



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP The Mount

**For reporting year
1 March 2023 to 29 February 2024**

Published August 2024



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Introduction (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 The Mount is a category C¹ prison, built on one side of a disused airfield adjacent to the village of Bovingdon in Hertfordshire. It is at the edge of a residential area, just over a mile from a mainline railway station, and is well served by bus routes. This makes it a very open and accessible site for walkers, as well as for anyone who wants to propel packages over the fence. It is also vulnerable to drones.

The prison's residential accommodation is sometimes viewed in two 'halves':

- The 'bottom half' was opened in 1987 as a Young Offenders Institute and comprises 5 wings of which 4 (Brister, Fowler, Ellis & Lakes/Wellbeing) are configured in a four-spur design on two landings, making it difficult to observe prisoner behaviour. The fifth (the Annexe) has no toilets in its cells and is used to accommodate 'super-enhanced' prisoners, who are unlocked and, thus, able at all times to access shower and toilet facilities, as well as a lounge and kitchen.
- The 'top half' was opened after the prison was re-categorised as an adult prison in 1989. Two wings built in the 1990s, Howard and Dixon, have a two-landing galleried design that allows for better observation of prisoners. Narey opened in 2007 and has larger cells with their own showers. It is currently used to house older prisoners (over 50s). Nash was opened in 2015, with a mix of purpose-built double cells and single cells spread across two wings (Nash A and B).

The prison's current operational capacity is around 1,039 prisoners² (see below), with 96 men (9.3% of the total) in single cells that have been doubled up with bunk beds. These doubled-up cells have very restricted space for prisoners' possessions and, much more importantly, fail to afford prisoners proper living space and privacy.

The prison has two gyms (one for each 'half'), education facilities and workshops.

The Mount is, supposedly, a hybrid prison, with the stated aim of providing training and rehabilitation for 80% of its population and a resettlement service for the remaining 20% during the last 3-4 months of their sentence. A substantial increase in the number of foreign national prisoners had been anticipated but has not happened.

The prison's character has changed in recent years through the combined effects of a growing prison population and continued delays in the criminal justice system. In particular, as the category B local prisons filled up with prisoners on remand awaiting trial, prisoners serving very short sentences have been sent to The Mount. Space has been created by doubling up single cells and sending prisoners who previously might not have been deemed suitable for open conditions to category D prisons.

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1. *Category C prisons are for those who cannot be trusted in open prison but who have been recognised as being unlikely to make any attempt at escape.*
 2. *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.*

Having so many short-term prisoners has strained the prison's resources in a number of areas.

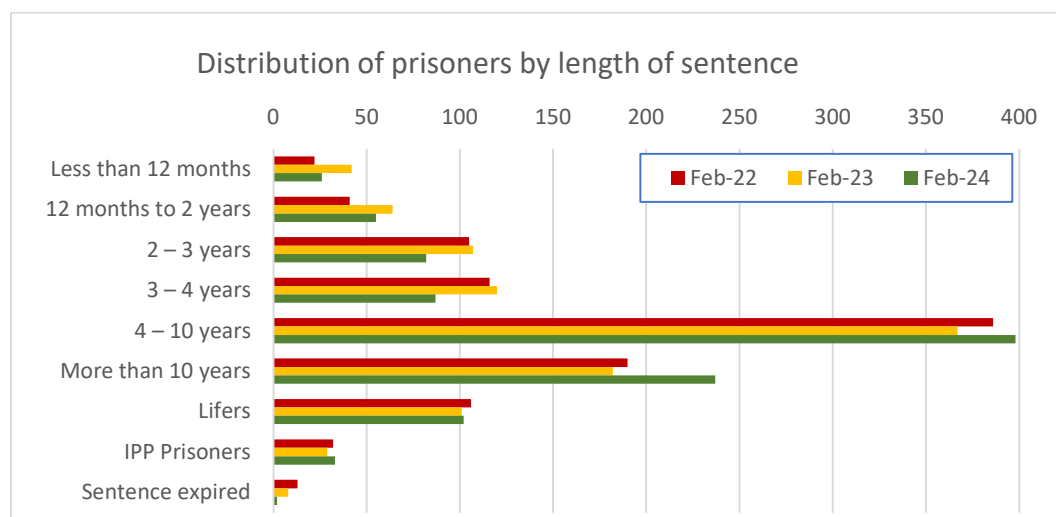
The resettlement service offered by The Mount is intended for prisoners from Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. But, in practice, prisoners are also released from The Mount to other areas, especially London.

2.1 Accommodation as of 29 February 2024

Operational capacity	Cells out of action	Spaces available	Roll
1,039	5	1,034	1,022

2.2 Prisoners by length of sentence

Length of original sentence	Number of prisoners		
	28 Feb 2022	28 Feb 2023	29 Feb 2024
Less than 12 months	22	42	26
12 months to 2 years	41	64	55
2-3 years	105	107	82
3-4 years	116	120	87
4-10 years	386	367	398
More than 10 years	190	182	237
Prisoners serving life sentences	106	101	102
IPP Prisoners	32	29	33
Sentence expired	13	8	2
Total	1,011	1,020	1,022



3. Key points

3.1 Background to the report

The changes that we have seen over the last 12 months are significant, positive, and a testament to the good work of the Governor, his senior management team (SMT) and the staff as a whole. Moreover, they have been achieved in a difficult environment, with continued overcrowding, increasing churn of prisoners (in and out), and a lack of funds to address the outstanding (and growing) capital needs,

When we wrote our last annual report, covering 1 March 2022 to 28 February 2023, the prison was in a dire state. It was understaffed; prisoners were being held in their cells for far too long each day, without access to education or workshops; drugs were rife throughout the prison; and, worst of all, the prison was not keeping prisoners safe, with an appalling record of deaths in custody from drug use and self-harm.

Twelve months on, much has changed for the better:

- The prison is, finally, fully staffed with staff retention rates increasing markedly and sickness levels falling. This is largely because staff, especially those working on the wings, now feel much more confident and better supported by their managers. However, we are told many of the new recruits arrive from their initial induction without the necessary level of training or proficiency in the basic duties, requiring the prison to introduce supplementary training and support.
- As staffing has improved, the prison is able to offer a much-improved regime, with prisoners spending more time out of their cells and many more able to go to education and training.
- Most pleasingly, the management of safety has improved significantly, with troubled prisoners being far better supported through any personal crises.

This said, there is much, often outside the control of the staff and the prison, that still gives the Board cause for concern:

- The congestion and delays in the criminal justice system are having knock-on effects on the prison. So many prisoners are being held on remand in the category B local prisons that prisoners are being sent to The Mount to serve short sentences. They are not in The Mount for long enough to benefit from any training or rehabilitation, but managing their admission, induction and release on licence takes significant resources. At the other end of the scale, prisoners are being sent to category D prisons very readily. This means the prison no longer has a body of prisoners working towards category D re-categorisation who can be trusted with orderly and other roles that can only be filled by low-risk prisoners (e.g. farms and gardens).
- The Mount is overcrowded, with too many prisoners held (9.3%) in double cells that are designed for only one person. As a temporary measure, this

could be considered acceptable; as a short, medium, or long-term solution, it is not.

- The prison does not have enough training and education places: about 400 in the morning and again in the afternoon (see §7.1) for more than 1,000 prisoners.
- Drugs are still rife and while the prison now has an incentivised substance-free living wing, which has helped, there is too little support to help prisoners give up drugs. The system also needs additional external support and funding for this, as well as to improve the physical barriers to the importation of drugs.
- The housing crisis and shortage of approved premises³ mean that around 50% of the men released will be homeless and end up sleeping rough.
- All too often, it seems that short sentences do not help prisoners rehabilitate but rather (a) take away the fear of prison, and (b) cause prisoners to lose jobs, relationships and housing, creating a revolving door back into prison, given their lives on the outside have been so disrupted by the sentence.

The offender management unit (OMU) works hard to prepare prisoners serving life sentences and those on open-ended indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPP) for review by the Parole Board. However, the prison does not have any specific training or courses to offer them. The plight of the IPP prisoners is heart-breaking. There were 32 IPP prisoners in the prison⁴, all many years over their tariff. They report they are losing touch with friends and families, worry that the outside world has changed, making hard for them to cope when released, feel at odds with the rest of the prison population who have release to look forward to, and suffer from what amounts, in the view of the Board, to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

3.2 Main findings

3.2.1 Safety

Drugs are readily available in the prison and pose a threat to prisoners both from their effects and from the debt and criminality associated with their sale. The trade in drugs in prison is clearly lucrative for organised crime and requires increased external action.

That said, the prison has significantly improved its management of vulnerable and troubled prisoners, with a weekly multi-disciplinary safety intervention meeting (SIM), at which the needs of all such prisoners are assessed and action is initiated.

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3. *Approved Premises are premises approved under Offender Management Act 2007, which provide intensive supervision for those released on licence who present a high or very high risk of serious harm to themselves or to others.*
 4. *There is an inconsistency between the figures given to us by the prison about the number of IPP prisoners in the prison as of the end of February 2024 (33; see §2.2) and those provided by the OMU (32; see §7.3.1).*

3.2.2 Fair and humane treatment

After the best part of a decade, the prison is fully staffed, and prisoners are now getting out of their cells for substantial periods each day, although there are not enough opportunities for work or education. From the Board's observations, staff appear to have more confidence in dealing with prisoners and, partly as a result, the relationships between prisoners and staff seem to have improved.

The prison is clean and well maintained, although the showers on some wings are increasingly in dire need of refurbishment. The kitchen performs wonders with a very modest budget – less than the allowance for a (single) free school meal per prisoner.

A continuing concern is the conversion of 48 single cells to hold two prisoners. These lack any personal privacy and storage space for personal possessions and cannot ever be adapted to hold two prisoners in conditions that the Board would regard as humane.

Most serious by far, the continued detention of IPP prisoners long after they have served the tariffs that represent the punitive part of their sentences is inhumane. The prison is not able to provide these prisoners with much in the way of programmes, courses or support to help them progress towards release; instead, these men are, to all intents and purposes, being 'warehoused'. Talking with IPP prisoners can be heart-breaking, as they report themselves losing hope and fight, seeing their families drift away from them and suffering what amounts, in the view of the Board, to PTSD if they are unable to secure release on licence. This is despite universal recommendations that they are prepared for release, but no-one prepared to make explicit the conditions they need to meet or to quantify the risk to the community if they were to be released.

3.2.3 Health and wellbeing

Prisoners' physical healthcare provision is broadly on a par with that offered in the community. Fewer hospital appointments were cancelled, because escorts were more readily available.

The provision of mental healthcare is generally good and, pleasingly, the number of mental health referrals has dropped now that prisoners are getting out of their cells more. The waiting time to see a dentist has dropped by two-thirds.

3.2.4 Progression and resettlement

The prison offers a variety of educational courses, vocational training and offender behaviour programmes, but does not have enough places to allow every prisoner to engage in activities full-time. Prison offender managers (POMs) set sentence plans and direct and support prisoners to complete them, but their ability to do this is strained by an influx of prisoners serving short sentences.

Prisoners nearing the end of their sentences are helped in the process of leaving prison, known as going 'through the gate', by assistance in opening bank accounts, acquiring identity documents, contacting Jobcentre Plus and finding housing.

However, the housing crisis means that approximately half the prisoners are homeless on discharge and many face rough sleeping.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

One issue outweighs all the others: IPP prisoners.

