



# **Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Bedford**

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

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# Contents

<b>Introductory sections 1 – 3</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the establishment	4
3. Key points	5
 <b>Evidence sections 4 – 7</b>	
4. Safety	11
5. Fair and humane treatment	16
6. Health and wellbeing	23
7. Progression and resettlement	27
 <b>The work of the IMB</b>	
Board statistics	33
Applications to the IMB	34
 <b>Annex</b>	
IMB survey	35

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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**

### **2.1 Purpose**

HMP and Young Offender Institution (YOI) Bedford (to be referred to subsequently as 'HMP Bedford') is a category B reception and resettlement prison for adult and young adult men, with the following functions:

- to receive prisoners from court, on remand and following sentencing;
- to keep remand prisoners until the outcome of their court case;
- to risk-assess, categorise and allocate sentenced prisoners to a suitable prison to serve their sentence;
- to manage and keep safe prisoners serving their sentence in HMP Bedford and to prepare them for release;
- to receive prisoners from other prisons to prepare them for release into the local community.

### **2.2 Accommodation and facilities**

HMP Bedford has 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 421 (310 being the certified normal accommodation, which is the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being overcrowded)<sup>1</sup>. However, one wing was out of use during the reporting period, with the result that the operational capacity was 389.

As a busy reception prison, Bedford takes both sentenced and remanded prisoners, mainly from courts in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

It is important to recognise that the prison was designed for a capacity of 310. It is, therefore, overcrowded and has been for many years.

### **2.3 Prisoner characteristics and lengths of stay**

HMP Bedford is classified as a reception and resettlement prison. This means that it receives prisoners who have been sentenced at Luton Crown Court, ready for categorisation.

Prisoners are also remanded to HMP Bedford mainly from Luton Crown Court. These remand prisoners account for 80%-90% of the prisoners in the prison.

Whether sentenced or on remand, it remains the case that there is sustained and relatively rapid movement ('churn') of prisoners – around 2,500 different prisoners (or prisoners returning more than once) occupied the prison for the year to July 2024. This level of churn poses particular problems for the prison, in terms of being able to offer meaningful interventions and build the productive relationships between prisoners and staff, which are necessary to maintain a safe and orderly jail.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Context to the report**

##### **Remand prisoners**

Nearly all the prisoners in HMP Bedford (up to 90%) are on remand or otherwise unsentenced. Although the prison's key functions of safety, humane treatment, healthcare and wellbeing apply to all prisoners, those on remand have different rights (such as unlimited social visits, for example) and different needs (such as, for example, court and trial information rather than sentence planning) from sentenced prisoners. This creates challenges for the prison - and the prison system. We reflect on the issues in this report.

##### **'Prisoners' voice' survey**

As in the last two years, we have undertaken a 'prisoners' voice' survey to try to get a better view of the things that matter to those in the prison. This year, we received 73 responses, which are woven into the report in the relevant places. The survey questionnaire can be seen in Annex A.

Whilst the response rate of 19% is not insignificant the Board recognises that, statistically, it does not necessarily represent the views of all the prisoners at HMP Bedford.

##### **HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) inspection of November 2023 and the issuing of an Urgent Notification (UN)**

In November 2023, HMIP inspected the prison and found that in its inspection categories, HMP Bedford performed poorly in three of them (safety, respect and purposeful activity) and not sufficiently good in the other (preparation for release). As a result, it issued an Urgent Notification for improvement. This is the second such notification the prison has received, the first being in 2019.

##### **Time period covered by this report**

This report covers the period 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024. It was written in August and September 2024. Where significant and relevant information has emerged between the end of the reporting period and the time of writing, it has been included. The statement 'in recent months', which is used in the report, refers to the months of July and August 2024.

#### **3.2 Main findings**

##### **Safety**

- The induction process is haphazard and limited in its effectiveness. In our prisoners' voice survey, 38% said that they had not received an induction and 35% of those who had received one said that it was of a poor quality.
- Whilst self-harm rates remain high, it appears that the prison has had some success in addressing them.
- The prison had high levels of assaults on staff for most of the reporting period.
- It does not appear difficult for drugs and other illicit items to get into the prison: on average, there is at least one find every day.

## **Fair and humane treatment**

- The prison remains overcrowded with, in the majority of instances, two men sharing a small cell and toilet, which the Board considers inhumane. There are some single cells.
- Whilst, overall, the wings are cleaner, the condition of some cells is shocking, with no curtains or, sometimes, bits of plastic or old blankets at the windows. Also, the cells are often not properly cleaned in between occupants.
- The Board is pleased to report that the segregation unit (also known as the care and separation unit, or CSU) has, at last, been relocated from its underground location to the main wings. However, the project has been beset by design and construction issues and was delivered some 18 months late.
- There has been significant progress in delivering the key worker scheme, although it is not yet fully operational.
- The yearly number of complaints increased from 1,400 to 1,800, although there have been positive changes in recent months, and we are now seeing a downward trend.

## **Health and wellbeing**

- There is a lack of effective communication between healthcare and prisoners, leading to frustration and missed appointments; 75% of prisoners we asked felt that the healthcare service was poor and slow.
- Group and individual work to support drug rehabilitation is no longer carried out and, in our view, the service is worse than it has been in previous years.
- Although, in the Board's view, prisoners still spend too much time locked in their cells, the situation has improved markedly from a year ago.
- For much of the reporting year, the gym was operating on a reduced basis. However, things have improved recently and there are now four gym staff and usually a full range of sessions operate, including at the weekend.

## **Progression and resettlement**

- Whilst there have been positive aspects around the provision of education, we are concerned that the provision of more maths and English courses at the expense of music and art does not recognise the impact, as most prisoners being on remand (and, therefore, only attend education on an elective basis).
- The library is well-managed and has proved a popular facility.
- The prison continues to only be able to offer limited vocational training and work.
- Prisoners were reasonably positive about family contact, with nearly 70% saying that they were able to maintain regular contact with their family.

### **3.3 Main areas for development**

#### ***TO THE PRISON SERVICE***

- The long delay and design issues associated with the relocation of the CSU suggests some basic flaws in understanding how prisons work and a lack of consultation with local managers. When will the Prison Service address this issue?
- The insistence on providing additional maths and English places, at the expense of art and music, does not appear to recognise the elective nature of

a prison where most inmates are on remand or the relationship between drug use and more attractive alternative activities. How will the Prison Service resolve this issue?

- The paper-based system for managing property remains unfit for purpose and the inconsistent approach between the prisoner escort contractors in respect of the number of bags carried causes problems for the prison and prisoners. What steps will the Prison Service take to improve this system?

