



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

**For reporting year
1 February 2024 to 31 January 2025**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated. Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

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

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

The Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty.

The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Lewes is a reception and resettlement category B local prison for adult and young adult prisoners. It mostly serves the courts of East and West Sussex and holds sentenced and unsentenced prisoners, prisoners on remand and young adults (age 18 to 21) in categories B and C. It also takes some category D prisoners returned from open conditions and holds people whose prison sentences have been completed but are detained under Home Office powers prior to deportation.

The prison's operational capacity (maximum accommodated without risk of disruption due to overcrowding) at the end of January 2025 was 620¹: at that time, the prison held 581 prisoners: twelve months earlier, it was holding 554 prisoners.

The prison is located in the East Sussex county town of Lewes. Its main buildings, with five residential wings, were completed in 1853. A modern block, with two residential wings, opened in 2008. There are seven residential wings in total, plus a healthcare wing and a care and separation unit used to segregate prisoners. Details of the accommodation are as follows:

- A wing: a general wing for drug recovery, housing up to 125 prisoners.
- B wing: the care and separation unit (CSU) for segregating prisoners, with 16 cells, including two where a prisoner can be kept under constant supervision by a member of staff to reduce the risk of suicide or self-harm, and two special accommodation cells where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of prisoner safety.
- C wing: a general wing, housing up to 150 prisoners.
- F wing: for vulnerable prisoners, housing up to 147 prisoners; also used to house a small number of newly arrived prisoners when the early days centre (L wing) is full.
- G wing: for prisoners on enhanced status (the top level of the prison's incentives scheme to reward good behaviour through increased privileges), housing up to 23. This became an incentivised drug free living unit as the IMB's reporting period closed.
- K wing: a designated neurodiverse unit (NDU) housing up to 22 prisoners.
- L wing: the early days centre for newly arrived prisoners, with single cells housing up to 80 prisoners.
- M wing: a general wing of single cells housing up to 94 prisoners.
- Acute inpatient care unit in the healthcare centre (HCC) for up to nine prisoners.

There is a large, well-equipped gym and a second sports hall for prisoner use, as well as a multi-faith centre and various workshops.

The main providers of services to the prison were: Serco (transport to courts and local prisons); Gov Facility Services Ltd/GFSL (facilities' management in prisons across southern England); DHL (ordering and delivering prisoners' purchases); Bidfood (kitchen supplies); East Sussex County Council (library services and social

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.

care); Milton Keynes College (for education); HM Prison and Probation Service; Southdown Housing; Jobcentre Plus; Pact (Prison Advice and Care Trust), providing family support services.

There are three contracted providers of health and social care:

- Practice Plus Group (PPG) is the main provider, contracted via NHS commissioners to deliver primary care, including GP services and health screening, inpatient care, substance misuse, mental health, pharmacy and crisis response services. Subcontractors provide dentistry, optician, podiatry and physiotherapy services.
- East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, in partnership with PPG, provides sexual health clinics and screening programmes, such as those for abdominal aortic aneurysm, bowel cancer and diabetic retinopathy.
- Agincare (contracted through East Sussex County Council social care services) is responsible for social care.

A number of voluntary and other organisations provide services. These include:

- Samaritans
- SSAFA (the armed forces charity)
- National Association of Official Prison Visitors
- Prison Family Support (local charity that works to reduce the impact imprisonment has on children of offenders in custody at HMP Lewes)
- Sussex Pathways (charity that works in prisons and communities to help reduce offending behaviour)
- Prison Fellowship (Christian-based charity supporting prisoners)
- Advocacy People (charity that supports prisoners with healthcare complaints)
- LOSRAS (Lewes Organisation in Support of Refugees and Asylum Seekers)
- Shannon Trust (national charity that works to train and inspire prisoners who can read to teach those that can't)
- Change Grow Live (CGL) (a charity that helps people change the direction of their lives, grow as individuals, and live life to its full potential)
- Reconnect (care after custody service that seeks to improve continuity of care for people with an identified health need)
- Interventions Alliance (supports people to overcome barriers and foster personal wellbeing)
- Stone Pillow (homeless charity)
- ADDER (addiction, diversion, disruption, enforcement and recovery)
- AfEO (accommodation for ex-offenders).
- CXK, an organisation contracted by HMPPS to give careers advice and prepare learning plans.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

In the Board's view the reception and induction processes for new prisoners have improved over our reporting period.

There was a 16% fall in incidents of prisoner-on-prisoner violence, down to 194 compared with 232 the year before. The number said to be serious fell from 28 to 17.

There was a 15% increase in the number of assaults on staff with 79 incidents, 12 of which were said to be serious, up from five in the previous year.

The number of self-harm incidents rose from 620 to 651. The Board notes that the number of self-harm incidents has increased significantly over the past five years, but that last year's 5% increase shows that the rate of increase has fallen.

There were 721 incidents involving use of force recorded in the Board's reporting period, a 25% increase over the previous period's total of 581.

Fair and humane treatment

Areas of the prison have been refurbished, redecorated and are noticeably cleaner.

Consistent and effective heating and hot water supply continues to be a problem and at times the wings have been unacceptably hot or cold for prisoners and staff alike.

The Board notes a big increase in the recorded number of key working sessions but has been unable to confirm the quality and consistency of these sessions.

Across the Board's reporting year prisoners made 1,287 complaints to the prison: up from 906 in 2023/24, an increase of around 25%.

Health and wellbeing

The Board is pleased that time out of cell (regime) has increased and welcomes the general improvement this has made to day-to-day life for most prisoners.

The Board has welcomed the reduction in waiting times for routine healthcare appointments and a general improvement in the quality of healthcare.

However, the Board was troubled about gaps in psychiatry, especially in the summer of 2024, when there was in effect no psychiatrist in the prison. The Board would welcome greater mental health service provision at HMP Lewes going forward.

The Board is again concerned about delays faced by prisoners who need to move to a secure mental health facility because of a shortage of such provision nationally.

Progression and resettlement

The Board welcomes the increase in places for work or education, but notes that most of these places are part-time and that there was a fall in attendance for education toward the end of 2024 around the time a new regime was introduced.

The Board welcomes a new focus on the support needs of remand prisoners, and work that's underway to develop a remand strategy.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Will the Minister work with government colleagues to ensure that the forthcoming Mental Health Bill identifies appropriate measures to improve care for prisoners with severe mental illness, including more provision in secure units, and ensure that these measures are properly resourced and delivered with minimum delay?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Will the service explore all options to enable the quickest possible replacement of the prison's heating and hot water system and ensure, in the interim, that the Governor receives adequate resources to keep prisoners warm in winter?
- Will the service work with NHS colleagues to boost investment in mental health services in the prison and in particular review the adequacy of psychiatry provision?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Will the governor renew efforts to reduce incidents of self-harm, which have gone up by around one third over the past two years?
- Will the governor prioritise the development and implementation of the prison's remand strategy to better support the needs of remand prisoners?
- Will the governor act to reverse the fall in prisoner attendance at education that's been seen since the improvement in the prison's regime in late 2024?

3.3 Responses to the last report

WILL THE MINISTER	
Issue raised	Minister's response
When will the Minister allocate the necessary funds to help upgrade the poor infrastructure at HMP Lewes, and improve living conditions?	An approved schedule of work is now being delivered to improve the living conditions at HMP/YOI Lewes. I am pleased to say that the majority of the cells at the prison have now been refurbished and there is active work on the remainder. Shower upgrades are also underway, and further funding has been approved to progress other identified infrastructure work. This includes CCTV upgrades, the perimeter wall project, upgrading site-wide fire systems, and fire doors.
Update: Plans to upgrade the CCTV system have stalled because the identified supplier went out of business. See section 4.4.4 below.	
How will the Minister work with colleagues across government to increase the provision of specialist secure mental health services for offenders with serious mental health problems?	Increasing the provision of specialist mental health services for offenders with serious mental health problems remains a challenge. The Ministry of Justice is working with the Department of Health and Social Care to reform the Mental Health Act (1983) and introduce the Mental Health Bill in this parliamentary session. The Bill sets out vital reforms to support people with severe mental illness in the criminal justice system with the aim of speeding up access to specialist inpatient care and

