



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Brixton

**For reporting year
1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025**

Published January 2026



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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

Brixton has since 2012 been a resettlement prison, described in June 2024 by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP), in an inspection report of the prison, as 'the most overcrowded category C prison in the country'. The certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded) was 530¹. On 30 August 2025, the roll was 697.

There are five residential wings. For each wing, the operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) at the end of August 2025 was:

- A wing: 164 prisoners, plus 36 on the London pathways unit (LPU; for prisoners with personality disorders who have committed to psychological therapy).
- B wing: 149 prisoners in general accommodation.
- C wing: 134 prisoners in incentivised substance-free living (ISFL).
- D wing: 46 prisoners, drug recovery and wellbeing wing until May; thereafter, a first night reception wing, after which men are moved on to other wings.
- G wing: until May 2025, 234 prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSO) and other vulnerable prisoners (VP). After May, this housed general population prisoners.

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

The main external service providers, largely unchanged since the last reporting year, are:

- maintenance and kitchen: Mitie (with subcontractors for vermin control, washing machines, etc)
- education and training: Novus, subcontracting to Bounce Back and Allandale
- library (Lambeth Council)
- Shannon Trust
- the Clink Restaurant
- National Prison Radio
- Probation Service (PS)
- housing: St Mungo's, a Commissioned Rehabilitative Services Provider
- work and benefits: Jobcentre Plus (JCP)
- healthcare: Practice Plus Group (PPG), subcontracting to Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust (BEH) and others
- substance misuse and wellbeing (with healthcare): Forward Trust (FT)
- visitors' centre and work with families and children: Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)
- employment/training, information, advice, and guidance (IAG): Prospects, which is part of the Shaw Trust
- escort contractor: Serco

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

3. Key points

- The ready availability of drugs had increasing impact through the year. The potency varied by the batch and this unpredictability resulted in men being found under the influence (UTI), emergency ambulance call-outs and a strain on healthcare and uniformed staff.
- From late 2024, the prison was preparing for a change in Brixton's function from a category C to a category B reception prison to ease population pressures in the south east and accept men directly from court. The date set for this change, originally April, slipped to late 2025, with no precise date fixed at the time of writing the report, in September 2025. From May, the prison was asked to adapt its acceptance criteria by reducing the minimum time left to serve to 28 days. This contributed to the exceptionally high rate of churn.
- During the extensive modifications for the re-role, long-term deterioration in the structure of parts of the buildings was discovered. These obligatory repairs to the reception/offender management unit (OMU) wing have further delayed the re-role.
- For many years, the prison has been short of space for single cells and interview rooms on the wings and for classrooms in the right location for activities. This, and the rate of churn, affected education and treatment programmes (for mental health and substance addiction).
- The re-role required recruitment of middle managers, improvements in security, the reintroduction of an in-patient unit and the expansion of video-link facilities to serve the courts properly. By the end of the reporting year, in August 2025, the recruitment of a sufficient number of uniformed middle managers had been successfully completed, enabling each residential wing to have two custodial managers (CM), with consequent improvement to oversight.
- The early release scheme (to tackle the ongoing overcrowding crisis in prisons, certain prisoners serving 'standard determinate sentences' became eligible to be released after serving 40% of their sentence instead of 50% - SDS40) in autumn 2024 was well handled. Planning for re-role necessitated the transfer around May 2025 of all PCoSO (prisoners convicted of sexual offences who were on G wing) and relocation of several departments of the prison.
- HMIP, accompanied by Ofsted, made a progress review visit in March 2025. We have referred to their conclusions, but the evidence in this report is our own.
- Our reporting year runs from 1 September and we have referred throughout to the first six months (to the end of February) as H1, the first three months of the reporting period as Q1, and so on.

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- Arrangements for the reception and induction of men transferred from other prisons were improved; but men known to be violent or unstable continued to be transferred in.
- A 25% reduction in self-harm continued the previous year's trend, owing in part to there being fewer prisoners who frequently self-harmed than in previous years. The average number of men self-harming each month was halved.
- Meetings observed by the Board about and conversations with men on the ACCT process (assessment care in custody teamwork, used to support prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide) were respectful and supportive.

- There was a small reduction in the number of assaults during the year, but still well above the five-year average. A third were on staff.
- Use of force (UoF) was about as frequent as the previous year and recorded promptly. It was reviewed at weekly meetings. Batons were drawn on two occasions and used on one; we were satisfied that procedures were followed correctly. PAVA (a synthetic incapacitant spray) was used once, the first time by Brixton staff since it was issued in 2019.
- UoF was reviewed weekly with all body-worn video camera (BWVC) footage and the evidence reports of officers involved.
- Illicit items, particularly drugs, were brought in by various routes, principally drones. There were CCTV failures throughout year; BWVC use was much improved.

Fair and humane treatment

- We received fewer reports of rats or broken washing machines. Food continued to be very good. Staff and prisoner relations were observed to be good, with imaginative one-off and regular informal opportunities for sport together.
- There was an active programme on equalities, with Governors each leading on a protected characteristic. Very few discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRF) were submitted.
- Carelessness in logging property on transfer and failures to track it down when lost continued. Payment of compensation for losses were disgracefully slow.

Health and wellbeing

- Waiting lists for assessments and specialists have been acceptable. For counselling or psychotherapy, however, the delays were longer than the average time spent in Brixton. Administration of healthcare appointments was observed to be excellent. There were several initiatives in support of wellbeing.
- The Board welcomed staff training in dealing with neurodivergent (ND) prisoners, in particular for officers engaged in the use of force (UoF) with these men.
- Forward Trust (FT) did good work on substance misuse, but there were too many men found under the influence of drugs (UTI) to handle individually.

Progression and resettlement

- Backlogs in induction and assessment at the start of the reporting year were much improved, induction was completed within two days of arrival and 80-90% of men were assigned to education or work within a week of arrival. The prison was short of classrooms, and some offers of courses by external charities could not be taken up.
- The 30% of the population out of work/education in March had been reduced to 23% at year end, which was impressive given the high rate of churn and other disruptions.
- Through the reporting year, an average of 84% of men were housed on the first night of custodial release (against a target of 90%).