When, in February 2023, the then Government rejected the recommendation of the House of Commons Justice Committee that IPP prisoners be re-sentenced, it committed, among other things, to ensuring all IPP prisoners had ‘bespoke sentence plans’ to help them progress towards release through establishing clear criteria. This has not happened and, apart from the dedication and professionalism of the prison’s offender managers, there is **nothing** to help IPP prisoners achieve release: no courses, no programmes, no psychological support... nothing. *‘These people... remain... in an unsustainable limbo.’*⁵

The continued detention of prisoners long after they have served the punitive part of their sentence can only be morally justified if they are given all the support they need to become ready for release and if the conditions for such release are clear and objective. This should not be conditional on their being able to demonstrate that they are highly unlikely to be a danger. The burden of proof should be reversed. **THERE IS NO EXCUSE – THE NEW GOVERNMENT MUST MAKE THIS HAPPEN.**

There are other significant issues, which are also a matter for the Prison Service, as highlighted in §3.1, above:

- The congestion and delays in the criminal justice system are having knock-on effects on the prison. So many prisoners are being held on remand in the category B local prisons that prisoners are being sent to The Mount to serve short sentences. They are not in The Mount for long enough to benefit from any training or rehabilitation, but managing their admission, induction and release on licence takes significant resources.
- The Mount is overcrowded, with too many prisoners held (9.3%) in double cells that are designed for only one person. As a temporary measure, this could be acceptable; as a short, medium or long-term solution, it is not.
- Drugs are still rife and while the incentivised substance-free living wing, has helped, there is too little support to help prisoners give up drugs. The delay in the Governor’s initiative to only allow single-use, tamper-free vapes (see §6.6.4 below) to prisoners, which would have been expected to reduce the opportunities to use Spice, apparently for administrative and/or contractual issues outside of his control, is regrettable.

5. Chair of the Justice Committee, Sir Bob Neill, 9 February 2023.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

The Board has four service-wide recommendations:

- The Prison Service should consider what can be done with existing resources to better support IPP prisoners (see §7.3.1).
- Significant funding is needed to improve The Mount's defences against drones and throwovers (where people from outside the prison throw parcels, which contain illicit items, over the walls, to be picked up by prisoners) by replacing vulnerable cell windows and installing a comprehensive umbrella of netting, which is currently wholly inadequate. Partial measures will not suffice.
- A system for the management of prisoners' personal property should be developed that (a) ensures a much greater degree of accountability and responsibility for the safekeeping of such property, especially when a prisoner is being transferred, and (b) supports this objective by facilitating modern day 'track and trace' location monitoring – ideally using hardware and software rather than, as at present, paper and card (see §5.9).
- A proper data recording and management system should be introduced to replace the current use of myriad internally constructed spreadsheets and PowerPoint documents that are isolated, inconsistent and require too much manual involvement when reports or information are called for (see §9).

TO THE GOVERNOR

The Board recommends that the Governor carries on with what he is doing, with major improvement visible in a number of areas. The proliferation of drugs remains an issue but, in the opinion of the Board, there is little more that The Mount itself can do without additional support in areas such as improved physical defences (see §3.3 above, §4.6, and §6.6) and – frankly – a better structured and resourced programme for those prisoners looking to come off (or stay off) drugs,

3.4 Summary of progress

The Mount has made huge strides forward since the Board's last annual report. The improvement in staffing numbers, experience and retention levels, resulting in noticeably better relationships with each other, prison management and prisoners, has been an undoubted success in the year, and we compliment all those who have been involved. The prison has fully re-opened and prisoners are getting out of their cells for decent periods and taking part in purposeful activities. It may not yet be at the standard it aspires to achieve, but the direction and pace of travel are right.

Evidence (sections 4 – 7)

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

The increasing number of receptions into the prison has created huge pressure on the reception team and the induction process generally, with the numbers of receptions rising from 40 a month to a routine 100. The reception area was initially created for a prison holding 400-plus prisoners and is now dealing with over 1,000, as well as an increased turnover. In the Board's experience, the reception and induction staff work exceptionally hard to process prisoner arrivals, frequently requiring them to work overtime in cramped conditions. This is not acceptable.

Additional problems have been caused by the body scanning machine being out of order for some time, requiring physical body searches. Also, late arrivals mean that stores have been closed, so not all the appropriate 'first night' equipment has been available, such as pillows and laptops (which provide all relevant information for the prisoner).

However, all the required processes appear to be carried out in terms of cell-sharing risk assessment, searching, healthcare interviews and property management (with the support of two very well-trained and efficient prisoners who are employed there). Despite these pressures, the prisoners with whom members of the Board have spoken and, indeed, followed their processing throughout, have been happy with their treatment and the information provided.

It should be noted that reception in the establishment received 'Green' for the bus-to-bed audit and 'Amber-Green' for both safety and security – a high rating in these areas and exceptional for a category C prison.

Once on the dedicated induction wing, prisoners have an informal orientation carried out by peer prisoners, then a formal educational assessment and one-to-one interview by information and guidance (IAG) to plan their educational and work pathways whilst in the establishment. Until recently these have been fairly meaningless, as there was little room for progress or work, but now that workplaces have been increased, prisoners are starting to feel the benefits. However, pathway plans cannot always be facilitated immediately due to waiting lists in the chosen areas of work.

A plan for all prisoners to have a 'tour' of the workshops and library as part of the induction process has recently been introduced. This has increased the number of applications for the workshops, although staff shortages mean that these tours and, indeed, the induction process cannot always be facilitated.

4.2 Releases

The increased churn rate of prisoners, caused by the introduction of the end of custody supervised license (ECSL)⁶, places significant pressure on the reception team and community offender managers (COMs). On one day recently, for example, there were 20 scheduled releases; on another, a prisoner had been told he would be released and had friends waiting for him outside, only for Probation to fail to provide his licence in time, a situation that was unacceptable – and wholly avoidable.

4.3 Suicide, self-harm and deaths in custody

4.3.1 Self-harm

On average, there were 27.5 incidents of self-harm each month. Typically, prisoners harming themselves do so more than once, so that the number of prisoners self-harming is significantly less than the number of incidents. Self-harm can be triggered by drug use (especially Spice, a chemical compound that mimics the effects of the active ingredient in cannabis), debt (often resulting from drug use), running out of vapes, frustrations with the regime and depression.

In November 2023, the prison introduced a new suicide and self-harm strategy. It aims to reduce the levels of self-harm and suicide by better supporting prisoners who are a risk to themselves, creating a rehabilitative culture and, crucially, training staff to understand how to identify the risks and triggers of prisoners at risk so they can be supported effectively.

Positive action has been taken to improve the completion and monitoring of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans, which are the key care planning process for prisoners identified as at risk of suicide or self-harm. The ACCT process requires that actions are taken to ensure that the risk of suicide and self-harm is reduced. All staff who have direct contact with prisoners are receiving suicide and self-harm (SASH) training, as are members of the Board.

All safer custody issues are managed by a dedicated safer custody team, which identifies and supports prisoners who are suffering from a variety of issues. The team co-ordinates with other functions in the prison, including wing staff, probation, mental and physical healthcare, drug treatment, activities and chaplaincy. All these support activities are co-ordinated through a weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM), where the progress of prisoners identified as needing support is monitored and further action initiated as necessary. At a recent SIM, the cases of 31 prisoners were reviewed: 3 were newly emerging safeguarding concerns, 18 were prisoners on formal challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs), used to manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence, and 10 were on ACCTs. Board members

6. *The ECSL allows lower-level offenders to be released before their automatic release date. Initially allowing qualifying prisoners to be released up to 18 days early (October 2023), it was extended to prisoners with between 35 and 60 days remaining in March and to 70 days in May 2024. The announcements are often made with little or no warning. Those not eligible include people convicted of sexual or terrorism-related offences, category A prisoners, and those serving a recall.*

attend the SIMs from time to time, to monitor the processes reporting that the discussions of vulnerable prisoners are well-informed, and that action is initiated and followed-up appropriately.

4.3.2 Deaths in custody

During the reporting period, there were 6 deaths in custody. All are deeply regretted, and our thoughts go out to the friends and families of the deceased. Reports from the Prisons & Probation Ombudsman (PPO) have been received for 4 of these:

- The first death was confirmed as suicide. The PPO felt that opportunities were missed to reopen an ACCT document. The prison's processes have since been reviewed and improved.
- The second death was established as being from cocaine toxicity 12 days after the person had been released from The Mount. The man concerned had a long history of substance misuse prior to sentence. While at The Mount he had been offered support by the Forward Trust's substance misuse and improving access to psychological therapies (IAPT) services but had declined to participate. On release, after initial contacts with Probation, the person missed appointments and was found deceased in his release accommodation, with illicit drugs in his possession.
- The third was confirmed as suicide. This person had never given staff any cause for concern, shown any signs of self-harm or suicide and had never been subject to an ACCT. The PPO report found no indications that staff should have considered him at a raised risk of suicide. His death came as a shock to those who knew him.
- The investigation into the fourth death, also suicide, identified a missed opportunity to put support in place when the prisoner said he felt suicidal, even though he subsequently told a mental health nurse that he was no longer hearing voices and had no thoughts of suicide or self-harm. The head of safety accepted that the ACCT should have been reopened as a precautionary measure and procedures have been reviewed since the death.

Of the other two deaths, for which PPO reports are still awaited, one was, apparently, self-inflicted, and the other, apparently, was drug related.

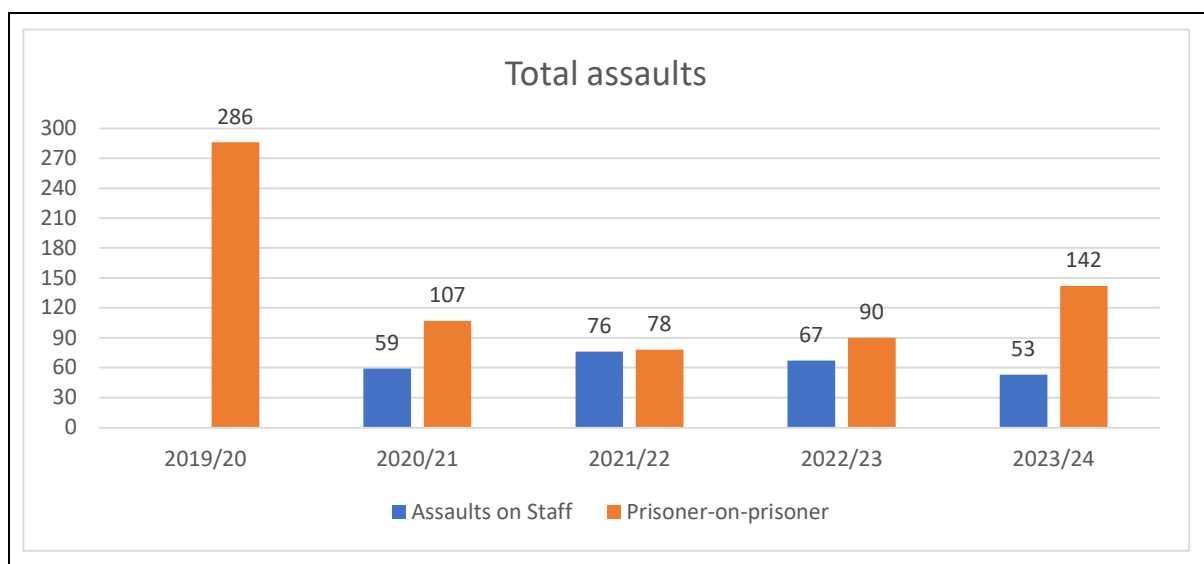
Work has been carried out to ensure that all staff are aware of and understand the medical emergency response codes and their responsibilities during medical emergencies. The head of safety has also implemented a localised training package for staff to assist with identifying risks, triggers and protective factors.

When prisoners are secured in their cells during the night, the risks of are heightened, despite the introduction of in-cell phones, laptops and TVs. With this in mind, the security department has introduced an updated night operating policy, which instructs staff on the procedures that must be followed to maintain the security of the prison and the safety of staff and prisoners during night state.

4.4 Violence and violence reduction

There were 53 prisoner-on-staff assaults on during the reporting year (compared with 67 in 2022-23), of which just two (10 in 2022-23) were classed as serious. The number of assaults varied from month to month, with a peak of 9 (1 serious) and a low of 1 assault (not serious). There is no apparent pattern or trend to the month-to-month variation.

There were 142 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in the reporting year (90 in 2022-23), of which 24 (10 in 2022-23) were classed as serious. The number varied from month to month, with a peak of 18 (two serious) in April and a low of 9 (1 serious in August 2023). Again, there is no obvious pattern or trend to the month-to-month variation, although in the Board's view, the overall increase is likely to be as a result of the greater free-flow and the increased incidence of drug use, with the attendant debt. This increase should **not** be used as a reason to reduce the greater opportunities for prisoners in terms of association and movement.