	ensuring that offenders and defendants with severe mental health needs are able to access timely support in the most appropriate setting.
Update: the inadequacy of provision of specialist secure mental health services nationwide for offenders with serious mental health has not yet been addressed.	
Will the Minister improve access to resettlement & probation services for prisoners held on remand?	Due to the increase in the remand population, HMP/YOI Lewes has been approved to extend the current accommodation provision which covers all unsentenced prisoners, both remand and those awaiting sentencing. A new remand strategy, which includes a provision of resettlement needs and accommodation support, commenced implementation during September 2024.
Will the Minister review sentencing guidelines to reduce the number of offenders going to prison and length of sentence, and so help relieve pressure on prison spaces?	Sentencing guidelines are developed by the Independent Sentencing Council for England and Wales and any review of the guidelines is at the Council's discretion. To address prison population and capacity pressures, the Government has already enacted policy to reduce the time those sentenced to standard determinate sentences (SDS) serve in prison from 50% to 40% of that sentence. This measure, known as SDS40, will not apply to prisoners sentenced for sex offences and certain offences of domestic abuse, and will also exclude serious violent offences with a sentence of four years or more. This ensures prison is reserved for the most dangerous offenders. We will continue to assess the impact of these measures on the prison population.
Will the Minister reverse last year's rejection by Government of the House of Commons justice committee's recommendation that remaining IPP prisoners should be re-sentenced and bring forward legislation to commute IPP sentences to determinate ones?	I understand the Board's concerns about prisoners subject to Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences. The Lord Chancellor has announced that from November 2024, anyone who was released on IPP licence five or more years ago and has spent at least the last two years of that period in the community without being recalled, will have their IPP licence terminated without the need for a review by the Parole Board. The Secretary of State will also have two new 'Risk Assessed Recall Review' powers. The first enables her to not reset the two-year period after someone is re-released from a recall. Secondly, she will be able to re-release people who have been recalled at any point without referring the case to the Parole Board. These measures will make an overall difference to the number of IPP prisoners held across the estate and mark a positive first step. The Lord Chancellor and I are committed to making progress towards a safe and sustainable release for those continuing to serve an IPP sentence whilst ensuring that protection of the public is not compromised. Area Executive Directors for England and Wales will continue to develop and implement operational IPP delivery plans that will improve front line

	support to help those serving IPP sentences achieve the objectives within their sentence plans and move towards a prospective safe and sustainable release.
Update: At the end of the Board's reporting period, there were five prisoners at HMP Lewes subject to IPP. The Board deplores this continuing situation.	
WILL THE PRISON SERVICE	
Issue raised	Response
Urgently improve living conditions at HMP Lewes through better repair and maintenance services.	Performance measures indicate that the contractor, GFSL, has been performing to a good level and compliant in completing the planned maintenance work at HMP/YOI Lewes. However, it is recognised that reactive work is sometimes delayed. The Ministry of Justice is supporting the Governor to help improve living conditions through a Local Asset Manager team. This is a rehabilitative project initiated by the Governor which is progressing flooring and painting and decorating projects. The Lewes Assurance and Multi Skilled (LAMS) prisoner teams on each wing have also been expanded and 60% of all cells have now been refurbished and work is ongoing on the remaining 40%.
Increase funding to help improve and extend education and skills development at HMP Lewes.	<p>Education: funding is set as part of a national formula which considers prison type and population. In view of the overarching funding pressure on education, it is not expected that additional funds will be allocated to HMP/YOI Lewes to support improvements. Since April 2024, the prison has however sought to maximise the education budget and now has an Employment Advisory Board and implemented a new curriculum to best meet the needs of the population. Education attendance has continued to improve over this reporting period.</p> <p>Skills & Employment: HMP Lewes has an Employment Hub, run by the Prison Employment Lead, which helps prisoners prepare for work. This includes supporting them with CVs, other resettlement needs and securing training and industry-recognised qualifications for prisoners wanting to start employment, such as in the construction sector. Since June 2023, the ID and Banking Administrator has provided prisoners with 116 accounts, 45 driving licences, and 444 birth certificates to enable prison leavers to take up work opportunities and support other resettlement activities. A review of classroom capacity is taking place so that provision can be increased. The Hub runs a minimum of four employment events a year and hosted its first 'Unlocking Construction' events in June 2024. These are supported by HMPPS' New Futures Network team alongside a range of employers such as Balfour Beatty. Prison Industries also facilitated a visit to introduce Dulux Academies, and the prison is working to progress this partnership.</p>

Update: monthly average attendance at education over the 2024/25 reporting period was 60% of allocated places. Since April 2024, the ID & Banking administrator has provided prisoners with 114 bank accounts, 40 driving licences, and 574 birth certificates. Prison Industries engaged with Dulux and Willmott Dixon to open academies within HMP Lewes, but the companies did not proceed with the proposition.

WILL THE GOVERNOR

Issue raised	Response
The Board welcomes the new opportunities for purposeful activity but asks for an increase in time out of cell for prisoners.	HMP Lewes has now created 454 activity spaces this reporting year. Alongside this, we have introduced a new regime that includes evening regime for those prisoners on enhanced regime. Average time out of cell has increased from 4.5 hours to 7.5 hours. At weekends we are regularly delivering a full time out of cell regime with a rostered shutdown list when staffing does present as a challenge due to hospital bedwatches/constant supervision requirements.
The Board welcomes improvements in the new prisoner induction process but asks for an end to the practice of using F wing as a first night overspill.	The new early days processes in L wing have seen a more transient population through the early days centre providing spaces for new receptions each night. The use of F wing as an overflow has not been needed for many months. This has been achieved by our new processes; the low prison roll has also been a factor. Whilst F wing may need to be utilised if capacity becomes a challenge, our plans will ensure that new receptions will remain in EDC and licence recalls who have been at HMP Lewes before will go to F1 for one night until a space can be made available on general population.
Update: increases in the prison population towards the end of the IMB's reporting period saw a minimal number of newly arrived prisoners located temporarily in F wing rather than in the dedicated early days centre (EDC), in which new prisoners are generally placed before they move onto a main wing.	
Given the increase in incidents of prisoner-on-prisoner violence and self-harm, the Board asks for extra steps to encourage good behaviour and to improve the management of the assessment, care in custody and teamwork process (ACCT), used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide.	Alongside the new regime, HMP Lewes has created more regime for enhanced prisoners. In the first 28 days of this new regime, despite us unlocking the population for longer, we have seen a positive impact on safety metrics. Use of force, prisoner on prisoner assaults and assaults on staff have declined and are the joint lowest in reported incidents against comparator prisons across HMPPS. We have seen a slight decline in self-harm, but this remains a challenge to the high volume of prisoners with significant self-harm histories and complex needs. A commissioned 'lived experience' expert is working with the safety team to help reduce self-harm. In January 2025 the prison will join the national pilot scheme to replace razors with electronic shavers. This aims to remove the adaption of custom weapons from prison razors and to reduce the number of prisoners using razors to self-harm by cutting.

Update: over the Board's 2024/25 reporting period, prison figures show increases in self-harm, use of force and prisoner assaults on staff. IMB members continue to monitor instances in which ACCT paperwork is not appropriately managed.

The Board asks for new measures to reduce the availability of illicit drugs and alcohol across the prison.

Proactive work continues to disrupt the ingress of illicit drugs. Numerous joint operations with law enforcement colleagues have arrested outside individuals in their conspiracy to convey illicit drugs into the prison. The prison has appointed a drug strategy lead to work with the substance misuse team (SMS) to create a supportive environment for prisoners with substance addictions. In this way, G wing was turned into an incentivised substance-free living unit (ISFL) in February 2025 to accommodate prisoners who commit to living free of drugs. A drug taskforce consisting of two prison officers, healthcare staff, SMS and the drug strategy lead has been set up to support prisoners with addiction within HMP Lewes and with external teams post release.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 The prison revised its reception and induction processes for new prisoners during 2024, and the Board's view is that the new processes are much improved. Reception and the early days centre (EDC) are managed by the same head of function, which strengthens co-ordination. Shortages of kit noted in previous years have all but disappeared, and the EDC is generally clean and tidy.

4.1.2 This was achieved despite the surge in prisoner numbers during the first half of 2024, including large numbers of remand prisoners from beyond the prison's Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) catchment area. Reception and the EDC often had to stay open late into the night to process new arrivals, and parts of the induction process might be delayed: this can be tiring and distressing for prisoners and staff alike. Population pressures continue and the Board remains concerned about the use of F wing as an overflow when the EDC is full. When this happens, inductions can be missed, exercise restricted, first night calls delayed, and safety issues can arise.

4.1.3 Health assessments and the management of medication for new arrivals in reception has improved, with a prescriber on duty into the evening. However, the absence of a psychiatrist in the prison for parts of 2024 (see section 6.3.1) meant delays in meeting the needs of some prisoners with mental health problems. The provision of appropriate medication for new prisoners with physical conditions could also be delayed if there was inadequate access to their prescribing history.

4.1.4 Increased numbers of first night calls were made from the EDC, and most were made in private. The ease by which other phone numbers were added to the PIN could be slow because of staff shortages. Important items such as vapes, phone credit and toiletries are given to new prisoners in a 'goody bag', although some prisoners are said to have not known they had to reimburse the cost of these items.

