



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Whitemoor

**For reporting year
1 June 2023 – 31 May 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) Whitemoor lies outside the Cambridgeshire town of March. Opened in 1991, it is one of five high security prisons in England within the long term and high security estate (LTHSE). From July 2023 the prison population began to return to its normal capacity of 458, having been reduced by about a quarter for a major electrical upgrade.¹

At the end of the reporting year, 2.5% of the population were high risk category A, 33% were category A, and 64% category B. 16 men were held under indeterminate imprisonment for public protection (IPP).

Whitemoor was one of five high security dispersal prisons and was nominally a category B training prison. Although nearly two-thirds of Whitemoor's population were category B, they were held in category A conditions; and they needed special consideration before they could progress to be with their nominal peers in pure category B jails.

All Whitemoor prisoners were accommodated in single cells with integral sanitation, but used separate, shared external showers.

The prison comprised the following units:

- three main residential wings, two with a capacity of 126 and one with 114;
- the Fens Unit, accommodating up to 62 prisoners undergoing psychological treatment for personality disorder, delivered in partnership with the National Health Service (NHS); an outreach programme for the rest of the prison was suspended because staffing and other factors prevented adequate support by wing-based staff;
- a close supervision centre (CSC) holding up to 10 prisoners, managed nationally to provide a secure location for the most disruptive, challenging and dangerous prisoners in the prison system;
- a psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE) unit designed to enable prisoners to maintain and build on developments they had previously achieved in prison, with a capacity for 30 that had yet to be attained;
- the Bridge unit, opened in April 2019, designed to support prisoners progressing out of segregated conditions, with a capacity of 12, also yet to be attained;
- a segregation unit of 18 cells, two of which could be used to hold prisoners from the close supervision centre;
- a Healthcare unit that held up to 9, though not as part of the prison's formal capacity.

On 31 May 2024, Whitemoor had 529 operational staff (68% men, 32% women) and 93 non-operational staff (72% women, 28% men). Numbers for the ethnicity of staff were not available but it was evident from observation that few ethnic groups other than white were represented.

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

General

- The arrival of younger men early in their long sentences made for a less settled prison as new arrivals adjusted to their environment and to each other. New staff were acclimatising too. Violent incidents and officer shortages challenged staff morale. Prisoners' patience was tested by regimes that, due to staffing problems, were curtailed throughout the year.

Safety

- There were 8 serious incidents of violence against officers, as well as 5 committed by prisoners against other prisoners.
- Illicit drugs remained problematic, but the prison intercepted considerable quantities of drugs, phones and weapons sent in via drones.
- Too often assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) reviews were held without multidisciplinary support teams.

Fair and humane treatment

- Key work reports often did not explore issues, and it was hard to see if follow-up actions happened. Some staff failed to take ownership of problems.
- Limited funds constrained progress with some facilities, but most shower units had been refurbished to some extent. Rodent infestation persisted.
- Food provided was in line with what the small budget allowed but serveries on most wings were poorly managed in terms of supervising portions and adhering to menu options. Spur kitchens on residential wings were too small and inadequately equipped to accommodate all who might use them.

Health and wellbeing

- Poor organisation on some wings often meant that medical appointments were missed, and medications were typically delivered late.
- Time out of cell got better by the end of the reporting year but for most of the year main residential wings lost between one-fifth and a quarter of their sessions. The smaller units fared worse.

Progression and resettlement

- There were more progressive moves, especially in the last quarter of the reporting year; but there was only one downgrade from Category A to B.
- Purposeful activities remained limited for much of the year. Education lost between 30% and 60% of their sessions. Workshops fared not much better.
- Visiting arrangements were inadequate and too many events were cancelled at short notice. There were long waits for legal visits. The arrival of in-cell telephones was welcome but limited staffing for monitoring calls meant that the daily allowance was limited to 60 minutes across Dispersal Prisons.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- (Previously submitted to the Prison Service.) Will the Minister direct the reconfiguration of the High Security Estate so that the two-thirds of prisoners at Whitemoor who are Category B are not held in the more restrictive conditions needed for those who are Category A?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Will the Prison Service set formal standards to ensure that time in long-term jails is used constructively, and that activities labelled as purposeful truly are?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Will the Governor ensure that prisoners have fair and dependable access to all visits, including legal ones, whether virtual or in-person?

