



# **Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Featherstone**

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

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## Introductory sections 1 – 3

### 1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

## 2. Description of the establishment

2.1 HMP Featherstone is a public sector, closed, category C training and resettlement prison for adult men, situated eight miles north of Wolverhampton. It opened in 1976 and occupies part of the same campus as HMPs Oakwood and Brinsford. It receives prisoners mostly from local prisons HMPs Hewell and Birmingham.

2.2 The prison has a baseline certified normal accommodation of 671<sup>1</sup>, with an operational capacity of 687. Most cells, apart from those on house block 5 (the induction wing), are single occupancy.

2.3 The accommodation comprises seven residential house units. House block 1 to 4 are two-stories, with a maximum capacity of 120 on each. House block 5 is three stories, with a capacity of 88, and is used for induction. House block 6 is a drug-free house, with a capacity of 33. House blocks 7 and 2 have a capacity of 88 and are usually occupied by prisoners on the enhanced level of the incentives scheme. The care and separation unit (CSU), for segregated men, holds up to 10 prisoners in standard cells, plus a special cell.

2.4 The prison serves the Warwickshire and West Mercia areas for resettlement purposes. Prisoners are expected to improve their education levels, work and train in preparation for release in the final part of their sentence

2.5 Key providers of services are:

- Physical healthcare provider: Practice Plus Group (PPG)
- Mental health provider: Inclusion (Midlands Partnership NHS Trust)
- Learning and skills provider: Novus
- Escort contractor: Geo Amey
- Catering services: Bidvest
- Medication: Practice Plus Group
- Library service: Staffordshire Library Service
- Ordering and delivering of canteen items: DHL
- Maintenance: Amey

2.6 There is a gym, healthcare department, kitchen, education department, library, chaplaincy, reception and visits' hall, as well as extensive workshops and horticultural areas. Other departments are located either in the main administration block or elsewhere around the prison. The visitors' centre is located separately, at the front of the main prison, is operated by the charity, Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT).

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

### **3. Key points**

#### **3.1 Background to the report**

3.1.1 This report presents the findings of the Board at HMP Featherstone for the period 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024.

#### **3.2 Main findings**

##### **Safety**

3.2.3 From its observations, the Board believes the prison to be generally safe. Levels of violence, self-isolation and open assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents have decreased since the last report. although there is some increase in self-harm. The Board is concerned that body worn video cameras (BWVCs) are now being drawn, however not always turned on. There was an issue with the BWVCs: it was found that over 50% were not functioning, they were all taken and serviced. As a result, usage has now increased. The same problem occurred with the staff radios; they have had to be updated due to the batteries not holding a charge. We are aware that management recognises this issue and is making increased use a priority.

There had been an increase in weapons found.

3.2.4 The enhanced gate security pod does provide a deterrent for the smuggling of illicit items into the prison. However, during the period of the report, it was frequently out of use, generally due to the lack of available trained staff.

3.2.5 Compared to much of the prison, the reception area is welcoming and generally works well, even though pressures of the prison population meant that there were large numbers of late arrivals. This was due to transport having to move prisoners from police cells, then courts and, lastly, to prisons.

3.2.6 Property, both on transfer and within the prison, remains a significant issue. The Board frequently receives applications (prisoners' written submissions) regarding missing property during prisoner transfers. This has been exacerbated by poor staffing in reception, leading to insufficient time to deal properly with property. Even though there is a volumetric control of property, other prisons do not adhere to it.

The X-ray machine was moved into reception to enable the scanning of property coming into the prison.

##### **Fair and humane treatment**

3.2.7 Featherstone was built in the 1970s and, as stated in many previous annual reports, is showing its age. Much of the prison is in poor condition and significant investment is needed to bring it up to modern standards. Rodent infestation was a problem in many parts of the prison throughout the reporting year. Prisoners were encouraged not to throw food and rubbish out of the cell windows, and cleaning teams were allocated to clean up outside the wings.

Ferral cats have been brought in to help with the rodent problem.

The rubbish and food thrown from cell windows has decreased.

3.2.8 The quantity and quality of the food were issues for prisoners. Quantity problems may originate in menu choices and could also be dependent on how food is distributed from the serveries. Prisoners complained about portion sizes, which vary among the house blocks, depending on the supervision of the staff. The quality of the food seemed variable, but perception may also be affected by changes forced on the kitchen by suppliers. A new menu system was brought in; this had a few teething problems to begin with but seems to be getting slightly better. There is an issue with the menu sheets coming back into the kitchen on time.

There have been issues with the trolleys not being returned or cleaned on time.

There had been issues with broken/old equipment in the kitchen, things were taking a long time to be repaired. The floor in the dry stores has been damaged for over four years. There had been issues with the freezers, also the fire alarm kept activating due to too much heat in the kitchen.

