



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Ashfield

**For reporting year
1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Ashfield is a privately managed prison run by Serco, located in the village of Pucklechurch in south Gloucestershire, around 10 miles from each of Bristol and Bath. It is a specialist training and treatment category C establishment for adult men, exclusively for prisoners convicted of a sexual offence (PCoSO).

The prison has a baseline certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being overcrowded) of 416¹, with an operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) of 412. Throughout the reporting period, it has typically accommodated between 404 and 410 prisoners on site at any one time.

Accommodation consists of two main residential units, Avon and Severn, each with four wings accommodating between 40 and 60 prisoners. Its early days centre (EDC) is a smaller, 16-cell unit, which acts as an induction centre and houses new arrivals and induction orderlies (trusted prisoners who take on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison). There are 260 single cells and 78 double cells in total, all with integral sanitation, plus eight shower cubicles on each of the main wings. Seven of the single cells are on the ground floor and have been purpose-built for prisoners with disabilities. There are two gated cells for prisoners requiring constant supervision. There is no separate care and separation unit for segregating prisoners.

Allowing for minor fluctuations from month to month, statistics presented on a quarterly basis for the diversity and equality action team (DEAT) meetings demonstrate that black, Asian and other minority ethnic prisoners (including foreign national prisoners) have consistently averaged between 21% and 22% of the population (24% in the previous reporting period). At any one time throughout the reporting year, the prison has housed between 19 and 22 foreign national prisoners. The number of prisoners in the population aged over 50 has also stayed fairly constant, at around 42.5% (43% in the last report). In numerical terms, the largest individual group (27.2%) continues to be prisoners aged 30-39. At any one time, about 88% of prisoners have been serving determinate sentences and about 12% of prisoners have been serving indeterminate sentences (ISPs and IPPs.)

The population is relatively stable in comparison with many HMPPS prisons with, typically, about 16 new prisoners arriving each month. Some prisoners transfer to category D open conditions, but a growing number have to be released directly into the community, as places are not available in resettlement prisons.

As a contracted-out prison, Ashfield has a Director and an HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Controller. There has been greater stability in the composition of the senior management team in 2023-2024 than in the course of 2022-2023.

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

The period covered in this report was one dominated by a greater degree of uncertainty than in previous years. Whilst the Director and prison staff worked hard to enable the prison to concentrate on operating on the principle of business as usual, daily life was inevitably disrupted by a full unannounced [HM Inspectorate of Prisons \(HMIP\) inspection in October 2023](#) and the knowledge that the existing contract was about to be terminated in 2024. Serco was required to ensure that the prison was returned to the physical state it was in at the commencement of the contract, so it underwent an almost constant stream of repairs to the premises, with contractors on site for much of the time. It is to the prison's credit that every effort was made to ensure safety and keep disruption to a minimum, although prisoners were unhappy about necessary restrictions to movement around the site.

The HMIP inspection was preceded by a measuring the quality of prison life (MQPL) survey. This produced consistently more positive results than those from comparator prisons since 2021, and responses to 57 of the 206 questions asked were significantly more positive. The HMIP report included contributions from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The report was broadly very positive and complimentary, with three of the four areas awarded the top grade of 'good', the notable exception being purposeful activity, which was rated as 'poor'. This was primarily because of what were judged to be significant inadequacies in the delivery of education, training and work opportunities.

Throughout the reporting period, the prison, alongside its normal functions, was also seconding small numbers of experienced staff for varying degrees of time to HMP Fosse Way, which is also run by Serco.

Until April 2024, the prison also had to manage an anxious period for staff, as the process for bidding for the new contract was underway and employees were not privy to the content of the bid, which was developed by a separate Serco bid team. The rules and constraints governing the competitive bidding process restricted the prison's scope to introduce and implement new projects and initiatives. After being awarded the new 10-year contract, the prison has now been able, from the middle of May, to begin the mobilisation phase in preparation for the commencement of the new contract on 1 November 2024. This will involve a major repurposing of a number of the accommodation areas, along with significant changes to the organisation and the delivery of education, skills and work (ESW), an expansion of input from the interventions unit and the creation of an intended therapeutic community (TC) in the coming years.

Safety

- Ashfield must be congratulated on a very impressive record on safety in this reporting period. There has been a significant decrease in both the number of incidents of self-harm and violence. These statistics are endorsed by prisoners' perceptions, as captured in the HMIP survey, which reported, in October 2023, that 90% of prisoners felt safe at HMP Ashfield.
- The number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) cases (used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) has also fallen. Reviews attended by Board members have been observed as

professional, caring and effective in supporting prisoners, with good representation from relevant departments.

- A robust programme of both mandatory and intelligence-led cell searches and drug tests has been effective in minimising the presence of illegal items and there has been no evidence of psychoactive drugs in the reporting period.

Fair and humane treatment

- Overall standards of catering and accommodation remain very good. Facilities are clean and well maintained, although problems persist with showers and washbasins.
- The Board has observed numerous positive interactions between staff and prisoners. This is reinforced by the high standard of key working, which is appreciated by most prisoners and has led to Ashfield being identified by HMPPS as an exemplar to other prisons.
- Despite complaints to the IMB from prisoners about a perceived imbalance between behaviour warnings and the formal recording of positive comments, the incentives scheme generally works well to reinforce a calm and constructive atmosphere: nearly 9 out of 10 prisoners are on the enhanced regime at any one time and almost all the remainder have standard status.
- The number of prisoners locked in their cells on good order or discipline (GOoD) or cell confinement (CC) remains very low indeed, compared with national norms. It is to Ashfield's credit in managing challenging behaviour effectively at an early stage that it continues to have no need of a dedicated segregation unit.

Health and wellbeing

- The overall standard of service provided in the healthcare centre is good, and at least comparable with that in the external community. However, there have been occasional staffing vacancies, particularly long waiting lists for optometry appointments (and, to a lesser degree, for physiotherapy) and occasional shortages in the availability of specific medication.
- The department has been, for much of the reporting period, adversely affected by the restrictions on prisoner movement outside scheduled movement times. However, this was largely resolved in late spring 2024, with the provision of an officer to escort prisoners back to wings or work areas after appointments on most days.
- There is a comprehensive team of specialists providing a growing range of mental health support. A welcome development has been an increased emphasis on the particular needs of the neurodiverse population.
- Over the reporting period, there has been an enhanced emphasis throughout the prison on staff and prisoner wellbeing, with additional activities provided to meet a range of diverse needs.

Progression and resettlement

- The Board acknowledges that this has been a very challenging, unsettling and stressful 12 months for the ESW staff. This was due to a change of manager, a very critical HMIP/Ofsted report and additional complications caused by the department's embryonic plans, some of which had to be abandoned or reversed after the announcement of the bid result.

- Scheduled rotations in probation personnel have not impacted adversely on the efficiency of the offender management unit (OMU). However, its overall workload has increased, in part because of these, and also, owing to HMPPS population pressures, because of a more rapid transfer to open conditions for those recategorised as suitable and, worryingly, a growing number of prisoners failing in the local open prison who have then been transferred to Ashfield.
- The interventions unit has continued to exceed its targets in providing a wide range of psychological services and offending behaviour programmes (OBPs) to reduce the risk of reoffending.
- The prison has continued to place a high emphasis on family connections, with the continuation of its families at the centre of throughcare (FACT) programme and an expansion in the provision of family social visits. Its family and significant others (FASO) strategy was rated top in the prison's comparator group.
- The upward trend of the number of direct releases from Ashfield is set to continue, given that it is proving impossible to secure places for them in resettlement prisons. This is placing greater pressure on Ashfield to develop a comprehensive resettlement service in the final months before release.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- In our 2022-2023 annual report, we queried why, after parole boards had recommended that life sentenced and IPP prisoners convicted of sexual offences be transferred to open conditions, it was taking such a lengthy period of time for these to be confirmed or rejected by the Secretary of State for Justice. The Minister assured us that replies should be received within 28 days, yet the average wait for a reply at HMP Ashfield is around three months. Could the Minister please explain why the delays remain and what is being done to resolve the matter?
- In common with other prisons, a small number of prisoners released from Ashfield in the last 12 months did not have suitable accommodation arranged prior to release. What solution is the Minister proposing to resolve this matter?
- At present, prisons are not routinely told which prisoners released by them have reoffended, or why. Does the Minister consider such information might help prisons better assess their interventions and rehabilitation programmes?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- At present, very few resettlement prisons will accept people convicted of sexual offences. No prisoner from Ashfield has been moved to a designated resettlement prison since January 2023, in part for this reason and in part because prison population pressures have overridden the earlier offender management in custody model. Are there any plans to increase the number of resettlement prisons that will accept such prisoners?

TO THE DIRECTOR

- In order to increase prisoner confidence in the fair application of the incentives policy, are there any plans to introduce a process of systematic monitoring

and quality assurance, in particular to establish consistency amongst staff members in awarding positive comments?

- Given ongoing comments to the IMB by prisoners that Ashfield feels increasingly like a category B prison, can the Director provide some reassurance that movement restrictions will be reviewed in the near future and that the rationale for any changes will be clearly communicated to prisoners?
- Given the good record of the equality and diversity department at Ashfield, what assurances can be given that, under the new contract, it will continue to be adequately resourced and staffed and that prisoners will be able to continue to attend the very constructive events that the forums organise?