3.3 Response to last report

The Minister underlined the importance of rehabilitative work in prisons, the Board having been dismayed that decisions made by a former Secretary of State had given a different impression and thereby disheartened staff and prisoners.

The Minister also set out what was being done to help those held under indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPP). The Board acknowledged that care was being taken in Whitemoor to help men on IPP sentences to progress.

The Board had asked the Prison Service to reflect whether the Dispersal System remained the best way to hold prisoners, with all category B prisoners at Whitemoor held with greater restrictions than their nominal peers elsewhere in the prison estate, limiting their sense of progression. The system remained, as did the Board's doubts.

The Board also asked the Prison Service to give priority to funding works such as the refurbishment of showers. There was good progress but each of the main residential wings had at least one set of showers still needing attention, and some of the work was cosmetic.

The Board asked the Governor to develop residential areas so that men who wanted to live in more peaceful, settled conditions could do so. The process of recanting was a demanding one with the arrival of more volatile prisoners and less experienced staff making the safe management of the population difficult. The Board acknowledged that the prison needed time for new prisoners to settle.

The Board also asked the Governor to raise local prisoner pay rates. Whilst that remained a yet to be attained goal, the prison tried to compensate by allowing up to two parcels of clothing a year.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 General stability

The process of closing one wing at a time for rewiring had proved to be highly disruptive. Refilling the prison profoundly altered the population mix at Whitemoor, with many arrivals being young and early in their often long sentences. Officer shortages for much of the year disrupted regimes. Times were difficult for all parts of the Whitemoor community.

The prison retained the ambition to establish a progressive spur on one residential wing, but many of the newly arriving prisoners were resistant to rules and regulations. Older men who in the past had helped restrain bad behaviour were being ignored, and some were bullied.

Wings had begun to settle by November, but one wing had a mix of difficult men, and another was particularly affected by drugs. By February, problems focused on one spur on each of two wings, whilst the third main residential wing had become settled. There were several assaults on staff in March, some of which were serious.

4.2 Reception and induction

The process of gradually refilling residential wings meant the arrival of a larger number of prisoners than normal for Whitemoor. That began in July and continued until January. The reception and induction of new prisoners was planned and managed well.

4.3 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There was one death in custody, the cause of which had yet to be established by an inquest.

During the reporting year, 136 new assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents were opened in respect of men deemed to be at risk of self-harm or suicide. Of these, 21 (15%) were for men held in segregation. The number of individual self-harm incidents totalled 409, with peaks in June (70) and October (56). Many of these related to prolific self-harm by a small number of people. Cutting was by far the most frequent means of self-harm. Of the prisoner population in May 2024, 71% had never self-harmed.

The prison ran a well-used Listener Scheme in conjunction with Samaritans. At the end of the reporting year there were 11 Listeners. The introduction of in-cell telephones from January made direct contact with Samaritans easier. Throughout the reporting year, large numbers of Listener contacts were prompted by issues related to the regime and to difficulties with staff. Listeners reported frustrations resulting from some new officers having little understanding of how to approach prisoners.

The Board's principal concern with the management of self-harm was that too many ACCT reviews were conducted without a multi-disciplinary team. Too often only a couple of uniformed wing staff were present. Efforts were made to improve participation. For example, ACCTs for men in segregation were completed at well-

represented Segregation Review Boards, including for men not due a segregation review that week. However, for elsewhere in the prison, Mental Health and Psychology said that they would attend reviews only for prisoners with whom they were already working.

