



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Brixton

**For reporting year
1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024**

Published February 2025



Contents

Introductory sections 1 – 3	Page
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the establishment	4
3. Key points	5
 Evidence sections 4 – 7	
4. Safety	8
5. Fair and humane treatment	12
6. Health and wellbeing	15
7. Progression and resettlement	18
 The work of the IMB	
Board statistics	21
Applications to the IMB	22

All IMB annual reports are published on www.imb.org.uk

Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

Brixton continues to be a resettlement prison, described in June 2024 by [HM Inspectorate of Prisons \(HMIP\), in an inspection report of the prison](#), as ‘the most overcrowded category C prison in the country’. The certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded) is 528¹. On 30 August 2024, the roll was 749.

There are five residential wings. The operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) on 30 August 2024 was:

- A wing: 220 prisoners, including 36 on the London Pathways Unit (LPU, for prisoners with personality disorders who have committed to psychological therapy).
- B wing: 164 prisoners in first night and induction accommodation.
- C-wing: 134 prisoners in incentivised substance-free living (ISFL).
- D wing: 46 prisoners, drug recovery and wellbeing wing.
- G wing: 234 prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSO) and other vulnerable men (VP).

The care and separation unit (CSU), where men are segregated from other prisoners, holds seven cells, one of which can double up as a constant supervision cell and another as a special accommodation cell (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety), plus a shower room.

The external service providers, largely unchanged since the previous reporting year:

- Maintenance and kitchen: Mitie (with subcontractors for vermin control, washing machines, etc)
- Education and training: Novus, subcontracting to Bounce Back and Allandale
- Library (Lambeth Council)
- Shannon Trust
- The Clink Restaurant
- National Prison Radio
- Probation Service
- Housing: St Mungo's, subcontracted by the NPS
- Work and benefits: Jobcentre Plus (JCP)
- Healthcare: Practice Plus Group (PPG), subcontracting to Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust (BEH) and others
- Substance misuse and wellbeing (with healthcare): Forward Trust (FT)
- Visitors' centre and work with families and children: Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)
- Employment/training, information, advice, and guidance (IAG): Prospects, which is part of the Shaw Trust
- Escort contractor: Serco

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

This IMB annual report avoids drawing evidence from reports by HMIP, which has visited Brixton three times since 2022, most recently in June 2024. It draws principally on the IMB's attendance at meetings, daily reading of operational summaries and members' visits made during the year. Our observations, however, tally with those of HMIP; many of them are identical to those we expressed a year ago. All opinions in this report are those of the Board, unless stated otherwise.

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- Population pressure increased this year, requiring the prison to receive prisoners with serious mental health problems. Such prisoners subsequently took up disproportionate staff resources.
- Self-harm continued at the same level, with a few prolific harmers accounting for much of the total. Safety intervention meetings (SIMs) and assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) reviews addressed these issues sympathetically and looked for solutions specific to the individual; but key working schedules were erratic during the first third of the year. From December, key work improved steadily.
- The number of assaults remained high; fewer were on staff and there appeared to be no indications that staff were targeted personally.
- When force was used, it appeared necessary and proportionate. No prisoners required hospital treatment after an incident when force was used.
- Prisoners self-isolated throughout the year, sometimes as many as eight at one time. Their reasons have almost always been debt and the fear of violent enforcement. The ready availability of drugs was largely responsible.
- In addition to improvised weapons, flick-knives were found during searches. Although we know of no instances of knives being used in assaults, their presence was of serious concern.

Fair and humane treatment

- The condition of the accommodation continues to be unacceptable. Decency checks on cells (also known as accommodation frequency checks, or AFCs) were erratic and there were regular shortages of bedding and clothing. Curtains around the cell lavatory, to offer privacy from the other occupant or the observation panel, were frequently missing.
- The regime was not consistent and very poor on B wing for men who were often awaiting induction and had no activity or education. We did not think the regime on B wing was compatible with OPCAT.
- From the Board's observations, various subcontractors engaged by Mitie provided a poor service, affecting emergency cell bells and the control of vermin. A national contract to cover washing machines was also unsatisfactory. There appeared to be no contract penalty clauses to address lapses in the services they provided.
- Property continued to be lost during transit to Brixton or from wings to the CSU.
- The kitchen provided excellent meals against a tight budget, including particularly imaginative and generous options for religious or cultural festivals.
- Officers in the SIM, or when asked by IMB, often had good knowledge of men on the wing or landing, and we observed friendly relations with them.

Health and wellbeing

- The prison coped with an increased turnover and all arrivals were screened for healthcare and wellbeing issues within 24 hours.
- Queues on the wings for the distribution of medication did not appear to be supervised sufficiently to prevent the illicit diversion of medication.
- The waiting times for medical appointments across all areas of healthcare and seemed comparable with those in the outside community. Paramedics were on duty every day into the evening.
- Despite many seizures of phones, drugs and 'hooch', these were pervasive throughout the year. Almost a third of ambulance call-outs were for prisoners under the influence. Escorting them was a drain on staff resources (as was the case for frequent self-harmers).
- Up to half the prison population were on Forward Trust's drug rehabilitation caseload.
- Healthcare appeared to provide a comprehensive service, with workshops and special campaigns.

