



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Brixton

**For reporting year
1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023**

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Contents

Introductory sections 1 – 3	Page
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the establishment	4
3. Key points	5
 Evidence sections 4 – 7	
4. Safety	7
5. Fair and humane treatment	9
6. Health and wellbeing	11
7. Progression and resettlement	14
 The work of the IMB	
Board statistics	16
Applications to the IMB	16

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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

During the year under review, Brixton has continued as a category C resettlement prison. The certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded) is 528¹. The 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) is 798 and the number accommodated on 31 August 2023 was 759.

There are five residential wings:

A wing accommodates the general population and the London pathways unit (LPU; for prisoners with personality disorders) for up to 36 prisoners who have committed to psychological therapy. B wing is used for induction. C wing accommodates full-time workers and men who have enhanced status under the prison's incentives scheme; and D wing is a mixed drug recovery and wellbeing unit. G wing accommodates prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSO).

- A wing has 135 cells;
- B wing has 88 cells;
- C wing has 70 cells;
- D wing has 26 cells; and
- G wing has 149 cells.

The care and separation unit (CSU), where men are segregated from other prisoners, has seven cells and one special cell (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety), which doubles as a holding cell.

In the Board's view, overall, the condition of the accommodation is unacceptable, and the cells are too small for two men sharing in normal circumstances.

The main external service providers, largely unchanged since last year, are:

- Maintenance and kitchen: Mitie
- Education and training: Novus, subcontracting to Bounce Back and Allandale
- The Clink Restaurant
- National Prison Radio
- Probation Service (PS)
- Accommodation services: St Mungo's, which is a commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) provider
- Work and benefits: Jobcentre Plus (JCP)
- Healthcare: Practice Plus Group (PPG), subcontracting to Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust (BEH) and others
- Substance misuse and wellbeing (with healthcare): Forward Trust (FT)
- Visitors' centre and work with families and children: Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact)
- Employment/training information, advice, and guidance (IAG): Prospects, part of the Shaw Trust

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- Overcrowding at HMP Brixton resulted in the establishment accommodating general population prisoners on the vulnerable prisoners' wing, which necessitated restricting the regime of both groups of prisoners.
- The prison lacks the facilities to adequately support persistent self-harmers, while the ability to transfer them to appropriate facilities is severely limited.
- Despite significant efforts, the prison seems unable to reduce the amount of contraband entering the establishment.

Fair and humane treatment

- Prisoner accommodation continues to be inadequate, too small, too old and too dilapidated.
- The facilities for prisoners washing their own clothes continue to be inadequate.
- From the Board's observations, vermin are a continuing and constant presence in the prison.
- Missing and lost property, particularly on transfer from other establishments, continue to be a major concern for prisoners.
- In the Board's view, The prison kitchen continues to provide excellent meals.

Health and wellbeing

- In the Boards' view, supervision of the distribution of medication continues to be inconsistent.
- The waiting times for medical appointments across all areas of healthcare have reduced significantly and the new model of care (NMC) has been successfully introduced.

Progression and resettlement

- In the Board's view, the number, range and standard of many educational and training opportunities is inadequate.
- The employment hub provides men preparing for release with essential documents, help with CVs and signposting employment opportunities.
- The proportion of prisoners released to accommodation, albeit temporary in too many cases, has increased substantially since the last reporting period.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The prison cannot hope to fulfil its function as a resettlement prison while it accommodates around twice as many men than it can provide education, training and employment opportunities for. There are even fewer purposeful activities for men convicted of a sexual offence. The Chief Inspector has repeated his previous comments that *'a reduction in headcount and an increase in purposeful activity are prerequisites for the prison to provide decent living conditions and realise its potential as an effective London*

resettlement jail. Decisions on the future of G wing and how to address the unmet needs of its vulnerable prisoner population are also well overdue. Ultimately, as I stated previously, the prison can only be more successful if a substantial proportion of its prisoners are released temporarily outside the prison wall each day to work in the community’.

How – and when – does the Minister plan to ensure that these changes are made in the foreseeable future?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- When will the Prison Service address the significant improvements in the infrastructure of the prison that have been needed for many years?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- The Board raises matters of concern with the Governor from time to time as they arise.

