



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Deerbolt

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

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

At a baseline level, a maximum of 529¹ sentenced men can be accommodated at HMP/YOI Deerbolt, which is in a semi-rural location near Barnard Castle in County Durham. 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 prison) was reduced to 387 from June 2019, but now numbers have increased to nearer to 470.

Deerbolt is a category C training and resettlement prison (which means it holds prisoners with a low escape risk but who cannot be trusted in open conditions). It was first established as a young offender institution (YOI) for 18-21 year olds with sentences of up to four years, and has education, work training and activities to suit this prisoner group. Last year, this was increased up to the age of 29. This age limit has now been lifted, meaning that Deerbolt can accept male prisoners of any age.

The main providers of services in the prison are Novus (education), Amey (works/maintenance), Spectrum (healthcare) and Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (mental health). Visitor care and support is provided by the voluntary agency, North East Prison Aftercare Society (NEPACS), which also offers provision for family social visits and group work with young fathers.

The purpose-built establishment was opened in 1973. It includes an administration centre, 10 residential wings with exercise yards (including the new K wing and segregation unit), substantial industrial workshops and education classrooms, a gymnasium, reception, chapel, reducing reoffending unit and visitors' centre. The buildings have been maintained over the years and have regularly been refurbished by the prison to meet both the latest regulations for fire safety and general standards.

Gaining access to available keys is often a challenge, with many staff in the establishment.

Prisoners are received from a wide national catchment area and not just the north east region.

¹ Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's/YOI'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

Background to the report

In the reporting period, the Board is confident that members have visited and engaged in dialogue in all areas of the prison. Through this, we feel that we have covered as much ground as seemingly possible for a group of volunteers. Our members have shown understanding about the challenges faced by HMP/YOI Deerbolt and, as such, brought great enthusiasm to the role. We believe we have monitored the prison effectively in a fair, balanced and accurate way and provided maximum value for the public's investment in the IMB.

The IMB at Deerbolt recognises and reports on the enormous difficulties facing the Prison Service, particularly as it recovers from the ever-present staffing recruitment and retention challenges. As noted in our previous report, the Board is still concerned about the lack of meaningful rehabilitation at a time when staffing numbers have stabilised. The IMB continues to believe that this is not the fault of the senior management team at Deerbolt, who are not only aware of the challenges but often still go above and beyond to provide suitable activity. During the reporting period, the IMB has been concerned about the turnover of newly enrolled staff and their competency in the role. In addition, on numerous occasions in the reporting period, we have been disappointed by the lack of professionalism and the inability of some new staff to lead prisoners in everyday tasks. This, amplified by recurrent issues of officers being redeployed to other prisons, has meant that there has been great stress on the management team to provide a meaningful and productive regime.

Further, the IMB has commented on how difficult it has been to communicate with some prison staff. While we volunteer to monitor the prison, giving up our own time, we are often frustrated with the lack of response to basic requests for information.

3.1 Main findings

Safety

In the Board's experience, Deerbolt feels generally safe, and we have never had any issues while visiting the prison. However, this appears not to be the case for some prisoners and staff. Levels of violence remained high in the reporting period, whether this concerned serious prisoner-on-prisoners assaults or, indeed, prisoner assaults on staff. It is helpful to consider the situation from a prisoner's point of view. So, through circumstances of low staffing or staff inexperience, you are locked up for up to 23 hours on a given day. Then, during this period, you become frustrated by the lack of regime, which is also different to that in your previous establishment. Moreover, you feel you have not been given the opportunity to channel your energy into something meaningful. Next, you find yourself contemplating taking drugs or joining a gang as a coping mechanism. The outcome of all of this may be that you resort to violence for protection, to settle debts and/or for catharsis. With some prison staff not being adept at prison craft and, perhaps, not having the skills to interact with prisoners on a one-to-one basis, there is an increased likelihood of the prisoner lashing out. That said, while violence is often hard to predict, we are

confident that prison management at Deerbolt thoroughly understands the person behind the behaviour and the complexities of most prisoner relationships.

So, as an overview, it would be difficult to suggest that Deerbolt is a safe place for some prisoners. This is backed up by our regular dialogue with the senior management team, which often describes the challenges posed by drugs, violence and/or debts. That said, senior Deerbolt staff should be commended for their 'intelligence' work, as we are confident that they endeavour to understand the profile of all the men in the prison. However, it has to be stated that, if prisoners were engaged in more meaningful activity, this might give them alternative ways of channelling their energy. The Board believes this could help reduce the 'attractiveness' of drugs to many prisoners who take such just to pass their time.