Progression and resettlement

- Most aspects of education, skills and work training were inadequate, especially induction. Many men were consequently spending longer in their cells: there were either not enough jobs to occupy them or they were not cleared to take them quickly enough. By the end of the reporting year, there were unfilled jobs, in, for instance, The Clink Restaurant (which is open to the public and staffed by prisoners).
- English and maths provision often failed to meet the learning needs of prisoners: there was a pressing need for this.
- The employment hub continued to provide men with essential documents for release and arranged visits from potential employers. Its work was hampered by the short stay of a significant proportion of men.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- HMP Brixton is the final stage in a chain of reception/training/resettlement prisons; but population pressures 'upstream' have led to the 'inappropriate' sort of prisoner arriving in Brixton, one who has unaddressed issues and insufficient sentence time remaining to resolve them. This means that they leave Brixton ill-equipped to avoid reoffending. How does the Minister plan to change this?
- Living conditions and a shortfall in opportunities for education, training and employment demoralise the men. Boredom and the ready availability of drugs combine with mental illness to drive self-harm, violence and a pessimistic approach to rehabilitation. Much work was done on ROTL, but there were no successful placements. How do you resettle a man who is only in the prison for 5.4 months (para 7.3)? The Minister needs to address these issues urgently. When will he do that?
- There have been similar paragraphs to these in all our annual reports since 2012 (as far back as the present writer has consulted). Over these 12 years, we have addressed 12 of your predecessors, who have averaged 358 days in the job. We hope that when writing to you next year, we will be able to report that the failings described below have been addressed.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- HMP Brixton recently celebrated its bicentenary. Old buildings do not get better with age and without money spent on them; we have reported as much year after year. In 2012, we wrote 'The neglect of capital works at Brixton, over many years, means that the prison buildings are not fit for purpose, and will not be, despite best efforts, for some time to come.' More needs to be done to improve the cells and facilities, the availability of clothing, bedlinen and furniture, and the security of the prison (such as CCTV and netting). But the accommodation will not be decent until the capacity is reduced so that men do not have to share cells designed for one prisoner.
- Things that would raise prisoners' morale (and, probably, that of the staff) would be: increased time out of cells; purposeful activity for all men; the eradication of vermin; cell phones available from day one, with prompt clearance of family and legal numbers; and fewer items of property lost in transfer.

TO THE GOVERNOR

- The Board provides written reports to the Governor each week, meets her or her deputy each month and raises other matters of concern as they arise.

3.3 Response to the last report (this was published in November 2024 and no responses were received at the time of writing this report)

Issue	Response given	Action taken
Education, training, or employment opportunities for only half the population.		
No opportunities release on temporary licence (ROTL)		
Major improvements in the infrastructure of the prison have been needed for many years.		
Subcontracted services for vermin control, washing machines and cell bells are inadequate, all of which has been reported in previous years.		
Prisoners transferred without sentence plan or OASys (a tool to assess the risks and needs of prisoners).		

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

- As population pressures increased, the prison had to process men arriving at short notice and often late in the day. An increasing number of men arrived without relevant documentation. One man arrived in a medical crisis, while others were unsuitable for transfer. When the Board was able to observe reception, care was taken to ensure a meal was available.
- After the end of their routes to change (R2C) project, 18 officers were trained by the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) to triage men for access to their services in the first days in Brixton. The induction passport was revised to reflect this by including questions about family contact and care experience.
- There were periods of severe delays in induction for allocation to jobs and activities, mostly caused by short-staffed information and guidance (IAG). This meant men waited sometimes several weeks (at one point, two months) on B wing with nothing to do.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

- Self-harm incidents (351) were down 17% on the previous year, but still considerably higher than the five-year average. A few prolific self-harmers accounted for much of the total. In one month, three prisoners accounted for over half the 43 incidents, with one prisoner (harming 13 times and taken to hospital eight times that month, despite being on constant supervision) requiring blood transfusions as a result of the self-harm. In this context, their name appeared in 43 of our weekly reports to the Governor. An attempt to transfer the prisoner to a more suitable establishment failed.

	Total self-harm	Average monthly	Av no. of prisoners monthly	Max by anyone in one month
2019-20	214	18	10	7
2020-21	211	18	9	20
2021-22	203	17	9	10
2022-23	423	35	13	20
2023-24	351	29	16	13

- The number of men with a high cell-sharing risk assessment (CSRA, indicating violence) has been up to 135 and always over 100 this year; before 2020, it had never more than 50.
- Certain groups were particularly vulnerable to self-harm: those with mental health issues, men in the CSU and on G wing and those who had never had a visitor or had been in care. A programme of targeted-support visitors for this last group was started. Over four months (April-July), G wing men accounted for 60% of self-harm incidents, even though they made up only 30% of the population.

