



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Hewell

**For reporting year
1 October 2024 to 30 September 2025**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent Board, appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community where 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 Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Hewell was built in 1993 and is classed as a local category B reception prison for adult men. (Category B prisons house those who pose a serious escape risk but don't require maximum-security conditions.) It is in a rural setting, half a mile from a main road and three miles from the nearest towns of Bromsgrove and Redditch in Worcestershire, where there are train stations.

The prison's operational capacity (OpCap) was 1094¹. Based on monthly statistics, the average population was 1,008 (92% of capacity, compared with 94% last year). These numbers are achieved by prisoners sharing cells intended for one occupant. The certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded) was raised from 795 to 825 during the reporting year.

As was the case last year, most prisoners are on remand. For example, HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) reported in June 2025 that 63% were on remand or convicted but awaiting sentence, and 10% were recalls. The churn (turnover of men through admissions, transfers and releases) of prisoners is high: HMIP reported that around 383 new prisoners are received and 228 released each month.

A significant proportion of men received are from courts outside the prison's designated area. A recent sampling found that this amounted to 10% of new arrivals.

Hewell has six houseblocks (HBs) and two specialist units.

- A houseblock for men deemed vulnerable within the prison.
- A houseblock with reception and the early-days unit.
- Three general houseblocks for convicted, remanded, sentenced and unsentenced prisoners.
- A houseblock with wellbeing provision for prisoners who have drug or alcohol dependencies and related conditions.
- Oak unit: a facility for prisoners with low mobility or needing social care.
- A segregation unit (where prisoners are kept apart from the general population, usually for discipline, safety or protection reasons), with a capacity for 25 men.

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. OpCap is defined as 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.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

The findings of the IMB at Hewell must be considered in the context of the continuing problems and pressures facing the criminal justice system and the Prison Service. The prison population crisis leads to crowding, which reduces the options for well-matched cell sharing. Continued backlogs in the court system result in a significant proportion of prisoners on remand - and for long periods. This changes the balance of the population in local prisons. The rapid turnover of prisoners makes it difficult to keep cells in a good state.

Despite these pressures and challenges, our observations have led us to believe that the Governor and staff at HMP Hewell have continued to focus on delivering a safe, fair and humane regime. HMP Hewell now has an effective prison council and 'Here to Help' peer mentors. These have a positive effect on organisational culture, staff and prisoner relationships and wellbeing.

There have been two changes of Governor, in February and May 2025.

Safety

- **Self-harm:** Incidents of self-harm fell to 755 from 1,033 last year, in part due to a reduction in the number of repeat self-harmers. We observed safety meetings and noted a diligent and problem-solving approach to understanding the reasons for self-harm and attempts to reduce incidents of harm.
- **Violence:** There were 478 incidents of violence, compared with 475 last year: 334 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and fights and 144 assaults on staff.
- **Reception:** The reception and induction process continued to be supported by additional staffing resources from NHS England, to complete assessments within timescales. To address the pressure of late arrivals, a 'twilight' shift was maintained and was achieved within existing prison staffing resources.
- **Use of force:** When the Board witnessed use of force incidents, they seemed proportionate and humanely executed. We observed a sample of weekly and monthly reviews of the data and body-worn video camera (BWVC) footage and noted that staff in attendance were diligent in their analysis of situations, keen to commend good practice, ready to take action where it fell short and alert to lessons learned. BWVC deployment during use-of-force incidents remained at approximately 80%. It remained difficult to assess attempts at de-escalation, which may have been made prior to the use of force. In the Board's view, both the quality and timeliness of record-keeping could be improved.
- **Illicit substances:** Hewell has one of the lowest positive results for mandatory drug testing compared to other reception prisons. Even so, drugs and illicitly brewed alcohol continue to be discovered. Cannabis and psychoactive substances (PS) are among the most prevalent drugs found. Hewell operates a therapeutic response to individual prisoners who test positive for drugs or are found under the influence (UTI). There is a dedicated houseblock for prisoners with drug and alcohol issues. An incentivised substance free living (ISFL) spur within this dedicated houseblock is planned in early 2026.