There were fewer Safer Prisons staff in Whitemoor than in other Dispersal prisons. For much of the year the role of safer prisons officer doubled with that of disability officer.

4.4 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

In the year under report there were eight serious and 87 non-serious assaults on staff. There were five serious and 39 non-serious assaults by prisoners on prisoners. There were two serious incidents involving barricades.

To illustrate the range of issues, of the 15 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults between January and March 2024 five were attributed to bullying; four were due to gang rivalry; two related to debt; two were retaliatory; one was over a snooker game; and one was unattributable. There were some signs of organised bullying and extortion, and in March four prisoners were self-isolating because of threats to them. The prison dealt with these issues robustly.

With officer morale at times low, and especially following a serious assault on an officer in March, several officers remarked to Board members that officers who enforced rules were more likely to be targeted for violence.

4.5 Use of force

The use of force peaked at 43 uses in August 2023, 46 in February 2024 and 32 in May. The main age group involved was 18–25-year-olds. Although that age group formed only 14% of the prison population, they typically accounted for 44% of the uses of force. The division by ethnicity was more proportionate. Black, Asian and mixed race men accounted for 49% of the prison population and 53% of the uses of force. The largest single reason for the use of force was in response to threats to members of staff.

Board members routinely attended Use of Force meetings and were satisfied without exception that all cases of the use of force were rigorously analysed, and that lessons were learned and disseminated. They especially noted the contributions made by Healthcare and Health and Safety.

4.6 Preventing illicit items

Illicit drugs remained problematic, but the prison successfully intercepted considerable quantities of drugs, phones and weapons sent in via drones by organised gangs.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

There were significant improvements in the general cleanliness of residential areas, although the Board routinely heard complaints about shortages of cleaning materials – including for personal use in cells. It was hard to understand why there were so many variations in supply arrangements across the prison. There were also complaints (notably in March) about tardiness in staff moving rubbish bags, despite rodent infestation.

Most showers had been refurbished but each of the main residential wings had at least one set of showers below reasonable standards.

The Kitchen continued to suffer from breakdowns, the most notable problem being when all gas-fired equipment had to be switched off in March because of safety concerns. Some replacement equipment had sat unused since November 2023, awaiting the installation of a Phase 3 socket, the situation continuing beyond the end of the reporting year. Works had advised against buying the equipment.

Prisoner staffing in the Kitchen was a problem at the beginning of the reporting year, when the regime that workers had to follow restricted their association time and access to gyms. Continuing attempts to introduce food management software (Athena) successfully used in other prisons repeatedly failed.

Across the reporting year there were 183 complaints about food (9% of total complaints). Most were about insufficient quantities, menu requests not being met, and problems around special dietary requirements. Some of the problems were due to failings on the part of serveries to enforce proportion control, as well as allowing some prisoners to switch their choices. Tellingly, the incidence of complaints seemed to be less on some wings, implying better localised management. For several months there were problems in providing adequate breakfast packs on time.

Although the Board received few applications about food, comments picked up on monitoring visits echoed these complaints. In discussing them with the Kitchen Manager, our impression was that she strove to address points within her control.

The Board frequently reported that many servery workers and cleaning officers failed to wear regulation white jackets and hats. Whilst this improved significantly by the end of the reporting year, there were typically at least some failures to comply. Rodent infestation remained a problem across the prison.

The Board were pleased to note that gardens on exercise areas, most of which had been abandoned, were brought back into use. Most were enthusiastically maintained by prisoners.

5.2 Segregation

Both the administration and management of the Segregation Unit improved over the year. Segregation Review Boards increasingly began on time, were well-chaired, focused on action, and systematically monitored progress, including with comprehensive minutes. Mental health and psychology staff always attended. The only significant absentee was Security, which was unhelpful. There were concerted efforts to return men to main location or transfer them to other jails. Whilst there were

some long-stay men, in most cases delays were inevitable given the complexity of their cases – including factors often in the men’s own control.