4.1.5 In September 2024 a group of prisoners housed on the EDC were trained to support new arrivals through their induction. They are called Insiders, and their work has extended to other wings to help prisoners as they relocate from the EDC. New arrivals are also seen by chaplaincy to review faith and pastoral care needs. Out-of-cell time can be limited for prisoners in the EDC: prisoners are generally locked up after morning domestics until mealtimes, unless they have assessments. Some prisoners stay in the EDC for more than the standard five days if there is no space elsewhere. The Board monitors that prisoner identification cards located outside cell doors on the EDC are often missing or incorrect, and regards this as a safety risk.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 During the Board's reporting period 651 self-harm incidents were recorded, a 5% increase compared with 620 in 2023/24, and up by around one third since 2022/23. So, whilst incidents of self-harm are up, the rate of increase is slowing. The large majority (85%) are classed as low in severity, and the total also includes ongoing self-harm behaviours by a small number of prisoners, some of whom have complex mental health problems. The increase over time may reflect better reporting, which the Board welcomes, as well as prisoners' frustrations with

restrictions in the daily living routine, referred to as regime, which includes time spent in and out of cell, and opportunities for exercise and purposeful activity. Self-harm has started to come down since the regime has improved: see section 6.5 below.

4.2.2 The assessment, care in custody and teamwork process (ACCT) is designed to focus care and attention on prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide. The number of ACCTs opened over the Board's reporting period was 676, the same as the year before. The prison has worked to improve the management of ACCTs, yet the Board still noted times when ACCT documentation is deconstructed, meaning officers only see the daily observation sheets which do not include details of 'trigger events' that might increase risk. Members have also reported when ACCT observations were not recorded in an appropriate or timely manner.

4.2.3 The cases of prisoners at risk of self-harm or suicide are considered at the weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM). The Board has monitored these meetings and found them well supported by wing staff, offender management team, healthcare, chaplaincy and the safety team. The number of Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide confidential emotional support to fellow prisoners) has increased from an average of eight a month to just over nine. Action has been taken to reduce bullying, especially on F wing, where perpetrators were identified and managed more proactively: being bullied can be a trigger for self-harm. In January 2025 the prison became part of a national programme to replace shaving razors with electronic shavers: razors can be used to self-harm or harm others.

4.2.4 There were two deaths in custody during the reporting period, both await the coroner's inquest. The Board considers that the actions of prison management and staff following a death in custody were compassionate and sensitive.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 The Board welcomed a 16% fall in incidents of prisoner-on-prisoner violence recorded over the reporting period: 194 compared with 232 in 2023/24. The number of these considered as serious fell from 28 to 17.

4.3.2 However, the Board was concerned that the number assaults on staff by a prisoner rose by 15% to 79, with 12 considered to be serious, up from five in 2023/24. This illustrates the difficult and sometimes dangerous situations that prison officers regularly face, and the Board has monitored the conscientious and committed manner in which a great many staff respond to these risks.

4.3.3 The number of violence-free days over the reporting period rose from 171 to 180. The Board is pleased to see that all violence reduction investigations were completed and that the challenge support and intervention plan process (CSIP) is being used more often to support and manage prisoners who pose a significant risk of being violent and of harming others. The 2024/25 CSIP referral figure rose to 852 from 623 in 2023/24 and was more than double the figure of 421 two years earlier.

4.4 Use of force

4.4.1 There were 721 use of force incidents in the Board's reporting period, a 25% increase over the previous period. Force can range from a guiding hold to a multi-staff intervention requiring personal protection equipment (PPE). Of the 721 total, 225 involved refusal to return to cell; 51 were planned; 483 involved guiding/escorting holds; 362 were full restraints; 271 involved rigid bar handcuffs,

and 159 required personal protection for officers. Officers drew batons on two occasions, and PAVA (an incapacitant spray) on eight occasions, using it twice.

4.4.2 All such incidents are reviewed in a weekly meeting chaired by the deputy governor. The Board has monitored these meetings and found them well run. Documentation is reviewed, as is footage from CCTV and body worn video cameras (BWVC), where available. The meeting considers questions of necessity and proportionality, and ensures issues raised are dealt with quickly and effectively.

4.4.3 One third of use of force incidents (241) were against a prisoner from a Caribbean, African or other Black background, and 294 against a prisoner aged 18-25. The Board is concerned about the numerical and percentage increase in use of force overall and about the disproportionate use of force against specific groups of prisoners. However, the Board has no evidence of bias or prejudice. Robust debriefs following use of force do not suggest that prisoners consider there to have been bias, nor do complaints, feedback from prisoner forums or applications to the IMB. Questions of disproportionality are also considered by the prison's diversity and inclusion steering group. However, we note the Chief Inspector of Prisons' comment in March 2024 that 'while some disparity of force against both young adults and prisoners from a minority ethnic background had been identified, the reasons for this were not yet fully understood or addressed.' The Board will continue to monitor these matters and notes the prison's new strategy for managing younger prisoners, which aims in part to reduce poor behaviour: see section 5.4.4.

4.4.4 The Board remains concerned that some areas of the prison are not covered by CCTV: a risk to staff and prisoners alike. The collapse of plans to renew and expand the CCTV system, when the identified supplier went out of business, remains a major disappointment. The prison's leaders have said they are looking for interim funds to enable some CCTV installation and improvement in high-risk areas.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

4.5.1 The number of intelligence reports recorded during the Board's reporting period rose to 9,553, up 12%. There was an increase of nearly 30% in the number of intelligence-led cell searches (410). Overall, the number of finds in these searches rose to 226 from 208: 154 weapons were found, up by just over one third (35%), whilst mobile phone finds fell to 141 compared with 154. Around 400 litres of illicitly brewed alcohol was seized, nearly double the 220 litres seized the previous year.

4.5.2 The Board recognises that HMP Lewes faces significant challenges in reducing the availability of illicit items such as drugs, weapons and mobile phones. The use of drones to carry illegal items is a significant problem, with 66 intercepted finds attributed to drones or throwovers within the reporting period, a big fall from 127 the previous year. The value of the illicit items in these packages was calculated by the prison at more than £1.5m. The prison continues to work with Sussex Police and HMPPS on appropriate counter measures.

4.5.3 From January-April 2024, 116 random drug tests were completed: 30 were positive. Random testing was then discontinued but will resume in March 2025. The Board welcomes this resumption, seeing that random tests help give a clearer picture of the drug situation. During the reporting period there were 41 finds by the itemiser of drug contaminated articles, compared with 66 in the previous year. The itemiser is a scanner that can detect trace amounts of narcotic.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 Prisoners at HMP Lewes are mostly accommodated in buildings built in the mid-nineteenth century which require significant and ongoing work and investment to maintain a decent living environment. These simple facts present persistent challenges to staff and prisoners alike. Nonetheless, the Board notes that accommodation and shared areas have been refurbished, redecorated and are noticeably cleaner. This progress was reaffirmed when, towards the end of the Board's reporting period, the HMPPS performance assurance & risk group awarded an amber/green rating for the quality of living standards (rated red in 2019).

5.1.2 However, problems with the heating and hot water supply persist. The main gas supply was disconnected following a gas leak in November 2023 and temporary boilers quickly installed: credit goes to the teams that worked at pace to achieve this. However, heating and hot water supply across all wings is inconsistent: frequently too cold, although M wing could often be stiflingly hot. The Board notes the prison's efforts to secure funds to renew the system, which will be a major undertaking. We note the efforts as well of the GFSL team in liaison with the relevant contractors to keep the system working. However, the arrangement is expensive and bad for the environment, whilst the outcome for prisoners is unacceptable in the Board's view.

5.1.3 A power surge in January 2025 damaged the control panel on F Wing and caused a fault in the operation of the automatic fire vents in the wing's roof: they had to be left open in case of fire. This led to unacceptably low temperatures and the ingress of heavy rain: staff and prisoners alike suffered as the temperatures fell.

5.1.4 Showers on C wing, G wing and the healthcare inpatient unit were refurbished in 2024. Asbestos in the ceiling of healthcare was removed and the area made safe. Other work in healthcare included the creation of a sensory room and the refurbishment of outpatient holding cells. The Board has raised a concern several years running about the visibility of the toilet in one of the holding cells in the outpatient centre, and is disappointed that this decency issue has yet to be addressed. Work is underway to replace the incandescent and fluorescent lighting to LED. New fixed fire suppression units were installed on all wings.

5.1.5 The Lewes assurance multi-skills team (LAMS) has made an impressive contribution to the improved environment across the prison. LAMS is a team of enhanced prisoners with experience of building trades, and they have laid new flooring, refurbished cells, redecorated communal areas, and fashioned custom-made pieces of furniture. The cost saving to the prison from November 2023 to the end of the Board's reporting period was more than £350,000.

