



Independent
Monitoring
Boards

Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Usk and Prescoed

**For reporting year
1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

HMP Usk and Prescoed is comprised of two public sector prisons located in and around the town of Usk in south-east Wales. They are managed by one Governor, supported by a senior management team (SMT).

- HMP Usk is a category C prison (which holds those who cannot be trusted in open conditions but are considered unlikely to make a determined escape attempt) for 276¹ prisoners
- HMP Prescoed is a category D open prison (for those assessed as a low risk to the public and trusted not to escape) for 260 prisoners.
- Cilwrgi Farm Training Centre enables prisoners from Prescoed to work and receive training in agriculture and a range of other industrial activities.

2.1 HMP Usk opened in 1844. Located in the town, three main wings fan out from a central control point. These now house vulnerable prisoners, with the majority convicted of sexual offences (PCoSOS), of whom more than 40% are aged over 50.

The regime is designed to prepare prisoners for safe release and reduce their risk of reoffending. Specialist sex offender treatment programmes (Horizon, Kaizen and Becoming New Me) are provided for PCoSOS. There is an education department which, in addition to offering basic academic skills, provides courses in carpentry and waste management.

2.2 HMP Prescoed's aim is to enable prisoners, in the latter parts of their sentences, to re-integrate into the community before release. Employment outside the prison is promoted. A range of education and vocational training is offered through on-site work placements and on-site training. This includes waste management, bricklaying, roofing, horticulture, catering and hospitality.

2.3 Cilwrgi Farm Training Centre is a satellite unit of a working farm, which enables prisoners from Prescoed to work and receive training in agriculture, robotic milking, operating farm machinery, forklift driving and warehousing; this has recently been expanded to include rail and track maintenance. This is important because these occupations can provide relatively secure and well-paid employment on release. In the past 12 months, the Board has been told by staff that rail track training has not maximised its potential, due to lack of trainers. There has been good uptake on the forklift and farm machinery course when available.

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

3.1 Main findings

The Board considers the prisons to be well managed by the senior management team, with strong leadership and vision from the Governing Governor. This maximises positive opportunities and outcomes for prisoners.

The Board meets the Governor (or a deputy when unavailable) monthly and raises any concerns and issues for clarification with him. These are responded to, discussed and acted on, where the Governor feels it is appropriate to do so.

Safety

- Prisoners inform the Board that they feel safe. In HMP Usk, prisoners talk about the strong community feel. Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, bullying and self-harm levels remain low. There have been no serious incidents during the reporting period. However, the Board has noted that there have been reports of bullying against the PCoSO population at HMP Prescoed.
- The Board has observed that staff are conscientious in following the processes associated with assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents, which are designed to support prisoners considered to be at risk of suicide or self-harm. The number of ACCTs raised has reduced significantly in HMP USK from 48 in the last reporting year to eight this year.
- Use of force was particularly low, with five incidents at Usk and three at Prescoed. This concurs with the Board's observation that relations between officers and prisoners are generally good. PAVA spray (an incapacitant) has never been used at either establishment.
- The use of illicit substances at both sites was low, but there remain issues with prisoners exchanging prescription medication. A zero tolerance for testing positive for Class A and Class B drugs has been introduced; in the previous reporting year, it applied only to Class B.

Fair and humane treatment

- The Board notes that time out of cell and outdoor activity is maximised, with prisoners in HMP Usk having 10 hours' time out of their cells during the week and around eight hours each day at the weekend.
- The Board continues to observe productive, positive relationships between staff and prisoners and notes the efforts made to support prisoners with protected characteristics (which include, among others, race, religion, age, disability, sex and sexual orientation), as defined by the Equality Act 2010.
- HMP Usk is a Victorian prison but, despite this disadvantage, the Board notes that outcomes for prisoners are generally good. Although most cells have two men in situations initially designed for one, they live in a decent and supportive environment. If prisoners are risk assessed as needing a single cell, this tends to be accommodated. A cell refurbishment programme has been completed during the reporting year, which has improved living conditions, in the Board's view, and has been appreciated by the prisoners.
- HMP Prescoed was opened just before the Second World War. It is an open prison, with accommodation blocks that vary between single or double cell occupancy. The accommodation blocks are functional, although some are in

suboptimal condition. Overall, cleanliness is satisfactory, but prisoners report a lack of cleaning materials. Facilities for preparing food are limited. The Board welcomes the ongoing improvements of painting and refurbishment and the upgrading of the kitchens.

