



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Hewell

**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 where 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 Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Hewell is classed as a local category B reception prison for adult men, which was built in 1993. It is in a rural setting, half a mile from a main road and three miles from the nearest towns of Bromsgrove and Redditch, in Worcestershire, where there are train stations.

The certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded) was stable, at 795¹, through the reporting year. The operational capacity (OpCap; 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) was 1094, dropping to 1090 in August 2024. Based on monthly statistics, the average population was 1033 (94% of OpCap), with a peak of 1075. These numbers are achieved by prisoners sharing cells intended for one occupant.

At the start of the reporting year, 60% of prisoners were on remand. During the year, this peaked at over 80% on remand, or convicted but awaiting sentence.

Hewell has six houseblocks (HBs) and two specialist units. Population pressures and the high number of remand prisoners have worked against being able to maintain the specific focus of some houseblocks.

- General houseblock for convicted, remanded, sentenced and unsentenced prisoners.
- Reception and early-days unit.
- Resettlement houseblock for prisoners reaching the end of their sentences, and one spur designated an incentivised substance-free living unit.
- Wellbeing provision for prisoners who have drug or alcohol dependencies and related conditions, including less complex mental health issues.
- Houseblock for men deemed vulnerable within the prison.
- Houseblock for older (over 40 years old) prisoners.
- Oak unit: a facility for elderly prisoners with low mobility, who may be in receipt of local authority social care.
- Care and separation unit (CSU/segregation), with a capacity for 25 men.

Neither the Oak unit nor the CSU are included in the OpCap of the prison.

In the last three months of the reporting year, in recognition of increased prison numbers and the changing profile of the population, a re-profiling exercise was undertaken, re-designating some houseblocks, and the Oak unit, with implementation from October.

The Board is pleased to report there are no longer IPP (imprisonment for public protection) prisoners serving the initial part of their sentences in Hewell.

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

Context

The findings of the IMB at Hewell must be considered in the context of the continuing problems and pressures facing the criminal justice system and Prison Service. These are well documented in the IMB National Annual Report, published in May 2024, and have increased during our Hewell reporting year. The following were applicable at Hewell in the reporting year.

Continued backlogs in the court system resulted in a significant increase in the percentage of prisoners on remand, and on remand for long periods, changing the balance of the population in local prisons.

Crowding reduced options for well-matched cell sharing and may have contributed to prisoner relationships, disputes and mental health issues, with a consequential impact on the levels of self-harm and violence. The fast churn of prisoners made it difficult to keep cells in a good state, and the limited maintenance budget made it difficult to keep essential equipment functioning.

A national shortage of beds led to an 'any bed, anywhere' practice. This meant that many men were held in prisons miles from home and family, which was not conducive to maintaining family contact or opportunities for progression and resettlement, or for avoiding homelessness on release. Servicing high levels of receptions, transfers and discharges seriously impacted staffing resources throughout the year.

Hewell's lack of IT is a 21st-century failing that deprives prisoners of being self-directed in managing their in-prison activity and maintaining/developing skills needed for life outside the prison. There are no digital kiosks (self-service computer terminals that allow prisoners to manage their daily affairs), let alone in-cell laptops. Paper-based systems lead to slowness, frustration and mistrust, all of which take up staff/officer time.

While progress was made in identifying neurodiversity across the prison population, resources have not increased to address the needs recognised. The Mental Health Bill did not appear, as the Minister had assured in the response to our last annual report, and the gap between need and resources to address mental health and psychological/social problems expanded.

Despite the onslaught of these pressures and challenges, our observations have led us to believe that the Governor(s) and staff at HMP Hewell have been focused on delivering a safe, fair and humane regime. To address the national pressures, they have been willing to challenge accepted working practices and to redesignate resources to maximise opportunities for the greatest number of prisoners.

Commitment to improving equality and respecting diversity has been maintained, and the most recent drive to give greater voice to both prisoners and staff through an effective prison council and prisoner mentors, is beginning to impact positively on organisational culture, staff and prisoner relationships and wellbeing.

There was a change of Governor in February 2024.

Safety

- Incidents of self-harm increased to 1033, compared with 664 in the previous year. In the last three months of the reporting year, there were 50% more self-harm incidents involving unsentenced prisoners than sentenced prisoners. We observed safety meetings and noted a diligent and problem-solving approach to understanding the reasons for self-harm and how to reduce it.
- There were 475 incidents of violence: 302 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and fights, mainly related to debt; and 173 staff assaults, the main reasons being prisoners' mental health and non-compliance.
- The reception and induction process was strengthened by additional staffing resources from NHS England to complete assessments within timescales. To address the pressure of late arrivals, a 'twilight' shift was instigated, achieved within existing prison staffing resources. While the process has had some success, the high number of arrivals and departures every day put unsustainable pressure on assessment and screening, and even on basics such as keeping cells clean and decent and allowing kit to be replaced.
- When the Board witnessed use of force incidents, they seemed proportionate and humanely executed. We observed weekly and monthly reviews of the data and body-worn video camera (BWVC) footage and noted that officers and Governors in attendance were diligent in their analysis of situations, keen to commend good practice, take action where it fell short, and always alert to lessons learned. BWVC deployment during use-of-force incidents remained at approximately 80%. There was some improvement in record keeping over the year. Our concerns about the introduction of Pava incapacitant spray, mentioned in the last report, were not realised, as it was used on just two occasions this year.
- There was a low reported incidence of illicit substances in the prison until the end of the reporting year, when there were several incidents. We noted that the Governor and senior team took immediate action to investigate and to resolve the situation. We noted a strongly therapeutic response to individual prisoners who tested positive for drugs. Hewell has one of the lowest positive mandatory drug testing results within their local prison comparator group.