Although the causes varied, pressure on staff in the Segregation Unit remained high. Particularly during the earlier part of the reporting year, the Unit held several men with medical and mental health problems or personality disorders. Staff typically managed such prisoners with patience and sensitivity, but it was sometimes draining for them.

Despite successes in moving on several men who had seemed stuck in segregation, numbers remained high throughout the year. In September 2023 several incidents, including one of concerted indiscipline, meant that 12 prisoners had to be separated when the Segregation Unit was already full. They were held on a main wing spur, causing considerable problems for managing men in two separate locations, and providing consistent regimes. At the November 2023 Segregation Monitoring and Review Group (SMARG) meeting, it was felt that residential wings were too readily resorting to the segregation of men. It was suggested that of the 16 men then segregated, only five needed to be there.

Especially during the last few months of the reporting year, there was concern that the number of Segregation Unit staff either on sick absences or restricted duties placed too much reliance on staff from elsewhere in the prison. That and poor behaviour from some prisoners was judged to be adversely affecting staff morale and burn out.

There were usually between three and five segregated men judged to be at risk from self-harm or suicide and managed under ACCT procedures. The Board were concerned that ACCT reviews were seldom conducted by a multi-disciplinary team. This was remedied towards the end of the reporting year by conducting all ACCT reviews at Segregation Review Boards.

Across the year there were also significant numbers of men being segregated for their own protection. There was no discernible effort to treat these men more favourably than those segregated for bad behaviour.

In terms of ethnicity, the mix of men held in the Unit generally paralleled the wider Whitemoor population, but with a tendency for there to be disproportionate numbers of white men.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

The prison brought in the HMPPS Standards Coaching Team to enhance performance, particularly in respect of disciplinary matters such as searching and the enforcement of boundaries. The team arrived in February and remained for the rest of the reporting year.

There was success in getting more Key Work sessions done, although spot checks by Board members often found that men in need of support were getting infrequent sessions. More generally, too many reports appeared to reflect uncertainty about the purpose of Key Work. Reports often listed problems without showing how they were being explored or followed-up.

The number of general applications submitted reached 5,790, placing a substantial administrative workload on the Business Hub. Many questions submitted in those

applications – for example about jobs, visits, phone calls and other day-to-day issues – could have been better discussed with Key Workers or other wing staff. Dealing with many questions directly, rather than telling prisoners to submit written applications, would have created better prisoner-officer relationships, as well as broadening everyone's knowledge of how systems worked and might need to be changed. Many complaints against staff reflected conversations that might have been conducted in different ways. Spending time might have saved time.

There were marked differences between residential wings on how effectively they managed routine tasks, such as getting prisoners to Healthcare, supervising medications, overseeing food service, and distributing cleaning materials.

Finally, the Board noted several instances where there was too often a tendency for no one to take responsibility for something being done. The Board particularly noted two cases where the needs of visually disabled men were not met because no one took charge or focused on results. Processes were sometimes followed as if ends in themselves.

5.4 Equality and diversity

By race, the Whitemoor population was diverse. In July 2024, 49% of prisoners were white; 28% were Black or Black British; 12% were Asian or Asian British; 9% were Mixed Race; and 2% were categorised as other.

There were 107 prisoners registered as disabled in May 2024.

There were 156 cases using Discrimination Incident Reporting Forms (DIRFs). Of these, 12 (8%) were supported after investigation. Whilst the failure rate was high, it reflected the Board's observation with formal Complaints and applications to the IMB that discrimination was often alleged without evident justification.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Medical absences and vacancies often stretched the Chaplaincy but they were able to provide their usual pastoral and worship services. They were disappointed, especially at feasts and other major events, that there were upper limits on the number of men present in one area, but they were able to hold parallel events.

