



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Low Newton

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

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty.

The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention.

OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment.

The IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

Low Newton opened in 1965 as a Remand Centre with four wings holding young men up to 21 years of age and a discrete wing for women of all ages on remand and sentenced.

The prison was re-rolled as a women's prison in 1998 when it was refurbished. It now consists of eight residential wings together with general prisoner use areas e.g. healthcare, education and workshops.

One wing is for the induction of new prisoners. One houses prisoners taking part in programmes designed to address mental health problems, especially those on the Psychologically Informed Planned Environment (PIPE) programme.

Another wing which opened in 2022 consists of 24 individual modules within an outdoor area for low-risk prisoners judged ready for greater autonomy. One wing is for prisoners serving longer sentences. The remaining four wings are general purpose. There is a small segregation unit with a capacity of three prisoners.

Low Newton holds women of all ages from 18 years upwards, both those on remand and those who have been sentenced. It includes those serving short sentences to those serving licence sentences and also restricted status (high security) women.

The maximum number of prisoners that can held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime, known as the operational capacity, was 298¹.

The actual number of prisoners has gradually been increasing due to a number of women being held on short sentences. At times during the reporting year the prison has been full and unable to take more prisoners.

Most cells are single occupancy with a small number of double occupancy cells. Adult prisoners and young offenders are integrated. Risk assessments are carried out before it is decided on which wing a young offender should be located.

During the period of this report there has been a change of Governor; the new Governor came into post in January 2024 and is developing a new strategic view for the prison.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- The prison is seen by the Board as a reasonably safe environment for prisoners and staff, with staff having a good knowledge of the prisoners.
- Prisoners are still arriving late and are often the last to be dropped off having been in a van full of men on their journey.
- The number of prisoners with severe mental health issues is the main cause of the increase in the incidents of self-harm and assaults with a lot of the increase down to repeat offenders.
- The use of body worn cameras was inconsistent but this has now been rectified with a consistently high number of incidents recorded.

Fair and humane treatment

- The accommodation is kept clean and is looked after.
- Segregation is used for as short a time as possible. Sometimes it is for punishment but it also has a role as a quiet and supportive space.
- The Board considers that generally relationships between staff and prisoners are good.

Health and wellbeing

- There continue to be a significant number of prisoners with mental health problems; although good work continues to be done by the prison's mental health team, including encouragement of prisoner input, it is not always fully staffed and to some extent it is firefighting rather than being able to implement longer-term treatments. This is an issue that has continued from previous years to concern the Board.
- Throughout the year prisoners have reported delays in accessing healthcare; despite some attempted improvements, the delays continue.
- The Board welcomes the return of the charity Junction 42 to the art room in the education centre. Many prisoners had expressed concern that they weren't able to use the room as they had previously.

Progression and resettlement

- Recently a new Head of Learning and a new Local Education Manager have been appointed to oversee Education. Senior management in the prison are supporting the promotion of literacy across all areas with the library at the forefront.
- The Learning and Skills manager has been successful in gaining accreditation for various vocational activities in the prison.
- The Board is concerned about those women sent to prison on short sentences which doesn't allow for meaningful work to be done with them.
- The Board is also concerned about the small number of prisoners released without accommodation to go to which can result in a quick return to prison, some of whom are subject to the assessment, care in custody teamwork (ACCT) process on release (ACCTs are the tool used to provide support to those at risk of self-harm or suicide).

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

Why are so many prisoners who present with severe mental ill health and personality disorders continuing to be sent to prison?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

Can funding be sought to provide and install a body scanner?

There are many instances of custodial transport services creating further trauma for women and adversely impacting reception processes. How can this be improved?

TO THE GOVERNOR

The Governors routinely answer questions from Board members at our monthly Board meetings, however, the following questions remain:

What plans do you have to improve prisoner access to healthcare & mental health support?

For some time now the IMB have not had the opportunity to attend adjudications; how can we work to improve this situation over the next year?

How do you see our relationship improve over the course of the next year?

