



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Dartmoor

**For reporting year
1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

2.1 HMP Dartmoor is a category C training prison for up to 640¹ adult male prisoners. During 2023, the prison had to take an additional 49 prisoners, who were accommodated by doubling up in cells. On 20 September 2023, the prison's roll stood at 682 and had been sustained at approximately this level until this reporting year.

2.2 The prison is situated in Princetown, on the western edge of Dartmoor National Park, eight miles from Tavistock and 16 miles from Plymouth (the nearest mainline railway station). Access is difficult, with very limited public transport. The local environment is harsh and can be particularly bleak in winter.

2.3 The prison comprises six residential wings (known in HMP Dartmoor as Tors), a care and separation unit (CSU), healthcare suite, chapel, education facilities and workshops. In addition, there is a large gymnasium, a well-equipped kitchen and other facilities to support the life of the prison. A fully integrated smoke-free regime is in operation: all wings are integrated and accommodate main and vulnerable prisoners or offenders who have committed crimes of a sexual nature, the majority of whom are in single cells. The prison and prisoners are supported by contractors and charities, either working in the prison or visiting on a regular basis.

2.4 The buildings are leased from the Duchy of Cornwall and the Prison Service is responsible for their upkeep. A new 25-year lease came into effect in December 2023. The terms include a rolling break, which can be exercised at any time after the first five years, on giving five years' notice. This means the minimum term is for ten years.

2.5 Most of the buildings in the prison are old but kept clean; they are built of granite and are prone to damp. There are very well-maintained and attractive garden areas. The prison is one of the major employers in the town, alongside agriculture, tourism and a brewery.

2.6 However, the reporting year has been dominated by the impact of the response to the monitoring the prison for Radon gas. (This is a radioactive gas we can't see, smell or taste, which comes from the rocks and soil found everywhere in the UK.) This resulted in a nine-month period of decanting and recanting prisoners, culminating in the decision, in August 2024, to temporarily close the prison to deal with the issues. This report outlines, in some detail, the length of time it took the Prison Service to reach that decision, and the effects of that long period on prisoners and staff in HMP Dartmoor. As at time of writing, in mid-October 2024, NO decision has been taken about the future of HMP Dartmoor.

2.7 The Ionising Radiation Regulations 2017 (IRR17) apply to any work carried on in an atmosphere containing Radon gas that exceeds the statutory limit. If there is work carried out in an atmosphere above the statutory limit, then an employer must restrict, so far as is reasonably practicable, the extent to which employees and other persons (i.e. prisoners) are exposed to Radon gas and must ensure that employees and other persons are not exposed to Radon gas above a statutory limit. Following monitoring of Radon gas at HMP Dartmoor, it was found that Radon gas levels were above the statutory limit and prisoners were being exposed to Radon gas to an extent that exceeded the statutory limit.

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.

2.8 Radon monitoring timeline

- The prison is required to carry out regular Radon gas monitoring under the Radon gas Prison Service Instruction (PSI), in place from 2015-2019, and its subsequent replacement. Monitoring took place in 2010, when concentrations were below the statutory action levels.
- However, in 2020, monitoring did find elevated levels of Radon gas in subterranean areas adjacent to kitchen and workshops. These results suggested that some members of staff might have experienced annual exposures greater than the limits set out in statute.
- Due to regrettable delays in escalating the issue in HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the MoJ Property Directorate, internal mitigations were not put in place until 2022 and the monitoring of residential wings did not commence until 2023.
- The programme of in-cell monitoring ran from August 2023 to March 2024, a rolling programme across all cellular accommodation.

2.8.1 It had been planned that mitigating actions, such as fitting sump pumps to allow ventilation on E, F and G wings, would take place in the spring of 2024, requiring full wing decants (i.e. the transfer out of men from the prison) for up to 12 weeks. However, by late December 2023, following the first residential test results, F and E wings were closed and the prisoners transferred out. It is extremely unfortunate that the first decant of F wing residents, many of whom are particularly vulnerable due to age and health conditions, took place a couple of days before Christmas – a difficult time for prisoners and their families. In addition, transfers in were stopped and Welsh prisoners were transferred to prisons in Wales. The head count was then 648.