5.6 Incentives schemes

Although the recanting of the population brought in many more difficult to manage prisoners, the proportion of men on Enhanced privileges increased. On average, across the reporting year 69% of Whitemoor prisoners were on Enhanced, 28% on Standard and 3% on Basic. Across the Long Term and High Security Estate this was exceeded only by the Isle of Wight (82% Enhanced). Frankland was much the same (71%) but other comparable prisons had smaller proportions, some significantly so: Wakefield 63%, Full Sutton 57%, Long Lartin and Woodhill 46%.

The distribution across the reporting year of privilege levels by race was shown in the table below.

	Asian	Black	White	Mixed and other	Total %
(Share of population)	(12)	(28)	(49)	(11)	(100)
Incentive level:					
Basic %	5	36	47	13	(100)
Standard %	8	36	44	11	(100)
Enhanced %	12	24	55	8	(100)

By age, younger men at Whitemoor were less likely to merit Enhanced. In May 2024, for 18-25-year-olds it was 58%, and for 26-35-year-olds it was 67% (against an average of 72%).

5.7 Complaints

There were 2,960 complaints in the reporting year, of which 183 were against staff. 541 complaints (18%) went to appeal, of which 41 were against staff. Comparison with the previous year was difficult, given the change in the number of prisoners.

Excluding complaints against staff, the highest number of complaints were about property (36%), residential issues (18%), visits (12%) and food (9%). 25% of complaints were about miscellaneous other issues.

Senior leaders undertook quality checks of responses. They judged 12% to be exceptional and 46% good. 34% were acceptable. 3% were returned as unacceptable, and 5% were ungraded.

Lateness in responding to complaints peaked in October, when 27% were overdue. Largely thanks to a drive by the new Deputy Governor, the numbers reduced to 12% by January and levelled out at around 10% by the end of the reporting year.

5.8 Property

Reception tried hard, especially during the recant, to move property as quickly and as securely as possible. There were however problems, not all of which were caused by Whitemoor. Property was well handled for items that travelled with prisoners but there were delays and some losses for property sent separately. The latter were held in the outside stores, with loads brought in only once weekly. Further delays were caused by security checks, hampered at times by the limited availability of search dogs. There were also complaints around changes to the policy for the sending in of birthday parcels.

Complaints about property peaked in November and December but were the lead reason for complaints throughout the year, averaging at over one-third of total complaints.

The processing of property for prisoners transferring out of Whitemoor was also not always smooth. There were 13 complaints in February.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Whilst prisoners too often chose not to attend medical appointments, more typically it was the failure to deliver patients from wings to Healthcare that accounted for the high number of no-shows. Whitemoor routinely lost limited places for specialist services, particularly dentistry. The delivery of medications was also slow, so that they were typically not delivered at times prescribed on clinical grounds. The fact that a few supervising officers managed all these healthcare arrangements perfectly, highlights organisational failures by others.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Physical healthcare services available to prisoners were good. Whilst there were long waiting lists for dentistry and optical services, failures in getting prisoners to appointments for those and other specialist services meant that some were missed.

6.3 Mental health

The Mental Health Team were short-staffed but appeared to manage their caseload well. The Board were pleased to note that a member of the MHT routinely attended Segregation Reviews.

6.4 Time out of cell, regime

Staff shortages seriously limited time out of cell throughout the year. Details were as below:

Area	% of sessions closed											
	Jun 23	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sep 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Apr 24	May 24
A wing	Out of use			26	26	19	20	20	21	19	18	10
B wing	21	21	23	26	26	19	21	21	16	18	17	14
C wing	27	26	24	25	25	23	20	20	19	19	18	16
Fens Unit (D wing)	5	8	5	7	7	6	4	1	5	13	5	6
CSC Unit (F wing)	32	40	30	26	26	20	22	24	24	14	22	19
PIPE	57	53	77	34	34	24	29	25	25	23	28	36
Bridge	35	37	34	33	33	22	28	29	27	25	22	16
Segregation Unit	34	32	33	39	39	31	36	34	19	23	23	22
Healthcare	35	32	33	42	42	33	30	30	23	30	18	19

Whilst the Fens Unit had by far the best regime, the PIPE and Bridge did less well than other residential areas, seriously impacting the therapeutic interventions they were able to offer.

