



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Peterborough (Women)

**For reporting year
1 April 2023 to 31 March 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

His Majesty's Prison (HMP) and Young Offenders Institution (YOI) Peterborough is a private prison on a brownfield site in the city centre, made up of two separate establishments, one for women and one for men, which share the same staff and management. It opened in March 2005 and is run by Sodexo Justice Services under contract to the Ministry of Justice. There is a performance delivery unit headed by a manager reporting to a Deputy Director, which tracks the contractor's adherence to the terms of the contract and also the actions arising from HM Inspectorate of Prisons inspections, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman investigations, audits and reviews. There is also a controller team on site employed by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), which monitors the contractor's performance on behalf of the Ministry of Justice.

HMP/YOI Peterborough women's prison serves the east Midlands, east of England and Essex. The operating capacity is 384¹. There are two modern houseblocks containing 10 wings, including a young adults unit for women aged 18-25, a life and long sentence unit and a foreign national prisoner unit for those awaiting deportation. There is also a 12-bed, 13-cot mother and baby unit (MBU). Facilities include classrooms, workshops, a gym, chapel, library and gardens.

Each wing has an electronic kiosk on which prisoners may, for example, order their meals, book social visits and appointments, communicate with prison departments and review their finances.

The prison manages its staff recruitment and training needs locally. Recruitment has continued through the reporting year.

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

Prison regime

The Board's principal concern this year is that the impact of population pressures, staff shortages, management changes, and lack of good quality purposeful activity is adversely impacting on prisoners. As well as planned restrictions of regime, exercise and time out of cell is too often curtailed at short notice. Prisoner morale is suffering due to the lack of basic regime. The Board notes that facilities in the women's prison are closed ahead of closures in the men's prison. This has been a consistent cause for concern over a number of years.

Safety

The Prison has been seen to work hard to create a safe environment. A very few prolific individuals have significantly affected the picture.

From the Board's observations, the management of those prisoners at risk of suicide and self-harm is well structured, professional and compassionate, despite the extreme pressure experienced by staff (paragraph 4.2).

Violence and prisoner officers using force have increased due to prolific perpetrators, population pressures and lack of regime (paragraph 4.3).

Fair and humane treatment

Generally, relations between staff and prisoners appear to be good, but are becoming strained by the lack of regime. Key work is, however, still not consistently of a high enough standard (paragraph 5.3).

Adjudications (disciplinary hearings) for prisoners who are alleged to have broken prison rules are generally fair, while those who receive time segregated are dealt with compassionately, with an emphasis on rehabilitation (paragraph 5.2).

Health and wellbeing

The new primary physical and mental healthcare provider has taken a long time to settle. Their staffing was initially restricted, which impacted services, particularly the timely issuing of medication. This had consequences for the entire daily regime, but improved during the reporting year (paragraph 6.1).

The quality of care was reported as reasonable by an in-year Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection. Healthcare was the principal reason why prisoners asked for help from the Board (these made up 21% of all applications, which are prisoners' written representations to the IMB). The Board sees gaps in the way the healthcare unit deals with patient complaints, and that communications are not addressing prisoners' concerns (paragraph 6.1).

Progression and resettlement

The prison has been working to improve education, work and skills. New leadership has been brought in and plans put in place. Early signs appear good, but this is a critical area, with significant change needed.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Will the Minister be working with colleagues to enable the enactment of the Mental Health Bill as soon as possible?
- The Board remains concerned at the number of women serving very short sentences. What does the Minister plan to do about this issue?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- When will HMPPS increase the provision or licensing of approved accommodation to which women can be safely released?

TO THE DIRECTOR

- How and when will the Director ensure the prison makes better use of best practice models across the women's estate?