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
<p>To the Minister</p> <p>1. Why, after parole boards have recommended that life sentenced and IPP prisoners convicted of sexual offences be transferred to open conditions, is it taking such a lengthy period of time for these to be confirmed or rejected by the Secretary of State for Justice?</p> <p>What assurances can the Minister give that this can be reduced in the near future?</p>	<p>1. The Minister, in his response, outlined the criteria by which prisoners on indeterminate sentences are assessed for suitability for open conditions and stated that the Parole Board, since 1 August 2023, had applied the new test to all hearings.</p> <p>Where a prisoner was awaiting a decision from the Secretary of State (including imprisonment for public protection prisoners convicted of sexual offences) on whether a move to open conditions would be accepted or rejected, this would be considered under the new criteria and they would be notified accordingly, within 28 calendar days.</p> <p>The Minister also explained that HMPPS was exploring (unspecified) further initiatives to develop the process for considering open conditions for ISPs</p>	<p>1. Last year, it had taken eight months, on average, for a decision from the Secretary of State to be received. The Board is pleased to report that the wait time is now about three months. Whilst this is an improvement, it is still not meeting the official target time of prisoners being informed within 28 calendar days.</p>

	to ensure decisions are made swiftly and effectively.	
<p>To the Prison Service</p> <p>1. Despite numerous assurances, over a number of years, that the loss of prisoner property during transfer from prison to prison will be addressed, no significant progress has been made and it remains a serious issue.</p> <p>What additional practical actions to those already identified are being taken by HMPPS to address this?</p> <p>2. With the large number of elderly prisoners in the custodial estate (particularly in prisons such as Ashfield), cases of dementia and terminal illness requiring 24-hour care are increasing. The specific needs of these</p>	<p>1. The HMPPS response merely referred to the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, already in existence, which outlines that Governors and Directors should ensure management checks are undertaken to have confidence that prisoners' property is being handled correctly and with care (e.g. that property cards are being completed accurately and that the volume of property held by prisoners is checked regularly and does not become excessive).</p> <p>2. The HMPPS response explained that it was developing an ageing population strategy, which would include management of those with dementia and those in need of end-of-life care. As part of this, they</p>	<p>1. The Board remains unconvinced that there has been any noticeable improvement since the introduction of the Policy Framework.</p> <p>The Board has continued to receive an increasing number of complaints about the late or non-delivery of property on transfer to HMP Ashfield. In 2023-2024, this has remained the second highest category of complaints received (13 out of 120). The Board's inspections of property cards on arrival also reveal that processes for recording prisoner property elsewhere can be haphazard and inaccurate and the Board remains unconvinced that there are sufficiently robust quality assurance processes in place in establishments to drive improvement. Inadequate volumetric control at transferring prisons also causes additional complications.</p> <p>2. As yet, there does not appear to be a published HMPPS plan for the creation of specialist facilities within the prison estate for those prisoners with advanced dementia. Ashfield is still required, as best it can, to manage</p>

<p>prisoners cannot be adequately met in normal prison conditions.</p> <p>What plans does the Prison Service have for addressing this issue through the creation of special custodial centres?</p>	<p>would be considering the use of specialist units for prisoners with significant health or social care needs. The strategy would be published in 2024.</p>	<p>the additional demands on its time and resources generated by prisoners with dementia, with limited specialist training available for staff. This is not satisfactory.</p>
<p>To the Director</p> <p>1. The Board remains concerned at the inability of the prison to produce accurate income and expenditure accounts for the Prisoner Trust Fund (PTF), despite repeated requests for this information. The fund is designated solely for the improvement of prisoner facilities and services not covered by the Serco contract and is generated entirely from the surplus made from prisoner phone calls and purchases from the prison shop. The prevailing prisoner view is that these charges are higher than in other prison establishments.</p> <p>The Board asks yet again, therefore, for transparency and accountability in the case of this fund and for accurate accounts to be produced.</p> <p>2. With regard to the current local incentives scheme system:</p> <p>Can the Director give an assurance that the implementation of the most recently revised incentives</p>	<p>1. The prison responded positively to our request, although it took most of the reporting period to produce accurate accounts in what was revealed to be a very complex system for recording income and expenditure. The Board finally received a satisfactory response in May 2024, in which the Director provided assurance that there were now accurate accounts to the satisfaction of HMPPS, and that Serco had appointed someone to manage PTFs going forward.</p> <p>2. The Director informed the Board that, following the introduction of the Incentives Policy Framework, all necessary policies held at HMP Ashfield were reviewed to fall in line with mandatory</p>	<p>1. The Board is now satisfied that systems are in place to manage the fund more robustly and transparently, and that there is now a clear process for authorising expenditure, which includes prisoner consultation. In addition, the prison has reviewed the cost of phone calls and significantly reduced them. This will, of course, generate less money for the fund in future but is a welcome response to prisoner complaints. Prices in the prison shop, however, are already broadly in line with elsewhere and the prison has, until now, successfully resisted pressure to increase them in line with inflation.</p> <p>2. The Board acknowledges that, at any one time, by national standards, a particularly high percentage (around 87% or more) of prisoners are on enhanced status and</p>

<p>will be subject to rigorous, ongoing monitoring to ensure that it is closely aligned with the philosophy and practice of the national incentives scheme and it is applied consistently and that it will be subject to a further review in June 2024?</p>	<p>actions within the Policy, and that the local policy had been adapted to fall in line with any subsequent changes to the Framework. In addition, he informed the Board that Ashfield's Local Operating Policy is in line with national policy guidance, and this was acknowledged in the 2013 HMIP Inspection. The Board was also assured that the prison's incentives policy is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure consistency and adherence to the mandatory actions within the National Incentives Policy Framework.</p>	<p>almost all the others are on standard. Those on basic are always in single figures and, on occasion, there are none at all.</p> <p>There does not appear, however, to be in place any formal or systematic quality assurance system to monitor whether staff are being consistently diligent in awarding positive comments (required for qualifying for and maintaining enhanced status) and prisoners have regularly approached the Board on these matters in 2023-2024. As promised, the prison undertook an annual review in 2024, attended by prisoners and observed by a member of the Board. The meeting, however, was almost exclusively restricted to a review of the facilities list, and not these wider issues within the implementation of the incentives policy as a whole.</p>
<p>3. The Board acknowledges that recent changes to how prisoner movements are conducted have been necessary whilst dilapidation work has been undertaken, and to align HMP Ashfield more closely with security requirements. However, these changes have caused dismay amongst longer-stay prisoners who had earned their category C status some time ago by</p>	<p>3. The Director explained that, from a security perspective, concerns had been raised by HMPPS regarding free movement from the houseblocks, as the front doors were purposely left open. In addition, all the planned construction work necessitated the curtailment of free movement around the establishment. Prisoners would be restricted to</p>	<p>3. The restricted movement times have continued to generate numerous informal complaints from prisoners to the IMB in the course of 2023-2024. They have presented problems for orderlies who needed flexible movement around the site to carry out their duties, those wishing to visit the library, and prisoners (and their</p>

<p>demonstrating a good level of behaviour and self-discipline and who now regularly comment that the establishment increasingly feels like a category B prison.</p> <p>In order to retain prisoner goodwill and compliance, can the Director provide reassurance that the rationale for any permanent changes is discussed with prisoners and their concerns are taken into consideration? Any changes need to be clearly communicated to all prisoners.</p>	<p>moving at scheduled mass movement times only. This was communicated via several notices to prisoners and at prisoner advice and information committee (PIAC) meetings. The Director acknowledged that this had caused some frustration, but he assured the Board that the policy would be kept under review and modified when appropriate.</p>	<p>'buddies') attending medical appointments who were unable to return to the wings or to work or education classes without considerable delay.</p> <p>In the latter part of the reporting period, there have been some limited adjustments to try to relieve some of these problems, and the Board has been led to understand that a further review is due by October 2024.</p>
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Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

Ashfield staff must be commended for an outstanding record relating to safety. Between July 2023 and June 2024, there has been a decrease of 57% in self-harm incidents and a 70% decrease in assaults (if fights were included in the figure, it would be a 58% decrease). These are figures of which Ashfield can feel justly proud. They reflect a very effective multi-disciplinary approach to safety and good interdepartmental communication, as exemplified by the weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM) attended by representatives of all departments. Particular credit must go to the safer custody team and the residential staff, whose daily work has helped to create and maintain such a safe environment.

4.1 Reception and induction

Feedback from new arrivals to Ashfield continues to be very positive about the reception and induction processes, which are both comprehensive and well structured.

The facility provided by prisoner escort custodial services (PECS) for transfers in and out of Ashfield has improved compared with the same period in 2022-2023, as a result of fewer cancellations and postponements. Late arrivals after healthcare staff have gone home cause frustration for both prisoners and staff. The latter are required to process prisoners beyond normal shifts and to conduct hourly first-night observations. The issue is that prison transfers are understandably lower in priority than court transfers, so the problem is not likely to be alleviated in the near future.

The early days centre (EDC; a small unit, with a maximum of 16 cells, including a small number of orderlies) continues to provide prisoners with an excellent stepping stone before transferring to residential houseblocks. The small community - and an induction process spread usually over a two-week period - provide an opportunity to settle in and become familiar with Ashfield processes, particularly for those who are relatively new to custody (i.e. sentenced within three months). They also provide staff with the opportunity to get to know prisoners and identify what additional support, if any, may be required. For example, as part of induction assessments, any prisoner reporting a neurodiverse condition is assessed and individual support plans (ISPs) and individual care plans (ICPs) are developed, as appropriate.

One aspect of the EDC, however, that can cause challenges for prisoners relocating to the houseblocks is that the centre comprises only single cells. Cell-sharing risk assessments (CSRAs) mean that some are disappointed to learn they will be housed in double cells on the main wings.

The number of prisoners arriving either on an ACCT or a post-closure ACCT has increased (see 4.2) but, to the credit of Ashfield staff and the support they provide, the majority of these are closed within a short period of arrival.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

For at least the past five years, the number of ACCTs recorded at Ashfield has increased, year by year, so it is very pleasing to report that there has been a decrease in the reporting period. Between July 2023 and June 2024, 87 ACCTs have been recorded, compared with 104 in the equivalent period in 2022-2023. The

highest number in a month was 12, in July 2023, the lowest was four, in August 2023. Of the total of 87, 14 were for prisoners transferring in on either an open or a post-closure ACCT (post-closure ACCTS on transfer are included in the total ACCT figure). Eight ACCTs were opened within two weeks of arrival. Only 42 ACCTs were opened at Ashfield following an incident of self-harm, which is a marked change from previously. Reasons varied for ACCTs being opened, but the most common were related to being new to custody, conflict with staff/challenge by staff, low mood or family/partner issues, including bereavement. Board members continue to monitor ACCT reviews when they can and consistently report that they are professionally and empathetically conducted.