Fair and humane treatment

- Accommodation: The communal areas of the prison are bright, clean, decent and well-maintained, the result of a sustained positive approach to having a clean and decent regime. The focus towards the end of the reporting year was on improving the condition of individual cells, which is a challenge given the churn of prisoners, the sharing of cells and the disgraceful practice of prisoners eating and using the toilet in the same space.
- Segregation: From the Board's observations, the unit provided a fair and safe regime, with a focus on progressing men out of the CSU. We have had concerns about the use of segregation for those with complex and severe mental health needs, but recognise that it was usually the least harmful option. The appointment of a dedicated nurse has improved the continuity of care and reduced anxiety in some men.
- Key working: Delivery appeared poor at the start of the reporting year and declined further, due to population pressures and churn. In the second half of

the year, there was a positive focus on building prisoner and staff relationships and giving prisoners a voice through a prison council. A prisoner-led prison council, fully supported by the Governor and senior leadership team (SLT), increased prisoner engagement, and a rigorously delivered action plan for improvements promoted more trusting relationships between staff and prisoners.

- Equality and diversity: Commitment was maintained and the engagement of prisoner equality mentors and a dedicated equalities induction resulted in more prisoners being heard, and feeling they are being heard, in the Board's view.
- Regime: For most of the year, time out of cell remained at Covid levels. Crowding and churn made it impossible to provide meaningful activity for all the men. A comprehensive re-profiling exercise was undertaken to enable more equal access to work and other activities, which was being implemented at the end of our reporting year. 'Here to help' prisoner mentors have been an energetic and an influential force for good. The engagement of remand prisoners in activities was at its highest-ever level.

Health and wellbeing

- General health: We noted long waits for appointments with an optician, but were not made aware of problems with GP or dental appointments.
- Mental health: We were shocked by the extent of mental ill health within the prison population and the wait for appropriate services. Despite the proactive efforts by the prison, a large and busy local prison cannot be an acceptable environment for such unwell individuals.
- Drugs and alcohol services: Maintaining the integrity of the dedicated drugs and alcohol service was compromised by crowding and churn, including the incentivised substance-free living programme in a dedicated houseblock.
- Wellbeing: The lack of sufficient education and employment for all of the men was mitigated by a range of diversionary, soft skills and vocational activities. These were well subscribed and made a significant contribution to the wellbeing and resettlement prospects of many prisoners. The need to constantly bid for funding and tendering contracts was regrettable.

Progression and resettlement

- Education: Population churn negatively impacted the potential for men to complete education programmes. At Hewell, a third of men moved on within a month and two-thirds within three months. This was exacerbated by about half the population having a reading and literacy level of a 9-11 year old.
- There was significant improvement in the clarity and comprehensiveness of information about the range of learning opportunities.
- Vocational work and training: Activity boards were proactive in allocating employment opportunities, either on houseblocks or in industries (which deliver work-like training environments that give prisoners the foundations to improve their employment prospects on release), but it was not possible to provide opportunities for all the men who wanted to participate. There was an addition to the range of industries on offer, and almost all work now leads to a recognised certificate. At the end of the reporting year, most jobs were split into part-time, allowing nearly double the number of prisoners to participate.

- Resettlement: The employment hub, working closely with Inside Job (a peer-led initiative that finds jobs for people while they are serving their sentences) workers and prisoner mentors, provides an impressively well-resourced, purposeful service, in the Board's view. The Inside Job workers continue to be available to men after release, and available data suggests that 25% of men are known to be in employment after release.
- Children and families: The number of social visit sessions (230 per week) for 1000 men has been inadequate, exacerbated by the churn. At the end of the reporting year, there were plans to increase this to 552, operational from 1 October. There is no separate child contact room. The number of men from out of the area is not conducive to maintaining family relationships, and the prison has been unable to provide adequate catering for their visitors.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- What will the Minister do to reduce numbers in custody related to the length of time on remand due to backlogs in the courts?
- Will the Minister consider alternatives to custodial sentences?
- What will the Minister do to ensure that the provision of mental health services for prisoners, inside prison and in dedicated mental health facilities, is improved?
- Will the Minister invest more in the maintenance and updating of prisons, to end inhumane and unsanitary conditions, and to meet the needs of an ageing population with related health and mobility challenges?
- Will the Minister ensure that all prisons and prisoners have access to IT systems to increase prisoner skills and chances of employment, to free up prison officer time spent on paper systems and to promote a fairer and more transparent regime?
- Will the Minister extend support for prisoners after release to reduce recall and re-offending?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- When will Hewell benefit from changes to training, as identified in the independent review of training carried out by Lord Timpson, and to be taken forward as part of the wider Enable programme?
- Why are governors unable to interview Band 3 staff locally?
- When will Hewell have IT access for prisoners? All prisons should allow direct access for prisoners to enable them to be self-directing and reduce the burden and mistrust of paper-based systems.
- Are the current health needs assessments, including mental health assessments, still fit for purpose given the changing demographics of the prison population?
- Could you establish a process to ensure that prisoners can take a record of progress and achievement in educational and vocational activities with them when moving between prisons.

TO THE GOVERNOR

The Board recommends that the Governor:

- Maintains and develops the existing high level of commitment to equality and engagement, giving prisoners a greater voice and promoting a staff culture that emphasises the prison as a place of opportunity.
- Evaluates the impact of changes to the re-designation of some houseblocks, the core day and the five underpinning key priorities.
- Improves family contact by providing basic refreshments for visitors on arrival and a child contact room.
- Enables prisoners transferring to other establishments to take with them a record of progress and achievement in education and vocational activities.