4.4.1 Support for vulnerable prisoners and safeguarding

The prison opened 289 ACCTs in the year (down slightly, from 298 in 2022-23), an average of 24 a month. The number opened varied somewhat from month to month, with a high of 35 in February 2024 and a low of 14 in March 2023. There is no apparent pattern in the month-to-month variation.

Board members review the majority of open ACCT documents and talk with prisoners who are being cared for. Generally, the standard of care appears to be good, with the ACCT documents evidencing that prisoners' problems are understood; that the prisoners are receiving the support they need; that healthcare is involved appropriately; and that there is proper case management.

The safer custody team is well led and staffed by dedicated, hard-working people. Almost always when members raise concerns about individual prisoners, we find that they are already known to and being managed by the team.

4.4.2 Self-isolating

At any one time, the prison will have up to a dozen prisoners who are not covered by the ACCT protocol but who have chosen to isolate themselves from the prison regime. These self-isolators are known to and managed by the prison's safer custody team and are visited from time to time by Board members. Prisoners typically put themselves behind their doors to try to force a transfer to another prison because they are in debt and/or are being threatened, because they fear rival gang members in the prison, or simply to be nearer to their families.

The safer custody team monitors these prisoners, tries to ensure they have at least a basic regime and endeavour to resolve their issues with moves to different wings. But some situations are intractable and/or prison transfers are hard to arrange so that, as of the end of March, one prisoner had been in self-isolation for a year, with two others having spent more than six months in isolation.

4.5 Use of force

All incidents involving the use of force (UoF) are monitored and recorded on the daily briefing sheet. Most prison officers use their body worn video cameras to record these incidents and footage is used to review the incidents in (mostly) weekly meetings.

There are around 40 incidents a month and for all of prisoners involved there is debrief, with a post-incident review completed with the prisoner by a member of staff who was not involved in the incident. Some prisoners refuse, but it gives those who take part an opportunity to reflect on the incident and how it could have been handled differently. The staff involved are also encouraged to complete a staff reflective practice review. All prisoners are seen by healthcare after being restrained, with an F213 form⁷ completed.

All these actions are recorded on the UoF action tracker, with hyperlinks to video and other evidence. There are follow-up monthly meetings to follow through plans of action and highlight both good and bad practice. Guidance and information are distributed to all prison staff through a digital content distribution system.

The most common reason for UoF is a prisoner's refusal to carry out an order, with one wing involved in more incidents than others. A deep dive is being initiated by the prison to establish reasons both for prisoners and officers involved.

There are currently 157 officers issued with PAVA spray⁸, but to date this has not been used in any incidents. There were 4 incidents in the reporting year in which a baton was drawn.

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7. *An F213 form records injuries to prisoners including those arising from assaults, accidents and unexplained injuries*
 8. *PAVA spray is an incapacitant spray similar to pepper spray but significantly more potent than CS gas. It is dispensed from a handheld canister, in a liquid stream and has a maximum effective range of up to 4m (13ft).*

Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP The Mount

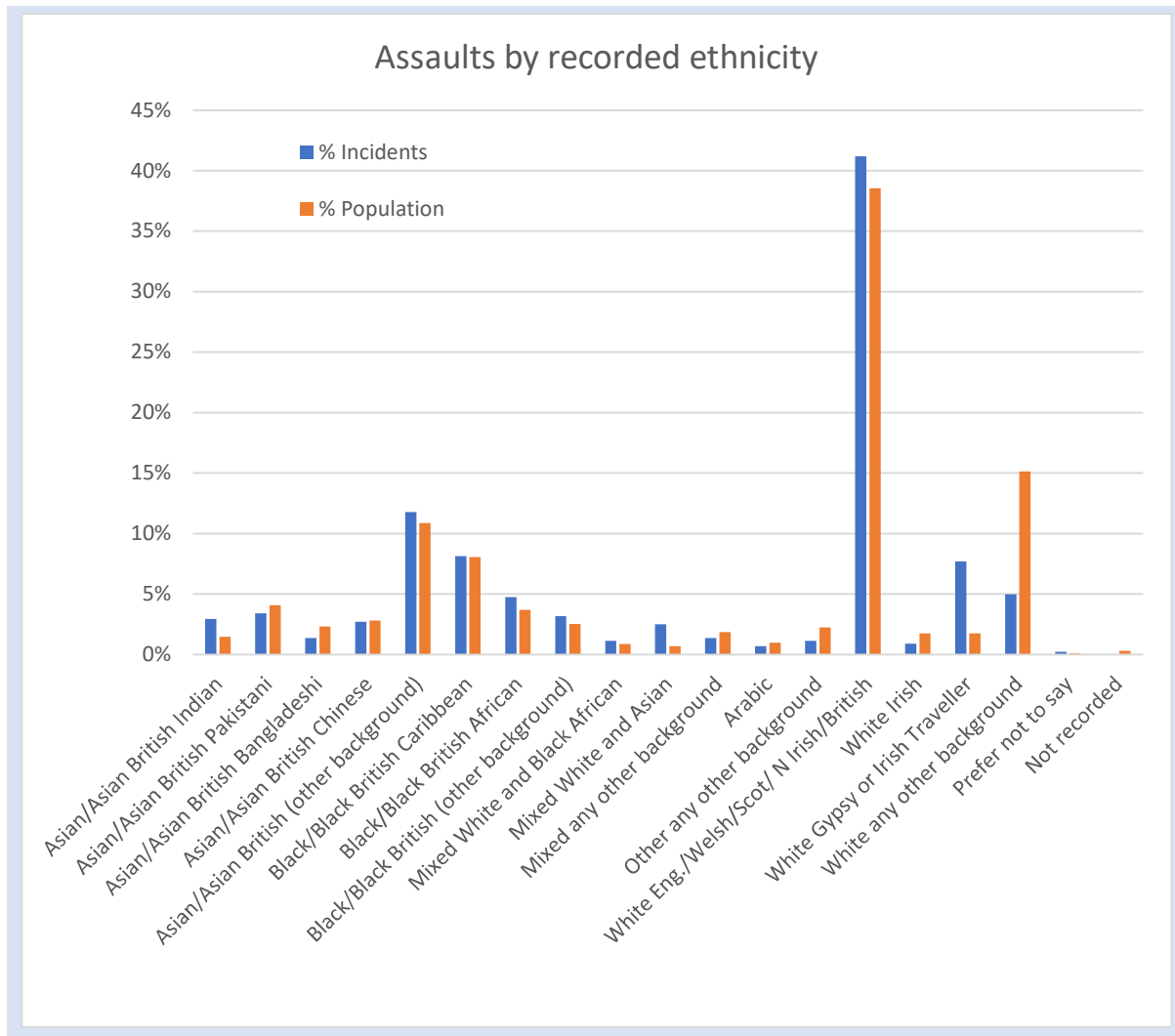
The statistics for January to December 2023 show a 30% rise in incidents to 444 from a total of 304 in 2022. This could be due to the increase in prisoner numbers, the fact that the prison had 'opened up' during the year, the use of drugs or a more fluid population.

Mth	Incidents	Planned	Unplanned	PPE	Prisoner taken to ground	Use of the Baton	Special accommodation	Full relocation	Healthcare attendance	C&R instructor attendance	Injury to staff	Injury to prisoner
Jan	39	10	29	35	4	0	0	Data not retained	Data not retained	0	4	2
Feb	43	5	38	36	8	1	0			0	2	1
Mar	38	4	34	22	5	0	1			0	2	1
Apr	33	6	27	18	2	0	0			0	0	1
May	45	7	38	25	5	0	3			0	2	2
Jun	17	3	14	21	2	0	2			0	1	1
Jul	24	2	22	14	3	0	1			0	2	1
Aug	38	0	38	11	7	0	2			0	3	6
Sep	37	1	36	12	2	0	0			1	1	1
Oct	48	2	46	28	5	1	0			2	3	4
Nov	42	2	40	18	8	0	1			7	2	1
Dec	40	4	36	24	8	0	2			1	0	2

4.5.1 Violent incidents by recorded ethnicity

Broken down by ethnicity, a large plurality (38.5%) of the violent incidents related to the 'white British' (W1) group. The seemingly disproportionately large discrepancy between population and incidents for the 'white other' (W9) group presumably reflects categorisation discrepancies amongst the various 'W' groups.

Ethnicity	Incidents		Population	
	No.	%	No.	%
A1 - Asian/Asian British Indian	13	2.9%	15	1.4%
A2 - Asian/Asian British Pakistani	15	3.3%	42	4.0%
A3 - Asian/Asian British Bangladeshi	6	1.3%	24	2.3%
A9 - Asian/Asian British (other background)	12	2.7%	29	2.8%
B1 - Black/Black British Caribbean	52	11.7%	112	10.8%
B2 - Black/Black British African	36	8.1%	83	8.0%
B9 - Black/Black British (other background)	21	4.7%	38	3.6%
M1 - Mixed White and Black Caribbean	14	3.1%	26	2.5%
M2 - Mixed White and Black African	5	1.1%	9	0.8%
M3 - Mixed White and Asian	11	2.4%	7	0.6%
M9 - Mixed any other background	6	1.3%	19	1.8%
O2 - Arabic	3	0.6%	10	0.9%
O9 - Other any other background	5	1.1%	23	2.2%
W1 - White Eng/Welsh/Scot/N Irish/British	182	41%	397	38.5%
W2 - White Irish	4	0.9%	18	1.7%
W3 - White Gypsy or Irish Traveller	34	7.6%	18	1.7%
W9 - White any other background	22	4.9%	156	15.1%
NS - Prefer not to say	1	0.2%	1	0.1%
NR - Not recorded	0	0%	3	0.2%



4.6 Preventing Illicit Items

As reported in the last annual report, the trafficking of illicit items into the prison remains a huge problem, with drugs and mobile phones being widely available.

The prison has tight controls over some methods of entry:

- All staff and visitors should enter via a strict (airport-style) security area. There are two body scanners and conveyor belt-style X-ray machines for bags and other items, although there are times when one or both are not operational. Body searches are also carried out.
- Visitors must first go to the visitors' centre and leave all bags, phones, etc, in lockers. They are then escorted across to the prison in small groups and subjected to the scanners and X-ray machines, plus searches by specially trained dogs. CCTV is used in the visits' hall to spot attempted passes.
- Mail is checked by the sniffer dog teams and Rapiscan machines.

Furthermore, the security department works hard to ensure that all staff are aware of the signs that prisoners are engaged in bringing in illicit items and that searches of cells are carried out to the required frequency. Substantial finds of contraband are made from time to time.

This said, the prison remains vulnerable because:

- It is close to the M1 and M25 (so on the route of County Lines⁹ drug dealers).
- The prison is surrounded by an airfield and housing estate, from which drones can easily be launched and throwovers made.
- Much of the prison is not protected by netting.
- Cells have window grills that can be loosened to allow access for drones or for the 'fishing' from cell windows of packages dropped by drones or thrown over. Mobile phones can be used from within cells to direct drones with precision to the right window. There are as yet no dates for the installation of new windows that would prevent this method of entry.

Drone activity and throwovers continue to be a problem. There has been an increase in finds, with a large quantity of contraband being seized. But the concern is that more finds might simply reflect more attempts to bring in contraband rather than greater success in preventing such traffic.

- Mobile phones are used from inside the prison to direct the drones to specific areas (even a particular cell) and, despite significant finds, it is currently proving impossible to stop the influx of illicit items entering the estate.

Finds of fermenting liquids seem to go in cycles, depending on the availability of ingredients, the presence of prisoners with brewing skills and, perhaps, the availability of other drugs. Overall though, finds of fermenting liquid have declined.

Much has been learnt and tried to prevent the supply of illicit items getting into the prison. But, as technology improves, it is a continuing battle for all establishments.

9. *County Lines exist where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police or local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The 'County Line' is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs.*

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The overall estate was clean and tidy (and no longer littered, as in the past). There is a continuing programme of repainting cells and common areas in the wings (as one Governor said, *'Prisons should always be nicely painted because paint's cheap and labour free'*). By contrast, the common areas in the administrative blocks where prisoners cannot work are looking shabby. The entrance and common areas on some wings have been made brighter by colourful murals painted by prisoners. The difference (and the effect on the 'feel' of improved wings) is noticeable, as are the artistic talents of a number of the contributing prisoners. The prison has spacious grounds with flower beds and lawns.