There had been a few prisoner kitchen workers who had to be removed from the kitchen due to stealing. Furthermore, there were also various old and mouldy white goods left outside in the corridor near the kitchen, along with over six months of waste oil.

3.2.9 Staff and prisoner relations are generally satisfactory. However, the Board believes there remains a cultural problem with a small group of staff, who are inconsistent with their approach to prisoners.

Senior management take these matters seriously and appear to address them appropriately when they occur. For example, following a proven staff misconduct, staff have been suspended and are now no longer employed.

3.2.10 The fluctuating staffing levels has caused some concerns during the reporting year. At the very end of the reporting year, the situation had improved considerably, and it seems essential it does not reoccur.

The offender management unit (OMU) had a lot of extra work when the first and second tranche of early releases of prisoners occurred. This caused a considerable backlog, as the OMU had to focus on the releases - which they managed extremely well.

## **Health and wellbeing**

3.2.11 It was another challenging year for healthcare within HMP Featherstone. Staffing levels have been an issue, which has meant that medication sometimes could not be dispensed without disrupting the regime. This has been a problem for some time and thought has been given to how the dispensing system can be changed to enable medication to be dispensed consistently. Sometimes, the correct medication was not given out or ordered. A new central hatch has been opened to dispense the medication. Sometimes a healthcare professional was not present at reviews, which was often due to staff shortages. Also, there were problems with prisoners being able to get to healthcare appointments. Lots of 'code blues' (medical emergencies requiring immediate prisoner attention) were called and this is very resource intensive to healthcare department, resulting in some planned appointments being delayed.

## **Progression and resettlement**

3.2.12 The resettlement clinic is well established, and more prisoners have a bank account open on release.

3.2.13 OMU were very challenged in the reporting year due to the extra work of the early releases in the latter half of 2024.

3.2.14 Prisoners are given help with completion of CVs for job applications, accommodation, birth certificates and driving licences. A new head of education was appointed, this has enabled more courses and education to be given, there were a lot more that attended education and managed to receive qualifications.

## **3.3 Main areas for development**

### **TO THE MINISTER**

- As previously reported over several years, Featherstone is in a dilapidated state and does not provide the facilities expected in a modern prison. Many applications received are about the quality of the food and this could be improved if the kitchen facilities were improved. The kitchen and the equipment is old and dated, it requires a high level of constant maintenance. How does the Minister plan to rectify the situation?

### **TO THE PRISON SERVICE**

- Mental illness is a serious issue within prisons. The compassionate answer appears to be to locate some of these prisoners in isolation in the CSU, where largely untrained staff attempt to deal with them in a humane way. This is not acceptable and there needs to be a way of speedily transferring these prisoners to more appropriate accommodation that can better cater for their health. Will the Prison Service commit to carrying this out

### **TO THE GOVERNOR**

- Issues with low numbers of healthcare staff have, on occasion, meant that the regime has been disrupted because of delays dispensing medication. This has been an ongoing issue and consideration should be given as to whether the system can be changed to increase its reliability and consistency.
- The culture amongst staff remains problematic in some cases. We believe this issue is understood by the Governor, but continued vigilance is necessary to ensure these issues continue to be addressed.
- There was an issue with no printers working around the establishment, this was due to no ink; new printers were installed.

## **3.4 Progress since the last report**

3.4.1 Dilapidated state of the prison: as detailed in this report, little progress has been made, except for some minor cosmetic changes.

3.4.2 Transfer of contracts causing significant problems: no significant problematic contracts have been transferred.

3.4.3 Property: both within the prison and for incoming prisoners, property remains a significant issue.

3.4.4 Prisoners arriving with contraband are identified by the full-body scanner used on entry to reception, and the issue is dealt with accordingly. The scanner is only used when there is suspicion or strong intelligence that they may be carrying something.

3.4.5 Provision of healthcare: healthcare continues to have many problems, but the Board believes the department is working hard to rectify them and provides a good service within the prison.

3.4.6 Staff culture: from its observations, the Board felt there was a problem with the culture of a small number of staff last year. This continues to be the case and continued vigilance will be necessary by senior staff to eliminate these issues

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

#### **4.1 Reception and induction**

4.1.1 There is inconsistency with using the enhanced gate security in the modular building. When it is not being used, we are told it is due to staffing or training issues. When this process is in place, prohibited items are found so can be a very useful deterrent when working.

4.1.2 The reception area remains clean and is welcoming for both newly arrived prisoners and those being discharged or transferred to other establishments.

4.1.3 When fully staffed, reception works well. There has been an increase in prisoners arriving late which is challenging; for example, eight prisoners arrived late during September. Frequently, staff are redeployed, particularly at weekends, which, at times, has caused an unsatisfactory build-up of property and issues for prisoners.