3.3 Response to the last annual report (October 2022 to September 2023)

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister 1. Addressing backlogs in the court system 2. Progression of the Mental Health Bill and whether it will address complex mental health needs of prisoners. 3. Ensuring mechanisms/ safeguards to monitor the impact of rigid-bar handcuffs and Pava incapacitant spray, to reduce the potential for a culture shift towards control and enforcement.	1. Outlined plans to increase the number of judges and court sittings; outlined plans to invest £200 million for essential modernisation and court building repair work. 2. Commitment to improvement through non-legislative means and collaboration with partners. Driving forward a non-statutory independent role to improve delivery of the 28-day time limit set out in the NHS good practice guidance. The Mental health Bill will progress when parliamentary time allows it. 3. Assurance of robust scrutiny measures, including a national panel, to monitor usage and analyse trends.	1. Concerns remain. 2. Concerns remain. 3. Concerns, based on Hewell's experience, were not realised.

<p>4. Responding to growing awareness of prisoners who are neurodivergent and those with low levels of literacy.</p>	<p>4. Significant progress has been made to increase support for neurodivergent people through the Cross Government Neurodiversity Action Plan. The Ministry of Justice will be publishing a final 18-month update in spring 2024.</p> <p>Assurance of progress on commitment to a new prisoner education service and a HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)/ Ofsted action plan based on a thematic review of reading in prisons.</p>	<p>4. The last update on the Government website was September 2023.</p> <p>Some evidence of commitment to improvement; no update on Government website since September 2023.</p>
<p>To the Prison Service</p> <p>1. Access to IT for prisoners at Hewell.</p> <p>2. Improving the effectiveness of agencies working together to improve resettlement and reduce the chances of homelessness, unemployment and re-offending.</p> <p>3. Training for new prison officers, and training for all staff in key working.</p>	<p>1. Information was provided about progress in some prisons, but nothing about when Hewell will expect to progress.</p> <p>2. Gave information about what exists; no recognition of problems expressed.</p> <p>3. Linking with the Enable project to review training for prison officers. Reviewing and re-</p>	<p>1. No progress; no date for IT at Hewell.</p> <p>2. Progress at the local prison level only.</p> <p>3. Not implemented.</p>

Evidence Sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Population pressures and the churn of prisoners impacted negatively on provision of effective screening and assessment on arrival. For example, in August, there were 502 arrivals, each one representing an individual set of needs and circumstances. This was exacerbated by the number of men redirected to Hewell from courts that would usually be served by other prisons. In August, there were 154 such receptions: 83 directed from HMP Birmingham and 71 from distant locations, including Bristol, Cardiff, Staffordshire, Nottingham and Manchester.

Late receptions, up to midnight on occasions, were a problem, reducing the time for screening and assessment, as the priority was to get men, who may have been in court and transit since early morning, fed and to cells. The Governor successfully introduced a 'twilight' staff shift, which meant that staff receiving late arrivals had not been working all day and volunteering for overtime. From the Board's observations, additional NHS input improved screening and assessment.

The churn of prisoners placed stress on HB2 where new prisoners are inducted, both in terms of maintaining the cleanliness and decency of cells, replacing the kit for prisoners, and being able to complete a comprehensive programme of induction. At the end of the reporting year plans were being made to adjust the programme from a two-week induction to a one-week induction.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Self-harm: Incidents increased to 1033, compared with 664 in the previous year. The highest number of self-harm incidents involved unsentenced prisoners, 50% higher than for sentenced prisoners. There were 65 incidents reported at the beginning of the reporting year and 41 at the end, with significant spikes in June (127) August (134) and October (134). Figures were distorted by several prolific self-harmers.

The Board observed safety meetings and noted a diligent and problem-solving approach to understanding the reasons for self-harm and how to reduce it. Hewell was ranked the fourth lowest in a comparator group of ten for incidents of self-harm per 1000 men.

The top five self-harm triggers reported in the last quarter of the year (198) were identified as:

- Hearing voices/mental health: 44
- Healthcare/medication: 37
- Partner/family concerns: 30
- Location in the prison: 26
- Vapes (lack of): 24

ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) plans: Despite diligent quality assurance scrutiny by the safer custody committee and follow-up, our observation is that ACCTs (used to support prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide) still lack depth and analysis. Without exception, of those we have reviewed, the prisoner's voice did not come through and prisoners had not taken the opportunity to contribute

on the dedicated page for their input. We repeat our comments from last year's report that it is a missed opportunity and integral to the process to encourage prisoners to complete this page, or give them help to record their views and feelings.

The pressure on staff to complete paperwork in a crowded prison is recognised and, significantly, the highest number of ACCTs are opened in reception and HB2 the (early days in custody houseblock). In the last quarter of the reporting year, 276 ACCTs were opened, 87 of which were in reception and 72 on the induction houseblock.

Deaths in custody: There were no deaths in custody in the reporting year.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction

There were 475 incidents of violence recorded in the reporting year: 178 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and 124 prisoner fights, with debt being reported as the main reason. Hewell was the fifth highest in a comparator group of ten establishments for prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, whereas it was the lowest in the previous year. Of the 173 staff assaults, the main reasons identified were prisoners' mental health and non-compliance.

The Board is not able to provide a comprehensive analysis of the reasons for violence, but speculates that crowding and cell sharing, with little slack for careful matching of men, plays a part, as does the length of time that men are held on remand.