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister		
Issue about movement of a prisoner with severe behavioural difficulties.		A review has been undertaken of the circumstances involved.
Concern as to when more flexibility on Friday release of prisoners will result from new legislation.	Legislation and guidance have been published.	There are a larger number of prisoners released on a Thursday.
To the Prison Service		
Capital funding is needed to update various facilities, including CCTV.		The projects are acknowledged as being either needed or helpful additions, but no funding is available.
Issue about drugs search policy in the women's estate.		HMPPS only has authority to search male prisoners who are suspected of internally secreting illicit items. Other measures are available in the women's estate.
Transport arrangements so that women are	Contracts and processes are in	Women are still arriving late or having suffered abuse by male prisoners on the van. This has a

not disadvantaged in comparison with the male estate.	place to mitigate this.	knock-on effect with staff having to remain in reception with an effect on the prison regime.
To the Governor		
How to prioritise the key workers' scheme against other staff demands.		Staff demands will always vary, although contact with the prisoners is a priority.
How can the Board have better oversight of adjudications and good order or discipline (GOoD) reviews.		The Board is notified each week of any reviews taking place and when.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Prisoners often arrive at the prison late. Sometimes the women have been transported in a van with men who have been verbally abusing them. The women often arrive distraught having had to wait while the men are dropped off first. One recent late arrival had taken seven hours to get from Workington via Carlisle, Newcastle Crown Court, HMP Holme House and HMP Durham.

The late arrival at the prison can mean that the right staff and services are not available for the prisoner to be processed correctly. Prisoners awaiting transport to court are sometimes subject to delays in being collected. One prisoner who should have been at court for 10am wasn't collected until 11.30am and still had a long journey to go.

The induction process is staggered over a few days to allow the women to absorb a large amount of information. This is of particular relevance to those women who arrive not having expected to be sent to prison when they left home in the morning and are more concerned with their family and children.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

The table below shows an analysis by month of the number of recorded incidents of self-harm during the annual reporting period March 2023 to February 2024

2023	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	35	36	60	66	77	90	72	71	72	62
2024	Jan	Feb								
	19	44								

During this reporting year the total of deliberate self-harm incidents was 704. This was a substantial increase over the previous years actual of 398.

The average number of incidents per month in this reporting period was 59. This is compared to the average over the previous reporting year of 33.

There were major increases in the number of incidents from May to December 2023. This is attributed to prisoners who repeat acts of self-harm (defined as up to 5 incidents) and prisoners that are prolific self-harmers (in excess of 5 occasions). Cutting and the use of ligatures are the two most prominent methods of self-harm.

Low Newton has a relative low number of women that commit singular incidents of self-harm. On average 4 prisoners per month are prolific self-harmers, which when combined are accountable for at least 24 incidents. In response, safety officers are tasked to see all new receptions and any prisoner who has been involved in an incident of violence and self-harm.

The Board often monitors the weekly safety intervention meetings (SIM) and is concerned at the number of prisoners with severe mental health issues, who would be best placed in a more appropriate non-prison environment.

During this reporting period there has been one death in custody. The PPO has not yet completed the investigation into the death.

The following breakdown shows the number of ACCTs in each month over the reporting period.

2023	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	19	39	30	24	37	30	27	24	29	29
2024	Jan	Feb								
	37	41								

As self-harm has increased over the reporting period, subsequently a rise in the number of ACCTs has taken place as they are inextricably linked.

In comparison to the previous year's level of 281 this reporting period shows an increase of 85 to a total of 366.

There are no identifiable trends as to prisoners being placed on ACCTs as there are various reasons between incidents, these reasons include: low moods, thoughts of self-harm, low severity cutting, use of ligatures and mental health issues - some of which are very severe.

The Board regularly monitors the weekly Safety Intervention Meeting (SIM) and has observed meetings where every prisoner on an active ACCT is reviewed by management and the staff responsible for managing individual ACCTs including healthcare, mental health, as well as other relevant stakeholders.

From the Board's observations, attendance from all departments has been consistent, action plans are assigned and followed up and outcomes are discussed at the next meeting. The Board also monitor ACCTs whilst on weekly monitoring visits which include observing the ACCT file and engaging with the prisoner.

The Board does not consider the increase in the overall number of ACCTs to be a cause for concern, it is more of a demonstration that staff recognise the need to place prisoners on an ACCT at an early stage. The Board is satisfied that those women who are vulnerable on ACCTs are managed efficiently.

A review of ACCTs is underway by the prison, with a view to improve the quality of the information and consistency of reporting.

The Board will continue to monitor.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

From the Board's weekly monitoring visits, our regular monitoring of safety meetings and frequent engagement with prisoners, we believe that prison management see safety as a major priority. This culture cascades down to staff of all levels and to those other agencies and stakeholders involved in providing services to the prison.

