



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Maidstone

**For reporting year
1 March 2023 to 29 February 2024**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

2.1 Overview

HMP Maidstone is one of three establishments exclusively for foreign national prisoners. It caters for category C adult male prisoners (whose escape risk is considered low but who cannot be trusted in an open prison) and has an operational capacity of 613¹.

An establishment for foreign national prisoners faces the challenges of language and cultural issues, as well as prisoners' anxiety about sentence management, immigration and potential deportation.

Almost all of the population is of interest to Home Office Immigration Enforcement (HOIE), which has an on-site team in the prison. The majority of prisoners will be removed from the UK at the end of their sentence. In the reporting year, 85% were deported or removed to an immigration removal centre (IRC), with 15% released or bailed into the UK.

HMP Maidstone is within the town of Maidstone and much of the estate consists of Victorian buildings with buildings added in the latter part of 20th century. Both the location and the state of the buildings provide challenges in providing a secure, safe and humane environment.

2.2 Agency support/services

- Primary healthcare: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Mental healthcare: Oxleas in-reach
- Psychological healthcare: Bradley Therapy Services
- Dental healthcare: Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Substance misuse treatment: Change, Grow, Live (CGL)
- Samaritans
- Learning and skills: Milton Keynes College (MKC) replaced Weston College as the provider in the latter part of 2023
- On-wing education activities: Rocketeer Group
- Management of maintenance and repair work: Government Facility Services Limited (GFSL)
- Workshop contracts: Public Sector Prison Industries (PSPI); Maidstone has a number of prison industries offering locally sourced work, including brickworks (teaching bricklaying and building skills) and a print shop
- Children's visits, family days and parenting courses for dads in prison: Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)
- Literacy help: Shannon Trust
- Singing activities: Beating Time
- Advice and support for prisoners: Citizens Advice
- Kinetic Youth supports the organisation and work of the community council

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

- From the Board's observations, HMP Maidstone is, overall, a safe prison. The prison appears to be well run, with prisoners, for the most part, seeming to enjoy a good relationship with staff and each other.
- The Board is concerned about the number of illicit substances and items that are entering the prison.
- The Board observed the appropriate use of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) concern logs and challenge, support, and intervention plans (CSIPs) to support prisoners with thoughts of self-harm and violent behaviours.

Fair and humane treatment

- From its observations, the Board believes that prisoners are, in general, treated fairly and humanely.
- The Board observes the most common issues raised by prisoners in relation to fair and humane treatment are related to their immigration status and perceived delays in confirming or managing their release dates.
- In the Board's view, key worker sessions remain a focus for the senior leadership team (SLT), both in quantity delivered and quality.
- The Big Word translation service is offered and used, if required. It is available on the wings and in communal meeting rooms. The community council meets regularly with prison management and a catering forum discusses cultural or religious food options with the catering manager.

Health and wellbeing

- Health services are provided in the establishment. The difficulties and constraints evident on the service in the community are heightened in a closed, prison environment. The Board observed care and compassion from the healthcare teams.
- Mental health problems that exist in all prisons are, perhaps, exacerbated both by being a foreign national prisoner in a British prison and the evident stress caused by the management of immigration status and issues.
- The lack of medium- and high-secure mental health beds is a national issue for prisoners requiring transfer to these from the prison. This led to long stays in the care and separation unit (CSU), where prisoners are segregated, for two prisoners in the reporting year.
- A full-time neurodiversity support manager (NSM) started in November 2023. Her role is to identify and support both prisoners with neurodiversity traits and staff managing them in the establishment and is part of the roll out of the work, skills and knowledge programme in prisons in England.

Progression and resettlement

- There is a new education provider in place, and they have set an annual delivery plan for education. The intention is to allow progression through levels and to prepare learners to progress in education or skills and work.

- For many foreign national prisoners, this includes English for speakers other languages (ESOL) as a starting point. The reporting year has seen a reduction in the numbers of prisoners released or bailed into the UK.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- How does the Minister plan to work with the Home Office to require that prisoners are able to sign official documentation either in their own language or in a language they understand?
- How will the Minister support the Prison Service to reduce the prevalence of drugs and other illegal items across the estate?
- What steps will the Minister take to support the Prison Service in providing better purposeful activity offerings and resettlement services to prisoners?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Articulate a clear plan to reduce the prevalence of drugs within the prison estate, both from a demand and supply perspective, and provide guidance and resources for prisons to tackle this endemic problem.
- Support HMP Maidstone in providing more meaningful and purposeful activity and the resource to expand the soft skills offering.
- Enable HMP Maidstone to provide a ROTL facility.
- Provide funding for CCTV across HMP Maidstone and for enhanced gatehouse security.
- Improve access to translation services for foreign nation prisoners, so that papers served, and information served, can be viewed in their native languages.