Fair and humane treatment

As noted from observations during our four previous reporting periods, staff, both individually and collectively, try to do their best to treat the prisoners fairly and humanely. Moreover, the Board also believes that prison staff hold quality one-to-one communication with the most vulnerable prisoners and those with challenging behaviour. However, from conversation with prisoners, we are concerned about the interaction between the staff and the wider population and with individuals who often do not comply with the prison regime. That said, while we found it difficult to analyse the quality of this dialogue, the increase in key worker sessions, which were observed during the reporting period, can only be a real positive. However, there may also be issue with how this message is coherently relayed to the prisoners through some staff. As a result of this, on multiple occasions, the now more experienced and 'savvy' prisoners have complained about how, on some days, staff have not completed basic tasks, such as facilitating medications to wings or giving prisoners adequate yard time.

The IMB would like to praise Deerbolt staff in the segregation unit for their organisation and compassion, as well as their commitment to prisoners with more complex needs, particularly when they often have to manage challenging behaviour. While Deerbolt still does not have suitable facilities to deal with many of those with complex needs, the staff have continued to try to understand the challenges by developing relationships and showing patience. Segregation unit staff have continued to communicate with the IMB and keep us informed of prisoners' circumstances. The now rejuvenated laundry facilities should also be commended, as this service has been a major concern for the Board over past reporting periods.

Health and wellbeing

In previous reports, healthcare staff (both physical and mental) have been commended for their high-level service. We would, again, like to praise the effective work of the drug and alcohol rehabilitation team (DART), which continues to collaborate with other teams, and to the dentistry team for its work. However, with an increase in the age profile of the average prisoner, together with the aforementioned staffing challenges and the facilities of Deerbolt, the physical healthcare team has struggled during this period. The Board notes that staff are under huge pressure and are not to blame for the struggles. But it is no surprise that we have received complaints from prisoners regarding healthcare during the reporting period. With such radical changes in the requirements of the provision, should a rapid increase in

prisoners' ages not have led to changes in provision/funding changes? Should this not have been forecasted by management external to Deerbolt?

As an overview of wellbeing needs, prisoners are often locked up for too long, although the prison does endeavour to organise activities to help keep them occupied.

The Board urges HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) senior executives to visit Deerbolt, so they can meet the healthcare team, urgently review the staffing model and support additional resources that are clearly needed to meet the demands from the establishment.

Progression and resettlement

From the Board's observations, there have been continued improvements, since 2022, in the level of and availability of education provision, owing towards progressive rehabilitation. However, aligned with other areas of this report, if you rapidly increase the average age of prisoners overnight without being able to change the offering, how can prisoners be meaningfully progressed towards improved rehabilitation and, potentially, reduced recidivism rates in the future?

Improvements in the number of staff and the ability of Novus (the education provider) to meet its contractual obligations have been observed, although staffing issues continue to impact classes. In common with our previous report, the prison still struggles with short-notice cancellations of classes, due to prison staff shortages or unexpected issues or incidents, which continue to blight the delivery of this form of rehabilitation. The Board has observed a high standard of tuition and prisoners generally being engaged. With prisoners often familiar with many other institutions, the move from an experienced category C trainer to Deerbolt, for example, into part-time, rather than full-time, work, to a restrictive regime due to staff shortages, they become frustrated in their everyday activities. That said, the IMB remains concerned, especially about the perception of how frequently provision is cancelled, due to staffing or accommodation issues, and the ability of the provision to suit the ever-increasing ageing demographic of HMP Deerbolt.

The IMB would commend the high-level work of the library staff, who often develop novel initiatives to stimulate the prisoners, as well as the offender management unit (OMU) and the work of the resettlement planning team at the prison. We believe that while some prisoners are often confused about how they meet the requirements for a category C establishment, the quality of dialogue between case managers and the resettlement service is performed to a very high standard, with prisoners often released to suitable accommodation on release. Although, it must be added that, as a region, the north east could benefit from more beds for prisoners so they are not released without a fixed abode.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The Board urges HMPPS to visit Deerbolt, meet the healthcare team, urgently review the staffing model and support additional resources clearly needed to

meet the demands from the establishment. When will the Minister's office set up this meeting?

- Does the Minister believe that changing Deerbolt from a young offender institution to a category C prison has been a success?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- It appears that, on the surface, Deerbolt has improved figures for staff retention and, as such, officers often have more than two years' experience at the prison/YOI. However, we are often concerned by the lack of prison craft of officers. Is there any way that Deerbolt can gain the necessary funding for senior officers to be placed on each wing of the establishment to improve such skill level?
- As this was highlighted in the previous report but not answered, we ask again how HMPPS will ensure that staffing levels and site-specific demands are considered before assigning staff to other locations? Will the focus be on enabling each site to maintain a full operational regime rather than mandating a percentage of staff to be sent on detached duty, potentially compromising the functioning of the sending establishment?
- HMP/YOI Deerbolt is in a rural area, remote from main centres. Is this acknowledged and how will it be factored into holding onto existing staff and further recruitment? We ask, again, as this question was not answered in our previous report.
- It is nearly five years since the start of the Covid pandemic, yet prisons are often locking up prisoners at similar levels, due to alternative challenges such as low staffing. Will the Prison Service consider changing legislation to set out a 'new minimum regime'?
- Does the Prison Service have plans to build on local links to improve employment opportunities for prisoners on release?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- What oversight does the Governor have over the prioritisation of works within the establishment?
- HMP/YOI Deerbolt is an important employer in the local community. Are there further plans to improve the visibility of the prison in the community?
- During the reporting period, we were not sent key information about individuals in the segregation unit, the use of special accommodation and these prisoners' incentives scheme status, because the details were removed from the daily stability report. Can the Governor confirm that they will now send the Board this information regularly?