The introduction of the community and safety reps has been pivotal in improving the early days in custody process. This has had a positive impact on women who are new to custody and provides support from arrival in reception through first night and on to early

days. The feedback from both prisoners and staff has been positive and well received. It is the prison's intention to extend this service to the whole prison.

The weekly and monthly safety meetings are very well attended, by all staff responsible including a cross section of stake holders. The meetings review all the elements of providing a safe environment for prisoners and staff. Action points and follow up activities are reviewed on a weekly basis. The Board believes that HMP Low Newton is highly vigilant and proactive in its management of safety.

Recorded incidents of Violence

Month	Assaults on staff	Prisoner on prisoner	Fights
March 2023	8	1	3
April 2023	3	2	1
May 2023	3	2	1
June 2023	11	2	1
July 2023	15	0	4
August 2023	3	3	1
September 2023	6	3	4
October 2023	3	1	2
November 2023	10	2	1
December 2023	5	2	2
January 2024	6	6	1
February 2024	8	2	1

Total acts of violence during the reporting period were 129 this is an increase of 77% over the previous year. Of the three main elements contributing to the total acts of violence by far the biggest rise in violence is attributed to assaults on staff which have increased by 86% when compared to the previous year.

There are four months in particular during 2023 where the number of violent incidents on staff far exceeded the other eight months of the year. This is attributed to repeat offenders and accounts for 25 violent attacks.

The incidents on prisoner-on-prisoner violence have increased by nine and the number of fights has risen by eight. During this reporting period HMP Low Newton have received into custody some very challenging individuals with poor mental health and those with severe mental health needs. This is one of the main contributors in the rise of assaults on staff.

Staff have been subjected to some very violent prisoners whereby the need for use of force has been administered in protection of themselves and preventing prisoners self-harming. When these recorded incidents are reviewed in the presence of a Board member, it is the Board's view that the use of force was proportional to prevent acts of violence.

The recruitment and retention of listeners (prisoners who are trained by the Samaritans to provide peer support) is one of management's key objectives and an ongoing recruitment campaign for listeners is in operation.

The safety staff work closely with the Samaritans to ensure listeners are fully trained and support and recognition is given for the work they do.

Training and workshops have been arranged for the neurodiversity support manager to support listeners when they receive a callout from prisoners with neurodiverse needs in order to support and communicate with them.

4.4 Use of force

The combined total of incidents during this reporting period year was 280. This is a significant increase over the previous year's actual of 176.

The use of guided holds and particularly control and restraint are the two most used methods where use of force is administered.

The main reasons for use of force are three-fold, non-compliance, assaults and fights and preventing self-harm particularly by ligature.

During the spring and summer periods the use of body worn cameras was inconsistent and therefore evidence was not captured and recorded. However, the Board is pleased to see that this has been rectified and a consistently high number of incidents are now recorded.

Recording incidents at an early stage has also improved over recent months, this has helped to provide clearer evidence when weekly reviews by the prison take place.

The multi-disciplinary use of force development meeting is held weekly and is well attended, where delegates review all use of force footage. Upskilling of staff also takes place. In addition, the safety team works to manage those women with neurodiverse and mental health issues, to ensure staff are adopting a trauma informed approach with women who may experience use of force being used.

The Board has witnessed that the up skilling and training has improved the overall handling of use of force incidents.

Although the use of force has increased, the Board has evidenced and is satisfied that the need for use of force is established prior to its use. Furthermore, we are satisfied that the most minimal level of force necessary is used, and that de-escalation is carried out with care and compassion. The Board frequently monitors the weekly meetings and observes many incidents. The Board will continue to monitor.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Findings of illicit items are identified and recorded by intelligence reports (IR). There were 205 reports between 01/03/2023 – 29/02/2024.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The IMB regularly monitors the various wings and consider that they are clean and well managed. Most of the cells are single occupancy but some have been supplied with bunk beds for double occupancy. Work is being done to improve decency for prisoners. Curtains and a plastic chair are being provided in the cells. It is part of an attempt to normalise the environment to aid the transfer to the outside on release.

At times recently the numbers in the prison have been very high mainly due to the large numbers of prisoners sent from courts on short sentences. Recently the prison was 'closed' for a few days as there was no room for new prisoners.

The wing made up of modular units for low risk women or those prisoners coming to the end of their sentences continues to be popular. The outdoor environment has been improved with awnings, picnic benches & planting.