### **TO THE GOVERNOR**

- The induction process remains inconsistent in terms of quality and delivery – 38% of prisoners we asked said that they had not received an induction.
- Violence towards staff has been, for most of the reporting year, highest of all reception prisons and although this has improved in recent months there are still issues to be addressed.
- We hope that, with the relocation of young adults to F-wing, the opportunity is taken to reinvigorate the STRIDE programme and regain the initial impetus of a dedicated youth wing.
- It does not appear difficult for drugs and other illicit items to get into the prison: on average, there is at least one find every day.
- Whilst there have been improvements in overall cleanliness, many of the cells remain in a very poor condition.
- There has been no progress in the provision of digital kiosks.
- We would like to see the key worker scheme fully operational in the not-too-distant future.
- We are concerned that the number of black, Asian, other ethnic minority prisoners and those from the Traveller community are significantly over-represented in adjudications.
- We feel that HMP Bedford's strategy for remand prisoners had many positive elements, and we would like to see more progress on its implementation.
- We are concerned about the large rise in applications we have received about healthcare, the general negative view of prisoners and the lack of access to healthcare managers.
- We are concerned that group and individual drug rehabilitation work is no longer carried out.
- Whilst we understand the national context, we feel strongly that education needs to offer a suitable range of courses to attract the (elective) remand prisoners and provide attractive diversion activities.
- It remains disappointing that, of the five workshops, there are only three able to provide activities.
- We would like to see if the delays in giving prisoners access to phone numbers could be reduced by a simple computer system replacing the current arrangement of bits of paper being carried around.

### 3.4 Response to the last report

#### From HMPPS

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
It is disappointing that funding to support staffing in the young adults' unit has been removed.	The performance improvement grant that funded the posts is no longer available.	The young adults' unit has been relocated to a wing, which has specifically trained staff.
The system for managing prisoners' property is not fit for purpose and, in particular, there are no protocols or standards for inter-prison property issues.	The Prisoners' Policy Property Framework, introduced in 2022, sets out processes for the management of property. Governors should undertake management checks to see that the system is working.	The paper-based system remains unfit for purpose.
It is disappointing that HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) does not measure time out of cell (or, perhaps, time locked in cell) or appear to give any importance to it, when purposeful activities are not available.	HMPPS has introduced a measurement of time spent on purposeful activity.	Time out of cell is still not measured.
The early identification of release areas by the Probation Service would be helpful where prisoners, because of the length of time served on remand, have only a week or so before release. Better coordination in this area would be really useful.	HMPPS acknowledged the challenges in this area and the difficulty of recruiting into probation teams.	No progress.

#### From the Prison Service and the Governor

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
The induction process is not consistent and there is no process for assessing quality.	No formal response.	The response from prisoners suggests there has been no improvement in this area.



Issue raised	Response given	Progress
The lack of a suitable computer in the healthcare rooms in reception means that healthcare staff cannot access the personal escort records (PERs).	No formal response.	Healthcare staff in reception still cannot access the PERs.
We hope there will be a strong and continued focus on making the young adults' unit a success.	No formal response.	The young adults' unit has been relocated to a more suitable wing and will, we are told, be staffed with specially trained officers.
Prisoners have regularly reported issues about pigeon droppings, cockroaches, showers not working and broken tumble dryers.	No formal response.	Whilst the wings are cleaner, there remain problems with rodents, cockroaches and pigeon droppings. There are also ongoing problems with the water and heating systems.
The provision of application forms (prisoners' written representations to the IMB) and other forms on the wings is inconsistent.	No formal response.	This situation has not changed.
We look forward to the CSU being relocated early in 2024.	No formal response.	The CSU was relocated to B wing in September 2024.
We hope that the key worker scheme can soon be fully implemented.	No formal response.	There has been some improvement since last year, but the scheme is still not fully operational.
We are pleased that the prison has developed a remand prisoners' strategy. We hope it will put focus strongly on implementing its recommendations.	No formal response.	Unfortunately, the remand strategy has not been implemented.

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
Prisoners spend far too long locked in their cells.	No formal response.	This remains the case, with around half spending over 20 hours per day in their cell. However, the situation has improved since last year.
We are disappointed that the mental health steering group, which seemed to offer the promise of an effective and integrated approach, has not met for some months and appears to have fallen into abeyance.	No formal response.	The prison feels that the working group is no longer necessary, as the mental health team is not integrated into the weekly healthcare operational meetings.

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

#### **4.1 Reception and induction**

##### **Reception**

The physical environment within reception remains cramped, cluttered and uninviting. However, when we asked new prisoners for their views, the response was a shrug and ‘It’s a prison, innit?’

When prisoners arrive, there is at least one healthcare nurse and one mental health nurse in attendance. There is no longer a doctor on duty, although they are available on the phone. In our monitoring of the reception process, we witnessed nurses not being able to access the digitised prisoner escort records (PERs), so having to ask a prison officer to print them off. The reason for this is unclear, but it appears to be an avoidable inefficiency.

Despite the problems with the physical area, we found many positive aspects to the reception process:

- Staff and orderlies (trusted prisoners who take on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison) work in a professional manner, creating a calm and respectful environment.
- Phone PINs (a prisoner’s personal identification number, which allows them to make calls to landline and mobile numbers) are usually provided before prisoners leave reception.
- A hot meal and drink are given to all new prisoners.
- We were particularly impressed with the ‘Just arrived? You’ll be OK’ booklet. This is an impressive laminated, clear and simply worded booklet, with helpful graphics and lots of useful information.

Following the reception process, new prisoners were, until July 2024, allocated cells on the top floor of D-wing (subject to factors such as risk-based intelligence and disability). Now they are accommodated in E-wing, which is attached to, but segregated from, the main wings.

##### **Induction**

From the Board’s observations, the induction process appears haphazard and limited in its effectiveness. In our prisoners’ voice survey, 38% said that they had not received an induction, while 35% of those who had received one said that it was of a poor quality.

From our observations of inductions, the slideshow presentation was out of date, difficult to read (white writing on a blue background) and contained too much information for one session. In addition, the room to be used was not always available and, when we visited, needed a clean.

As stated, above, from June 2024, new prisoners have, usually, been located to E-wing, which is self-contained and has a much more suitable room for induction. This offers the prisoner the opportunity of a much better prison experience. However, in the Board’s view, the induction presentation needs to be reviewed to ensure that:

- it delivers the information that prisoners want to know;
- it is suitable in style and length to be interesting and easy to understand; and
- provides an introduction to the prison that gives the sense of a professional and well-managed organisation.

## **4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody**

### **Self-harm**

Rates of self-harm at HMP Bedford remain high. Between June 2023 and May 2024, there were 484 instances of self-harm. This is the fourth highest rate of self-harm across 29 comparable prisons. During May 2024, 55% of 21 self-harm incidents involved prisoners cutting themselves, while a further 32% involved the use of ligatures.

Despite this, the situation has improved – the self-harm rate (per 1000 prisoners) for the period April-June 2024 fell by 27% from the previous three months and was 57% less than the comparable period in 2023.

All instances of self-harm are recorded on the prison's daily briefing sheet and discussed at the morning meeting for senior staff. This ensures that all staff are aware of the prisoners who present a risk of self-harm. Prison staff collate comprehensive data on self-harm. Those data are reviewed at the monthly safety meetings, where staff discuss specific prisoners who are particularly vulnerable to self-harm, as well as the reasons why the incidents occurred.

A disproportionate number of self-harm incidents occurred on D-wing, which houses those who need drug and alcohol misuse support and is indicative of the traumas and challenges associated with no longer having access to these substances. It may also be connected to the reduced service that the drug rehabilitation team had been able to offer (this is discussed in section 6.5 of this report). It is also worth noting that prisoners identified ethnically as 'white' record twice the number of self-harm incidents in comparison with the numbers in the prison, whilst Muslim prisoners record half the number of incidents.