Fair and humane treatment

- **Accommodation:** The communal areas of the prison are bright, clean, decent and generally well-maintained, the result of a sustained positive approach to having a clean and decent regime. Maintaining the condition of individual cells remains a challenge, given the churn of prisoners, the sharing of cells and the degrading practice of prisoners having to eat and use the toilet in the same confined space.
- **Segregation:** From the Board's observations, the segregation unit provided a fair and safe regime, with a focus on progressing men out of the unit. We have concerns about the use of segregation for those with complex and severe mental health needs but recognise that it is usually the least harmful option. The provision of a dedicated nurse seems to have improved the continuity of care and reduced anxiety in some men.
- **Key working:** Delivery of formal key work has remained at a low level. Key working is where prisoners are assigned an individual prison officer whose responsibility is to engage, motivate and support them throughout their time in prison.
- **Engagement:** A prisoner-led prison council, fully supported by the Governor and senior leadership team (SLT), increased prisoner engagement. A rigorously delivered action plan for improvements has continued to promote more trusting relationships between staff and prisoners.
- **Equality and diversity:** Commitment has been maintained with the continued recruitment of prisoner equality mentors and a dedicated equality induction.
- **Regime:** During the year, the regime underwent a radical change. This had two objectives: firstly, to reduce the time that many men had been spending confined to their cells; and, secondly, to ensure a fairer and more balanced distribution of opportunities in work and education. Under the new regime, the population of the prison was divided into two halves, with one half out at work or education in the morning whilst the other remained on the houseblocks. This was reversed in the afternoon. It replaced full-time work or education for a smaller number of men with part-time engagement for a much larger number. It represents a different response to one of HMP Hewell's persistent problems: the lack of sufficient purposeful activity to engage the entire population.

Health and wellbeing

- **General health:** We were not made aware of problems with GP or dental appointments, although the waiting list for dentistry is typically long.
- **Mental health:** We remain concerned about the high levels of mental ill health within the prison population and the prolonged waits for appropriate services. Despite the proactive efforts by the prison, a large and busy local prison cannot be an acceptable environment for such unwell individuals. At the reporting year end, 170 men were receiving specialist treatment for their mental health, in addition to those being treated by the GP service. In the space of five months, seven men were sectioned (detained under the Mental Health Act for compulsory treatment) on their release and, as of September 2025, ten were awaiting transfer to secure mental hospitals or clinics. Many of

the men with mental ill health spend time in the segregation unit as the least harmful option.

- **Drugs and alcohol services:** Hewell has one of the lowest positive results for mandatory drug testing compared with other reception prisons. Even so, drugs and illicitly brewed alcohol continue to impact prisoners. Cannabis and psychoactive substances (PS) are among the most prevalent drugs found. Hewell operates a therapeutic response to individual prisoners who test positive for drugs or are found under the influence (UTI). There is a dedicated houseblock for prisoners with drug and alcohol issues and there is an intention to establish an Incentivised Substance Free Living spur within this houseblock in early 2026.
- **Wellbeing:** The lack of sufficient education and employment for all prisoners was partly mitigated by a range of diversionary, soft skills and vocational activities.

Progression and resettlement

- **Education:** Population churn negatively impacted the potential for men to complete education programmes. At Hewell, a third of men moved on within a month and two-thirds within three months. This was exacerbated by about half the population having a reading and literacy level usually expected of 9-11 year olds. From the Board's observations, the Shannon Trust charity has worked effectively with prisoner mentors to improve literacy. There has been significant improvement in the clarity and comprehensiveness of information about the range of learning opportunities.
- **Vocational work and training:** Activity boards were proactive in allocating employment opportunities, either on houseblocks or in industries (which deliver work-like training environments that give prisoners the foundations to improve their employment prospects on release), but it was not possible to provide opportunities for all the men who wanted to participate. There was an addition to the range of industries on offer, and almost all work now leads to a recognised certificate. At the end of the reporting year, most jobs were split into part-time, allowing nearly double the number of prisoners to participate (but for half the time).
- **Resettlement:** The employment hub, working closely with Inside Job (a peer-led initiative that finds jobs for people while they are serving their sentences) workers and prisoner mentors, provides an impressively well-resourced, purposeful service, in the Board's view. The Inside Job workers continue to be available to men after release, and available data suggests that 25% of men are known to be in employment after release. The number of men who choose not to engage with these services does, however, remain disturbingly high.
- **Children and families:** The number of social visit sessions available at the start of the year (230 per week) was considered inadequate. An attempt to create additional visiting sessions was partially successful: extra weekend slots were popular but weekday mornings were underused and eventually discontinued. There is no separate child contact room, despite a long-standing recognition of the need for families to have a degree of privacy for the most sensitive events and discussions. The prison has been unable to provide adequate catering for visitors.

3.2 Main areas for development

Note: Some of these questions are repeated from the previous report because the issues remain unresolved and continue to have a significant impact on prisoner welfare and rehabilitation.