There has been a very dramatic decrease in this reporting period in the number of self-harm incidents, at just 69 (including those that occurred after an ACCT had already been opened), compared with 159 in the last reporting period. The highest number in a month was 18, in July 2023, and the lowest was one, in June 2024. Seven were classed as serious (requiring external treatment), resulting in an in-depth investigation, with the rest classed as minor. Cutting or scratching accounted for 35 incidents. A number of self-harm incidents occurred when prisoners were challenged by staff for behaviour, so safer custody staff have been working to help prisoners with coping strategies. Also, prisoners commencing medication to manage sexual arousal (MMSA) have been identified as being at particular risk of self-harm. Consequently, better communication between interventions and the mental health and safer custody teams has been set up to share information on those starting MMSA and to arrange additional support.

Until June 2024, safer custody provided a wide range of activities for improving wellbeing. These included art sessions, 'walks for life', ultimate gaming, films and board games. From January 2024 until May 2024, weekend activities were also introduced in response to the HMIP inspection report, which highlighted the lack of activities for prisoners at weekends. Responsibility for these has now transferred to the wellbeing department (see 6.7), so safer custody is now focused on facilitating safer custody gym sessions (for those who would benefit from smaller sessions or who don't usually use the gym), one-to-one sessions and access to the Snoezelen multi-sensory room, which is a relaxing space that helps reduce agitation and anxiety (see Table 1, Annex B.) On Saturday nights, safer custody streams a film (one of the new DVD additions to the library) on the 'Ashfield' television channel, which remains on a loop for a week to allow prisoners more flexibility as to when they watch it.

Ashfield safer custody staff continue to provide well-structured peer support through safer custody coordinators, safer custody representatives and Here to Hear (H2H) prisoners, who provide confidential emotional support to their peers. Table 2, in Annex B, shows use of H2H and the Samaritans help line. It should be noted that a small number of prisoners account for a significant number of calls to the Samaritans. In April, for example, when the highest number of calls were made to the Samaritans (409), one prisoner made 320 of the calls, another made 57, and a third made 25.

Personal intervention plans (PIPs) are set up for those with complex needs. These provide additional, focused support for a limited period whilst a prisoner is finding the environment particularly challenging. These are often set up for prisoners new to custody and are usually established after being on an ACCT, when it is recognised that continuing support is required. The highest number in place at any one time was

during March and April 2024, when there were 12 plans, while the lowest was four, in February.

An increase in individual care plans (ICPs), which are managed by the safer custody team, reflects improved identification of neurodiverse conditions, as well as conditions such as dementia. ICPs are implemented as a result of healthcare staff assessments on induction and highlight how best to engage and support an individual. In July 2023, there were 10 ICPs, but by December these had increased to 17, where they remained, except for an increase to 18 for one month, in April.

Separately, ISPs are created and maintained by the neurodiverse support manager (NSM) within ESW (see 7.1 and 7.2). These plans cover all prisoners reporting neurodiverse traits, including those who might fall outside of the healthcare thresholds. ISPs are more dynamic than ICPs in order that any change in environment (e.g. moving from education to a vocational activity) is reflected and identify any particular adaptations that might be required for that environment. Also, the NSM, together with the prisoner, identifies goals, which they work through together to help the individual whilst at Ashfield.

Both ICPs and ISPs are disseminated amongst all the staff who will have dealings with the individual.

Only one death in custody occurred in the reporting period. The prisoner died of natural causes. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) investigation judged that the clinical care was of a good standard and equivalent to what he could have expected to receive in the community.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The Board is pleased to report a very significant decrease in violence in the reporting year, with seven assaults and three fights, compared with 24 assaults and one fight in the previous reporting period. All have been prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and the majority have been classed as minor, with only two serious assaults requiring external medical attention.

Challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs), used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence, continue to be deployed effectively to facilitate the management of threatening and/or aggressive behaviour. There were a similar number of referrals in the reporting period to the last report (72 compared to 71), but 23 progressed on to plans, compared with only 11 in the previous 12 months. Referrals cover both victims and perpetrators, as well as those with higher violence in prisons estimator (VIPER) scores on arrival. Ashfield has been receiving more prisoners with higher VIPER scores than in previous years. Previously, prisoners with VIPER scores above 0.7 were identified for CSIP referrals, but in April 2024, the threshold was raised to 1.0, reflecting the increase in the number of prisoners arriving with higher scores. Even if a referral does not lead to a plan, work is undertaken with the prisoner to address the concerns that led to the referral.

4.4 Use of force

In the Board's view, use of force (UoF) is very much the last resort at Ashfield, with de-escalation techniques deployed in the first instance. During the reporting period, there have been seven incidents of planned UoF and three occasions of

spontaneous UoF. This is a decrease compared with the last reporting period, when there was a total of 21 UoF incidents.

The majority of planned UoFs were in relation to transfers of prisoners, whereas in the case of spontaneous UoF, one incident was to release a ligature and the other two related to returning prisoners to their cells on lock up when, despite protracted discussions, the prisoners refused.

There were eight occasions when control and restraint (C&R) was deployed (compared with 12 in the last reporting period) in the form of rigid-bar handcuffs. There was no other use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

All C&R incidents are scrutinised after the event by a member of the senior management team, a member of the chaplaincy and, separately, a member of the IMB to ensure actions are proportionate to the incident.

Pelargonic acid vanillylamide (PAVA), a synthetic pepper spray, was not used in the reporting period, although all operational officers have been trained in its use.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Ashfield has continued to maintain an excellent record for the prevention of illicit items entering the establishment. Over another 12 months, no psychoactive drugs (such as Spice, which is a synthetic cannabinoid) have been found. This is achieved to a great extent through robust procedures and effective intelligence gathering and analysis. For the reporting period, a total of 338 routine cell searches were conducted, with a further 34 intelligence-led/targeted searches. Finds from cells were mostly inappropriate material, including explicit writings and pictures. However, other finds included a mobile phone, hooch (home-brewed alcohol), improvised weapons/tools, broken razor blades, and bank details of people unrelated to the cell occupant or other miscellaneous items not listed on their property cards.

A total of 502 mandatory drug tests (MDTs) were conducted, with only two failures (other than positives from authorised medication). The two failures were for non-authorised opiates. A total of 24 suspicion-led drug tests were conducted, with no failures.

Ashfield reception has a body scanner, which is routinely deployed to screen prisoners returning from open conditions, due to the risk they present of having obtained and secreted illicit items. For this reporting period, no illicit items were identified via body scans.

Another key process in maintaining security is the routine scanning of mail using a Rapiscan X-ray machine. In the reporting period, 10 positive indications were recorded for very low levels of Spice and low levels of cocaine.

Visitors also present a risk to the prison, but thorough searches and the use of a passive sniffer dog have minimised the risk of illicit items being smuggled in.

All the above processes are also key contributors in maintaining the high standards of safety enjoyed by HMP Ashfield.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The Board's monitoring reports throughout the year reflect that the overall standard and cleanliness of the accommodation is very good. The facilities are well maintained and the wings are kept clean, organised and free from rubbish. The wing orderlies seem motivated and hardworking, and systems are in place to maintain the standard of cleanliness.

One notable issue, however, is that, at any one time, a few showers of the 64 in total on Avon and Severn houseblocks have been seemingly out of commission, with two showers proving particularly problematic. The IMB has been led to understand that the problem appeared worse than it was because some prisoners had been placing 'out of order' notices on some showers that were actually functional. The showers that were genuinely out of order were logged on the prison's maintenance system and were usually repaired reasonably quickly. Nevertheless, the functionality of the showers remains a concern for the IMB, given the prisoners' regular comments to us about inconsistent water temperatures, poor water flow and drainage issues.

Some of the cells suffer from temperature issues, with prisoners reporting that they can be excessively hot in the summer and very cold in the winter.

An issue was identified, again, in relation to last year's annual report, with the in-cell washbasins. These persist in suffering from black mould, peeling paint and general discoloration, although the prison has made assurances that the matter is in hand. Cell carpeting has been replaced with more hygienic vinyl flooring during the reporting period, as part of the refurbishment programme.

Most exercise yards can be accessed by wheelchair users, but there are a couple of wings that have not been provided with the necessary ramps. This issue has been raised by the Board before and will need following up now that the contract has been awarded. It has also been noted that the touch screens on the internal digital kiosks are positioned too high for those in wheelchairs to be able to use them easily.

The quality of food is generally considered good at Ashfield. The Board has received regular positive feedback from prisoners throughout the reporting period, including comments that the food compares favourably with other prisons. However, during the reporting year, there were 48 positive comments sent via the internal digital prison kiosks and 50 negative comments (of which 30 were about the general quality of food and 20 related to vegan diets). The catering department acknowledged that it had experienced problems throughout much of the year with the availability of general food supplies and that vegan products posed particular difficulties.

The provision of food for religious festivals and events received positive feedback from prisoners.

5.2 Segregation

Ashfield does not have a separate segregation unit. Prisoners who need to be segregated are usually confined to their own cell or another single cell on a different wing or, in exceptional circumstances, a cell in the EDC. When constant supervision is required, Ashfield has two gated cells that can be deployed.

There were eight occasions when prisoners were segregated under GOoD (good order or discipline) and eight segregations under CC (cellular confinement). This represents an increase in GOoD compared with the previous reporting period, when there were just four. There are no particular trends to explain the increase, as the reasons varied, including inappropriate sexualised behaviour, risk to staff and a fight between two prisoners. The number of CCs has decreased compared with the last reporting period, when there were 12. CCs generally relate to violent or threatening behaviour towards staff and/or prisoners.