5.1.6 The system of clothing exchange at HMP Lewes has been upheld as the 'gold standard' within the prison service. There has been plenty of kit for weekly exchange using the now upgraded kitbags, with ample supplies of bigger towels and flannels. However, at the end of the Board's reporting period, problems developed with the supply chain, and only large sizes of clothing were supplied: laundry could not be sent to HMP Elmley for cleaning as there was not enough kit available to replace it. The only regularly working washing machine in the prison's community equipment store (CES) had to be used at weekends to meet demand. The industrial grade washing machines and dryers on the wings have been maintained, although timely

notification by wing officers is required to enable repairs to be done quickly. Some prisoners have told the IMB that personal clothing items are stolen from the wing laundries because access is not properly managed.

5.1.7 At the end of the Board's reporting period, the catering department was spending £3.22 per head per day, against a budget of £3.05. It provides over 1,760 meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner), with a standardised menu with five options offering a balanced diet whilst keeping close to budget. At the end of the reporting period, 16 special diets were provided per day, two prisoners were registered for Kosher meals and one as lactose intolerant. Halal, vegetarian and vegan dishes are provided. A hot breakfast is provided Monday-Thursday, with cereal on Friday and at weekends.

5.1.8 The Board has at times been concerned that food service on the wings might not always be adequately supervised by staff, allowing unfair or unequal portion distribution. The Board has also raised concerns that servery workers were not always wearing appropriate protective clothing and is pleased that this issue seems to be receiving attention. The Board also reports regular ongoing problems with the basic functioning of the servery units (heated lamps, hotplates etc).

5.1.9 Prisoners with enough money can buy items from 'canteen', including fresh fruit and vegetables, managed and delivered by DHL. However, the Chief Inspector of Prisons reported in March 2024 that only 13% of foreign national prisoners responding to their survey said that they could buy what they needed, compared with 51% of British prisoners. The Board has queried the limited range of certain items available, particularly tinned vegetables, but has not received an answer.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 Segregation involves a prisoner being moved from a residential wing to a care and separation unit (CSU) for disciplinary reasons, for their own protection or for the good order of the prison. IMBs monitor these units to check that prisoners are treated humanely and fairly. The CSU at HMP Lewes has 16 cells, including two constant supervision cells for high-risk prisoners and two special accommodation cells from which items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed to help keep prisoners safe. The unit is generally kept clean and tidy although the condition of the showers is poor. Heating problems meant it could feel cold particularly in the constant supervision cells. There has been a consistent staff group, although staff rotation policies ensure staff don't work too long in this difficult environment. Ways to enable prisoners in CSU to access prison education are being considered.

5.2.2 On average, 33 prisoners are segregated each month, with seven of these being on an ACCT. There were numerous constant supervisions on the CSU due to a suitable inpatient unit cell not being available. Special accommodation was used eleven times over the reporting period: all were in relation to self-harm or suicide risk, occurred whilst the prisoner was on an open ACCT and on constant supervision, and where prisoners were violent and/or refractory towards staff. Notification to the Board of use of special accommodation has been timely; however, the completion of paperwork has been poor. The Board considers segregation review boards to be generally held within the correct timeframe, although not all are attended by a healthcare clinician, generally because of the non-availability of healthcare staff rather than a failure of the CSU to inform relevant parties of a review. Three prisoners were segregated for more than 42 days during the Board's reporting period, all were authorised within the required timeframe.

5.2.3 The segregation, monitoring & review group (SMARG) meets to consider issues relating to ethnicity, age, religion and any disability of those held on CSU. The Board has monitored these meetings. There continues to be a disproportionate number of prisoners from a Caribbean, African or other Black background located in CSU compared to the prison population, also of Muslim prisoners and prisoners aged 18-25. The constant supervision cells are unsuitable for prisoners that require a wheelchair.

5.2.4 Prisoners accused of breaking the rules are dealt with through a process of adjudication: what prisoners call 'nickings'. These are done by either an internal or external adjudicator, depending on the seriousness of the charge. In 2024/25 there were 2,667 adjudications at HMP Lewes, up 9% from 2,497. The number proven was much the same, the number dismissed showed an increase of around 15% to 408. Adjudications are observed by members of the IMB on an ad hoc basis, including those conducted by an independent adjudicator: processes are seen to be followed correctly. Measured by figures and percentages, there was an overrepresentation in the last quarter of 2024 of 18–25-year-olds being adjudicated (31% of adjudications), of Muslim prisoners and of prisoners from a Caribbean, African or other Black background.

5.2.5 The Board notes that the prison's leadership considers questions about overrepresentation and disproportionality in a variety of ways: see section 5.4 below. Whilst the Board is satisfied that the figures do not reflect bias or discrimination, it will continue to monitor.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key working

5.3.1 Staff recruitment and retention improved over the year, and the prison was allowed to recruit over its establishment figure: this has helped the prison to allow prisoners more time out of cell. The Board notes that the Chief Inspector of Prisons found that staff-prisoner relationships were generally positive: 70% of survey respondents said they were treated with respect and 75% knew staff members they could go to for support. The Board has monitored instances of helpful interaction between staff and prisoners, but some prisoner applications to the IMB may reflect a lack of confidence on the part of new staff to deal with a prisoner's routine requests.

5.3.2 Meetings of a prisoner consultation group (PCG) took place across the year, as did forums based on the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010, each convened by a senior manager. A standard agenda covering aspects of prison life is followed at the PCG, and minutes are taken. However, notification of meetings appeared to have been minimal, and awareness is low. The turnover of prisoners meant it was rare to have the same representatives for consecutive meetings.

5.3.3 The prison has commissioned an ex-prisoner who now works to support the prison service to give 'lived experience' insight to staff. He is working to develop a 'good prison officer' guide to demonstrate how good conduct and decision making by officers can promote better behaviour on the part of prisoners.

5.3.4 At the beginning of the Board's reporting period, key working focused on prisoners on a priority list identified through the weekly safety meeting, plus older or younger prisoners who were not in work or education. The number of key work sessions reported in February 2024 was 274. Over the year the list has expanded to include prisoners from other cohorts. The number of key work sessions reported to

have been offered peaked at 426 in July 2024, dropped to 312 in September and decreased again in November, said to be due to the introduction of the new regime. Overall, the number of key working sessions across 2024 was 3,150, a significant increase on the 1,044 sessions in 2023. Work was ongoing on a new key work strategy, due to come into effect from February 2025.

5.3.5 An officer is detailed each day for key work on the main residential wings. They aim to speak with prisoners identified, go through a key work check list and write up notes. These should be quality assured by the wing's custodial manager, but the Board is unsure that this happens consistently. A prisoner on a smaller wing is supposed to have weekly key working with regular wing staff. On the inpatient unit, however, prisoners were likely to see a different key worker each week and given the state of their mental health, might not always engage; however, daily wellbeing checks were carried out on all inpatient prisoners. The Board appreciates the significant increase in key work over the year but is aware of how rapid turnover of prisoners can disrupt consistency and relationships. Overall, the Board has been unable to confirm the quality and consistency of key work sessions over the year.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 The Board reported last year about the prison's progress in meeting its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. A diversity and inclusion manager had driven improvement, overseeing meetings of the diversity and inclusion steering group and engaging directly with managers to address areas of concern. However, the Board's view is that progress has slowed since the manager took interim responsibility for the head of safety, diversity and inclusion role in late 2024.

5.4.2 Accurate data about outcomes for prisoners is essential both to highlight issues of disproportionality and to guide appropriate action. Both the Board and the Chief Inspector of Prisons have expressed concerns in the past about weaknesses in this regard, and so the Board is disappointed that the more recent meetings of the diversity and inclusion steering group have not taken place because of the interim arrangements referred to above. Data collated by HMP Lewes shows:

- On average, around three-quarters of the prison population self-defined as white British, Irish or other white ethnicities; around 10% as Black; 5% as Asian; and 3% as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller.
- Around 40% of the prison population declared some form of disability, with around half of this proportion declaring a mental health problem.
- Around one fifth of the prison population is aged 18-25; one third is aged 26-29; and just over one third is aged between 30-39.
- The highest recorded religious outcome continues to be 'no faith'. Data collected by the chaplaincy team shows two-thirds of prisoners who professed a faith self-described as Christian, and 22% as Muslim.

5.4.3 Data shows that the prison population is disproportionately young (aged 18-25) and that younger prisoners are more likely to experience poor outcomes: to have force used against them and to be on the basic (lowest) level of the incentives scheme used to reward good behaviour. At times in 2024 over half of the population on basic was aged under 25. Data also shows that over half of the number of Muslim prisoners at HMP Lewes are under the age of 29, that Muslim prisoners are more likely to be on basic and less likely to be enhanced (the highest level). Prisoners

from a Caribbean, African or other Black background are also more likely to be on basic. The Board notes the prison's new strategy for managing younger prisoners, led by an operational manager, who completes all debriefs to review use of force against younger prisoners, and is giving new attention to ACCTS, self-harm and violence involving young adults. Whilst the Board is concerned about issues of disproportionality, it has no evidence of bias or prejudice driving the figures and notes the various ways in which the prison's leaders examine and use the data.