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- This was to have been the reporting period in which Brixton changed from a category C resettlement prison to a category B primarily serving the courts. Preparations for this change have impeded work to reduce reoffending within the nine pathways: in particular mental health, substance misuse, education and vocational training. Will the Minister take note that this falls short of the response he gave to last year's report (3.3 below)?
- During the year, 11 men were unlawfully detained (UD), i.e. held after their release date. We have been told that UD compensation would be issued through HMPPS's regional litigation teams if a legal claim is made by the individual and then assessed on a case-by-case basis by the presiding judge; and that HMPPS do not pay this by default. The Board considers this unjust: prisoners should be made aware of their right to compensation and the default action should be to make payment to them unless they sign a waiver. Will the Minister make this happen?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- The decision to send to Brixton men with as little as 28 days left to serve impeded or negated a range of resettlement actions. Will the Prison Service take measures to avoid a repetition of this damage?
- Property mislaid in transfer to Brixton has continued to cause distress to prisoners and wasted staff resources. From a sample of complaints we researched (5.7 below), we found unacceptable delays in recovering property and, when untraceable, in paying compensation for its loss. Men are likely to have been released before either of these steps. We (from the prisoners' money section within the prison) have no way of confirming that compensation was in fact paid after release. What steps will HMPPS take to remedy this?
- Given that in-cell phone calls cost more than calls outside prison, wages inside are low and men can only buy phone credit from their 'spends' account (which also covers canteen purchases) while being unable to use savings or private funds, what steps are being taken to ensure that emotionally vulnerable prisoners and those with overseas family can maintain essential contact without exhausting their allowances?

TO THE GOVERNOR

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

3.3 Response to last report (which was published in February 2025)

Issue	Response given	Action taken
Population pressures 'upstream' have led to the 'inappropriate' sort of prisoner arriving in Brixton, one who has unaddressed issues and insufficient sentence time	Prisons continue to ensure that the rehabilitation needs of each prisoner are met and protected	The average time spent in Brixton has reduced considerably. The decision to re-role to B category has led to building work and

remaining to resolve them. This means that they leave Brixton ill-equipped to avoid reoffending.	despite the impact of population pressures	prisoner transfers that adversely affected rehabilitation.
Living conditions and a shortfall in opportunities for education, training and employment demoralise the men. Boredom and the ready availability of drugs combine with mental illness to drive self-harm, violence and a pessimistic approach to rehabilitation. Much work was done on ROTL, but there were no successful placements. How do you resettle a man who is only in the prison for 5.4 months?	<p>Most prisoners continue to be held in the right place at the right stage of their sentence to get the help they need to manage their risks.</p> <p>For those with less than 12 weeks till release, they are still scheduled for discussion and actions fast-tracked dependant on the time left.</p>	As a result of an increase of men with short sentences, the number of men with less than 12 weeks till release has exceeded the capacity to support them.
Things that would raise prisoners' morale (and, probably, that of the staff) would be: increased time out of cells; purposeful activity for all men; the eradication of vermin; cell phones available from day one, with prompt clearance of family and legal numbers; and fewer items of property lost in transfer.	HMP Brixton has implemented numerous measures including the G wing art club; having an activities orderly; and introducing neurodiversity representatives with clear processes of tracking skills development and progress. Other initiatives include weekly music therapy sessions and a joint collaboration between the physical education and teaching teams to deliver a blended fitness to maths course to incentivise the development of functional skills.	<p>Wings are being kept clean and rats are less evident, particularly in the second half of the year. Property is still lost in transfer and examples cited in 5.7 below indicate long delays in its recovery or compensation paid.</p> <p>Some activities (fashion and textiles, horticulture) were closed down during the year.</p>

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

- The small sample of induction sessions that the Board attended showed sympathetic questioning and covered care experience, including suicidal feelings, visits and debt problems. We noted that a man could opt to be checked every four hours by night staff on his first night. The change to a smaller reception wing mid-year gave new arrivals a less stressful induction: men there spoke to us appreciatively of the staff.
- As was the case last year, some men transferred to Brixton were clearly not suitable for a category C prison: one was already e-listed (escape risk) from a category B CSU and on an ACCT (self-harm monitoring – see 4.2). Another man arrived with a history of 17 adjudications (six of which had been referred to the police) within a 12-month period, including several assaults on staff. Despite this, he was re-categorised to category C in June 2024 and transferred to Brixton in September. A further assault led to this man being recategorised to category B and he was transferred out in mid-September.
- Induction fairs were held weekly, with the chaplaincy team, the Shannon Trust, the gym, the charity Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), the OMU, learning and skills and Job Centre represented.
- We were told of frequent delays in reception, when the transport brought the wrong files for the prisoners they conveyed.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm

- Weekly safety intervention meetings (SIM) discussed about 20 prisoners of concern and were well-structured, indicating detailed knowledge of them. Participation by Governors ensured actions were followed through. Prisoners were referred to respectfully.
- About 275 ACCTs were opened during the year, an average of 23 per month. We noted discussion at weekly SIMs and Governors' rigorous quality assurance of ACCT files, leading to a general improvement in the standard of documentation. We observed about a dozen ACCT reviews. Staff were consistently patient and sympathetic towards the prisoner. On one occasion, translation from Arabic was provided by an officer. External pressures were, however, evident at times: in one review, the officer chairing the assessment had not read the ACCT file before the meeting started so was working from it 'live'. We noted awareness of the need to make ongoing challenge, support, intervention plans (CSIPs; used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence) action-orientated, but for these there was sometimes a lack of clarity about what resources were available.
- We were glad to note that the self-harm total has fallen again this year (see the table below). The monthly average of 30 in H1 dropped to about 14 in H2. The total of 277 was down 21% on last year, itself a drop of 17% on the previous year. The drop in H2 coincided with the removal of safety razors and replacement with disposable ones. As in previous years, monthly totals were influenced by the presence of a few individuals who self-harmed frequently: during the year, four such men contributed 65 incidents (24%) to the total. The majority of self-harm was by cutting, with smaller numbers of ingestion of noxious substances, and ligatures and other forms of strangulation.

	Total self-harm	Average monthly	Av no. of prisoners monthly	Max by anyone in one month
2019-20	214	18	10	7
2020-21	211	18	9	20
2021-22	203	17	9	10
2022-23	423	35	13	20
2023-24	351	29	16	13
2024-25	277	23	8	20

- There were about a dozen Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to offer confidential and emotional support to other prisoners and cleared by security) in the prison during the year. Prisoners were also able to phone the Samaritans from their cells without paying any call charge. The line was not subject to any security monitoring and was available at all times without restriction. The Samaritans' Listener support team visited the prison weekly.

Deaths in custody

- We regret there were four deaths in custody for one of which we have seen the Prison and Probation Ombudsman's (PPO's) final report. One of these was post-release, the others while in custody. Two of the deaths occurred in hospital, one in a cell. Family liaison officers offered support to relatives, where possible. Samaritans, Listeners and members of the staff care team were available to give emotional support to prisoners or staff affected by the deaths.
- Use of ligatures was frequent and although not fatal, these were, in some cases, classed as near misses: one man self-harmed with a ligature four times in his first week and may owe his life to the diligence of staff. We noted the risk that men in the CSU might use the phone cords as ligatures: the prison's response was quick to replace these with shorter ones.