Health and wellbeing

- From the Board's observations, the health and wellbeing needs of the prisoners are assessed and met appropriately, with prisoners being very positive about the care they receive and the non-judgemental culture of the health staff.
- The Board is concerned that the mental health staffing establishment was reviewed during the reporting year but not increased. The appointment of a physiotherapist was planned but withdrawn by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Monmouthshire County Council.
- The Board notes the increasing number of elderly prisoners with specific needs relating to general mobility. The Board fully supports the SMT's planned accommodation reconfiguration in HMP Prescoed to support these prisoners in the most appropriate environment.
- The Board has noted the impact on staffing due to an increase in the number of prisoners being transferred to hospital, as both inpatients and outpatients. Due to the urgent nature of these attendances, the impact on daily officer numbers has led to a reduction in time out of cell for the prisoners at HMP Usk.

Progression and resettlement

- From the Board's observations, HMP Prescoed has remained successful in offering work placements to prisoners, although this task is becoming more challenging. The Board also greatly values the crucial role played by the employment leads.
- The Board is concerned about a small number of prisoners being released without appropriate accommodation, despite the best efforts of the prison.
- The Board notes the increasing time it takes to agree release on temporary licence (ROTL) for prisoners following admission to HMP Prescoed. We acknowledge the complexities involved but we are pleased to see that the open estate is exploring new and creative approaches to help reduce the average duration. The success rate for those on ROTL is 99.68% for both day and night release.
- A suite of training and education offers a well-rounded combination of building essential skills in literacy and numeracy, along with hands-on experiences such as farm work, catering, woodworking and waste management. These also provide pathways to accredited programmes such as NVQs (national vocational qualifications).

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The Board has seen an increase in the number of IPP prisoners, from 10 to 11 across both prisons. We remain concerned about the lack of recategorisation of IPP prisoners and the level of recalls. What specific

actions will the Minister take to address these issues and improve outcomes for IPP prisoners?

- The Board is concerned about the rising number of prisoners with limited mobility and other disabilities. While we acknowledge the assistance provided by the SMT and social services, including the provision of aids, there are still worries about access provided by the HMPSS to personal social care, particularly for prisoners who are frail or face mobility and cognitive challenges. What concrete steps will the Minister take to ensure these prisoners receive timely and adequate social care, and how will accountability for delivery be monitored?
- The Board has expressed concern that the early release scheme, originally implemented as an emergency measure to address prison overcrowding, risks becoming standard practice. The significant number of releases has resulted in a constant turnover of prisoners in HMP Prescoed, as efforts continue to maintain capacity. Consequently, individuals entering category D establishments often have insufficient time remaining for meaningful rehabilitation through release on temporary licence (ROTL), traditionally one of the main strengths of an open prison. What specific commitments will the Minister make regarding the future role of category D open prisons, and how will the integrity of their rehabilitative purpose be safeguarded?
- The Board has noted an increase in the average time required to achieve ROTL during the reporting period and acknowledges the involvement of several external agencies in this process. What strategies are in place to address these challenges and reduce the time needed to secure ROTL at HMP Prescoed and other prisons in the open estate? Additionally, how will progress be monitored to ensure these measures deliver measurable improvements?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- The ageing population at HMP Usk presents several challenges. The increased demand for both general and palliative healthcare will necessitate additional resources and funding, such as expanded weekend services and more staff allocated to hospital escorts. Furthermore, the current infrastructure at HMP Usk is not well suited to the needs of older individuals. What specific measures are being considered to address these issues? How will these plans ensure that the prison can meet the complex needs of this demographic in the medium to long term?
- The Board has observed that, due to strategies aimed at reducing overcrowding, the profile of prisoners at HMP Prescoed has changed, and some prisoners now lack sufficient time before release to gain ROTL. Additionally, this situation requires an expanded offering of purposeful activities. What are the specific plans and resources being put in place to address these challenges?
- The Board has concerns there are insufficient phones at HMP Prescoed and they lack privacy for the prisoners. What steps are you taking to resolve these issues and what is the expected timeframe for completion?