There is a shop which the prisoners can use to buy personal items if they have the money and some clothes are available to purchase. A prisoner who comes in with nothing can be given some items from the stock of donated clothing held in reception. The IMB regularly visits the shop, which is staffed by prisoners.

Prisoners help prepare the food for other prisoners. They are trained in food safety matters; kitchen work can provide a basis for a career when released. The kitchen manager surveys the prisoners asking what they feel about the food and other matters such as portion sizes, whether more healthy foods should be provided and suggestions for future menu choices.

IMB members visit the kitchen on each monitoring visit and find the food varied and of fair quality.

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit (CSU) consists of three cells. Recent efforts have been made to improve the environment with the unit having been painted internally and externally, with murals on the exercise yard walls. Prisoners are held here as punishment for as short a time as possible, rarely for more than 14 days but more often up to seven days.

The CSU is also used sometimes as a quiet place and an area to give support to vulnerable prisoners.

There is a core of staff who have experience in dealing with the sort of prisoners who are located in the unit, sometimes having to cope with prisoners with difficult mental health needs. Staff work hard at building up a rapport with prisoners and encourage them to improve and control their behaviour.

IMB members are informed of all moves to the CSU and, if possible visit that person. Subsequent GOoD reviews are conducted by a governor and attended by appropriate members of staff with all necessary information available.

The prisoner attends the review if they wish. Those reviews which IMB members have been able to observe during the reporting year have been conducted fairly and in detail with prisoners given ample opportunity to present their views.

Prisoners who are awarded cellular confinement at adjudication (reviews held to determine whether a prisoner has breached prison rules) but cannot be accommodated in the CSU

due to its small size are located on landing cells. They are still managed by the CSU. This is not a regular occurrence and is risk-assessed on a case-by-case basis. Visiting Board members, if possible, visit anyone awarded on wing cellular confinement.

Board members make every effort to observe adjudications when making monitoring visits, although the numbers and incidence are necessarily erratic. Monthly statistics are reviewed by members at Board meetings.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Generally speaking, relationships between staff and prisoners are good. Staff tend to have a good knowledge of prisoners, as Board members find when discussing specific prisoners during monitoring visits – for example, those on ACCTs.

However, this is sometimes jeopardised by staffing changes or shortages. The Board member who monitors most monthly safety meetings continues to find that there is in-depth knowledge of the prisoners who are of concern and are discussed in detail at the meetings.

Frequent lock-downs, due often to staff shortages, does affect the opportunity to build and maintain effective relationships and for some prisoners can impact negatively on their mental health & general well-being.

5.4 Faith and pastoral support

The prison has a chapel and a multi-faith team of chaplains led by a managing chaplain. The chapel is a light airy room and is also used as an area for meetings and celebrations of prisoners' achievements.

The prison population is predominantly of declared Christian or no faith, but there are also small numbers of other faiths, including Muslims and Pagans. Board members regularly meet chaplains going about their tasks on the prison wings.

5.5 Incentives schemes

The incentives scheme is being revised. The aim is to reduce the necessity to take things off a prisoner who misbehaves but rather to deny access to the better things available to standard and enhanced level prisoners. To this end, work is being done to improve the offer available to prisoners such as offering group and evening activities and increased association time. A prisoner put on basic level, for example, may not get their TV removed but wouldn't have access to the nicer options improving prison life.

5.6 Complaints

At each of the monthly Board meetings the Board receives a comprehensive set of data on complaints received by the prison during the month. The data shows things such as the category of complaint, how many complaints were made by each wing and which prisoners submitted the most complaints. The report identifies any developing trends. Board members use this data to triangulate against the Board's own observations and for a further in depth look at prison complaints picking, for example, one category of complaint or those made by one prisoner.

5.7 Property

The Board gets limited complaints or issues about property. When a prisoner has complaints about property or who wants something from property stored in reception they tend to direct their query straight to prison staff.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Health and wellbeing are at the heart of the Board's monitoring function at Low Newton.

Board members are confident in engaging in discussions with prisoners around their wellbeing and where necessary will signpost them to appropriate support from across the prison.

The Head of Healthcare is still relatively new in post and has identified areas for improvement involving working with others who also support prisoners.

The Board enjoys positive relationships with both prisoners and officers which helps the Board to successfully progress issues around health and wellbeing.