2.8.2 In the early new year of 2024, it was clear that issues relating to the replacement of essential and key workers e.g. kitchen and garden orderlies (trusted prisoners), Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to offer confidential emotional support to other prisoners), peer supporters, Peaceful Solutions (a charity that trains prisoners to support other prisoners who are struggling), etc, were occurring and impacting on the remaining prisoners' experience.

2.8.3 In February 2024, it became apparent that the ventilation system was not as operationally robust as had been assumed and, consequently, some of the cells were showing unexpectedly high readings of Radon gas. In addition, some of the ventilation grills had become blocked over a period of years. The Board was told that this could potentially cause cell closures on A wing. The position relating to B and D wings was now less clear, as the same situation could apply to those wings. G wing was fluid, with several cells locked and prisoners being transferred to other wings and other prisons. It appears that there were no identifiable patterns of contamination in which cells would be affected – by wing or by level.

2.8.4 In addition to monitoring the level of Radon gas in a specific cell, each prisoner was now being assessed, based on length of occupancy and daily activity, to check if their exposure to radon gas had exceeded the statutory limit set out in IRR17. The prisoners' individual readings were given to most of them, together with a Q&A sheet. It was, therefore, possible for prisoners with equal Radon gas exposure readings to have had a different time limit in cells exposed to Radon gas, depending on the level of Radon gas in the cells in which they were based. However, not all prisoners were given their specific Radon gas exposure levels in a timely manner and some complained that the lack of information about their exposure increased their anxiety. The situation was

complex and the IMB found it difficult to communicate with certainty when asked questions by prisoners during monitoring visits.

2.8.5 The Board's monitoring visits during this time did find there was a need to deal with locked cells and their contents to avoid further damage, due to damp and mould. We asked if the senior management team (SMT) was considering the redistribution of cell furniture to the remaining prisoners and updating the asset schedule for the location of in-cell phones and TVs.

2.8.6 The healthcare team advised on the viability of transferring elderly prisoners with certain conditions to prisons a long distance away. All prisoners were transferred and, on occasion, members of the healthcare team accompanied the prisoner if there were concerns about their safety.

2.8.7 At the beginning of March 2024, there were now 505 prisoners in HMP Dartmoor. Specialists were on site to try and determine the location of the worst Radon gas spots and why, in a few places, there was so much inconsistency in readings from one cell to another.

2.8.8 At this point, the Board had a number of serious concerns regarding the situation and took the decision to write to the Director General of Operations at HMPPS to express these concerns and seek assurances. The concerns related to the exposure of prisoners and staff to the potential risks of lung cancer and other risks that the Prison Service knew about through regular Radon gas monitoring; reassurance that the results of testing that took place in 2010 did not show a safety risk to prisoners and staff; the reason for the two-year gap between the Radon gas testing results in 2020 and the introduction of mitigating actions in 2022; the reason we had been told that a request from the Prison Officers Association (POA) to bring in an independent specialist was turned down; and assurance that prisoners transferring out would not be disadvantaged in terms of their journey to rehabilitation. Mr Copple's response was helpful and demonstrated that HMPPS were considering the points we had raised and were taking urgent actions to mitigate the risks to prisoners and staff, as they were identified. He acknowledged that there had been regrettable delays in escalating the issue within HMPPS and the MoJ Property Directorate in 2020, leading to interim mitigations not being in place until 2022.

2.8.9 By April 2024, there were 352 prisoners on the roll and this trend would continue, for prisoner numbers to reduce over the summer. The minimum number of prisoners that would enable the prison to remain open had not yet been determined.

2.8.10 Further ventilation was needed and interim measures - in-cell grill replacements, more pumps and further airflow and systems - were to go in over the summer and would then require 90 days' testing to assess impact. The Board was told that the decision about a future for the prison could not begin until the end of the summer, and only then could work start on a costed and effective plan and an assessment of the options. Independent experts were engaged to do this.

2.8.11 Testing started on a further 41 non-residential areas, and contingency planning was underway should levels be found to be high for the control room, gatehouse, visits' hall, reception and other business-critical areas.

2.8.12 The staffing situation was difficult, and it was clear to the Board that there was a question over the viability of previous staffing levels with the reducing number of prisoners. The leadership team was trying hard to make the situation work.