3.3 Response to the previous report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister		
<p>The Board welcomed the reduction in the number of IPP prisoners, from 14 to 10, during the reporting period and is aware of the legislative framework. However, we remain concerned around the lack of recategorization of IPP prisoners. What are the Minister's plans for this group of prisoners?</p>	<p>Focus on moving appropriate IPP prisoners to open conditions, with decisions made swiftly and effectively. Action plan published 15 November 2024, with a focus on effective frontline delivery and support post release. (e.g. APs, psychology services).</p>	<p>Beginning of reporting period: 10 IPP prisoners; end of reporting period: 11. (Five in HMP Prescoed, one of whom is due to be released; six in Usk, one of whom is also due to be released.)</p>
<p>The Board acknowledges the pressures on parole boards but remains concerned about the significant impact on prisoners. How does the Minister plan to reduce the delays in holding parole boards?</p>	<p>HMPPS [Prison and Probation Service] has taken several steps to reduce the pressure on listings queue. This has resulted in it decreasing by almost 40% since March 2023.</p>	<p>Improvements have been evident.</p>
<p>The Board has concerns around the increasing number of prisoners with limited mobility and other disabilities. The Board acknowledges the support for these prisoners from the SMT and the input from social services to provide aids. However, concerns remain about access to support for personal social care. How will the Minister address this issue?</p>	<p>For social care provision, there is joint working between Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Monmouth County Council and 0.6 of a senior carer. Additional care and support are processed via a request to the wider local authority care at home service. Plus, prisoners have right to self-refer for an assessment.</p>	<p>Concerns remain about whether 0.6 of a senior carer is sufficient for the elderly prisoners. There is also unease regarding the lack of weekend care.</p>
To the Prison Service		
<p>The Board is concerned that the number of probation officers is inadequate. This has been raised in previous reports. The Board recognises there is a national shortage but is</p>	<p>Nationally, there has been a centralised recruitment campaign, which saw an increase in probation officers in Wales. The vacancies</p>	<p>Sickness has impacted staffing. Average time to process ROTL has increased over the</p>

<p>concerned about the impact on existing staff and prisoners. The Board asks what is being done to address this deficit?</p>	<p>have been filled, in August 2024 and September 2024.</p>	<p>reporting period - the community probation officers are part of this process. The situation has improved and the number of complaints regarding property have decreased.</p>
<p>The loss of prisoners' property when transferring from other prisons continues to be a problem, which has not improved, despite being reported regularly and nationally. The Board is concerned that the current contract for prisoner transfer is exacerbating the problem and does not consider items of value to the prisoners, causing unnecessary distress when transferring prisoners within the prison estate. The Board asks that this is addressed as a matter of priority.</p>	<p>HMPPS is aware of the problems in the practical application of the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework and continues to look at what further can be done locally to improve this.</p> <p>During the last 12 months, there have been no complaints received from HMP Usk or HMP Prescoed in relation to the loss of property attributed to the PECS [prisoner escort and custody services] contract.</p>	<p>The situation has improved and the number of complaints regarding property have decreased.</p>
<p>The Board has noted an increase in the number of prisoners being transferred to hospital, as both inpatients and outpatients, and the impact on staffing. Due to the urgent nature of these attendances, the impact on daily officer numbers has led to additional lockdowns during the day. The Board asks if the staffing establishment has been increased to reflect this?</p>	<p>HMP Usk and HMP Prescoed recognise that there has been an increase in the amount of short notice hospital escorts. These are in response to urgent medical need, which do have an impact on regime delivery and key working. However, the prisons continue to work to a regime management plan relating to their agreed staffing compliment to help mitigate the effects.</p>	<p>The concern remains. It has been noticeable that, in HMP Usk, this has impacted daily office numbers and has led to additional lockdowns during the day.</p>

<p>The Board is supportive of the SMT plans for escorted absence for men potentially suitable for progression to open conditions but notes the delay in gaining support for this from the HMPPS policy lead for ROTL. The Board asks if this decision can be expedited?</p>	<p>HMPPS welcomes that the Board is supportive of HMP Usk's proposal on escorted absences, and how this might be applied in a risk assessed way is being considered.</p>	<p>No visible progress.</p>
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Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

Prisoners inform the Board that they feel safe. Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, bullying and self-harm levels remain low. There have been no serious incidents during this reporting period.

4.1 Reception and induction

From the Board's observations, there is a supportive assessment process for new receptions, where they are provided with comprehensive information packs. The reception staff and orderlies (trusted prisoners who take on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison) have been observed to be welcoming. There are new facilities in reception at HMP Prescoed, which have made it more inviting.

There is a consistent induction process, with good peer support on both sites.

There continue to be persistent issues with late arrivals, particularly among healthcare staff, who are required to remain on site beyond usual working hours to assess all new receptions. The Board is also concerned that prisoners are sometimes transferred without their prescribed medication.