- Weekly SIMs discussed about 20 prisoners of concern and were well structured, indicating detailed and wide knowledge of these men. Participation by Governors ensured actions were followed through. Prisoners were referred to respectfully.
- We regret there were three deaths in custody during the reporting year, one of which was, apparently, self-inflicted: the Coroners' Court inquest and the Prisons & Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reports are awaited. The family liaison officer gave extended support to relatives where appropriate.

ACCTs

- When the Board was able to observe ACCT reviews, they were usually conducted with patience, sympathy and care. However, there were occasional lapses, when documentation could be patchy, despite weekly quality assurance by Governors and custodial managers. In one sampling of six ACCT files, we found all had immediate care plans but several had no entries in the longer-term care plans. A member of the mental health team and of the chaplaincy attended ACCT reviews whenever possible.

Cell bells

- We repeatedly reported problems with cell bells, some of which were the result of deliberate damage by a prisoner (which could affect all the bells on a wing), but mainly due to an issue with the system itself. Here are some examples: a monitor in the desk office was not working for about a year; bells constantly ringing, then not ringing 'as the result of an upgrade'; a 50-minute wait for a bell to be responded to; the London pathways unit (LPU) office on the third floor unable to hear a bell set off in their section, which was actually ringing elsewhere in the wing office on the ground floor.

During one such a failure of the service, a landing officer walked round every five minutes to see if any of the grey boxes outside cells had a light showing. This seemed to us an adequate but inefficient fall-back until repairs were completed. In January, we were told that if the prison could not fix the fault, they would call out a sub-contractor, who would endeavour to attend within four hours. We saw no evidence of this. This appeared to be another external contract insufficiently quality assured or enforced: others were the CCTV system (4.5); vermin control; and washing machines (5.1).

CSIP reviews

- Mid-year, the management of reviews of challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP), used to manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence, was improved, with more referrals. A new system led to typically 10-15 men on CSIPs being reviewed at weekly SIM meetings, with each allocated to a senior wing officer. Increased case manager training would have enabled more CSIP reviews to be completed, as only a limited number of staff were available to conduct these reviews. Experienced officers were occasionally diverted from regular duties to conduct quality assurance or ACCT and CSIP reviews, meaning gaps could occur on wings.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

- There were 301 assaults in the year, a very slight reduction year-on-year but still well above the five-year average. A total of 33% were on staff, compared with the

previous year's figure of 40%. These were, generally, the result of intervention during prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, dealing with a prisoner's non-compliance of orders or, on occasion, accidental injury by a prisoner. Ten of these were referred to the police. There were no indications that staff were targeted personally.

	Total assaults	Monthly average	On staff	On prisoner
2019-20	142	12	38	88
2020-21	130	11	70	60
2021-22	164	14	66	98
2022-23	311	26	123	188
2023-24	301	25	100	201

- Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults were prompted by gang issues (e.g. disputes over control of the drugs economy), bullying (often drug-debt enforcement) and petty disputes.
- A survey early on in the year indicated that there were about 80 gang members in the prison, of which only 8% were on CSIPs. Increasingly through the year, gang intelligence was being collected from reception interviews and other sources and shared at security, drugs and harms (SDH) meetings. The transfer or release of a gang leader usually prompted fights for his top spot.
- The number of improvised weapons found in the prison remained a concern: searches also found flick-knives, though these were not used in assaults and may perhaps have been held to threaten or deter.
- Men self-isolated periodically throughout most of the year, up to eight at a time, almost always to avoid the threat of violent enforcement of debt. The IMB tried to visit all isolators at least weekly. Daily checks by the safer custody team were intended to ensure the accuracy of records and that self-isolators were offered the same benefits as others on the wing. These included changes of kit (bedlinen, etc) and 15-20 minutes for a shower or fresh air every third day. On some occasions men declined the opportunity of time out of cell. This was recorded on NOMIS (the national computer system). We have, however, reported many instances of this falling short. For example, one man was only out of his cell twice in three weeks, while another was not out of his cell at all the previous week. Men complained to the Board about having no time in the fresh air. Entries on NOMIS, if made, were often poor and did not record if time out of cell was offered or accepted. In November 2023, we were told there was no system to prioritise in-cell phones for self-isolators. We were assured, in March 2024, that a prisoner who was self-isolating would always be given the opportunity to attend a legal visit or healthcare appointments. The number of self-isolators varied: sometimes there were six or more on a wing, although this had fallen by August.

4.4 Use of force

- Use of force (UoF) incidents averaged 38 a month against 31 a month in the previous 12 months, the increase being the result of a standards team recommendation that earlier and limited UoF could avoid escalation of an incident.