3.3 Progress since the last report

It is undeniable to the Board that the Deerbolt management team has shown sensitivity and compassion in navigating the ever-changing landscape of prisoner demographics. Moreover, it should be commended on how staff often think outside the box in working with prisoners and while developing novel initiatives when doing so.

However, for optimal progress to happen at Deerbolt, the IMB feels that further financial support and local powers are required to support the management team.

While we are aware that this is the case in many public areas, for existing staff to be developed/staff sickness to be reduced, for outdated facilities to be improved and a rehabilitative culture to be promoted, all in a bid to reduce recidivism rates in the community, increased funding needs to happen and staff should be allowed to make their decisions more freely. Failing that, Deerbolt should be a prison that people 'are talking about'. Consider that tax payers' money was spent on providing an establishment that was geared to training 'young lads', aged 18-21, and successfully rehabilitating them. Then, fast forward, just a couple of years, and now prisoners are of any age and from different backgrounds, serving different lengths of sentences and having contrasting sentencing experience. If you go from being a specialist to a general prison, what should follow, in the Board's view, is a top-down approach, to not only improve facilities, but also a large-scale review to consider whether existing prison management is being given all the tools necessary to be allowed the opportunity to make the prison a success. In the Board's view, the previous quantifiable success, obtained through the Prisons Strategy White Paper, is too inflexible for the needs and quantified success of prisons such as Deerbolt. It is unfair on staff when they are giving 100%, day in, day out, to simply be notified that their prison is not performing to the required standard. Inevitably, this leads to low morale, negatively effecting everyone on the prison.

Issue raised	Response given	Action taken
To the Minister		
Many ageing establishments, including Deerbolt, require significant investment for maintenance and upkeep. How does the Minister plan to secure ample funding for this purpose?	HMPPS is generating a long-term strategy beyond the current review period. With it, there will be condition surveys that will inform subsequent budgets.	The IMB will continue to monitor any future funding.
Despite population pressures, how will the Minister ensure that HMPPS is held accountable for ensuring prisoners are located as close as reasonably possible to their families to better support and enable contact, as recommended in Lord Farmer's report?	As Deerbolt is considered a 'national resource', it can receive prisoners from anywhere in the UK. However, there are complex considerations that need to take place to facilitate a move in these situations.	The IMB remains concerned about prison transfers at more local establishments to where the prisoner is to be released.
We now have a dozen IPP [imprisonment for public protection] prisoners at Deerbolt who do not understand what they need to do to gain release (particularly when they are past their original sentenced	HMPPS has developed an updated action plan that will allow for IPP prisoners to have sentence plans. At the time of the response, Deerbolt has six IPP	In a very sensitive and complex area, the IMB remains concerned with regard to the long-term outcomes for

<p>detention date) and whether Deerbolt can, in fact, offer the level of service necessary to let them attain their release. May we have clarity from the Minister on how to achieve certainty for each individual prisoner?</p> <p>Deerbolt's location is in a rural area, remote from the main centres. Is this recognised and how will they factor this into holding onto existing staff and further recruitment?</p> <p>Given the number of services that a prison leaver often needs to access on release, how will the Minister ensure that prisons are adequately equipped to deliver on their designated roles? Also, in cases where establishments operate beyond their standard functions, such as training prisons handling prisoners in their resettlement phase, how will the Minister guarantee sufficient resources and support (as stated in the Prisons Strategy White Paper), ensuring equal attention and expert guidance for those in training prisons nearing release?</p>	<p>prisoners and they are given thorough assessment and support when in the prison.</p> <p>This was not answered.</p> <p>The National Allocation Protocol and Offender Flows enable prisoners to be held in prisons providing adequate levels of security and allows them to have interventions to help them progress. Where prisoners are in the resettlement cohort and remain in a training prison, the Probation Service provides commissioned rehabilitation services for sentenced prisoners, wherever they are held and released.</p>	<p>IPP prisoners at the establishment.</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>The success of this will be monitored by the Board in the forthcoming reporting periods.</p>
<p>To the Prison Service</p> <p>While acknowledging the need to support establishments across the country, how will HMPPS ensure that staffing levels and site-specific demands are considered before assigning staff to other locations? Will the focus be on enabling each site to maintain a full operational regime rather than mandating a percentage of staff to be sent on</p>	<p>Not answered.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