The doubling up of single cells continues to cause concern, and these hold 96 prisoners (9.3% of the roll). Prisoners in these cells share a forced intimacy without adequate privacy; there is not even enough space for prisoners to put away their personal possessions. It is not uncommon to see double cells, even purpose-built doubles, where prisoners have used bedding to create makeshift screens around in-cell toilets (although the prison does re-order and issue proper curtains from time to time). For a period, most newly arrived prisoners were not being issued with pillows for their first few nights, but this problem has now been fixed. We trust that the problem will not recur.

As always, showers on some wings need refurbishment. There is an on-going programme, but it does not keep pace with normal wear-and-tear.

The kitchen performs miracles to feed prisoners on a very modest budget. (To put this into context, the amount allowed per prisoner, per day, for ingredients is roughly two-thirds the cost of a McDonald's Happy Meal.) The budget is supplemented by food grown in the prison's kitchen garden. Prisoners say the portion sizes are good and the food is acceptable (*'Not bad for prison'*).

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit (CSU) is used to house prisoners who need to be removed from the prison's 'normal' accommodation for one of three broad reasons:

- for their own protection, such as, for example, needing to de-tox from heavy drug use or they are being or feeling threatened by other prisoners (Rule 45);
- they pose a threat to staff or other prisoners (Rule 53); or
- they have been adjudicated to have broken a prison rule and sentenced to a period of cellular confinement (Rule 55).

All prisoners in the CSU are visited daily by a Governor, GP, mental health workers and the chaplaincy. The segregation of prisoners, other than those on cellular confinement, is reviewed within 72 hours and then at least fortnightly at meetings, in each case attended by mental health workers and observed by an IMB member. The

staff working in the CSU are of a very high standard and the attention, understanding and care that these officers give to the prisoners are exemplary.

Over the past year, the prison has become increasingly adept at moving prisoners back from the CSU into normal accommodation, usually to a different wing. Some prisoners at particular risk are transferred to other prisons, but transfers can take significant time to arrange.

Over the period under review, 11 prisoners (up from 6 in the previous year) were placed in 'special accommodation' (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety) for short periods. Of these:

- four had persistently damaged prison property;
- three had made continued and serious threats to staff;
- two had assaulted staff;
- one had engaged in persistent non-compliance; and
- one had barricaded themselves in the CSU.

There were 8 'dirty' protests, undertaken by seven different prisoners – up from 6 in 2022/23.

Just two prisoners held in the CSU were sectioned, both of whom returned to the main part of the prison, whilst 18 prisoners were held in the CSU for 42 days (the limit allowed without external authorisation) and over. Typically, these prisoners need to be transferred to another prison. There is no mechanism to make this happen so, instead, transfers must be negotiated between prisons, which are, understandably, reluctant to accept prisoners with challenging behaviour or serious issues. The longest of these was 242 days. Another prisoner spent 51 days in the CSU then, again, later in the year, spent a further 52 days there. A third prisoner was released from the CSU after 83 days. These should be viewed as exceptions, not the rule.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

The prison has been able to increase its number of officers so that it is now fully staffed. This has been achieved, in part, by increasing the retention rate. Levels of sickness have been reduced. The terms and conditions of prison staff have not been improved. Rather, the improvements in staffing seem to reflect good leadership by the Governor and his SMT in creating an environment in which staff feel supported and valued. Wing staff can be seen out on the wings engaging with prisoners and not lingering in offices, as has happened in the past. The consequences are two-fold: staff are better able to understand and deal with prisoners as individuals, and the jobs of the staff have become more rewarding.

The prison is resuming key work, which largely stopped during the pandemic lockdown. Efforts are being made to improve the quality, as well as the quantity, of key work sessions.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Over the period of this report, 95 discriminatory incident reporting forms (DIRFs) were submitted. Of these, 38 were determined not to be to do with discrimination issues; of the remaining 57, two were upheld. Another two were partially upheld and of these, one was about the behaviour of a staff member and one the behaviour of a prisoner. The upheld matters concerned acknowledgement of religious days, removal of offensive graffiti on a religious drawing and respect for a religious object.

These numbers are significantly down on the previous year, when 127 forms were submitted, 81 of which were found to be concerned with discrimination issues and six were upheld.

The prison ran a very active programme of events covering a wide range of equality, diversity and inclusion matters. These included topics such as the needs of care leavers, the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, trans-gender issues and marriage and civil partnerships, to name a few.

Diversity and equality wing reps, for whom training is ongoing, meet every month.

However, the prison has few facilities for disabled prisoners (see §6.4), wheelchair access across the estate is very poor and there are long distances between some residential wings and facilities such as healthcare, education, the visits' hall and workshops, which are often open to the elements.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy caters for 31 beliefs, with the aid of visiting faith leaders. Those aligning to Christianity are the largest group, while the second largest are those following Islam. The chaplaincy meets its statutory duty of providing one hour of worship for each faith each week: Islamic services are held on Friday, Roman Catholic Mass on Saturday and other Christian services on Sunday. The chaplaincy also runs religious study groups. Each wing has a Christian and a Muslim chaplaincy representative, who liaises with the chaplaincy and organises (monthly) meetings on the wings.

All new arrivals at The Mount are met by a member of the chaplaincy within 48 hours. Likewise, prisoners are visited as they approach release. A member of the chaplaincy visits the CSU every day and also attends ACCT reviews, when wanted by the prisoner concerned, and provide support to all those affected by a death in custody.

The chaplaincy co-ordinates requests from prisoners to attend funerals or visit seriously ill family members. It checks with security about whether or not such a visit would be an acceptable risk and also with residential to see if escorts would be available.

At the end of the reporting year, the position of head of chaplaincy role was vacant, there was no Church of England chaplain, and the Roman Catholic priest was part-time. The prison benefits from support from volunteers from outside the prison.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The Incentives scheme at The Mount is barely on the Board's radar. We receive few complaints about the application of the policy and, anecdotally, the prisoners accept the policy is applied fairly.

Our one concern is that the Incentives scheme warnings and downgrades can have markedly asymmetric effects: for a prisoner on a determinate (fixed length) sentence, a warning or a downgrade will serve as an incentive to improve behaviour but will have little lasting effect; but for an IPP prisoner, a warning could lead to the Parole Board denying them progression towards open conditions or release and so mean an extra year of imprisonment. Fortunately, Governors and experienced wing staff are aware of this asymmetry and do what they can to ensure that the effects are not disproportionate.

5.7 Complaints

Prisoners are encouraged to see if a problem can be resolved by speaking to a key worker or officer on their wing before submitting a complaint. Complaint forms are available to all prisoners on all wings and completed forms are collected each weekday from secure mailboxes. Prisoners should receive a response to their complaint within five working days of the complaint being logged. The complaint must be answered by someone who is capable of providing an adequate and meaningful reply. Prisoners have the option of referring a complaint to the Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations (IPCI, which is part of the Prisons & Probation Ombudsman¹⁰) if a complaint is not resolved after an appeal.

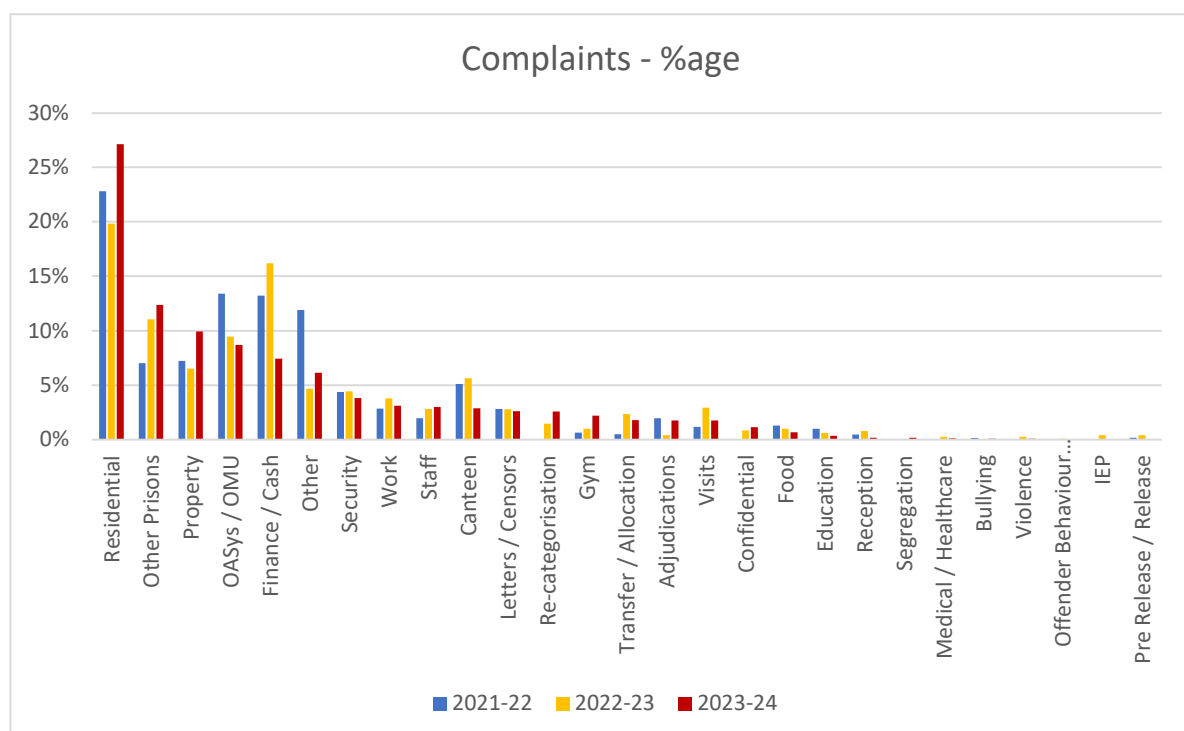
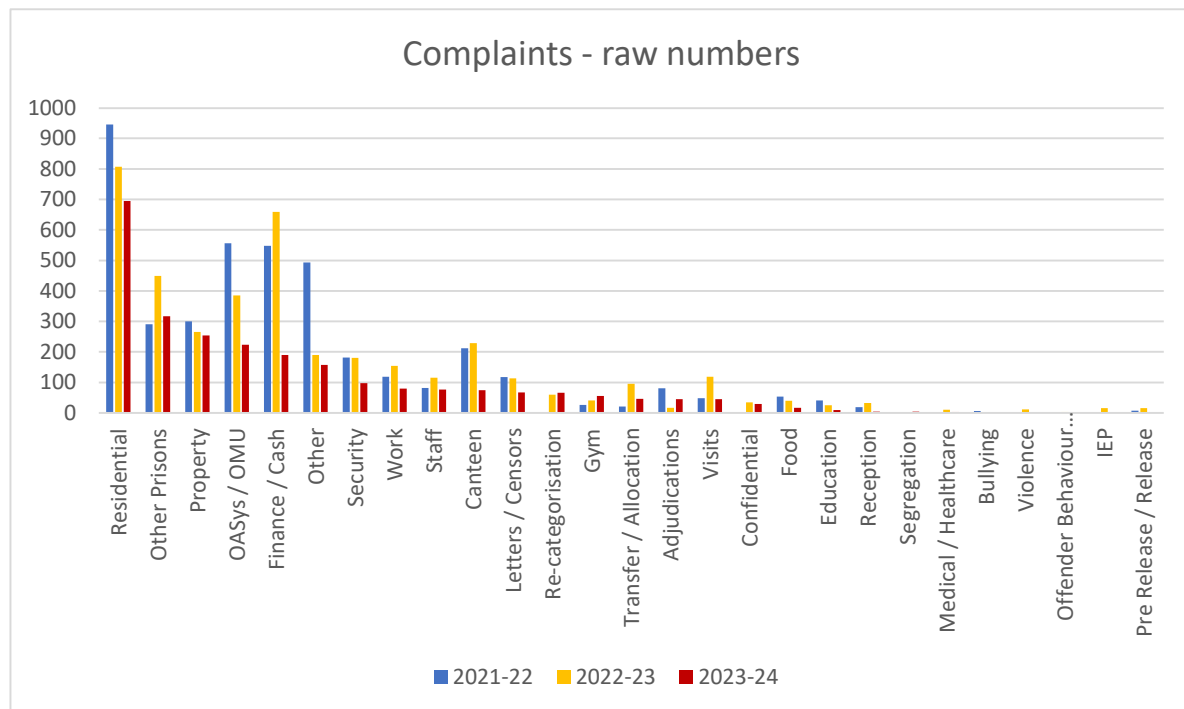
In the reporting period, there were 2,561 prisoner complaints. This is a significant reduction - 43% - compared with the number of complaints submitted in the previous reporting year and includes (in the major categories) falls of 68% in complaints relating to canteen, 65% in finance/cash, 48% in work and 42% in OASys/OMU (sentence related). In the Board's experience, this reduction likely has two causes. First, the prison is now fully staffed, and the staff can be observed out on the wings engaging confidently with the prisoners. Secondly, the prisoners are more content and less inclined to raise grumbles now that the prison has been re-opened and they are out of their cells and able to engage in activities.