- Most UoF was by guided holds, with a refusal to return to cell being the most frequent reason, and 80% of which concerned prisoners on A wing. A total of 93% of UoF incidents were recorded on body worn video cameras (BWVC). An audit in August found 60 BWVCs were not working and 30 were unaccounted for.
- Governors chaired a weekly scrutiny of all BWVC footage with C&R (control and restraint) coordinators present. There were no records of batons being drawn or used. PAVA incapacitant spray was only drawn once by Brixton staff, but it was not used. However, it was used, for the first time in Brixton since 2016, by the National Tactical Response Group, or NTRG (a team trained to intervene in high-risk situations) in June.
- The IMB was invited to witness all planned UoF: eight such witnessed incidents included a) an incident at height by the NTRG, lasting four hours in total and (involving over 20 staff); b) a cell-fire behind a barricaded door (13 staff, with officers in smoke hoods); and c) the relocation of a refractory prisoner who was spitting and incontinent, having smeared his cell with faeces. These were all handled correctly, decently and without injury.
- A total of 74% of prisoners subject to the use of force had a registered disability. This includes neurodiversity-related, as well as physical, disabilities.
- There was a continuing lack of negotiators. In January, there was only one, whose training was not current. At the reporting year end, staff were still on the waiting list for this nationally organised training.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

- Contraband finds from searches indicated that mobile phones (154 found during the year) and drugs (178 seizures, of which 70 were new psychoactive substances/NPS, also known as Spice) continued to be widely available. Routes included 'throw-overs', of which 11 were intercepted, and 'passes' during visits. We noted fewer interceptions of drugs via mail.
- The visits' hall was monitored live on CCTV and by officers. Police were called to arrest any visitors caught passing contraband: we noted one occasion when the visitor was merely banned from visits for six months. Action was taken to prevent such leniency recurring. Cannabis worth £12,000 in jail was found on one prisoner after a visit.
- Brewing of alcohol (hooch) appeared to continue through the year. There were 69 such seizures as a result of cell searches.
- Diversion of medication (19 seizures) continued to be a problem. About 70% of men had medication in their possession. We noted the absence of officer supervision at the medicines' hatch in over ten of our weekly reports, but the comments to us from dispensary staff indicated that there was almost never any oversight. An indication of the lengths to which prisoners would go was the finding of a man in possession of someone else's regurgitated medication.
- CCTV coverage of both the wings and the exterior of buildings was unreliable. Staff in the control room, where about 12 cameras were monitored live, told us in May that there were not enough cameras to cover all the perimeter. Several cameras were either facing the wrong way or static. Some cameras had not been working for several months. In March, CCTV had not been working on C wing for weeks or on the gate (where rats chewed through wiring). In April, CCTV on A wing was particularly poor and several assaults were missed as a result.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

- Population pressures continued. In September 2023, there were still a few men from general population wings A and B remaining on G wing (from the previous year). For several months this year, there were 'lodgers' from A and B wings in the London pathways unit (LPU).
- These moves appeared unplanned: in January, six men were moved onto the LPU without any forewarning (the LPU staff were on a team training day at the time). There were then about ten men there who were not on psychological programmes, for which the LPU is reserved. The consequences were interruptions of remedial programmes and restrictions on regime when two categories of prisoner could not be allowed out at the same time. Two men put on LPU had already assaulted staff elsewhere in the previous week. A prolific self-harmer was also placed on the LPU. New arrivals inappropriately placed on G wing missed out on formal induction programmes (which take place on B wing), although some induction was given on the wing.
- Cell decency checks (AFCs) were erratic and there were frequent shortages of stores, including toilet paper. There was a regular shortage of basic clothing and bedding requirements; this was particularly bad from January to March. Clothes were not available from the weekly canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials using their allocated funds) so men had to order them from catalogues and pay delivery charges.
- This lack of clothing and linen was aggravated by the repeated failure (and excessively long repair time) of washing machines, particularly from January to March. At one time, the machines on A, B and D wings (the last of these had no machines for months) were out of service at the same time. LPU laundry was being done on G wing, with clothing left to dry on the landing railings. On B wing, men were forbidden to dry clothes on the railings when the dryer was not working. There were no alternatives to divert the laundry to, as this was a prison-wide issue.
- Rats had the run of most wings (particularly A and B – in showers, serveries and wing kitchens) and in the air ducts of the windowless control room. A pest control person came for half a day per week, which was inadequate. Producing one dead rat a week equates to a fraction of the productivity of a single female rat.
- The prison's kitchen continued to provide excellent meals of high quality, variety and adequate quantity. Board members regularly tasted the food. Celebratory menus for Christmas, Easter, Eid and other religious/cultural events were generous, imaginative and available to all prisoners. Calorific values are now provided on the weekly menu choice lists. Prisoners' comments and requests at food committee meetings and in servery feed-back books were noted and heeded.
- Space and equipment in the prisoners' kitchens varied by wing and was poor on A wing. Imaginative meals were produced there nevertheless.

5.2 Segregation

- The CSU, where prisoners are segregated, has one constant supervision (CS) cell. There were only two other constant supervision cells in the prison (on A and G wings), so this was used to accommodate men needing such observation.
- Cells were frequently out of use as a result of intentional damage by the occupant. The shower room and adjacent cell wall had been damaged by damp from above for

over a year. This was painted over ahead of the HMIP visit in June but the damp reappeared a couple of weeks later. At times, we noted there was no privacy curtain in the shower room. After arrival in the CSU, men frequently went two days without being offered a toothbrush: it was no excuse to say they had not asked for one.