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Increase the number of officers trained to quality assure use of force incidents to avoid delaying the scrutiny of incidents.
- Reduce illicit substances and items entering the establishment.
- Improve relationship and collaboration with HOIE to ensure better communication with prisoners.
- Continue to increase the quantity and quality of key work sessions and to produce quality assurance information.
- Work with the Prison Service to secure resources to provide more purposeful activities and expand the education offering.

3.3 Response to the last report

To the Minister:

Issue raised	Improvements
To work with the Home Office to require that prisoners sign official documentation either in their own language or in a language they understand. Many prisoners need help with translation, which they are not receiving.	Some progress. This work is ongoing, but little progress nationally.
To work with the Home Office to ensure that anyone who has completed their custodial sentence does not remain within HMP Maidstone. People who are detained for immigration reasons should be moved to the immigration detention estate.	Some progress. Improved, partly due to changes in sentence management Increasing transfers to IRCs now being used prior to deportation.
Ensure that no category D prisoner, for whom there are no barriers to transferring to the open estate, is held in a category C establishment.	Limited progress. Lack of category D places in prison establishments nationally, so limited progress.
Give permission to HMP Maidstone to offer a release on temporary licence (ROTL) programme.	No progress. Changes to immigration policy and early release schemes mean ROTL seems to no longer be a high priority at the current time.

To the Prison Service:

Issue raised	Improvements
Provide funding for CCTV across the prison and for enhanced gatehouse security.	Progress. Funding for CCTV has been approved. This project is well under way. It is in the planning stages and a full set of plans have been drawn up and agreed.
Provide feedback to HMP Maidstone on the effectiveness of activities undertaken to prepare prisoners for release, both in the UK and abroad.	Work in progress.
Provide funding to allow HMP Maidstone to increase the provision of good-quality activities for all prisoners.	Work in progress.

Facilitate sharing across the prison and, where relevant, the immigration detention estate, of core material produced for foreign national prisoners and detained individuals.	No evidence of progress.
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To the Governor:

Issue raised	Improvements
Allow prisoners who attend rehabilitation courses to keep their places at, and pay from, training and education.	Resolved.
Reintroduce Governors' wing surgeries.	No progress. Governors' wing surgeries have yet to restart. Are there any plans to restart Governors' wing surgeries?
Increase the quality and quantity of key work sessions.	Good progress. Number of key worker session is increasing and quality monitoring has been in place since early 2024.
Increase the privileges available to category D and IS91 prisoners who remain in HMP Maidstone.	Limited progress. Reduced the numbers of category D and IS91 prisoners in the estate; there are limited local options.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

- Board members have observed prisoners in reception and have monitored induction.
- We are pleased to note that the confidentiality of reception screening interviews has improved since last year, more comprehensive recording of new prisoner assessments, including English language skills, have been introduced and there is more use of interpretation services when needed.
- While the Board has observed a high level of professionalism from reception staff, late and short-notice arrivals have become more common, presenting the reception staff with additional challenges.
- Prisoner induction appears to be well managed, with new prisoners supported effectively by staff and peer workers, their needs being identified in the first few days.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

- The number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) concern forms opened increased to 121 in the reporting year, from 83 last year.
- The quality of ACCT documentation was observed to be generally good and was a continued focus for management. ACCT care plans and review meetings observed by the Board were usually well managed, with notable care being seen to be taken by many case managers.
- ACCT opening had no strong correlation to prisoner age, but the majority were opened for black and mixed heritage prisoners.
- There were 84 incidents of self-harm recorded this year, down from 89 last year. The main trigger recorded for self-harm and for the opening of ACCT concern forms was uncertainty about, or unhappiness with, immigration status. Other common triggers were noted as low mood or hopelessness, lack of access to vapes, and unwanted transfers.
- The Board observed that threats to self-harm are taken seriously, and that ACCT concern forms opened in response to such threats may have prevented further negative behaviour. The Board considers that good support and care is given by prison and healthcare staff to those who threaten or action self-harm.
- The Board records with sadness that there were two deaths in custody in the reporting year. An inquest found that one of the deaths was self-inflicted, but the reason was unclear; the Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) has issued its report, with recommendations. The other death was, apparently, self-inflicted, and the inquest is yet to take place. The Board reports that we were notified of both incidents, information was shared and no significant concerns with post-processing of the incidents were noted.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

- The granularity of reporting and analysis of violent incidents has improved over the past year and the Board congratulates the prison on its work around understanding and managing violence contexts and triggers. The number of violent incidents recorded for the reporting year was 103, an increase on the

previous year. There were 63 prisoner-on-prisoner incidents, of which 13 were classified as serious, and 40 prisoner-on-staff incidents, of which five were classified as serious.