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue	Response given	Action taken
Shortage of category D places (in open prisons) across the prison estate restricting movement to open conditions.	Places under development.	Problem at Brixton reduced.
Shortage of accommodation on release.	More attention being devoted to this issue.	Issue less concerning.
Prisoners allocated to the prison who do not fit the profile.	This sometimes necessary.	Issues continue.
Poor condition of accommodation and facilities at Brixton.	Some remedial works programmed.	Some improvements, but major works still urgently required.
Prisoners transferred without a sentence plan or OASys (a risk and needs assessment).	Regrettable.	No action taken.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

- Too many prisoners wait for too long before being taken to first night accommodation.
- In November, prisoners reported that they had been waiting for four weeks for induction. In January, 202 men were waiting for induction, although this had fallen to 27 men by May.
- In June, it was noted that a number of men on an assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plan (used to support prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide) had transferred to Brixton without their ACCT file being transferred at the same time.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

- The prison does not have the facilities to deal with persistent self-harming prisoners, although some are eventually moved to secure hospitals.
- There were twice as many self-harm incidents as in previous years, but the number of men involved in any month was only slightly greater.
- Over the first half year (September to February), three men accounted for half the total of self-harm incidents.
- There were two deaths in custody, one of which was self-inflicted. The other death was, apparently, from natural causes, with the inquest yet to be held.
- Covid restrictions had reduced goal-oriented self-harm to virtually none. However, the months following their relaxation saw a resurgence of harm-seeking transfers both within the prison and to other establishments. The prison, for the most part, seemed to successfully resist this pressure.
- Sometimes, ACCT documentation appeared to be incomplete, and some care plans did not address the issues identified.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

- The prison officer take-up rate of body worn video cameras varied between 50 and 70 from the 112 available. Technical problems at the charging station in the gatehouse reduced take-up and the system is about to be replaced as a result.
- In October, a member of the safer custody staff won a national award as Safer Custody Officer of the year.
- In the early part of the reporting period, in particular, there were tensions arising from rival gangs being represented amongst the prison population, with very limited opportunities for separation.
- Self-isolation on the wings seemed to be a response to debt.

4.4 Use of force

- Use of force incidents averaged 16 each month against 18 each month in the previous 12 months.

- We agree with HM Chief Inspector of Prisons' report on an independent review of progress in November 2023 that the prison's scrutiny of use of force has much improved.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

- The Board is concerned about prisoners suffering new psychoactive substances (NPS) attacks (such as convulsions, paralysis and extreme behaviour), as well as arise in throw-overs (where people from outside the prison throw parcels containing illicit items over the walls, to be picked up by prisoners) and attempts at passing illicit items during social visits: in April, officer monitoring of the visits' hall resulted in 12 men being restricted to closed social visits following suspected 'passes' of contraband in open social visits.
- NPS continue to have a significant impact on the prison with, in some months, as many as 25 men being reported as under the influence of these drugs.
- Throughout the year, but particularly in the run up to Christmas, there were a significant number of finds of fermenting liquid in cells – 12 or more a week.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

- Population pressures led to a small number of general population men being accommodated on G wing, which is usually reserved for prisoners convicted of a sexual offence (PCoSO). This resulted in the regime for both sets of prisoners being restricted and this is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.
- Cells remain too small, especially for men sharing, as well as being dirty and, in some cases, lacking furniture and privacy screens.
- The wing washing machines and driers are unreliable and breakdowns take a very long time to be rectified.
- There appear to have been shortages of clean bedding and towels.
- Basic items such as toilet rolls have, at times, been in very short supply on the wings, even when they have been available in the stores.
- The prison has suffered from the presence of rats throughout the reporting year, despite the efforts of exterminators.
- The prison's kitchen provides excellent meals of high quality, variety, and adequate quantity.