2.8.13 At the April 2024, Board meeting members asked the Governor about the impact on prisoners and if there was likely to be a point at which the prison couldn't provide all necessary services. Some activities for prisoners were already no longer viable e.g. Braille could not take on additional work, and Textiles were unable to fulfil their full contracts; Storybook Dads had returned to its Dartmoor base in January/February 2024 from a decampment to HMP Channings Wood, only to move back again once the absence of experienced prisoners made it impractical to continue the work from here.

2.8.14 When deciding on where a prisoner should transfer, the prison ensured that it was aware of the courses they were following, particularly if the course was part of sentence planning. But the bottom line was that when a prisoner reached the statutory maximum acceptable period of exposure to Radon gas, they had to transfer out, irrespective of course status.

2.8.15 By now, there were more jobs than prisoners available, so purposeful activity should have been achievable in most cases. However, there were issues regarding security. Plus, there was a high proportion of prisoners with neurodiversity issues, which meant that some of the remaining prisoners were unable to undertake some jobs, such as working in the kitchens or gardens, or taking other, 'red band' roles (for trusted prisoners).

2.8.16 Monitoring visits by Board members found that many of the empty, locked cells still contained equipment, such as phones, TVs, etc, and, occasionally, uneaten food.

2.8.17 Peer support was further impacted by the decline in the prison population. Peaceful Solutions and safer custody reps saw a significant fall in members.

2.8.18 At the IMB Board meeting in April 2024, members expressed the view that it was a pity more was not being done, given the surplus number of officers and officer support grade (OSG) staff, to provide additional activities for the prisoners remaining at Dartmoor. It appeared to be a great opportunity for trying new activities.

2.8.19 In May 2024, the Board was told that, following discussions between the Gold Commander (the strategic lead for managing major situations), the Director General Operations of HMPPS and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), HMPPS agreed that further decants should be paused. Prior to this change in policy, it had been anticipated that the prison's population would be 100 by August 2024 and just 40 by the end of 2024.

2.8.20 The staffing situation was difficult and there were reports of staff becoming used to working with a vastly reduced population.

2.8.21 But, in June 2024, following further discussions between Gold Command, the Director General Operations of HMPPS and the HSE, HMPPS agreed to suspend the pause in the decant. So, the 65 prisoners who had been due to go at the time of the pause were now transferred out, and up to 30 prisoners left HMP Dartmoor each week, as they reached the limit of their exposure time.

2.8.22 By now, the head count in one week of June 2024 was 137. A and D wings were down to fewer than 20 occupants and plans were put in place to transfer these prisoners to B and G wings and to close A and D wings. 'Operation Decant' required the prison to keep 200 cells ready for emergency occupation.

2.8.23 Education was now limited to maths and English; the Industries department was impacted, with the Textiles unit due to close because of its inability to service the contract.

2.8.24 In yet another twist, in the first week of July 2024, it was reported to the Board that following ongoing meetings between HMPPS and the HSE, the decision had been taken to recant men to the prison over the next few months, to reach an operational capacity of 391, with up to 30 prisoners being recanted each week. The HSE would keep the situation under constant review and the decision could change over the following few months.

2.8.25 Work was done on drawing up mitigation plans, with a view to providing a long-term solution to the Radon gas issue, but the key issue would be viability and cost. The presentation of the proposals was due in early August 2024.

2.8.26 During the first two weeks of July 2024, the recanting progressed, with up to 30 prisoners a week coming in. However, due to other factors, on some occasions the prisoners were arriving late in the day, which presented reception with some challenges. There was no change on the status of the integrated regime. The Board was told that E wing would not open in the foreseeable future, due to higher Radon gas readings

2.8.27 Finally, after seven months of decanting, pausing, decanting and recanting, it was announced on 17 July 2024 that, based on incoming Radon gas monitoring results from the monitoring of the wing atriums, which were significantly higher than anticipated, the decision had been taken to temporarily fully close the prison. This meant decanting all remaining prisoners and transferring staff out. There are 41 testing areas and the strategy of moving people around the premises was no longer considered viable. The final decanting exercise started immediately, and by 1 August 2024, the final remaining prisoners were transferred out of HMP Dartmoor.