- There is an increase in younger and gang-affiliated prisoners than in previous years, which had led to short periods of instability. From the Board's observations, these are well managed through careful placement of individuals, efforts to ensure that younger prisoners are in work and/or education and positive engagement with staff and more experienced prisoners.
- Challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIP) are actively used, as are complex case reviews and, while not always successful, there is evidence that men managed in these ways have benefited.
- There was one incident of concerted indiscipline during the reporting year. This involved multiple prisoners on three wings. Board members observed that the incident was handled well, in a short timeframe, and that all prisoners were returned to their cells without injury to prisoners or staff.
- There were a number of instances of prisoners self-isolating, with the most common reason being a perceived risk of harm to themselves due to debt, gang connections or the discovery by other prisoners of the offences for which they were imprisoned.
- The Board notes that prisoners who are self-isolating are dealt with effectively and empathetically. However, access to the prison regime continues to be limited, due to reduced staffing levels at times when vulnerable prisoners can be let out of their cells.

4.4 Use of force

- There were 120 use of force (UOF) incidents recorded in the reporting year, up from 102 last year. The majority of incidents were recorded as unplanned, most commonly because of a prisoner's refusal to relocate, typically to the CSU.
- The Board recorded 11 serious incidents in the reporting year. We were informed about all of these, except one, in the requisite timeframe. The majority of the incidents involved relocating a prisoner to the segregation unit or were due to a prisoner going onto the netting.
- Batons were noted as having been drawn once. While PAVA incapacitant spray was not recorded as being used, the seldom-used threat of it was observed to have had a deterrent and de-escalation effect.
- The most recent HM Inspectorate of Prisons Report (HMIP) noted continued concerns about the oversight of UoF incidents. The Board's monitoring includes regular attendance at UoF review meetings, where careful analysis and exploration of learning points is observed. The Board has no serious concerns in this area, although we note that there are few officers trained to quality assure UoF incidents before their review, which can delay the scrutiny of incidents.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

- There are ongoing issues with illicit substances and articles in the prison. Random and intelligence-led searches have yielded results but, despite this, the Board remains concerned about the continued ready availability of illicit substances and articles.
- Dedicated search teams (DST) are organised in regional hubs and deployed to prisons in their area. HMP Maidstone is covered by the Kent, Surrey and Sussex DST.

- Regional specialist search teams visit periodically and will act on intelligence to prevent and deter any potential threats of disorder. This, combined with intelligence-led searches by local prison staff led to the seizure of significant quantities of illicit substances, notably cannabis and hooch (prison-brewed alcohol), and of illicit articles, mainly mobile phones.
- Reports of cannabis smells around the estate increased markedly this year. The Board has concerns that this situation has, or may have, become accepted and normalised.
- The prison contends that 'throw-overs' (where people from outside the prison throw parcels containing illicit items over the walls, to be picked up by prisoners) are the main means of entry for illegal items and the Board has no reason to dispute this. It is regrettable, therefore, that full CCTV coverage of the prison estate is not in place. External CCTV surveillance of common public sites for throw-overs has not been implemented, seemingly due to restrictions related to the historic nature of the prison walls. Local police do not routinely resource patrols or operations to deter throw-overs.
- Gate searches are unusual at Maidstone. The prison states that the carrying in of illicit items is not a major channel of entry for them; that intelligence-led searches of staff and visitors are sufficient; and that additional searching would not be an effective use of resource. The Board is unable to determine, from the information available to it, whether these assertions are justified.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