Emergency cell bells (ECB), cell floods and fires

- There were a dozen reports to Mitie of cell bells being out of use and, separately, we heard many complaints; some of these failures were clearly the result of vandalism. In December, we were told that a CSU cell had been out of use since June since the ECB, a mandatory requirement, was not working: Mitie's sub-contractor apparently needed to get a part from China and did not have stock on the shelf. Around that time, another CSU cell was out of use for the same reason.
- During the year, Mitie logged 26 reports of cell flooding, almost always the result of vandalism. There have been 30 fires recorded on SPHERA during the reporting period 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025, all fires were intentional; these sometimes required the use of high-pressure water mist through an inundation port (on one occasion, this was found to be painted over and unusable). The risk of serious injury was greater when the prisoner had barricaded his cell. On one occasion, the anti-barricade equipment failed when the Allan keyhole was found to be blocked.

Self-isolation

- Throughout the year, men chose to self-isolate for their safety. From an H1 (for the period September 2024 to February 2025) average of three or four men at a time, this rose to about eight or nine through H2. Their motive, when we asked, was almost always fear about debt, due to drugs, although the men would not explain their reasons in full to the IMB. We tried to visit all these men every week.
- During the year, regime (time out of cell) for self-isolators was changed from once every three days individually to all of them every day at the same time (while enhanced men were being unlocked for free flow to education). Most of the self-isolators were happy with this change. A few men, however, chose to remain locked up, as their fears of violence were too great. In such instances, those men were taken out individually to get their medication and to shower. Meals were brought to their cells.
- Self-isolators welcomed the Board's concern and usually said they intended to continue until release. Landing officers were invariably well briefed about the self-isolators on their wings and, when an isolator was asleep, would brief us on how they were that day.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

- There were 277 assaults in the year, a very slight reduction year-on-year but still well above the five-year average. A total of 30% were on staff, compared with the previous year's figure of 33%. A total of 99 improvised weapons were found during the reporting year.
- We observed the monthly security, drugs and harms (SDH) meetings regularly, where statistics were produced on violent and self-harm incidents and were broken down by age group and ethnicity, with likely drivers discussed. Special attention was paid to drugs finds and methods of conveyance. As the year continued, attention was drawn to the prevalence of debt as a driver of violence and self-isolation.
- Violence among prisoners was often triggered by trivial disputes and retaliation but, as noted above, debt was also a key driver. Violence towards officers was usually due to officers challenging non-compliant behaviour and, in fewer cases, the result of intervening in fights.
- There were, however, a few instances of violence targeted at specific officers: an officer who had urine and faeces thrown at him ('potted') on two occasions told us he knew that the assailant had been coerced or paid by other prisoners to do this.
- Gang affiliations reported at reception varied from 5% to 8%, but were not considered likely drivers of violence.
- The senior leadership team (SLT) identified debt as an issue for which the prison must take some responsibility, rather than just blaming it on the men. The Board suggested that a more liberal application of prison regulations might allow men to purchase phone PINs from their private account rather than it being deducted from their spending money. Until the time of writing, in September 2025, the prison considered it 'educational' for men to manage their budgets. Many men, however, will choose vapes rather than contact with their family. The Board supports an adjustment in the regime to allow men to pay for their phone PIN credits from their private accounts to stay in contact with their families, which can help alleviate stress.
- We noted the lack of trained negotiators for serious incidents, but its impact has been minimal, given the few protracted incidents where the need for negotiators was required. This is consistent with a category C prison. Three staff are booked for training in February 2026, the earliest available date.

Assaults by prisoner on prisoner and on staff compared by year:

	Total assaults	Monthly average	On staff	On prisoner
2019-20	142	12	38	88
2020-21	130	11	70	60
2021-22	164	14	66	98
2022-23	311	26	123	188
2023-24	301	25	100	201
2024-25	277	23	83	196

4.4 Use of force

- Use of force (UoF) incidents averaged 39 per month this year compared with 38 in the previous year. A total of 242 prisoners were involved, with 92% of these unplanned and 8% planned. The Board was invited to observe several planned interventions on prisoners barricaded in their cells or refusing a transfer to another wing or prison. In all the cases we observed, the prisoner became compliant, and the competence of the action was recorded in the post-briefing.
- A total of 246 (53%) of 463 UoF incidents were undertaken to prevent harm by assault, to control fights and assaults that had broken out, and to counter physical threats. The remainder were for assorted reasons, such as prisoners UTI, cell transfer refusals, verbal threats, self-harm prevention and incidents at height.
- Of prisoners involved in UoF, 126 had disabilities (learning difficulties, ADHD, autism, multiple personality disorder or dyslexia).
- Batons were drawn on two occasions and used on one. Warnings were given ahead of each of three strikes and follow-up actions were appropriate. Minor injuries to the shins were dressed by healthcare. We subsequently discussed this in detail with the officer involved and were satisfied that procedures were followed correctly. This year was the first time since our 2019-20 report that batons had been drawn.
- PAVA incapacitant spray was used by one officer confronting six prisoners fighting, the first time it has been used by Brixton staff since it was issued in 2019. It was also used by the regional tactical support group dealing with an incident on the netting.
- UoF was reviewed weekly with all body-worn video camera (BWVC) footage and the evidence reports of officers involved. We have been impressed by the careful scrutiny of each incident, the identification of men and staff involved, noting care to protect the man's head at all times (particularly going down stairs) and dissemination of any necessary improvements.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

- Drugs were increasingly available, as was evidenced by the number of finds during searches, the confidential conversations that Forward Trust (FT) have with their (unidentified to IMB) clients and the market price on the wings. There were seizures of smart phones.