TO THE MINISTER

- What is the Minister doing to ensure that the provision of mental health services for prisoners, inside prison and in dedicated mental health facilities, is improved? What is the timetable for impact of the forthcoming Mental Health Act for prisoners?
- What is being done to ensure that the 28-day limit for transfer of prisoners to a mental health hospital is enforceable?
- Will the Minister ensure that all prisons and prisoners have access to IT systems to increase prisoners' skills and chances of employment, to free up prison officer time spent on paper systems and to promote a fairer and more transparent regime?
- What is the Minister doing to extend support for prisoners after release to reduce recall and reoffending?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- When will HMP Hewell benefit from changes to training, as identified in the independent review of training carried out by Lord Timpson, and to be taken forward as part of the wider Enable programme?
- Why are Governors unable to interview band 3 staff locally? This could help mitigate the high drop-out rate for new recruits.
- When will HMP Hewell have IT access for prisoners? All prisons should allow direct access for prisoners to enable them to be self-directing and reduce the burden and mistrust of paper-based systems.
- What measures will the Prison Service take to ensure that funded pilot schemes, such as the HMP Hewell Here-to-Help peer mentorship programme, include metrics and criteria for success, as well as a contingency plan for scaling up if successful?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- What steps will you take to develop an incentives scheme that is respected and effective?
- How will you maintain and build on the successful 'Here to Help' peer mentorship programme, and what steps will you take to secure funding for mentor training and accreditation?
- How will you re-evaluate the regime to maximise opportunities for time out of cell, work and education?
- What actions will be taken to increase the capacity for assessing men during induction so they can be quickly assigned to appropriate work or education?
- When will the transfer of men with severe or complex mental health conditions be consistently achieved within the 28-day limit?

3.3 Response to the last annual report (October 2023 to September 2024)

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister		
1. Reducing numbers in custody related to the length of time on remand due to backlogs in the courts?	1. Committed to reducing backlog. Extension of magistrates powers and prioritisation of cases. Lord Chancellor review commissioned.	1. Initiatives such as SDS40 have reduced population. Court backlogs continue to rise.
2. Considering alternatives to custodial sentences.	2. Sentencing Review/Bill.	2. Bill at Committee Stage in Parliament.
3. Ensuring mental health services for prisoners is improved.	3. Mental Health Bill to parliament on 6 November 2024. Care and speed of transfer should improve.	3. Mental Health Act given Royal Assent on 18 December 2025.
4. Investing more in the maintenance and updating of prisons.	4. £23.2m invested in HMP Hewell over previous five years. Funding received for lift in houseblock 6.	4. Investment in infrastructure, including lift replacement,
5. Providing prisoners with access to IT systems.	5. Launchpad roll-out [a digital, in-cell platform designed to support prisoner rehabilitation and engagement], but does not yet include HMP Hewell.	5. No progress.
6. Extending support for prisoners after release to reduce recall and reoffending.	6. Notes benefits of local employment.	6. No further initiatives announced.
To the Prison Service		
1. Changes to officer training and the Enable programme.	1. Enable programme in early-adopter sites. Roll-out to HMP Hewell not then confirmed.	1. Not yet rolled out to HMP Hewell?
2. Ability for Governors to interview band 3 staff locally.	2. Piloting of local delivery models.	2. Not yet at HMP Hewell.
3. IT access for prisoners in Hewell.	3. See Minister's response.	3. Not yet at HMP Hewell.

<p>4. Fitness for purpose of health and mental health assessments.</p> <p>5. Improve provision for transfer of prisoners' educational and vocational records across institutions.</p>	<p>4. Needs assessment expected to be refreshed for HMP Hewell in early 2025.</p> <p>5. Learning and Work Progress Service will be in mandatory use by 1 April 2025.</p>	<p>4. Assessment completed in December 2025.</p> <p>5. System now in place.</p>
<p>To the Governor</p> <p>1. Maintain and develop commitment to equality and engagement</p> <p>2. Evaluate the impact of houseblock re-designation and changes to the core regime.</p> <p>3. Improve family contact with refreshments and a child contact room.</p> <p>4. Enable prisoners transferring to another establishment to take record of their achievements with them.</p>	<p>No written response - updates provided monthly in person to the Board.</p>	<p>1. Done.</p> <p>2. Achieved.</p> <p>3. Refreshments still not available in the visitor reception centre. No child contact room.</p> <p>4. Learning and work progress service in place.</p>

The ministerial response can be read in full [here](#).

Evidence Sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Population pressures and the churn of prisoners impacted negatively on provision of effective screening and assessment on arrival. For example, in a randomly selected four-week period in August, daily handover sheets showed a count of 757 arrivals and 750 departures, including two days in which over 100 men passed through reception. This was exacerbated by the number of men redirected to Hewell from courts, which would usually be served by other prisons.

Late receptions, up to midnight on occasion, posed problems for timely screening and assessment, as the priority was to get men, who may have been in court and transit since early morning, fed and to cells. A 'twilight' staff shift was implemented, which meant that staff receiving late arrivals had not already worked a full day and volunteering for overtime.

The churn of prisoners placed stress on HB2, where new prisoners are inducted, both in terms of maintaining the cleanliness and the decency of cells, replacing the kit for prisoners and being able to complete a comprehensive programme of induction. Staff focus their efforts on inducting prisoners who had not previously been held at Hewell.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There were 755 Incidents of self-harm in the reporting year compared with 1,033 in 2023-2024. Hewell now sits in the lower half of the comparative group (13th lowest out of the group of 31 comparator establishments).

Self-harm incidents

Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25
133	73	62	49	45	62	27	43	29	79	88	65

Out of the last 5,000 new receptions at Hewell, just 250 men have self-harmed, which suggests that the majority of those who arrive at the prison remain safe during custody and do not become 'first time' self-harmers as a consequence of their imprisonment.