4.1.4 Overall the induction process runs smoothly, and all prisoners receive a medical screening. Prisoners spend their first night on the top floor and are observed hourly. Induction for gym, education and healthcare are completed during their first week.

4.1.5 Drones have been active over the prison; some contraband had been retrieved.

#### **4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody**

4.2.1 There has been one death in custody during this period. ACCT documents were found to be not being filled out correctly by staff.

#### **4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolators**

4.3.1 Challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs), used to manage and support prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence are being addressed more; more officers are advised to use these more frequently.

4.3.2 There are prisoners self-isolating due to debt, under threat or mental health issues.

#### **4.4 Use of force**

4.4.1 The IMB members regularly observe the use of force meeting and can confirm that force is used appropriately most of the time; unfortunately, a few times it was deemed extreme, but the staff concerned were dealt with appropriately.

#### **4.5 Preventing illicit items**

Several times, illicit, prison-brewed alcohol has been found.

## **5. Fair and humane treatment**

### **5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food**

5.1.1 The prison, in general, continues to be in poor condition. General maintenance takes place; however, very often things need replacing, and due to finances, this rarely happens.

5.1.2 The lift is operational, however, must be used in conjunction with an officer, which is challenging. Frequently wheelchair users cannot access the correct area of the prison.

5.1.3 The heating system is on or off, there is no way of controlling the thermostat. House blocks cope as best as they can, but situation is not great. The hot conditions enable the brewing of illicit prison-brewed alcohol. When prisoners are under the influence, (mainly in the evening) we have observed them the following day where they have fallen and burnt themselves on the scolding heating pipes.

5.1.4 There continues to be a general feeling amongst prisoners, and this was also reported in last year's report that food portion sizes are too small, and often not very appetising. The Board observes meals frequently and believes that, over several years, the quality of food appears to have improved. Some items are consistently rejected by the prisoners, e.g. soup, salads and fruit, and consideration should be given as to whether the menu can be amended while maintaining appropriate nutritional standards. The quality of food does vary, according to menu choices, and seems dependent on the level of supervision at the servery. Food comments' books are not easily available on all house blocks and do not appear to be well used. It is hoped that these issues can be addressed in the future. The main kitchen has old and worn-out equipment. During our weekly monitoring visits, we were reporting damaged and unsuitable equipment, which is a constant concern. The Board has also monitored the use of the servery and the comments' books, to find they are ineffective, which needs to be addressed.

The Board frequently observes that prisoners do not wear the appropriate PPE whilst serving food. Also, there were no cleaning materials, on some of the house units. The dish washers are not working in the serveries, and all pots are hand washed. Hot plates kept short circuiting.

5.1.5 The Board have observed a lack of kit; for example, bedding and no tea towels, and prisoners were drying pots with toilet roll.

5.1.6 The Legionella outbreak that started in 2023 was still present during this reporting period.

5.1.7 Raw sewage was in the sterile area also continues to be a problem this reporting period.

### **5.2 Segregation**

5.2.1 The Board observes the condition of the segregation unit at least weekly. The conditions of some of the cells is quite poor. The Board has observed 'dirty protests' (when a person deliberately urinates or defecates without the use of the proper facilities supplied, as an act of non-compliance or protest) on several occasions.

5.2.2 The Board observed some good working relationships between staff and prisoners. Prisoners with mental health problems are housed in the segregation unit, and this is challenging for the staff.

5.2.3 On occasions the Board observed a lack of bedding and distraction packs for the prisoners. Also, on occasions there were insufficient radios and telephones.

### **5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers**

5.3.1 Key workers have high case load numbers and sessions do not always take place, the sessions for the most vulnerable prisoners are prioritised.

5.3.2 There is a high churn of inexperienced staff who are mentoring very new staff; this can cause issues and inconsistencies.

### **5.4 Faith and pastoral support**

5.4.1 The judgement of the Board is that chaplaincy continues to provide a good quality service to prisoners of all faiths who want their support.

5.4.2 Chaplaincy staff visit all new prisoners within 24 hours of arrival, as well as seeing all prisoners before they are discharged and visiting the CSU daily.

5.4.3 The Board is content that all the different religions in the prison are being supported.

### **5.5 Incentives schemes**

5.5.1 The three-tier system of earned privileges to incentivise positive behaviours, with basic (the lowest level of privileges), standard and enhanced (the highest) continues and generally works well. A criticism we have been made aware of on several occasions is where a drop to basic occurs, and the paperwork is not provided to support this.

### **5.6 Complaints and applications**

5.6.1 The complaints' system generally works well; however, the Board has observed that if the staffing in business hub is reduced the complaints are not logged.