- Cannabis (112 finds, up 28%) was most frequently found; there were 71 finds of spice (a chemical compound that mimics the effects of the active ingredient in cannabis) or psychoactive substances up 7%. Men were often found UTI – at times over 20 in a week – and requiring urgent healthcare intervention. On one occasion, a member of FT staff found within 15 minutes over the lunch hour (when very few wing staff were on duty) three prisoners unconscious in their locked cells. One had barricaded, another was lying in vomit and the other was unconscious. A prisoner observed it was 'easier to get spice in here than to get paracetamol for a toothache'; another said that there were more drugs available on B wing than on the streets outside.
- Random drug tests showed a disturbing increase between January and May, resulting in 44% of men testing positive. This was brought back under control and averaged 27.5% over the last months of the year. Suspicion-based drug tests had a much higher positive rate, averaging 73.7% over the same period. In July, healthcare issued a troubling report about the danger of the introduction of Nitazene, a new and very powerful synthetic opioid. Staff training is planned in the administration of Naloxone (which can reverse the effects of opioids in overdose or withdrawal) to men thought to be overdosing on this substance.
- Interception of Rule 39 mail (privileged legal letters) detected drugs on a number of occasions and a number of throw-overs were also detected; 'hooch' (illicit, prison-brewed alcohol) was found on 105 occasions (62 in the previous year).
- Transfer of drugs between wings continues to be frequently during chapel services (where repeated visits to the toilet aroused suspicion). During free-flow (set times when men go between their wings and activities without escort), searches are limited to a rub down search. We were told dogs could not be risked in such a situation unless there were sufficient officers to restrain men from kicking them.
- For contraband delivery, the most alarming increase was drone incursions, a technique that increased in frequency.

CCTV

- Failures in CCTV systems continued through the year.
- Coverage by BWVC, however, has improved as a result of stricter control by supervising officers and was reviewed at the use of force meetings.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

- The oldest wings of the prison, A and B, probably date from the first half of the 19th century. Taking one of these cells at random, we measured it as 6.4m². Subtract the footprints of a double bunk, TV table, toilet, side table and wash basin and the remainder was about 3m² available for walking around, usually shared with a cellmate. The toilet is about a metre from the bunk, on which prisoners sit to eat their meals. Provision of a privacy curtain around the toilet was checked regularly. Without across a chair in the cell, men spent much of the day lying on their bunk beds. This is manifestly too crowded. Although this has always been the case and is a problem in almost all prisons across the estate, familiarity should not prevent our reminding the reader of it.

Food

- The quality and variety of food gets consistently high marks from prisoners and the kitchen was, at Christmas, a finalist for prison catering team of the year. Their prisoner satisfaction survey scored 80% against a national average of just 30%. We sampled the food regularly and found it to be hot, tasty and sufficient at the serveries. A visit in January by the regional catering supervisor confirmed this. The catering staff visit the wings regularly and chair a committee with wing representatives to discuss menu preferences.
- The catering budget for three meals increased during the reporting year from £3.12 to £3.80 per day, per prisoner. We have seen in the kitchen the care taken in preparing special meals for about 30 men with ten different needs: diabetes, lactose intolerant, kosher, spice-free, allergies to nuts, fish or salt, soft meals (for two men with no teeth) and sealed packets (for those who distrust anything open or shared). Kosher meals cost £9.83 per meal (usually for two to five men; if Orthodox, they get two such meals a day).
- Religious or other special occasions are celebrated with a more interesting meal for the whole population; those observing Ramadan are given hot boxes for their evening meal and a pre-sunrise breakfast pack.
- We have frequently remarked in our weekly reports to the Governor that, while server workers always wear gloves, they regularly claim that there is a shortage of hairnets or hats. Officers overseeing the serveries were inconsistent in enforcing correct usage.
- We heard much mention of rats in the early months of the year and noted specific areas where they were prevalent (the men's kitchens, the CSU and wing showers, the control room, the London pathways unit). There were 11 reports of rats to Mitie in the first half of the year and only two in the second half of the year, coinciding with general improvements in cleaning, which were evident on all wings.

Adjudications

- We recorded our observance of about 20 adjudications (disciplinary hearing when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules) by six different Governors during the year. We found procedures were clearly explained, prisoners' views were given sufficient time and outcomes were fair. In one case, failure of the CCTV on the wing prevented it being able to inform the proceedings. We noted an instance of an adjournment to provide language translation when necessary.

- Cases heard (on video) by the independent adjudicator allow for harsher sentences than Governors can give. But officers told to us that a quantity of drugs trafficked that warranted a two-year sentence outside the prison, incurs in prison only two weeks' stay in the CSU. The risk-reward calculation for a drug dealer in prison is far more favourable than outside. If the accused can find reasons for adjournment beyond his release date, the case would be dropped.
- During our reporting year, 58 incidents (44 in the previous year) were referred to the police and 30 were closed (i.e. the police closed their investigation, which could be for a number of reasons, such as that the victim did not want to support the claim or insufficient evidence). This total included 12 assaults on staff (10 in the previous year) that were referred, five of which were closed.

5.2 Segregation

- The Board visited all men in segregation at least once every week. Their occasional complaints to us about the state of the cells or showers were usually quickly remedied. Complaints about the CSU staff were very rare. Vandalism was frequent; dirty protests occasional.
- The Board observed a sample of reviews throughout the year and noted that they were conducted fairly and courteously by the Governor in charge, with men able to express their feelings openly.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

- Relationships have been generally observed to be good. Recent arrivals told us that staff were helpful, friendly and compared well with those in their previous prisons. Highlights included staff (including the Governor), prisoners and the local community (about 55 in total) running a half marathon together in the prison to coincide with the London Marathon, raising over £7,000 for the Prison Reform Trust. A 5km 'Walk the Walk' within the prison for a breast cancer charity by 67 men and 55 staff raised over £1,000.
- The Board received some general complaints about the lack of contact with key workers. These sessions were originally intended to be weekly, with each officer seeing separately half a dozen prisoners; the allocation of 45 minutes per prisoner for this proved unrealistic, particularly during the summer leave period. By the end of the reporting year, however, the number of sessions per month increased and the emphasis was on improving quality.
- Applications to the IMB relating to treatment by staff were 10% fewer than the previous year; we have noted several instances of staff showing patience and sympathy in calming a heated situation.
- Following criticism by HMIP in their March report, senior management was more visible. Examples include Governors' presence during free flow and wing forums organised by custodial managers. This visibility gave men the chance to raise wider issues with them.

The prison council met regularly, providing a forum for elected representatives from each wing to discuss issues of concern with Governors and departmental heads. There were very few complaints there about staff and prisoner relationships.

5.4 Equality and diversity

- The prison buildings are not suited to meet the needs of elderly and disabled prisoners, particularly those in wheelchairs. G wing had a lift, but it was not working

for most of the year. This was particularly inconvenient until May, when the prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSO) population was transferred to other prisons: there had been several elderly and frail men among them. The need for a lift (see also 6.4 below) continues, however, as some prisoners on upper floors use crutches. They, and others, rely on prisoner buddies for collection of their meals and to help them move around the prison. One prisoner who used a wheelchair (although not all the time) complained that he was unable to access the yard on his own. His family finally bought one for him. Personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEP) were reviewed regularly and signage on the cell doors of relevant men was clear.