Last year, the Board noted the prison's diligent, problem-solving approach to understanding drivers of self-harm and developing strategies to reduce it. The same can be observed this year, as is evident in the safety minutes and the RAG-rated actions (a red, amber and green system used to indicate priority and progress) recorded.

Cutting has remained the most common method of self-harm. In May 2025, self-strangulation and cutting both had 11 incidents each. There was a reduction in cutting, attributable to a new razor policy (replacing blades with electric razors). However, razors were replaced by other items, usually categorised under 'plastic material'. This included items such as prison cutlery and anything made of plastic that could be broken and was sharp enough to use to self-harm.

Throughout the reporting period, certain methods of self-harm increased, due to a number of individuals repeatedly using the same techniques, such as head banging, self-strangulation or ligaturing. Most incidents were low level and required little or no medical intervention.

There was a spike of self-harm in October 2024, driven by a high number of repeat cases (26), including one individual who self-harmed on 34 occasions.

During the reporting year, individuals gave various reasons for self-harm. For six months, 'mental health' was cited as the primary factor. This included prisoners with mental health issues and being identified as complex, those who were very unwell, individuals reporting that they had self-harmed, due to struggling with their mental health (diagnosed or undiagnosed), and prisoners stating that they were hearing voices.

Listener numbers (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide peer support) have increased across the establishment, following a successful round of training. This has coincided with an increase in Listener calls: 10 in April compared with 37 in June.

There were five deaths in custody in the reporting year.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction

There was a total of 478 acts of violence reported at Hewell, compared with 475 last year. These comprised 144 assaults on staff (30%) and 334 acts of prisoner-on-prisoner violence (70%).

Incidents of violence

	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25
On Staff	11	14	8	8	15	11	10	11	6	18	15	17
On Prisoner	32	41	35	29	29	23	24	23	29	27	23	19
Total	43	55	43	37	44	34	34	34	35	45	38	36

Prisoners with mental health issues was a prevalent trigger and featured as a top reason in 11 of the 12 months for staff assaults and eight of the 12 months for prisoner-on-prisoner violence. Over the reporting period, staff assaults were frequently triggered by acts of non-compliance and prisoners being challenged. Common reasons for prisoner-on-prisoner violence over the reporting period included debt, issues with cell mates, bullying and theft.

ACCTs: Over the reporting period, according to data from the local log, 778 assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans were opened. These are used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide.

Self-isolators: Over the reporting period, according to data from the local log, there were 28 self-isolators.

From our observation of the monthly safety intervention meeting, data packs and close monitoring of high-risk individuals with complex needs, we were satisfied that the Governor and staff had diligently and energetically tried to understand and reduce the levels of violence.

4.4 Use of force

In the Board’s view, force has been used proportionally and executed humanely. Board members have observed live events, watched video footage and monitored monthly use of force meetings.

There has been a small increase in use of force incidents through the year:

Use of force incidents

Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25
68	70	68	67	60	58	92	64	69	84	84	84

The majority of incidents at HMP Hewell involving force tended to relate to escorting holds. Batons were not used during the reporting year, and PAVA incapacitant spray was used only six times. Analysis at a monthly level tended to show that black, mixed heritage and/or young prisoners were over-represented in use of force incidents; the prison is undertaking more analysis to understand this and the relationship between the factors.

The Board remains concerned that attempts to de-escalate situations to avoid force being used vary across the houseblocks and may be a reflection of the inexperience of staff. The weekly scrutiny meetings often lack evidence of efforts to de-escalate the situation under review. We are satisfied that Governors and custodial managers are aware of the need to make improvements in this area and that they are taking steps to improve officer and prisoner relationships and to create a culture that encourages engagement.

Use of body-worn video cameras remains stubbornly at around 80% of incidents. Documentation quality and consistency is being improved via feedback to staff. However, documentation is often not completed within target times (e.g. in September 2025, only 53 out of 84 of the ‘Annex A’ documents were done within the 72 hour limit).

4.5 Preventing Illicit Items

The number of finds of illicit substances remains relatively low. Many of these finds occur during accommodation fabric checks (AFCs) as a result of officers demonstrating curiosity and vigilance while on duty.

From the Board’s observations, the use of drones to import illicit substances is practically non-existent at Hewell.

Cannabis and psychoactive substances are the most commonly smuggled illegal drugs into the prison. The introduction of the ‘safer vape pen’ project in October 2025 should go some way to addressing the problem of tampered vapes.

A number of officers and prisoner volunteers have received training in how to use nasal naloxone, an effective, fast-acting antidote for opioid overdose. Currently, 35% of staff are trained, and the programme is now a mandatory part of future officer training.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Hewell took part in a national 'clean and decent' initiative and has sustained the commitment. The public areas of the prison, including the houseblocks, are clean and bright. A visitor from another prison commented that it was more like a hospital than a prison. There are still concerns about the state of individual cells, with the churn of prisoners and crowding making it difficult to maintain and improve them.