2.8.28 HMPPS informed the HSE of this decision and the state of HMP Dartmoor in operational readiness. HSE accepted this decision and asked to be updated if emergency plans to accept prisoners to HMP Dartmoor were triggered.

2.8.29 At its August 2024 meeting, the Board was told that the closure of the prison could be temporary but, if so, the earliest it could reopen would be 2026. In this circumstance, Dartmoor staff have been on a period of short-term detached duty, pending being matched to a permanent role. Staff will join their new establishments permanently in January 2025. If the closure were to be permanent, the lease requirements would have to be met at, potentially, some considerable cost.

2.8.30 If the closure were to be permanent, the lease requirements would have to be met at, potentially, some considerable cost. Staff would become members of the prison to which they had transferred.

2.8.31 On our subsequent visits, monitoring reports noted that the area outside A wing was infested with rats and, generally, the prison's infrastructure, particularly, but not exclusively, on E wing (the oldest wing), was decaying. Windows had been left open when wings were vacated in an effort to increase the ventilation. However, this had led to an infestation of bats, birds and insects, which exacerbated the decline in the estate.

2.8.32 From mid-July 2024, all staff working in education, plus all industries and activities had been transferred to other establishments.

Operation Decant

2.8.33 HMP Dartmoor was part of Operation Decant, which was being managed by the Gold Commander. So, although empty of prisoners, it remained in a position of operational readiness to take prisoners in the case of emergencies for the period up to 23 September 2024. The Board was informed that transfers in would not include people remanded and sentenced, due to the recent riots. HMP Dartmoor would only take category C prisoners and those who were compliant.

2.8.34 To prepare for Operation Decant, food was kept in the freezers, with a small team of civilian catering staff on board; prison staff deployed elsewhere would be brought back; and water management and chlorination was being undertaken in unoccupied cells. Education and activities staff were not included in this programme, as they would not be required under the Operation Decant circumstances. Healthcare staff were working between HMP Channings Wood and HMP Dartmoor, but some needed to stay in place for Operation Decant. Between 60 and 271 places were being held.

2.8.35 Although the prison remained operationally ready to accept prisoners under the Operation Decant arrangements, there were, in fact, no transfers in. At the end of the period – 23 September 2024 – the contingency plans were stood down and operational areas, such as the kitchen and the healthcare centre, were closed.

2.8.36 To date, the prison is empty of prisoners and retains a small management team for current and future planning, plus a skeleton staff for safety and security. No decision has been taken or announced about the future of HMP Dartmoor and there is no indication of the timeframe for that decision.

2.9 The rest of this annual report reflects mainly on the first three months of the reporting year. It also draws attention to some of the issues that arose from the problems caused by the lack of decision-making and tackling the issues caused by the harmful effects of Radon gas on prisoners and people working in the prison.

2.10 The Board would wish to place on record its thanks to all staff, in all areas of the prison, for their hard work, support and willingness to share with the Board the decisions, or lack of, that went in to planning for the future of the Prison. The willingness of the Governor and the SMT to engage with the Board during the year has been particularly appreciated.

2.11 While the Board fully acknowledges the strain on staff it also recognises that for many of the prisoners this was a particular stressful time. Our duty is to ensure that prisoners are treated fairly and justly and in acknowledging that responsibility we hope that all those transferred out of HMP Dartmoor have settled into their new accommodation and are accessing the work, support and health courses required as part of their sentence plan.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

The Board's analysis of relevant indices, including incidents of violence and self-harm, indicates that the prison continued to be a generally safe environment in the reporting year. The uncertainty regarding the future did not appear to lead to an increase in self-harm and instability amongst the prison population, which is a credit to them.

Fair and humane treatment

The Board found access to in-cell phones, installed during the reporting year, had a positive impact on prisoner wellbeing. On the negative side, the continuing occupancy of many cells by two prisoners was not fair or humane. We reported on this at length in last year's annual report.

Health and wellbeing

Healthcare provision was impacted this year by two significant factors: that this was the first complete year following a change of provider in 2023; and HMPPS's reaction to Radon gas monitoring from early December 2023, which significantly changed the profile and number of patients and the services required.