- Significant areas of HMP Maidstone are more than 200 years old and, therefore, require constant updating and maintenance.
- GFSL is tasked with maintaining the prison and its infrastructure and, given the demands of its age, manages to do a competent job, in the Board's view.
- The average occupancy during the reporting period was 599, with 14 spaces under operational capacity. The prison had the fewest prisoners in June, averaging 577, and February 2024 saw the highest number, averaging 612. This is an increase on the previous reporting year.
- Of the four wings, two host double cells: Weald, the induction wing, has 49 shared cells, and Kent has five. This situation remains unchanged since the previous reporting year. The cell sharing risk assessment (CSRA) is undertaken as part of the Induction process. Officers confirm that an up-to-date CSRA is recorded or undertake one.
- In February 2024, the operational and system assurance group (OSAG) carried out a measuring the quality of prison life (MQPL) audit on living conditions. The findings are recorded as assurance ratings (substantial, moderate, limited and unsatisfactory). Maidstone was recorded as achieving a 'moderate' rating in all four domains (harmony, professionalism, security and wellbeing and development).
- The prison, therefore, is 'mostly compliant', with the expected standards of living conditions in the following domains:
 - The establishment proactively manages the environment to ensure prisoners are provided with safe, clean and decent living conditions.
 - The prison rooms provide a safe clean and decent environment that is in a good state of repair and fit for purpose.
 - The prison communal areas provide a safe, clean and decent environment that is in a good state of repair and fit for purpose.
 - Prisoners are encouraged, enabled and expected to keep themselves, their cell and communal areas clean.
- Given the age and general fabric of the prison, we consider this to be a fair reflection of our findings during our monitoring.
- Food quality and quantity continue to be an issue with prisoners. The budgeted amount spent per day on prisoner meals is £2.47, which represents the national average. However, due to inflationary pressures, the prison averaged £2.95 per prisoner over the four quarters, rising to £3.03 in the third quarter and £3.40 in the fourth quarter.
- The prison provides specialised diets, as required by prison service orders, such as, for example, halal and kosher, as well as themed meals for festive or religious periods, including Diwali, Christmas, Ramadan and Rosh Hashanah.
- In the reporting period, the following projects were either given the go-ahead or completed.
 - Kent wing shower block refurbishment, to improve decency.
 - Approval by Ministry of Justice projects to replace all windows in the establishment was granted.
 - The building work on the new sports hall began (completed in July 2024).

5.2 Segregation

- The Board believes that the CSU continues to be well-run. From the Board's observations, staff treat prisoners with respect, and prisoners are closely monitored, providing good levels of care.
- The average stay on the unit was 10.45 days. This is higher than the last reporting year and is skewed by one prisoner with complex issues, who stayed for 242 days, and seven prisoners with stays over 42 days (the limit allowed without external authorisation). Reasons for the extended stays primarily relate to prisoner recategorisation to category B status (for those considered a risk to public safety), where spaces in other establishments need to become available and, until such time as they do, a recategorised prisoner is not allowed to reside with the general population at Maidstone.
- Information regarding the number of prisoners recategorised for the whole reporting year is unavailable, as the offender management unit (OMU) has only recently recorded these data from January 2024. At of December2024, seven prisoners had been recategorised to category B status.
- Given the perceived increase in prisoners re-categorised to category B being held in the CSU, the Board has been focused on ensuring these prisoners receive a regime, considering that they are not held there for punishment purposes. In addition to the standard regime for segregated prisoners, they should receive:
 - at least one hour on the exercise yard (two hours, if staffing levels permit);
 - a daily shower; and
 - meal collection and cell cleaning time.
- Recategorised B prisoners ideally should be offered:
 - In-cell TV, depending on their incentives scheme status.
- All prisoners should receive distraction and or education in-cell packs.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Wing surgeries

- The Board continues to focus on immigration and offender management.
- The OMU continues to run wing surgeries supported by peer workers every week, focusing on one wing per week. The Home Office Immigration Enforcement (HOIE) team reports that the most common issues raised by prisoners are related to their early removal scheme (ERS) sign-off and perceived delays in the process.
- The HOIE in-prison unit also continues offering wing surgeries at the weekend on a similar cycle to the OMU.

Community council

- The prison community council continues to operate, meeting twice monthly, once independently and once with the senior leadership team (SLT) and stakeholders.
- Where possible, the IMB monitors the monthly meeting with all stakeholders. We have observed mostly good relations, interactions and satisfactory outcomes.
- Some of the issues raised relate to prison regime; missing laundry; catering; the business hub; and sentence management.

Key work

- Sessions continue to be a priority area for the SLT. Within most of the reporting year, the data only related to quantity of sessions delivered within the agreed timeline parameters, which is in line with the previous reporting year. But, from the start of 2024, quality assurance checks are being carried out.
- At the start of the year, HMP Maidstone scored an average of 1.48 out of 4 for key work quality; however, internal dip tests for the first quarter of 2024 indicate an improvement, with an average of 2.2 out of 4.
- This puts HMP Maidstone ahead of comparator prisons. To achieve 'Green', the establishment needs to achieve a score of 2.4 on key work quality, and the Board will look to report in more detail on this area in the next annual report.