detached duty, potentially compromising the functioning of the sending establishment?		
<p>To the Governor</p> <p>What oversight does the Governor have over the prioritisation of works within the establishment?</p> <p>HMP/YOI Deerbolt is an important employer in the local community. Are there further plans to improve the visibility of the prison in the community?</p>	<p>The Governor explained to the IMB Board the contractual obligations of external groups and that the prison is very much reliant on others with regard to works in the establishment.</p> <p>The Governor reassured us that the prison is to now develop outward reach, particularly with regard to community links.</p>	<p>This is an ongoing monitoring area.</p> <p>The Governor did meet with local councillors regarding links. The IMB feels that further external visibility would benefit the prison in the short- and long-term.</p>

Evidence sections 4 – 7

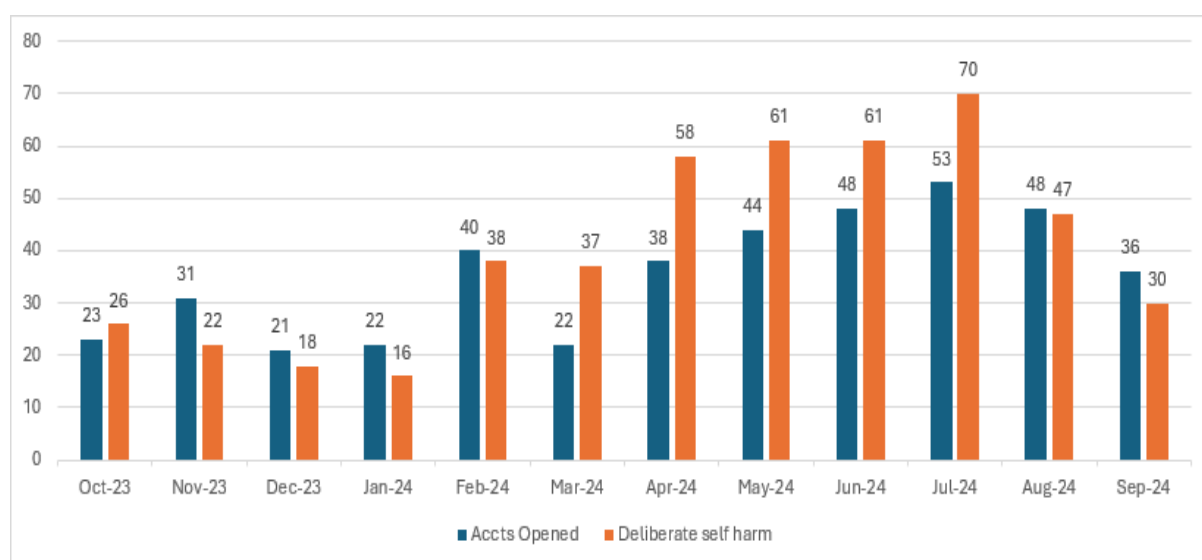
4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Reception of prisoners appears to be thorough and competent, although there continues to be immense frustration at the loss of the personal possessions (as in, they don't arrive with the prisoner), as well as the inevitable cost of compensation and the expense of resolution. However, it must be noted that Deerbolt has had an approximate 50% increase in the number of prisoners. Also, there has been a wholesale move from a YOI prison to include a much wider age range of prisoner. This has been demonstrated by statistics highlighted in September 2024, namely that there were 260 prisoners when it was a YOI but now close to 500 men as a category C prison, 30 of whom have medical issues requiring a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP).