The primary response from prison staff is to use assessment care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) procedures (used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide). This process involves creating a plan to minimise the risk of further harm. Primarily, these plans involve setting the frequency at which staff must observe the prisoner to ensure they are safe. This varies, from constant observation to once every hour. Plans created under the ACCT procedure are regularly reviewed. Staff assess all prisoners at the point of reception and an ACCT is opened if the prisoner indicates they are likely to harm themselves. At any time, around 16 prisoners had an ACCT plan in place, representing around 4% of the prison population.

The IMB's analysis of reports of self-harm incidents indicates that the reasons for are both diverse and complex. Some prisoners deliberately self-harm as a reaction to frustrations with prison life. Other prisoners harmed themselves during the course of broader behaviour and damage to property. Some prisoners harmed themselves in response to profound sadness or severe mental illness.

In addition, the prison operates a safer custody helpline for prisoners, which receives around 50-60 calls a month.

In summary, the prison has had some success in addressing the high levels of self-harm. The biggest single reason for self-harming is mental health issues (20%) and, therefore, the strength of the mental health team is a critical factor in reducing self-harm levels.

### **Deaths in custody**

The Board is sad to report that there were three deaths in custody in HMP Bedford between July 2023 and June 2024. From the initial information, it would appear that one of the deaths may have been self-inflicted, while the causes of the other two deaths are, as yet, unknown.

We await the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) report to find out more details of the reasons behind these deaths and what lessons, if any, can be learnt.

## **4.3 Violence and violence reduction**

### **Assaults on staff**

HMP Bedford continues to have high levels of assaults on staff. Between July 2023 and March 2024, it had the highest number of all 29 reception prisons and three times the average. However, the picture has improved in recent months, and in August 2024 HMP Bedford had less than the average number of assaults for similar prisons. It is too early to see if this is sustained, but we certainly hope so.

Typically, around half the assaults involve spitting or throwing liquids (including hot/boiling water and urine). The most common reason for assaults on staff is a reaction to being challenged, which may be to do with the way the challenge is delivered, or simply that the prisoner does not like instruction. Mental health issues can also lead to violence, and there is some correlation between self-harming, neurodiversity issues and violence.

In addition, there are repeat offenders: these can be very troubled individuals who self-harm, are destructive to cells and property, spend time in the CSU and, sometimes, carry out dirty protests. At any time, there may be just a handful of these prisoners, but they will take up a disproportionate amount of officer time and skew the overall violence figures.

Despite the high levels of violence, the trend for the past 12 months is slightly, but clearly, downwards.

It is also worth noting IMB members go into the prison two or three times every week and visit the wings and speak to prisoners. It is rare to witness a fight or see officers restraining a prisoner.

### **Prisoner-on-prisoner violence**

Although the levels of prisoner-on-prisoner violence remain high, they are falling, with the prison moving towards the average for all reception prisons. The reasons for prisoner-on-prisoner violence are different to those for assaults on staff: young people aged between 18-25 years carry out most of the attacks with, the Board understands, the underlying drivers involving gang or organised-crime issues. As

one prisoner put it when it was suggested that male egos should be left at the prison gate: 'I know, but he attacked my mate. What am I going to do?'.

It is in this context that the importance of the young adults' (YA) wing and its STRIDE programme is clearly demonstrated. The unit was introduced, with some fanfare, in 2022, with a dedicated custodial manager (CM) and staffed with 14 officers who had received specialist trauma-informed practices training. The STRIDE programme was focused on managing conflict and reducing reoffending so that when young adults moved onto the main wings, they would be less likely to be violent and cause trouble. The programme was eight weeks long and the initial signs were encouraging.

However, the Board believes that, over time, the young adults' unit has, to an extent, lost its way: the specially trained staff have, largely, moved to other roles/jobs, the CM now has shared duties, and the STRIDE programme has been reduced to five weeks.

In June 2024, the young adults' unit was relocated to F-wing, which is suitable for the purpose, as it is physically separated from the main wings and contains a large teaching area. We know that the prison is seeking to staff the unit with the right officers, and we very much hope that the opportunity is taken to reinvigorate the STRIDE programme and regain the initial impetus.

In our prisoners' voice survey, we asked how safe they felt and 64% said that they felt safe, while 17% said they felt unsafe and the remainder not expressing a clear view.

#### **4.4 Use of force (UoF)**

UoF is the term used to describe incidents where officers must use force on prisoners to resolve a situation. This is difficult and unpleasant for both officers and prisoners and something that, ideally, should happen quite rarely.

HMP Bedford has the second highest level of UoF of all reception prisons. However, this is not surprising, given the violence levels set out. There are no recorded incidents where batons needed to be drawn or used.

Young adults are disproportionately involved in UoF incidents, with around twice as many as would be expected for the population size. This reinforces the importance of the young adults' unit being well staffed and effective.

The majority of UoF incidents occurred on Thursdays during the reporting period. This may have been linked to prisoners receiving canteen (food, snacks, vapes and other items they are able to purchase through the prison system), which can lead to trouble.

#### **4.5 Preventing illicit items**

Prior to the Covid pandemic of 2020, HMP Bedford, along with most other prisons, carried out random mandatory drug tests (MDTs), which provided a good assessment of the amount of drug use within the establishment. However, because of staffing issues caused by the pandemic, MDTs were suspended and have not yet been resumed (HMP Bedford is one of only six of the 29 reception prisons that are not now carrying out MDTs). As a result, we have to use proxy measures to assess the number of drugs and other illicit items in the jail.

An analysis of the prison's daily briefing sheets for May and June 2024 showed that for the 61 days involved, there were:

- 37 drug finds;
- six alcohol finds; and
- 36 finds of other illicit items, mostly phones or phone items but also including some weapons.

This means that, on average, officers find an illicit item every day in the prison. Clearly, there are questions about how they get in. But some credit should also be given to the prison for the effectiveness of their intelligence-informed and targeted searches. In terms of drugs finds per 1,000 prisoners in reception prisons, HMP Bedford is slightly above average but is not exceptional.

The experience of the prison's substance misuse team is that there is an awful lot of cannabis in the prison and cocaine is not uncommon. It is interesting that during 2020, when there were no visitors, regular 'throw-overs' (where people from outside throw packages containing illicit items over the prison wall, which are then picked up by prisoners) being intercepted. Now, there are very few 'throw-overs', which might suggest that supplies are brought in through visits, or staff and other workers.

In addition, the prison has told us that there have been some 14-day recall prisoners (prisoners who break the terms of their release on licence are recalled for 14 days) who have been targeted by organised crime gangs to bring in drugs by breaking their licence and getting recalled.

## **5. Fair and humane treatment**

### **5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food**

#### **Accommodation and clothing**

HMP Bedford remains overcrowded, with two men sharing a small cell and toilet, with minimal privacy. The Boards regards this as inhumane. Some cells are shocking: no curtains or, sometimes, bits of plastic or old blankets at the windows. Because of the pressure of accommodation, cells are often not properly cleaned in between occupants. Recently, efforts have been made to ensure that cell cards are up to date and visible at each door.

The wings are generally cleaner, and the decency checks and cleaning rotas are helping to maintain higher standards. The prison also runs tidy cell competitions.