The recently appointed Governor is introducing a new prison strategy in consultation with staff and includes safety, the lived experience, regime, wellbeing & growth and preparation for release – each has an identified lead officer who will report monthly.

The renewed focus on wellbeing is welcomed and will be reported on at future Board Meetings attended by the Governor.

Healthcare has experienced continuing staffing issues across the year which no doubt has impacted upon performance and access to services. That said, there has recently been a successful recruitment campaign and capacity will improve once all are in post. Where there are staffing gaps there is backfill with bank and agency staff.

Staff development is also seen as important. There are a number of staff on training courses particularly relating to pharmacy and prescribing. There has also been a revitalisation of the lunch and learn sessions. All new staff have received immunisation and vaccination training.

Board members visit healthcare on nearly every monitoring visit. There are usually a number of prisoners receiving inpatient care at any one time.

Where possible Board members try and engage with the prisoners, but this is not always possible, and they are not always responsive. Usually prisoners are inpatients because they have serious mental health needs. It seems to be the exception for a prisoner to be in healthcare with physical health needs.

6.2 Physical healthcare

The healthcare unit has some residential cells and facilities such as waiting and examination rooms. The unit is cleaned by prisoners who are proud of the work that they do. There are shortages of staff at times. Outpatient services such as GP, dentist and optician are provided on a regular basis but there are often long waiting lists. Waiting times for various services are as follows:

- Ultrasound scan on average 12 weeks
- X-ray on average 2 to 3 weeks
- Dentist on average 10 weeks
- Podiatry on average 7 weeks
- Physiotherapy on average 2 weeks
- GP on average 3 weeks

The IMB is aware that there are a significant number of 'no shows' which has reduced the number of appointments; plans are in place to address this issue which it is hoped will improve access to healthcare services for prisoners.

In September 2023 healthcare ran a recovery market in the gym and invited key community recovery services, women's specific services, Reconnect To Health, partner agencies and showcasing the offer from the drug and alcohol recovery team (DART) in Low Newton. Each service had a stall to meet clients at, discuss their offer, and they directed clients towards the service in their area of release. All prison staff were invited to the event to meet with community services and understand the recovery offers for release.

Throughout the last year healthcare has been working closely with NEPACS (North East Prison Aftercare Society) to improve and establish a robust process for families/carers. This is to make services seamless providing relevant information or guidance, so families and carers remain a big part in the recovery/rehabilitation of the patients.

6.3 Mental health

The IMB engages well with members of the mental health team (MHT) and are supported well when making enquiries. Collaboration with other stakeholders in the prison is a key feature of the work undertaken by the MHT

Ongoing staffing issues have impacted upon the work of the MHT; prisoners routinely report that access to MHT is very difficult and responses are often slow.

Board members have had concerns for the past year about the number of prisoners presenting with severe mental ill health. Very often healthcare or the CSU proves to be the most appropriate place to locate them as it provides a quiet environment with some caring staff who work as a team in dealing with the various issues with which they are presented. Nevertheless, this is far from ideal and some prisoners have been seen to deteriorate whilst there.

Caring for severely ill prisoners requires all staff to work together to achieve the best possible outcome and the CSU now have a dedicated team of uniformed staff who have developed expertise and liaise with healthcare staff and the MHT.

Some prisoners still require a move to a mental health bed in the community and waiting times for such a place have been lengthy. There were four transfers to hospital from prison in the past 12 months plus one transfer from prison when released (straight from prison to hospital).

It is clear that the prison is often being used as a place of safety for individuals with mental health needs. Board members are also concerned about the necessary resources that may or may not be available in the community to support women who are released with such severe issues or in distress. Prisoners often voice concern to Board members about their worries over having no accommodation to go to. The prison drugs team work to get prisoners onto methadone (a daily dose) or preferably onto Buvidal which can eventually be given as a monthly injection and supports ex-offenders in the community to maintain jobs. Unfortunately this is not available in all areas that women are released to.

On a positive note however the newly appointed Governor and his senior management team are introducing extra activities aimed at improving behaviour and wellbeing.

The gym has been running over 50's wellbeing classes which are very well received and Junction 42 continue to offer art and craft activities which are also very popular. It will be

interesting to see how these initiatives progress in the coming year and if they are able to promote resilience in a fragile community.

The gym operates wellness sessions three afternoons per week. Prisoners apply to attend and priority is given to those with a MHT referral.