- There was a small bookshelf of library books, which were changed once a month. Sometimes there were no radios available for prisoners, as for weeks in the spring.
- The CSU was staffed by experienced officers and we noted their patience in dealing with prisoners who displayed particularly challenging behaviour. With about 1% of the population, the CSU had about 10% of the total self-harm and virtually all of the prisoners who engage in 'dirty protests'.
- The segregation monitoring and reports group (SMARG) met quarterly. There is a 42-day limit on the amount of time a prisoner can spend in the CSU without external authorisation. A category B prisoner was held in the CSU for almost three months and would have had a TV and more time out of his cell in a category B prison. During a three-month period, the average length of stay was 10.5 days; we noted that one stay of 56 days was documented properly. Where men were on ACCTs in the CSU, paperwork appeared to be have been done correctly.

Adjudications

- The IMB observed at least 20 adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules) by various Governors. We were generally impressed by their respect, thoroughness, patience and clear explanation of the process.
- An independent adjudicator (IA) heard more serious cases by video link. On one occasion, all 18 cases were adjourned for further information. On another, all but one of 15 were adjourned. CSU officers told us that serious drug dealers (by definition, those passed to the IA) delayed their case by all means possible until after their release, when they were dropped. Officers, who spent about half an hour per case in preparation, found this waste of resources demoralising. The IA hearings were only once a month, so cases could often be out of time.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

- In the early months of the year, daily operations report (DOR) statistics suggested that very little key working was taking place, coinciding with a shortage of band 3 officers. In November, a NOMIS entry, recording a session on 23 October, indicated that it was the first key work since April for a man who had been on and off an ACCT and could have been considered a priority.
- By December, however, key work notes were being added to ACCT documentation. During the second half of the year, key working improved in reach and quality. The number of sessions almost doubled in April to October, 2024 compared with the previous year. This was the result of improved data management, awareness of prisoners missing out and better record keeping and quality assurance of the process. There were, however, still some snags in ensuring all men benefitted from key worker sessions; this is particularly important for recent arrivals.
- There were 30% fewer assaults on staff in the second half of the year than in the first half; the prison assessed this as partly the result of better key working.
- The prison council worked well for prisoner reps to raise complaints and have them taken seriously. Elections for these reps were instituted during the year and the IMB was invited to monitor them. We consider this an imaginative way to inform and involve more men in the relationship with the prison management.

5.4 Equality and diversity

- There were events to celebrate Black History Month, Gay Pride, Irish and the Gypsy Romany Traveller population. Organised by the chaplaincy team and the equality staff, these included competitions, quizzes and mental health chats.
- Dedicated support was given to transgender prisoners, of whom there were four. This included provision of gender-affirming clothing and make-up, the education of staff and prisoners, forums and regular welfare checks.
- Some men with restricted mobility were transferred to Brixton, despite its limited ground-floor accommodation. One man waited many months for a hand rail to be installed in his cell.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

- Attendance at services (Muslim, Catholic and Protestant) varied, with fluctuations in the roll; 20-25% of men attended services or religious study groups. Twelve faith groups were supported: the Rastafarian chaplain had 25 worshippers at one point in the year; other groups were smaller, and a rabbi saw Jewish prisoners individually. Chaplains or volunteers attended ACCT reviews and the weekly safety intervention meetings (SIMs) for vulnerable more regularly than in previous years, and were often seen on the wings talking to individuals. Memorial services were held and prayers (on request) for deceased family members. The Sycamore Tree restorative justice programme ran three times. The absence of the Anglican chaplain, due to ill-health, did not affect Sunday services, which were provided every other week, often by volunteers from a Peckham church, with either Baptist or Pentecostal services on the alternating weeks. A new chaplain was appointed but did not take up the post.

5.6 Complaints

- The Governor's daily meeting reviewed the number of outstanding complaints (COMPs), rarely more than half a dozen internal and closer to 20 to other establishments. The offender management unit (OMU) received more complaints than other teams (as one might expect in a resettlement prison, but it was more because of the pressures on them). COMPs sent to other prisons seldom, if ever, got a response within the mandatory two weeks. Almost all internal COMPs were answered within a week. Sometimes, men complained to the IMB about unsatisfactory replies. We learned in June that COMPs unanswered for six months drop out of the statistics. We saw no justification for such a decision.
- The majority of general requests (submitted via prisoner information desks/PIDs on the wings) related to the OMU, reception, property and learning and skills (the latter reflecting the continuing lack of purposeful activity).