As part of monitoring visits, segregated prisoners are routinely visited by members of the Board and we have reported that prisoners have been receiving their entitlements and their treatment has been humane. When possible, Board members have also observed GOoD reviews (where the prison determines if the prisoner should or should not remain segregated) and have reported full representation from relevant departments, with proceedings professionally conducted and outcomes fair and appropriate.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Compared with many establishments, staffing levels at Ashfield have been very good. For the prison custodial officer (PCO) grade, staffing levels have mostly equalled or exceeded the complement. Only for three months did PCO staffing fall below complement (at its worst, it was only 1.2 full-time equivalents below complement), but for nine months it was exceeded, as Ashfield had permission to over-recruit to allow for staff secondments to HMP Fosse Way. In total, ten PCOs were seconded to HMP Fosse Way for periods of 3-7 months. Additionally, five Ashfield PCOs were seconded to PECS for various periods of time. At times, however, staffing has been stretched, particularly when there were a number of escorted hospital bed-watches (see 6.5).

The challenge, though, as for many establishments, is the level of experience of PCOs. Around 45% (46% in the last reporting period) of PCOs have three years' or less experience, with around 39% (36.25% in the last reporting period) having two years' or less experience. During the reporting period, 25 new officers were recruited, four of whom had previous PCO experience. Inexperience can lead to inconsistency in approach, particularly in relation to responding to behaviour, an issue occasionally raised by prisoners either informally or via applications (written representations) to the Board, and this makes the role of the COMs (custodial operational managers) in managing this aspect more important (see 5.6).

Interestingly, in the HMIP prisoner survey, conducted in October 2023, of the 160 respondents, 80% agreed that staff treated them with respect, and 69% stated that a member of staff had talked to them in the last week about how they were getting on. HMIP commented that this was better than at similar prisons. Furthermore, 85% of respondents agreed that if they had a problem, they would have a member of staff to whom they could turn.

Key work at Ashfield has been observed to be well managed and robustly assured. For the entire reporting period, the target of providing a key work session for 74% of all prisoners has been consistently exceeded by an average of 9%. In the inspection in October 2023, HMIP commented that 'Ashfield had the second highest recorded level of key work in the last 12 months of all adult male prisons'.

The key work entries for prisoners identified as vulnerable are routinely subject to quality assurance, along with a random sample of others. On average, 83% of audits have been graded in the top two quality categories. The influx of new officers, together with secondments, has resulted in more experienced officers having a greater number of cases (on average, seven, one more than usual), as newly recruited officers would only be allocated two cases initially. The risk that prisoners pose, along with PCO experience, are taken into account when prisoners are allocated to key workers. Generally, prisoners report positive comments to the Board about their key workers; and, in the HMIP survey, 80% of respondents reported that their key worker was either very or quite helpful.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Throughout the reporting period, the Board has observed that there has continued to be a broadly positive atmosphere in the prison. In addition to monitoring, in person, a number of the monthly forums and a selection of the organised equality and diversity events, the Board has also been able to receive and analyse copies of the minutes and statistics provided for all DEAT (diversity and equality action team) meetings, along with those of the monthly forums. In addition, HMIP wrote in complimentary terms about equality and diversity at Ashfield and the 'highly dedicated' work of the equalities coordinator.

Towards the very end of the reporting period, however, there were some indicators that the momentum was beginning to wane. By June 2024, equalities orderlies were voicing concerns about proposed limitations on prisoner attendance at the events they organise, given the heightened priority attached to attendance at work and education classes in response to the critical Ofsted report. They were also facing the prospect of the loss of their office based on the main education corridor. The promised move to a larger office, which could accommodate meetings more easily, had failed to materialise.

There was also ongoing frustration at disappointing levels of attendance at forums by prisoner officer champions. Forums cover protected characteristics such as race, religion, age, disability, sex, gender reassignment and sexual orientation, against which it is unlawful to discriminate. However, encouragingly, attendance by senior management team 'leads', from October 2023 onwards, was generally much improved in all except the age forum and the pride (LGBTQ+) forum. It can be frustrating for prisoners if there is no senior manager or champion in attendance who can answer their questions or with whom they can raise concerns. In addition, despite their best endeavours, it was not always possible for the equalities coordinator (or her deputy, appointed on a temporary basis) to attend all meetings, as they were also being called away regularly to other duties, especially at times of reduced staffing levels or when they were diverted into working on equalities-related issues for Serco nationally.

In the Board's view, despite all these growing challenges, it is to the credit of the department that it has, nevertheless, continued to function well, primarily because of the dedication of all involved and their very constructive relationship with the chaplaincy and the catering department.

On a positive note, 2023-2024 saw a noticeable decline, in comparison with previous years, in the number of black and Asian prisoners complaining to the Board that they were treated less leniently in response to minor misdemeanours. There were,

however, the usual concerns raised at forum meetings about the limited range of black hair products and of specialist Caribbean and Asian food products that could be purchased from the prison shop. The prison was endeavouring to resolve these, but with mixed success, owing to practical constraints. The Board was only very infrequently informally approached by prisoners on matters of race or ethnicity. Of the total of 120 applications received by the Board, only three were on racial/ethnic matters. In addition, of the 41 discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs) received by the prison, only nine were related to ethnicity.

Significantly, statistics presented at the quarterly DEAT and at other prison management meetings indicated that black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners were not disadvantaged or disproportionately represented in key areas such as adjudications (disciplinary hearings held when a prisoner is suspected of having broken prison rules), orderly posts, incentives scheme status, access to interventions programmes, use of force incidents or segregation. For example, in a prison where adjudications are very low in number, measured by general prison standards, of a total of 124 charges during the reporting period, 93 (75%) involved white prisoners, closely in line with the percentage of white prisoners in the establishment. With regard to those accessing an accredited offending behaviour programme such as Horizon or Kaizen, 77.3% were white and 22.7% were black, Asian or mixed race.

Members of the pride forum and individual prisoners did, however, voice concerns to the Board about a small but growing minority of prisoners exhibiting homophobic behaviour, predominantly in the form of verbal abuse rather than physical threats. In total, 17 (41.4%, the largest individual category) of the 41 DIRFs investigated in 2023-2024 pertained to this. Of these, only six (including two complaints about members of staff) could be proven conclusively, highlighting the problems faced in investigating such allegations when there have been no witnesses or any other corroborating evidence. Nevertheless, where those staff investigating had reason to believe there might be some validity in the complaint, verbal warnings were given, key workers were encouraged to address negative views and, in some cases, restorative justice sessions were arranged. It is also encouraging that the prison includes equality and diversity training in the training course for new officer recruits to increase staff awareness and readiness to identify such behaviour and challenge it.

In all other respects, there is much that is very positive to report, not least that there has been a notable improvement in the second half of the reporting period in the range and quality of data presented at DEAT meetings and a real opportunity for open discussion with prisoner representatives. Since July 2023, successful, well-attended events have included Black History Month, a 'Big Sing' organised by the 'all ages' group, a motivational talk by a disabled musician, International Day of Peace, a 'coming out' event organised by the pride forum, and an event run by members of the Veterans in Prison Association (VIPA) for Armed Forces Day. The disability forum has been producing an article for the 'Ashmag' prison magazine on a different disability or hidden disability each month in order to raise awareness and understanding.

With regard to prisoners with disabilities or mobility issues, some who might otherwise struggle to reach their emergency cell bell have been issued with personal wrist alarms. Other potential improvements are under review. The Board remains

concerned, however, that there are prisoners with dementia whose needs the prison finds challenging to address in full, despite its best intentions.

For those prisoners who are neurodiverse or have learning difficulties, the appointment of a neurodiversity support manager, attached to the ESW (education, skills and work) department, has been a positive step forward and, from what Board members have observed, good progress is being made. A detailed strategy has been drawn up to provide appropriate support and reasonable adjustment plans for those identified as neurodiverse and to provide training for staff.

Foreign national prisoners (typically around 20 at any one time) are now having more success in accessing social video calls to contact relatives abroad. They receive additional phone credit to help defray the cost of phoning abroad and acknowledge they are benefiting from a recent review of phone charges. The Home Office representative is now visiting regularly to deal with all aspects of deportation and repatriation.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy department at Ashfield is central both to faith services and pastoral care, with support being provide to those of all faiths and none.

There are two full-time members of staff and four part timers. There are also several visiting chaplains: many are voluntary and travel across the UK to serve the smaller faith groups. Efforts are also made to provide online faith sessions, such as that offered to Rastafarians. The prison chaplains provide support for Christians, Catholics, Orthodox Jews, Methodists, Mormons, Anglicans, those of the Church of Scotland, Pagans, Quakers, Muslims, Buddhists, Rastafarians, Sikhs, Hindus and spiritualists.

Ashfield has continued to struggle to find a Rastafarian visiting chaplain and has scheduled an online meeting with the Rastafarian centre to try and address this. At the end of the reporting period, there were four prisoners registered as Rastafarians in Ashfield, although only two were active.

There is a multifaith chapel and another room available for quiet time or meditation. The regular silent meditation course held at the end of the afternoon has proved very popular with prisoners and staff (the chaplaincy also supports staff wellbeing in the prison.)

Members of the chaplaincy team attend ACCT reviews for prisoners, where possible. They visit prisoners who are segregated and those on hospital bed-watch. There are also close links with the families strategy in the prison. The chaplaincy runs a popular seven-week course that focuses on dealing with loss and much of this work crosses over with family work.

The chaplaincy service runs several events for religious festivals, and they work with catering to offer suitable food for celebrations. Opportunities for musical activity are developing, including a male voice choir and the facility for prisoners to rent musical instruments.

Outside agencies working with the chaplaincy at Ashfield include Storybook Dads (where prisoners record themselves reading a story for their child), Changing Tunes (which offers rehabilitative music sessions), the Angel Tree project (a Salvation Army

project, gathering Christmas gifts for children, which sent out 35 parcels in December 2023), Prison Fellowship (a Christian group supporting prisoners) and a local foodbank, to which the prison contributes.

5.6 Incentives schemes

Throughout the 12 months covered by the annual report, the overwhelming majority of prisoners (typically between about 87% and just under 90%) enjoyed the benefits of the incentives schemes' enhanced status, with around 10% to 12% on standard and rarely more than one or two prisoners on the basic level at any one time. Each status is based on behaviour and dictates the privileges to which the prisoner is entitled. Based on these raw statistics, Ashfield prisoners would appear to fare better than might be the norm elsewhere.