- Each member of the senior management team led on one of the seven relevant characteristics (of the nine protected under the Equality Act 2010) and was tasked with organising related events such as Black History Month, a forum for Muslim prisoners, Gay Pride, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Months. The Board has not observed any instances of racial discrimination and notes that very few DIRFs (discrimination incident reporting forms) were submitted. We have occasionally spoken to men who feel deterred from submitting such a complaint, fearing that it could make things worse. By the end of the reporting year, all wings and the London pathways unit had DIRF post-boxes to ensure confidentiality.
- Monthly equality meetings helped ensure that prisoners were treated fairly, regardless of their background, and that the particular needs of different groups were met. There was concern that GRT prisoners did not find formal classroom training in literacy and maths relevant to their lifestyle; there were attempts to create opportunities for increasing literacy and numeracy through practical situations. The equality section took note of the needs of prisoners with specific disabilities. For a deaf prisoner, a flashing light within the cell was fitted so that staff could press it before they opened his door. This enabled him to be aware, when using the toilet, that staff were about to come in. Personal alarms (a neck tag) to alert staff were issued to prisoners where necessary. During the year, three prisoners (a mix of transgender and non-binary/gender fluid) were provided with makeup and one with gender-appropriate clothing.
- We noted that provision for prisoners with English as an additional language needed to improve. The Big Word translation service was promoted and there was a database of staff who speak foreign languages.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

- The multi-faith chaplaincy supports prisoners regardless of faith, delivering each week nine faith services, various faith study sessions and a Bible study session for staff. About 200 men attend one of the services each week, close to 30% of the prison population.
- The chaplaincy visits self-isolating prisoners and those on ACCTs once a week and attends all ACCT reviews. They keep a note of family illnesses, deaths and anniversaries of prisoners' relatives and their release dates to offer timely support. The chaplaincy drew on such insights to contribute to more general meetings. There was a Christmas carol service.
- Besides a managing chaplain, the team has Roman Catholic and Muslim members full time, and weekly visits by ministers of ten other faiths. The post of Anglican chaplain has been re-advertised but unfilled for about two years. They are supported by about 30 volunteers from the local community, who provide services on Sundays. In partnership with Change for Good, the chaplaincy provides through-the-gate

support on release; they deliver parenting courses with the charity Kids Matter and, with Survivors UK, support for victims of abuse or neglect at any time in their lives. This includes prisoners who have been traumatised in childhood or teenage years. They also offer emotional support to staff.

- Until the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) discontinued it in February, the chaplaincy was involved in the Sycamore Tree Restorative Justice programme. A representative of the armed forces charity SSAFA visits the prison fortnightly and supported half a dozen veterans through the year. Early in the year, Care After Combat was contracted by the MoJ to support veterans in prisons.

5.6 Complaints

- Prisoners can complain through general applications via the prisoner information desk (PIPs are prisoners running an information office on each wing), through the prison's complaints system (COMPs) and to the IMB. PIPs regularly told the Board that most of the complaints they received related to the offender management unit (OMU), particularly home detention curfew (HDC) and PINS (which determine the names of people men are allowed to phone).
- Prisoners should receive a response to an internal COMP within one working week; those to other prisons within two weeks. Response times for the former improved through the year and for the final five months none were overdue – a record for the previous five years. For the latter, responses were seldom on time and delays of several weeks were not uncommon. Statistics for these were noted daily at the Governor's morning meeting.

5.7 Property

- The Board received 27 applications (8%) on internal lost property and 35 applications (11% of the annual total) relating to property lost in transfer to Brixton; external COMPs (i.e. to other prisons) averaged 30 per month, of which 40% related to property. Our random quality assurance checks found instances of extreme delays and carelessness:

Example 1: a man transferred to Brixton complained two months later to the sending prison about lost clothing. This resulted in his clothing being sent on to Brixton a couple of days later. An unsigned entry to his Brixton property card recorded its receipt but not where, among several hundred boxes, his stuff belongings had been put. Almost eight months later, the property had still not been located.

Example 2: two visitors provided clothing for separate individuals, but both bags were mistakenly delivered to one person. Compensation was promised but delayed, owing to administrative errors, including a lost application. After repeated follow-ups, payment of several hundred pounds was finally made nine months later.

Example 3: a man's parcels, sent by his family, were rejected unfairly. This was conceded by the responsible Governor, who agreed to a refund of £50 for the postage. Despite regular reminders, our check with prisoner accounts found that no refund had been paid 10 months after the issue was raised.

These details were sent to the responsible Governor, who has committed to a review of the systems in reception.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

- Healthcare consists of three elements: Practice Plus Group, commissioned to provide medical services including physiotherapy and podiatry and optical services, etc. They have, in turn, commissioned Forward Trust to provide substance abuse services. North London NHS Foundation Trust provides mental health and psychological and talking therapies. Dental health is covered by a separate provider. Prisoners can access healthcare via applications, the medication hatch or speaking to a prison officer on the wing.
- The low number of Board members has limited our monitoring of this area. The June 2024 HMIP visit (with a Care Quality Commission component) spoke well of healthcare in Brixton, as did our own reporting for that year. A doctor is on duty from 8.30am to 5.30pm every day and visits the CSU on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. A pharmacist delivers medications every day (see 6.3, below). One of the specialists covering eight regional prisons and visiting Brixton weekly told us that the administration staff of healthcare were top of this league; he attributed the efficiency of their appointments control in part to the system of free flow. Complaints to the Board about healthcare averaged about two a month (half of the number in the previous year and mostly from men wanting more information about their treatment). There were healthcare reps on all the wings, who were helpful in getting men to collect their medication and delivering appointment slips.
- Early in the reporting year, non-attendance of appointments, including nurses' clinics, continued to be high (100-140 per week). Scheduled hospital appointments and emergency call-outs represent an appreciable drain on healthcare and uniformed staff as below:

	Total
Planned hospital escorts	487
Planned bed watches	4
A&E attendances	172
Unplanned bed watches	35

6.2 Physical healthcare

- The physical education staff offered all men up to four hours a week in the gym and ran yoga sessions. Full-time workers had gym in the evenings and men over 50, or those needing remedial gym, were allocated time at the weekends. The gym staff continued to do a good job of getting men to the gym from B wing, especially those awaiting induction and with nothing to do.

6.3 Mental health

- Throughout the year, about 10% of the prison population had serious mental health disorders that required specialist psychiatric input. The Board found the wait times to be acceptable. Access to a psychiatrist was dependent on urgency and need.