From our observation of the monthly safety intervention meeting, data packs and close monitoring of high-risk individuals with complex needs, we were satisfied that the Governor and staff had diligently and energetically tried to understand and reduce the levels of violence.

4.4 Use of force

There has been no evidence of excessive use of force. Board members have observed live events, watched video footage and monitored monthly use of force meetings. There was increased use of BWVCs during the year and an improvement in completing the paperwork within timescales. Any lessons to be learned are highlighted at the monthly meeting, action plans are implemented and, where due, staff are commended on good practice.

The concerns we reported last year about the implications of rigid-bar handcuffs and Pava spray were not realised. Incidents were low and it did not lead to a culture change, i.e. a move towards an atmosphere of enforcement and control, as we feared, rather than engagement and good relationships.

The Board remains concerned that attempts to de-escalate situations to avoid the use of force vary across the houseblocks and may be a reflection of the experience of staff. We are satisfied that Governors and custodial managers are aware of the need to make improvements in this area and are taking steps to improve officer and prisoner relationships and to create a culture that encourages engagement.

4.5 Preventing Illicit Items

This has not been of significant concern during the reporting year. In the last three months of our reporting year, there was an increase in the number of finds and the

number of men found to be under the influence. We noted the Governor and senior staff taking a robust approach to investigation and resolution.

There were two parallel elements in the prison's response to the availability of illicit substances. One sought to sustain a secure perimeter, preventing or intercepting traffic of illegal drugs into HMP Hewell. The other was precautionary and therapeutic, a service to the men in the prison's care. The former saw a continuing effort and alertness to novel attempts to breach the outer security of the establishment. The latter element involved 291 men – about 30% of the total roll – on a substance misuse programme and a vigorous system of recognising and reporting others whose behaviour or test result suggested they should be considered for intervention.

The consequences of a new illicit substance, manifested most shockingly at a prison in south Wales, have prompted a commendably prompt response at Hewell. Naloxone, effective as an antidote to an opioid overdose in the short term, is now available across the prison and staff are trained in its use.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Hewell took part in a national 'clean and decent' initiative and has sustained the commitment. The public areas of this prison, including the houseblocks, are clean and bright. A visitor from another prison commented that it was more like a hospital than a prison. There are still concerns about the state of individual cells, with the churn of prisoners and crowding making it difficult to maintain and improve them. At the end of the reporting year, we became aware of robust plans to focus on cell improvements.

We remain concerned by the inadequately designed accommodation, with cells intended for one routinely being shared. Cells are poorly ventilated and can become too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. The prison has gone through the year without any of its critical equipment comprehensively breaking down. The risk of such an eventuality, however, looms ever larger. The air-handling units, critical to acceptable conditions on the houseblocks and in the kitchen, were installed when the prison was built in the early 1990s and had a design life of 20 years. Much the same could be said of the heating system. The need for proactive investment is urgent.

Crowding leads to people who are not well matched sharing cells and can result in conflict and misery. For those with specific mental health, or neurodiverse needs, sharing can be torture. It is not surprising that some men prefer to be segregated, or that they exaggerate behaviours to try and get single-cell status.

Despite having a tight budget, the kitchen manager and staff have worked hard to get the most from every penny spent. There have been only three applications (prisoners' written representations to the IMB) this year about food, generally concerning the range of options for those with particular dietary needs.

The Board received seven applications (compared with one last year) about canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials using their allocated funds). Many more comments and concerns were raised by prisoners when monitoring houseblocks. There were concerns about missing items, items being damaged and perishable and edible food being beyond safe consumption. Disappointment over canteen can harm the wellbeing and mental health of individuals and can lead to debt and obligation, which can lead to increased friction. This is particularly true in the case of vapes. Much of the problem seemed to lie with the contractor, but some were about how staff managed the process and their lack of motivation to resolve problems. We were pleased to note a new system for checking and recording canteen complaints was introduced in the last quarter of the reporting year.

5.2 Segregation

The Board has maintained close monitoring of the care and separation unit (CSU), where men are segregated, throughout the year. We have noted that reviews (where the prison determines if the prisoner should remain segregated) are timely and thorough, focusing on progressing men out of the unit. The addition of a dedicated segregation nurse has been transformational. She has provided continuity between reviews, and between Governors, who chair the reviews. She has also built trusting

relationships with the men, which has given some the confidence to speak up at their reviews. Psychology input to review plans for individuals and to provide staff with an opportunity to discuss and reflect has also been positive. There is a high commitment to the unit being clean and decent and to keeping the living environment positive, including refurbishment of the exercise yard with more stimulating visual materials.

We have not been concerned about the CSU being used inappropriately to maintain good order and discipline. We share the concerns of the Governor and staff that the unit has been used to keep safe men who have complex and harmful mental health conditions and who need specialist external provision. When men fail the mental health algorithm assessment, Governors are diligent in decision-making, taking account of all available information and completing the relevant paperwork on time. The regular senior officers and staff in this unit are positive and proactive in their approach, showing respect for the men and injecting some humour and warmth whenever appropriate.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key working

We witnessed positive staff and prisoner interactions and staff who went the extra mile to resolve problems for prisoners, to listen to them and to encourage their engagement in the regime and progression. We also noted staff who were harassed and distracted, trying to do several things at once, and who had little time for personal interaction. This varied from houseblock to houseblock and from week to week. It was not possible to determine whether this was due to the culture promoted by the custodial manager and senior officers, or to the churn of men.