However, the basic structure of the prison cannot change. The problems are seasonal - too cold in winter, too hot in summer, fans not available when required – plus, ongoing problems with the water and heating systems and the ever-present issue of rodents, cockroaches and pigeon droppings.

Apart from odd blips in the system, there is little to report on clothing. The provision and laundering of prison-issue clothes and sheets seems to work smoothly. However, the washing of personal clothing depends on functioning washing machines and driers on the wings. Recently in D wing a washing machine was out of order for two months. These machines are under contract and it should be a priority to ensure that they are in working order.

The prison is still hampered by a lack of digital infrastructure, which means that, for example, applications to the prison, complaints and menu choices are all paper based. Many prisons have digital kiosks that mostly overcome this issue but, although this has been long promised at HMP Bedford, to date there has been no progress.

#### **Food**

The IMB rarely receives a written complaint about the food. However, in conversation, prisoners complain about the lack of variety, particularly with fruit and vegetables and the meagre fillings in the lunchtime rolls. There has been a budget increase, but it does not cover the cost of food, which has universally risen.

The kitchen has maintained the serving of the main meal at around 4pm, apart from during the month of Ramadan, when separate arrangements are made. There was some problem with the donation of food by a local mosque during this period and, as a result, it could not be used. We hope that this issue can be resolved for next year.

New food comments books have been issued to all wings and catering forums encouraged to discuss food-related issues. The cleanliness of servery trolleys has improved, but staff and servery workers have to be constantly reminded of the regulations. A full-time member of staff has been absent for much of the reporting year, which affects the kitchen routine; otherwise, staffing numbers were stable during the reporting period.



## **5.2 Segregation**

The Board has, for many years, set out in each annual report the horrible and unacceptable conditions for both prisoners and staff of the underground CSU. The prison system has also recognised this and in our 2021 report we were able to report that plans for relocation of the unit were 'in an advanced stage'. In our 2022 report, we stated: 'Work to relocate the segregation unit to B wing from the current location began in April 2022. The estimated date for completion and handover to the Governor is March 2023. We very much look forward to this happening.'

Unfortunately, the project has been beset by design and construction difficulties. The prison's listed-building status introduced added complications, but some of the design decisions seem bizarre. For example, during construction, it was found that:

- shelves for kettles were located on the opposite cell wall from the only socket;
- the observation lights for officers to look into cells at night had no outside switches;
- the dirty protest cell was located next to the kitchen servery; and
- the route to the exercise yard was through the showers.

Whilst these issues have now been resolved, we would have to question what assurance process the design went through and to what extent local Governors and officers were consulted.

The new CSU, located on the ground floor of B-wing, finally opened in late September, some 18 months late having been further delayed by IT issues.

We continue to be impressed by the care and empathy shown by officers working in the CSU, with some of the prison's most disturbed and difficult prisoners. Some prisoners will break their furniture or flood their cells (one individual put three cells out of action) and some will smear their faeces on the walls in a dirty protest. It is a challenging environment.

The IMB has observed most of the weekly reviews (where the prison determines if a prisoner should remain segregated) carried out for prisoners in the CSU. Our experience is that they are undertaken fairly and that the Governors involved engage well with the individual prisoners.

In terms of numbers, prisoners were most commonly held in the CSU for 7-14 days, with the overall average stay being around 11 days. Two prisoners were held in the CSU for more than 42 days (the limit allowed without external authorisation).

## **5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers**

### **Staff relationships**

From the Board's observations, it is fair to say that staff and prisoner relationships are mixed. We have seen numerous examples of good interaction between officers and prisoners. The IMB prisoners' voice survey indicated that prisoners' views on staff were, overall, more positive than negative. However, there was significant inconsistency, with comments such as 'sometimes helpful', 'some good, some not' and 'depending on staff, as some want to help' being the most prevalent.

We also asked the question 'How easy is it to find things out?'. Of the responses, 47% said it was hard to find things out and the overall opinion was that most officers

did not know enough to answer questions and that the best way to find things out was to ask other prisoners.

The second largest category of complaints to the prison was about staff (13% of non-confidential complaints).

### **Key workers**

HMP Bedford was one of the leading lights when the key worker scheme was introduced a few years ago. The idea is that each prisoner has a named key worker, who spends at least half an hour a week with them as part of the offender management programme. It should mean that the prison gets a much better knowledge of individual prisoners, which allows them to provide targeted support. The prison had a good reputation for this, with a well-managed process and team.

However, after 2019, the key worker scheme almost disappeared, with interactions being limited to those deemed a high risk. The situation had shown some improvement by the end of the reporting year. The prison has been concentrating on vulnerable prisoners, care leavers (young men who have got into trouble after leaving the care system), those with learning difficulties and those on ACCTs. But, more recently, every prisoner has been allocated a key worker. In the period January to July, the following sessions were carried out:

- January-March 2024: 102 sessions
- April-June 2024: 294 sessions
- July 2024: 250 sessions

This is good progress, and we look forward to the full key worker service being provided.

## **5.4 Equality and diversity**

### **Ethnicity, age and religion**

While the diversity of prisoners varies continually in a prison that houses people on short sentences and remand, the following figures give an approximation of the mix of prisoners in HMP Bedford:

- 20%-25% are young people aged between 18 and 25.
- 10% are prisoners over the age of 50.
- around 35% are from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.
- the highest declared faiths are Christianity (40%) and Islam (25%-30%).
- about a quarter of the men are foreign national prisoners (in March, for example, there were 34 different nationalities in the prison), with the majority from Albania or Romania.
- a small number, perhaps around 10, are 'IS91', which means they are foreign national prisoners being held by the Home Office in the prison (rather than an immigration detention centre), even though their full sentence has been completed.

We note with concern disproportionality around adjudications, which are significantly over-represented by prisoners of black, Asian, other minority ethnic groups and, particularly, the Traveller community.

What this could mean is that prisoners from these groups either commit more offences, are accused of committing more offences, or are treated less leniently than white prisoners. The Board is not able to take a view on this, but we feel that the prison needs to understand the reasons behind these figures and whether any conscious, or unconscious, discrimination is involved.

## Neurodiversity

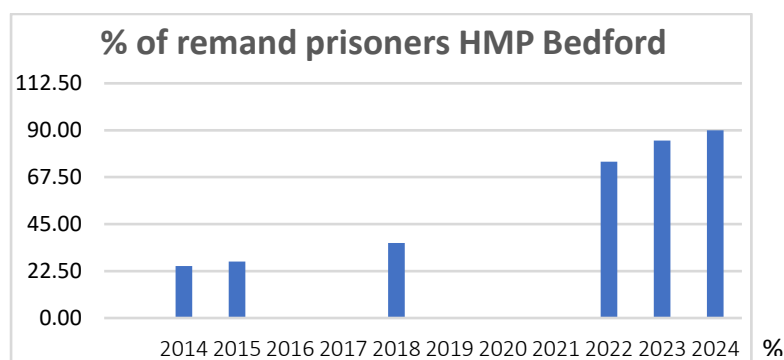
Although there are no official figures, it is estimated that around 20% of the prison population in HMP Bedford are neurodivergent. This includes autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia and tic disorders. It embraces differences in behaviour and brain function, rather than viewing it as something 'wrong' with the brain.

