



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Elmley

**For reporting year
1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024**

Published January 2025



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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 to the prison's records.

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

2. Description of the establishment

HMP/YOI Elmley is a local prison situated on the Isle of Sheppey that serves the courts of Kent. It was originally part of the Sheppey cluster of three prisons but is now a standalone establishment. The operating capacity, or 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), of Elmley at the start of the year was 1137, which fell to 1043 by the end of the reporting period, in October 2024¹.

The ethnic make-up of the prisoner population in October 2024 was as follows:

- White: 72%
- Black: 11%
- Gypsy, Roma, Traveller: 5%
- Asian: 4%
- Mixed heritage: 4%
- Any other category: 3%

Elmley opened in February 1992. It was built on the Bullingdon design and originally consisted of four house blocks, each designed to accommodate 155 prisoners, plus a care and separation unit (CSU), where prisoners are segregated, which could house seven. In later years, two further house blocks were constructed and the single cells were converted to doubles. For some time, the cells in the original house blocks were used as trebles, although these have now, thankfully, been returned to doubles.

The prison houses remand and sentenced adult prisoners, as well as young adults. The population consists of a number of vulnerable prisoners, foreign national prisoners, those with drug dependency and/or mental health issues, life-sentenced prisoners and a growing number of older prisoners, many with disabilities.

Contracted services are:

- Physical healthcare services provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust.
- Mental health services provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust.
- Substance misuse services provided by Change, Grow, Live (CGL).
- Education provided by Milton Keynes College.
- Maintenance provided by Gov Facility Services Limited.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- The prison is taking steps to improve the process of reception and induction for new prisoners. However, from the Board's observations, good practice is not consistently embedded.
- Whilst many prisoners report feeling safe within Elmley, a significant number do not, judging by the applications (prisoners' written representations) to the Board. Concerns are, typically, worries about violence and factors related to mental health. Prison data shows that incidents of violence have increased compared to the previous year despite a fall in the prison OpCap.
- Razor blades are the main instrument of self-harm. The Prison Service has been too slow to replace these with safer electric shavers.
- The fire risk assessment for house block 5, undertaken in December 2023 and carried out under Article 9 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, states that the likelihood of fire is high and that the consequences for life safety in the event of fire would be extreme harm. The Board is of the view that it is wholly unacceptable and negligent of the prison for house block 5 to be operational until risk is sufficiently mitigated.
- The documentation of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans (used to support prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide) is not effectively quality assured by the prison, potentially putting vulnerable prisoners at risk.
- Key working as a vehicle to promote safer custody is insufficiently developed, with some prisoners either unaware of its existence or its purpose.
- During the reporting period, the Listener scheme (whereby prisoners are trained by the Samaritans to provide confidential emotional support to fellow prisoners) ceased. Whilst the prison hopes to be able to recommence this in 2025, its absence detracts from a culture of safer custody.
- Instances where the prison has resorted to using force to restrain prisoners has increased significantly over the reporting period, compared with the previous two years, with black prisoners more than twice as likely to be restrained than white prisoners.
- The prison does not comply with the expectation to have use of force (UoF) incidents quality assured via independent qualified scrutiny. Whilst the IMB is able to attend some reviews of UoF, for monitoring purposes, it does not have the capacity or specialist training to fulfil this function.

Fair and humane treatment

- The quality of existing accommodation has continued to deteriorate since the last IMB report, due to inadequate investment to replace broken equipment and insufficient resources to provide effective maintenance.
- Prisoners regularly complain about the quality and nutritional value of prison food. Based on the Board's own assessment, we consider there to be shortcomings in what is provided and we believe it could be improved within the scope of the current financial limits.

- The prison operates an effective provision for segregation in the care and separation unit (CSU). When the Board has been able to observe, officers work hard to establish positive relationships with prisoners in this facility within the context of strict rules.
- The prison's approach to promoting equality and diversity has improved significantly during the reporting period, because of proactive analysis and targeted actions. The prison appropriately considers discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) in line with statutory expectations, albeit without the required independent external scrutiny.