Key working, which we noted last year was given, at best, lip service, was abandoned during the year, as it was just not realistic given the population. We note that there was a national review of all prisoner officer training, including key work, undertaken during the year, but we have yet to see any tangible outcomes or changes.

From the Board's observations, the introduction of 'here to help' mentors, who support and assist prisoners with induction and everyday problems, has been transformational. These men take time to listen and solve problems and can be a bridge to officers and other prison support staff. They have been able to help calm and support individuals and improve mood and morale on houseblocks. Through the prison council, they represent the voice of the prisoners, and we note that concerns raised are being addressed. This builds trust and confidence and reduces frustration and anger. They also support men who are on ACCTs with mental health conditions, encouraging them to take part in the regime, integrating them into prison life, as well as setting up arts and crafts classes that the men can use for escapism and as therapy.

The training these mentors undertake is comprehensive (see annex C). Our concern is that their success may lead to officers spending less time on care and problem-solving, concentrating only on control and discipline.

We have witnessed the significant impact on individual mentors and their prospects for progression and resettlement.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, reported last year, has continued, with strong support from the incoming Governor and energetic positive support from the equalities lead.

Reporting is generally very good, although the use of the Prison Service equality tool makes it easier to see a snapshot than to track identified issues over time. Some themes, such as the over-representation of black and Muslim prisoners in use of force incidents, are recurrent. Likewise, some age and minority ethnic groups are recurrently under-represented in the enhanced (top) level of the incentives scheme.

One area of concern is the impact of lift outages on the lives of wheelchair users. One lift in HB5 has been out of action all year, for the third year running. The consequence of this was that some vulnerable prisoners had to traverse corridors next to other houseblocks and exercise areas, where they were subject to physical and verbal abuse. Due to this, one vulnerable prisoner has not been outside or done any exercise since December 2023. The remaining lift has been out of action since July 2024, resulting in prisoners missing court appearances, being unable to get fresh air and exercise and missing family social visits. The prisoners submitted multiple complaints about this. We noted that management was diligent in chasing up repairs with the contractors, but the problem remained.

A systematic effort was made to maintain a central register of every man with a personal escape and evaluation plan, or PEEP (which provides assistance for those who cannot get themselves out of the prison unaided in an emergency). This records its implications for their regime, with access to fresh air being a prominent problem. There were over 30 men with PEEPS, mostly relating to their mobility. Yet, at the end of our reporting year, on 30 September, the prison had lacked a working lift since 24 July (9 weeks). There was a shortage of cells able to accommodate a wheelchair. Apart from the Oak unit, there were only two available to mainstream prisoners and two more on the vulnerable prisoners' unit. There were also problems in arranging transport for men in wheelchairs. One wheelchair user, who achieved category D (which meant he was eligible for transfer to an open prison), had to wait ten months for his progressive move, a delay caused by a lack of accessible accommodation and, once that was resolved, suitable transport.

From the Board's observations, the use of equality advocates during the year was transformational, and the national training they undertake is impressive in its depth and range. Being an advocate has made a positive difference to individual prisoners. The advocates assist in the induction of new prisoners and we have noted that their input encourages prisoners to speak up and to engage. Recruiting and training advocates to replace those released or transferred was a challenge, but we noted that some men carried forward the role in their new prisons after transfer. The input of advocates to equality meetings and their positive feedback to other prisoners helped build trust and confidence that they were being listened to.

The setting up of a monthly prison council in the summer of 2023, involving 'here to help' mentors and prisoner advocates, has furthered the impact of the equality advocates. This is attended by the number one Governor and functional Governors and concerns raised are given full attention. A rigorous and transparent RAG rating system (which stands for red, amber, green) for recording concerns, actions and

solutions has given confidence to staff and prisoners that they are being heard, a step towards building trusting staff and prisoner relationships.

The neurodiversity support manager (NSM) continued to have an impact, in terms of advancing a strategic approach and supporting individual prisoners (e.g. matching their educational needs or helping them understand their condition). One activity this year was to combine datasets to obtain a better estimate of the mental health and neurodiversity needs of prisoners. In August 2024, the estimate was an astonishing 57.3% of the population with such needs. As noted last year, the prison environment, culture and regime could not be less well designed to cater for the people with such needs. The NSM was investigating best practices in other establishments, such as HMP Pentonville, and intends to establish similar practices in Hewell.

Inclusivity was actively promoted in Hewell, with training on inclusive behaviour for staff and prisoners' inductions. Events such as Black History Week are well-supported and popular.

Hewell has one houseblock for vulnerable prisoners. In some important organisational respects, there have been improvements in the regime for men needing an additional degree of protection. Education provided several courses in two outreach classrooms on the houseblock, and the possibility of working in the gardens was also to be welcomed. The uncomplicated support of some staff was welcomed. The Board reported concerns about a handful of staff who behaved less even-handedly towards individuals made vulnerable by their background. The response from the Governor was robust in addressing our concerns.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

This was valued by the men; the Board received no complaints about faith or pastoral support. During the year, the death of a long-serving Imam, and the time taken to find a replacement, meant that not all Muslim men were able to attend Friday prayers each week. The prison did what it could to accommodate, but not all available accommodation was suitable for the purpose. The lack of a Catholic chaplain restricted opportunities to attend Mass. The presence of a chaplain at almost all CSU reviews provided comfort and support to many men.

5.6 Incentives schemes

Despite reviews and plans to improve this in the previous year, the incentives scheme was not seen to have had an impact or to motivate prisoners to engage and progress. This may have been due to the high numbers of men on remand and the churn of prisoners, or simply that the rewards were not motivating enough. The incentivised drug-free living unit was not always able to fulfil its function, due to crowding. Towards the end of the year, the Governor announced a plan to introduce a unit within a houseblock for prisoners with enhanced status.