5.2 Segregation

- One man was held in care and separation unit (CSU) for more than 42 days (the limit allowed without external authorisation) during the reporting period.
- The CSU has been used to accommodate men supported by constant supervision.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

- In the Board's view, communication with prisoners has improved but there are still too many last-minute changes in routines, and cancellations of regime.
- Relationships between staff and prisoners appear to have improved, with staff recruited and beginning their careers during the covid lockdowns gaining experience of the prison working normally.
- Communication between management and frontline officers also seems to have improved due to a more structured approach.
- The national standards team provided more than a month's coaching and training for staff who seem to be consistent in responding to prisoners.
- Key working entries on Nomis (the internal computer system) have, at times, been neither good in quality nor quantity; only 45% of detailed sessions took place in one week, that is, 220 men were not seen who should have been seen.

5.4 Equality and diversity

- In the early part of the reporting year, there was a welcome increase in discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs), suggesting greater knowledge of, and confidence in, the process.
- In December, 50% of occasions in which force was used involved black prisoners, who made up only 30% of the prison population.

- Data identifying areas of disproportionality are collected, but the prison does not do enough analysis to understand why disproportionality occurs, or to address unequal treatment effectively.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

- From the Board's observations, support is given to men of all major faiths (and none).
- Pastoral support is provided for men experiencing depression, loneliness, family break-up, self-harm and bereavement.

5.6 Incentives schemes

- The scheme is perceived by both the men and staff to be more geared towards the punishment of poor behaviour rather than rewarding good behaviour.
- The proportion of men on the basic (lowest) level of the incentives scheme has, however, remained low.

5.7 Complaints

- In November, staff sickness led to a marked deterioration in the speed and quality of the responses to complaints. Recovery took some time.
- Complaints about property lost in moves between establishments remain at a very high level and take a very long time to resolve. This is due to the lack of urgency placed on these issues by the prisons that men have transferred from.

5.8 Property

- Moves to the CSU can cause property loss issues, especially with regard to shared cells.
- Cell clearance forms are not always given to the prisoners in good time.
- The lack of consistency across the prison estate over what property the prisoners are allowed causes many of the issues.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

- A new model of care (NMC) was phased in between April and June, dividing primary healthcare into early days in custody (the first 14 days, EDiC), planned care, unscheduled care, and pre-release and transfer. From the Board's observations, this resulted in closer working among the different departments of healthcare, as well as with prison staff.
- A free phone service (Call PHIL) was on offer and used by friends and family who had healthcare concerns about men.
- All therapeutic services, both in mental health and substance misuse, were challenged by a lack of space in which to work, especially on A wing. The healthcare unit also reported that their patients found the bi-weekly Wednesday lockdowns for prison staff training difficult to manage. This is because, with prisoners locked in their cells all day on staff training Wednesdays, there is reduced access to medical appointments and dispensaries.

6.2 Physical healthcare

- All men were screened within 24 hours of arrival, despite some short-notice late arrivals, when population pressures increased towards the end of the reporting year. Between 92% and 98% of men had their second screening within seven days. Men were offered the same vaccinations as they would in the community (Covid, flu, MMR and shingles).
- Men are registered with GPs prior to release and, if leaving with no fixed abode, the pre-release team works with the outside community offender manager (COM).
- Waiting times for all medical appointment were mostly no longer than six weeks, but in April there was a 15-week wait for a dental check-up; and, from April to July, a 14-week waiting list for the physiotherapist. The optician also had over 60% of men waiting more than six weeks in April, May and July, but had cleared the list by the reporting year end. Appointment non-attendance (DNAs) for all areas of healthcare remained high throughout the reporting year, particularly for the GP and the dentist. There were 289 DNAs in April, which included spaces in clinics run by nurses. Regime restrictions and inefficient officer escort arrangements contributed to delays and DNAs.
- Under the NMC, dispensing shifted to pharmacy. About 75% of dispensed medications were held by men in their cells (IP), with spot checks conducted to help identify trading. From the Board's monitoring, dispensing hatches were inconsistently overseen by officers. Dispensing and the delivery of other healthcare services on G wing were badly affected in July and August, when population pressures meant both the general population and MCSO men had to be housed on the wing with two separate regimes.

6.3 Mental health

- Mental healthcare services provide one-to-one talking therapies (cognitive behavioural therapy/CBT and counselling), trauma-focused group therapy, and occupational, speech and language therapy. Referrals increased from 53 in September 2022 to 84 in August 2023, including referrals for attention

deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism and learning disability assessments.