One of the first wings to be decanted was Fox Tor, which was the home of many elderly prisoners with long-term medical conditions, including dementia, and social care needs. As a result, the requirement for social care provision reduced significantly and the workload for these elderly, complex patients, with chronic conditions and social needs, was also reduced, with specialist procedures and equipment no longer required.

Progression and resettlement

The transfer of prisoners, following the decisions taken to move men out after Radon gas was found, was completed with sensitivity and concern for their wellbeing, in the Board's view. However, some prisoners were transferred out with little notice and no regard paid to the courses they were on to enable progression.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- When will the future of HMP Dartmoor be decided and communicated?
- As illustrated by the sample of responses to our previous annual reports, outlined below, the Board has grave concerns about the apparent lack of credibility in the Ministerial responses to our questions in recent years. What assurances can the Board be given that the responses are reviewed regularly and that any major planned actions not undertaken are investigated and actioned? Of particular note here would be the Ageing Population Strategy (now over two years' late), planned overnight health support at HMP Channings Wood (over a year late) and the IPP Annual Report (due six months ago).

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Is HMPPS satisfied that it fully complied with its own PSI on Radon gas monitoring?

- Lockdown, due to the Covid pandemic, coincided with the elevated Radon gas levels being identified. During this period, 2020-2021, prisoners were frequently locked down for 23 hours a day. The risk to prisoners of prolonged exposure to Radon gas in cells with poor ventilation appears to have been ignored. Why was this not raised?
- When will the future of HMP Dartmoor be decided and communicated?
- When will the HMPPS Ageing Population Strategy, now two years' overdue, be published?
- What progress has been made on the provision of overnight care at a category C prison in Devon? When will it be introduced?
- When will the IPP Annual Report, due in March 2024, be published?

3.3 Responses to the last two annual reports

Some of the issues raised in the last two annual reports are no longer relevant, due to the actions taken in response to the Radon gas monitoring and the consequent temporary closure. However, the following issues remain outstanding and are of major concern to the Board.

Issue raised	Response	Progress
The Ageing Population Strategy was raised in 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and, again, this year.	2021-2022: The Ageing Population Strategy is being developed to ensure older prisoners are held in appropriate places with purposeful and rehabilitative activities.	No progress.
	2022-2023: We aim to publish the strategy in 2024.	No progress.
	2024	The strategy has still not been published.
Overnight health care requirements, raised in 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and, again, this year.	2021-2022: a task force was set up to develop long-term sustainable solutions, plus 24-hour care packages are commissioned. However, it is accepted that facilities are not currently sufficient in the region.	No progress.
	2022-2023: the new healthcare provider committed to 24-hour provision at HMP Channings Wood.	No progress.
	2024	No progress.

Provision of workstreams for prisoners on IPP sentences Raised in multiple years.	2022-2023: The IPP annual Report will be published in March 2024. 2024	No progress. No progress.
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Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

As has been explained in 2.6, no receptions or inductions were needed for most of the reporting year. At the beginning of the reporting year, Board members observed inductions for new arrivals on a weekly basis.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There was one death in custody during the reporting year, apparently from natural causes.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Levels of violence in the prison appeared to remain low. Peer support was impacted by the decline in the prison population. Peaceful Solutions and safer custody reps saw a significant fall in members. The main concerns men brought to the team were Radon gas-related, but also included the lack of work, limited access to the offender management unit (OMU) and officer-related issues.

4.4 Use of force

The monthly average for 2024 was six incidents. An improvement in the use of body worn video camera (BWVCs) and the completion of relevant paperwork was evident as the year progressed. Further training, however, was required into what constituted full BWVC footage to ensure that incidents were recorded from the outset. The Board has been concerned about the lack of Use of Force meetings taking place and has raised the issue with the SMT.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Our monitoring showed that mobile phones and illegal drugs were still entering the prison via a variety of ways. The Board was informed by the Governor that this was often through mail impregnated with drugs being delivered into the prison, even as the number of men in the prison fell. Phones and drugs are highly valued items of currency in prison and their confiscation can lead to violent incidents and threats made to other prisoners, as well a level of debt, which causes issues.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

There has been positive progress during the reporting year on the installation of in-cell phones, which has had a positive impact on prisoner wellbeing, together with improvements in television reception. During the year, the internal laundry was decommissioned and laundry was sent to HMP Channings Wood. Plans to introduce a replacement laundry were put on hold, due to the emerging Radon gas situation.