This may be considered a hidden disability and may manifest itself in ways that lead to use of force or adjudications. For example, a neurodivergent person may take a little while to process an order given by an officer and may be seen to be resistant, when, in fact, they are just trying to understand. In September 2023, 10% of prisoners had ADHD but represented 30% of those assessed as likely to be violent.

The prison has a neurodiversity support manager, who is relatively new in post but who has a programme for addressing these issues and raising awareness amongst staff. We hope they are successful.

## 5.5 Remand prisoners

HMP Bedford has changed from a prison that predominantly held sentenced prisoners to one that is almost all (90%) remand prisoners, as the graph below illustrates:



However, neither the prison nor, as far as we are aware, the Prison Service has introduced policies, procedures or resources to address this new reality.

Whilst the basic functions of safety, healthcare and humane treatment are the same for all prisoners, remand prisoners have different rights around social visits, they want to know about court dates rather than sentence management and they pose a real challenge to 'discharge' services, which provide little support to those who are not sentenced. During their time in prison, whether they are subsequently convicted or not, remand prisoners are likely to have lost their job, their home and possibly their relationships.

We were pleased to note in our last report that the prison had developed a remand prisoners' strategy and felt that the following actions were particularly important:

- to have a dedicated manager for induction and a review of the process;
- to review how the social visits system can accommodate the entitlements of remand prisoners;
- to review the incentives scheme against the needs of remand prisoners;
- to consider dedicated officers in the offender management unit (OMU) to work with remand cases and support prisoners directly released from court.

However, no progress has been made in implementing the strategy. That is not to say that nothing has been done – a housing information booklet for remand prisoners has been developed, for example – but the IMB feels that there should be a stronger focus of understanding and addressing the needs of prisoners on remand.

## **5.6 Faith and pastoral support**

The chaplaincy team comprises representatives from most of the major denominations: Islam, Church of England, Pentecostal, Catholic and Buddhist. Services on Sundays are delivered by celebrants of the Church of England, Salvation Army, Pentecostal Church and Kings Arms (evangelical church). Whilst, in the past, there were issues with prison staff getting prisoners to these services, attendance has improved over the period of this report.

In addition, the chaplaincy runs a number of courses, including bible study, parenting, anger management, yoga and meditation. One Church of England priest, with expertise and training in this subject, also supports victims of sexual abuse on a voluntary basis.

With the retirement of three chaplains, representing the Church of England, the Pentecostal Church and a lay Catholic chaplain, the team has been short-staffed in recent months. Despite this, they have not cut back on their workload. As a result, existing staff have had to work longer hours, with the lead chaplain, in particular, sometimes working six or seven days a week. Vacancies have been covered by sessional staff.

Every day, a member of the team attends induction, visits everyone on an ACCT, in the CSU and in healthcare and attends ACCT reviews. They are also available to offer confidential emotional support, without judgement or prejudice, on an individual basis in the event of family bereavement, serious illness or to prisoners with suicidal thoughts or who are in distress for any reason.

This dedicated chaplaincy team seems to be trusted and respected by all members of the prison community and provides a much-needed beacon of compassion and hope in a bleak environment.

## **5.7 Complaints**

We reported last year that HMP Bedford had the highest level of complaints of all reception prisons. Unfortunately, the situation seems to have got worse for the reporting year. The yearly number of complaints increased from 1,400 to 1,800 between July 2023 June 2024 and the number per 100 prisoners was twice the average for all reception prisons. The single largest category of non-confidential complaints was regarding property (26%), with the next largest being about staff (13%).

However, we are aware that there has been a review of the complaints system, how it is managed and how staff should deal with them. The initial results are encouraging, with recent months showing a significant reduction. Hopefully, next year, we will be able to report that the number of complaints HMP Bedford receives is less than the average for reception prisons.

It is unclear why the prison has had such a high level of complaints: it may simply be that prisoners feel they have more to complain about. Or, and this is perhaps more likely in the Board's view, that issues that could be addressed on the wings are not, and a complaint is then seen as the best way forward. Prisoners know that at least it will be recorded and they will get an answer of some sort, even if it is late.

This also chimes with comments from our prisoners' voice survey, where prisoners said that it was difficult to find out what they needed to know and that officers often did know the answers but did not have the time to address them or simply forgot in the hurly-burly of prison life. The relative lack of key worker sessions may also play a part.

Whatever the reasons, it is clear that HMP Bedford has far too many complaints and the prison should try to understand why that is and what can be done about it.

We would add that the complaints system is well-managed, and that the complaints' staff are always courteous and helpful.

## **5.8 Prisoners' property**

Of the 209 applications submitted to the IMB, 37 (18%) related to property. About a third of these were about property transfers between prisons. In addition, as set out above, 21% of the prison's complaints concerned property.

Like most prisons, HMP Bedford is trying to manage a system that is paper-based and not fit for purpose. In the circumstances, the prison does not do too badly: the proportion of IMB applications that are about property has reduced in recent years and it is no longer the biggest single category. However, the following examples illustrate some of the frustrations with the system.

**Example 1:** Mr <sup>2</sup>A's cell was flooded, through no fault of his own, and his clothing mostly ruined. The prison agreed that he could have new clothes sent in and Mr A completed the appropriate form, which was approved by the relevant Governor. So far, so good.

However, the prison runs by bits of paper physically being carried places and, in this case, it had to get to the main gate so that, when the parcel arrived, it could be checked as being approved. This part of the process did not work, with the result that when Mr A's parcel arrived at the main gate, staff there did not have the approval form, so did not accept the parcel. A very frustrated Mr A had to start the process again.

If the approval had been registered on a computer system, the main gate could simply have checked that, but that is not the process

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<sup>2</sup> The initials of prisoners given in examples are not the actual initials of the prisoners involved.

**Example 2:** Mr B was transferred to HMP The Mount from HMP Bedford, but not all his property went with him. After some while, it still had not arrived and the IMB at HMP The Mount contacted the IMB at HMP Bedford to see if we could locate it.

It transpired that there was a record of his property going from the prison's reception to its post room but no record of it leaving there, as such records are not kept. In addition, HMP Bedford uses Royal Mail as its courier, whilst most other prisons use DX and, we were told, some prisons do not accept parcels from Royal Mail.

In the end, we could find no evidence that Mr B's property was sent to HMP The Mount, but also it did not appear to be in HMP Bedford.

**Example 3:** The national prisoner escort contract uses two transport operators: Serco and GeoAmey. However, although they are both part of the same contract and are governed by the same HMPPS policy, it is clear that there are examples of when they have interpreted this differently.

The contracts cover roughly half of England each and HMP Bedford is the nearest prison to the boundary point for many journeys. So, a prisoner being transported from a prison in the north to a prison in the south will be taken by one carrier to HMP Bedford and stay the night there (sometimes more than one night). He is then picked up by the other carrier, who has a different bag policy. The usual result is that two or three bags of the prisoner's property are left in HMP Bedford, which then has to arrange, separately, for them to be taken to the final prison.

It would be unfair to suggest that these examples typify HMP Bedford's approach to managing prisoners' property – it has made improvements in this area over recent years. But it does show the impact that quirks and inefficiencies in the systems – bits of paper being carried around, issues with prisons using different parcel operators and policy inconsistencies between prisoner escort companies – can have.