5.4 Equality and diversity

- The follow data is taken from the diversity and inclusion (D&I) team's fourth quarter report, which is coincident with the end of the Board's reporting year.
- Compared with the same period last year, the average number of different nationalities recorded is less at 82 (last year, it was 86).
- Eight nationalities account for 50% of the population, the largest population being Albanian (17%).
- The number of languages spoken is difficult to establish. Some countries have over 20 dialects.
- The largest percentage of prisoners are aged 21-29 years (38%), followed by those aged 21-25 years, who account for 20% of the prison population. Two prisoners are aged over 70 years.
- The largest minority ethnic group was white (46%), while mixed-heritage prisoners had the lowest recorder numbers (5%). The number of black prisoners was reported as noticeably low (23%) when compared against trends since 2021, of 25% and above.
- Data around the number of those identifying as from the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller communities are still not being identified as part of the reception/induction process.
- The D&I team provides clear data analysis on the use of force, adjudications (disciplinary hearings held when a prisoner is charged with having broken prison rules) and the incentives scheme. Data is considered in the context of protected characteristics.
- Of the 36 cases of prisoners who were restrained in a use of force incident, 36% were white, 33% were black, 14% were of mixed heritage and 6% were Asian. The age group involved in the highest percentage of UoF incidents was the 21-29 year olds (53%), while the highest percentage religion group was Christian (58%).
- With adjudications, the highest percentage minority ethnic group was white (41%). The highest percentage age group were those between 21 and 29 years old (54%). The age group with the largest proportion of proven adjudications was the 30-39 year olds, while the highest religion group was Christians (50%), followed by Muslims (42%).
- The Board has no concerns about the data correlation regarding use of force and adjudications.
- The total number of discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRF) received during the reporting year was 24.

- During the fourth quarter, three DIRFs were logged for investigation and three were upheld. Four DIRFs were received and assessed as not being discrimination incidents.
- The breakdown of DIRFs (note: one form ticked two or more protected characteristics) was as follows, all of which were answered within the 28-day timeframe:
 - Gender: 1
 - Religion/Belief: 2
 - Sexual orientation: 1
- Prisoner complaints are analysed to see if there are any patterns for protected characteristics. The IMB reports no concerns.
- The Board received five applications (prisoners' written representations) regarding equality and diversity in the reporting year. These included:
 - Race: 4
 - Religion: 1
- All equality and diversity applications to the Board have been investigated and appropriate action taken, e.g. submission of DIRF (if not already done), followed by a discussion with the D&I team and the safer custody team. The Board has no concerns in this area.
- It is HMP Maidstone's policy that all DIRFs are quality assured by a qualified outside organisation. The Maidstone D&I team has arrangements in place with PACT, Citizens Advice and CGL.
- Weald wing has a cell designated to accommodate prisoners who use a wheelchair. Kent wing has a large cell that offers easy access to the servery, association area and shower, as there are no steps to negotiate.
- All prisoners who are recognised as requiring support are referred to external social care for assessment.
- Copies of D&I meeting minutes and presentations are placed in the prison library.
- Prisoner forums, with a member of the senior leadership team overseeing them, include older prisoners; disability; neurodiversity; younger prisoners; veterans; gender and sexual equality; care leavers; and religion.
- A full-time neurodiversity support manager (NSM) started in November 2023. Her role is to identify and support prisoners with neurodiversity traits and the staff managing them in the establishment.
- Approximately 54 prisoners have a declared neurodiversity (ND) need, which includes: learning difficulties and disabilities (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia); attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); autism spectrum conditions; and cognitive impairments, due to acquired brain injury (ABI).
- The NSM's attendance and input into complex case reviews and safety intervention meetings (SIMs) and approachability/accessibility is noticeable.
- Hidden disability alerts (if the prisoner consents) are placed on individual case notes.
- The NSM has highlighted two priority areas: early data capture at reception, first night and inductions; and staff awareness.
- A neurodiversity training package for directly and non-directly employed staff is being rolled out.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

- During the fourth quarter, an average of 20 different religions within the population were recorded by prison.
- Christians accounted for the highest percentage group (46%), a decrease from last year (50%). Muslims accounted for next highest percentage group (43%), an increase on last year (38%).
- The chaplaincy team records prisoner religions on the prison system.
- The Board is pleased to note that the chaplaincy team is active and involved in all aspects of prison life and is effective in supporting prisoners.