Water ingress during wet weather has continued to cause damp and mould in some residential wings, which affected the quality of some prisoners' experience in their cells. When it rained, corridors between wings were littered with containers to, often unsuccessfully, keep the floor dry. There were major slip hazards. As wings remained empty and were shut, conditions to the fabric of the building continued to deteriorate. An increase in the number of rats was noticed outside the wings.

5.2 Segregation

The reporting year started with six of the eight cells in the care and segregation unit (CSU), where prisoners are segregated, being available for use. These had a frequent turnover and efforts were made by staff to ensure that prisoners were not encouraged to stay long. The practice of reducing cellular confinement punishments after a period of good behaviour continued and appeared to be effective.

5.2.1 A man on a long-term dirty protest was transferred to Dartmoor CSU in mid-June. He restarted his protest the next day. His period of separation on arrival was, in total, 1,050 days in various prisons., which is clearly unacceptable and was repeatedly raised by the IMB. When observed by the IMB, the staff in the CSU were supportive in their approach and encouraged him to engage with those attending the unit to reduce his isolation. He remained in CSU until the beginning of August, when the last prisoners left and he was transferred.

5.2.2 When the decanting of prisoners started in December 2023, there was a marked decrease of prisoners coming into the CSU. The staff kept themselves fully occupied with paperwork but, over time, there was a sense of resignation and disappointment following the years of indecision regarding the future of the prison.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 Peer support was impacted by the decline in the prison population. Peaceful Solutions and safer custody reps saw a significant fall in members. However, it should be noted that, in the early part of the reporting period, Peaceful Solutions continued to play a significant role in supporting men in a range of ways. In December and January 2024, 78 one-to-one sessions took place. The main concerns that men brought to the team were: Radon-gas related, lack of work, access to the OMU and officer-related issues. An increase in Listeners was planned, with 20 applications and interviews scheduled for February and March.

5.3.2 As the number of prisoners fell, key working increased, although slowly, and some men reported to the Board during our monitoring visits that it was still proving difficult to see their key worker.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 For the first three months of the reporting year, the Governor and the senior management team (SMT) continued to deliver attention and provide commitment to strengthen support to equality and diversity. However, absence of some of the members of the SMT, due to sickness, meant that gaps in the provision of this support started to appear.

5.4.2 Based on our discussions with prisoners, there was still no confidence in the discrimination incident reporting form (DIRF) system. Prisoners, again, told us they feared personal comeback if they raised issues.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 Our monitoring found a hardworking and empathic chaplaincy team, delivering support to prisoners at a difficult time, despite a senior member leaving due to promotion.

5.6 Incentives schemes

5.6.1 The number of prisoners on the basic (bottom) level of the incentives scheme remained low over the course of the reporting year and these prisoners were regularly and appropriately reviewed, in the Board's view.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 In the first three months of the reporting year, the Board received a number of applications (prisoners' written representations) complaining about the excessive amount of time taken to reply, or the poor quality of responses, to complaints by prisoners. Where the Board has monitored the prison's complaint responses (e.g. in looking at IMB applications), we found that these continued to be inconsistent in detail both at Comp1 (a form for making an ordinary complaint) and Comp1A (a form to appeal the response to your first complaint) levels. The response quality, as for last year, still seemed to be determined by the individual person responding. The Board observed some excellent responses, but others seemed more limited and would have benefited from further quality assurance.

5.8 Property

5.8.1 As prisoners were moved from HMP Dartmoor, the Board randomly sampled the collection of property and prisoner experience as they left the prison. We found that this was handled in an efficient and effective manner.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

6.1.1 This was the first full year that Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust operated in the prison. They also provided clinical services for substance misuse; the psychosocial services for substance misuse transferred to the charity, Change, Grow, Live (CGL). All other subcontracts: dental, podiatry, X-rays and scans; physiotherapy and opticians remained unchanged.