5.4.4 The prison makes use of the national calendar of campaigns, awards and awareness days to highlight issues, including Black history month, national recovery month (substance misuse), Movember (men's health), and HIV/AIDS awareness. Given the high proportion of Muslim prisoners, the Board's view was that an opportunity was missed in not marking 2024's Islamophobia awareness month.

5.4.5 A prisoner can raise a diversity and inclusion concern through the discrimination incident reporting form (DIRF) process. In the Board's reporting period, 33 DIRFs were submitted, down from 36. Most involved accessibility, and work is underway to ensure that prisoners with mobility needs are offered purposeful activity on the wings. The Board was concerned last year to learn about a shortage of wheelchairs, particularly on F wing, where most prisoners aged over 60 are located. The Board was disappointed to learn that one disabled prisoner was given incentive level warnings for failing to attend education classes, when the wing was regularly unable to provide him with the wheelchair he required to get there.

5.4.6 Foreign nationals made up around 16% of the HMP Lewes population: the largest groups were Albanian, Irish, Polish, Iranian and Indian. The prison's education provider works to support prisoners who speak limited English, and a monthly immigration surgery is held. The Lewes Organisation in Support of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (LOSRA) helps support foreign national prisoners.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons commented in March 2024 that 'chaplaincy provided excellent support and... was visible and engaged effectively ...' The Board shares this view. In January 2025, the team had 24 regularly attending chaplains (four directly employed, 14 sessional and six volunteer chaplains), plus six occasionally visiting chaplains. The service also had 35 volunteers and 11 official prison visitors. Chaplains are available from the following faiths: Christian traditions, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Quaker, Jehovah's Witness, and Pagan. Visits are arranged from the Rastafarian, Spiritualist and Latter-day Saints faiths.

5.5.2 At the start of 2025, around two-thirds of prisoners professed a religious belief (369 out of total of 546). The main groups were: 249 Christian traditions (Roman Catholic 100, Church of England 82, other 67); 82 Muslim; eight Pagan; six Buddhist; four Rastafarian; three Jewish; plus a small number of other faiths. Longer-term prison population trends perhaps offer a more meaningful insight, and, in this way, the Board notes a 14% increase in the Muslim prisoner population over the year.

5.5.3 Direct chaplaincy faith support is provided for over 98% of prisoners professing a faith by a chaplain of their registered faith. Weekly corporate worship is available for all faiths, and the chapel and multi-faith room are well-used. If no chaplain is available for a faith group, occasional visiting chaplains are invited to visit and, in their absence, corporate worship and faith support will be facilitated by a

chaplain of another faith. Prisoners are additionally offered in-cell faith support, and there is a risk-assessed process for prisoners wishing to attend services from the CSU and inpatient unit. Religious festivals are celebrated, and the Board notes the good efforts made by the prison's catering team to meet religious dietary needs.

5.5.4 The biggest proportion of the team's work is pastoral. Chaplains visit new prisoners within 24 hours of arrival and speak with prisoners in the CSU and healthcare inpatients every day. A chaplain will visit a prisoner on an ACCT (deemed at risk of self-harm) at least once a week. Chaplains conduct pre-release interviews six to eight weeks prior to release and on the day of discharge. Chaplaincy also delivers a programme of courses and interventions, notably Living with Loss, Sycamore Tree (victim awareness), and Facing up to Conflict. Support is offered to prisoners to maintain family and community ties, including family tracing. A team of 11 official prison visitors are available for all prisoners including those who rarely, if ever, have social visits. There is a prisoner penfriends scheme and Angel Tree, which enables prisoners to send a Christmas present to their children (53 presents were sent for Christmas 2024). Young offenders are offered support to identify and thank a supportive adult on Mother's Day.

5.5.5 Support is offered to prisoners, staff and families following a death in custody. Prisoners are supported following the death or serious illness of a relative, including with the application process for an escorted visit to family at such times. Chaplaincy will offer virtual visits and streaming of funerals when these visits are not possible. Secular mindful meditation sessions are offered to inpatient prisoners and on the neurodiverse wing (K wing). Just before Christmas 2024, chaplaincy facilitated the process of giving 'Vinnie bags' to prisoners leaving the prison. Donated by the Saint Vincent de Paul charity, these contained appropriate clothes and toiletries.

5.6 Incentives schemes

5.6.1 An incentive scheme is used to encourage good behaviour. In line with national practice HMP Lewes has three incentive levels: basic, standard and enhanced. Prisoners enter the prison on standard and after seven weeks, if they demonstrate consistently good behaviour, can apply to be enhanced and receive more social visits, time out of cell, gym access, purposeful work and money to spend. Being on basic can mean the removal of the in-cell TV, less gym access and less money to spend. The Board notes that the percentage of prisoners on enhanced status rose significantly across 2024 from around 20% of the prison population to around 30%, reflecting efforts by the prison to encourage better behaviour and a better regime. The percentage of the population on basic stayed at around 5%.

5.6.2 The Board notes that the percentage of white and Asian prisoners on enhanced status more than doubled to over 30%, that the percentage of prisoners aged 26-45 on enhanced status rose from around 18% of the population to around 35% but that younger prisoners aged 18-25 were more likely to be on basic. Data also shows that Muslim prisoners and prisoners from a Caribbean, African or other Black background are more likely to be on basic. As discussed, the Board has no evidence of bias or prejudice driving but will continue to monitor the situation.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 Any prisoner can complain about an aspect of their experience. They do this in writing using a Comp1 form which they post into a box on the wing, to be collected

each night. However, the Board has monitored that forms are not always available and has spoken with officers who said they did not know how to source them. The prison's analysis of complaints made by prisoners across the Board's reporting year shows 1,287 complaints, up from 906 in 2023/24 and an increase of around 25%, in line perhaps with the rise in prisoner numbers.

5.7.2 The prison reviews a complaint, and will judge it as upheld, not upheld or rejected. A snapshot from June-August 2024 shows 90 complaints about property: 16 upheld, 1 partially upheld, 4 rejected, 69 not upheld. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons reported in March 2024 that prisoners' trust in the system was low with only 24% of survey respondents saying complaints were dealt with fairly. The prison's analysis shows that around 84% are dealt with within the two-week timeframe.

5.7.3 The biggest category of complaint across the Board's reporting year involved property: 286 complaints, 22% of the total. This was followed by residential, 247 (19%); staff 103 (8%); canteen 101 (8%); food 72 (6%). As with previous years, property and residential complaints predominate, and both increased significantly compared with the previous year. The number of complaints about staff also went up significantly. Around 10% of complaints involve a comp1A, which is an appeal against the prison's initial response to a complaint. Prisoners also sent 73 confidential access complaints from April 2024 to January 2025: these generally allege staff misconduct and are sent directly to the governor. There were 58 such complaints in the previous year. Healthcare complaints are dealt with separately by the healthcare provider, so do not feature in this section of our report.

5.7.4 The largest proportion of complaints in 2024/25, just over one third of the total, came from F wing, which has the second highest population (around 22% of the total), so there is some disproportionality. The other larger residential wings, A and C, each account for around 15% of complaints, in line with previous years. The second largest proportion came from M wing, with just less than one fifth of the total.

5.7.5 The prison's complaints analysis does not offer insight about outcomes from complaints, other than the number upheld/not upheld. Neither does it categorise complainants according to the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010. However, the prison's bi-monthly diversity and inclusion report does record complainants by ethnicity: the data does not reflect any disproportionality.

5.8 Property

5.8.1 As noted in section 5.7 above, the biggest category of prisoner complaint in the Board's reporting period involved property: 22% of the total, a significant increase over the previous year but in line with the year before that. Property is consistently the most common complaint category investigated by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman: 27% of their total in 2023/24.

5.8.2 The number of applications from prisoners to the IMB about property was 51: of these, 35 were about property within the prison, and 16 during transfer from another establishment. This was the fifth highest category of applications to the IMB. The total number and ranking are the same as the previous year, but the issue might be underreported in that some property concerns are reported under different application codes, for example, post and family contact: see point 5.8.4 below.

5.8.3 The Board has highlighted concerns about property going missing when a prisoner is moved from a residential wing to the CSU: the responsible governor has acknowledged the problem and suggested difficulties might arise when a prisoner had been sharing a cell, or that staff might not be following the correct processes. Steps are being taken to improve practice: a custodial manager has been tasked with reviewing the situation and officers have been coached on the issue.

5.8.4 Some prisoners report delays receiving property sent in by family or friends, or deliveries that are rejected at the gate and returned to sender. This might be because of mistakes in the initial application to receive the items, or inconsistent information displayed on the package when delivered. The prison is taking steps to improve the process following discussion at the prisoner consultative group.