Health and wellbeing

- Overall, 40% of applications the Board receives are healthcare related, with reasons typically about mental health or medication.
- Provision for healthcare has improved significantly during the reporting period, with a fall in waiting periods for medical attention or assessment.

Progression and resettlement

- Education provision has been enhanced during the reporting period, with improvements in the quality of teaching and recruitment of appropriately qualified teachers. However, the effectiveness of provision is impeded by unacceptably low levels of attendance.
- Vocational provision observed during the reporting period to support prisoners to learn useful work-based skills to gain employment on release is of variable quality. Opportunities for prisoners to develop skills by improving the prison environment are limited, in the Board's view.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Substantial investment is required to bring existing accommodation up to an acceptable standard. Aspects, including access to clean, working showers and reliable heating are insufficient and provision continues to deteriorate. When will the Minister address this issue?
- Prisoners - and staff - are at substantial risk of serious harm due to the fire safety issues on house block 5. When will the Minister take urgent action to address this very worrying problem? And will the Minister preclude its use as a residential house block until the risk is effectively mitigated?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Improve funding for vocational work-based opportunities for prisoners to support effective transition back into legitimate paid employment on release and promote greater opportunities for prisoners to directly improve their living environment.
- Remove prisoners' access to razor blades as an instrument of self-harm and replace these with safer electric shavers.

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Work with external partners to reinstate the prisoner Listener scheme, as a matter of urgency, to support a culture of safer custody.

- Identify the reasons why black prisoners are twice as likely to be subject to the use of force when compared with white prisoners and put in place effective strategies to reduce the disproportionality.
- Ensure that UoF reviews and discrimination incident reporting forms are independently scrutinised to ensure procedures are fair and transparent.
- Deliver 45 minutes of effective key working to all prisoners on a weekly basis, in line with national expectations.
- Address the inconsistency in the quality of ACCT documents through effective quality assurance.
- Improve arrangements for ensuring that prisoners attend education classes and healthcare appointments routinely on time.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

The prison operates a safer strategy meeting group, which meets monthly to review practices and identify improvements. The Board receives the minutes of the meetings.

4.1 Reception and induction

The prison has taken steps to improve practice in this area amid concerns that some prisoners experience significant anxiety when arriving in the prison. The prison has put in place a revised procedure during the reporting year, entitled 'Bus to Bed', which seeks to make the entry into Elmley clear, informative and, above all, humane. Whilst in its infancy, there is evidence that this new approach is having a positive impact. Leaders responsible for reception and induction want to improve provision.

Key to reducing risk at the point of arrival is officers taking note of the prisoner escort record (PER) and the suicide and self-harm warning form, where they are provided. Because of pressure to get prisoners through reception and onto their designated house block, evidence indicates that this does not take place consistently.

Staff and prisoners report persistent kit shortages for new prisoners in reception.

Showers are not routinely provided to new prisoners on their day of arrival.

Providing new prisoners with access to make a phone call on arrival does not always occur and is particularly a concern at the weekend, as staff are not available to update prisoners' PINs (these are personal identification numbers, which allow prisoners to make phone calls). For prisoners with court-applied restrictions to phone use, the prison undertakes to inform a named contact of their arrival in prison.

The prison has three prisoners who act as 'insiders' to offer support and guidance to new arrivals. These prisoners are an invaluable resource and form of support.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

During the reporting period, there have been a total of five deaths in custody.

At the last inspection of Elmley, in 2022, HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) found that outcomes for prisoners for safety were not sufficiently good, which was a repeat of the finding in the 2019 inspection.

During this monitoring period, the Board has looked at a range of factors that affect prisoner safety, primarily through observation and talking to prisoners.

Incidents of self-harm have risen, from 532, committed by 226 individuals, in 2022-2023, to 580, committed by 336 individuals, in 2023-2024. The percentage of incidents of self-harm carried out by black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners has declined from 34% in 2022-2023 to 18.75% in 2023-2024.