5.7 Property

- A total of 12% of all the applications (apps) the IMB received during the year related to property lost in moves between establishments: these 49 apps were the highest total in the past five years. The Board could do very little to resolve these and frequently advised the prisoner to seek compensation via the PPO. We were told by one prisoner that his application was successful. The PPO is not obliged to notify us.
- A further 8% of applications to the Board related to property lost or delayed within Brixton. Men in the CSU frequently experienced delays in the transfer or, sometimes, the loss of their property following cell clearance.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

- The benefits of regular monthly meetings between all healthcare departments and the prison, led by the Governing Governor, were apparent in improved teamwork and the smoother delivery of healthcare. A monthly newsletter explained the screening procedures, how to book appointments and informed about various clinics and workshops. There were healthcare reps on all the wings.
- As the prison population increased, early days in custody (EDiC) felt the pressure of men transferred in four days a week (profiled for three), and sometimes late in the day. All arrivals were, however, screened within 24 hours and 98-100% of men received their second screening within a week.
- The pre-release team, which sometimes received less than 24 hours' notice of men leaving under end of custody supervised licence (ECSL) scheme, was challenged in setting up outside healthcare appointments for men. Post-release support for up to 12 weeks was available for more vulnerable men.
- At least one paramedic was available from 07.30am to 8.30pm seven days a week for unscheduled care.
- There were incidences of men sitting in the healthcare waiting area too long, not being taken back to the wing or returned to their activity after being seen, which resulted, on one occasion, in a fight. Non-attendance of appointments (DNAs), including nurses' clinics, remained high, at 49-139 a week.
- Complaints about healthcare averaged about 20 a month, mostly from men wanting more information about their treatment. The Board received 41 healthcare-related applications, mostly about waiting times.
- There were 174 code blues (ambulance call-outs), of which nearly a third were for men under the influence (UTI).

6.2 Physical healthcare

- For a couple of months there was GP coverage only two days a week; but most GP appointments were available within a week.
- Waiting times for other health professionals varied. Nearly all were less than six weeks, but podiatry had seven men waiting more than six weeks, and there was a short period with a 14-week wait for the physio at the start of the year. The Board was not generally concerned about waiting times for a dental appointment.
- The vaccination programme offered the same vaccinations available in the community, including Covid, flu, MMR and, if age-qualified, shingles. An average of approximately 40% refused (71% for flu/Covid), higher than in the community. After refusing three times, men could sign an agreement not to be asked again.
- The PE staff offered all men up to four hours week in the gym and ran yoga sessions. Full-time workers had gym in the evenings and men over 50 or those needing remedial gym were allocated time at the weekends. During the summer months, men on the enhanced (top) level of the incentives scheme had an outdoor evening session. A far higher proportion of men attended gym than any other activity, in up to 140 sessions each week, around 1,000 prisoner-hours per day; but 57% of men did not attend gym, according to a needs' analysis in March (but higher by the end of August).

6.3 Mental health

- An enthusiastic neurodiversity support manager (NSM) started identifying cases and training officers in November. A total of 55% of respondents, from 260 men surveyed, had indicated neurodiversity. Unfortunately, the NSM left the prison in June, without an immediate replacement. Mental health referrals increased from around 80 to 125 a month in July and August.
- Waiting times for mental health assessments were less than a week; there was a three-month wait for counselling; and six months for one-to-one psychotherapy, although to benefit from this, men needed a minimum of six months to serve.
- Workshops on trauma, anxiety and stress were offered to help support the increasing numbers of short-term prisoners. These were over-subscribed and had an average waiting list of 100 men.
- One-to-one therapies were often challenged to find suitable space to work on the wings, especially A wing.
- Waiting times to see an occupational or speech and language therapist were short, if at all. A music therapist took groups of up to eight men from the summer and a psychotherapist specialising in sexual trauma joined at the end of the reporting year.
- Some persistent self-harmers were housed in the CSU, as was a man suffering an extended psychosis.
- Four men were transferred to psychiatric hospital beds under section 47/49 of the Mental Health Act: one within the 28-day national standard (from referral and transfer), and three between 35 and 48 days. One man was released and sectioned at the gate. The Board is concerned that these men were not identified for hospital care at a previous prison.

6.4 Social care

- One man arrived with a personal care package from his previous prison and local authority and delivered by healthcare professionals. The learning and skills and safer custody teams organised carers (prisoner volunteers) for men needing support with laundry, meal collection and cleaning their cells. The carers were not given safeguarding training.
- The prison was in the process of addressing its social care policies and procedures. Lambeth Social Services came in to do social care assessments.

6.5 Time out of cell

- The prison was locked down for two Wednesdays a month for staff training and on Friday afternoons for canteen delivery. An alternative, though restricted, regime operated on these days to allow some time out before the training. Lunch, dinner and evening association allowed further time out of cell and all health appointments were as usual.
- Prisoners on B wing continued to spend more time behind their doors than those on other wings, with men generally out for only one hour a day. The IMB was told that this was to incentivise men to move off the wing. There were occasions when prisoners who posed a risk to others had their regime restricted to enable a safe but separate regime for both them and the rest of B wing. Time out of cell on this wing was also adversely affected by induction delays (impacting, in particular, on those with a relatively short time to serve) and the limited availability of off-wing activities.