5.8.5 The Board was concerned to hear last year from a prisoner who had not been given property brought to the prison by relatives. He complained, but the prison rejected this saying it had not received the property, and this was upheld by the Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations (IPCI), a service of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. It was only after intervention by the IMB that the prison reviewed its records and found that its post room had registered the property as received, but now many months later, the property could not be found. Nearly a year on, the prisoner had still not received a formal acknowledgement of the prison's responsibility nor an offer of compensation. The case can be said to highlight weaknesses both in managing property and in dealing with complaints.

5.8.6 The Board notes that the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework from September 2022 suggests a single point of contact in prisons to help manage property issues. This has not been adopted at HMP Lewes. The IMB nationally has proposed bar-coding all items of property and creating a digital inventory system but is aware that digital improvements of this type are not anticipated across prisons nationally in the near term.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

6.1.1 Practice Plus Group (PPG) is the main provider of healthcare services at HMP Lewes, covering primary and inpatient care, mental health, substance misuse, pharmacy and crisis response services. Subcontracted services include dentistry, eye care, sexual health, podiatry and physiotherapy. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons reported in March 2024 that 'overall, health services had improved significantly'. The Board echoes this view but had been extremely concerned last year about gaps in psychiatry provision: see section 6.3 below.

6.1.2 The Board notes that the recruitment and retention of healthcare staff is a challenge, with only 65% of establishment permanently in post at the end of our reporting period, much the same as a year previously. Temporary nursing and pharmacy staff have been a significant presence for much of the year. However, the Board welcomes that the senior team has stabilised: a new head of healthcare started in April 2024, a permanent head of substance misuse in June 2024 and the GP team reached full complement in August 2024. The Board regrets that the role of the patient engagement lead (PEL) was scaled back whilst the postholder covered staff shortages elsewhere. The prisoner health champion role remains on hold.

6.1.3 Missed appointments in the prison's outpatient centre were generally low. Communication failures, officer unavailability and changes to the regime can have an impact on attendance but the Board is encouraged by how the prison and PPG work together to manage this. Changes to the regime at the end of 2024 meant that prisoners with a healthcare appointment would be collected by an officer from their place of work or wing. The Board noted instances when prisoners missed external healthcare appointments for reasons such as delays with transport or lack of escorts. Missed hospital appointments can compromise the wellbeing of prisoners, particularly those with complex or serious conditions.

6.1.4 A prisoner can raise a problem about healthcare via a written form. PPG will log this as a 'concern' and seek to resolve it within five days. If a prisoner remains dissatisfied, they can raise a complaint. This is logged separately and has a resolution deadline of 20 days. However, PPG acknowledged that many concerns were not dealt with in a timely way, and prisoners continue to object to the IMB about this. The Advocacy People, an independent charity helping prisoners with health issues, was not able to provide a presence within the prison during the latter part of our reporting year, though could still offer support if notified. Healthcare-related applications to the IMB rose from 90 in 2023/24 to 106. These generally involve getting appointments, waiting times to be seen, or access to medication.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 PPG supports a range of primary care interventions and clinics. Staff turnover contributed to some short-term variation in waiting times, but the Board monitored that average waiting times have been reasonable and have improved. However, waiting times for psychiatry reached unacceptable levels in 2024, and such waits are likely to have been detrimental to the physical wellbeing of some prisoners: see under section 6.3 below.

6.2.2 As noted in section 4.1.3 above, nurses do an initial health assessment on new prisoners in reception and can identify pressing needs. The process for new arrivals in reception has improved, with a medication prescriber on duty into the evening. However, the provision of appropriate medication for new prisoners with physical conditions could be delayed where access to prescribing history is limited.

6.2.3 A prisoner can ask for a healthcare appointment by submitting a written application. These are triaged to help prioritise needs and reduce waits: urgent appointments can be seen the same day. Primary care and allied health professional outpatient clinics are held weekdays, and there were weekly clinics on the wings, although a private treatment room is still not available on C wing, which has the largest population. Dental clinics run two days each week, with a dental nurse in the prison three days per week. Applications to see the dentist were triaged by the nurse and patients in pain or with an urgent need could be seen in the next available clinic. The Board considers waiting times for dentistry to be managed appropriately.

6.2.4 The Board had been concerned that late arrivals at reception present safety risks to staff and prisoners alike. Equally, and again due to the high turnover of prisoners, there have been instances of prisoners being released without the appropriate medicines or support within the community. The Board notes, however, the diligence and empathy of staff working in such circumstances. Having raised previously the issue of ligature risks associated with door hatches within the inpatient unit, the Board has been advised that a risk assessment is now done for each prisoner to determine if and when the hatches will be left open, and that replacement door hatches that carry less risk have been fitted. Instances of medication being dispensed from pharmacy hatches on the wings without an officer being present have reduced, but any such instances are still a cause for concern.

6.2.5 The Board welcomes the efforts of the PPG healthcare teams to raise health awareness both by way of the Health in Justice programme and by introducing supplementary targeted topics relevant to the prison's changing population.

6.3 Mental health

6.3.1 Caring for prisoners with a mental health need is one of the biggest challenges for healthcare delivery within the prison system nationally. Self-assessment data collected by the prison shows around 20% of prisoners declared a mental health need, but the PPG head of healthcare puts the scale higher, at up to 35% of prisoners. A PPG nurse will conduct an initial health screening at reception and will refer a prisoner for assessment by the PPG integrated mental health team if needed. The Board notes that waiting times for such appointments have fallen and can now be one day for urgent requests and five days for routine assessments. However, members frequently hear from prisoners about longer waits.

6.3.2 The Board had been significantly concerned about gaps in psychiatry provision. This became critical in the summer of 2024 when there was in effect no psychiatrist in the prison. The Board acknowledges the challenges in recruiting and retaining such specialist staff, but as psychiatry waiting times for acutely unwell prisoners rose to over 30 weeks, prisoner wellbeing undoubtedly suffered. In November 2024, with a psychiatrist in post, waiting times were still reported to be around 11 weeks for a non-urgent appointment to review/prescribe medication, and even at the end of our reporting period some prisoners might wait around nine weeks

to see the psychiatrist. Given the extent and complexities of mental health need in the prison, the Board calls for greater mental health service provision going forward.

6.3.3 Mental health needs are generally managed on the wings, but some acutely unwell prisoners will be located in the prison's inpatient care unit, which has nine cells. The Board continues to be concerned about delays faced by prisoners who need to move to a secure mental health facility because of a national shortage of such provision. Two prisoners who had long waits for such a move presented significant behavioural challenges during 2024, and the Board commends the professionalism, kindness and diligence shown by staff caring for them.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1 Some prisoners who need support with daily tasks such as showering or getting dressed, mostly because of a disability or long-term illness, can be eligible for social care. Most prisoners requiring social care at HMP Lewes reside on F wing, where older prisoners are generally located. Referrals for social care are made to East Sussex County Council, who will assess need and where appropriate commission services from Agincare, an independent provider of care nationwide. Social care referrals dropped in 2024: the prison considers this might have been because the occupational therapist role employed by PPG was vacant for a time.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

6.5.1 The Board is pleased to monitor that time out of cell has improved significantly over this past year, having expressed concerns about this issue in previous years. More time out of cell is undoubtably good for the wellbeing of most prisoners and has helped improve the general atmosphere across the establishment.

6.5.2 For the first months of the Board's reporting period, a prisoner in work or education would be out of cell for around five hours a day Monday-Thursday, but just 1.5 hours a day if they were not in work or education. Both totals include morning domestics and meals. The weekend regime was even more limited. Other than for faith services and social visits, prisoners were out of cell for just 2.5 hours either before or after lunch. This meant prisoners on a wing having time out of cell before lunch on Saturday would not be unlocked again until 9.30am on Sunday.

6.5.3 The situation began to improve in July 2024 when having more staff available enabled the prison to extend the weekend regime to allow time out of cell morning and afternoon on both days. Then, in November 2024 following a major change to staff shift systems, the regime was significantly improved to allow a daily weekday average of up to 6.5 hours out of cell for a prisoner with work or education, later extended to over 7 hours per day. Prisoners not in work or education would be out of cell for a little over 3 hours a day. The time allocated to exercise in the open air doubled to one hour: a prisoner in work or education in the morning should be offered exercise in the afternoon, and vice versa. Additional opportunities were offered to enhanced prisoners as a means of encouraging good behaviour, for example, evening gym sessions and extra weekend regime.

6.5.4 The Board has monitored the positive impact on the wellbeing of prisoners and on the atmosphere overall as time out of cell has increased. It notes the prison's efforts to maintain the new regime at times of staff shortage and on public holidays.

However, the Board noted a fall in attendance for education around the time the new regime was introduced: the prison is working to address this proactively.