5.6 Incentives schemes

- The Board received only three applications about the prison's incentives scheme in the reporting year.
- D&I analysis (in the fourth quarter) showed that Asian prisoners made up the highest proportion of prisoners on the enhanced (top) level of the incentives scheme.

5.7 Complaints

- A total of 660 internal complaints (those concerning HMP Maidstone) are recorded as received across all categories in reporting year.
- The Board has observed a noticeable improvement in the processing and effective answering of complaints since the new business hub manager took up the post in October 2023.
- The Board was unable to compare the number of complaints received during the reporting year against those received in the last reporting year because of a significant lack of data logged prior to the new manager's arrival.
- Complaints data during the three-month period of December 2023 to February 2024 showed 246 complaints, of which 189 were internal complaints.
- Subjects of internal complaints included residential, sentence management, and operational issues. Healthcare received the lowest number of complaints (approximately 1.5%).
- External complaints (those for other prisons or organisations working with the prison) included DHL refunds and missing property on transfer.
- With regard to complaints response times, prison data show that 83% were answered within the service level time, with 17% answered late.
- The Board observed that workable solutions were pursued to common administration complaint issues, such as delays in prisoner phone contact numbers being added.

5.8 Property

- Concerns raised about reception not dealing efficiently with property during the last reporting year have not been an issue this reporting year.
- HMP Maidstone performed reasonably well within its assigned comparator group when considering property complaints, with the prison, on average, performing within the top four of the ten assigned prisons during the reporting year.
- Property complaints fall into two categories: items not being issued to prisoners, because they fall outside the local facility list; and delays in issuing property.
- The Board observed that to address property issues, more officers have been briefed on permissible and non-permissible items and that the staffing of reception has improved to help prevent backlogs developing.

- Applications to IMB relating to Maidstone property fell to 13, compared with 45 in the previous reporting year. None of these showed themes or specific areas of concern.
- There were 36 external property applications, 16 of which were complaints about lost/missing property during prison transfer. These prove difficult to resolve, as ownership of the complaint can be refuted by other establishments and not all establishments respond in a timely fashion, if at all.
- Issues around other prisons not observing volumetric controls for prisoner property being transferred were seen to be less prevalent compared with last year.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

- The February 2023 Action Plan, in response to the HMIP Inspection (October 2022) and Care Quality Commission (CQC) report, highlighted some areas of concern, which have since been addressed.
 - Area of concern: prisoner who required equipment to manage their health condition.
Action: review of ordering process, with a weekly assurance test.
 - Area of concern: translation services not always being used.
Action: healthcare monitoring via a log.
 - Area of concern: external hospital appointments not being chased or followed up.
Action: excel spreadsheet reviewed daily by the head of healthcare.
 - Area of concern: how medicines are stored by the pharmacy team.
Action: standard operating procedures in place to ensure medicines are supplied and recorded safely and room temperature medicines are correctly stored.
 - Area of concern: insufficient oversight or leadership from a pharmacist. Action: pharmacist attempts to come in monthly; a senior technician comes in every two weeks.
- Other than complaints around external hospital appointments, the Board reports no concerns involving the areas included in the Action Plan.
- GP appointment waiting time were observed to be consistent with, or less than, those in the community and waits for dentist appointments' consistent with community experience.
- The Board received five applications regarding external hospital appointments. Further investigation showed that the issues were not a result of any problems in the prison but were due to national issues with obtaining appointments.
- From the Board's observations, healthcare complaint forms are readily available in all residential areas.
- Acknowledgement of a healthcare complaint is sent by the head of healthcare (usually within one day of receipt) and a response to the complaint is sent within one week or less. Response letters provide instruction about what to do if a prisoner is unhappy with the response (i.e. the right to appeal). The complaint is reviewed by a different member of staff of the equivalent, or near equivalent, grade. If the prisoner is still unhappy, they are provided with the details of Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (these PALS complaint forms are available on the wings).
- The Board reports no concerns around the management of healthcare complaints.

6.2 Physical healthcare

- In the reporting year, the Board received 16 applications regarding healthcare issues. None of the applications flagged up areas of particular concern, in the Board's view.
- The Board has found healthcare staff both helpful and approachable when answering queries, while properly safeguarding patient confidentiality.