Of the complaints, 89% were answered within five working days. The categories most complained about were: residential, 27%; issues relating to other establishments (often property related), 12%; OASys/OMU, 9%; property (within The Mount), 10%; and finance/cash, 8%. Other notable categories included: work and education, 4%; issues with staff, 3%; access to the gym, 2%; canteen discrepancies,

10. *The Prisons & Probation Ombudsman carries out independent investigations into complaints and deaths in custody. The purpose of these investigations is to understand what happened, to correct injustices and to identify learning for the organisations whose actions are overseen so that the PPO and IPCI make a significant contribution to safer, fairer custody and offender supervision.*

3%; and transfers to other prisons, 2%. Hearteningly there were a total of just 4 complaints about violence and bullying.

Looked at graphically:



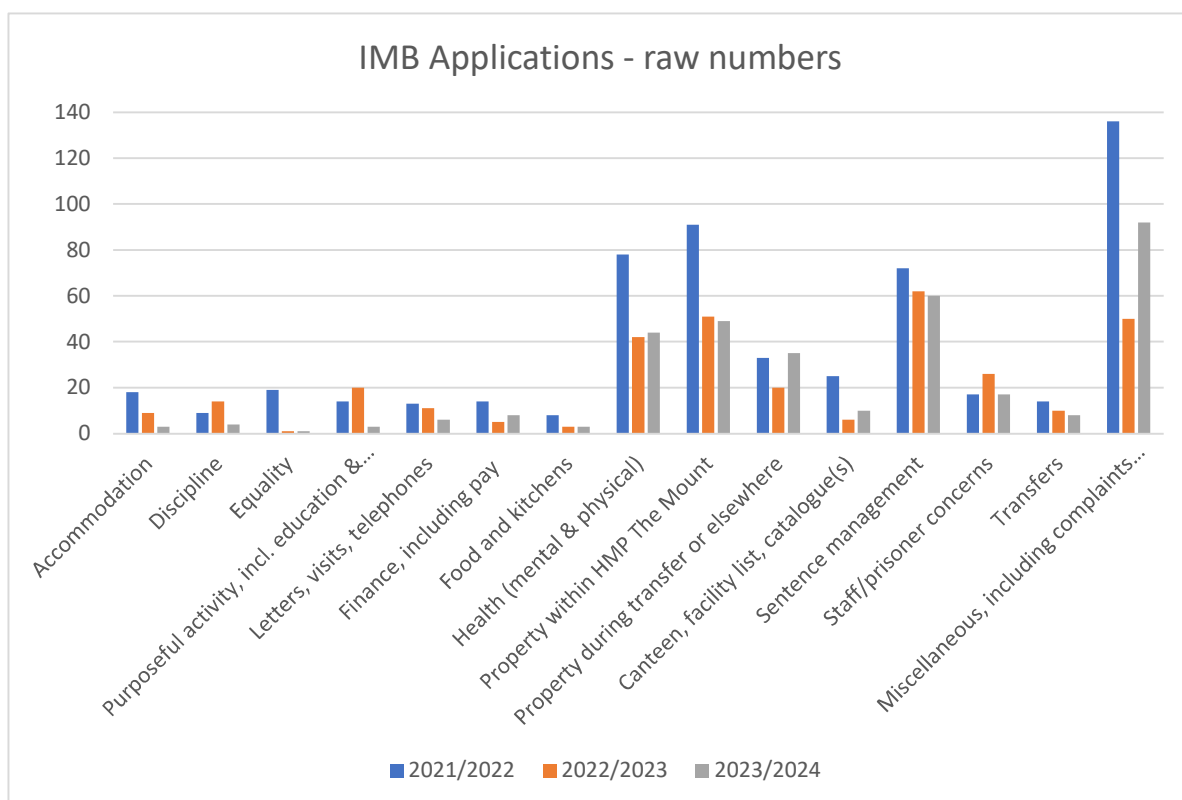
Complaints about healthcare are treated separately and there were 147 such complaints in the year. To put this into context, there were in excess of 40,000 prisoner-healthcare contacts during the reporting year.

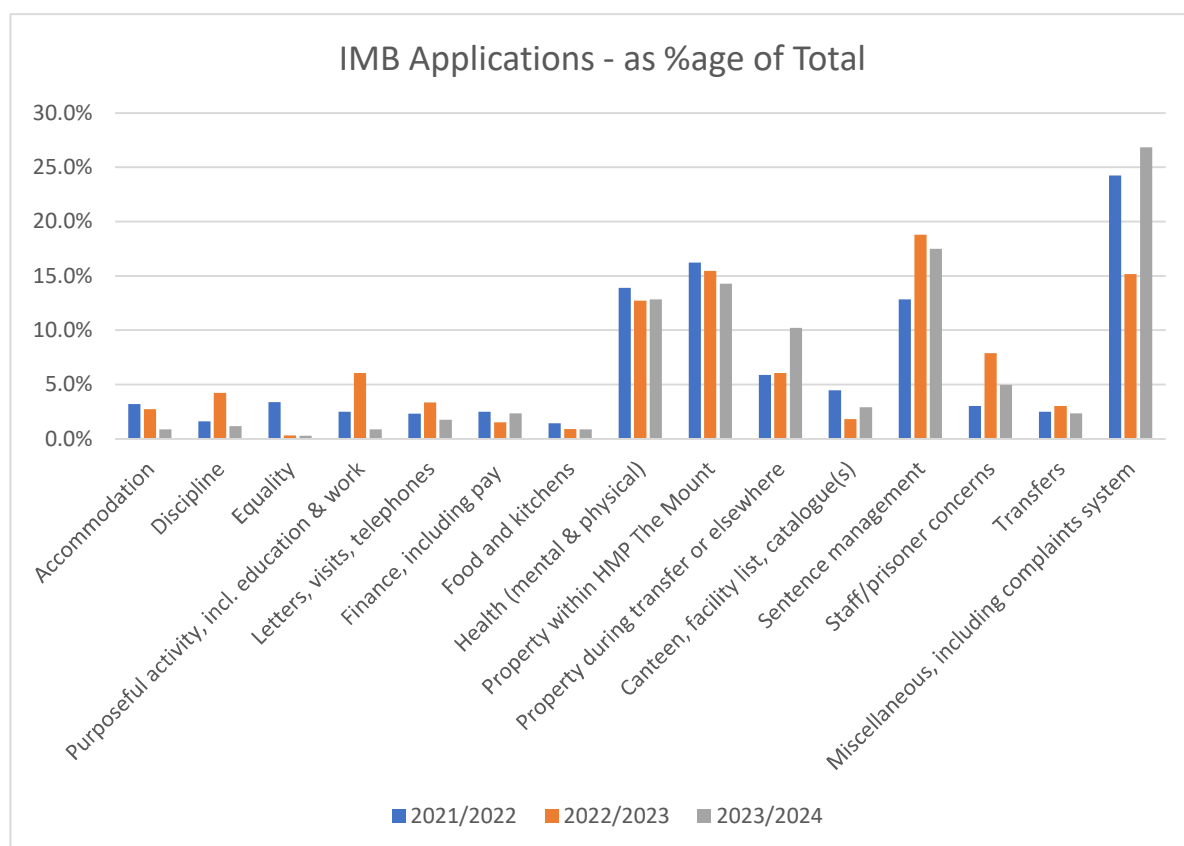
5.8 Applications to the IMB

As the graphs below show, the reduction in the number of complaints is – as would be expected – also reflected in the number of issues considered by the IMB at The Mount and signifies the generally improvements in atmosphere and relationships referred to elsewhere in this report. These include reductions in the number of applications (prisoners' written submissions to the IMB) in the two years between 2021-22 and 2023-24 of:

- 79% relating to purposeful work and activity
- 63% relating to food and the kitchens
- 43% relating to finance and pay
- 44% relating to physical and mental health
- 46% relating to property (within the Mount)

The only category where there has been a rise (see §5.9 below), is in relation to the items of prisoners' property that are mislaid, or fail to be transferred, during the transfer process, and this is an area that should receive greater focus.





5.9 Property

The IMB receives more applications about property both within the establishment and on transfer than any other issue – 24.5% of the total in 2023-24.

Many of the issues within the establishment are dealt with fairly promptly on the wing and mostly relate to property being lost (or stolen) when a prisoner is removed forcibly from their cell and the cell is not secured. It is not always possible to secure a cell immediately if the cell is shared (which they are in the majority of cases where property goes missing). However, it is not acceptable for prisoners' property to be lost in this manner, particularly as it frequently leads to claims for financial compensation, which are borne by the prison.

There has been a considerable increase in the complaints about property missing on transfer to the prison. These problems mostly arise from the quantity of property that some prisoners are able to accumulate and possess in prison and the limitations and/or inability of the transport system to accommodate their transfer. The property allowance is three bags and one large item, but some prisoners – especially those on longer sentences - have up to 15 bags, which need to be transferred with them, accommodated on arrival, or forwarded by the previous prison.

Some of the transferring prisons also seem to have a somewhat cavalier attitude to property, with prisoners arriving without their property, as well as a lack of response to complaints and apparent inaction in pursuing lost property, even denying they have received correspondence from The Mount when it can be shown that emails

were received and read. The privately run prisons are disproportionately represented in this group. Despite the best efforts of the complaints and correspondence team, the Board Chair all too frequently has to contact their counterpart in the transferring prison to trace lost property – often (fortunately) to good effect.

Our report last year stated the following and this still applies: ‘The Board hopes that a new national policy regarding the management of transfers of prisoners’ property is being developed and would welcome a system where all prisoners’ property travels with them when transferred. This would also benefit from a greater degree of tracking, tracing and handing over responsibility for prisoners’ property.’ We have seen no sign that such a scheme is being considered, never mind implemented, but the time saved and reduction in compensation for HMPPS from no longer having to defend, or pay out for, justified claims would be considerable. Such a system would:

- ensure that staff at the sending prisons are held responsible for the prisoners’ property that is being handed on;
- require that any property held at the sending prison after a prisoner is transferred is sent to the receiving prison within a reasonable time, e.g. a month;
- contractually require the prison transport companies to transport all the property that prisoners are entitled to have in their possession; and
- include monitoring to overcome the situation whereby problems originating in the sending prison become apparent only in the receiving prison.

All these problems are fixable without new systems, but HMPPS should *‘Develop much better systems and procedures for the transfer of prisoners’ property’*. The sending prisons need to take much more care when clearing cells and forwarding property. In the medium term, a modern track-and-trace system using hardware and software rather than the current paper and card is needed.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Healthcare services are provided by Practice Plus Group (PPG), one of England's largest independent providers of private, insured and NHS healthcare. Dentistry is provided by Community Dental Services. The two services work collaboratively.

Healthcare has its own complaints system, but prisoners can and do complain to the IMB. This said, prisoners make relatively few complaints to do with healthcare and those that are made are mostly concerned with delays to hospital appointments, consequent treatment and changes in medication. It is not uncommon for newly arrived prisoners to have been prescribed painkillers and other drugs with significant value in the prison's illicit economy that the prison's healthcare team finds not to be necessary, whilst some prisoners will demand branded rather than generic drugs.

There was a significant increase in Code Reds¹¹ from 45 in 2022/23 to 99 in 2023/24. Most of these Codes are called for a small number of regular self-harmers. The support given to these self-harmers is discussed in §4.4 above.