Staff are also being supported in dealing with some of the extreme situations they find themselves in via trauma risk management (TRiM) and vicarious trauma training.

6.4 Time out of cell, regime

The gym continues to offer a mix of industry related qualifications, courses aimed at supporting wellbeing, team building and staff training. Their average prisoner participation is 56.33% which compares more than favourably with other prisons in the women's estate. Their collaboration with Sunderland Football Club as part of a twinning project continues and the PE course now earns the FA qualification Developing Leadership through Football award in which thirteen prisoners have been successful.

A recent team of the month award cites the "significant and positive contribution towards the prison regime in delivering industry related qualifications and promoting education with physical activity". Unfortunately, the gym was closed for three weeks whilst work was carried out to repair the leaking roof, ceiling and showers. Contact continued on wings during this time.

6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

DART operate a number of services across each week at Low Newton all of which are publicised and well used. They include acupuncture and yoga/mindfulness, breaking free online, substance awareness and DART induction group, SMART (self-management and recovery training) and physical exercise and recovery (PEAR). DART also offer Naloxone (a treatment to reverse opioid overdoses) training by the dedicated recovery co-ordinator.

Prisoners working with DART are allocated their own Co-ordinator who provides individual support.

DART offer a wide range of in cell workbooks and distraction packs to support improved wellbeing. The packs include manuals/interventions around all illicit drugs, emotions, behaviours and harm reduction/relapse prevention around substances. These packs have reflective questions for clients to learn and explore their own use. They also offer self esteem and positivity workbooks and work around women's health and substance misuse/the menopause.

All prisoners are offered a referral to their home area recovery services which can include an appointment with those services soon after release.

A recent and welcomed development at Low Newton has been a drug-free environment where a dedicated wing houses those prisoners who are identified and screened as being suitable. Strategies are in place to promote this and it will be interesting to see how successful this is.

There have been increases in the number of searches for drugs both of prisoners and staff although it is not as comprehensive as it could be in the absence of a dedicated search teams (DST) and dogs.

A body scanner would make a massive difference at Low Newton but we understand that not only is the scanner expensive but there would have to be some structural alterations to accommodate it.

Work is being done to improve the quality of ACCTs and IRs so that it is clear when a prisoner has an issue with drugs.

Buscopan continues to be a problem as it easily stolen from chemist shops before a woman comes into prison and can then be sold on. Two wings are drug free with prisoners signing a compact to that effect.

6.6 Soft skills

Junction 42 continues to provide creative arts both in workshops and in-cell providing support with social skills, confidence building and mental health issues.

A snapshot of their work in the last six months shows that, for example, they have provided in-cell activities for thirty prisoners across eight wings and have supported 420 hours of learning.

They have also met 15 prisoners on release and are supporting 51 prison leavers in the community. They provide hygiene packs, induction packs, prison leaver packs and emergency phones on release when necessary. They are able to assist in setting up bank accounts and applying for benefits.

Prisoners participating in the Koestler Awards have been successful again in a variety of categories and the prison has been awarded a Platinum Award as a result. Junction 42 are working on wall murals in the CSU yard and walkway to visits.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

A recently appointed head of learning, skills and work oversees all learning, skills and work activities. He has reinstated quality improvement group meetings where all provision is monitored. Learning walks are undertaken and any training needs identified.

British values posters are being displayed around the prison and awareness raising sessions for staff across education, industries and gym are taking place.

An enthusiastic neurodiversity support manager carries out assessments and has set up a tracking system to which all departments will have access. She also carries out staff awareness sessions (including for the IMB). She is experimenting with reduced timetables alongside in-cell learning, where appropriate, to address neurodiverse needs.

Acorn Training provides information, advice and guidance services and is working on a literacy and numeracy tracker which will help with the appropriate allocation of learners. Allocation of learners to education places has recently increased.

A newly appointed local education manager, employed by the contractor Novus, oversees classroom activities.

There are 80 prisoner places available. A recent 'snapshot' shows a monthly attendance rate of 82% and an internal (Ofsted style) inspection has provided positive feedback about the quality of teaching and learning, effective sequencing of learning, robust quality assurance and high expectations of teachers and managers.

Work is required on attendance, destination of learners and readers' progress. During this year the education department was closed for two weeks due to staffing shortages when there were several concurrent bed watches and constant watches.