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

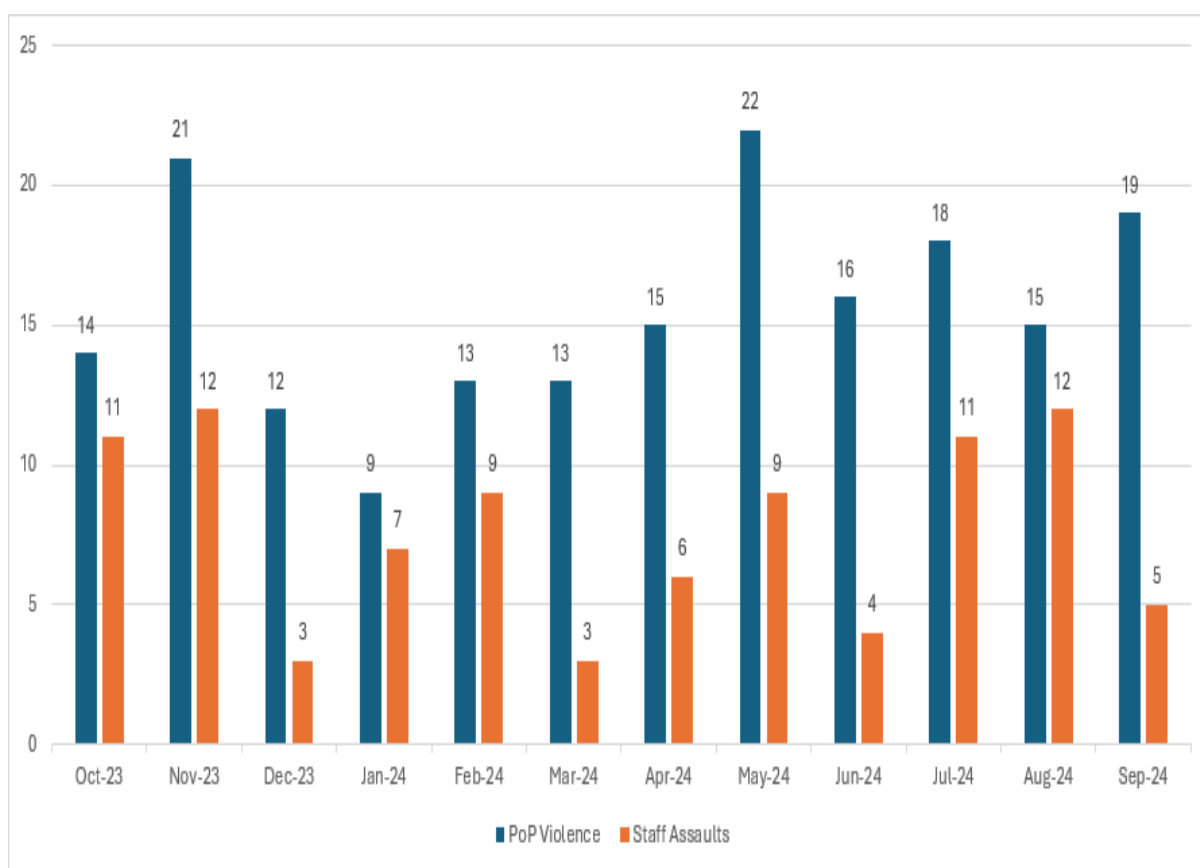
Rates of self-harm and the number of assessment, care in custody and team work (ACCT) plans opened (which are used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) appear to be higher than last year. While, as with other years, the Board is very concerned about this and acknowledges that it needs to be actively monitored, it may well be that Deerbolt staff are now improving their ability to assess and report on such incidents. While incidents do happen with individual prisoners, staff are aware of such instances. The preponderance of prisoner safety issues concern drugs, which remain a problem for us, as is seemingly the case across the entire prison estate, self-harm, which is monitored closely, and assaults, both prisoner on prisoner and prisoner on staff.



4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Prisoner violence is an ongoing problem and, as the Governor has reported to the IMB at our monthly board meetings, most of these issues are associated with drugs, violence or debt. While the number of violent incidents and assaults on staff are comparable with the last reporting period, we remain impressed by Deerbolt's management of individual prisoners, awareness of associates and non-associates and co-ordination of intelligence. However, there is a stark deficiency in the ability of Deerbolt to allocate a senior resident prison officer to each of the wings and with substantial numbers of new staff, often with little 'prison craft' experience. New staff are more likely to be micromanaged, on a one-to-one basis, which increases the opportunities for prisoner-on-staff and prisoner-on-prisoner assaults. Senior officers are sorely needed to lead a high, consistent level of safe prison environment. We understand the frustration of prison leadership with the apparent difficulties of securing them.

The IMB regularly observes safety intervention meetings (SIMs), which are well attended. Information is shared and actions planned, supported by an impressive knowledge of prisoners' behaviour traits and needs. There is a focused effort in maintaining a safe establishment and dealing with immediate issues, but at the heart of these is a mix of debt, drugs, violence and frustration at the inconsistencies of regime, restrictions on movement and association.



4.4 Use of force

Use of force continues to be limited at Deerbolt and is not a concern for the Board. When incidents occur or when we may be required because of prisoner actions, we continue to be quickly made aware of circumstances. As noted in our previous report, where there are ongoing incidents, the IMB is notified and able to monitor any control and resolution. In response to prisoner requests, we have observed force being used on a number of occasions, and we have been confident about its application.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Seemingly in common with other UK prisons, substance misuse is an ongoing problem. With a change in the demographic of the prison and men being moved in from other establishments, there have been multiple occasions where prisoners have had a 'code blue' (a medical emergency when someone has breathing difficulties or has collapsed) due to drug use. With prisoners being locked up for long periods of time, the Board is in no doubt that a lack of meaningful activity is contributing to this issue.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing and food

Residential wings

Deerbolt has 10 residential wings and a care and separation unit (CSU), where men are segregated from other prisoners. J wing has closed permanently, and we expect it will be demolished, as it is uneconomic to repair. K wing closed for refurbishment, but significant structural problems were found and work is ongoing. G wing is used for inductions and appears to function well. It is also used for young prisoners moving to an adult prison, pending the re-opening of K wing.