We remain concerned by the inadequately designed accommodation, with cells intended for one person routinely being shared. Cells are poorly ventilated and can become too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. While the prison has managed to avoid any of its critical equipment breaking down this year, the longstanding anxiety over infrastructure should be alleviated in the coming months by work that has been funded and scheduled.

Last year, we expressed concerns about maintenance. Boilers were 'single points of failure', air-handling units were in use well beyond their planned operational lifetime and lifts were out of use for long periods. This year, the situation is more positive: the boilers and control units have been replaced, the lifts fixed and the air-handling units are scheduled for replacement in 2026. There is also a plan to replace damaged flooring across the prison.

Crowding often forces people who are not well matched to share cells, which can lead to conflict and significant discomfort. For those with specific mental health or neurodivergent needs, sharing can be extremely distressing. It is not surprising that some men prefer to be segregated or that they exaggerate behaviours to try and get single-cell status.

There have been only four applications (prisoners' written representations to the IMB) this year about food, three of which were from the same prisoner about a special diet. However, when Board members observe the serveries, we get frequent negative comments about the quantity, quality, temperature and choices of food.

The Board received only two applications about canteen in 2024-2025 compared with seven the previous year. Canteen is the facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials using their allocated funds. This improvement may reflect a new system for checking and recording canteen complaints that had been introduced.

5.2 Segregation

The Board has maintained close monitoring of the segregation unit throughout the reporting year. We have noted that reviews (where the prison determines if the prisoner should remain segregated) are timely and thorough, focusing on progressing men out of the unit. In the Board's view, the continual presence of a dedicated segregation nurse has been transformational. She has provided continuity between reviews, and between Governors, who chair the reviews. Psychology input to review individual plans provide staff with opportunities for discussion and reflection have been positive. There is a strong commitment to maintaining a clean, decent unit and fostering a positive living environment.

We share the concerns of the Governor and staff that the unit has been used to keep safe men who have complex and severe mental health conditions and need specialist external provision. In the Board's view, when men fail the mental health algorithm assessment, Governors are diligent in decision-making, taking account of all available information and completing the relevant paperwork on time. We remain appalled at the frequency with which governors have no choice but to override the health care assessment that an individual was mentally unfit to be segregated. In one case this year a single individual was in that situation on eleven successive occasions, all for want of a place in specialist care elsewhere. And, as an illustration, in August 2025 30 out of 58 new arrivals in the Unit were deemed unfit to be segregated.

From our observations, the regular supervising officers and staff in the unit are positive and proactive in their approach, showing respect for the men and injecting some humour and warmth whenever appropriate. Some of the acutely ill men have received exceptional care from officers motivated by compassion and decency rather than the limits of their job descriptions.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key working

We observed positive interactions between staff and prisoners, with staff frequently going above and beyond to resolve issues, listen to concerns, and encourage engagement in the regime and progression. We also noted staff who were harassed and distracted, trying to do several things at once, and who had little time for personal interaction. This varied from houseblock to houseblock and from week to week.

Key working, which had been abandoned during the previous year, was resumed at a low level in the reporting period.

From the Board's observations, the work of 'Here to Help' mentors, who support and assist prisoners with induction and everyday problems, was transformational. These men took time to listen and try to solve problems and were a bridge to officers and other prison support staff. They had been able to help calm and support individuals and improve mood and morale on houseblocks. Through the prison council, they represent the voice of the prisoners, and we note that concerns raised are being addressed. This builds trust and confidence and reduces frustration and anger. They also support men on ACCTs with mental health conditions, encouraging them to take part in the regime and integrating them into prison life. In addition, they organise arts and crafts sessions that provide a constructive outlet and distraction.

The end of funding for the training of these mentors and for the dedicated member of staff who had led the scheme brought the continuation of this valuable work into question. We are encouraged, however, to observe the effort that is being made to sustain the essentials of the scheme. Apart from its wider benefits, it offers to suitable prisoners a remarkable opportunity to develop and progress. At least five of the original cohort have progressed to open prisons and we hear some encouraging reports of the contribution being made by others after their release. This year, the mentors have also become Independent Prison Complaints Investigations (IPCI) ambassadors, guiding other prisoners through the processes and requirements of making a complaint.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, reported in previous years, has continued, with strong support from the incoming Governor and energetic positive support from the equality lead.

Some reporting themes, such as the over-representation of black, Muslim and young prisoners in use of force incidents, are recurrent. Likewise, some age and minority ethnic groups are recurrently under-represented in the enhanced (top) level of the incentives scheme.

In 2023-2024, we reported our concerns about lift outages and the impact on the lives of wheelchair users. One lift in HB5 had been out of action all year, for the third year running. We are, therefore, pleased to report that the lifts have been repaired or replaced and are now fully operational.