There was also an increase in Code Blues¹² from 128 in 2022/23 to 288 in 2023/24. Code Blues are typically called as a result of serious drug use. In the Board's view, the increase probably reflects, in part, increased drug use within the prison and, in part, a changing formulation of the Spice in circulation in the prison, which can contain serious intoxicants as well as synthetic cannabinoids.

A total of 1,148 appointments were scheduled at outside hospitals: of these, 69 (6%) were cancelled by the prison because escorts could not be provided, which is a lower number than in previous years. To put it into context, 117 appointments were cancelled because the prisoner refused to attend, 185 were cancelled by the hospitals and 162 were 'clinically re-prioritised'. Waiting times for external hospital appointments are broadly in line with those in the community.

The longest waiting times had been for dentistry; but these were down from 42 weeks at the start of the year to 12 weeks at the end, with 2 full-time and 2 ad hoc dentists.

6.2 Physical healthcare

The services available for prisoners, according to need and application are:

Triage (nurse-led, with prisoners assessed before being referred to a GP, if necessary)

GP	Sexual health	NHS health checks	Psychology
Long Term Conditions	Optician	Medications	Psychiatry
Ultrasound	Physiotherapy	Mental health	Dentistry

11. A Code Red is called when a prisoner needs urgent attention for a bleeding wound.

12. A Code Blue is called when a prisoner is having trouble breathing. Healthcare staff attend with different packs, according to the condition called.

6.3 Mental health

The service has continued to be available seven days a week, with good effect. Face-to-face consultations take place, as well as telephone calls for welfare checks on non-urgent referrals and reviews. The use of the in-cell telephone continues to allow mental health staff to keep in touch with clients and also allows contact with the Samaritans.

The number of referrals fell from 985 to 751 (a 22% reduction). In the Board's view, this improvement is probably because the prison has opened up and prisoners are spending more time out of their cells, in work or education, and interacting with their fellow prisoners, all of which could be expected to improve prisoners' mental health.

6.4 Social care

The prison has few facilities for disabled prisoners. Wheelchair access to the older wings is not catered for at all, including there being no access to showers. Narey wing has showers in each cell but no adaptations for wheelchair users. There are two adapted cells on Nash wing.

The prison consults with the local authority's social services team if a prisoner needs an assessment. Some aids can be provided to assist a prisoner, but wheelchair access across the estate is very poor and there are long distances between some residential wings and facilities such as healthcare, education, the visits' hall and workshops. There is no specialist support or special unit within the prison and no overnight medical care. Palliative care is very limited within healthcare and any end-of-life care needs to be provided outside the prison.

6.5 Exercise, regime

Recently, the regime has relaxed considerably. Prisoners now get substantial time out of their cells for association and domestics (time spent on personal hygiene, calling family or socialising, etc) or to attend activities every day. The prison has been operating a proper category C regime¹³ for the first time since 2017, when the regime was first restricted to cope with staff shortages before even more draconian restrictions were imposed because of the pandemic.

The physical education unit is currently working well and is back to the way it was before Covid, with all prisoners getting gym time.

All prisoners have TVs in their cells, in-cell telephones for authorised numbers and internal calls, and access to social video calls (previously known as 'Purple Visits'), whilst all residential units have their own small outdoor exercise areas, some with outdoor gym equipment.

Personal laptops with constrained functionality have been provided to prisoners where they have access to make applications such as to healthcare, receive

13. *Meaning that prisoners should be able to engage in resettlement activities such as preparing for work, gaining qualifications, studying, gaining work experience and getting themselves ready for release or to prove themselves ahead of re-categorisation/transfer to a category D (open) prison.*

responses to applications, apply to education courses and recreational content, as well as giving real-time access to their spends accounts.

Saracens Rugby Club has continued to run its rugby/personal development courses twice a year. The prison also featured in an ITV documentary, *Grand Slammers*, in which players from England's 2003 Rugby World Cup-winning team trained prisoners - most of whom had never played rugby before - to take on a staff team. Tottenham Hotspur Football Club also ran a football and personal development course and fielded World Cup-winning former players (Argentiniens Ossie Ardiles and his former team-mate Ricky Villa) to present certificates to prisoners who completed the course.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

We address elsewhere the actions taken to try to reduce the supply of drugs coming into The Mount (see §4.6). But the prison also needs to address the demand for drugs, which continues to be a serious problem.

This was recognised in the prison's 2023 drug strategy, which was created after a visit from the National Drug Strategy Team (NDST) and it set out three goals:

- To restrict supply
- To reduce demand
- To build recovery.

6.6.1 Incentivised Substance-Free Living (ISFL)

As part of this strategy, the prison has created an incentivised substance free living wing for prisoners who wish to become drug-free. Those on the ISFL wing can access support from peer mentors and the Forward Trust (which has the contract to support prisoners with substance abuse problems), have more time out of their cells, have opportunities to engage in work or education and are paid a small weekly 'wage' to acknowledge that giving up drugs is hard work. Prisoners on the ISFL wing are subject to random drug testing and are removed from the wing if they fail a test, are seen to have used drugs or alcohol, or otherwise fail to respect the wing's rules.

6.6.2 Forward Trust

The execution of the prison's strategy to reduce the demand for drugs has been hampered by the inability of Forward Trust to provide the support needed. Individual Forward Trust workers are dedicated, hard-working and do excellent work with their clients but, overall, there are two major issues with the support the Forward Trust has been able to provide:

- First, and outside the control of the Forward Trust, it is no longer contracted or funded to run proper 12-step programmes for recovery from substance abuse.
- Secondly, it has been unable to recruit and retain enough staff to deliver the support it is contracted to provide. This has resulted in, for example, case workers being asked to carry heavy burdens triaging new arrivals, working with clients and providing advice and support to prisoners being discharged.

In addition, there has been no peer support manager to train prison peer supporters and health and wellbeing champions (HAWCs). The Board suspects that the funding the Forward Trust receives is inadequate to pay the salaries required to attract the required number and quality of staff.

In October 2023, the NDST made a follow-up visit. They were happy with the work that had been carried out after the initial visit and put forward suggestions for further improvements. They highlighted the failures of the Forward Trust to deliver the peer support programme for substance misuse as a significant risk to the establishment.

6.6.3 Current status

This progress notwithstanding, drugs remain too readily available and too much in demand at The Mount. Prisoners' health and wellbeing are at risk. Code Blues are called daily and result in the attendance of healthcare and, depending on the seriousness of the situation, paramedics from the already stretched Ambulance Service. Drug dealing within the prison leads to violence and debt (with families outside the prison often threatened to cover the debts). Above all, a prisoner leaving prison with a substance use problem is significantly more likely than a sober prisoner to breach the terms of their licence and/or re-offend and be re-imprisoned.

6.6.4 Local initiatives

In addition to the creation of the ISFL wing, we were encouraged by the Governor's plan to introduce a ban on the use of reusable/rechargeable vapes within the prison. This was in an attempt to prevent their being used to take Spice and their replacement by single-use vapes that cannot be tampered with to allow the addition of NPS-infused paper.

Whilst there were clear hurdles – not least the fact that the disposable vapes are more expensive for prisoners to buy and arrangements would need to be made for the used vapes to be recycled – the Board fully understood the reasons for the initiative and recognised that a very commercially attractive deal had been done to secure the initial consignment of vapes. The Board was, therefore, disappointed to be told that the programme would not be going ahead. We understand that the Governor had been prevented from acquiring more than the initial order because the supplier approved by HMPPS could not match the price and quality of vape obtained independently by the Governor. We have recently learned that a solution has been found, which will allow the trial to proceed, and continue if successful.

In the opinion of the Board, this initiative is welcome and should be pursued.

6.6.5 Summary

It is clear to the Board that whilst The Mount should continue to take action to reduce both supply and demand, and HMPPS should facilitate the provision of improved physical barriers (such as comprehensive netting rather than the current, wholly inadequate patchwork, and the replacement of vulnerable windows in cells), a broader approach to address the fact that drug trafficking into prisons is a major source of revenue for organised crime groups. Wider action against drug trafficking by organised criminal activity will be needed if this problem is to be overcome.

6.7 Soft skills

Prisoners have opportunities to train to develop and then use peer mentoring skills, whether this be as Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to offer confidential emotional support to fellow prisoners), HAWCs, Shannon Trust Mentors (teaching prisoners to read), OMU workers, diversity and chaplaincy representatives or classroom assistants. In the past, the prison has had a HAWC on every wing, offering basic but highly valuable advice and support on a variety of matters, including giving up substance abuse and basic health issues. Unfortunately, the number of HAWCs has dwindled, as the Forward Trust has been without a staff member to train and supervise them.

The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) continues to help prisoners retain and build their relationships with their children and other family members.

A Pride in Prison and Probation (PIPP) group was established last year to support LGBTQ+ prisoners.

Therapy dogs continue to visit the prison and are much appreciated, and their sessions are now better structured and supported.

Prisoners derive satisfaction from working to repair bikes for sale by Sue Ryder and from the sale for charity of woodwork items. More prisoners have signed up to cell work, producing high-quality needlework for sale for charity.

The prison also runs wellbeing days for staff, which are much appreciated. (The most recent day included, amongst much else, a Morris Dancing display for staff; it would be a fun challenge to give such a display to the prisoners.)

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

The contract provider for education is People Plus and the education accommodation consists of a main block, a small additional skills centre and 3 vocational workshops.

There are approximately 400 prisoner places available in the morning and afternoon, most of which are half-time. These consist of English, Maths and IT courses, as well as a range of other subjects, including Art and Music. Most courses are accredited and certificated.

The vocational courses on offer in the workshop complex are plastering/bricklaying, carpentry and motor mechanics, with plumbing recently introduced. Barbering is available in the Skills Centre. There have been problems with the employment of vocational instructors, but this situation has improved recently. These vocational courses are very popular with the prisoners as they give them a genuine trade.

Attendance in education was around 55% through the reporting period. This figure has improved recently, as prisoners are challenged more regularly for non-attendance both on the wings and in classes and the general prison culture moves towards being more employment oriented.

The achievement target for English of 52% was reached and/or exceeded and a 50% target for Maths was also achieved throughout the reporting year. Achievement in vocational courses of 69% was also reached. There was poor allocation for essential digital skills' courses for reasons unknown.

All prisoners are assessed as part of their induction process and those below Entry Level 3¹⁴ are offered places on education. The non-readers should be supported by Shannon Trust prison mentors, but even though mentors have been sourced (mainly having come from other prisons), they are unable to operate either through lack of access to learners or through lack of co-ordination. However, a co-ordinator is being actively sought and, hopefully, this position will change once they have been employed.

A neurodiversity support lead was appointed in September in order to assist those with educational and other needs across the prison, which is a very positive move.

Prisoners are able to enrol for Open University (OU) courses and 34 were enrolled in October (the start of the OU academic year). Some have been transferred out and others transferred in - there are currently 25 prisoners studying. They are able to have OU as a workplace or be released from other workplaces in order to study. They have to use the computers in the library in order to type up assignments, as their in-cell laptops are incompatible, but time prior to assignment due dates can be allocated.

The library holds around 11,000 books and subscribes to a number of magazines, with a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction publications available¹⁵. It is open all day from Monday to Thursday, plus Friday mornings, with evening sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It is well used, with library sessions being announced on wings and officer escorts provided.

Storybook Dads runs very successfully from the library. These are now videoed with an 'Under the Sea' backdrop so prisoners can read stories to their children and is very popular. The library also runs a book club, where 20 copies of each chosen book are provided by the charity Prison Reading Group, which the prisoners can keep. This is also very popular. Fine cell embroidery workshops operate from the library, which are increasing in popularity.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Since our last annual report, there has been a marked improvement with instructors in all workshops. Many have a real 'buzz', which prisoners like and benefit from being part of. It seems unfair to single out examples but, in the Board's view, the bike shop, motor mechanics, plastering, bricklaying, plumbing and barbering stand out. At the opposite end of the scale, the double-glazing shop is not popular, because it

14. *Entry Level 3 is equivalent to a GCSE English grade below 1 (G). It's a stepping-stone qualification to achieve GCSE level for adults who learn better with practical, real-life examples.*

15. *The most popular genre remains 'True Crime'!*

does not lead to a qualification or a route to work outside. Where qualifications are given, these are NVQ Level 1¹⁶, which is a starter level rather than Level 2¹⁷, which would enable a man to work in the trade concerned.