- Mental health waiting times for most assessments was between 10 and 15 days, while urgent ones were all seen within 48 hours. Four men were transferred to secure hospital beds; the average transfer time was 56 days, the longest transfer time was 76 days, over two and half months.
- To support men who are not in Brixton long enough to benefit from one-to-one sessions (waiting time is around three to four months, followed by 12 to 15 weekly sessions), weekly workshops covering subjects such as anxiety, managing sleep, stress, and trauma, were delivered from May onwards. These were consistently over-subscribed.

6.4 Social care

- The prison had no men requiring a local authority social care package. The safer custody team organised carers on the wings, who helped support men by, for example, delivering their meals, doing their laundry and cleaning their cells.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

- Men were behind their doors on Friday afternoons for canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials using their allocated funds) delivery and when the prison locked down for staff training on two Wednesdays a month.
- The regime on B wing, the induction wing, where men can often wait several weeks before getting a job or activity off the wing, was intentionally restricted to encourage men to move to other wings; the Board believes this was both unfair and inhumane.
- In July and August, when population pressures resulted in both the general population and PCoSOs being held on G wing, two separate regimes were run, reducing both sets of men's time out of cell.
- At the same time, the number of men self-isolating began to increase, not so much as a result of debt but because they said they felt generally unsafe. Self-isolators did not always get time out of their cells each day; and, when they did, it was not always for a full half-hour.
- The PE staff offered all men up to four hours a week in the gym. Full-time workers had gym in the evenings and over 50s or men needing remedial gym were allocated time at the weekends.
- Men on the enhanced level of the incentives scheme were given extra time out of cell to play cricket, badminton and other sports in the summer. When staffing allowed in the winter, men could play pool, ping-pong and video and board games in the community centre.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

- At any one time, about 10% of the prison population (70-80 men) were on opiate substitutes. Forward Trust (FT) carried a total caseload of between 250 and 300 men. On D wing, men were offered a range of interventions, including a 12-step Substance Dependency Treatment Programme or a shorter Stepping Stones substance-dependence programmes. Trauma therapy

groups were begun in May and found to be helpful in preparing men for later group therapies.

- FT found their work intermittently undermined by illicit NPS use on the wing and, on a couple of occasions, unsuitable men being placed on the wing.
- Across the rest of the prison, FT worked with some 250 men. A family support worker delivered group work on the importance of relationships, and a transitional worker provided support to men for up to six months after release.
- Men at risk of overdosing after release were trained to use and given a dose of naloxone (a medicine that can temporarily reverse the effect of opioids in an overdose). FT saw men if they had been found under the influence and attended their clients' ACCT reviews when they could.
- There were FT peer mentors on most of the wings for most of the reporting year.
- The fellowships, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous came in and were well supported by men.
- Halfway through the reporting year, C wing was declared an incentivised substance free living wing (ISFL). Men had to sign a compact to stay drug free; if they refused or tested positive, they were de-selected from the wing. Some new communal furniture, including a fridge freezer and electric grills were purchased for the wings. These were brought into use in June, once the systematic drug testing began.

6.7 Soft skills

- Certitude, a charity that runs accredited peer-mentoring courses, worked with men across the prison who, after graduating, are expected to act as volunteer peer mentors on their wings.
- Forward Trust and Shannon Trust had their own peer mentors, while PACT had champions who help support men with their family connections.
- The safer custody team organised violence-reduction reps, as well as carers to support men needing help with laundry, meal delivery and cell cleaning.
- Samaritans trained and supported Listeners (prisoners who can offer confidential emotional support to their peers).
- D wing residents were able to access some mindfulness instructions, which were part of FT's courses focused on wellbeing. Men have enjoyed the weekly 'fine cell' work sessions, with several men carrying on with their own stitching projects between visits. One prisoner said: 'I find it calms me down.'