From the Board's observations, the use of equality advocates during the year was impressive, and the national training they undertake is impressive in its depth and range. Being an advocate has made a positive difference to individual prisoners. The advocates assist in the induction of new prisoners and we have noted that their input encourages prisoners to speak up and to engage. Recruiting and training advocates to replace those released or transferred was a challenge, but we noted that some men carried forward the role in their new prisons after transfer. The input of advocates to equality meetings and their positive feedback to other prisoners helped build trust and confidence that they were being listened to.

The setting up of a monthly prison council in the summer of 2023, involving 'Here to Help' mentors and prisoner advocates, has furthered the impact of the equality advocates. This is attended by the number one Governor and functional Governors, and concerns raised are given full attention. A rigorous and transparent RAG rating system for recording concerns, actions and solutions has given confidence to staff and prisoners that they are being heard – an important step towards building trust and positive relationships.

The recent creation of a neurodiversity hub within the prison is a promising development.

Inclusivity was actively promoted in Hewell, with training on inclusive behaviour for staff and prisoners' inductions. Events such as Black History Month are well-supported and popular.

Hewell has one houseblock for vulnerable prisoners. In some important organisational respects, there have been improvements in the regime for men needing an additional degree of protection. Education has provided several courses, along with outreach support in a houseblock classroom, while the potential opportunity to work in the gardens is also a valuable addition. However, the loss of opportunities in the textiles workshop, at least for the medium term, has increased the number of vulnerable prisoners without employment. The straightforward and consistent support offered by many staff has been greatly appreciated.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Faith and pastoral support has been valued by prisoners, and the Board has received no complaints. The presence of a chaplaincy representative at almost all segregation reviews seemed to provide comfort and support to many men.

5.6 Incentives schemes

Despite reviews and plans to improve the incentives scheme last year, it did not appear to have any impact or motivate prisoners to engage or progress

5.7 Complaints

The Board did not undertake a systematic review of prison complaints this year. However, we were pleased to see that a quality assurance system is in place to monitor complaints and their responses. A 10% sample of complaints is analysed, and responses assessed against procedural justice criteria. These check, for example, whether the complaint is treated seriously, answered respectfully and with an appropriate tone, and completed within seven days. Feedback is given to individual responders, which helps improve quality.

Quarterly quality assurance (QA) meetings include a comprehensive breakdown of complaints by category, houseblock, timeliness and distribution by age, ethnicity and religion (which also feed into the equality, diversity and inclusion meetings). Actions can include forums to investigate trends or disproportionalities. The QA meeting is attended by member of the senior leadership and a 'Here to Help' mentor representative.

5.8 Property

The number of applications to the Board about property going missing in the prison fell from 25 last year to nine this year, which may reflect better handling of property complaints by the prison. Applications about property during transfer was stable, at nine also.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Due to low Board member numbers, we have not been able to devote time to monitor all aspects of healthcare. There was a sharp increase in IMB applications about healthcare (to 45 in 2024-2025, compared with eight last year). However, these relate to a variety of issues and there is no consistent theme.

We were pleased to see the continuation of weekly healthcare meetings, attended by senior healthcare managers. These meetings focus on reviewing individual prisoners' cases, facilitating transfers to external facilities, where needed, and ensuring the most effective use of healthcare resources in the prison. We were also assured that the needs of men in segregation are addressed in this forum.

6.2 Physical healthcare

We were not made aware of any problems with GP or dental appointments.

Although the number of formal applications to the Board was low, we were concerned by reports from prisoners and their advocates about missed healthcare appointments, often due to late notifications from officers. Officers, however, stated that prisoners had refused to attend.

6.3 Mental health

We continued to be shocked by the extent of mental ill health within the prison population and the wait for appropriate services. Despite the proactive efforts by the prison, a large and busy local prison cannot be an acceptable environment for such unwell individuals. We have made specific comments under the section about segregation.

6.4 Social care

The prison estate is not equipped for an ageing population and the social care needs that accompany it. This is also true of Hewell, as indicated in several sections of the report. Oak unit was redesignated in 2024-2025 to provide accommodation for men with low mobility and social care needs.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

During the reporting year, the regime was changed radically, with the intention of providing more (but part-time) work and education, alternating with periods of association. However, time out of cell is still limited and the regime is again under review.

Gym

The department offers a varied programme of activities, designed to cater for the widely differing needs of the prison's population. This makes it all the more disappointing that places are frequently left unused. We also note that timetabled opportunities are restricted or cancelled when the specialist staff are redeployed to fill gaps elsewhere.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

All those testing positive for illicit drugs are given the opportunity to engage in a rehabilitative activity facilitated by Hewell's substance misuse service (SMS). Any negative award received by a prisoner under the prison's incentives scheme is suspended whilst they engage and is dismissed if they complete the work with SMS.

Those who are repeatedly found under the influence (UTI) are managed through a drug challenge support and intervention plan (CSiP). So far, Hewell's most frequent users have not been found under the influence again since their support plans were closed.