6.3 Mental health

- The number of prisoners on the mental health team's caseload ranged between 14 and 20 per month during the reporting year.
- The number of prisoners on the neuro-developmental pathway averaged 10 at any one time.
- The Maidstone psychology team is now fully staffed: psychologist, one day a week; counsellor/therapist (same person), four days a week (split role, covering two days for each); assistant psychologist, three days a week; healthcare assistant, three days a week (8am to 7.30pm; includes primary care evening cover).
- The psychology team runs regular groups to try and work through the waiting list. The team reports that waiting times are becoming more manageable.
- The healthcare assistant's role includes wing drop-ins to see prisoners who repeatedly self-refer for minor complaints or those requesting to be seen urgently. They also support the running of psychology group sessions where and when necessary.
- Difficulties for healthcare staff accessing their online system which were seen last year and with prescribing some medications are no longer an issue.
- The lack of availability of low and medium secure beds nationally remains a concern.
- The Board has observed that the mental health team is a visible and approachable presence around the prison. Its attendance at ACCT reviews (and good order or discipline/GOOD reviews, when applicable) is significant and prisoners consistently report to the Board that they receive good support from the team.

6.4 Social care

- The Board is included on the adult safeguarding and healthcare local delivery board recommended attendees list for monitoring purposes.
- In December 2023, ten prisoners on the social care list included two prisoners with care plans in place; six prisoners awaiting Kent County Council (KCC) signature on paperwork, KCC care reports or still waiting to be seen by KCC; one prisoner refusing to engage; and one prisoner deemed not needing social care support.
- The Board welcomes the social care initiative and hopes to report further on its effectiveness in our next report.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

- In May 2023, changes were made to the weekend regime to offer more time out of cell.
- In September 2023, changes were made to allow prisoners on the enhanced (top) level of the incentives scheme time out of cell one night per week on a rotational basis.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

- The charity, Change, Grow, Live (CGL), reports that the main challenges at Maidstone are the brewing and consumption of alcohol and the use of cannabis, with occasional use of Spice (a synthetic drug that mimics the effects of cannabis) and cocaine.

- The average number of clients on the CGL caseload during reporting year was 100. Previous issues with the healthcare department informing CGL of new clinical clients have now been addressed.
- CGL staffing during the reporting year was low, but the charity reports that this has now improved.
- There were three CGL peer workers, that is, prisoners assisting the CGL team, at the beginning of the reporting year, but this has now been reduced to two.
- CGL reported that prisoners' previous concerns about the loss of earnings or dismissal from employment or education because of attendance at CGL group sessions do not appear to have been an issue during this reporting year.
- Alcoholics Anonymous continues to run weekly sessions. CGL reported that Narcotics Anonymous does not run sessions and has not made plans to come in to the prison.

6.7 Soft skills

- There are several opportunities for people to improve their soft skills. All sessions run for approximately an hour and can be attended once a week. Some of the sessions are voluntary, these include Beating Time. Some are peer support activities such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Some are by referral by the mental health team, such as Emotional Coping Skills.
- The range on offer is good, but there are only about 140 places available each week. Given a population of 600 this is a small number. The Board hopes that the prison will expand the number of soft skill opportunities available, and that HMPPS will provide funds to allow this to happen.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

- Education services are provided by Milton Keynes College (MKC), which took over the prison contract in 2023. So, this is the first year that MKC has been involved in setting the Annual Delivery Plan for Education.
- Milton Keynes College and the prison have selected a broad curriculum, designed to meet the needs of learners.
- The intention is to allow progression through levels and to prepare learners to progress in education or in skills and work. For example, ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) learners who progress to the end of the course are then able to progress onto industry-recognised qualifications such as multi-skills. These include bricklaying, plastering, painting and decorating, tiling and also barista and food production.
- Recruitment has progressed, with staff and teachers coming in to provide ESOL pre-entry, bricklaying, catering and plastering courses, as well as induction. A reading strategy champion has also been employed. Eight staff are now in post with a full complement of 12 planned.
- The last Ofsted inspection highlighted a number of areas of concern and MKC is working through an action plan to address these. It includes a quality improvement plan, with priorities such as the quality of education, reading and tutorial plans. It also includes a plan to increase the education offer, as well as the quality of the offer.
- There were 1235 educational places planned over the year, although the teaching capacity to deliver this is not all in place.
- As HMP Maidstone is an establishment for foreign national prisoners, there is a demand for English language and literacy, as well as vocational, qualifications. However, Ofsted expects a set amount of functional skills training, which leads to some tension in the educational offer. The prison Governors have supported a reduction to four functional skills sets a year, which will help provide capacity for the courses that are in higher demand.
- The challenges faced by the education service are similar to the rest of the prison in the area of digital technology. For example, there were no SMART boards and the only computer scanner available was unreliable. MKC has arranged for nine SMART white boards to be purchased and installed to support modern teaching methodologies.
- Library services are provided by Kent Library Services and a wide range of books are provided in a range of languages, as well as English.