Whilst many prisoners report feeling safe within Elmley, there remain a significant number who do not. We have identified this through either applications to the IMB by prisoners or through direct conversations. Prisoners who have reported concerns often cite factors relating to their mental health and worries about violence.

When analysing how self-harm occurs, the leading cause is through cutting, often with prisoners' own razor blades. This, as an instrument of self-harm, has been widely recognised by the Prison Service for some time. It is unacceptable that a move to electric razors for all prisoners is still in its feasibility assessment stage.

From the Board's observations, the prison seems intent on reducing self-harm and violence. Since the last IMB report, it has started to put in place several key strategies to help make the regime safer for prisoners.

Leaders have identified that a key way to reduce self-harm is for officers, through training, to understand the triggers. The prison has launched an awareness campaign called 'Just Ask Why', where officers are encouraged to spend time talking with potentially vulnerable prisoners to de-escalate difficult situations. Research within the prison has shown this to be effective.

Prison leaders expect to see a decline in self-harm because of a new, concerted approach to psychological safety over the next 12 months and we look forward to seeing this in evidence in our next report.

Assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents have been used more frequently than that identified in the previous report, with 398 opened in 2022-2023 compared with 574 in 2023-2024. However, the Board is concerned that the prison holds conflicting data on these numbers, which impacts our confidence in the prison's data management systems. The prison is unlikely to be able to effectively analyse trends in ACCT usage if it holds unreliable data.

Whilst ACCT documents usually follow the prisoner around the prison, the format is a source of concern, as it is difficult to use, with some officers stating that it needs to be urgently improved. The Prison Service should provide a simpler and clearer format, which will help provide useful and accessible information on the most vulnerable prisoners. The quality of ACCT documents is variable. Some are well organised and easy to use, whereas others are disorganised. Irrespective of the shortcomings of the ACCT document format, the prison should ensure that more effective quality assurance procedures are in place to maintain an acceptable standard.

As reported in section 5.4, there are too few key working sessions taking place. It is a national expectation that a 45-minute key working session takes place for all prisoners on a weekly basis. On average, around 20% of the required total occur each week, which is unacceptably low. The Board takes the view that high-quality weekly key working sessions for all prisoners would, in all likelihood, support an improvement to safety in the prison.

It is regrettable that the in-house Listener scheme has ceased this year as a support mechanism for vulnerable prisoners. Prison Listeners were an integral part of the prison's safer custody strategy, and their absence is a concern. Vulnerable prisoners are now directed to the Samaritans.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Prison data show that assaults this year have increased, from 315 in 2022-2023 to 380 in 2023-2024. Within the 2022-2023 figures, 70 were assaults on staff, compared with 137 in 2023-2024, with 246 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in 2022-

2023, compared with 245 in 2023-2024. These figures are within the context of a fall in the OpCap, from 1137 in 2022-2023 to 1043 in 2023-2024.

The causes of violence continue to be varied, with custodial debt remaining the most significant reason.

The prison has launched a self-isolator strategy during the reporting year, although there is insufficient evidence to judge its effectiveness. Outside of this strategy, self-isolators with whom we have spoken either speak positively about the general support they have received or are unaware of its availability.

Challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs), used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence, are a positive feature of the prison. Prisoners with whom we have spoken to refer to them as helping them move forward. Observations of CSIP review meetings between officers and prisoners show a productive and positive dialogue.

4.4 Use of force

The prison continues to monitor use of force (UoF) incidents but does not comply with the expectation to have incidents scrutinised consistently by an independent representative, as per section 22.5 of the [2023 Use of Force Policy Framework](#). Whilst the IMB has been able to observe some reviews, we have neither the capacity nor the expertise to fulfil this function.

During the reporting year, there were 903 UoF incidents. This represents a significant increase on the 744 reported in 2022, particularly given that the OpCap has reduced in this period by nearly 100 prisoners. There were no incidents requiring the use of batons or PAVA incapacitant spray.