5.7 Complaints

The Board was unable to undertake a review of prison complaints this year, due to our low number of members. We were pleased to note that a new quality assurance process for complaints was introduced by the end of our reporting year. Our observation is that responses to complaints were often timely but varied widely in the breadth and depth of the responses given.

At the start of the reporting year, we were concerned about the number of complaints made against named staff through confidential access, and the time taken to take any consequential action. By the end of the reporting year, our concerns were allayed by evidence that the backlog had been cleared and that new cases were being addressed swiftly and thoroughly.

5.8 Property

There was an increase (up from 13 to 25) in the number of applications to the Board about property going missing in the prison, usually when men were moved from shared cells and their property was not secured in a timely fashion. This may have been reflective of the pressure on staff due to the churn of men, but, for individuals, it had the potential to be devastating, especially when family mementoes and personal items had gone missing. In the final quarter of the year, a more rigorous process for cell clearing and protecting property was introduced.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Due to low Board numbers, we have not been able to devote time to monitoring all aspects of healthcare. We received just eight applications relating to healthcare, compared with 25 last year.

The concerns we noted during general monitoring were in two areas: the mental health and the social, psychological and emotional needs of prisoners, and the lack of provision for those who have mobility challenges or needs relating to ageing and social care.

We were pleased to see a weekly healthcare meeting established towards the end of the reporting year. This was attended by senior healthcare managers who reviewed and tried to progress individual prisoners inside the prison and to external facilities, as well as to ensure the most effective deployment of healthcare resources within the prison. We were assured that the needs of men who were segregated were being addressed in this forum.

6.2 Physical healthcare

We noted long waits for appointments with an optician, but were not made aware of problems with GP or dental appointments.

Although the number of formal applications to the Board was low, we were concerned by the number of comments made by prisoners and their advocates about missed healthcare appointments due to notification from officers not being given to them in time. Officers said that prisoners refused to attend. We are pleased to note that this is being reviewed by the healthcare team.

6.3 Mental health

We continued to be shocked by the extent of mental ill health within the prison population and the wait for appropriate services. Despite the proactive efforts by the prison, a large and busy local prison cannot be an acceptable environment for such unwell individuals. We have made specific comments under the section about segregation.

Oak unit was set up in 2022-2023 to provide accommodation and a therapeutic regime for men with serious mental health or complex social-emotional and psychological behaviour challenges. It was staffed from the overall staffing establishment by dedicated staff, committed to the initiative, and they had some notable successes. However, they did not have any specialist skills or training to meet the needs of the men in their care.

During the reporting year, the unit had to accommodate men who had physical disabilities or mobility or social care needs that could not be met on general houseblocks. We have commented elsewhere on the low number of single cells or cells at Hewell, and problems with lifts and stair lifts.

The unit also accommodated men who had been segregated and were awaiting alternative provisions but were not considered fit for the CSU, and men who had displayed issues with their behaviour on other houseblocks and benefited from time out in a unit with a higher staffing ratio.

Following a re-profiling exercise in the latter part of the reporting year, the Governor decided that this unit was not able to deliver the service intended and that it would be redesignated.

The Board acknowledges that the staff in this unit did not have the range of skills necessary to deliver its function and that population pressures and the limitations of the prison building had compromised its operation. However we are concerned about the potential impact on the CSU and other houseblocks.

6.4 Social care

The prison estate is not equipped for an ageing population and the social care needs that accompany it. This is also true of Hewell, as indicated in several sections of the report. The former Oak unit is being redesignated so it can meet the social care needs of older prisoners.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

At the end of the previous reporting year, men were still locked in their cells for 22 hours a day, with low take up of employment and engagement activities. We were concerned that this may become a normalised regime, especially as many as 40% of staff had only known this regime.

For most of the reporting year, the position remained the same. By the end of the period in review, there was a marked increase in men engaging in meaningful activity, and a new regime was agreed on and ready for implementation. This regime intends to double the number of opportunities for men, by providing half-day education and work opportunities and corresponding time out of cell for those who engage in the regime.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Maintaining the integrity of the dedicated drugs and alcohol service was compromised by crowding and churn, including the incentivised substance-free living programme in a dedicated houseblock. In the final three months of the reporting year, there was a determined effort to identify and report any prisoner thought to be affected by substance misuse. Those responsible for providing illicit substances appeared to be dealt with robustly. For those affected, the approach was more therapeutic, encouraging men to engage with the substance misuse programme, which most seemed to do.

6.7 Soft skills

A range of diversionary, soft skills and vocational activities mitigated education and employment opportunities not being available to all men. These were well subscribed and made a significant contribution to the wellbeing and resettlement prospects of many prisoners. Workshops for enrichment included talks by inspirational speakers, poetry, art, music and discussion groups. The prison marked the achievements made by the men, sometimes by inviting family members in for celebration events.

The need to be constantly bidding for funding and tendering contracts is time-consuming for the dedicated rehabilitative culture lead role. This person, who also oversees the implementation of a clean and decent regime, has a can-do, problem-solving attitude that impacts positively, not just the prisoners, but on the staff, too.

7. Progression and Resettlement

7.1 Education and library

Essential information about the full range of learning opportunities at HMP Hewell has now been brought together in a single handbook. Its combination of clarity with comprehensiveness makes it a valuable resource.