Ashfield prison reviewed and updated its own local incentives policy in April 2024. The philosophy underpinning both the national and Ashfield's own policy was designed to shift the emphasis away from addressing poor behaviour with the removal of entitlements and towards acknowledging and reinforcing good behaviour. Both HMPPS guidance notes and Ashfield's own policy state, for example, that there should generally be four times as many positives as negatives recorded.

Over the reporting period, 222 incentives scheme behaviour warnings were given, an average of between 18 and 19 a month. These were issued by a wide variety of staff (only two officers gave the equivalent of one warning a month) and some would also have triggered a status review.

Some prisoners, however, have reported to the Board that they believe that the policy is not being implemented consistently. They claim some staff too readily resort not just to incentives scheme behaviour warnings but also to negative comments in case history notes for what prisoners believe to be petty or minor matters. Prisoners have also claimed that some prison staff are less diligent in acknowledging particularly good behaviour by recording positive comments in prisoners' case history notes.

However, contrary to prisoners' beliefs, the majority of incentive scheme warnings were for serious offences, such as threatening or abusive behaviour towards staff or other prisoners (28%), refusal to attend work or other scheduled activities (22%), breaking various rules and regulations (17%), possessing unauthorised articles (6%) and breaches of contact bans (4%). Seven prisoners accounted for almost 18% of behaviour warnings.

With regard to more general positive and negative comments, it should be noted, however, that although key workers are expected to check whether their allocated prisoners have received positive entries on Nomis (an internal computer system), the Board remains unconvinced that there is any systematic quality assurance system in place at senior management level to analyse the data and identify which staff may or may not be recording positive entries in case history notes. Consequently, it is not possible to make a direct comparison between these and the number of behaviour warnings or negatives to identify whether the 1:4 ratio is consistently being achieved. The Board notes that both positive and negative comments are perceived by prisoners as very significant for both the annual review process and, more importantly, parole hearings.

Another related issue raised with the IMB by retired prisoners has been that they felt they were potentially disadvantaged if they were not working or if health or mobility issues limited their ability to take on voluntary roles. This was because it was much harder to demonstrate that they were going above and beyond to earn the necessary positive entries on their record to qualify to retain their enhanced status. The Board has now received reassurances from the prison that suitable allowance will be made for this.

On a positive note, Ashfield's local incentives policy includes a separate rewards system (usually in the form of £2 phone credit, cupcakes, a pack of sweets or an extra gym sessions) for exceptional contributions or for repeatedly going above and beyond in helping others. Over the reporting period, 124 rewards for positive behaviour were given, equating to an average of about ten a month. This goes some way to suggest that good behaviour is being more diligently rewarded than previously.

Overall, the (admittedly partial) data suggest that the incentives scheme is being followed broadly consistently, despite the perceptions brought by prisoners to the Board's attention.

5.7 Complaints

A total of 648 formal complaints were received during the reporting period. This compared with a total of 606 formal complaints in the last reporting period, an increase of almost 7%. In the reporting period, 519 complaints were Comp 1 (a complaint); 95 were Comp 1A (an appeal); and 34 were Comp 2 (a complaint about a sensitive issue addressed directly to the Director.)

Complaints categorised as 'residential and safety' were the most common, namely 286, representing 44% of the total. The content of these varied considerably. Issues are highlighted if there are more than two complaints about the same matter during a month, such as, for example, about the operation of the incentives scheme or high temperatures or excessive noise on the wings. No one issue has featured every month, but complaints regarding incentives were mentioned in six separate months and loud music or noise were mentioned in five separate months.

The second highest category of complaint was 'reducing reoffending', with 154 (24%), followed by the category 'external' (91, or 14%), most of which were about property.

The highest number of complaints received in any month was 75, in January 2024, and the lowest was 35, in December 2023, with a monthly average of about 54. The highest number of complaints received from a single prisoner in a month was eight, although one prisoner made 23 complaints over the reporting year and another made 22. In fact, it is worthy of note that almost a quarter of all complaints were made by fewer than 4% of the population. Over the year, there were 31 complaints about staff, none of which was substantiated.

In nine individual months, all complaints were responded to within the stipulated timescale. Only in June 2024 was the monthly target, of 95%, not met, at 94.7%. The monthly average achieved was 99.1%. There were 78 interim responses (a holding response until a full response could be sent). The Board has been informed that a thorough analysis of complaints, identifying themes and trends, is discussed at the

monthly performance and compliance meeting but, as members of the Board are not in attendance for monitoring purposes, we have no means of knowing how this information is then followed up and what specific action results from this to address the issues raised.

Moreover, written responses to formal complaints seen by the Board vary considerably in quality. Many are done well. However, despite the fact that a percentage of responses are subject to assurance checks by managers to identify various issues and are fed back to the relevant head of department to rectify, some shown by prisoners to IMB Board members continue to miss the point, are unclear or abrupt in tone and can undermine prisoners' confidence in the system.

It is noted, however, that the areas of concern in applications to the Board appear to correlate with the categorisation of complaints to the prison.

5.8 Property

Property at Ashfield has been observed to be organised efficiently by a very experienced officer and an orderly. The electronic property recording system continues to be more accurate and reliable than many of the paper versions on which prisoners' property has been recorded at previous establishments.

Prisoners use the internal digital prison kiosks to request exchanges between in-cell and in-storage property and can expect a reply within ten days. Property is delivered to the wings once a fortnight, using a daily rotational system.

Property lost in transfer from other prisons, including legal paperwork and other valuable or sentimental items, continues to be a regular issue. The Board received more applications this reporting year about property (13 compared to 10 the previous year). As such, it remains one of the most frequent approaches made by prisoners to the Board. As mentioned in 5.7, above, of the 91 complaints the prison received about other prisons, the majority were about property issues.

The charity shop created in the previous reporting period is running well. It enables prisoners, when released or transferring, to donate items they don't want to take with them. Such former property is re-sold to other prisoners and the proceeds donated to charity.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust has provided healthcare services at HMP Ashfield since October 2022, so has had 20 months, to the end of this reporting period, to ensure its services are working well.

Initial assessments are carried out on new prisoners within 24 hours of their arrival. A second screening will take place within seven days. These targets are set by NHS England and both are met at HMP Ashfield.

This year, the aim of the full-time head of the healthcare centre was to fill all staff positions and reduce waiting times. The Board is pleased to observe that these two key aims have largely been achieved. In July 2023, the shortage of staff was still a lingering issue, but by the end of June 2024 all posts had been filled. It is hoped that following security checks, the newly filled positions of pharmacy technician, occupational therapist (OT), mental nurse practitioner, mental health support worker and neurodiversity nurse will be in post by the end of summer or early autumn 2024.

There is a bimonthly health improvement group (HIG) forum, which enables prisoner representatives to meet healthcare staff to discuss their concerns and consider possible improvements. A local delivery and quality board (LDQB), made up of the contract director and healthcare professionals, including NHS England, meets once a month to discuss best practice.

Prisoner surveys are also used to assess ongoing problems. The most frequently mentioned concern has been how a change in the movement regime, introduced in the summer of 2023, has affected access to healthcare services. As movement is only allowed at certain times during the day, patients have had, until very recently, to remain in waiting rooms for prolonged periods, unable to return to their cells, or to their work or education classes. This has now been alleviated somewhat by the prison providing an officer to accompany each group of prisoners to and from their appointments, but occasional shortages in prison staff mean this has not always been guaranteed. Prisoner orderlies have been trained to take blood pressure readings and to help relieve feelings of stress or anxiety amongst the waiting prisoners. However, the prison has not re-introduced the system, which was used before this more restricted movement regime was introduced, to enable the healthcare orderly and 'buddies' (orderlies) to move more freely between the healthcare centre and cells.

An improved toilet facility and the provision of a water fountain for prisoners' use were eventually made available near the healthcare centre's waiting rooms. The lack of these facilities in summer 2023 became an ongoing source of concern for some prisoners.

Initially, the change in the movement regime led to an increase in the number of 'did not attends' (DNAs) at appointments, as some prisoners chose to stay in their places of work or education rather than sit in the healthcare centre waiting room for prolonged periods. However, the number of DNAs has started to fall as prisoners have become used to the new arrangements. By the end of the reporting period, only four or five DNAs were reported each month.

Waiting lists are largely in line with services available outside prison. Board members have observed a significant effort to improve waiting times, particularly for the optometrist, although we are told that more work needs to be done to reduce the physiotherapist's list.

6.2 Physical healthcare

A GP, provided by DrPA Secure, is commissioned to attend the prison three times a week, mornings or afternoons only. The spread of this service over the week is designed to ensure that, if any prisoner is in segregation, they can be visited at various times during the week. Waiting times are generally no more than two weeks, with urgent cases receiving same-day appointments, where possible. In-person and in-cell triage via phone is carried out by nurses.

One clinical lead nurse, a paramedic and four primary care nurses are employed each weekday and two healthcare assistants provide full-time support work.

The occupational therapist and one assistant are on hand to lead the 'wellman' clinics and retired prisoner groups. From the beginning of 2024, the healthcare team has worked alongside prison staff in the gym and from the education department to provide some of the wellman groups, including weight loss/healthy eating and pulmonary health. These are popular sessions and are often held in the gym.

The podiatrist, whose time is divided among five prisons in the region, started the reporting year playing catch up, as a long backlog had developed by July 2023. Visits are monthly and the waiting time is back to around six weeks.

The waiting time for an appointment with the optometry services at the start of the reporting period was increasing. Up to the end of 2023, only around five prisoners were being seen by the optometrist each month. At its worst, there were more than 70 prisoners waiting for eye checks and associated services. As a result, the head of healthcare commissioned more sessions to help deal with the waiting list backlog. The optometrist is usually commissioned to work one session a month, but with the extra six sessions booked between the end of the reporting period and the beginning of the next, the Board has been told there should be only six prisoners on the waiting list by the end of July 2024.

There is a great demand for physiotherapy sessions at HMP Ashfield, partly owing to the high number of older prisoners. There is one session a week, but it is continually full and means some prisoners are missing out. The Board has been told that extra sessions are planned, but these are due to begin in the next reporting period.