6.1.2 The delay in the transfer of the healthcare contract led to a delay in consultation on - and agreement to - the new staffing model. This resulted in a nine-month freeze on recruitment for several key posts in an already challenged service.

6.1.3 Following the appointment of the head of healthcare and the completion of the new staffing model consultation, the reporting year appears to have been a period of successful change and consolidation, with new initiatives regarding employing nursing apprenticeships; changes to improve teamwork; the introduction of an improved queries and complaints procedure; and closer working between primary care and mental health services.

6.1.4 Patient engagement has been an area of significant concern to the new head of healthcare. During the reporting year, he attended a number of prisoner group meetings, the result of which led to revised protocols for applications and complaints regarding healthcare issues.

6.1.5 All three areas of the healthcare department worked effectively during the decant period to ensure the provision of effective and thorough handovers as prisoners transferred.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 The top risks to prisoners throughout the reporting period were:

- Ambulance waits at the prison and waits outside Derriford Hospital.
- Neurology outpatients: extreme delays in outpatient follow-up with Derriford neurology team of 18-24 months led to delays in treatment and deterioration in patients, often resulting in emergency admissions.
- Clinical practice: staffing levels continued to be challenging but improved during the year. However, the department was unable to provide 24-hour care, which made the establishment unsafe for some prisoners. In addition, moving prisoners, particularly those on end-of-life care, was challenging. Weekend cover was, at times, particularly difficult, due to a lack of staff capacity.
- Cleaning: this remained an ongoing concern, especially with regard to the flooring in treatment rooms.
- Financial: the ageing population continued to present challenges, and the service provision did not match the needs.

6.3 Mental health

6.3.1 During the decanting period due to the Radon gas risk, the mental health team ensured the provision of effective handovers for transferred prisoners, particularly those with complex needs, to facilitate continuity of care. Some group work was stopped due to prisoners transferring out, e.g. the cognitive stimulation therapy group (because of the closure of Fox Tor). There were difficulties with planning service delivery, due to the

uncertainties around reducing/increasing the population size. The Board was told that there was an increase in prisoners' levels of anxiety due to the uncertainty of the situation.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1 One of the first wings to be decanted was Fox Tor, which was the home of many elderly prisoners with long-term medical conditions, including dementia, and social care needs. As a result, the requirement for social care provision fell significantly and the workload for these elderly, complex patients with chronic and social conditions was also reduced, which meant that specialist procedures and equipment were no longer required.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

6.5.1 The reduction in prisoner numbers resulted in an increase in time out of cell across the board. However, the Board continued to be concerned about the lack of consistency from one wing to another, with ad hoc decisions to keep prisoners locked up dependent on which officer was on duty rather than the circumstances at the time. Staff availability was the biggest factor affecting regime provision. Some prisoners complained that their time out of cell was poor, particularly at weekends, and that unlocking was often late, further eroding the time available. In-cell telephony helped considerably in enabling prisoners to make phone calls in their cells, allowing more time for other domestic duties.

6.5.2 As the number of prisoners fell, due to the decant, access to the gym was easier and the PE staff made every effort to maximise the number of men accessing each of the gym sessions. There were specific sessions for elderly prisoners, those with mental health conditions and men who were nervous about attending the gym. Our monitoring has recorded a consistent level of satisfaction with the staff and sessions provided.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

As a result of the decanting process, caseload numbers dropped and group programmes were reduced. Planning service delivery with the constant changes due to transfers out was difficult. Board monitoring showed that care was taken to ensure transfer handovers aided continuity of care in the new establishments men were transferred to.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library, vocational skills and work

7.1.1 Education, provided by Weston College, saw a very challenging period from October 2023 to August 2024. This was a result almost exclusively of two factors: the uncertain Radon gas situation, with the subsequent decanting of prisoners, leaving classrooms and workshops short of students and workers at short notice; and serious staffing issues, both for front-facing and administrative staff within the education department and the activity hub.

7.1.2 Early in the reporting year, the Board found that about 80% of the prisoners were accessing the library and 11 men were Open University students, with nine on other, distance courses.