The opportunities provided have to be seen in the context of the needs of the Hewell population. These exemplify the churn characteristic of a local reception prison. A third of the population will typically move on within a month, two-thirds within three months. Only a quarter of the prison roll has been both convicted and sentenced and are, therefore, able to discuss their time in custody in a rounded manner.

Nevertheless, such an overall assessment is attempted during the fortnight of induction. This assigns a prisoner to one of seven pathways and so to activities best fitting his needs. This work is done regardless of whether a man is convicted or only remanded.

In many individual cases, the most fundamental need of all is reading. With around half of the prison typically at, or below, the level expected of a 9 to 11 year-old, attention in this area is an inescapable priority. The ambition to support individual tuition with varied informal opportunities is admirable. In this context, it is disappointing to observe the reduced prominence of the literacy support which supplements the activity of the Textiles workshop.

The Shannon Trust, however, is active across the prison. The work is done by a score or so of mentors. Sustaining this body of mentors – one of whom was himself unable to read when he entered prison – involves a constant drive to recruit and train replacements for those who have been moved elsewhere.

Even this entirely appropriate priority threatens to be overwhelmed by the recently relentless traffic in and out of HMP Hewell. The initial assessment of need in English and Maths, routinely part of the fortnight spent on the induction landings, has a capacity for 360 individuals per month. Yet, in August 2024, the prison had just over 500 new arrivals. It would be facile to expect every man to receive an individual assessment, as it would be to expect a thoughtful review of his overall needs while in custody.

The educational courses provided are predominantly short-term, aiming to allow some relevant achievement within the few weeks that may be available. This situation emphasises the value of close liaison between the Department for Education and the neighbouring prisons expected to receive many of their students as they are transferred. The IMB acknowledges that an individual's work will be sent on, if the receiving prison request it, but it would like to see Hewell - and all prisons - do this as a matter of routine. Men undertaking these courses are often hesitant learners and any failure to transfer credit for their achievements can be unnecessarily discouraging. Similarly, it is disappointing to find that strenuous efforts are not made to deliver to ex-students the certificates they have earned.

The very brief, even fleeting, nature of these opportunities to address long-standing educational issues makes the continued problem of poor attendance all the more frustrating.

Around 150 men at Hewell will typically be foreign national prisoners. Those who lack any spoken English are concentrated on one houseblock, where an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) class is provided. As the reporting year ended, there were 23 such prisoners. Providing an ESOL class in the laundry where they were working proved a success for a particular group of prisoners.

Library: This is self-evidently an important facility, not only as a source of information, literature and DVDs, but also as a place of good-humoured support. All who wish to use the opportunity timetabled for their houseblock must be able to do so. We noted a variation in the take up of library between houseblocks and, also, that men are commonly late in arriving, limiting their time there.

7.2 Vocational training and work

The majority of employment opportunities are on the houseblocks, supporting the life of those who live there. The Board is pleased that these now seem to be distributed fairly and allocated to suitable men. This has been achieved through the work of the activity boards. These jobs are often routine and may be undemanding, but the fact that each one takes a man out of his cell makes it a valuable opportunity.

Almost all of the work in industries now leads to a recognised certificate. A recent addition to the established range of activities is the assembly of garden furniture for a large local company. It may promise a route into employment for some men on their release, although the extent of this recruitment has yet to be seen.

7.3 Offender management and progression

The Board is relieved to report that HMP Hewell no longer holds any IPP prisoners who are still serving the initial part of their sentences. The injustices that can result from this sentence have been widely acknowledged. Late in the reporting year, however, there were still nine men who had been released but then recalled to custody. Three of these individual cases illustrate the implications of an IPP sentence.

The men have, respectively, served an initial 11 years after a tariff of four years was imposed in 2006; 11 years after three-and-a-half were imposed in 2007; and seven years after three-and-a-half were imposed in 2011. They now find themselves, all these many years later, serving out their periods of recall among men who have committed similar offences but have been given determinate sentences (for a fixed length of time).

7.4 Family contact

The visitor begins by booking the intended visit. This can be done online, but there is more flexibility to discuss dates by phone. This service is contracted out and the IMB has often heard reports of frustratingly long time such calls can take. When the Board made 'test' calls to this phonenumber, the waiting times were extremely variable: some were answered immediately, while others went unanswered after 30 to 60 minutes.

Travel to the prison has become an increasingly significant issue, as the number of men from more distant areas has increased. Family journeys from Manchester, Reading or south Wales are far from unusual. This makes it all the more regrettable that the visitors' reception centre is still unable to offer families a hot drink or basic

refreshments. There is a plan to refurbish and reinstate the kitchen, but after many months it has still not progressed beyond the laying of a new floor.

Social video calls offer a limited alternative to conventional social visits. Each week, there are 30 opportunities to spend an hour meeting approved family members via social video calls. The Board was unable to confirm take up. The conventional visits' hall offered 230 bookings each week, inadequate for a prison of 1000 men, many of whom had the visiting entitlements that go with being on remand. At the end of the reporting year, plans were in hand to double the number of social visits.

The lack of a child contact room, however, appears to be an altogether more solvable problem. There was formerly a space, supervised but more private, where men could deal with delicate family situations, such as, for example, saying goodbye to a child about to be taken into care, but which became required for another purpose. A plan to replace it is said to exist and the Board hopes it soon becomes a reality.

Although the arrival of in-cell telephony has greatly reduced the barriers to family contact, one important issue does persist. The entitlement to one initial phone call has been met by the provision of an 'open' PIN (a personal identification number that prisoners must use to make phone calls) and the advance of a small credit; all too often, however, men find themselves with the means of phoning but not the required 11-digit number. That is usually stored on their phone and retained in reception. There is a process for retrieving these numbers, but it relies on staff being available. Were it possible to note down one or two essential numbers during the reception process, it would meet an important need and help reduce anxiety and frustration.