Clinical treatment

Approximately 200 prisoners are engaged in clinical treatment at any one time. This is roughly 20% of Hewell's overall population. Treatment includes opioid-substitution therapies such as prescribed methadone and Espranor, as well as benzodiazepine and alcohol detoxification. Over half of those in treatment (around 115) live on the dedicated houseblock for drug rehabilitation.

Incentivised substance-free living unit (ISFL)

It has been agreed that Hewell will launch an incentivised substance-free living zone in a dedicated houseblock in early 2026. This new unit will allow 70 prisoners the opportunity to live substance-free and will strengthen Hewell's drug-treatment pathway for those motivated to live substance-free whilst in custody and on release into the community. We anticipate that providing a substance-free living space will offer greater stability and hope, and will improve continuity-of-care outcomes when prisoners transition from Hewell to community-based drug-treatment services.

6.7 Soft skills

A range of diversionary, soft-skills and vocational activities helped offset the fact that education and employment opportunities were not available to all men. These activities were well attended and made a significant contribution to many prisoners' wellbeing and resettlement prospects.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education and library

Essential information about the full range of learning opportunities at HMP Hewell has now been brought together in a single handbook. Its combination of clarity with comprehensiveness makes it a valuable resource.

The opportunities provided have to be seen in the context of the needs of the Hewell population. These exemplify the churn characteristic of a local reception prison. A third of the population will typically move on within a month, two-thirds within three months. Only a quarter of the prison roll has been both convicted and sentenced, and are, therefore, able to discuss their remaining time in custody in a more complete and informed way. Nevertheless, an overall assessment is still carried out during induction. This process assigns each prisoner to one of seven pathways, helping to identify the activities that best match his needs. This takes place regardless of whether the individual has been convicted or is on remand.

In many individual cases, the most fundamental need of all is reading. With around half of the prison typically at, or below, the level expected of a 9 to 11 year old, attention in this area is an inescapable priority. The ambition to support individual tuition with varied informal opportunities is admirable. In this context, it is disappointing to see the reduced prominence of the literacy support that supplements the activity of the textiles workshop.

The Shannon Trust charity is active across the prison. The work is done by a score or so of mentors. Sustaining this body of mentors - some of whom were themselves unable to read when they entered prison - involves a constant drive to recruit and train replacements for those who have been moved elsewhere.

In HMP Hewell, the arrival rate of new prisoners exceeds the testing capacity in education. The initial assessment of need in English and Maths, routinely part of the fortnight spent on the induction landings, has a capacity for 360 individuals per month. However, in one four-week period in August 2024, the prison received just over 750 prisoners, some of whom had been assessed within the previous 12 months. Given the testing capacity, it is unrealistic to expect every man to receive an individual assessment, let alone a meaningful review of his overall needs while in custody.

On the day we sampled, near the end of the reporting year, 236 men were still waiting for their initial assessment. Of those who had been assessed, 73 were below Entry Level 3 and, therefore, ineligible for a job in the prison until they had reached the required standard. This highlights the crucial role of the education department: success in basic-skills courses enables access to a more purposeful regime in Hewell and better prepares men for life after release. In this context, the persistently high levels of absence reported by the department are a serious concern.

The educational courses provided are predominantly short-term, aiming to allow some relevant achievement within the few weeks that may be available. This situation emphasises the potential value of close liaison between the education department and the neighbouring prisons expected to receive many of their students as they are transferred. The impact of the cuts to prison education budgets signalled at the end of the reporting year have yet to be determined.

Around 150 men at Hewell are typically foreign national prisoners. Those with little or no spoken English are concentrated on one houseblock, where an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) class is provided.

The library continues to be an important facility, not only as a source of information, literature and DVDs, but also as a place where prisoners receive good-humoured support. It is essential that all men who wish to attend during their allocated session for their houseblock are able to do so.

7.2 Vocational training and work

Most employment opportunities are based on the houseblocks, supporting the daily life of the men who live there. The Board is pleased that these roles now appear to be allocated fairly and matched to suitable individuals, a development achieved through the work of the activity boards. Although many of these jobs are routine and not especially demanding, each one offers time out of the cell, making them a valuable opportunity for the men who hold them.

As it is a condition of employment in the prison that men should have achieved Entry Level 3 in basic functional skills, there are, inevitably, a pool of prisoners who are unqualified for work. It is appropriate that they are directed towards the education department, but the low rate of attendance in that department and periodic shortfalls in its staffing can mean that their situation is not addressed with any urgency.

Almost all the work in industries now leads to a recognised certificate. A recent addition to the established range of activities is the assembly of garden furniture for a large local company. It may promise a route into employment for some men on their release, although the extent of this recruitment has yet to be seen.

7.3 Family contact

Travel to the prison has become an increasingly significant issue, as the number of men from more distant areas has increased. This makes it all the more regrettable that the visitors' reception centre is still unable to offer families basic refreshments. It is reported that the kitchen is to be refurbished and brought back into use, but after well over a year, the project has progressed no further than the installation of a new floor.

