related (inc. HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-cat etc.	142	15.3%	9%	130	12.2%	▲
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee concerns inc. bullying	102	11.0%	-17%	123	11.5%	▼
K	Transfers	34	3.7%	-6%	36	3.4%	▲
L	Miscellaneous	48	5.2%	-14%	56	5.2%	▼
L1	Complaints System	34	3.7%	-48%	66	6.2%	▼
L2	Regime related	14	1.5%	-46%	26	2.4%	▼
	General Applications	926		-13%	1069		

Annex A

Service providers

Provider	Services
Central North West London NHS Trust (CNWL)	Healthcare: Inpatients and outpatients, medical care for residential areas, pharmacy and dental care
CNWL – In-reach	Mental healthcare
Doctor PA	GP
The Forward Trust	Substance misuse
Surrey County Council	Social care
Novus	Education and training
Gov Facility Services Ltd (GFSL)	Maintenance and repair

Annex B

Healthcare complaints by category

Concerns/complaints	2023	2022	2021
Accessing care	26	96	49
Bedding	5	0	0
Care quality	45	24	38
Concerns	3	19	8
Dentist	34	23	23
GP	11	41	43
Healthcare staff	12	1	12
Medication	134	149	94
Mental health	31	43	16
Miscellaneous	12	11	61
Patient query	1	0	0
Single-cell request	24	21	n/a
Treatment request	18	0	0



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