6.5.5 Gym sessions are always popular with prisoners. In April 2024, with extra physical exercise instructors (PEIs) in post, a full gym programme was offered to around 150 prisoners each day. The improved regime enabled each wing to have four gym sessions of 1.5 hours a week, including an evening session. There were extra gym sessions for enhanced prisoners, a separate session for transgender prisoners and twice weekly sessions delivered on the healthcare inpatient unit.

6.5.6 A three-month course is delivered in collaboration with Brighton & Hove Albion football club for up to 16 prisoners to achieve a football coaching qualification. Brighton table tennis club ran weekly sessions in the gym, with eighteen prisoners able to attend at any one time. All wings now have access to table tennis tables, bats, nets and balls, although a safety assessment has to be completed before they can be issued. Olympic weightlifting workshops on Tuesdays and Thursdays have been popular, although numbers in sessions are limited for space and safety reasons. First aid courses have also been delivered by PEIs.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

6.6.1 Practice Plus Group (PPG) runs substance misuse services (SMS) to offer clinical and psychosocial support to prisoners with experience of addiction. This can involve stabilisation, crisis intervention or recovery from dependence. The Board welcomed the arrival in June 2024 of a full-time experienced SMS manager. The team, however, is small, and the manager has described frustratingly long recruitment processes and funding challenges. Better integration across services has been a priority, for example, through the co-location of teams.

6.6.2 The prison adopted a new substance misuse strategy at the start of the Board's reporting period, in line with the UK Government's 2021 drug strategy. This prioritises breaking drug supply chains, promoting treatment and recovery, and reducing demand. In July 2024, the prison appointed a non-operational governor as drug strategy lead, focusing on recovery-focused interventions rather than punitive approaches. Two officers have been allocated to support the strategy, working with prisoners found under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

6.6.3 New arrivals to the prison have their substance misuse needs assessed at reception and are referred to SMS as appropriate. Referrals are also made by the mental health team and by wing officers. The prison uses the Smart Recovery Inside Out programme with weekly meetings of up to 12 prisoners (although generally limited to 10). AA (Alcohol Anonymous) and CA (Cocaine Anonymous) come into the prison as support once a week. The SMS team has trained prison staff to support the administration of naloxone, a medication used to reverse the effects of opioid overdose. Minerva wing, an incentivised substance free living unit for some prisoners who commit to be drug-free, opened in February 2025, just after the Board's reporting period closed.

6.6.4 The prison's pre-release services seek to arrange continuity of care for prisoners with substance misuse needs as they leave the prison. Links continue with community partners, primarily Change Grow Live (CGL), a charity that attends the prison and offers advice to prisoners on the wings. However, releases direct from court or under early release programmes can hinder good planning and outcomes.

6.7 Soft skills

6.7.1 At the start of the Board's reporting period, the detox wing had just been moved from K wing to L wing (the induction wing) to help improve support for prisoners needing a detox programme. K wing then became the dedicated neurodiverse unit. Prisoners with neurodiversity needs can struggle on a main residential wing and so can benefit from the small unit's calmer environment. It provides a regime including education, yoga, gym, and various games. Most prisoners eat together around a communal table and there is a sensory room for those that need a calm and safe space. Prison leaders believe that being able to refer prisoners to the unit has meant shorter stays in CSU for some prisoners with neurodiversity needs. It is noted though that the healthcare provider PPG is not currently funded to provide neurodiversity assessments.

6.7.2 Funding linked to the opening of Minerva wing (the incentivised substance free living unit, ISFL) at the end of our reporting period (see point 6.6.3 above) has allowed recovery-focused yoga sessions to be recommissioned. A number of yoga courses are being delivered, one in the gym open to prisoners from the main wings, and one for prisoners on the ISFL. An additional sensory room has been opened in the healthcare unit, again to provide a calm environment for help prisoners manage their stress.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 Milton Keynes College has been the education provider since April 2023 and has increased the number and range of education sessions. A new manager was appointed in April 2024, and whilst urgent building work and staffing shortfalls led to the suspension of some sessions early in 2024, the situation has improved.

7.1.2 A prisoner's abilities in English and maths are assessed as part of their prison induction, and the results shape their personal learning plan. Around two-thirds of Lewes prisoners record low levels of literacy and numeracy (only half have scores equal or greater than the average 11-year-old and 7% achieve the minimum score), and this drives efforts to help develop such skills. Note that the population fluctuates, and the latest quarter had more prisoners with secondary education skill levels.

7.1.3 Attracting and retaining learners can be a challenge given the rapid population turnover, the number of remand prisoners (in prison until their trial or subsequent sentence hearing) and of prisoners on 14-day recall (back in prison because they broke the terms of their licence agreement after release). Education attendance improved up to October 2024 and averaged 60% of allocated places each month over the reporting period. However, attendance has fallen since the introduction of an improved regime, and the prison is working to address this: educational officers have worked to support staff and prisoners during educational delivery time and engage with prisoners not attending their courses.

7.1.4 A new strategy to promote reading was developed in 2024, with a whole prison approach across education, industries, reducing reoffending, residence and regime. Classroom-based learning was offered in English and maths from entry-level 1 (start of primary school) to GCSE level equivalent, plus as an unaccredited projects-based level to build self-confidence. Other courses include art (works are displayed around the prison and can be entered for the Koestler Awards for arts in criminal justice); English for speakers of other languages (ESOL); peer mentoring; reading skills; behaviours in the workplace and a creative and social group. A group of prisoners worked on a newsletter for the prison community. Barista, food safety awareness and food hygiene courses had been offered.

7.1.5 The prison library run by East Sussex County Council continues to be popular. It is open mornings and afternoons Monday to Thursday, with up to 25 prisoners at each session. Monthly attendance fluctuated from 395 to 729, with 844 new members over the year. Library activities included book clubs (part of the reading strategy), 'penned up' creative writing workshops funded by the Arts Council and Ministry of Justice, a philosophy workshop, author visits, poetry slams, reading ahead challenge, and Shannon Trust reading programme and outreach. The library supports health information and advocacy sessions, Family Days to promote reading for families, with book bags for children, and Storybook Dads, where prisoners record stories on CD or DVD for their children (67 users engaged last year).

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 Providing a good number and range of work or training activities keeps prisoners occupied, gives them a small income and supports progress through the prison system. By the end of 2024 the prison had reached its target of having 450

activity spaces for work or education. Most roles are part-time, so a 100% capacity represents around 55% full-time equivalents, and prisoners must choose between education or work. By the end of the Board's reporting period, there were 181 education places (97% filled, 157 prisoners engaged), 122 wing-based workspaces (87% filled, 106 prisoners engaged) and 180 workspaces off the wings (62% filled, 111 prisoners engaged). The Board previously noted insufficient places for all prisoners to have a role, so welcomes the progress made.

7.2.2 A prisoner should have their own personal learning plan and be allocated an activity based on their abilities and preferences. Sentenced prisoners are expected to work unless there is good reason why they cannot. Remand prisoners are not required to work although HMP Lewes encourages their engagement. Prisoners under the 14-day recall process are difficult to allocate for purposeful activity because of their short spell in the prison. More than one third of jobs require enhanced status and to encourage better behaviour, the time period to become enhanced was reduced from 12 to seven weeks.

7.2.3 Wing-based work includes cleaning, food service, and laundry. Work-based activities include food safety, industrial and bio-hazard cleaning, construction, business builder, and customer service/employability skills. New workshops were set up to recycle life jackets for Border Force, service in-flight headphones for Virgin Atlantic, pack darts, and copy and pack printed material (including information packs for new prisoners). Land-based activities include planting, creating ponds and clearing drains. The waste management workshop (including TV repair) generated funds for the prison and the number of places increased in advance of new recycling legislation. Catering and server roles are offered in the staff canteen, but the turnover in the prison population and delays in gaining security clearance have undermined the chance to gain a qualification there. Plans to establish dry-lining and decorating workshops in association with large employers did not come to fruition. However, six employment fairs were held within the prison, attracting employers from construction, rail and traffic management: 92 job offers were made.

7.2.4 Attendance as a percentage of allocated session at education and industries was at 83% in January 2025: attendance for on-wing work remains near 100%. The prison's activities team provided numbers and percentages of prisoners engaged on 4/2/2025, just after the Board's reporting period ended. The prison population on that day was 588: of these 343 (58%) were employed, 234 (40%) unemployed, 11 (<2%) disabled, long-term sick or retired. Unemployment correlates with youth, with 47% of prisoners aged 18-25 having no work, compared with 36% of prisoners aged 59-59.

7.3 Offender management and progression

7.3.1 The prison's offender management unit (OMU) supports the management of a prisoner through their sentence and aims to reduce reoffending. OMU's work over 2024 was shaped by the rise in the prison's population, particularly the number of remand prisoners, from around 50% of the population at the start of the Board's reporting period to 73% at the end. The Board has previously registered concerns over the lack of support for remand prisoners and so welcomes OMU's more recent focus on their needs, and work being done to develop a remand strategy.