All the open wings appear to be in good condition and reasonably clean. A 'clean wing' competition provides some incentive for the men to keep standards up. The furnishings are often damaged or old and in poor repair. We understand that this will be addressed by an in-house repair workshop, which should save money and waste. The gym is very well equipped and seems to be well used by the men. I wing runs as an incentivised substance free living (ISFL) wing, which is popular and appears to be successful. It has a more open regime, with communal dining and activities such as karaoke. There are plans to open a second ISFL wing and, in due course, a 'lifer' wing with a similar regime. The prison is not overcrowded. Repairs to the fabric of the buildings take some time, although priority is given to the CSU.

Laundry

The laundrette has an efficient wing rota for washing and drying prisoner clothing on the same day, while bedding is laundered off site. The system seems to work well, resulting in far fewer complaints than in previous years.

Food

The menu runs on a four-weekly cycle. Breakfasts are pre-packed cereal or porridge, delivered once a week with teabags and long-life milk cartons. The lunch and afternoon meal options include hot and cold choices, with biscuits, fruit and a dessert. Meals are served at the wing servery and mostly eaten in the cells. Menu choices are made on paper and sent to the catering team. The menu is clearly set out to show the type of dish, and symbols are used to assist men who have reading challenges. Themed meal choices are offered each month. An analysis of the menu shows a good range of poultry, meat and fish options, as well as healthy, vegetarian, vegan and halal choices.

Even though the daily food allowance is still low, the catering team manages to provide a varied menu, as well as special diets, which include soft food for men with dental issues. The IMB has noticed a considerable drop in food-related complaints during our monitoring visits – a big change from previous years. A prisoner survey found that most men rated the food as 'average' or 'good'. Portion sizes can vary with the level of supervision of the meal service and has sometimes resulted in wings running out before all prisoners have received their meals.

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit, or CSU, has 13 cells and two special accommodation cells (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety). The wing is in good condition and damage seems to be repaired

promptly. Facilities are basic and include a library and an outdoor exercise area. All the good order or discipline (GOoD) reviews (where it is determined if a prisoner who has been segregated due to disruptive behaviour should remain segregated) we have observed have been fair and supportive, with reasonable outcomes. We have escalated to the Governor our concerns about not having any data on the number of men in the CSU and how often the special accommodation has been used. This is because the information was removed from the daily stability report, so we have been unable to confirm our observations. Nevertheless, we have found the CSU to be well managed and usually calm, while relationships between the staff and men appear good.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Deerbolt continues to have issues with staff recruitment, retention and sickness absence. Most of the staff cohort have less than two years' service, which means there are not enough experienced people to act as mentors or buddies or to guide them in 'jail craft'. Some prisoners who are serving long sentences seem to know more about the prison regime and rules than the officers on their wing. This is not unique to Deerbolt. Prisoners tell us that they struggle to contact their prison offender managers (POMs) and probation officers. The number of key worker sessions has increased and work is ongoing to improve the quality of recording information from the sessions. Staff absences have led to frequent regime curtailments and reduced opportunities for staff and prisoners to talk and resolve issues or build positive relationships. Managers have been working to bring absent staff back to the prison and to get those on restricted duties fully operational again. However this is ongoing, with limited success to date. From our observations, while good relationships do exist between staff and prisoners alike, general morale between most staff and prisoners was often at a low level during the reporting period.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Reports of discrimination incidents have been monitored throughout the year. The average is four or five a month. For example, in November 2023, 10 reports were made in regard to protected characteristics (which include, among others, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation): four concerned sexual orientation; four were about race; and two were in regard to religion/belief. None of the incidents reported involved complaints about staff behaviour.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Deerbolt has a multi-faith chaplaincy team, which has adapted to the changing needs of the population. Visiting chaplains supplement the team, so most prisoners can see a chaplain of their faith. Regular Christian and Muslim services take place and the team provides pastoral care for any prisoner who wants to have a confidential chat with someone who isn't a prison officer. They are a visible presence in the CSU and on the wings each day. The annual collaboration with the Angel Tree charity continued at Christmas. Video links enabled men to observe the funerals of loved ones when they couldn't attend in person. The chaplaincy team began working with the Proclaim Trust. The work involves prisoners writing their story and presenting it to an audience of staff and other prisoners. The presentations were thought provoking and very moving.