There is a clear disparity between the percentage of white and black prisoners who are subject to incidents of UoF. During the reporting period, UoF was applied to 4.63% of the white prisoner population compared with 9.57% of the black prisoner population. The prison has begun to try to understand the reasons behind this disparity, although this is very much in its infancy. Initial findings indicate that the reasons are multifaceted and complex. The Board considers this disparity to be of significant concern and would like to see urgent and well-planned action taken to lower UoF in relation to the black prisoner population.

The use of body worn video cameras (BVWCs) to record instances of UoF continues to be high in relation to the national target of 70%. During November 2023, a figure of 98% was recorded while, for the reporting year overall, the figure was 92%.

The prison operates a weekly meeting, where instances requiring UoF are reviewed from the preceding week. This is attended by a combination of senior leaders and senior operational officers, supported by an administrative officer, and is often observed by the Board. Since November 2023, some junior officers have been invited to attend.

The weekly UoF meeting is highly effective in both reviewing and identifying learning points to improve practice. Each instance is reviewed, and this is followed up by an analytical assessment of what went well and what could have been done better.

The prison has worked effectively to ensure that the weekly UoF meetings are seen by prison staff as positive and part of a culture of learning. To develop this, the

inclusion of junior officers, on a rotational basis, at the meetings is contributing to a broader organisational awareness of the need for consistent good practice.

Whilst BWVC equipment is new and in good working order, the prison has a less-than-effective CCTV system. On occasion, this has prevented a comprehensive review of UoF incidents. Given the importance of this area, care should be given to ensure ongoing investment in the necessary equipment.

Through the introduction of rigorous audits surrounding the wearing of BWVCs, leaders can now pinpoint where low take-up of cameras is occurring. This has been helped by the introduction of new equipment, which replaced the older cameras that often failed and led to a lack of confidence in their use. There has been greater focus on BWVC being switched on at the appropriate time to capture the lead up to, and justification for, the use of force.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

The security team keep records of items found on targeted searches throughout the prison. During the reporting period, 344 such searches were recorded, which resulted in the finding of illicit items on 177 occasions. This relates to a 51% success rate, which is in line with that stated in our last report. It should be noted that some such searches produced more than one item. The chart below shows the categories and numbers of finds. The security team has not noted any significant issues with drones during the reporting year.

Items	2022-2023	2023-2024
Phones	115	84
Alcohol	94	103
Weapons	148	151
Drugs	267	271
Total	624	609

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The quality of accommodation has continued to deteriorate since the last IMB report and, in some respects, is below acceptable levels.

The shower facilities on several house blocks are dirty and, in many instances, broken. Some shower facilities seen during the year are routinely infested with insects and, generally unsanitary. Some shower blocks are in better condition than others because of better cleaning. Hot water is usually sufficient although, on some occasion, it runs out at peak times.

The prison recognises that provision in this area is unsatisfactory and is attempting to seek external funding to address the problem. The Board would like to see this matter dealt with as a matter of urgency.

As stated in our previous report, many prisoners' cells continue to be in poor condition, primarily due to a legacy of poor maintenance. Whilst in-house maintenance teams attempt to keep on top of the demands of ageing facilities, they do not have the resources to improve matters to an acceptable level.

Over the winter period, the prison experienced the breakdown of heating to several areas, which left conditions unacceptably cold. The cause of the breakdowns was largely due to the inadequate heating systems in place. It is concerning that, without any significant improvements planned, the problems may well increase over the coming winter.

The fire risk assessment undertaken by HMPPS for house block 5 during the reporting period states the following;

29.1 Taking into account the fire prevention measures observed at the time of this risk assessment, it is considered that the hazard from fire (likelihood of fire) at these premises is high.

29.2. Taking into account the nature of the premises and the occupants, as well as the fire protection and procedural arrangements observed at the time of this fire risk assessment, it is considered that the consequences for life safety in the event of fire would be extreme harm.

The overall judgement made in the HMPPS assessment is that house block 5 poses an intolerable risk to safety.