In the Board's view, medication shortages replicate those experienced in the wider community. Between 2023 and 2024, there has been a national shortage of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) medication, which has affected HMP Ashfield. This is reflected in the number and type of complaints made by prisoners to the healthcare team. Generally, it appears that the number of queries (which have to precede a formal complaint) are low. The highest number of queries in a month over the reporting year was nine and the highest number of following complaints was six, albeit in different months. Most of these concerns related to medication shortages and lack of consistency in treatment plans between the different GPs.

However, prisoners transferred from HMP Dartmoor have also raised concerns with the Board about the possible effects of radon poisoning. No full study has been

carried out to check for possible symptoms, but each transferred prisoner has been given information regarding symptoms to look out for.

The autumn vaccination booster programme against Flu and Covid was completed, with only a couple of prisoners declining their vaccinations. Virtually all prisoners over 65 have been inoculated.

Improvements to the health bar service (which enables prisoners to purchase 'over the counter' supplies of shampoo, plasters, soap, eyedrops and toothpaste, etc) appear to have resolved the issue raised in last year's Board report, so that prisoners who share a cell can now order and pay separately from one another.

Decisions for any end-of-life care are taken by a multi-disciplinary team. In the absence of an in-bed facility at HMP Ashfield, a place needs to be found for appropriate specialist care, usually in a hospice or hospital or, possibly, an appropriately secure nursing home. Discussions have been held with HMP The Verne, which has an in-bed unit and might be able to accommodate patients from HMP Ashfield.

HMP Ashfield's healthcare team reached the finals of the Oxleas 'Best Healthcare in a Custodial Setting' 2023 award. They came second overall, and this was regarded by the head of healthcare as a great honour, reflecting the hard work carried out by a team working together well on one site.

6.3 Mental health

Throughout the reporting period, an average of 16 prisoners have been referred for mental health assessments each month.

A new deputy head of healthcare/mental health was appointed July 2023, which has helped boost the standard of mental health services. However, staffing has remained an issue throughout the reporting period. That said, targets have been met by using agency staff and all full-time positions have now been filled.

A new mental health practitioner (a learning disabilities nurse), working for most of the reporting period as agency staff, has now been given a full-time position. This is an important role, as they work alongside the neurodiversity support manager in the education department, identifying any difficulties experienced by prisoners and finding various coping strategies to help them. Prisoners who particularly suffer with low mood, especially at difficult times of the year such as Christmas and birthdays, also benefit from the support given by this practitioner.

A new speech and language therapist service has been introduced by Oxleas in the south west region during the reporting year. It is estimated that up to 60% of all prisoners have problems with communication. The aim is to help those who have been imprisoned for the first time to understand prison vocabulary and those facing parole hearings to express themselves as best they can.

A clinical psychologist is available five days a fortnight, supported by a full-time psychologist assistant. Various one-to-one appointments and group sessions are held to help prisoners manage their mental health needs, although diagnostic testing is no longer carried out. Conditions include anxiety, depression, and the full range of neurodiversity needs.

The occupational therapist team works alongside the mental health team to provide therapeutic help and social care for prisoners suffering from dementia and other memory problems. Under the previous healthcare contract, the contracted GPs were able to diagnose dementia, but this service is no longer available under Oxleas. However, the Board has been told that a new memory service is to be introduced with the help of visiting specialists from the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust (AWP).

The psychiatrist divides their time between HMPs Ashfield, Leyhill and Erlestoke, but is available at Ashfield once a month. This post oversees the provision of MMSA (medication to manage sexual arousal), which is being used by about ten prisoners. It is part of a pilot scheme being run by Nottingham Trent University to assess the use and impact of this type of medication.

More than 80 prisoners are engaged with mental health services, including group work and one-to-one sessions.

6.4 Social care

Throughout the reporting period, the contract has remained in place with South Gloucestershire Council, with a regular meetings taking place between their care manager and the prison's equalities coordinator. The Board has no concerns about the wait time for social care assessments. It is rare for there to be more than one or two prisoners requiring support from trained care workers, who can come in up to twice daily.

An occupational therapist was in post until almost the end of the reporting period and met fortnightly with the equalities coordinator. They provided helpful advice, support and training to the buddies who, on a daily basis, have continued to meet the needs of elderly or infirm prisoners and others with mobility issues or sight or hearing impairment. The buddies assist them with movement around the prison, cell cleaning and tidying, collecting food and medication and so forth, although they are not allowed to provide personal care. They have, however, regularly commented to the Board that restrictions on movement outside scheduled movement times have made their work particularly difficult, as each buddy may have clients in different locations needing assistance in any given fixed period. That said, the situation has eased a little in recent months.

The buddies have a monthly meeting with the equalities coordinator in order to identify issues that need addressing and to offer mutual support, given that some of their clients can exhibit challenging behaviour, especially those with dementia or serious personal hygiene issues. Buddies' meetings indicate some frustration with the occasionally inconsiderate and even hostile behaviour exhibited by other prisoners in medication or servery queues, where prisoners requiring support are entitled to priority.

The number of personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs), a bespoke escape plan for those who may have difficulties evacuating a building to a place of total safety without support or assistance from others, has steadily risen over the course of the year from around 40 to an average of 60 at any one time. This is mainly because the scope has been widened to include those with learning difficulties or neurodivergence who might struggle to understand what might be happening during an emergency evacuation. Each PEEP is reviewed every six months.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

HMIP noted, in their inspection in October 2023, that there was sufficient opportunity for prisoners to use the well-equipped outdoor exercise yards each day. In addition, they noted that prisoners were unlocked for 9.5 hours on weekdays and 8.5 hours at weekends (even when not engaged in work or education, as many only had part-time purposeful activity), and that these hours were better than at many other prisons they had inspected.

In the previous reporting year, the Board described three issues that had affected Ashfield's otherwise very good record, compared with many other establishments, for time out of cell. These included a Covid outbreak (commencing 25 January 2023), staff shortages over the New Year weekend (2022-2023) and staff being diverted to support Serco staff dealing with a case of concerted indiscipline elsewhere. During the 2023-2024 reporting period, time out of cell was restricted just once, owing to staff shortages over the New Year period, although staffing was occasionally stretched as a consequence of escorted hospital bed-watches.

Some restrictions on movements outside scheduled movement times remain, although some of these have been eased recently, especially with regard to healthcare appointments, with an escorting officer usually available to facilitate movement back to the wings. Nonetheless, some prisoners (as in the previous reporting period) have expressed the view that Ashfield has become more like a category B prison. However, the Director informed the Board that a change to the previous pattern of movements was required for security reasons, following an HMPPS inspection during the previous reporting period, to align Ashfield more closely with other category C prisons, as well as for the refurbishment programme required by contract expiry.

Prisoners at Ashfield have good access to the gym and library during the week but, as HMIP reported, 'there were insufficient enrichment activities at weekends'. The Board has welcomed the work of both the safer custody team and then the wellbeing department to begin to address this issue, and we look forward to further developments.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

From the Board's observations, there appears to be hardly any identified drug or alcohol misuse within the prison, but up to 40 prisoners are receiving support for historic substance misuse. The subcontractor, Change, Grow, Live (CGL), helps support those who have suffered from the effects of misusing alcohol, drugs and prescription medications before prison and who may relapse in the future.

'Foundations of rehabilitation' is an eight-week psychosocial course, held twice weekly, and offers specialist advice, therapy and peer support. It is very popular and helpful, according to prisoner feedback.

6.7 Soft skills

Two prisoners work alongside the occupational therapist and other prison staff to provide a weekday 'wellman' course, run over four weeks. The course includes relaxation and breathing techniques, combined with general fitness. A new group addressing the challenges of being a retired prisoner has also been set up and is proving popular.

In the latter part of the reporting period, the occupational therapist assistant introduced an arts and crafts course. Music workshops, in association with library staff and outside musicians, are provided occasionally. Most courses are run to help prisoners learn to relax in a challenging environment.

New groups set up since the last report include creative writing, better relaxation and sleep techniques, which can help prepare prisoners for their eventual release or at least provide a distraction during their imprisonment. The healthcare team has also started providing a wellbeing clinic for staff, which has proved helpful in identifying any physical or mental health concerns.

One suggestion from the bimonthly HIG forum was to introduce a whole course on relaxation techniques. A massage chair and specially designed lights have been bought and have been included in the improved relaxation courses.

Much of the responsibility for coordinating this work has come under the remit of a wellbeing department, set up in the latter part of the reporting period.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 and 7.2 Education, library, vocational skills and work

Ashfield, as a privately run prison, provides all education, work and vocational training in-house. These services, therefore, need to be assessed as a composite entity, managed by one Serco manager and three course team leaders.

In the IMB's last annual report, concerns were raised about a number of issues relating to the provision of education, skills and work (ESW) within the prison. It was noted that, in May 2023, a new head of department had been appointed, who had ambitious ideas for change and development, and work had begun on producing a detailed improvement plan. However, it was inevitable, given the scale of the task and the limited time available, that minimal progress in implementing the plan had been made by the time of the HMPPS and Ofsted inspections in October 2023. Ofsted's overall conclusion was that the provision of the service was 'inadequate' on a number of different grounds, including the provision of too few activity spaces, disruptions to attendance in education and work, slow progress in implementing a reading strategy and a lack of rigorous management and quality assurance. An additional criticism was that there were too few opportunities for prisoners to work towards levels 2 and 3 vocational qualifications, while several work areas offered no qualifications at all. The Board was also concerned that the situation had been allowed to deteriorate to such a critical point.

To the prison's credit, HMP Ashfield initially undertook a comprehensive needs analysis in order to address Ofsted's criticisms and to help inform the strategic direction of the service. This included assessing the likely number of prisoners who would be seeking employment on release and, based on the most up-to-date market intelligence, the type of work that could potentially be available to them, given the nature of their offence. The intention was to try and ensure that prisoners had the appropriate skills and education to help them access and obtain the necessary vocational skills.