5.6 Incentive schemes

The incentives scheme has not changed since our last report, although it is under review again. We have not had any data on the number of prisoners on each level of the regime, as this information was removed from the daily stability report.

5.7 Complaints

Most complaints concerned residential issues, followed by issues about property, finance/cash, staff, and letters/censors. As wings reopened after refurbishment, the prison population increased and involved many prisoner movements. We remain concerned that HMPPS does not have robust property-handling procedures in place to ensure that property moves with the prisoner, or to make enquiries to reunite property when it doesn't arrive with the prisoner.

We are unsure about how robust the complaints data is when no complaints are recorded under some headings. Healthcare is one example where we know complaints have been made but responses have not been forthcoming. We will follow this up in our next reporting year.

5.8 Property

See comments, above, in 5.7.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

- Physical healthcare and drug and alcohol testing services are provided by Spectrum.
- Dental care is provided by Burgess and Hyder.
- Mental healthcare is provided by Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV).
- A local delivery board, chaired by the Deputy Governor, is supposed to meet monthly, and to which the IMB is invited, for observation purposes. Throughout the reporting period, many of these meetings have not taken place or the IMB has not been informed of changes in dates so we have not been able to observe them.

6.2 Physical healthcare

- The increase in the number of older prisoners in the establishment continues to lead to issues and the healthcare department has struggled with delivery.
- The main issue with healthcare during the reporting issue has been staffing levels not being able to cope with the increasing demand for services from an older prison population.
- When the head of the healthcare department and other staff have been on leave, agency staff have been brought in. A business case had been put forward in relation to changing the staffing profile, and this had to be escalated to HMPPS.
- The Board is aware of an increased number of prisoner complaints about healthcare and, in some cases, it would appear responses have not been received. We know of at least one complaint where a prisoner was not treated on time, with serious repercussions for his health.
- Healthcare staff have reported that they are often threatened by prisoners and they don't trust the prison process to act on threatening behaviour.
- Dental services have appeared to perform well throughout the reporting period.

6.3 Mental health

- There is a common theme noted by the IMB during the reporting period that prisoners spend too much time in their cells, with too little to do. This appears to be due to staff shortages and does not help prisoners' mental health and wellbeing.
- The prison organises groupwork sessions covering trauma, acupuncture, books/reading, therapeutic art and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for insomnia. However, staffing issues during the reporting period have led to difficulties in delivery. Peer mentors continue to help with the positive delivery of health promotion in the wings.

6.4 Social care

- From the Board's observations, local authority social care assistance continues to be delivered well where there are individual needs.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

- The limited regime at Deerbolt during the reporting period, due to staff shortages, continues to affect prisoners' time out of their cells each day. This has resulted in the regime being cancelled and reduced access to the gymnasium at points.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

- DART regularly attends healthcare board meetings, and there is good collaboration with the other healthcare teams.
- In addition to structured face-to-face work, group sessions take place, but staff shortages can affect delivery.
- DART has worked very closely with the team on the induction wing to help make sure that new inductees were able to get harm-reduction face-to-face sessions.

6.7 Soft skills

- Staffing issues have generally affected the regime and most other most activities, although towards the end of the reporting period, group activities restarted, as referenced above.

Healthcare report themes

- The IMB commends and congratulate all healthcare staff for their hard work and efforts during the reporting period. Staff are clearly working under increased pressure and stress, with little acknowledgement or understanding from the Prison Service hierarchy of what demands have been placed on the healthcare service by the increasing the prison's adult population.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

Following the introduction of the new prison education service in September 2023, Deerbolt was quick to fill the posts of head of education, skills and work (ESW) and neurodiversity support manager (NSM). The benefits were immediate, particularly in the case of the appointment of head of ESW, who has provided new impetus to this area, capitalising on their experience from outside the Prison Service. The introduction of a new profile in October 2023 saw a significant increase in achieved education, training and work programmes. This was largely maintained until July/August 2024, when staff shortages, once again, resulted in regime restrictions.

The prison's transformation from a young offender institution (YOI) to a category C training prison (where young offenders are now, typically, around 18% of the population) has not yet been reflected in this area. The Board continues to be concerned about the lack of educational opportunities for the increasingly older prisoner. In the Board's view, this will need to be seriously addressed when the contract is renewed in 2025. The IMB will closely follow developments. That said, the introduction of a CSCS (construction skills certification scheme) Health and Safety Level 1 course (not run by Novus) in March is certainly a step in the right direction.

The ESW department has been budgeted for the full complement of the prison. However, although the prison has been operating at approximately 65-80% capacity over the reporting period, this funding has been only adequate to maintain output and is certainly insufficient to accommodate the needs of the changing age profile. No more money has been assigned for the change in age profile and prison category. Towards the end of the reporting period, the only facility introduced for the older prison cohort was the establishment of a chess club. Although popular, it is by no means a significant contribution to the requirements of older prisoners.