- Treatment length in the therapies team depended on the pathway. For psychological talking therapy, one-to-one interventions (e.g. counselling, CBT) for mild to moderate difficulties, there was a lengthy waiting list. This would consist of six to 12 sessions as standard, with an option of increasing for up to 18 sessions. One-on-one input with a clinical psychologist for more moderate to severe difficulties (e.g. complex trauma, PTSD, emotional dysregulation, psychosis) was much longer. The team also provided occupational therapy and speech and language therapy, both of which had shorter waiting lists.
- The churn meant, however, that there could be limited time for men to receive one-to-one treatment within the prison if their release date was less than six months away. Should there be a need for this, but not enough time for one-to-one, a brief triage assessment would be offered, with an invitation to one-off workshops on topics such as managing stress and worry, and understanding and coping with trauma, loss or bereavement. Waiting time to attend a workshop/group was still significant in length.
- A difficulty for the mental health team was the lack of community handover after release. Clinicians needed to share both personal knowledge of the patients and their detailed medical records. The churn impeded robust release plans for several reasons, including patients often not being in Brixton long enough for the mental health team to assess them properly. Community services would usually not accept referrals until they had confirmation of an address to which the patient was being released. This negated any pre-release planning or work. Most affected were those with severe and enduring mental illnesses who required injectable medication and had previously been detained under the Mental Health Act.
- A sensory room in G wing was still unready at the end of the year. Yoga classes (a four-week course) were always full.

Pharmacy distribution of medication

- Around 40% of the prison population were receiving medication for mental health issues.
- In the first half of the reporting year, we noted that there was frequently no officer supervision of the daily medication distribution by healthcare, particularly in the afternoons, when it often coincided with the servery being open (i.e. when there was a lot of prisoner movement). Mid-year instructions considerably improved supervision of the medication hatch on each wing. Self-isolators were to be brought there by wing officers before or after the rest of the wing was unlocked.
- It has been known in the prison for aspirin to be crushed up and sold as cocaine. Every medication is vulnerable to diversion as part of the prison currency. Regurgitation of medication occurred with the security team, on occasion, bringing to pharmacy part-chewed pills to ask what they were. During H1 (September 20024 to February 2005), 75% of the prison population on medication were receiving them 'in possession', i.e. to hold in their cells. Practice Plus pharmacy staff did spot-checks over weekends to identify those not taking the correct dose or potentially selling in-possession medication to others. A total of 29 finds of misdirected medication was almost double the previous year's total.

Neurodiversity

- Prisoners clinically diagnosed or self-declared as neurodivergent average about 60% of Brixton's population. Previous reports have indicated that approximately 72% of those in the CSU have neurodivergent needs. There is a well-established national

correlation between neurodiversity, mental health challenges, and substance misuse, and this is reflected within Brixton. According to the neurodiversity support manager (NSM), they also make up a large proportion of the third of the prison population who are unemployed.

- The NSM has been in place for most of the year. Prisoners have been trained and there are now neurodiversity representatives on each wing, providing excellent feedback about other neurodivergent men there. Training for officers on managing neurodiverse prisoners in UoF situations began with a pilot training programme launched in June at HMP Brixton and HMP Hull. This was developed collaboratively by the NHS England clinical psychology team and the national UoF team. Over a third of Brixton's officers have now been taught de-escalation techniques and an understanding neurodivergent needs. It is too early to determine the full impact of this training on UoF incidents, but we anticipate a reduction in these as staff confidence and understanding increase.

Care on release

- The release and transfer team work with the OMU to help newly released with access to healthcare and to offer support in the first days after release. Although many men are homeless on release, they may be housed within a day or two via the Probation Service. On rare occasions, HMP Brixton pays for a first night in a bed and breakfast to help a particularly vulnerable prisoner without accommodation.
- One of the release and transfer team's concerns is (continued) substance abuse after release. Healthcare-trained prison leavers in the use of naloxone, a drug that can reverse the effects of opioid overdose or withdrawal, which ex-prisoners who are using opioids can keep with them to have a friend administer to them in the event of an overdose.

6.4 Social care

- Early in the year, we noted a lack of clarity in the role of the local social services, who pays for what, or even what constitutes a disability – issues that cover residential, healthcare, equalities and safer custody. Lambeth Council provide social care for specific men, as necessary.
- We have noted men in difficulty and the time it has taken to sort things out: on G wing (when it was the only location for PCoSos), the lift (which would assist such men as these) was broken without repair for many months. A man with a broken arm and prosthetic leg was not accommodated on the ground floor.
- There was a shortage of wheelchairs within the prison, possibly because they were left in hospital after escorted visits.

6.5 Time out of cell

- Although men have complained to us that there is little to do during free hours, we have noted a lot of peaceful association activity, such as card and board games, dominoes and pool (for which most tables were recovered during the year). A monthly chess tournament takes place.
- Time out of cell has varied: for example, in April, B wing ceased to be an induction wing, with very restricted time out of cell and prisoners enjoying a minimum of two hours' association sessions, morning and afternoon, with free flow between landings

for men on the standard regime of the incentives scheme, a system of earned privileges to incentives positive behaviour. The evening association regime has also been reintroduced in full. But in the same week, A wing prisoners approached us to complain about the regime and lack of time out of cell and access to the yard (we were told 90 minutes maximum per day).

- For enhanced men (those who have earned the least strict regime in the prison), the physical education staff organised an evening community centre in the visits hall, which ran during the winter. In the summer months, these men (about 15 at a time) could enjoy cricket, volleyball and hockey. At lunchtimes, there were basketball, football and volleyball matches between staff and prisoners. Weekly callisthenics classes for a dozen men in the A wing yard frequently saw the supervising staff join in. A gym instructor, with 34 years in Brixton, told us men frequently told him that Brixton staff were more approachable than in other establishments.
- FT, sub-contracted by Patient Plus Group, has about 300 clients at any one time, doing alcohol detox, opiate substitution or a psychosocial modality. They treat their clients with medication, substance awareness teaching, relocation to another wing if they are at risk from drug dealers, organised community support after release, escort released men to probation and prescription appointments. It has been reported that these measures are necessary because of the widespread availability of drugs in the area and the ease with which individuals can be identified as recently released and known to be in possession of their discharge grant.
- We have already reported (see 4.5, above) the availability of drugs. In some weeks, over 20 men have been found UTI: these represent an increase in the longer-term caseload of FT, as well as a distraction of officer resources to cope with the immediate incident. By July, it was noted that there were too many UTI incidents to deal with them individually.
- Following the change in function of D wing, from drug recovery to induction wing, prisoners on the FT programmes were mixed with other prisoners, making it more difficult for those in recovery to adhere to the programme (this also depended on where they were in their recovery journey, i.e. whether they have been able to stabilise their drug use). In January 2025, there was concern that men released late in the day and/or at short notice (early/unplanned release) did not get appointments for post-release support. FT avoided this risk by setting up post-release appointments at the very start of the intervention. FT worked in partnership with Living Safely and Smart (substance awareness), Stepping Stones (motivation to abstinence and harm reduction) and The Bridge (Steps 1, 2 and 3 of the 12-steps therapy).