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
Can the Minister work with the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure women with serious mental health issues in the criminal justice system are directed to an appropriate pathway?	A draft Mental Health Bill was published in June 2022, which seeks to address this issue.	The draft Bill has yet to go through parliament. It was included in the King's Speech in July 2024.
Can the Minister take action to prevent prisons being deemed a place of safety for women with serious mental health issues?	A draft Mental Health Bill was published in June 2022, which seeks to address this issue.	The draft Bill has yet to go through parliament. It was included in the King's Speech in July 2024.
What steps is HMPPS taking to ensure that the Probation Service is adequately staffed, especially in respect of community offender managers?	A range of measures are being put in place covering from remand to release.	The release of prisoners remains a concern.
Can the Director take steps to ensure women's regime is not curtailed because of staff shortages?	The prison sees this as a priority.	Prison overcrowding and staff shortages have led to the problem becoming worse.
Can the Director continue to focus on embedding quality key work?	The prison sees this as a priority.	Prison overcrowding and staff shortages have led to the problem becoming worse.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

Prison regime

Overview

The Board has one principal area of concern that has adversely impacted on prisoners across nearly every aspect of prison life: the lack of a decent and rehabilitative regime.

Lockdowns Too often, wings are locked down, often at short notice, which means the cancellation or curtailment of work, education, library access, association and limitations on normal daily time out of cell.

Exercise Exercise by wing on the yards is often cancelled, curtailed or rescheduled at the last minute. Gym sessions are often cancelled, as staff are redeployed at short notice.

Work The range of work is narrow and often of poor quality: for example, a disproportionately large number of women are registered as wing cleaners. There are not nearly enough spaces for the number of women who want to work. Not enough vocational qualifications are offered. Work initiatives often don't last long: for example, mock bedrooms were created to offer training in hospitality, only to close soon after. It should be noted that the two catering workshops provide a good work offer.

Education An Ofsted inspection found the education offer did not reach acceptable standards. There was fault found with both basic skills in English and Maths, and in the offer of more advanced courses. More student capacity is needed, particularly for foreign national prisoners. It should be noted that the arts project group is well run, popular with prisoners and produces good-quality artwork that is used to brighten up public areas of the prison.

Preparation for release One-to-one key work has suffered considerably, which has adversely impacted the rehabilitation support prisoners received across the length of their sentence. There was also a lack of prison offender manager (POM) capacity during the first half of the year, which particularly affected the start and end of sentence casework, as too often POMs were cross-deployed to cover staff shortages. The number of POMs increased during the second half of the year.

Staff shortages Staff shortages have been severe and worrying. Staff sickness levels are high, both for short-term sickness and long-term absence. Staff have left in greater than normal numbers, often to work in other prisons locally. Additionally, staff have recently been seconded to support with issues in other Sodexo prisons. All this has destabilised the prison life in many different ways.

- **Frontline officers** Prison custody officer (PCO) and senior PCO staffing was particularly challenging, with a trend of PCOs leaving soon after completing their training. This was often due to staff shortages and a lack of support because so many experienced officers were unavailable for mentoring. This has led to a lack of experience on wings and difficulty in providing a reasonable regime for prisoners. Officers have very frequently been cross-deployed to priority areas, which has led to key areas being covered by inexperienced officers, and other lower priority but necessary work not being

completed. Despite this pressure, we see officers treating prisoners with compassion and dedication. We often receive feedback from prisoners who acknowledge how hard officers work for them.

- **Leadership** There has also been considerable instability in the management team. Both the Director and one of the Deputy Directors have been seconded for periods to other Sodexo prisons. There are several new and inexperienced middle managers. Most experienced middle managers have had to take on an additional workload, and often have had to move to cover critical posts. Managers have had to move around so much there has been a noticeable reduction in training, experience, and expertise. That said, we see managers working very hard, with dedication and determination to run a humane and decent prison.

Prisoner morale Poor, unpredictable and restricted regime, added to external factors such as national prison population pressures and greater use by courts of remand, has led to poor prisoner morale. The prison deserves credit for the way it protected the provision of resources to reduce violence and self-harm.

HM Inspector of Prisons (HMIP), Ofsted and the CQC An unannounced inspection was carried out in December 2023. The report highlighted similar concerns in these areas.