In response to this at the end of 2023, house block 5 was converted back into single occupancy and some basic fire-mitigation adaptations have been put in place. However, these have not appropriately addressed the serious concerns and the overall judgement that the house block is wholly unsafe remain.

The Board is firmly of the view that it is deeply inappropriate to continue to accommodate prisoners in house block 5, given the serious fire risk. We urge the Prison Service to take urgent action to close house block 5 immediately and provide safe accommodation for prisoners elsewhere until such time as appropriate remedial measures are taken.

One of the most frequent complaints made to the IMB relates to the quality and quantity of food provided. Our experience of monitoring food server areas is that the quality of food issued, particularly at lunch times, is insufficient for many men, although the prison resolutely maintains that it is. Whilst there is a financial limit to how much can be spent on prisoner food, ways should be found to improve the quality and quantity of what is provided.

Rules on hygiene and safety in serving areas are not consistently applied, despite prisoners who work on server areas being supervised by officers. During the reporting year, the gas supply to the kitchens failed, impacting the ability of the kitchen to prepare hot food. However, all prisoners still received one hot meal per day.

Prisoners made more frequent complaints to the IMB at the start of the reporting year regarding canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials using their allocated funds) delivery from DHL. However, processes have now improved, resulting in fewer complaints.

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit (CSU) is a well-run aspect of this prison and tends to be staffed by more experienced officers. In the Board's view, officers work hard to establish positive relationships with prisoners within the context of strict rules.

The prison has appropriately provided the facility for the IMB to be able to speak privately to all prisoners placed in the CSU throughout the reporting period. Prisoners are usually positive about the support they receive from officers whilst in the CSU.

On occasion, prisoners exhibiting very complex mental health needs are placed in the CSU, despite awareness that a more suitable setting is required. In one instance, a prisoner remained in the CSU in isolation for two lengthy periods of 42 and 79 days whilst awaiting a place to become available in a suitable mental health facility. The Board considered this to be inappropriate. Whilst the prison did all it practically could to support the prisoner, greater capacity needs to be made available nationally to reduce such incidents of transfer delay.

Board members monitored GOoD (good order or discipline) reviews and adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is suspected of having broken prison rules) throughout the reporting period. They occur within the context of prison rules and are chaired by a Governor on a rotational basis. Invariably, prisoners appeared to be treated fairly by the process and on almost all occasions prisoners told the IMB that they were content with the outcome.

5.3 Faith and pastoral support

Provision in this area has improved since our last report. The chaplaincy team has increased significantly to provide coverage for all major world faiths. There are 11 members of the team and five volunteer visitors. Support is offered to all arrivals, and opportunities to support prisoners with spiritual matters are readily available. Prisoners speak positively about the work of the chaplaincy and the effectiveness of its outreach work is impressive. There are plans to extend provision further by offering a bereavement course, as well as one for victim awareness.

5.4 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

The low rate of key work is an issue of concern for the Board. The expectation is that prisoners should have 45 minutes per week with a key worker. The reality is that, on average, only 20% of expected key working sessions occur on a weekly basis, usually because of low staff availability. Many prisoners with whom Board members spoke had little knowledge of who their key worker was or the purpose of key work. .

The Ministry of Justice defines key work in the following terms:

It's a way for offenders to build relationships with officers that are healthy and make them feel comfortable speaking to prison officers. It's a process to reduce violence, reduce drug-use, give offenders a point of contact with an officer to help them cope with custodial life (Ministry of Justice April 2019).

The Board believes that problems with safety, violence, relationships and drug use would, in all likelihood, improve were the appropriate time and effort be devoted to this important activity.

The Board notes that the completed key records we have seen show high-quality and effective dialogue.

Overall, staff and prisoners interact well. Usually, staff speak with prisoners appropriately within the context of clear rules and expectations. The Board has regularly seen how emotional intelligence is used by experienced staff to defuse difficult situations and maintain a calm atmosphere.