7.1.3 In the early part of the year in review, the library played host to several groups, such as, for example, in creative writing and a reading group, and every month there was a themed display, e.g. Black History Month.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 By April, only 136 prisoners were working, with places available for 242. The laundry and woodwork workshop were closed for the whole reporting period, and desktop and Braille were combined, with Braille phased out totally during the latter part of the year. The kitchens were short of prisoners, so a little more prepared food was being brought in. The Textiles unit was short of workers but was still just about managing to fulfill the contract. Some prisoners were unable to work in certain areas, such as the kitchen and gardens, for several reasons, including security. All wings, except the CSU, saw a reduction in cleaners.

7.2.2 Because of the vacancies in all areas, there was a concentrated effort by the prison to encourage all prisoners into some kind of activity, with incentives for some roles, e.g. kitchens and recycling. Continued resistance to work could lead to loss of status – such as enhanced status to the standard level - and loss of pay. In some cases, refusal may have been because of neurological differences, such as, for example, the level of noise in the textile workshop making it very difficult for some prisoners with autism.

7.2.3 In April, there were nine unemployed prisoners, seven on long-term sick and eight who were retired.

7.2.4 The Board appreciates the transparency of the education department and the activity hub about the difficulties and efforts to provide the best possible service to the prisoners so that they could progress and successfully resettlement. The Board recognises the dedication of most of the staff in what has been a particularly difficult and uncertain time. It was clear to the Board that the appointment of the neurodiverse support manager and the education and skills manager, as well as a curriculum manager with a 'can do attitude', was having an effect and the long-term results would have transformed the education department, in the Board's view.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 The reporting year commenced with a number of the challenges that were present and commented on in the previous report still being very evident, including, for example:

- significant numbers of prisoners not engaged in purposeful activities, a situation exacerbated by up to an additional 49 prisoners being accommodated under cramped and unsuitable doubled-up conditions;
- staff availability – either through illness or vacancy – negatively impacting some training courses;
- prisoners continuing to be released directly from HMP Dartmoor, despite it not being a resettlement-funded prison.

7.3.2 The decisions made by HMPPS, since early December, in reacting to Radon gas monitoring disrupted both plans for new initiatives and existing training courses, as well as interrupting progression, including planned exams, for individual prisoners.

7.3.3 The Board noted the high level of commitment, creativity and passion applied by the SMT and other staff in seeking out opportunities to create purposeful activities for more prisoners and in drawing all pathway leads together for a quarterly reducing re-offending meeting. One of the two meetings held in the reporting period was observed, and this demonstrated a practical and productive approach to prisoner progression and preparation for post-prison living.

7.3.4 Anecdotally, there were several occasions when Board members were informed by prisoners that they had not had, or were unable to, obtain contact with their prison offender managers (POMs) for a significant period, particularly concerning communication about sentence plans or approaching parole board dates. Such complaints were more noticeable from January to June. In some cases, following the complaint up with the relevant POM revealed a more recently noted discussion with the prisoner than had been initially indicated.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 Whilst the prison's social video call system continued to be problematic in October and November, the introduction of in-cell telephony to all wings in December and January significantly alleviated the difficulties that many prisoners had expressed during monitoring visits in maintaining contact with families/partners.

7.4.2 The issue of delays to incoming and outgoing post, as reported in previous annual reports, continued to present occasional problems in October and November. From December onwards, this was no longer a cause for frequent complaint, although this could possibly be attributable to the decreasing prisoner numbers.

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 Despite the lack of formal resettlement funding, the prison continued to plan for monthly discharge boards which were generally well attended by external organisations, although there was a noticeable absence from the mental health team and individual POMs, even when prisoner numbers had fallen. Attendance by prisoners was good when orderlies (trusted prisoners who take on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison) collected the prisoners, but this practical assistance stopped when the decant started.

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	13
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11
Total number of visits to the establishment	356 (498 in the previous year)

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year (until June 2024, after which no apps were received)
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	40	29
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	6	7
C	Equality	13	5
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	27	13
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	28	25
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	9	10
F	Food and kitchens	6	1
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	26	21
H1	Property within the establishment	19	15
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	18	10
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	3	5
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	16	6
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	57	26
K	Transfers	4	1
L	Miscellaneous	0	0
	Total number of applications	272	174



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