## 6. Health and wellbeing

### 6.1 Physical healthcare

This reporting year, for the first time, the highest number of applications to the IMB related to healthcare. In fact, it increased from ten, in 2022-2023, to 45, in 2023-2024. When we asked prisoners in our survey, 75% felt that the healthcare service was poor and slow.

Our own impression of the healthcare in-patient unit is that it is very scruffy and could do with painting and being cleaner, tidier and more welcoming. The office is a mess, with things all over the place in an untidy manner. Any visitor to the healthcare unit would get the impression that it was disorganised and uncared for.

Prisoners make applications to see healthcare but, routinely, do not get a response. The application may be actioned, but the prisoner is not informed: we have been told of incidents where prisoners have missed doctor's appointments because they did know that they had one. In one example, Mr X had a wound on his leg that needed dressing, and the nurse arrived at his cell to do this. However, no one had told Mr X and he had gone to work in the kitchen – eventually the nurse found him and dressed the wound there.

In another case, the IMB spoke to a physiotherapist, who had come from another establishment to see five prisoners - there is a waiting list. However, the clinic did not happen because i) the clinic space was triple booked; and ii) no officers were available to bring prisoners to the healthcare unit. The physiotherapist said that the latter happens quite frequently. She added that, at HMP Bedford, prisoners only know on the day of the appointment, but at other prisons they get advance notice through movement slips. A wing officer, who also expressed his frustration at healthcare staff said that wing staff were being fobbed off. He said that simple things were just not being organised and that it was very difficult for wing officers to resolve things.

In addition, there have been two particular medical incidents that have given cause for concern:

**Incident 1:** The IMB was contacted by an outside acquaintance of Mr Y. This person said: 'Earlier today, I was informed that there is a young gentleman at the above prison who is currently suffering from diabetes. He has been suffering really badly. His sugar levels are very high as he has been unable to check, as the equipment was taken off him by the prison officers. He has had several blackouts, dizziness, upon him falling to the floor he has broken his nose and no medical team has attended to him.'

We spoke to Mr Y and found that he had no blood/glucose (BG) monitor and no insulin in his possession. When he was given insulin, a lack of a BG monitor meant that he did not know how much to inject and, as a result, he suffered from two 'hypo' incidents.

We are surprised that a type 1 diabetic can be in the prison for six weeks without having a BG monitor.

**Incident 2:** Mr Z has just two teeth - in the bottom front of his mouth. It would appear to be obvious that he should have a soft diet. However, the kitchen would not provide

this unless requested by the healthcare unit, which had not happened, despite being requested by the prison dentist. Although this was finally resolved, there was a delay of weeks because of unnecessary bureaucracy.

The IMB has asked, on numerous occasions, to speak to the healthcare manager so that we could raise and discuss all the issues set out. However, because of changes in management and long-term sickness issues, this has not proved possible.

## **6.2 Mental illness**

Prisoners' medical information, including any diagnosis of mental illness, is not routinely shared with prison staff or IMB members. Therefore, the IMB does not collate any data or records specifically relating to the mental health of prisoners.

However, during the year, 12 prisoners contacted the IMB with concerns relating to their mental health. Prisoners said that they had to wait a long time to see staff from the mental health team or that they were unhappy with the care and treatment provided for their mental health. One prisoner said that staff were not taking his mental health seriously, and another said that staff discriminated against them because of their mental illness. One prisoner was seeking a transfer to a mental health hospital.

During our monitoring visits to the prison, we have spoken to prisoners who have appeared exceptionally vulnerable, due to overwhelming fear, anxiety and suspicions about other prisoners and staff. We have also found that prisoners demonstrating very disturbed behaviour have been held in the CSU for long periods of time. A report published by the national IMB, in January 2024, highlighted that many prisoners with mental illness are being held in CSUs. This report reflected many concerns of the Bedford IMB, which are exacerbated by the poor condition of the CSU facilities. The IMB wholly endorses the comments by the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons that: *'... the underground segregation unit was a disgrace. [...] Despite this, dedicated staff did their best to provide care for what were often very mentally unwell prisoners in wholly unsuitable conditions.'*

## **6.3 Time out of cell**

In the Board's annual reports prior to 2020, the length of time prisoners spent out of their cell was not seen as an issue. If they were not carrying out activities, then they would be on the wings in general association. In fact, there was a presumption that prisoners would be out of their cells unless there was a specific reason for them to be locked in.

This changed as result of three things: the Covid pandemic; difficulties in having the staffing levels for the prison to deliver the required regime; and a change in policy, where time out of cell was focused on education, training and other purposeful activity. The Prison Service does not measure how long prisoners spend in their cells, so we have had to rely on information from our prisoners' voice survey.

Last year's survey revealed that 92% of prisoners spent 20 hours or more in their cells. In this year's survey, that number had fallen to 47%, which we recognise as positive progress. Nonetheless, when we asked prisoners what the prison could do to improve the situation, the highest response was asking for more courses, training, jobs and gym access and time. It is striking that 15 of the respondents specifically



wanted more education courses, which is something that is covered more fully in section 7.1 of this report.

The gym is a very popular facility, but for much of the year it struggled with staffing levels and, as a result, was only open on a reduced basis. However, things have improved recently and there are now four gym staff and, usually, a full range of sessions operating, including at weekends. This is a big improvement from a year ago.

The AstroTurf was installed around ten years ago but has rarely, in the intervening period, been used for its intended purpose, which has always felt like a wasted opportunity.

#### **6.4 Prisoner expectations**

In our prisoners' survey, we asked the question: 'How hopeful are you for the future?' The responses provided some encouragement, with 47% saying that they felt hopeful for the future. However, this is a smaller percentage than last year. Quotes included: '*I am very hopeful. I just wish there was more support and activities to increase the chance of a better future*'; '*Very hopeful and will not be coming back*'; and '*Very hopeful because I feel the power in my hands to change*'.

This does reflect the fact that, while prison is a place of punishment, it can also offer opportunities and that a life of crime on release is not inevitable.

#### **6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

The prison's drug and alcohol strategy has three strands: restrict supply, reduce demand and promote recovery

##### **Restrict supply**

As we have seen in section 4.5, the lack of mandatory random drugs testing means that it is difficult to get a clear assessment of the level of drug use in the prison. However, the number of finds (around one every other day) and the experience of the substance misuse team suggest that drugs are widely available in the establishment.

##### **Reduce demand**

This is linked to purposeful activity: prisoners need something to do that is more attractive than taking drugs and lying in bed all day. In this respect, it is the art and music courses (and other, softer courses) that will encourage people into education, rather than maths and English. However, as set out in section 7.1, the music course is not now available.

About 100 prisoners are on methadone and probably around 60%-70% of prisoners in Bedford are regular drug users (although not necessarily addicted). From the self-declarations, 150-170 out of 370 prisoners have said that they are drug users

##### **Promote recovery**

In previous reports, we have been very positive about the work being carried out by the drug rehabilitation team (now called Supporting Change), including group sessions and individual counselling. Being in prison is often the first time that drug

users have been able to face up to their problems and, perhaps, find a way of changing their addiction.