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

From the Board's observations, new prisoners are received in a humane and caring manner, the atmosphere is welcoming and the staff professional and supportive. Resources are available to help new prisoners settle. While security is prioritised, intrusive full searches are only carried out on intelligence and with a senior manager's permission.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Overall, the care of suicidal and self-harming women appears to be very good and well managed. Wing officers are very supportive, and the assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) system (which is used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) is properly used. There were 1,355 incidents of self-harm, compared with 2,882 last year.

Of great concern is the number of prolific and often severe self-harmers who account for the majority of incidents. Of the totals above, this reporting year saw 1,091 incidents by women identified as prolific, compared with 2,559 last year. These women are managed through a weekly multi-disciplinary team meeting. The Board observes this regularly and finds it focused, well managed and with good-quality discussions across a broad range of disciplines.

There has been one death this year. Investigations into deaths in custody are discussed at the IMB Board meeting. We are pleased to report that, apart from the death in custody, there were few - and only minor - matters of concern.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Violent incidents have increased this year, again with the majority attributable to a few prolific women who may also be prolific self-harmers. This year there were:

- 109 assaults on staff, 11 of which were serious, compared with 65 last year, none of which were serious.
- 47 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, five of which were serious, compared with 23 last year, none of which were serious.
- 17 fights, none of which were serious, compared with 21 last year, none of which were serious.

4.4 Use of force

This year, the prison has invested significantly in this area. There is now a dedicated lead officer and training facilities have been improved. There is a weekly meeting, where CCTV and body worn video camera footage is reviewed and improvement planned. This year, there were:

- 557 occasions where force was used to restore good order, compared with 270 last year.
- 44 occasions where force was used to prevent self-harm, compared with 216 last year.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Accommodation remains in a generally good condition. However, there have been occasions when wing monitoring has revealed instances of poor hygiene and maintenance. Work is in progress to upgrade cell windows for improved ventilation. Some of the communal furniture has been observed to be damaged and visibly stained, and is gradually being replaced. The mother and baby unit (MBU) was found during monitoring to be very clean and well-appointed, with a range of toys for the children. While there are few comments in the comments books, women often tell us that the diet is very heavy on carbohydrates. The variety of menu dishes for women with special diets can be inconsistent.

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit, where prisoners are segregated, remains supportive and caring, and the unit generally works well below operational capacity. It is a constant challenge to manage the number of women who prolifically self-harm and/or are violent and often having severe mental health conditions. Managers need to decide whether to house them in the CSU or in the healthcare unit, and the Board finds that in almost all cases a humane balance was reached.

The Board particularly monitored adjudications during the second half of the year. Each presiding manager was observed to deal with cases humanely and fairly, ensuring that the charge was understood and that prisoners were able to have their say. The system was, however, seen to be bureaucratic and too many charges were dismissed procedurally.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

From the Board's observations, staff and prisoner relationships remain good overall, despite the staff shortages. The majority of staff can be seen to genuinely care for their prisoners and members often saw staff go the extra mile for a prisoner in crisis. In the main, prisoners report more positive than negative things about the officers; and, often, when complaining about the restrictions on regime, will also comment that it is not fair on the staff. The Board observes, however, that key work has not been delivered to the required standard.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The Board receives few complaints about discrimination and generally observes officers acting in an inclusive manner. The prison was without a diversity manager for much of the year. However, an enthusiastic new manager took up the post towards the end of the reporting year. The senior leadership team was, again, tasked with re-establishing diversity consultation groups, which it has done, and regular meetings are now held.

One prisoner was affected by the new gender reassignment rules. The prison provided notably excellent support within the rules framework.

5.5 Incentives schemes

The incentive scheme works overall to encourage and reward good behaviour. However, there may be inconsistency among officers in issuing green (good)

behaviour or red (warning) notifications. Additionally, the use of the lowest level to challenge violent behaviour is not necessarily consistent with adjudication outcomes. The appeal process is unclear, leading to perceptions of unfairness among prisoners.