Staffing was supplemented during much of the year by officers on detached duty, peaking at 30 in July. By the end of the reporting year, Whitemoor's own staffing numbers were edging back to normal, but as 30 or more new officers were at training college, the year closed with significant gaps.

6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

A five-strong Substance Misuse team had a case load in the 90s during the reporting year – 96 in May 2024. Their one-to-one sessions were hampered by regime closures and the limited availability of rooms for confidential sessions. Officer shortage and other problems meant that they could hold few group sessions.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

As the table below shows, Education were subject to substantial closures throughout the reporting year.

Area	% of sessions closed											
	Jun 23	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sep 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Apr 24	May 24
Education	34	39	25	60	60	51	30	18	39	50	45	37

The change in the ages and backgrounds of newly arriving prisoners increased the need for lower-level courses in literacy and numeracy. The Shannon Trust helped equip prisoners with these skills. At year end they began to provide a permanent, full-time representative to Whitemoor, based in the Library and funded by Education.

Education costs increased to the extent that the number of places that could be financed reduced from 110 to 64 over five years.

7.2 Vocational training, work

As the table below shows for two representative Workshops, vocational work was also hard hit by closures.

Area	% of sessions closed											
	Jun 23	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sep 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Apr 24	May 24
Coppermills (WS1)	34	55	35	31	53	32	36	23	29	50	50	41
Laundry (WS4)	37	53	28	28	45	30	30	18	32	44	50	44

The quality of jobs on offer remained low. About 30 jobs had been lost by the closure of the Max Spielman Academy and the British Legion contract.

The reasonable policy of rotating jobs every two years, to give everyone a chance at applying for one of the more attractive posts, might have been applied more generously for disabled men less able to find acceptable alternatives. The Board also met several prisoners who could have been given help – not least by Key Workers – to prepare for their jobs being rotated.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The decanting of some 120 prisoners to facilitate the rewiring project had given the opportunity to progress out a substantial number of men. The fact that they were subsequently replaced by prisoners more likely to be at an earlier stage of their sentences meant many fewer progressive moves during the reporting year. Such moves did however resume in the last quarter, during which 17 men went to real Cat B establishments and 4 to Cat Cs.

Because of these developments, the workload on the Offender Management Unit was heavy, with significant changes to the nature of their casework, including in dealing with many recently sentenced men.

Special attention was given to men on Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences. Four made progressive moves out of Whitemoor. At the end of the reporting year, all but two of the 16 IPP prisoners were in Discrete Areas (the Fens Unit, the PIPE or the Bridge) and were therefore being supported to progress.

7.4 The specialist units

Whitemoor had four specialist units.

The Fens unit was run in partnership with the local NHS trust and had a capacity for 62 prisoners undergoing psychological treatment for personality disorder. Planned additional outreach work across the rest of the prison was suspended in the reporting year because of the inability of wing staff to provide the required support.

The Close Supervision Centre was one of five national units that held some of the most dangerous men in the prison system. Whitemoor's unit (F wing) typically housed six to eight CSC men able to follow an open regime within the unit and progress towards a return to a normal custodial environment. Especially in the earlier part of the reporting year, a disproportionate share of closures because of staff shortages, made it difficult to build an open and settled community. Additionally, routine use was made of two cells in the segregation unit to hold CSC prisoners needing a period away from a main CSC unit. As they were typically confined in cell for all but one hour a day, and had very few meaningful interactions with others, their regime could not be deemed adequate for men in long term separation.