7.3.2 The Board acknowledges the hard work of OMU and the prison's pre-release planning teams to respond to a series of national schemes to reduce prisoner numbers. In 2023, the end of custody supervised licence scheme (ECSL) was

introduced. It was revised in early 2024, and again later in the year with a new early release scheme, SDS40. HMP Lewes is a local category B prison, so the number of early releases were not significant, but managing the complexities whilst continuing normal work was challenging. Changes to the home detention curfew (HDC) scheme in 2024 had limited impact given the low proportion of sentenced prisoners at Lewes: HDC releases amounted to no more than 25 during 2024.

7.3.3 OMU's staffing levels were broadly stable over the Board's reporting period. Although there was not a full complement of prisoner offender managers (POMs), the Board was not aware of any detrimental effect on sentenced prisoners: completion of the OASys offender assessment system used to assess the risks and needs of prisoners remained at or near 100%, and over 1,300 sentenced prisoners were transferred to other establishments to allow more appropriate rehabilitation and family contact. Transfers were conducted efficiently, although prison population pressures and security issues might frustrate a prisoner's preferences. The Board notes that OMU at times has to contend with a lack of clarity from the courts, with ambiguities over concurrent and consecutive sentences, which again adds to the challenges faced by the team.

7.3.4 At the end of the Board's reporting period, there were five prisoners at HMP Lewes serving imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentences, the same number as in the previous year. Whilst noting the changes introduced last year (see page 8 above) the Board deplores this continuing situation and is disappointed that the Prisons' Minister has not backed the recommendation of the House of Commons Justice Committee that remaining IPP prisoners should be resentenced, and to bring forward legislation to commute IPP sentences to determinate ones.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 In-cell phones are a main way to contact family, friends and legal advisors. Each prisoner has a personal identification number (PIN) and gets phone credit on arrival. They add to this according to their means and wishes. A risk-based process aims to allow at least one important call to be made on their first day: other numbers are added once the prisoner signs an agreement to use the phone appropriately, although some numbers may not be allowed. A higher prison population and staff shortages could cause delays in adding numbers: frustrating for prisoners and staff alike. Prisoners also speak of frustration where an in-cell phone is out of order, but they cannot move to another cell because spaces are tight. The number of faulty lines must reach a threshold before the contractor will attend.

7.4.2 The Board welcomed the increase in the number of social and legal visits introduced in late 2024: social visits have returned to pre-Covid levels of six days a week. Changes to furniture and layout in the visits hall boosted the number of visit spaces to 29 per session (although seven spaces carry restrictions). A further change welcomed by prisoners and families was an increase in the amount of money that visitors can spend and the sale of hot food in the hall. The lift from the forecourt into the block hosting visits was frequently out of order, presenting a challenge to visitors with mobility problems: it is scheduled to be replaced.

7.4.3 In the past, visitors could book visits directly with the prison, but a national online booking system was introduced in summer 2024, and the Board has heard of functionality problems. Visitors say that a booking could take days to confirm and may later be turned down. Some visitors arrived to discover a visit cancelled

altogether, and staff could not always fit them in. Even now, as experienced visitors book visits in advance, those trying to see a newly arrived prisoner as soon as possible spoke of delay, disappointment and distress.

7.4.4 The Board is disappointed that the visitor centre offering shelter, refreshments and toilets opposite the visitor entrance is still out of use, having been closed because of structural problems two years ago. Some visitors travel long distances, bring children and arrive early. Board members have seen and spoken with visitors having to queue outside in bad weather, and asked the prison's leadership to review the arrangement: the Board is unsure the situation has improved. Nonetheless, visitors have been complimentary about staff involved in visits and the Board has monitored kindness, respect and support.

7.4.5 Legal advisors also report difficulties booking visits, and at one time during the Board's reporting period a fault in the system meant no legal visits could be booked at all. This interferes with preparation for trial and with the work of probation officers. Video visits, whether family or legal, can be unavailable because the technology does not work, or because staff have been unsure of how the system operates.

7.4.6 Prisoners submitted 60 applications to the IMB about difficulties with family contact in 2024/25, around 10% of the total. There were around 110 complaints made by prisoners to the prison regarding letters and visits (the analysis does not specify legal or social visits): less than 10% the total. However, the prison's analysis includes complaints about phone contact in a more general 'residential' category, so the number of complaints relating to family contact will be higher.

7.4.7 Prison-based family support services are provided by a national charity Pact (Prison Advice and Care Trust), and by Prison Family Support, a local charity that works to reduce the impact imprisonment has on children of offenders at Lewes. Prison Family Support can support prisoners through the family courts, put them in touch with family solicitors and support them with social visits, even taking photos of families and prisoners together. In addition to operating the creche, PACT organised 10 themed family days over the year, which are very popular. As noted above, chaplaincy provides support to prisoners in times of family crisis, including following the death or serious illness of family members. They also offer pastoral support visits to prisoners who might not be having social visitors.

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 The prison's induction and pre-release (IPR) team will engage with sentenced prisoners up to 12 weeks before release to help them arrange things such as accommodation, finances, employment, benefits, family contact and ongoing health and care services. Information in the basic custody screening tool (BCST2), completed when a prisoner first arrives at the prison, is used to help shape their resettlement plan. The Board welcomes work to develop a new remand strategy, which includes provision for the resettlement and accommodation needs of remand prisoners who have previously been ill-served.

7.5.2 The Chief Inspector of Prisons' March 2024 report stated that around 65 prisoners were released from the gate each month, resulting in a high demand for resettlement services. The process was made more difficult over the year by the demands of a series of national early release schemes aimed at reducing prisoner numbers: see section 7.3.2 above.

7.5.3 A pressing need for some prisoners on release is to find a suitable place to live. An initial assessment of a prisoner's housing need is done within 24 hours of their arrival. A prisoner on remand or serving a sentence can receive advice about accommodation and housing from Seetec, a national provider of work and wellbeing services in the UK and Ireland. Otherwise, if it seems a prisoner will need support after serving a sentence, IPR will refer them to the local housing authority where they usually live. The IPR team has good working relationships with authorities in its Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) catchment area, but HMP Lewes has been accommodating large numbers of prisoners who normally reside outside the KSS area, which can hinder effective liaison with local agencies and providers. In addition, some accommodation plans need to be approved by the parole board. Some prisoners are released from prison with no fixed abode (NFA) because of the shortage of suitable housing. In April 2024 28 prisoners were released from HMP Lewes with NFA: 14 from the KSS area, four from eastern England, six from London, seven from Portsmouth, nine from Southampton. These numbers were consistent throughout the year.

7.5.4 The prison brought together IPR, the employment hub, the Jobcentre and others to share a welcoming open-plan area that prisoners can apply to attend. The team hosts a pre-release 'café', where they can speak with prisoners within a two-week period prior to their release to assess needs and identify what is required for a successful transition, offering advice and support where necessary. Prisoners can also meet with local organisations such as ADDER (addiction, diversion, disruption, enforcement and recovery) and Change, Grow, Live (CGL), which offer advice about continuity of care around drug and alcohol misuse. Donated clothes and blankets were available, plus vouchers for charity shops and food banks.

7.5.5 The employment hub works to support prisoners due for release to find and retain a job. Set up by New Futures Network, part of HMPPS, the hub runs courses and arranges visits from prospective employers, hosting seven such events over the year, three more than their contract requires. Companies attending have interviewed prisoners and offered work on release: around 90 job offers were made over the year, although these can only be taken up if a prisoner has accommodation to go to. Additional courses include the construction skills certification scheme, which is required for work on construction sites. In April 2024, only around 5% of prison leavers were going into work. By August 2024, this had risen to 20%. A change to the way data has been collated since then has meant it has not been possible to see the results for recent months.

7.5.6 The employment hub can help prisoners liaise with their bank, set up bank accounts and order a replacement birth certificate and driving licence. It also hosts CXK, an organisation contracted by HMPPS to give careers advice and prepare learning plans. After an initial assessment, CXK will do a four-week activities review, with a six-month follow-up if the prisoner is still at HMP Lewes. CXK also runs a work-ready programme, helps prepare CVs and disclosure letters and helps with interview techniques.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the IMB's annual reporting period	11, plus one on sabbatical
Number of members at the end of the IMB's annual reporting period	11, plus one on sabbatical
Total number of visits to the establishment	360

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	2023/24	2024/25
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	92	126
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	17	20
C	Equality	3	5
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	18	18
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	61	60
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	18	20
F	Food and kitchens	6	23
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	90	106
H1	Property within the establishment	27	35
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	24	16
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	7	10
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew (HDC), release on temporary licence (ROTL), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	67	56
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	48	42
K	Transfers	26	13
L	Miscellaneous	29	41
	Total number of applications	533	591



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