- The PE staff offered enhanced status men extra time out cell with a variety of sports in the summer months and, when staffing allowed, a community centre in the visits' hall during the winter.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

- Between 50 and 70 men were on opiate substitutes, including injections of buvidal. Naloxone (to counter an overdose) training and a single dose were given on release to men thought to be at risk.
- Forward Trust (FT) had a caseload of 250-350 men, with up to 46 housed on D wing, where they could access a range of group interventions, including 12-step recovery programme and the shorter Stepping Stones course.
- The weekly regular fellowship meetings (with Alcoholics, Narcotics and Cocaine Anonymous) on D wing were well attended. AA started holding meetings on G wing and the London pathway unit (LPU).
- There were periods when psychoactive substances (PS) were available on D wing. As with the LPU, the occasional placement of an unsuitable prisoner on the wing undermined the efforts of other residents.
- The incentivised substance free living (ISFL) unit had a rolling target mandatory of drug testing (MDT) of 268 men per month. Shortages of staff and testing kits, plus broken machines and population churn meant that this target was rarely met.
- From November, men found under the influence were placed on basic regime for 14 days and offered FT support but without the necessity of being tested at the time. This was changed later in the year. Referral to FT was patchy.
- A prisoner information desk (PID) worker told us that men who have not tried NPS outside were trying them inside prison due to boredom, stress and anxiety.
- The pharmacy team carried out spot checks of men's in-possession medication (about 70% of men receiving medication) to help identify diversion.

6.7 Soft skills

- The charity, Certitude, and the education team provided accredited peer mentoring courses to men across the prison. Forward Trust and Shannon Trust had peer mentors on most wings, most of the year, although B wing, with its transient population, was a challenge. The safer custody team organised wing violence-reduction reps and carers, PACT had champions and healthcare had reps across the prison.
- At any one time, there were, in the prison, at least a dozen Listeners, prisoners trained by Samaritans to offer confidential emotional support to their peers.
- The charity, Fine Cell Work, visited D wing one afternoon a week, providing men with a therapeutic and calming diversion. The charity has a south London workshop, which released men can join. The Liberty Choir also visited one afternoon a week, but attracted few prisoners. The charity, Belong, and other agencies offered emotional and rehabilitation support to a few men each.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education and skills

- Periodic staff shortages affected education provision. The Board found induction backlogs frequently throughout the year: in May, the backlog was 6-8 weeks and 140 men. Group inductions helped to relieve acute backlogs. Some prisoners told us they did not have sentence plans and could not see the relevance to their needs of the work or education they were allocated.
- Along with other London prisons, Novus was given a Notice to Improve (NTI), with the focus being on the quality of functional skills' delivery. In the last months of the year, however, efforts by the prison and Novus moved education out of the NTI. Assessment by the Novus quality manager indicated considerable improvement in the delivery of functional skills, although much is still to be done.
- Ofsted, as part of HMIP's unannounced inspection in June, rated most aspects of education, skills and work provision as inadequate, although it went on to outline a number of positive areas and practices throughout its report.
- In our view, for much of the reporting year, education and work provision was, indeed, below the standard expected of a resettlement prison, despite pockets of good work. English and maths provision often failed to meet the learning needs of prisoners: there was a pressing need for this.
- Education leaders sought opportunities to recognise good work and educational outcomes. Award ceremonies were well attended. Daily monitoring of attendance at education and activities was not always accurate, however: in a spot check in November, the Governor thought actual attendance was about half the reported number. For a time, men not attending without a good reason were given warnings that this could impact their status on the incentives scheme, but this was discontinued.

7.2 Vocational training, work

- Vocational education courses in construction (Bounce Back) and horticulture worked well, with examples of very good practice. Although their variety was limited, the men expressed enthusiasm for these courses. There was a vacancy for the horticulture tutor for several months, but G wing men were allowed to tend the garden occasionally under supervision. The limited curriculum offered was a constant irritation and we continued to hear frustration from G wing prisoners about the lack of available options. As with education (above), the induction backlog contributed to high unemployment.
- Meanwhile, there were unfilled vacancies, such as, for example, in The Clink Restaurant. This charity, which recently won an Institute of Hospitality Best Education Award, had 25 employed prisoners in April, with a capacity for 32. Its restaurant was almost always fully booked, thereby spreading awareness of resettlement needs to a wider public. In a three-month period, 15 men achieved certificates in food preparation, service and safety. The Clink also provided extended support for its graduates on release, having training kitchens within a mile of the prison.
- National Prison Radio had five men working in May, was negotiating work experience for them and also offered opportunities in its Brixton centre studio. Fulham Reach Boating Club ran courses each month, with an opportunity for through-the-gate support on release. The PE department ran gym instruction and

first aid courses: eight men were trained as gym instructors, with help to get a job on release. Several were, however, released before finishing the course.

- The prison library offered a wide range of books, although prisoners on A and B wings experienced some difficulties visiting it. The issue was frequently highlighted, but library escorts were not always in place. There was a G wing reading group and visits from authors in, for example, Black History Month.