The PIPE (psychologically-informed planned environment) was part of the same national strategy as the Fens Unit and sought to create a safe and supportive environment for the onward development of men with particular needs. The unit remained below its capacity of 30, mainly because of staffing problems. Its therapeutic programme was disrupted by regime closures. Between June and August 2023, the unit bore a heavily disproportionate share of such closures.

The Bridge had a national catchment area and aimed to help up to 12 men who had had prolonged spells in segregation and needed support to progress to normal location. It was situated adjacent to the segregation unit and often housed some of its overflow. Like the other specialist units, it suffered because of staff shortages. Whilst seven men progressed to onward pathways in 2023, the Board were concerned that the Bridge was failing to address its stated objectives. They therefore undertook a review of the Bridge, attached at Annex A

7.5 Family contact

For the first part of the reporting year there were continuous problems with communal telephones. There were then delays in introducing in-cell phones because Openreach failed to complete connections outside the prison. In-cell phones had been introduced to all wings by January 2024 but were frequently hit by generator tests. Prisoners were frustrated by the 45 minutes daily limit set across Dispersal Prisons – mainly due to staffing constraints on censoring work. The limit was raised to 60 minutes in February.

Video calls had become the norm during Covid lockdowns. Not least because many prisoners were far from their home areas, it was reasonable to assume that the prison would continue to make regular use of such calls. Instead, because the necessary staffing was not profiled – as it was in all other Dispersal Prisons – there

was continuous uncertainty about what could be offered. It was too normal for video calls to be cancelled at very short notice, causing distress.

Social and legal visiting arrangements were unacceptable throughout the year. Visits were cancelled at short notice, and re-booking was often not easy – especially when on-line booking was unavailable for several months. Whilst the closure of the usual visits hall for rewiring between January and May caused some dislocation, most cancellations were because of staffing problems. This was disrespectful to prisoners and their families, many of whom had to travel long distances and make complicated arrangements. There were times when it seemed, both for social and legal visits, that last minute cancellations were due not to staffing but to inadequate organisation.

The combination of a large increase in the number of prisoners at an early stage in their sentence and the restricted capacity for video calls and visits, caused serious problems with legal visits. In December 2023, callers found that legal video calls were fully booked until March, and legal visits until May.

Considering the experience of all forms of visits, it was hard to believe that the prison took seriously its proclaimed objective to maintain social contacts. There was also reason to doubt if prisoners had adequate access to legal visits to protect their human rights.

The work of the IMB

8.1 Board statistics

	2022-23	2023-24
Recommended complement of Board members	14	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	5	6
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	177	268

Although not all members were able to be fully active across the reporting year, the number of visits increased by 51%. Half the visits were shared equally by the Chair and Vice-Chair; two-thirds were covered by three members.

8.2 Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	2022-23	2023-24
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	5	6
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	14	18
C	Equality	4	3
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	15	19
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	19	30
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	2	7
F	Food and kitchens	5	8
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	14	16
H1	Property within the establishment	5	19
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	9	12
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	3	4
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	8	16
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	14	31
K	Transfers	3	1
L	Miscellaneous	16	17
	Total number of applications	136	207

The total number of applications increased by 52%. Some of this might be due to the larger than normal number of new prisoners, but it is possible that the increased number of IMB visits also generated additional applications.

The recanting of the prison to a large part explains the doubling of the number of property-related applications. Property accounted for 23% of all applications.

8.3 Serious incidents

Board members attended 7 serious incidents. One was for a death in custody, another was for a barricade and the remainder were incidents at height.

Annex A

The Bridge: summary

The Bridge is a national resource with a goal to progress prisoners from long-term segregation towards normal location. An IMB review in March 2024 sought to determine the extent to which the Bridge is meeting its defined objectives, and to assess the constraints on its performance.

The unit is described as providing “a supportive, psychologically and trauma-informed environment to support the progression and re-integration of prisoners. The principle behind the Bridge Unit is to address barriers to progression, through a robust care and management approach, opportunities for gradual re-integration, engagement in ‘regime’ activities, collaborative working and development of relationships with staff in a supportive environment.”