Social video calls offer a limited alternative to conventional social visits. Each week, there are, in principal, 30 opportunities to spend an hour meeting approved family members via video calls, although, typically, only around two-thirds of these are used. As noted above, sessions for in-person visits were increased during the year by doubling the number of weekend slots.

The lack of a child contact room appears, in the Board's view, to be an altogether more solvable problem. There was, previously, a supervised but more private space where men could manage sensitive family situations, such as, for example, saying goodbye to a child being taken into care. However, this room later became required for another purpose. A plan to replace it is said to exist and the Board believes that the need for it is urgent.

Although the introduction of in-cell telephony has greatly reduced the barriers to family contact, one important issue does persist. The entitlement to an initial phone call has been met by the provision of an 'open' PIN (the personal identification

number required to make calls) and the advance of a small credit. However, all too often, men find themselves with the means to make a call but not the necessary 11-digit number. This is usually stored on their phone and retained in reception. There is a process for retrieving these numbers, but it relies on staff being available. Our impression is that reception staff are now more consistent in allowing men to write down their numbers before surrendering their phones.

7.4 Resettlement planning

On release, many men rely on welfare benefits for their support, at least in the short term. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff in the prison manage to ensure that every man being discharged has the information he needs to access relevant benefits without delay. There are also strenuous efforts to ensure that prisoners leave with appropriate identification and are able to open a bank account.

From our observations, the employment hub provides a service that is well-resourced and purposeful. Men who choose to take advantage of it receive one-to-one support in preparing job applications and meeting prospective employers. Crucially, they can establish themselves with the Inside Job workers, who continue to be available to them after their release. This combination of full-time prison staff, Inside Job workers, some of whom have experience of resettlement, and energetic prisoner mentors, adds up to an impressive service. It would be good to see more men aspiring to make it part of their resettlement plan. Overall, around 25% of men released are known to be in employment six months later.

Our conversations with prisoners approaching release, however, can frequently remind us that work is not their highest priority. All too often their greatest concern is finding somewhere to live. Responsibility for housing men on their release is a shared responsibility, with the prison being only one of the several agencies that may be involved. Nevertheless, we can only be deeply concerned by the number of men who are known to leave without accommodation having been arranged. Precise figures are elusive, but it is broadly true that about a third of men appear to lack accommodation on their first night after release.

8. The work of the IMB

Board Statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9 plus one on sabbatical
Total number of visits to the establishment	309

NB: The number of visits to the establishment includes meetings, as well as direct monitoring. It should be noted that the figure does not capture work that Board members undertake outside HMP Hewell. This may include attending Board or establishment meetings via Teams, analysing data and preparing for visits, following up IMB applications, attending national, regional or training events, writing reports and undertaking general Board administration.

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
A	Accommodation including laundry, clothing, ablutions	15	21	22	8	11
B	Discipline including adjudications, incentives, sanctions	9	1	3	3	11
C	Equality	7	6	6	2	2
D	Purposeful activity including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	5	17	4	4	3
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	9	26	25	15	10
E2	Finance including pay, private monies, spends	9	13	7	5	12
F	Food and kitchens	24	32	2	3	4
G	Health including physical, mental and social care	53	42	25	8	45
H1	Property within this establishment	16	31	13	25	9
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	7	17	9	9	9
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	8	14	1	7	2
I	Sentence management including home detention curfew (HDC), release on temporary licence (ROTL), parole, release dates, recategorisation	12	22	18	13	19
J	Staff/prisoner concerns including bullying	66	65	37	22	28
K	Transfers	3	6	5	3	8
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints	23	25	17	0	0
M	Complaints	N/A	N/A	N/A	9	9
	Covid-19	4	0	N/A	N/A	0
U	Unknown	N/A	N/A	6	8	3
	Total	270	338	200	144	185

NB: In 2024-2025, three applications were untagged so were not classified. The total was, therefore, 188 from 129 individuals.

Most individuals completed a single application, but two accounted for 23 of the applications.

In the reporting year, there was a sharp increase in applications coded as healthcare, but these covered a number of topics and weren't consistently themed.

Property applications fell, although prison property still forms the bulk of the Comp1/1a complaints. This may suggest that HMP Hewell is more effective at dealing with property complaints in the reporting year. Applications concerning food were low, although individuals often took the opportunity to lament the quality and quantity of food verbally when encountering IMB members.

Annex A

Service providers

- Physical health: Practice Plus Group
- Mental health: Practice Plus Group, subcontracted to Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust
- Substance misuse treatment: Practice Plus Group, subcontracted to Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust
- Dental health provider: Time for Teeth
- Social care support: Worcestershire County Council
- Learning and skills: Novus
- Library: Novus
- Community rehabilitation: commissioned rehabilitative service accommodation support is provided through YSS and Nacro
- Careers information and advice: Inside Job/IAG
- Benefits information and advice: JobCentre Plus
- Children and family support services: PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust); YMCA; and Mothers' Union
- Escort contractor: GeoAmey/Serco



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