6.6 Soft skills

- In November, D'Oyly Carte sponsored a quartet of opera singers to give an hour-long performance in the chapel. Men were visibly moved. Mediation training (by Belong) was given to six to seven officers and the violence reduction representatives prisoners in December and January, over three days. From Brixton, there were two winners in the Koestler Exhibition at the Festival Hall in December. Koestler Awards is an annual programme encouraging people from the UK's criminal justice system to change their lives through the arts.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education

- As we reported last year, there were backlogs in induction in the first half of the year, with 108 men were waiting at end October; at the end of the reporting year, this was 109, but this blockage had, by then, been bypassed by drawing on responses already given by men in their previous prisons. With the change of D wing into an induction wing, procedures were much quicker and education inductions were completed within two working days of arrival. IAG (information advice and guidance, a separate contract from Novus) was more of a problem, apparently the consequence of their internal staffing shortfalls, according to senior staff in the learning, skills and education team.
- From February, the allocations board was working more efficiently and 80-90% of men were assigned to education or work within a week of arrival. For many months of the year, however, about 40% of the population were listed in the daily report as unemployed (about 130), awaiting inductions or refusing to participate (about 10).
- The regional quality manager for education told us in November that, as in other regional prisons, it was still a problem recruiting and retaining good maths and English teachers, subjects where standards still fell short. He spoke well of the departmental leadership, and horticulture was described as inspiring (though see 7.2 below). Ofsted returned (with HMIP) in March and found insufficient progress in the speed of allocation and quality of education, but that sufficient well-qualified staff had been recruited. The national contract for education came up for renewal in mid-2025 and, after a national re-tendering, People Plus will be taking it over from Novus after the end of this reporting year; we understand that most staff in Brixton will remain in their posts.
- We were present during checks in August to ensure classrooms and teachers were up to scratch. We sampled 30 lessons through the year and saw men fully engaged in their subjects. Teachers were well prepared. But information and communications technology (ICT) was an area that did not meet the required standard, partly due to poor quality equipment.
- There were insoluble problems, however: the prison remained over 150 activity places short, the high turnover of men left little time to complete courses, the availability of classrooms (particularly on the free-flow route that would allow men to get to them unescorted, which forced the prison to put on hold several offers from charities to run courses suitable for resettlement) and the relevance of courses that make men more motivated to attend them. A lot of providers would need to do their own risk assessments before making commitments, another likely delay.
- Attendance and punctuality were dealt with on a daily basis, with wing staff becoming more proactive as the year progressed. The 30% of the population out of work/education in March had been reduced to 23% at the year end. The departure of PCoSos (on G Wing) who had the best education attendance recorded distorted statistics.
- National prison radio was well staffed, produced programmes of high quality and provided some work opportunities on release in their studio in Brixton.
- The debt advisory service continued to offer help on the management of external debt. Since its inception in March 2024, 65 men have benefitted. This project, piloted in Brixton, has now been extended to 13 other prisons in the region.

The Shannon Trust

- The Shannon Trust provided pre-entry level help with reading and special classes for men with 'educational trauma' (e.g. distrust of figures in authority). Prisoner mentors were trained in approaching neurodivergent learners. ST told us they believed between 5% and 10% of prisoners were unable to read or write and between 40% and 50% had challenges with reading and writing.
- An interdepartmental (education, neurodiversity, library and the Shannon Trust) monthly meeting discussed barriers to reading tuition. The biggest problem became the high churn: despite checking on release dates before training, ST found mentors were transferred unexpectedly soon. The same could be true for the learners (but, in their case, without the waste of training resources).
- At times in the year, ST had difficulties pairing mentors with student, as the regime hours of the two could be different. They offset this by organising extra library visits between the fortnightly training sessions. On B wing, there was a high proportion of unoccupied men with low literacy levels and on a more restricted regime than other wings. In H1, ST told us they felt officers were unsupportive in getting out their mentees to work with them. By the year end, ST was giving officers weekly referral lists, depending on need, and receiving a response to confirm availability.
- There was a shortage of space for one-to-one meetings. At the year end, ST had 11 mentors, with three learners each, and five vacancies.

7.1.1 Library

- About 30% of the prison population were regular users of the library. Its two full-time staff (employees of Lambeth Libraries, assisted by two prisoner orderlies) kept an eye on the languages present in the prison at any one time and requested from their central branch a selection of foreign language books for them. When we checked on one occasion, books were available in Arabic, Albanian, Chinese, French, German, Polish, Romanian, Russian and Spanish. A weekly delivery from Lambeth Libraries keeps them up to date. There were library representatives on each wing.
- The three PCs in the library have stood idle for several years (as indicated by their still using Windows XP) and are now useless. In their time, they were very popular for e-learning (driving theory, consulting an encyclopaedia of criminal law, etc). The Board recommends they are replaced.
- The prison advice service was available one afternoon a month, provided by volunteer lawyers. With up to 10 men per session, it was always over-subscribed.
- Throughout the year, library staff had to phone wing officers twice a day to remind them to get escort staff to bring men over. Prisoners and library staff became frustrated by this waste of time, having other things to do while out of their cells (appointments, medication), but when in the library, men were well behaved and appreciative of this facility.

7.2 Vocational training, work

- For much of the year, the daily operational report showed over 150 men unemployed and, with those refusing or awaiting induction, this represented a high percentage of the population. Textiles/fashion (for up to 12 men) ceased in April and horticulture (for eight men) in August. In October, a waste management project was started to provide some jobs for men and savings for prison budget.
- The Clink Restaurant was less worried about its budget as the year progressed but could have employed more men, a consequence of delays to induction. In January,

they were still 10 workers short, still affected by the SDS40, from which a lot of their workers had benefited.