The review concluded that:

- The Bridge has achieved some success for complex, difficult men with at least 7 progressing to their identified pathways since 2023 - either to specialist units or main residential wings (mainly to specialist units).
- The physical environment remains incomplete and falls short of what is required to deliver the Bridge’s objectives.
- Trained staff levels need improvement with staff shortages seen as the biggest risk.
- Prisoner feedback is ambivalent, with most saying the reality does not live up to what was promised.
- Short notice lockdowns and general regime closure are frequent.
- Key Worker sessions are irregular and facilitated group sessions infrequent.

Evidence

28 prisoners were referred to the Bridge since 2023 of whom 13 progressed to the unit. Since then 7 prisoners were progressed to their identified pathways, mainly to specialist units in Whitemoor or other prisons. 8 men were deselected, mainly due to violent behaviour.

A full complement of staff to cover all shifts was originally set at 20 officers and 2 Supervising Officers (SOs). Current staffing is 10 officers and a recently recruited second SO. The normal officer complement for a shift is SO+4, with an additional officer to enable regular Key Work sessions. This was rarely achieved. Examination of p-NOMIS recorded Key Work sessions for Bridge prisoners as at 25th March showed only 9 Key Work sessions since January i.e. around 1 per prisoner over an 8 week period.

Regime data from June 2023 to February 2024 was:

% of sessions closed								
Jun 23	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sep 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24
35	37	34	33	33	22	28	29	27

Given this history, it is unsurprising that Key Work sessions have been limited and time out of cell can be short. For example, one weekend prisoners were unlocked for only 57 minutes.

There is no one-to-one support offered to Bridge prisoners. Support is through facilitated group sessions, handled by trained officers and the psychologist. Structured sessions facilitated by the psychologist were originally planned as weekly but were scheduled monthly and often didn't take place. Work was ongoing with the PIPE on funding a reading group session every other week, but this was still to be arranged (*it subsequently started and proved popular*). Each prisoner has a monthly review, chaired by the senior psychologist when their behaviour over the past month and their future progression is discussed.

Although the Bridge and the Segregation Unit are separate discrete units, their proximity creates difficulties. Frequent short-term lockdowns in the Bridge are caused by medication trolleys for Segregation passing via the Bridge. Served meals come from Segregation, with Bridge prisoners going to collect their meals before Segregation prisoner meals are delivered. Segregation prisoners are occasionally taken to the Bridge shower unit. Segregation prisoners are often located on the Bridge when the Seg is full. The gated cell in the Bridge is often in use, creating disruption to free movement in the unit.

Facilities in the unit are very basic. The kitchen is closed pending an upgrade; there is no meeting room or location for private sessions such as Key Working; the floors are in poor condition; the cells are no different from those in Segregation; showers are in very poor condition. Works have been requested, but the wait is long. There is, however, a pool table and a community X-box with a sofa and TV.

Individual prisoners are generally ambivalent. They complain (accurately) that group sessions and community meetings don't take place. There is significant frustration that the popular cookery sessions have had to be discontinued due to the closure of the kitchen. Exercise should be offered when cells are unlocked in the mornings, but prisoners claim this does not happen routinely. Short notice lockdowns for Segregation medication and the frequency of general closures cause unhappiness. They complain about the state of the showers, the lack of leisure facilities and the general condition of the unit – a common comment is that the reality does not live up to what was offered during the referral.

Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of staff in a constrained environment, the reality does indeed fall short of the stated offering.

Annex B

Service providers

- Healthcare services are provided by Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, and dentistry by Prison Centred Dental Care.
- Psychological services in the Fens unit are provided by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust.
- Education and library services are delivered by Milton Keynes College.
- Maintenance is undertaken by Gov Facility Services Ltd.
- Cambridgeshire County Council provides adult social care services.



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