### **5.7 Property**

5.7.1 Property continues to be a major issue for prisoners in Featherstone. For example, when a prisoner transfers in, he may have too many items to keep in his cell; he would have to sift through these and decide what is to go to into the stored prop area. This results in a reception area being quite chaotic.

5.7.2 We have observed other prisoners claim they have lost their property, and our board members spend a large proportion of their time chasing other prisons and IMB Boards.

5.7.3 Property continues to go missing in the main prison, particularly when a prisoner is transferred to segregation.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare general**

6.1.1 HMPPS is responsible for providing additional reasonable adjustments to support prisoner movement around the prison and access to the regime, such as, for example, wheelchairs for general use. The prison is currently making enquiries to obtain a wheelchair that would be available for ad hoc use whenever needed by any prisoner.

### **6.2 Physical healthcare**

6.2.1 Staffing levels have again, undoubtedly, been the major issue over the reporting year. The head of healthcare in November stated the 'staff are exhausted'. Plenty of agency staff are used - this brings its own challenges. There were a high number of emergency code reds and blues for staff to respond to, which put pressure on staff.

6.2.2 Wait times to see a doctor or a dentist has reduced which is good.

6.2.3 During this period, the GP completely withdrew the controlled drug Gabapentin (a strong pain killer) without full consultation with the prisoners. A spike occurred in trading drugs and violence against prisoner on prisoner.

### **6.3 Mental health**

Mental health services continue to be stretched; staff have very high workloads. Our observations show that there isn't the capacity for all prisoners to receive the appropriate care, and very often it is the prisoners with the highest mental health needs who receive the support, and the others with less acute, but still significant mental health challenges are left to deal with things by themselves.

### **6.4 Exercise, regime**

6.4.1 We observed ongoing disruptions to the regime; staff shortages and high code reds and blues affect this. The roll count was very often not correct, and we have observed waits and lockdowns of one hour until the roll check was correct.

6.4.2 Purposeful activity worked well, and the abolishment of part-time work was well received.

### **6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

6.5.1 The Board observed challenges with the drug recovery unit which was introduced. It was spread across two floors, which made it difficult to monitor. Due to the top floor wanting to be a recovery wing, but the bottom floors were still attending work, gym and education. Whereby they were able to bring drugs back onto the wing.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

7.1.1 Members of the IMB observed lessons throughout the reporting year. Also, the IMB members undertook some learning walks. These were mostly very positive. We were very impressed by the content of the lessons, the teacher's awareness of the individual learner's needs, and the differentiation used. It was noted during the learning walk that prisoner attendance was low (five prisoners in class and usually 10).

7.1.2 The education team also offer blended learning for entry level prisoners; learning takes place in their workplace. This helps to break down barriers for their future engagement with education.

7.1.3 The library is well used and well resourced. Prisoners are scheduled to have at least one hour per week library time. Library staff are proactive and arrange motivational speakers and actors. Also, Story Book Dads is a well-used and much liked activity where prisoners can record a bedtime story for their children.

7.1.4 Difficulties with the roll count affects the time available on purposeful activities.

### **7.2 Vocational training, work**

7.2.1 The regime permits prisoners to work full-time. Prisoners at entry level education will now receive blended learning in their workplace, which is working well.

### **7.3 Offender management, progression**

7.3.1 The OMU has been significantly stretched, due to the planning and execution of two SDS40 releases (where certain prisoners serving standard determinate sentences became eligible for release after serving 40% of their sentence instead of 50%, to tackle overcrowding) in September and October 2024. This resulted in delays with the other prisoners' paperwork. The staff did an excellent job in very stressful conditions.

### **7.4 Family contact**

7.4.1 During the Board's monitoring, the visit's booking system was not working properly; families were unsure if visits are confirmed and the Board observed several families being turned away as the visit had not been secured. Very upsetting for the prisoner.

### **7.5 Resettlement planning**

7.5.1 The resettlement clinic continues to work well and all prisoners within 12 weeks of release are reviewed on a regular basis. The Board has observed the release of prisoners and confirms that prison officers meticulously check paperwork and explain each prisoners' post-sentence conditions in a clear, concise way.

## 8. The work of the IMB

Coincident with the end of the reporting year, two experienced members left the Board. Although two newly recruited members were settling into the role, the Board is in a considerably weakened state compared with the start of the reporting year.

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	4
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	4
Total number of visits to the establishment	309
Total number of segregation reviews observed	50

### Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	9	5
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	6	5
C	Equality	5	-
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	4	8
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	10	5
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	7	10
F	Food and kitchens	6	10
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	16	35
H1	Property within this establishment	16	15
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	28	35
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	12	11
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorizations	26	22
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	9	15
K	Transfers	16	9
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	20	17
	<b>Total number of applications</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>202</b>



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