It was also recognised that it was important to address more effectively the needs of existing retirees and those who would reach retirement age on release. The number of those aged 60+ (i.e. those already retired or coming up to retirement) throughout the reporting period has averaged about 25% of the population, and those aged 50+ (some of whom serving longer or indeterminate sentences may also be close to retirement on release) make up a further 17%.

Ofsted identified that prisoners at Ashfield were insufficiently engaged in regular purposeful activity. One key part of the prison's improvement plan was to identify the reasons for this and then implement wide-ranging measures to address them, together with a rigorous system of quality assurance. The Board was pleased to note that, by the end of the reporting period, there was a demonstrable improvement in performance. Board members have observed on their more recent monitoring visits that there are now far fewer unoccupied prisoners on each wing during the working day.

Ashfield also designed a four-week introductory programme for all prisoners to undertake, supplementary to the initial general induction process. The intention was to implement it fully during 2024-2025. It would also have insured that prisoners were

fully engaged in appropriate purposeful activities at the earliest opportunity, which would have maximised their chances of employment on release.

As part of this, ESW introduced individual learning plans (ILPs). It is surprising they didn't already have them in place, given that these are the norm in most HMPPS prisons. Their purpose is to ensure that each prisoner takes responsibility for their personal, employability and vocational skills development. Their success is partially dependent on their use by all relevant staff. By June 2024, however, it was evident that further staff training was still required to achieve full effectiveness.

Although the importance of all prisoners achieving, at the very least, level 1 in numeracy and literacy and, preferably, level 2 is recognised, it is of concern that, towards the end of the reporting period, there were still 33 and 36 prisoners, respectively, on the waiting list for level 1 courses. A combination of insufficient numbers of staff with the required level of qualifications, along with a decision to prioritise the needs of entry-level prisoners, contributed to this. At the end of the reporting period, a staff recruitment process had commenced.

Equally worryingly, as a result of staff sickness and other absences, there was considerable delay in providing prisoners with their certificates on successful completion of some of the courses. Some left the prison unable to take their certificates with them, and it is essential that there is no repetition of this in 2024-2025.

In view of the importance of reading, both to enable effective access to ESW opportunities and for recreational and wellbeing benefits, a comprehensive improvement reading strategy plan was developed. By the end of the reporting period, effective assessments of reading skills had been carried out as an integral part of the induction process for prisoners arriving at Ashfield, with appropriate steps being taken, such as, for example, using Shannon Trust trained mentors to help those identified as needing additional support.

During the reporting period, the library showed an upward trend in attendances. This was partly owing to access to the library being made available on Saturdays for a few weeks for drop-in sessions. This was particularly beneficial for those prisoners who might have had difficulties, because of other commitments, in visiting during weekdays. At one stage, up to 150 men were making use of the library on Saturdays. However, by May 2024, there was a reduced number of Saturday openings and, by the end of June, no further Saturday sessions took place. However, it is pleasing to note that the provision of Saturday opening forms part of the new contract from the beginning of November 2024.

The library has continued to remain a welcoming environment and an increasingly important resource for prisoners, given the activities organised by the librarian. Under their editorial supervision, an excellent monthly magazine is produced, which gives prisoners writing experience and a chance to use their skills, as well as being informative for the prisoner population. There are five PCs in the library, linked to education, which provide access to the 'virtual campus'. If there is something that a prisoner would like from the internet, the librarian can, if the material is appropriate, copy and paste the items. In addition, the library hosts the prisoner advice line service (PALS), which enables prisoners to ask for information from a very enthusiastic, trained orderly about various matters related to prison rules and policies, as well as the wider criminal justice system.

In addition to the library coffee sessions for retirees, organised by the librarian, Ashfield should be congratulated for having established, at the end of the reporting period, a 'wellbeing hub', with activities available throughout the week specifically for retirees. These form part of the strategy to ensure that all the prison population is engaged in some form of purposeful activity and they have, so far, proved very popular.

In last year's IMB report, the Board raised concerns about the lack of support for those prisoners who are neurodiverse. Following the initiative introduced by HMPPs in all prisons in England and Wales, the appointment of a neurodiversity support manager (NSM) in September 2023, is already reaping demonstratable benefits. Ashfield should be congratulated on the number of initiatives that have been planned and implemented successfully by the NSM.

All prisoners arriving at Ashfield are now assessed for neurodiversity (see 4.1 and 4.2). At the end of the reporting period, there were 33 prisoners who had an individual support plan (ISP) tailored to their individual needs. The NSM personally provided specialist training to 111 staff members to help give them a better understanding of how to address some of the challenging behaviour that some prisoners demonstrate. In addition, two neurodiversity support orderlies were appointed, one for each of the two prison blocks at Ashfield, to help support prisoners. An autism-awareness event was held at which a specialist gave a presentation. A total of 41 prisoners attended and took away useful information and materials. It is noted that a neurodiversity-specialist nurse is due to commence work with healthcare services, which should help tackle issues faced by prisoners.

The gym, which is staffed by three enthusiastic, qualified physical education instructors (PEIs) plays an important part in delivering purposeful activities for prisoners, who are responsible for making their own bookings. There is close liaison with the safer custody team and the healthcare team, whose staff can also make specific referrals.

The gym offers a wide range of sports facilities, which are available in three separate areas (astro turf, weights room and sports hall). It is to the credit of the gym staff that they also arrange football competitions over the lunch period for staff and prisoners. This helps to develop staff and prisoner relations and to introduce friendly competition

One area of concern, however, is the high amount of time that prisoners could have spent in the gym but which was lost because existing PEIs are diverted to carry out other priority work in the prison at times of staffing shortages. But, in return, during periods of PEI staffing shortages, the gym has stayed open, as gym staff have received support from residential staff and custodial operational managers.

Opportunities at weekends are more limited, when only one PEI is on duty. Nevertheless, weekend activities have included cricket, badminton and rounders' competitions.

The gym is also an accredited learning centre, which means that prisoners can undertake courses that could potentially be useful for them on release. One example is a level 2 course on sports and nutrition. Additional courses are being considered for the coming year.

In summary, between October and the end of June, the Board hoped that the progress undoubtedly made in ESW as a whole would not be hindered or derailed by the contract bidding process. It was unfortunate, when the new contract result was announced, that some of Ashfield's own ESW plans were then likely to be overridden by alternative plans developed by the Serco bid team. Understandably, this has caused some consternation in the department and has adversely affected staff morale.

In conclusion, the Board hopes that Ashfield will now be able to build on the improvements already made between the Ofsted inspection and June 2024 and will be on a trajectory to continue to make significant improvements to ESW in the coming year. For this to be achieved, it will be critical to operate extensive quality-assurance monitoring of all aspects of the service to ensure that any ongoing or emerging issues or concerns can be addressed promptly.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The need to reduce the risk of reoffending is a shared objective throughout the prison, as well as being a central part of offender management.

Reducing reoffending strategy meetings, usually held bi-monthly, have been well attended by senior staff and have covered a wide range of matters over the reporting year. They have been chaired by the assistant director of reducing reoffending who is also head of the offender management unit (OMU.)

Responsibility for offender management is jointly delivered by 19 directly employed Serco staff, headed by the head of the OMU and a team of five HMPPS probation staff, led by a senior probation officer. The probation staff had been working alongside Serco staff since the Autumn of 2019, but during the reporting year were informed they would be rotated back into the community within months. The decision by HMPPS to rotate all their staff came as a surprise both to Serco and to the probation team. Two of the new probation staff were in post before the end of the IMB reporting year (with identified replacements for the other three who were scheduled to arrive in October 2024). They settled in well, despite their lack of prior prison experience, and with little impact on OMU delivery. The Board hopes that planning for the remaining two new team members and their new manager, who has prison experience, will prove to be just as seamless.

As HMPPS prison population pressures increased, the OMU became faced with another two-fold challenge, namely the need to speed up the process of moving suitable prisoners to space in category D open prisons, while subsequently dealing with a high number who were sent back.

The transfer to open conditions involved reviewing the category status of an average of 50 prisoners a month. This high number will increase at the start of the next reporting year after a further change to HMPPS eligibility criteria. Prisoners who passed category D reviews had to move out even faster than previously, with the time before transfer reduced from about two weeks to, often, less than a day. Naturally, this caused extra stress for prisoners and additional work for a number of different departments.

With operational capacity at Ashfield for 412 prisoners, during the reporting year there were 222 transfers in, 54 direct releases and 160 transfers out. Of the transfers

out, 91 went to category D prisons (62 in the previous year). The most popular choice of open prison remained HMP Leyhill (56%).

A total of 18 prisoners, who failed in category D establishments, were transferred to Ashfield in the course of the reporting year. Not all had been transfers from Ashfield initially, but the question of why they had failed in open conditions needed to be answered. Could it be because the fast change had left insufficient time to prepare them properly? A study by the interventions unit confirmed that this was one of the reasons, but significant, too, was the difficulty some prisoners convicted of sexual offences had in mixing with non-sexual offenders. They also felt open prison staff treated them differently and did not listen to them. Experiences differed between open prisons, and it remains an area that is being monitored closely both by the OMU and the Board. Extra support is clearly needed, not just at Ashfield but in some open prisons.

The OMU held two preparatory workshops in the first half of the reporting year but, after the HMIP report, they were halted temporarily to give priority to ESW activities.

A letter is sent to all prisoners about a month before they are due a category D review. This highlights the challenges and expectations of them in the new environment. It also gives them the chance to talk over any concerns with prison staff. Hearing about the negative experiences of returning prisoners spreads fear among those leaving, and this, too, must be addressed.

In the course of the reporting year, those on determinate sentences remained at 88% of Ashfield's population and those on indeterminate sentences at 12%. The level of multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) also stayed the same, as did the number of prisoners deemed a risk to children, at 85%.

With the growing number of prisoners transferring to Ashfield from their reception prisons shortly after sentencing, many of whom had not yet been assessed under the offender assessment system (OASys), a tool used to work out the risks and needs of a prisoner, the burden of work for the OMU increased further. It is to their credit that they have dealt with such extra pressures so efficiently.