Senior management in the prison are supporting the promotion of literacy across all areas. The library is at the forefront of this initiative with reading groups, book challenges and providing more Shannon Trust mentors to assist with literacy on wings (although this seems to be less popular as it encroaches on prisoners' free time).

The prison has recently been successful in applying for books from the local Borderline books charity and bookcases have been delivered to all wings to enable prisoners to have access to reading material without having to go to the library.

A prisoner information hub is being set up opposite the library, manned by prisoner volunteers, to enable prisoners to access all kinds of information and leaflets to take away.

There are two prisoner mentors now based in the library. There are plans for prisoners from CSU to access the library on a morning when the library is usually closed.

7.2 Vocational training, work

A part time employment coach from People Plus is soon to start working with prisoners who work in the laundries and other wing-based activities, who are in the last six months of their sentence, to build CVs and job skills.

The prison is a pilot site for the future skills programme - BEAM, which is an activity-based programme where learners are guaranteed an interview with BEAM.

The learning and skills manager has been successful in training assessors and has achieved success in gaining accreditation (and direct claims) for various activities including

food safety in the kitchen, performing manufacturing operations in the Ocado workshop, horticulture, gym level 2.

This work was referred to in last year's report, has now come to fruition and is being well received.

There are two Open University learners and a further five prisoners on distance-learning courses.

7.3 Offender management, progression

In the twelve months to 31st March 2024 there were 638 receptions of which 161 were recalls. Of these recalls 58 were fixed term (8 or 14 days), 8 breached top up supervision (14 days), the balance were fixed term recalls, home detention curfew (HDC) recalls and a couple of parole licence recalls. During this time there were 738 releases.

After the difficulties of COVID-19 and general staffing issues, staff in the offender management unit now report that prison offender managers and keyworkers are able to meet with prisoners as planned most of the time and their caseloads are not proving onerous.

Part-time staff have a caseload of ten prisoners and full-time staff a caseload of twenty.

Staff report poor literacy skills amongst prisoners, and they are now being encouraged to discuss this with prisoners and signpost where help can be found.

More employers are showing an interest in providing release on temporary licence (ROTL) places, amongst them Greggs, the Salvation Army and a local stable.

Staff report the biggest hurdle to successful release and resettlement is a lack of accommodation.

A pre-release team now convenes weekly to discuss imminent releases and those up to two months ahead, with various disciplines providing input.

A recent ROTL success has been a prisoner who spoke to a group of at risk young individuals on behalf of the charity Prison! Me! No Way! And was commended for her participation despite her nerves.

7.4 Family contact

A family engagement co-ordinator liaises with NEPACS) to support family contact, visits and family days. The scheme arranged visitors for prisoners who otherwise would have no-one coming to see them.

7.5 Resettlement planning

One of the persistent problems the prison faces are those prisoners sent by the courts on short sentences. This does not allow for any meaningful work to be done with the women to reduce reoffending or to sensibly plan resettlement.

Accommodation workers see every prisoner on admission to identify likely needs. Within 12 weeks of release, they will complete a resettlement plan and make the relevant referrals to the community to try to make sure each prisoner has somewhere safe to live. A wide range of interventions is provided, but areas of concern are finding appropriate accommodation and dealing with mental health issues.

Based on its interaction with prisoners, the Board has been concerned that a small minority are still released with no clear housing availability. This is traumatic for the prisoner and heightens the risk of reoffending.

This issue is not solely in the hands of the prison because of the outside contract for provision of suitable accommodation and the actual availability of appropriate accommodation.

The Board is aware through talking to some prisoners that even those with accommodation offers are at times apprehensive. This is the case when, for example, the prisoner is being released to a hostel and fears the uncertainty and upheaval of that life in comparison to the perceived stability of prison life.

There is also the fear that on the outside there will be access to drugs and temptations that will undo the work some of the women have done in prison.

There are some women whose lives in the community are so chaotic or uncertain they will commit further offences in order to be returned to prison.

8. The work of the IMB

There has been a resignation and illness has affected the work of the Board. New members are being mentored. Two members are still dual-boarding, being also members of IMBs for other prisons in the area.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	247

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	0	2
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	4	3
C	Equality	0	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	8	0
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	2	6
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	2	4
F	Food and kitchens	1	6
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	9	10
H1	Property within the establishment	1	5
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	7	1
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	0	0
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	1	6
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	2	10
K	Transfers	6	1
L	Miscellaneous	22	9
	Total number of applications	65	65



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