5.6 Complaints

The Board has observed that the system is well managed by the complaints clerk, with responses being generally timely. The Board is, however, concerned that managers' responses are too often seen to be incomplete, terse and dismissive. Consequently, the Board has decided to increase the level of monitoring for the next reporting year.

5.7 Property

National population issues have led to problems with prisoners' property, as HMPPS has moved women more frequently to make the most of available space. This has led to women sometimes arriving without their property. However, HMP Thameside worked very hard to deal with issues and ensure property went out with the owner or was subsequently sent on.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

At the start of the reporting year, Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHFT) took over the provision of primary physical and mental healthcare (they already provided secondary mental health and Integrated Substance Misuse Services). Because the Board had observed issues with that previous handover, the NHS Commissioner and NHFT were made aware of these concerns several months before the new contract started. In particular, the Board highlighted prisoners' concerns about how healthcare services were delivered, as well as issues regarding medications and how complaints were managed.

It has taken a long time for the new contractor to settle. An in-year CQC inspection reported that the quality of care was as expected. However, members continue to hear that prisoners are unhappy with the service and that wing officers feel they have insufficient information about how to proceed or help prisoners. The Board suggested that (a) this is an expectation gap and (b) there has been too little communication and engagement with both prisoners and staff. Consequently, the Board has devoted significant effort to working with the healthcare unit to provide detailed feedback.

Prisoners also report that they are unhappy with the way their complaints are dealt with, and the healthcare unit is the largest concern that women bring to the Board. Communication regarding complaints has been poor, and there is little transparency about the numbers or outcomes of complaints. Women frequently complain about problems with their medication, and there are issues due to officer and healthcare unit staffing. At the end of the year, staffing remained very challenging. However, an enthusiastic patient engagement lead had started, and there was already an improvement in prisoner feedback, which the Board hopes to see continue.

The prison has agreed with NHFT to pilot a regular operational meeting, so that the interaction between healthcare procedures and prison regime can be fully understood and better managed by both parties. This will include, for example, the impact of late medication rounds and the management of movement to appointments. The Board intends to monitor the effect on the prisoner experience.

6.2 Physical healthcare

The Board observes the NHFT clinical team battling staff shortages with dedication and care, and hopes to see sufficient staff and the key issues addressed.

6.3 Mental healthcare

Mental healthcare provision has improved over the year, although the waiting list is very long. NHFT has introduced more effective communication with prisoners and improved triage. It has also allowed prisoners to self-refer to give them an element of control, which has alleviated some of the Board's concern.

The prison was without a psychiatrist for the first four months of the reporting year. However, since the new psychiatrist started, referrals for gatekeeping assessments for hospitals has been speeded up. But, in the opinion of the Board, there are still too many prisoners who have to be restricted in the healthcare unit, or segregated in the care and separation unit, often for long periods.

6.4 Social care

NFHT has provided social care on behalf of Peterborough City Council (PCC) since July 2023. At the start of the reporting period, there were too many occasions when personal care appointments were missed due to a lack of NHFT staff. This has improved, but staffing issues remain a challenge. The Board is also concerned at how difficult it has apparently been for community offender managers (COMs) to ensure that those with social care needs are released into suitable accommodation; too many vulnerable prisoners are released without accommodation.

6.5 Time out of cell

The gym is too small for the size of prison and there is only a cardio room. Many years ago, a large gym hall was taken out of service and a dance studio built. This studio was condemned several years ago, and its repair/replacement has been announced time and time again, but work still has not started. The Board is very concerned at the lack of gym facilities. There also is a lack of appropriate provision for older women and the Board would also like to see the reintroduction of outdoor exercise, such as the trim trail, for example.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Prisoners very seldom raise concerns about this service.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 & 7.2 Education, work and skills

In 2023, the prison accepted that these areas needed substantial improvement. This was somewhat down to the departments needing to recover from Covid limitations, but also the impact of resources being targeted elsewhere and weak management, in the Board's view. The Board saw that the prison accepted these issues and an experienced senior manager was appointed; a plan was devised and early action taken. The need to take these steps was reinforced when the Ofsted/HMIP inspection was critical of this area.