The Supporting Change team works with prisoners during assessment sessions and when preparing them for release. In addition, it carries out in-cell learning and prepares individual care plans for those in need.

However, group work and individual counselling is no longer carried out. We are told this is because the healthcare contract, through which the Supporting Change services are provided, does not now require it. In our view, this means that the drug rehabilitation service is not as good as it used to be.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

#### **Education**

Whilst there have been positive aspects around the provision of education, we are concerned that the provision of more maths and English courses, at the expense of music and art course, does not recognise the impact of 90% of prisoners being on remand (and, therefore, only attend education on an elective basis) or the relationship between drug use and attractive alternative activities.

HMIP inspectors felt that insufficient places were provided in English and maths to meet the needs of HMP Bedford's population. In direct response to this, two new teaching specialists were appointed in the autumn term: one for English and one for maths. In order to provide the additional classroom spaces needed, the well-established and popular music course was closed down and the personal and social development (PSD) course moved from the classroom to an in-cell provision. This compromise provision for PSD clearly lacks the group dynamic and discussion opportunities available in the classroom.

Of greater concern to the IMB is the further contraction of the curriculum now provided. For many years, we have felt that courses available offer a very limited learning and experiential 'diet' to those not keen to pursue English or maths.

Many of the responses made to the prisoners' voice questionnaire asked for more activities, more courses to brighten their days. Whilst we understand that there is a clear policy about providing education places for the core skills, the net result of such a limited curriculum is to replace learning activities that prisoners want to do with those they do not want to do. We also need to note the relationship between the demand for drugs in the prison and the availability of activities that prisoners want to do (as set out in 6.5).

Whilst the Board recognises that there is an accommodation shortage, the library could be used again to accommodate visiting drama groups, as in previous years. The multi-faith room could also provide a suitable space for both drama and music events. Additionally, workshop 1, not within the remit of education, continues to be used as a storeroom for PPE (personal protective equipment).

Despite the appointment of the two new staff and the additional maths and English classes now available, filling these new classes has proved difficult. One reason is that there is often no waiting list from which to draw new learners, with all those showing willing having been allocated to classes. In addition, the high 'churn' of numbers in Bedford adds to the difficulty of allocation, and, as previously stated, the large majority of prisoners are on remand and, therefore, not compelled to attend education classes.

In order to raise attendance numbers, as per the HMIP inspection recommendations, three members of the activities' team visit the wings on a regular basis to speak to many prisoners who have chosen not to attend education. They explain the benefits and offer instant admission to those who are suitable. Overall, attendance levels have risen again this year. Data shows that 63% of those allocated to education have attended their classes (it was 57% last year). This upward trend is encouraging, but attendance levels continue to remain unsatisfactory.

HMIP inspectors also criticised leaders for not providing effective career education information, advice and guidance. In this regard, the IMB feels that considerable progress has been made this year. A former office in education was converted to an 'employment hub' last year and the prison's employment lead has been very active in promoting its use for the benefit of prisoners. The activities compact, which is compiled with individual prisoners, helps to establish career interests and also indicates the levels of support that individuals need to help them progress. The initial document used can be quickly translated into over 30 languages, for ease of access to those for whom English is not their first language.

From the '12 weeks to release' list, individuals are interviewed and an assessment made that leads to matching them to employment or other forms of support, such as help with employment skills and writing CVs, for example. A representative from Bedford Job Centre now also attends the employment hub on a daily basis and is available for advice and guidance. Additionally, prison-based employment information and guidance events, involving a range of company representatives, a 'job fair' and a three-day event to mark National Careers Week, have been organised on five occasions since September 2023.

Also, the now established 'employability' course is a regular feature of the curriculum. It runs on five weekly cycles, offering two sessions on health and safety, one session on food hygiene and two sessions on the construction skills certification scheme (CSCS). This last element, linked to site work in building and civil engineering, is very popular.

## **Library**

The library staff continue to be proactive in encouraging the use of the library and getting on to the wings for outreach and to replenish wing bookshelves. They provide a welcoming neutral space in which to browse, work and chat. However, they are dependent on a smooth-running regime to ensure that prisoners are escorted to the library according to their allocated timetable slot. The IMB received complaints from prisoners in F wing, (vulnerable prisoners), who wanted to use the library but frequently found there was no one to escort them.

The library staff promote the service through Storybook Dads (where prisoners record themselves reading a story for their children), reading groups and reading challenges and provide quizzes and other in-cell material. The library is very well used by the adjacent education department. There is some concern about the amount of stock being lost through reception and never recovered. This represents a considerable financial loss to the library budget and items can be difficult to replace.

## **7.2 Vocational training, work**

The industries manager has described the past year as being difficult. There have been unresolved staffing shortages, staff absence through illness and the additional demands of staff training and re-grading, in order to be able to offer more accredited courses, in accordance with the recommendations of the HMIP inspection.

It is pleasing to note that workshop 5, too long a neglected and unused resource, is now being renovated and is destined for new usage. It has been cleared and efforts are being made to equip it as an industry standard workshop for waste management

and recycling. Unresolved delays, regarding the installation of an adequate water supply and suitable wastewater provision, are slowing further progress.

Workshop 4, offering industrial cleaning and the biohazard courses, has been operative throughout the reporting year, but the number of courses delivered has been limited and the workshop is operating some way below its potential. New flooring has since been laid on all wings and the present buffers (floor-cleaning machines) are no longer suitable for the new flooring. A proposal to invest in new, suitable and lightweight machines was considered 'too expensive' and a resolution is still awaited.

Workshop 3 houses the cycle repair course. This remains very popular and successful. Regrettably, the instructor was indisposed earlier in the year and the workshop was closed for three months. It is now fully operational once again.

Workshop 2, once the base for packing and assembly work, has been unused since the instructor was promoted to industrial cleaning last year. Approval for the appointment of his replacement has not yet been received.

Workshop 1 remains a storage area for staff restraint-and-control clothing and equipment. This has been a 'temporary' situation for many months and industry will eventually need this space to be returned for their use.

We are pleased that HMP Bedford has now been approved as an accredited centre for the delivery of a new 'aims employability' course, which includes time management, numeracy in the workplace and the use of tools and equipment. However, at the time of writing, the course is not operational.

The amenities and conservation instructor left in October 2022 and a suitable successor was not appointed until May 2024. Consequently, there have been no new environmental initiatives during the reporting year. On the Board's regular monitoring visits, it has been increasingly evident that there has been little maintenance to the existing 'green' installations, whose introductions and subsequent improvements to the site we were so pleased to report on two years ago. Regrettably, there is now far more evidence of unchecked weed growth around some of the buildings. This is disappointing after the time and effort, earlier invested, in softening and enhancing much of HMP Bedford's stark Victorian edifice.

Conversely, the large, brightly flowering tubs, placed near the front gate, are well maintained and a welcoming sight on arrival.

Neurodiversity 'tool kits' (including reading pens, helpful colour overlays, and reading rulers) have now been introduced into workshops as an aid to prisoners' focus and learning. The neurodiversity support manager (NSM) has also compiled 'ND' logs, for each prisoner who has additional learning needs, in order to alert workshop instructors to the additional support that some of their learners will need in order to progress.

HMP Bedford is now engaging with a regional workshop to improve the educational and employment opportunities for prisoners convicted of sex offences and those who identify as vulnerable.