DHL continues to employ workers to complete canteen packs for other prisons. New staffing has made this a more popular and pleasant workplace, where prisoners are incentivised to complete to targets.

The bike shop, where bikes are refurbished for the Sue Ryder charity shops, provides good skills for the prisoners, as does the woodworking shop, where they mostly complete projects for local businesses.

The double-glazing workshop has always struggled to have enough work but, finally, secured a substantial order, only for this to be suspended when the workshop developed a leak after a prisoner climbed onto – and damaged – the roof. It took **more than 6 months** for it to be repaired by Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL), during which time the orders could not be fulfilled, the toilets and electrics were out of action and working time for the prisoners was lost. This delay was outside the prison's control, but nonetheless was unacceptable.

The prison also offers close supervision centre (CSC) site-safe, banksman and traffic management courses, as well as short courses in fork-lift truck driving. These can lead to external employment and are much appreciated.

Redemption Roasters is a specialty coffee social enterprise operating 10 coffee shops in London, a roasting facility at The Mount and 4 barista academies in other prisons. Its USP (*'Reducing Reoffending Through Coffee... Every bag sold helps reduce reoffending in the UK'*; www.redemptionroasters.com) reflects its commitment to reducing reoffending and reintegrating prison leavers into society.

It was intended that they would offer employment for prisoners on release, (23% of retail staff are prison leavers), but as of the end of February 2024 they have yet to offer employment to a single former prisoner from The Mount¹⁸. This may be due in part to the fact that all of the Redemption Roasters outlets are in London, whilst (see §2) *"The resettlement service offered by The Mount is intended for prisoners from Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire"*.

We have some concerns regarding the existing contract with Redemption Roasters and are pleased that a new one is being considered. We hope that this will address some of the shortcomings that we identified, especially regarding (a) an increase in the number of prisoners employed at The Mount, as there is space to do so, (b) a smoother, more efficient pathway to employment on release, and (c) a substantial increase in the payments to The Mount to compensate the prison for the costs of providing the facilities and the utilities required to operate the roastery.

16. A Level 1 qualification is equivalent to having a GCSE at grades D–G or 1–3.

17. A Level 2 qualification is equivalent to having a GCSE at grades A*–C or 4–9.

18. Since the end of the reporting year, 1 prisoner has taken up an offer of employment at one of Redemption Roasters' London coffee shops.

7.3 Offender management, progression

In our last annual report, we stated that the OMU and, in particular, the ability of the prison to help prisoners progress through their sentences towards release with a fighting chance of rehabilitation, were hampered by staff shortages and an excessive workload as consequence of the crisis in the criminal justice system.

The staff shortages have been largely addressed in terms of numbers, but the excessive workload continues. Delays in conducting criminal trials have meant that the category B local prisons have filled up with prisoners on remand so that those who would normally have served their time in local prisons are being sent to category C prisons such as The Mount. This adds significantly to the offender management and custody workloads, as the effort needed to process someone serving a 12-week sentence is not much less than that needed to process someone serving a 12-year sentence. Staff at The Mount have even reported having to simultaneously process the arrival of a prisoner into The Mount and their soon-to-be forthcoming discharge. POMs are much more visible on the wings, but some prisoners still complain that they find it hard to arrange to meet up with their POMs, with the excessive workload being the reason why.

In this context, it is very much to the credit of the OMU team that it consistently meets deadlines for re-categorisation reviews and Parole Board hearings. It is also only fair to add that some prisoners speak highly of the support they have had from their POMs.

7.3.1 Life and IPP prisoners

There are currently 32 IPP prisoners in the Mount (1 category B, 28 category C, and three category D), of whom 21 have been recalled. Their index offences are:

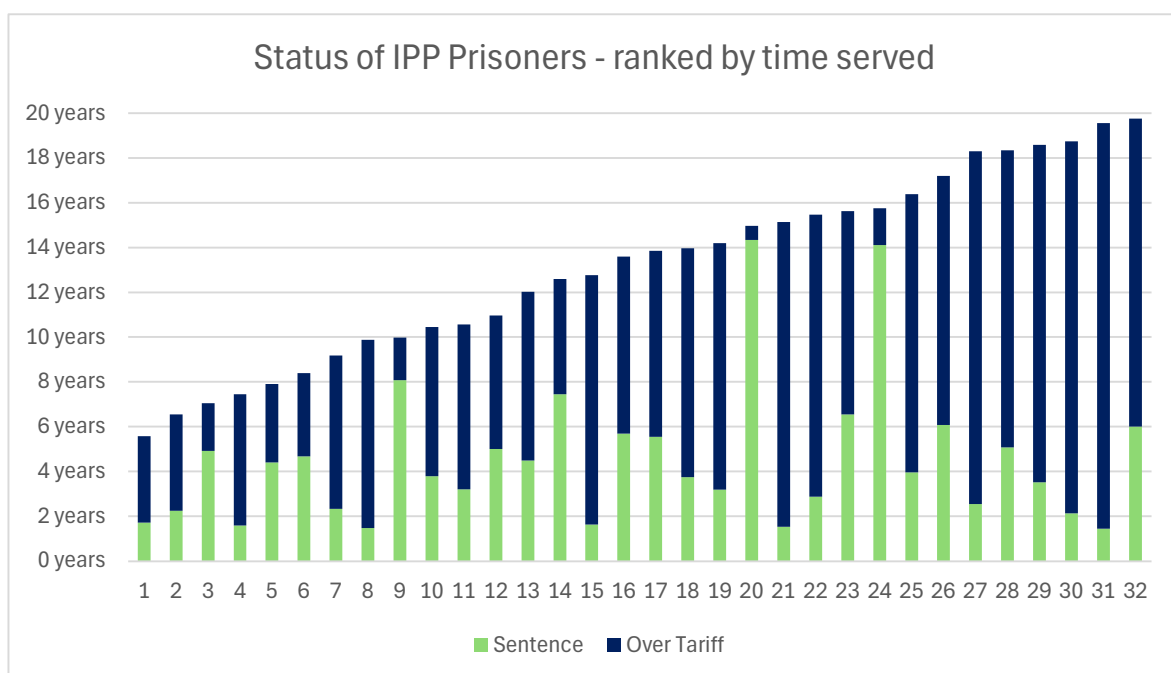
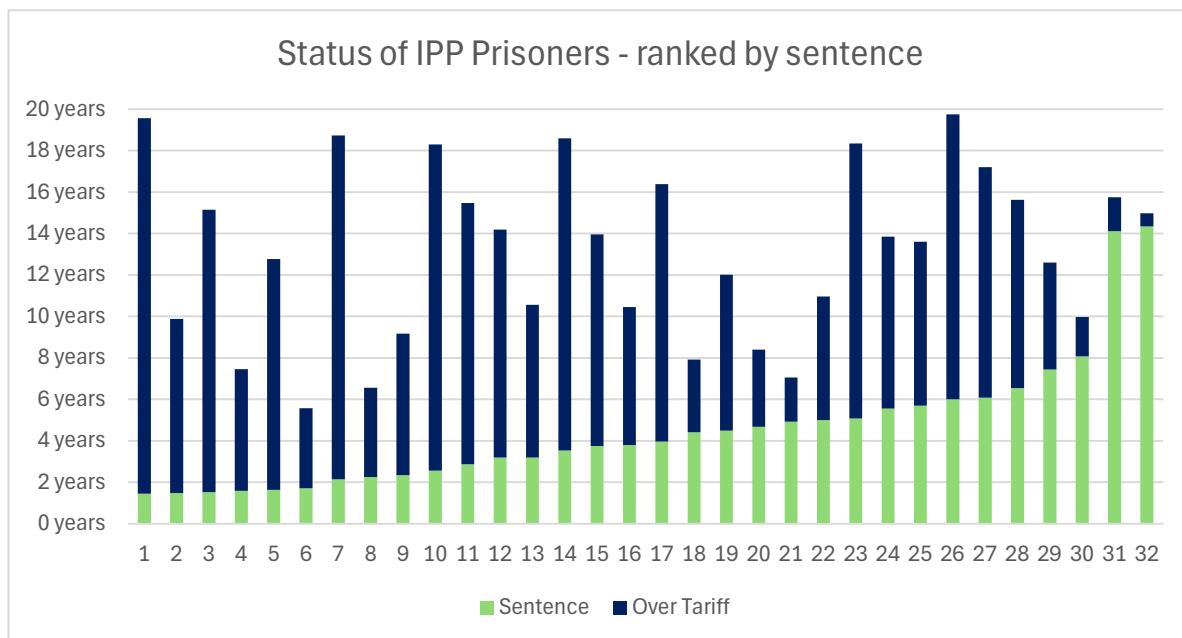
- Various wounding and assault charges: 15
- Robbery and conspiracy to rob: 5
- Arson: 3
- Aggravated burglary: 3
- Attempted murder: 3
- Firearms: 2
- Dangerous driving: 1

Analysing the data reveals some interesting facts:

- The average tariff to be served was 4 years and 6 months, with a minimum of 18 months and a maximum of 14 years and 3 months;
- The average time **actually served**, to the end of March 2024, is 12 years and 11 months, with a maximum of 19 years and 6 months (for someone sentenced to a tariff of 18 months!);
- The average time served over tariff is 8 years and 5 months;

- More than one-third (11 of the 32) have never been released. Of the remainder, the time spent on licence before being recalled varies from 1 month to 11 years and 4 months, with an average of 3 years and 5 months.

Looked at graphically:



A number of these prisoners have served the punitive part of their sentence, the court-imposed tariff, have good prison records, sometimes overcoming drink or drug addictions whilst inside, and often where relevant parties, i.e. the COM, POM and prison psychologists, **all** believe that release on licence is appropriate. But they remain inside, with no pathway to release, and no-one willing to quantify the perceived risk to the community if they were to be released.

Talking with IPP prisoners can be heart-breaking. They report that they lose hope of release: *'I feel exhausted, drained and have no fight left.'* They feel they are losing touch with their families: *'Families walk away because they don't know when you are going out.'* They struggle if they are released on licence: *'Everyone has moved on, and you are so alone in the community.'* They are uncomfortable being surrounded by people at very different stages in their sentence, younger, often still engaged in criminality and, crucially, with definite release dates. Above all, they find appearances before the Parole Board to be stressful and the disappointment of being denied progression emotionally and mentally crushing.

The Parole Board recently decided to order an additional psychological assessment for one prisoner, which had not been requested prior to the hearing as it should have been. The POM described the direct impact that this delay in consideration of his case had on the generally well-behaved prisoner's mental health as akin to PTSD. There was nothing more that he or The Mount could have done, yet they are left to deal with the consequences.

The Mount offers prisoners good support in preparing for Parole Board hearings and IPP prisoners speak highly of their POMs. But The Mount has little to offer IPP prisoners: no courses, no programmes and no dedicated psychological support. To a very large extent, IPP prisoners are just being warehoused. This is not intended as a criticism of the prison per se; the prison is not resourced to do more.

In 2023, in his reply to the Justice Committee, the then Secretary of State promised that the Prison Service would work *'with individual IPP prisoners to identify the most appropriate pathway and to provide bespoke sentence planning'*.

The reality at the moment is far from this ideal, and we will monitor what, if any, success there is in providing IPP prisoners with the support they need to progress.

7.3.2 Programmes

The Mount offers some offending behaviour programmes: the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP), for relatively low-risk offenders; Building Better Relationships (BBR), for prisoners convicted of intimate partner violence; and Identity Matters, for gang members. Prisoners speak well of these programmes and anecdotally seem to have some impact: one prisoner who defined himself entirely as member of a London post-code gang when he arrived at The Mount said that the Identity Matters programme had helped him change his life around.

7.4 Family contact

The frequency of social visits was increased in January, when increased staff numbers allowed, and visits now take place in the mornings and afternoons on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, and afternoons only on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. There are no visits on Fridays, as staff are needed to distribute canteen and escort prisoners to religious services. Up to 28 prisoners can have visitors at any one time. Each prisoner is allowed three adult visitors, plus up to 3 children. (Prisoners with more than 3 children can apply for them to visit.)