Novus continues to have sufficient staff to meet current contractual requirements. However, there has been a noticeable movement of staff to accommodate short- to medium-term gaps, with varying degrees of success.

In September 2024, there were no waiting lists for English and maths classes. But the rapid influx of prisoners over the early part of the summer has required consideration of expanding class sizes to accommodate the increased numbers which, in due course, may be insufficient. However, a prisoner forum (in June) indicated no more demand for these subjects, although there was a call for more time in industries workshops. When observed at first hand, tuition appears to continue to be of a high standard and the prisoners are, in general, well engaged.

The library continues to be well used and is a comfortable, welcoming space for prisoners.

The appointment of an assistant librarian has allowed the library to meet the additional demand. Wing visits are conducted when prisoners are unable to attend in person. With the older cohort, there has been a corresponding increase in demand for the excellent Storybook Dads and Raising Readers programmes. Both allow engagement between fathers and children, and the library manager is actively encouraging further participation.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Vocational and work activities have largely followed the same regime restriction pattern as the education department. Staffing levels have generally been maintained, but with some unforeseen sickness/retirement issues affecting class availability.

Deerbolt has an established industries building which, at first glance, appears well-equipped. However, maintenance issues have continued to plague the classes in the facility and an eight-week closure of the building did little to improve the reliability of the electrical system, despite it being the principal reason for the closure. During the winter months, in particular, electrical and heating failures have left prisoners cold and frustrated. For the eight-week closure, vocational training was moved to an office building on site, which required imagination by the staff to provide motivation for prisoners without tools and work spaces. By the end of the period, most groups were engaged in useful activity, which should have been provided from the start. A Christmas market (for staff) provided an opportunity to sell products from the industries classes which, in turn, was invested back into materials for use in the workshops.

Most activities appear well run and popular. Barbering, joinery and painting and decorating have seen prisoners achieve worthwhile qualifications. Unfortunately, the City & Guilds (C&G) qualification in the bike shop has been discontinued and with the supervisor's post not filled. The future of the facility is in question, as the prison (quite rightly, in the Board's view) seeks to optimise the training offer to prisoners. A horticulture C&G qualification course has got off to a good start, with the nine of the longest-serving prisoners (in the gardens) acting as the pilot group. If successful, this will be expanded.

A frequent complaint by prisoners, although never formally raised in an application (a prisoner's written representation), remains the comparison of salaries between Deerbolt and other establishments, which appear to be below the levels seen elsewhere. This has become more evident with the increase in older prisoners.

7.3 Offender management, progression

In general, progression of sentence plans has rarely been seen as a particular issue in Deerbolt and the IMB enjoys an open dialogue with the offender management unit (OMU). The Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) appears to be well run and course allocation correctly prioritised, although it has been difficult on occasion to convince prisoners that this is the case. The TSP team takes great care to ensure that prisoners are individually capable of completing the course and provides additional support, as required. The introduction of an in-house Kaizen course in January has been a positive move, but the domestic violence variant is not available at Deerbolt. With constraints over the whole prison estate preventing the transfer of prisoners to facilities where the course is provided, this has caused some issues. There has been some confusion over the requirement to complete Kaizen before becoming eligible for a category D (open) prison.

7.4 Family contact

The relative remoteness of Deerbolt continues to be an issue for visitors, particularly those from further afield, who may rely on public transport. Social video calls alleviate this problem but do not replace personal contact, particularly for those with

children. The north east prison aftercare society (NEPACS) team continues to provide a superb service to visitors, particularly those with young children. An external visitors' centre provides a comfortable, welcoming first impression, although a frequent complaint is that it appears to be a low priority for maintenance issues. The IMB has assisted in raising their concerns. The visiting area inside the prison is itself well maintained and enhanced by a crèche and a canteen.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Deerbolt now has access to a prison employment lead on a one-day-per-week loan from HMP Durham, with an aspiration to create a full-time position as more prisoners are being released directly from Deerbolt. The 'jobs unlocked' initiative has closed down but is expected to be replaced. Meanwhile, Ingeus and People Plus staff are very proactive in identifying prisoner career options and setting goals. The IMB has not received any applications regarding a lack of support in this area.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	181
Total number of shifts on the 0800 telephone line*	N/A
Total number of segregation reviews observed	29

*If relevant

Applications to the IMB (if relevant)

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	2	3
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	0	4
C	Equality	0	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	7	6
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	4	2
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	2	2
F	Food and kitchens	4	5
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	3	14
H1	Property within this establishment	7	7
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	2	3
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	1	1
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	7	2
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	6	11
K	Transfers	5	4
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	1	2
	Total number of applications	51	66



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