Overall, while there have been some positive features, it is extremely disappointing that only three of the five workshops are in operation, and one of those has provided a limited number of courses.

### **7.3 Offender management, progression**

With only 10% of prisoners in HMP Bedford being sentenced, there is less need for offender management and progression systems in the traditional sense. Remand prisoners tend to want support with information about court dates or getting access to information and documents necessary for their hearings.

Our contact with the offender management unit (OMU) has generally been positive and we have found the staff helpful and efficient.

### **7.4 Family contact**

In the IMB's prisoners' voice survey, prisoners were reasonably positive about family contact, with nearly 70% saying that they were able to maintain regular contact with their family. The biggest frustration appears to be the length of time it can take to get phone numbers added to their account so they can ring them – this can sometimes be weeks. We understand that the prison needs to check that the numbers are bona fide and that the person whose number it is wishes to receive the calls. However, again, the process involves the movement of bits of paper: a form is completed in reception and put into a pigeonhole, then, sometime later, it finds its way to the person checking the numbers. On the face of it, a shared computer system would speed this up considerably.

The service provider for prisoners' social visits, Invisible Walls (IW), continues to deliver an excellent service but is frustrated by unresolved issues. Here are some examples:

- There are still damp problems in the visits' centre and the ramp to the centre (for buggies and wheelchairs) is not regularly maintained, causing it to become slippery with pigeon droppings and leaves in the autumn.
- Other facilities, such as toilets, are poorly maintained.
- The visits' hall has been without air-conditioning for most of the reporting year.

It seems that profit from the cafe is not being ploughed back in order for Invisible Walls to provide 'extras', such as children's gifts, for enhanced family social visits and better equipment in the cafe. Hot food cannot be provided until equipment is upgraded. Two orderlies assist in the cafe but are not offered any training by the prison.

The new digital booking system allows families to book multiple social visits but sometimes they do not turn up, thus denying others the opportunity. In addition, new rules regarding visitor clothing seems draconian and IW staff are required to 'police' the system. Invisible Walls does now hold a selection of suitable clothing, which can be handed out to visitors.

The wellbeing course offered to young adults has been a great success and ably managed by volunteers. This was originally targeted at adults who do not receive social visitors but has been extended, in the new location, to anyone interested. Eight weekly sessions are followed by a 'bricks beyond bars' session. Staff from IW are very proactive and publicise their activities on the wing noticeboards.

The charity, 'Create', is applying for funding to deliver a programme for men to create a storybook for their children. In addition, family days (which bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings) are arranged on a regular basis, providing a whole day of activities, games, quizzes and entertainment, as well as a buffet lunch. Staff come in to help, often on their day off, and do not wear uniform to create a more relaxed atmosphere. Unfortunately, entertainers used by the service seem to have to wait ages to be paid, which is not good practice.

## 7.5 Resettlement planning

There is no doubt that this is a very complex area of work, involving a large number of organisations and agencies including:

- Supporting Change (the prison's drug rehabilitation team).
- Community Probation.
- The prison's offender management unit (OMU).
- Interventions Alliance (which has the accommodation contract).
- The prison's strategic housing specialist and local authority housing representatives, along with homelessness support agencies (including NOAH Housing First project, King's Arms Project and Emerging Futures).
- Other functions relating to resettlement: the prison employment lead, Department of Work and Pensions, the healthcare unit.

A pre-release board, which includes representatives from most of these bodies, meets every two weeks to try and establish the best release management for individual prisoners in terms of housing, jobs, healthcare, finance and other support functions. Prisoners also attend. This service is not available to the 90% of prisoners at HMP Bedford who are on remand but who may have lost their home and job whilst in prison.

It is also illustrative to look at the 'accommodation journey' of a prisoner, to see how many people are involved:

- **Reception:** BCST (basic custody screening tool) part 1 is completed in the first 72 hours. Within five days, the pre-release team (PRT) carries out BCST part 2, which enables it to assess accommodation needs on release. A recommendation can then be made to the accommodation contract provider, Intervention Alliance, if first approved by the community probation practitioners.
- **Interventions Alliance (IA):** IA has the contract for organising the provision of accommodation through others (such as, for example, Bedford or Luton Borough Councils). They will receive referrals from the PRT, then make further assessments of need and possible provision.
- **Community probation (CP).** The CP team is responsible for accommodation on release from custody and will complete DTF (duty to refer) forms to local authorities and independent housing providers.
- **12 weeks before release:** the pre-release discharge board considers the needs of individual prisoners who are due for release.
- **Types of accommodation:** can include approved accommodation, friends and family (subject to approval by CP), bail accommodation support (BASS) and accommodation through the community accommodation service (CAS).

This labyrinthine arrangement would be difficult at any time, but there are two particular challenges at present. Firstly, it only deals with sentenced prisoners, who, as outlined many times in this report, represent only a minority of men in HMP Bedford. Secondly, short sentences and early releases can make it very hard to arrange accommodation within the limited timescales. On average, about 70% of sentenced prisoners had accommodation on the first night of release, which is about average for reception prisoners, but still not very acceptable.



## The work of the IMB

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	We visited between two and three times every week.

## Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	10	22
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	10	12
C	Equality	8	3
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	10	11
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	10	29
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	6	10
F	Food and kitchens	8	7
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	10	45
H1	Property within the establishment	10	26
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	10	11
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	4	3
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, recategorisation	1	12
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	10	28
K	Transfers	1	1
L	Miscellaneous	2	35
	<b>Total number issues raised in applications</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>255</b>

Note: applications often contain more than one issue. The number of individual applications received in the reporting year was 209.

## Annex A

### IMB survey



#### WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK.

#### PLEASE WILL YOU HELP?

The IMB (Independent Monitoring Board) monitors conditions in the prison. Throughout the year, during our visits to the prison and our talks with you, we collect a lot of facts and figures, so we do have a pretty good picture of how the prison is operating.

WE WOULD BE VERY GRATEFUL IF YOU WOULD SPEND A FEW MINUTES TO TELL US ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN BEDFORD PRISON

ALL VIEWS AND COMMENTS YOU MAY MAKE WILL BE ANONYMOUS AND WILL NOT AFFECT HOW YOU ARE TREATED IN PRISON, IN ANY WAY.

HOWEVER, WE MAY USE QUOTATIONS FROM YOUR ANSWERS TO OUR QUESTIONS IN OUR ANNUAL REPORT.

<b>Did you have an induction? Was it helpful?</b>

<b>How many hours, on average per day, do you spend locked in your cell?</b>

<b>Do you feel safe in the prison? What are your main concerns?</b>

<b>Have you used healthcare or made app to them? What was the service like?</b>

<b>Do you have mental health worries? If so, was it easy to get help with these?</b>
--

**Do you like the way that your day is currently arranged for you?**

**PLEASE TURN OVER**

**What could the prison do differently to make life better for you? What other opportunities would you like to see?**

**Have you been able to make regular contact with your family?**

**How easy is it to find out things you need to know?**

**What do you think the prison does well?**

**How helpful are wing officers?**

<b>How hopeful are you about your future?</b>
<b>Anything else you want to let us know about?</b>

**THANKS VERY MUCH - IMB BEDFORD JUNE 2024**



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