Family days (with fewer prisoners and more space and activities for children) take place once a month. The first family day for prisoners with children who have special needs was held recently, and it is aimed to run such visits every 3 months.

Social visits can be booked online or by phone and prisoners' families almost invariably say that bookings are easy to make, and that staff are helpful.

A visitors' centre, where visitors can wait to be called into the prison and which offers light refreshments, is run by volunteers from the Hertfordshire Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders (HACRO). They do much to make visits pleasant and less stressful and their support is much appreciated.

All prisoners now have telephones in their cells so that they can speak to their friends and families, privately and at suitable times. Prisoners can also send and receive emails over their laptops (www.emailaprisoner.com), but this service is expensive.

7.5 Resettlement planning

The prison offers good basic support to prisoners about to be discharged. Prisoners are helped to acquire identity documents, such as a driving licence, to open a bank account, to make an appointment with Jobcentres Plus, to secure continuing support for substance abuse issues and to find housing. A weekly meeting is held where prisoners can speak to all those able to help them with these issues. Housing remains the greatest challenge and, despite considerable efforts from the prison housing team and COMs, roughly half the people leaving the prison are homeless, with many ending up sleeping rough. We also learned recently of one person who was released early to homelessness under the ECSL (see §4.2), but who has already been recalled twice.

7.5.1 ROTL (release on temporary licence)

The Mount has had the ambition of releasing men on temporary licence so that they can work in the community. A lot of good work has been done by the Reducing Reoffending team to raise the profile of the ROTL scheme both inside and outside The Mount. There are opportunities with local employers, and letting men out to work on ROTL would be good for the men themselves, helping them to integrate into society before their release, and would lift the mood of the whole prison. However, a number of procedural issues have made this very challenging. These include the high churn rate of prisoners and the moving of many prisoners who would have been candidates for ROTLs to category D prisons as a result of the rising prison population. It is hoped the prison will overcome the process barriers that have prevented this happening¹⁹.

19. It is worth noting that since the end of the reporting year, some progress has been made, with one prisoner starting a ROTL opportunity towards the end of May.

The work of the IMB (section 8)

8. Monitoring involvement

During the reporting period, the work of the Board has normalised following the difficulties of the pandemic, with a full monitoring visits' timetable in place and members conducting their duties in line with this. The visits consist of one member on duty every week, including observing CSU reviews, and two members dealing with applications weekly. There have been 2 or 3 minor Covid outbreaks, when members have been advised not to visit certain residential units, but currently there are no reported cases.

Rule 45 reviews in the CSU have been observed in person on all but a few occasions.

Three members of the Board have resigned – two due to health issues and one for personal reasons – with another on leave. Recruitment has been patchy. Two new members were appointed during the year, one of whom is already doing monitoring visits, but the other resigned after appointment as the demands of the role had not been made sufficiently clear. The most recent completed round, in November 2023, led to two successful applications, but the first then failed vetting due to a perceived (but unexplained) conflict of interest whilst the second withdrew during the security approval process due to a change in personal circumstances.

We are also due to lose another member at the end of 2024, as they will have completed 15 years of service as an IMB member, so it is to be hoped that the current recruitment process will allow us to add to our complement. Whilst the initial signs were good, with five people having expressed an interest in joining the Board, two withdrew and one was unsuccessful at interview.

The IMB Secretariat should look more closely at the application process, which takes a long time and can be opaque. It can also be frustrating when a new candidate, having successfully passed through the IMB selection process, is then placed in a 'holding pattern', often for many weeks (or, indeed, months) whilst their security clearance is confirmed within the Ministry of Justice.

8.1 Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	18
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	13
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	428
Total number of segregation reviews monitored	193

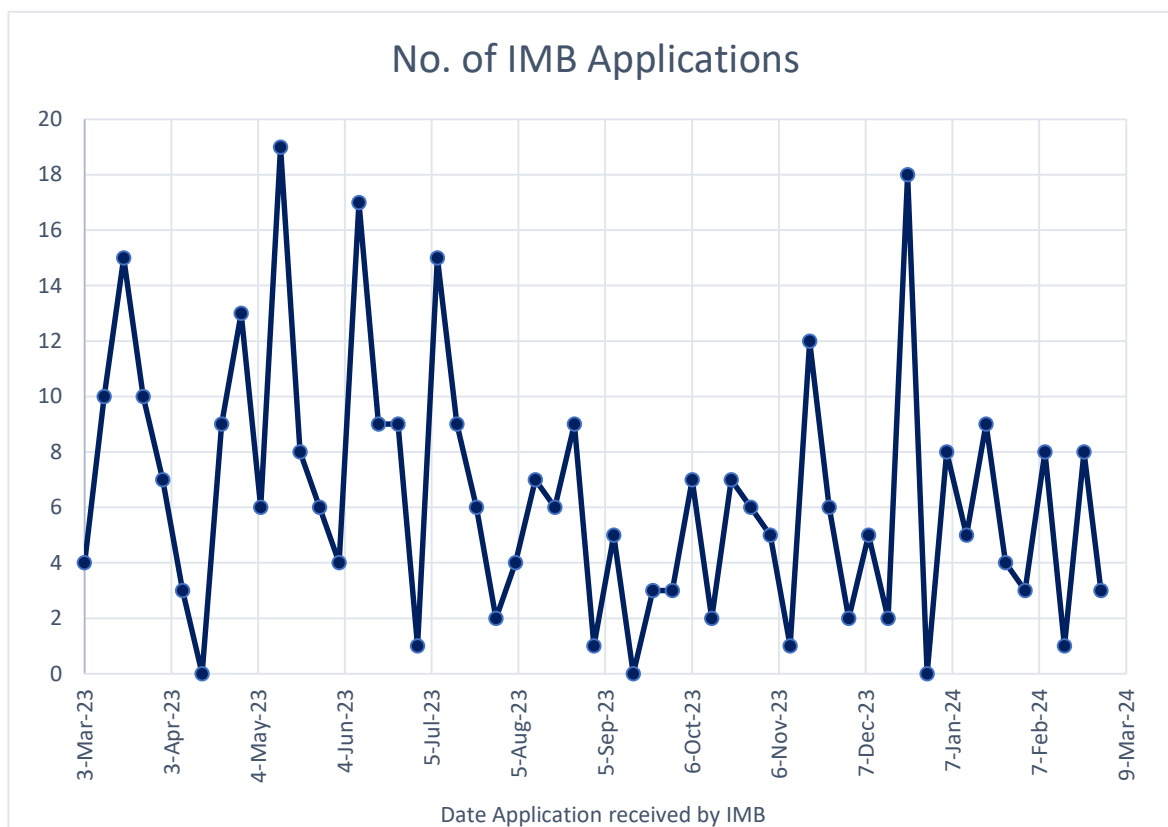
8.2 Applications to the IMB (including via the 0800 telephone line)

Code	Subject	2021/2022		2022/2023		Current - 2023/2024		
		Paper	0800	Paper	0800	Paper	0800	In Person
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	8	10	3	6	3	-	-
B	Discipline, including adjudications, Incentives, warnings and reviews, sanctions	3	6	7	7	3		1
C	Equality	11	8	1	-	1	-	-
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library & time out of cell	7	7	10	10	1	1	1
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	4	9	3	8	6	-	-
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	1	13	5	0	2	2	4
F	Food and kitchens	6	2	1	2	2	1	-
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	32	46	19	23	38	2	4
H1	Property within this establishment	45	46	39	12	46	1	2
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	8	25	19	1	32	1	2
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	4	21	1	5	7	3	-
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release, re- categorisation	21	51	35	27	50	5	5
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	5	12	8	18	17	-	-
K	Transfers	2	12	6	4	3	1	4
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	109	27	29	21	83	8	1
Total applications per category		266	295	186	144	294	25	24
Total number of applications		561		330		343		

Notes 1. The 0800 number ceased operation as of 1 July 2023

2. In-person approaches resulting in an application previously not recorded separately

As the graph demonstrates, the number of applications received by the IMB can vary dramatically – as can the complexity of the issue raised – but averages 6.8 per week (compared with 9.3 last year and 7.9 in 2021-22), showing the progress being made more generally. There is no apparent pattern or trend to the month-to-month variation.



8.2.1 Potential digitalisation of the IMB application process

After it was announced that the 0800 line provided by the IMB would be withdrawn – on 1 July 2023 – consideration was given to whether or not it would be possible for this option to be added to the prisoners’ in-cell laptops, and we consulted with a number of other IMBs where this had been done. They had all experienced a significant increase in the number of applications when it was first introduced, although the volume quickly dropped to more ‘traditional’ levels. We were willing to ‘take this on the chin’ if it made sense to do so, especially given the Governor’s understandable desire to reduce the amount of paper in circulation in The Mount.

However, and after considerable thought, it was decided not to proceed with a trial:

- the custodial management system (CMS) that we would need to rely on does not lend itself to the IMB application process. It is adequate for making simple requests (e.g. ordering meals or requesting an appointment with healthcare), but does not have the flexibility to allow the prisoner to set out the issues that we are asked to look into; and
- there was, apparently, no way for the Board to extract the data from the CMS, so we would need to continue with the existing manual record keeping.

9. Data

During the preparation of this report – the first for the new Chair – we were surprised by the difficulty we have had in obtaining the data we needed. This is not due to any lack of willingness by staff to assist us, but in the way that key information is recorded and stored. For example:

- It was often the case that information we needed had to be manually extracted from the 12 monthly reports that are prepared by the SMT and added together; each monthly summary was, itself, created by reference to the Daily Briefing Sheets, meaning that 366 separate data points had to be physically drawn out to produce each single outcome.
- For example, we wished to show the operational capacity of The Mount, after allowing for cells that were out of use, and track the number of prisoners on the roll to see how full the prison was over the course of the 12 months under review – how ‘hot’ it was running. The fact that this basic information is not readily available other than at a moment in time and would require 1,098 manual entries to show this meant that it was impracticable to produce and analyse.
- The recording of complaints – on a single spreadsheet – is barely fit for purpose, notwithstanding the generally diligent and professional approach of the team that has to use it. Even the inclusion of simple filtering does not facilitate more than the most basic analysis, and errors and omissions may not get picked up.
- The Daily Briefing Sheet, referred to above, the key operational document informing senior management of events in the previous 24 hours and alerting them to potential issues in the prison, is created overnight by the night orderly officer. According to one of them, it is *‘a bit of a nightmare’* and *‘just one of many checks and checklists we need to do on nights...[with] new stuff added on a weekly basis.’* It takes *‘a good 60 to 90 minutes a night’*, requiring information to be extracted from various systems, none of which appears to be linked in any way. It also involves calls to the wings and to the care and separation unit (CSU), with the volume of work depending on how much is provided by the day staff. As a result, key data may be missing or wrong. As a simple example, the Unlock Roll adjusted for the number of Discharges and Receptions may simply not produce an accurate forecast of the expected Total Lock-up that day!

The fact that such a crucial source of information for the Governor and the SMT is produced in such a way and doesn’t allow for aggregation (other than by adding another manual process) that would show patterns and/or trends is, to us, a source of concern – as well as a missed opportunity. Although the Board is not aware of any incidents where decisions have been made on the basis of incorrect or incomplete information leading to material adverse consequences, we do believe that this is a significant vulnerability that should be addressed.

Clearly, the creation of such a data information platform is not something that a single prison such as The Mount could (or should) establish. Moreover, given the time and investment that would be required and the patchy record of large-scale

public sector IT systems implementation, there will be a wholly understandable reluctance to commit to the creation of such a system across HMPPS. However, we believe this is necessary and, indeed, vital if prisons such as The Mount are to be able to operate as efficiently and effectively as they should. Properly designed, this platform would:

- ensure that the data is collected, kept and used securely, efficiently and cost-effectively;
- remove many of the mundane tasks of data entry, increasing productivity and reducing inputting errors;
- facilitate the efficient extraction of data, whether for one-off matters or for repeated/longer-term studies; and
- above all, allow the senior management of prisons, including The Mount, and indeed HMPPS more generally, to better understand what is going on in the prisons from relevant data and to allow them to make decisions and take actions based on information that is timelier and more accurate and where trends can more easily be identified and understood.



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