7.2 Vocational training, work

- Providing vocational training and meaningful work is a challenge. Workshop areas, such as the carpentry workshop, which allow prisoners to design and create items for prison use and to be sold by charities, are popular and constructive and the partnership with British Gypsum for training in plastering is welcome.
- The Board has observed that the outdoors team, encompassing waste management and gardening, is well organised, effective and popular.
- The Board considers the kitchen to be well run, although food quality and quantity issues have been raised by the community council.

- However, the ambition for all prisoners to be fully occupied requires a broader range of modern meaningful work and education to be provided.

7.3 Offender management, progression

- The Board considers the offender management unit (OMU) to be effective and it has managed a reduction in prisoners who no longer meet the criteria to be held in HMP Maidstone. However, there remain a number of prisoners who should not be in a category C prison, having been recategorised to a category D (open) prison or having been issued with an IS91 notice.
- The number of IS91 detainees (individuals who have completed their custodial sentence but are still of interest to the Home Office) fell significantly to an average of nine a month from an average of 31 a month in 2021.
- The number of category D prisoners detained was eight on average.
- At the end of the fourth quarter, 21 prisoners who had passed their early release scheme (ERS) date remained in Maidstone.
- The OMU reported that, for the purposes of resettlement, between 1 March 2023 and 29 February 2024, 738 prisoners/detainees were discharged from the establishment. Of these, 627 (85%) were removed from the UK or were moved to an IRC for removal from the UK. A total of 111 (15%) were released or bailed into the UK.
- The percentage of those released into the UK dropped in the reporting year, compared with the figure of around 33% in the previous reporting period.

7.4 Family contact

- Family services are undertaken by PACT.
- Residents are eligible for two social visits a month. The visits' room is adequate for the purpose, with a children's play area and a tea bar selling a limited range of refreshments. Each session can take up to 24 prisoners, although there is the potential for more social visits' spaces, if staff are available to supervise. Visit slots are usually fully booked.
- Family days (which bring together men and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings) restarted in December 2022, with an increased time of two hours and up to 24 families able to attend. Visits took place quarterly during the reporting year.
- Social video calls are available for prisoners whose families have difficulty visiting in person.
- In-cell telephony has helped the men to maintain contact with their families.
- The Board did not receive any applications regarding visits.

7.5 Resettlement planning

- The resettlement management unit continues to make good progress in implementing its programme of action. There is a preparation for release booklet, used to encourage prisoner engagement in resettlement plans. The unit systematically revisits the information provided by the prisoners three months before their release eligibility dates. They have also developed a country-specific resettlement release pack. There is a system in place for providing clothing for prisoners who are leaving Maidstone.
- Maidstone, unlike other establishments for foreign national prisoners, has no release on temporary licence (ROTL) scheme, which is regrettable. The Board believes there is value in providing a ROTL scheme.

8. The work of the IMB

Although the Board had several fewer members than recommended, the prison was monitored regularly, with two to four in-person visits a week. Four members resigned. A recruitment campaign resulted in two new members joining the Board.

The Board has an open and honest relationship with the Governor and the senior team, which results in issues brought up by the Board being carefully considered and responded to appropriately.

The Board is keen to encourage links with the other establishments for foreign national prisoners and those prisons with significant foreign national prisoner populations.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	5
Total number of visits to the establishment	300 (295 in 2022-2023)
Total number of GOoD reviews observed	85 (35 in 2022-2023)

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	9 (2.3%)	8 (3.8%)
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	19 (4.9%)	9 (4.3%)
C	Equality	6 (1.5%)	5 (1%)
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	7 (1.8%)	1 (0.5%)
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	50 (12.9%)	4 (1.9%)
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	22 (5.7%)	4 (1.9%)
F	Food and kitchens	10 (2.6%)	4 (1.91%)
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	23 (5.9%)	16 (8.2%)
H1	Property within the establishment	45 (11.6%)	13 (6.3%)
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	36 (9.3%)	36 (17.3%)
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	18 (4.6%)	7 (3.4%)
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	76 (19.6%)	72 (34.6%)
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	28 (7.2%)	17 (8.2%)
K	Transfers	5 (1.3%)	5 (2.4%)
L	Miscellaneous	34 (8.8%)	9 (4.3%)
	Total number of applications	388	208



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