However, on occasion, Board members have also witnessed deeply inappropriate behaviour by officers towards prisoners, including offensive verbal abuse and unlawful physical violence. When witnessed directly, these matters are brought to the attention of leaders, who undertake to deal with them appropriately.

During the reporting year, a significant number of new staff have been appointed and on most house blocks many staff are in their first or second year of service.

The Board is concerned about the increasing number of instances where some officers fail to follow basic procedures. Whilst failure to manage the use of radios and lock gates consistently in line with security procedures are management issues, they do impact on prisoner safety. The Board has noted a deterioration in the consistency of practice by officers throughout the reporting period.

5.5 Equality and diversity

From the Board's observations, the prison effectively monitors equality and diversity against a broad range of metrics. These indicate that prisoners with protected characteristics (these include age, disability, race, religion, sex, gender reassignment and sexual orientation, all of which it is unlawful to discriminate against) are more likely to have negative outcomes than the prison population as a whole. However, because of proactive analysis and effective targeted actions, the picture has improved towards the end of the reporting year. For example, the percentage of disabled prisoners who are on the enhanced level of the prison's incentives scheme improved significantly in September 2024 compared with the reporting period.

Disabled prisoners are, on occasion, disadvantaged due to the physical environment of the house blocks. Whilst a new house block under construction will have the

necessary disabled access arrangements, steps should be urgently taken to address deficiencies in other areas of the prison.

The prison actively promoted Black History Month, with numerous strategies designed to raise awareness in this area. An event organised in the chapel, with the theme of 'Reclaiming Narratives', was attended by 38 prisoners and was well received by those present.

Whilst some strategies to improve equality are in their infancy, the Board is reassured that leaders are determined to make improvements and promote diversity.

During the reporting period, a total of 38 discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFS) were submitted, of which ten were based on race and eight based on religion and belief. A total of four DIRF applications were upheld. The Board is satisfied that the DIRF process is managed effectively and in line with prescribed national arrangements, albeit without the necessary external independent scrutiny. The prison needs to urgently address this.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Overall, 40% of applications to the Board are for healthcare reasons, typically relating to mental healthcare and medication.

Prisoners often complain that there are lengthy delays in gaining medical appointments. However, there is no evidence that any delays are greater than those in the community.

Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust has delivered healthcare since April 2022 and there is evidence that provision is improving. Staffing levels have been enhanced during the reporting period as a direct result of more effective recruitment and retention processes.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Waiting times for appointments have reduced significantly during the year, according to both prison records and our own monitoring observations. Specifically, appointment availability for both the GP and dentist appear to be at least on a par with those available through the NHS in the community.

Prisoners regularly raise concerns about changes to their medication, which is sometimes different to what they had been prescribed in the community. The Board has been reassured that any changes made are strictly in line with NICE guidelines and are appropriate.

The prison has begun delivering vaccinations on house blocks directly. This has improved take up significantly.

On occasion, prisoners do not attend medical appointments and, on average, 11% of appointments are missed. This is often due to refusal to attend or prison officers failing to collect prisoners for their appointments on time.

6.3 Mental health

The prison has improved the provision of qualified mental health nurses over the reporting year. However, it has been unable to fully fill the 1.5 FTE (full-time equivalent) allocation for an on-site psychiatrist.

Many prisoners have complex mental health needs, which affect their behaviour and the level of support they require. A significant number of prisoners with mental health needs are placed within the in-patients department (IPD). On occasion, Board members have witnessed prisoners displaying distress in a manner that makes the atmosphere unsettling and frightening, both for the individuals concerned and others located in the IPD. The Board would like to see steps taken to improve mental health provision for those prisoners who require detention in the IPD.

The assessment and transference of prisoners who require secure mental healthcare does not always occur within prescribed time limits. In section 5.2, we refer to a prisoner who was detained in segregation for two periods of 42 and 79 days whilst awaiting transfer to specialist provision.

6.4 Time out of cell, regime

Over the course of the reporting period, time out of cell for prisoners not engaged in purposeful activity has remained low, with such prisoners spending between 21 and 22 hours per day locked in their cells. The problem with this is most noticeable in the evenings and at weekends. Prisoners report frustration at the unpredictability of the regime, which is often caused by staff absence or shortages because of short-term redeployment.