- Purposeful activity improved through the year: the 300 unemployed at the time of the HMIP inspection had been halved by the year end and Brixton was, by then, top of the regional prisons for purposeful activity. Over Q4, an average 42% of the population were in full-time activity (against a benchmark of 30%). A further 25% were in half-time activity (well above the 15% benchmark).
- The Bounce Back Project (a charity that supports prisoners to reduce reoffending) taught a range of building skills to about 40 men (a waiting list ensured they were full). Painting and decorating, dry lining, wall and floor tiling courses lasted two to three months and resulted in a City & Guilds qualification that enabled employment on release. Among the potential employers who visited to encourage employment applications were several household names in construction, transport and catering industries.
- Several external charities contributed support, mentoring and vocational training without charge to the prison. These included Kids Matter, SWIM (Support When It Matters), Finding Rhythms (music production), Fine Cell Work (needlework) and Onwards and Upwards (training as bike mechanics within the prison and then after release). This last also jointly funded the start of barbering courses, with the prison paying for the instructor. Most of these were available to about eight men at a time.
- Plans to restart employment with local firms for men to be released on temporary licence (ROTL) for working hours, with return to the prison each evening, had to be abandoned in October, when the decision was taken to re-role the prison to category B.

7.3 Offender management, progression

- The early release scheme (SDS40), allowing prisoners to be released at 40% of their sentence, rather than the usual 50%, consisted of two tranches (54 men in September and a further 31 in October). Of the London prisons, Brixton had the most men to release. The OMU had a greatly increased workload in the weeks before and 10 of the 54 did not know where they would be sleeping that night. Arrangements were made for them, including means to draw benefits immediately via several local Job Centres. Also available in the departure lounge portacabin were St Mungo's, external probation and PACT. The need to separate PCoSOs and other non-associates (such as gang members) was well planned.
- The initial plan (in late 2024) was to re-role the prison categorisation around mid-2025. Ahead of this, around May, the prison opposed a request from HMPPS to accept, as priority for transfers to Brixton, men with the shortest time left to serve. They agreed to accept those with a minimum of 28 days to serve. This increased the churn to up to 50 or more releases in a week and, by the year end, about 70% of the population had 12 weeks or less to serve, this being the time at which most of the pre-release actions are triggered (7.5 below).
- Sentence re-calculations, which should be done within five working days of arrival fell behind schedule, although by the year end the backlog had been reduced to about two weeks. Some incorrect calculations by previous prisons, two regional ones in particular, took time for Brixton to detect. During the year, eight men were released in error and 11 men were unlawfully detained (i.e. held after their release date). These mistakes illustrated the pressure on the OMU and the complexity of some of the rules. By the year end, the backlog was alleviated by improvements to procedures, the digitisation of records and the recruitment of experienced staff.

- In mid-year, the OMU set up weekly ‘surgeries’ on the wings to help alleviate slow communication. We observed part of a training day aimed at equipping landing officers to answer men’s questions rather than refer to the OMU. This was a welcome initiative. There were also delays outside in the Probation Service within the community.

7.4 Family contact, social visits, PACT

- Social visits and social video calls were run throughout the year, with family days organised by PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust) during school holidays and half-terms.
- Brixton was one of two establishments in which PACT ran the Routes 2 Change (R2C) befriending scheme. Funding for this ended in August 2024. It had assisted families in maintaining links with men during sentence and up to six months post-release. Despite this, Story Book Dads, through which men recorded themselves reading books to be sent home for their children, continued throughout the year, surviving a six-month hiatus due to building work.
- The reduction in funding meant that only one PACT family worker remained in Brixton at the start of this reporting year. Volunteer family workers assisted, but there was a delay (about three weeks at year-end) in providing support. In November, a member of Brixton staff joined the PACT team to assist with family services. That position was assured to the end of 2026.
- The PACT volunteer visitor scheme continued, matching volunteers with prisoners who have no one visiting. There was a 100% take-up when referrals were made. The child-friendly family room continued to be used to accommodate visitors with special needs and for meeting where privacy is required. In August, however, it was taken away and PACT were obliged to share a room with other functions.
- There were delays in approving phone PINs: these determine which phone numbers a prisoner is allowed to call. The delay affected prisoners received from privately run prisons. Measures taken to address this included the offer of welfare calls to their families on their first night and subsequent days until PINs are approved.
- The cost of calls from in-cell phones was higher in prison than outside; and wages inside were low. Men were also only permitted to buy phone credit from their ‘spends’ account – which has to cover their canteen as well as calls – and were not permitted to use savings/private funds for calls. Emotionally vulnerable men and others who need to phone family during the day ran through their allowances rapidly, as did those with family overseas.
- As in previous years, cold snacks remained the only food on offer in the visits hall. There was still no provision for card payment nor an increase in the amount of cash a visitor could bring in for snacks.

7.5 Resettlement planning

- We observed several monthly resettlement meetings and have been impressed with the coordination between many departments involved. The Board has not had the resources to monitor this in detail, but contributions by several departments are detailed above.
- Throughout the reporting year, an average of 84% of men were housed on the first night of custodial release (against a target of 90%). St Mungo’s noted that, since SDS40, they received considerably fewer referrals of men in custody and a corresponding surge in community referrals. This was true for all London prisons, but Brixton was doing better than average in catching such cases and working with

them. About 95% of St Mungo's clients had accommodation on release and at the year end, Brixton had been chosen to pilot a Rent and Ready course with the charity, Shelter.

- Over the period April to August (for which data was available to the prison), employment six weeks after release averaged 13.6% and six months after release averaged 19.7% (this last figure is close to the figures for 16-year-old school leavers). This did not include released prisoners who might have gone into any form of training course. Employment events attracting interest from about a dozen men took place about three times a month.
- From February, Create Further Opportunities (CFO) representatives were present in all London prisons to ensure that those with four weeks or less to serve were allocated a support worker. The programme provides a range of services, including housing, financial, relationships and life skills coaching. Men could be referred to one of their three hubs within the south London area, where monthly job centres were held.

8. The work of the IMB

- We reported last year that the Board had, for most of the year, numbered a third of its permitted membership. The departure (at the end of 2024, for various reasons and, in one case, the end of the 15 years permitted) of four members with a combined 35 years' experience has been compensated by the recruitment of seven new members during the year. Recruitment in December of five new members, through the national process did not, however, mean their arrival: the slow progress of appointment and security clearance delayed their starting the mentoring process (in the case of three of them until after the end of the reporting year).
- With advice from the IMB Secretariat, we have therefore concentrated much of our time on the training of seven new members, with the scope of our monitoring reduced to what we consider essential.
- In conclusion, we note that we have been welcomed at all prison meetings we have chosen to observe; have received from all staff frank replies to our questions and requests for briefing; and, with very few exceptions, been treated politely by the prisoners to whom we have spoken.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11
Total number of visits to the establishment	248 (previous year 309)

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	28	12
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	25	9
C	Equality	9	5
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	16	9
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	26	8
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	15	14
F	Food and kitchens	13	15
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	41	25
H1	Property within the establishment	32	27
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	49	35
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	6	12
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	54	61
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	97	87
K	Transfers	3	8
Total number of applications		414	327



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