7.3 Offender management, progression

- In December, the offender management unit (OMU) was running weekly surgeries on wings and managing home detention curfew (HDC) better than average for comparators: the number of men arriving without a sentence plan (as for some years) was a burden, as the prison was not resourced to provide one.
- The OMU's work in the second half of the year was dominated by SDS40 early release scheme. It was already challenging for St Mungo's to find accommodation in the spring, when there were at least five successive versions of guidance to be worked through. SDS40 then also disrupted men's mental health treatment and addiction support and interrupted courses before they could be completed. The existing discharge board was upgraded by pre-release scanning, with a weekly meeting involving all interested parties. In June, however, a plan to clear the category D boarding backlog (60 in February) could not be implemented because of SDS40. In the event, candidates for SDS40 were identified by the deadline of two weeks, a laudable effort by the OMU, assisted by staff from other prison departments.
- Another difficulty for the OMU (and for resettlement more generally) was that some prisoners had been arriving at Brixton with little time for essential resettlement activities to take place. A needs' analysis in March indicated that 58 such men had, on arrival, less than two months to serve, the average length of stay at Brixton being 5.4 months. A total of 9% did not have the first part of their sentence plan, required to be produced in the reception prison.
- Only 60% of prisoners had a bank account before release, essential to facilitate receipt of Universal Credit. ID and banking support was offered through the employment hub during the last 12 weeks of their sentence. In February, National Probation Service statistics were that only 10% were in employment six weeks after release.
- This overload on the OMU meant that many men were understandably anxious about the lack of contact with their OMU worker, their sentence plan or their parole hearing. Some sent in multiple requests, which only added to the OMU's workload. Applications to IMB on OMU matters almost tripled year on year.

7.4 Family contact

- There have been delays with men's phone numbers being added to their PINS, with some of the worst delays (several weeks) linked to transfers from private prisons. Other men, on arrival in Brixton, found their in-cell phones or leads broken or missing.
- Social visits and social video calls have run throughout the year, with eight family or fun days organised by PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust) during school holidays and half-terms. The befriending service, which supported 15 men's families outside and for up to six months post-release, continued. Halfway through the year, PACT launched its own visitor scheme, which matches a volunteer visitor with a prisoner:

19 men were receiving such visits and eight more, mostly on G wing, were awaiting a match by mid-July.

- At the end of the Routes 2 Change project, several PACT employees, including the therapeutic play worker, were made redundant and the future provision of many of their services uncertain. The one PACT worker left in the prison had a backlog of cases at the end of the reporting year (cleared in a couple of months).
- Storybook Dads, where recordings of men reading a story are sent home, has continued. The prison and library supported the Children's Book Project, which allows men to select and send a books to their children with a suitable message.
- The child-friendly family links room has been used to accommodate visitors who may have special needs and for meetings requiring privacy.
- Unhealthy snacks remain the only food on offer in the visits' hall. There has been no progress in the provision of hot food or a card payment machine.

7.5 Resettlement planning

- A lot of effort was put into starting the release on temporary licence (ROTL) scheme and a good list of potential employers drawn up. Staffing constraints meant that men could not be released early enough in the day for some jobs, such as in construction. ROTL was suspended for a period due to the introduction of SDS40 early release scheme and OMU resources being diverted. Whilst there are some additional local criteria, there were very few who met the national requirements for ROTL from a category C prison.
- In the autumn, problems arose – because of data protection requirements – in getting men's National Insurance numbers before release, after which it takes four to six weeks. In January, there was an increase in the number of men arriving with little time before release, making it difficult to get bank accounts or ID for them.
- At the beginning of the year, there was no debt advice worker. A debt advice kiosk, the first in a prison, was installed in March, but only 33 men had used it by August even though it was well advertised.
- The most pressing problems for resettlement are the perennial lack of activity spaces and, this year, the composition of the prison population. The March needs' analysis (see 6.2, above) showed that 35% had been of no fixed address before custody. A total of 232 were prisoners convicted of a sexual offence (PCoSO), but no accredited offending behaviour programmes were available in Brixton or for the 30% of the main population who had been convicted of a violent offence.
- Good work continued. This included induction fairs, for men to learn what services the prison offered; pre-release appointments in the Employment Hub, with information about ID, bank accounts and universal credit; housing advice; and Healthcare release planning. From May, a Probation-led meeting, which all interested agencies attended, discussed all men in the three months before release.

8. The work of the IMB

- For most of the year, the Board has numbered a third of its permitted membership and has not been able to cover all aspects of the prison. From January 2025, the Board will have six active members, plus one on sabbatical for a few months.
- Additionally, the slow progress of recruitment, appointment and, in particular, security clearance has frustrated some applicants into withdrawing their applications. Over the past four years, we have welcomed and then said goodbye to 18 new members: time spent training and mentoring them represents an appreciable drain on IMB resources.
- During the reporting year, we have been lucky to welcome two new members to Brixton, who have several years' experience in other IMBs.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	5
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	309

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	31	28
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	29	25
C	Equality	11	9
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	14	16
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	19	26
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	15	15
F	Food and kitchens	5	13
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	40	41
H1	Property within the establishment	29	32
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	34	49
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	15	6
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	39	54
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	150	97
K	Transfers	7	3
	Total number of applications	438	414



This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at imb@justice.gov.uk