Working alongside the OMU, the interventions unit continued to provide a wide range of psychological services, research and offender behaviour programmes to reduce the risk of reoffending. A new head of department was appointed mid-year, leading a robust team of about 20.

A key part of the team's work is psychological risk assessment for parole boards. All prisoners required to attend an offending behaviour programme (OBP) are also psychologically assessed to confirm which is best for them and if they are ready.

Each year, the interventions unit undertakes a needs analysis to check the content of the OBPs. The focus for the reporting year was on those prisoners who had also carried out non-sexual offences, in order to help reduce the risk of them reoffending in other ways. This involved about 40% of Ashfield's population. The report concluded that the existing programmes sufficiently covered other types of offending.

The two principal OBPs remained Kaizen and Horizon, for individuals considered, respectively, at high and medium risk of sexual reoffending. These have been running at Ashfield since 2017, and, for yet another year, targets have been

exceeded for both courses. A total of 16 prisoners completed Kaizen and 60 completed Horizon.

National demand still far outweighs supply for these two courses, especially Kaizen. Given the ongoing positive feedback about these courses, the Board was surprised to learn of the HMPPS decision to phase out and replace both in April 2025. Also to be terminated are several other programmes run at other prisons, such as Becoming New Me+, for which, over the years, prisoners at Ashfield with learning difficulties have transferred out. As a huge change, one new programme, Building Choices, will cover all aspects.

The only previously accredited course to continue is the Healthy Sex Programme, run at Ashfield since 2021, with waiting lists held nationally. This one-to-one, more specialised course focuses on developing skills to manage unhealthy or offence-related sexual interests. Seven prisoners completed it this year.

In July 2023, the interventions team started a new unaccredited workshop at Ashfield, called Making a Change. This is for individuals who are assessed as not ready to engage in OBPs, or who are struggling to progress in their sentence. Designed for groups of up to six, so far only three have been run for a total of 16 attendees but, again, with positive feedback. Whether it will continue is uncertain.

To mark participants' success in their programmes, 12 family members this year took part in post-programme reviews, either in person or over the phone, and 11 attended completion ceremonies.

Over the reporting year, 15 prisoners were referred for MMSA. Research about its effectiveness is still limited and taking it is a matter of choice for each prisoner. In assessing whether its potential benefits outweigh side effects, a few prisoners have decided against it.

Interventions training clinics are run to ensure that key workers and frontline staff are aware of the risks presented by the specific population at Ashfield. This helps them identify and report behaviour needed for further risk assessment and case management. A total of 30 clinics took place this year, attended by 50 staff.

Work on creating and maintaining a rehabilitative culture throughout the prison has continued. There have been fewer meetings than in the previous reporting year but several more prison-wide initiatives. To build on a sense of community, six prisoner rehabilitative culture champions were appointed to spread the principles and help plan events. These included an 'Ashfest' cultural festival and a staff welfare event. Staff wellbeing remains a crucial part of the agenda.

7.4 Family contact

Family social visits are held on Fridays Saturdays and Sundays, in the visits' hall. For those who family and friends cannot physically visit, there are social video calls.

In talking to prisoners after their social visits, the Board has found that they have expressed positive comments about the experience. They have reported that family members found the staff helpful and friendly. Some prisoners, however, having dressed in their best clothes for visits, dislike wearing a coloured bib, although this is important for safety and security reasons.

There were, previously, some issues with the temperature in the visits' hall, which now appear to be resolved. During the weekend, volunteers from the local Mothers' Union make tea and coffee for visitors in the visits' bungalow, and this provision of hot drinks for families on arrival is very welcome

About 37% of prisoners have no visitors. A small number receive visitors through the New Bridge Foundation.

HMP Ashfield runs a scheme called Families at the Centre of Throughcare (FACT), a scheme unique to Serco and for use in all Serco prisons. It was developed at Ashfield and has significantly helped the transition of new prisoners into custody, whilst providing a helpline for family and friends. A voluntary initiative, the process involves prisoners signing up to their family being kept informed of their progress in custody. Each family receives an email every six to eight weeks. The information includes positive and negative entries in the prisoner's sentence management record on the National Offender Management Information System (NOMIS.) Every two months, the FACT scheme also includes a dedicated day for prisoners and their families new to Ashfield. This includes a video of Ashfield, and speakers from key work, probation, security and the interventions unit. There is also an orderly from the EDC (early days centre), who explains what Ashfield is like from a prisoner's perspective. Between July 2023 and June 2024, there were nine FACT days, with 46 families attending and, at the end of June, 57 prisoners were signed up for FACT. Feedback from the FACT days and the process collected by the prison has been positive:

- 'First time coming here. Absolutely lovely staff & place. Can't wait to come again!'
- Member of staff: 'Bubbly, happy & catered for our dietary requirements.'
- About another member of staff: 'Approachable, able to answer questions, friendly manner.'
- 'Obvious, seeing [named prisoner], but getting to know how HMP Ashfield works, meet some of the staff, plus being able to ask questions, but most important, getting the answers we required.'
- 'We really enjoyed the day, would recommend this to any prisoner and their families.'

Separately from FACT, Ashfield runs regular full day events for prisoners and their families. Some of these are for adult children only and others are for children of school age, which are scheduled around the school holidays to maximise attendance. Food, music and sporting events are provided. Between July 2023 and June 2024, there were 10 family days, attended by a total of 141 family members. This included the first event for adult children of prisoners, which was well attended and appeared to be much enjoyed.

It is to the credit of Ashfield that it has chosen to work with Children Affected by Parental Offending (CAPO). Some staff have attended training and meetings and plan to develop this programme.

7.5 Resettlement planning

No prisoner from Ashfield has been moved to an official resettlement prison since January 2023. Prison population pressures have overridden the earlier offender management in custody flow model, and more are now being released directly into the community.

During the reporting year, there was a 29% increase in direct releases: 54 compared with 42 last year. The prison expects a higher number, again, in the next reporting year.

Probation staff shortages in the community meant that community offender managers (COMs) have sometimes been allocated to prisoners later than they should have been, although this did improve during the year. Much depends on where a prisoner will be released, with London the area most critically short of staff. COMs are responsible for sourcing and/or approving accommodation options. Case by case, they make referrals for approved premises (which provide supervision for those who present a high or very high risk of serious harm) or risk-assess a family address.

In the previous reporting year, all prisoners released directly were booked into accommodation before their release, although in some cases it was a close call. In the reporting year, six prisoners did not have any form of accommodation to go to on the day of their release. They were required, instead, to report to a designated probation office, where a council housing officer was responsible for finding them emergency accommodation. No appointments could be made pre-release. The Board considers this completely unacceptable.

The Secretary of State for Justice approved parole board recommendations for four IPP prisoners to be directly released under licence. Licence time is now shorter: five years rather than ten. Four were recommended for open conditions, but only one was approved. The Secretary of State also successfully challenged the direct release of one life-sentenced prisoner and refused another a return to open conditions. In the previous reporting year, it had taken eight months, on average, for a decision from the Secretary of State to be received. The Board is pleased to report that the wait time is now about three months, which is much better although it still does not meet the stipulated 28 day target.

While the OMU was considered excellent by HMIP, Ashfield was criticised for insufficient coordination of resettlement planning in the final months before release. To address this, the OMU has been working on documenting all the support offered to each individual approaching release, thereby providing a more accurate audit trail. Such support includes Ashfield's prisoners' advice centre, which offers a useful range of peer-led guidance, including information about approved premises. Outside agencies that come in to the prison and are contactable by phone are still, primarily, Citizens Advice, on matters such as financial benefit, and the Department of Work and Pensions, on employment possibilities. More support is expected from these and additional partner agencies when the new Serco contract takes effect in autumn 2024. It will, hopefully, help change the fact that, so far, no prisoner who has been released directly from Ashfield has gone straight into employment.

As well as OMU workshops, the Board has been told that a two-week resettlement and pre-release training package is going to be launched shortly, with accredited

qualifications in matters such as emergency first aid at work, fire safety, food safety, health and safety, safe moving and manual handling. Prisoners eligible to attend will have six months or less on their sentence, be coming up for parole, or will have been granted category D status.

In common with all prisons, Ashfield does not have the resources to track what happens to prisoners after release in order to gather useful learning points from this. The only way the OMU finds out if an ex-prisoner has reoffended is if a request arrives for a core record from the archives. No formal record is kept of such requests, but the estimate last year was about 20. Clearly, it would be useful if the Ministry of Justice/HMPPS were able to provide relevant feedback to prisons.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	279

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Current Annual Report	Previous Annual Report
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	3	6
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	30	19
C	Equality	3	4
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	10	5
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	8	3
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	4	3
F	Food and kitchens	3	4
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	11	16
H1	Property within this establishment	11	4
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	13	10
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	1	
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	3	17
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	7	5
K	Transfers	7	3
L/M	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	6	5
	Total number of applications	120	104

Annex A

Main service providers

- Physical health provider: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Mental health provider: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Substance use treatment provider: Change, Grow, Live
- Prison education framework provider: Serco
- Escort contractor: Prison Escort Custodial Service

Annex B

Tables and graphs

Table 1: Safer custody

	Attendance for safer custody sessions											
	July 2023	Aug 2023	Sep 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024	Apr 2024	May 2024	June 2024
Art	94	85	103	77	64	50	42	48	46	70	36	0
Safer custody gym	105	97	85	230	230	136	157	232	137	113	22	124
Weekend activities	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	65	29	78	0	0
One to one	86	115	95	140	111	211	226	188	124	138	67	75
Snoezelen room	2	5	4	0	0	0	5	0	2	2	0	0

- The use of Snoezelen rooms has decreased again, so safer custody will be actively promoting them once more. The safer custody gym remains very popular.
- There was an increase in one-to-one sessions in December, due to better capture of data and Christmas being a difficult time for many prisoners.

Table 2: Phone calls made between July 2023 and June 2024

	July 2023	Aug 2023	Sep 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Ma 2024r	Apr 2024	May 2024	June 2024
Here to Hear	8	6	5	3	19	23	22	7	1	5	4	5
Samaritans	135	83	173	93	82	82	66	133	134	409	381	222



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