The Board held back from detailed monitoring as the remediation plan was beginning to be implemented in the last months of the reporting year. These areas will clearly be a focus for the next reporting year.

- **Education** English and Maths skills assessment during induction has improved, and there are innovative workshops in the library, although more use could be made of this resource. The Board notes there is insufficient ESOL provision for foreign national prisoners. Additionally, there could be more provision of advanced education and use of distance learning such as the Open University. The art workshop deserves praise; it has an enthusiastic tutor and the prison benefits from their output livening up drab common areas.
- **Work and skills** There is just not enough good-quality work, which leads to too many women spending too long locked-down and not able to earn reasonable amounts of pay. There are two catering workshops: one provides the staff canteen and the other provides a coffee shop for staff and catering for events. Both offer useful qualifications. There has been investment in the hair and beauty salon, which is now offering more opportunity to gain a useful qualification. The prison is working to improve the provision of skilled-based work and is trying to work with companies who will offer work, qualifications and the chance of employment at the end of a prisoner's sentence. The IMB believes that more could be done to allow low-risk prisoners to be released on temporary licence (ROTL) to work.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The offender management unit (OMU) appears to have found the year challenging, mainly due to a general shortage of staff and staff being pulled away at short notice to support operational duties. The situation improved during the latter half of the year. National population pressures have also added to the strain. One of the main issues prisoners raised with the IMB concerned the delays in third-party agencies approving post-release accommodation. The Board will monitor this closely in the coming year.

7.4 Family contact

The prison recognises the importance of social visits. The process of arranging social visits is easy, the visits' hall is well organised and frequent family days (which bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings) are run for those who would benefit. The social video calls system, brought in during Covid, has been continued. The

Family Matters team continues to support prisoners with family issues, which has led to several reconciliations.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Within the prison, resettlement support is provided by the Link, which offers advice and support for issues such as post-release work and benefits, accommodation and banking. In the centre of Peterborough, the prison runs Outside Links, which provides post-release support and care, with the aim of reducing reoffending. The Outside Links facility was successfully relocated and expanded with PCC funding during the year. The Link has had a challenging year, due to staff numbers and redeployments, and the non-attendance of some third-party agencies. That said, it has achieved much with a population that has a very wide range of needs, with women ending long sentences, those on a short sentence 'revolving door', and even those whose remand has been protracted. This has required flexibility and professionalism.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	18 (serving two prisons on the same site)
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	371

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Current reporting year	Previous reporting year	Change
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	11	21	-10
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	1	0	+1
C	Equality	4	5	-1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	16	14	+2
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	24	21	+3
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	13	19	-6
F	Food and kitchens	11	2	+9
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	66	54	+12
H1	Property within the establishment	18	17	+1
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	4	4	0
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	12	9	+3
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	13	24	-11
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	37	48	-11
K	Transfers	3	4	-1
L	Miscellaneous	36	24	+12
	Total number of applications	269	266	+3

Annex A

Service providers

Key services were provided during the reporting year as follows:

- Physical healthcare, primary and secondary mental healthcare services: Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHFT)
- Learning and skills provision: Sodexo Justice Services
- Integrated substance misuse service: Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

The prison has worked with the national Probation Service as provider of probation services, together with contracted service providers and volunteer organisations including the following:

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- St. Giles Trust: core resettlement to Cambridgeshire and Norwich
- Changing Lives: core resettlement to Leicestershire
- Advance Charity: core resettlement to Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire
- Hibiscus: support for foreign national women prisoners
- Jobcentre Plus
- Bail Accommodation and Support Services (BASS): supported housing for those on HDC (home detention curfew) or bail
- Shaw Trust: skills and employability support
- Not Beyond Redemption: support for mother and child relationships
- Reeds Solicitors: legal advice
- Change, Grow, Live (CGL) Cambridgeshire: substance misuse, for prisoners from Cambridgeshire
- Seetec: accommodation support for sentenced prisoners

There are also a number of third-sector organisations providing specific services locally.



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