Many house blocks have access to table tennis and pool tables on each spur. Unfortunately, on some house blocks these are unusable due to equipment either being absent or missing.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

Education has faced some significant challenges since the last report, with the provision now delivered by Milton Keynes College (MKC). The key challenges have been unfilled staffing vacancies and learner absences.

Achievement rates for English and maths have dipped slightly since our last report. In 2022, 91% of learners achieved the required standard in English compared with 82% in 2023-2024, with 81% achieving the required standard in maths in our last report compared with 75% in 2023-2024. These figures are, however, based on those who took examinations, as opposed to the total enrolled.

Attendance has been a concern throughout the reporting period. The Board sampled four months over the reporting period. The overall attendance on education courses was:

- December 2023: 59%
- March 2024: 59%
- June 2024: 67%
- September 2024: 73%

Whilst this is an improving picture, it is significantly below the 85% overall recorded in our last report.

The reasons for absence are many but include staff availability and prisoner court or medical appointments. In addition, house block staff are not always effective at consistently bringing prisoners to their classes. The prison should take steps to improve education attendance, where it can do so. Junior staff routinely raise this as an issue with Board members.

Teaching observed during the reporting period has been of good quality and prisoners are invariably positive about their experiences in education classes.

Classes are provided in English, maths, project-based learning, Barista training and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages). There are a maximum of 148 education places provided by the contract with MKC. Given how well prisoners regard their learning and the dire state of literacy and numeracy within the prison population, we consider it essential that provision is enhanced in this vital area.

The Shannon Trust provides excellent training for prisoners to support other prisoners with reading and numeracy. Routinely, we have witnessed this activity in progress, and it is invariably of high quality and highly regarded by those giving the support and those receiving it.

7.2 Vocational training, work

The prison provides many opportunities for prisoners to work. Work is available in house blocks, kitchens and the laundry, as well as in general cleaning duties. In addition, there are numerous roles available for prisoners to support other prisoners. Prisoners value the opportunity to work, as it provides a sense of purpose and also a small financial income. Limited opportunities for work are available for remand prisoners, who account for between 60%-70% of the prison population.

In terms of work-based training, provision is of a mixed quality. Activities such as TBoats, which prepare breakfast packs for prisoners, do little to provide valuable skills on release and focus on tedious repetitive activity, whereas activities such as recycling have greater purpose and learning opportunities.

Whilst, as a Board, we have not been able to see all activity during the reporting period, we do consider that this, as an area, could be developed further by the prison to include more accredited courses.

The prison environment is in urgent need of care and attention. Green spaces around the prison are often unkempt and, as we have reported, in section 5.1, prisoner accommodation is in dire need of maintenance and refurbishment. The prison states that it is unable to routinely use prison labour to help address these matters, because doing so would be a breach of its contractual arrangements with external providers, who are paid to deliver such services. In addition, it would require further funding to provide adequate supervision. Where prisoners are given meaningful opportunities to improve their environment, they often excel.

The Board believes that, as a matter of urgency, ways should be found to provide more meaningful opportunities for prisoners to help improve the physical fabric and environment of the prison. The benefit of this would be a likely saving to the public purse and an opportunity for prisoners to take some responsibility for their place of residence. It is of note that, out of a prison population of over 1000 prisoners, there are undoubtedly plumbers, carpenters and painters and decorators, many of whom could have their skills effectively put to good use whilst in custody, as they repay their debt to society.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	3
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	5
Total number of visits to the establishment	132

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	2023-2024 reporting year	2021-2022 reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	8	10
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	9	10
C	Equality	1	7
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	10	7
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	6	14
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	5	7
F	Food and kitchens	14	6
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	70	59
H1	Property within this establishment	13	38
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	6	29
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	5	13
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	6	70
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	22	58
K	Transfers	2	3
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	0	42
	Total number of applications	177	373



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