7.5 Resettlement planning

On release, many men will rely on welfare benefits for their support, at least in the short term. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) strives to ensure that men are equipped with the information that allows them to access any relevant benefits without delay. The extent of mental ill health is but one measure of this need with, for example, 141 men receiving psychiatric treatment. There are also strenuous efforts to ensure that prisoners leave with an ID and can open a bank account.

The employment hub provides a service that is well-resourced and purposeful. Men who choose to take advantage of it receive one-to-one support in preparing job applications and meeting prospective employers. Crucially, they can establish themselves with the Inside Job workers, who continue to be available to them after their release. This combination of full-time prison staff, Inside Job workers, some of whom have direct experience of resettlement, and energetic prisoner mentors, adds up to an impressive service. It would be good to see more men aspiring to make it part of their resettlement plan. Overall, around 25% of men released are known to be in employment six months after.

8. The work of the IMB

Board Statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6, plus one on sabbatical
Total number of visits to the establishment	269

Comment: The number of visits to the establishment includes meetings as well as direct monitoring. While this is lower than in the previous year, it should be noted that the figure does not include Board members joining prison Teams meetings from home, at which data is analysed, concerns are shared and context is provided for our direct monitoring. The use of the secure Kahootz information system promotes smarter working, meaning that members can record monitoring visits and follow up on prisoner applications from home.

Applications to the IMB

The number of applications to the IMB fell from 200 to 151 compared with the previous year. This was surprising, given the churn of prisoners through Hewell during the year. It may be a reflection of prisoners having fewer concerns to raise or that men were not as aware of the IMB as they were in previous years.

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
A	Accommodation including laundry, clothing, ablutions	21	22	8
B	Discipline including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	1	3	3
C	Equality	6	6	2
D	Purposeful activity including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	17	4	4
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	26	25	15
E2	Finance including pay, private monies, spends	13	7	5
F	Food and kitchens	32	2	3
G	Health including physical, mental and social care	42	25	8
H1	Property within this establishment	31	13	25
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	17	9	9
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	14	1	7
I	Sentence management including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	22	18	13
J	Staff/prisoner concerns including bullying	65	37	22
K	Transfers	6	5	3
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints	25	17	9
	COVID-19	0	N/A	0
U	Unknown	N/A	6	8
	Total	338	200	144

NB: In 2023-2024, seven applications were untagged, so have not been classified.

Annex A

Service providers

- Physical health: Practice Plus Group
- Mental health: Practice Plus Group subcontracted to Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust
- Substance misuse treatment: Practice Plus Group subcontracted to Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust
- Social care support: Worcestershire County Council
- Learning and skills: Novus
- Library: Novus
- Community rehabilitation: Probation Service and Accommodation is YSS and NACRO
- Careers information and advice: Inside Job/IAG
- Benefits information and advice: JobCentre Plus
- Children and family support services: PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust); YMCA; and Mothers' Union
- Escort contractor: GEOAmev

Annex B

‘Here to help’ mentors training and activity

- Neurodiversity training and workshops
- Wellbeing training from Penal Reform with Dr Sarah Lewis and Dan Reynolds
- Took part in a gambling awareness video for Penal Reform and Grow Transform and belong
- Workshop training for mentors to understand the education process to signpost, also to link prisoners to the Shannon Trust
- Workshop training for Inside job - signposting for RMF construction academy and CSCS support
- Workshop training for industries to allocate employment
- Activities workshop so mentors can help peers to actively seek purposeful activity
- OMU workshop for mentors to have training in OMU for awareness for peers
- OCA and HDC workshops for awareness
- Resettlement and pre-release training to signpost peers
- Approved premises training to signpost peers
- Hepatitis C Awareness with The Hepatitis C Trust
- Hepatitis C Peer-to-peer training with The Hepatitis C Trust
- Workshop for a clean sheet to encourage peers to divulge their convictions when applying for employment
- Awareness training for social visits for mentors to help peers with obtaining visits
- Training and workshops with Reconnect - Care After Custody peer support.
- Training with the employment hub: awareness for peers for work after release from prison
- Training in employment banking and ID awareness for signposting
- Took part in a growth strategy event
- Workshop training to support Novus works for men seeking employment after custody
- Gambling awareness training with the Aquarius Charity
- Level 2 mentoring from Novus
- Nasal naloxone trained
- Part of the reducing reoffending support group
- First aid training
- Equality workshop
- Drug awareness training with Inclusion
- Money management from Novus

St Giles (partner agency)

- Assured learning to advise: accredited
- Help for homelessness: accredited
- Financial capability: accredited
- PRISM mental health training in prison: Big Dog Little Dog
- Mental health first aid: accredited; Big Dog Little Dog

Forums

- Supported HMPPS Change delivery team with a forum
- Supported MQPL with forums
- Supported Children and Families with forums
- Supported User Voice with forums
- Supported Independent prisoner complaint investigations with forums
- Peer support evaluation focus groups
- Neurodiversity forum support
- Supported CRIB (Continuity, Resettlement, Integrated Boards)
- Supported forums for DHL canteen
- Supported forums for food at HMP Hewell with the kitchen manager
- Supported forums regarding changes at HMP Hewell for work and wages
- Supported forums with PACT for family social visits
- Supported forums for their houseblocks to deliver positive changes
- Supported forums for approved premises
- Supported a forum with HMPPS



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