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

- Not enough education, skills and work opportunities are available to meet the needs of the prison population. Only a third of prisoners benefited from education or work leading to either a qualification or recognised skill training. The majority of prisoners worked in areas that provided few opportunities for them to develop the skills they needed for employment or training on release.
- On arrival at the prison, more than half the prisoners were identified as having English and Math skills below the level required for most jobs. There were education places for only around one in ten of these prisoners.
- Teaching in English and Maths does not support prisoners to develop their knowledge and skills at a rapid enough pace. Very few prisoners have taken accredited qualifications in these subjects. As a result, they cannot progress into work.
- Punctuality is poor because of delays to unlocking. Attendance of prisoners at training and work sessions is too often disrupted by other prison activities, such as social visits and gym sessions.
- The PE staff put nearly 600 men through courses in manual handling, health and safety, first aid and personal training. Street Soccer, the England Boxing Association and the Fulham Reach Boat Club delivered courses to over 100 men and offered some post-release support.

7.2 Vocational training, work

- Too many activity places were not used.
- The prison cannot offer work, education or training opportunities to more than two-thirds of the prison population, leaving many without purposeful activity or the scope to prepare positively for release.
- Prisoners and staff in vocational training report that students have a good understanding of the skills they are gaining and how these will be useful to them on release and that prisoners' practical work is of a high standard.
- From the Board's observations, workshops, classrooms and prison and wing work environments seem orderly, calm and, mainly, productive, which promotes prisoners' focus on learning and work.

7.3 Offender management, progression

- Prisoners meet their allocated prison offender manager (POM) during induction and receive support during the 12 weeks before release.
- However, POM contacts outside these periods were inconsistent and prisoners report a lack of support.
- Key work focuses on resettlement needs but more attention has been paid to men convicted of a sexual offence and those in the London Pathways Unit. Some other prisoners complain of little contact with their key worker.
- In December, 52 prisoners were waiting for a progressive move, and it was clear that some would be released before being given a transfer to an open prison.
- The early release scheme generated a significant amount of extra work for prison offender managers but resulted in few men leaving the prison early.

7.4 Family contact

- Social visits took place through the reporting year, with take-up gradually increasing but never reaching pre-Covid levels.
- Social video calls were limited to one per person, per month in May, but continued to be preferred by many men. Prisoners' comments included: 'I don't want my children seeing where I am' and 'It saves travel costs'.
- Ten themed family days (which bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings) were spread across the reporting year, organised around half-terms and national holidays. Storybook Dads, where men are recorded reading stories for their children, returned. A family friendly room was available for special multi-disciplinary conferences and where children with special needs visiting could be accommodated.
- The prison began to focus on men who never receive social visits. In December, 539 men had no social visits, of whom over 300 had never had a social visit at HMP Brixton. In July, 474 men had no social visits. At the end of the reporting year, PACT was planning a volunteer visitor scheme to run in parallel with the official prison visiting scheme, organised by chaplaincy.
- There was a shortage of working in-cell phones for much of the reporting year. This was especially the case on the induction wing - B wing - and hard on men who had just arrived and often left their previous prison with little or no notice. The landing phones on C and D wings were also often out of action.

7.5 Resettlement planning

- An employment hub has been established, which provides good information, advice, and guidance (IAG) on options for employment, training and further education following release. Prisoners receive assistance with writing CVs, completing application forms and drafting disclosure letters, as well as obtaining identity documents and opening a bank account.
- At the beginning of the reporting year, the prison was being sent men who did not match the profile, with some having very little time left to serve so giving the prison very limited opportunities to work towards resettlement.
- A total of 21% of the men leaving the prison in January and February were in work within six weeks of release.
- Prisoners have a greater chance of being released into settled accommodation than in previous periods, but there was still a reliance on the emergency housing service. Very few prisoners were now discharged without accommodation, but too much accommodation was only temporary.
- In November, of the 18 community offender management offices in London, 15 were rated red, 2 amber and only 1 green for their staff in post, which had a direct impact on the potential for successful resettlement.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	5
Total number of visits to the establishment	256

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	27	31
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	14	29
C	Equality	6	11
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	20	14
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	17	19
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	21	15
F	Food and kitchens	8	5
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	85	40
H1	Property within the establishment	17	29
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	47	34
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	9	15
I1	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	30	19
I2	Sentence Planning	5	5
I3	Sentence related other	33	15
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	107	150
K	Transfers	16	7
	Total number of applications	462	438



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