The Board is concerned about the increasingly frequent delays in prisoners being able to access release on temporary licence (ROTL). There is a session for all new arrivals to manage expectations regarding ROTL.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody.

The Board notes the introduction of the ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) process during the reporting year, designed to support prisoners identified as being at risk of suicide or self-harm. We have reviewed the comprehensive completion of ACCT documentation and observed the level of care and support provided throughout the process.

Eight ACCTs were opened in Usk in the reporting year, a drop of 38 from the previous year. Three ACCTs were opened in Prescoed in the reporting year, an increase of two from the previous year.

There were eight episodes of self-harm in HMP USK, a significant decrease from the 27 in the previous year, and none in HMP Prescoed during the reporting year.

There was one death in custody during the reporting period. The Board notes the support offered to both prisoners and officers following a death in custody. There is an opportunity for death and funeral planning, which is supported through the chaplaincy team. There have been no suicides in either establishment during the reporting year.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The number of violent incidents at both establishments remains low. In 2024-2025, there were 10 reported assaults on prisoners at HMP Usk, the same figure as last year. There were none reported at HMP Prescoed, in comparison with eight in the previous year.

There were no reported assaults on staff at either prisons.

However, during our monitoring sessions in the latter part of the reporting year, members of the PCoSO population at HMP Prescoed informed us that they were being subjected to verbal abuse. This was reported to the Governing Governor.

4.4 Use of force

The number of incidents involving the use of force remains particularly low, with five incidents recorded at Usk and three at Prescoed. This aligns with the Board's observation that relationships between officers and prisoners are generally positive. Notably, PAVA incapacitant spray has never been deployed at either establishment.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Positive mandatory drug testing (MDT) rates were low: 0.99% at Usk and 5.35% at Prescoed. Although illicit drug use seems to be relatively rare at both locations, issues have persisted with prisoners exchanging or hoarding prescription medication at HMP Usk. At HMP Prescoed, the discovery of illegal substances was frequently associated with release on temporary licence (ROTL) and, as a result, a proportion of prisoners returning from ROTL are scanned for internal packages. The facility enforces a strict zero-tolerance policy on drug use: any prisoner who tests positive for Class A or B drugs is transferred to a closed prison. Previously, possession of class B drugs resulted in disciplinary hearings, often allowing individuals to remain at HMP Prescoed. However, due to a rise in positive drug tests, it was decided to transfer prisoners back to closed conditions for Class B drugs. This change has led to a decrease in cases involving class B drugs.

A total of 94 prisoners from HMP Prescoed were returned to closed conditions, typically following rule breaches reviewed at multi-disciplinary meetings.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

HMP Usk is a Grade 2 listed building, built in the 19th century, with cells for single occupancy. These cells are now mostly used for dual occupancy, unless the prisoners are risk-assessed as needing a single cell.

Dual occupancy of a cell, built for one person in Victorian times, means that the cells are cramped, and offer little privacy or natural light. However, they live in a decent and supportive environment, and the prisoners rarely complain.

A cell refurbishment programme, which began in the previous reporting year, was completed during this reporting year, delivering new bunk beds, enhanced storage solutions and an improved overall environment. Whilst the presence of bunks is a challenge for those of the older generation who suffer mobility issues, it has been welcomed by the prisoners and does improve the living conditions. In-cell telephony was added in the previous reporting year and is appreciated.

Prisoners have easy access to showers and communal areas, with stair lifts to access the library and the Cameo (come and meet each other) suite. There are facilities for prisoners with reduced mobility to shower independently. There is a thrift shop in Cameo, where prisoners can purchase clothing.

From our observations, the prison is clean, due to the work of the orderlies, and there is pride amongst the wings for their cleanliness and presentation.

There is a new sensory garden, which has been particularly appreciated by neurodivergent prisoners.

HMP Prescoed was opened just before the Second World War. It is an open prison, with accommodation blocks that vary between single- and double-cell occupancy. All blocks have shower and toilet facilities, plus kitchen areas. In addition, there are individual 'pods' (temporary, self-contained housing units) for prisoners at work or nearing the end of their sentence. There are separate kitchens supporting the pods, although these are often less well maintained. A project to build an additional 80 rapid deployment cells has been delayed, due to the construction company going into administration.

In the Board's view, the accommodation blocks are functional, although some are in suboptimal condition. Overall cleanliness is satisfactory, but prisoners report a lack of cleaning materials. Facilities for preparing food are limited. The Board welcomes ongoing improvements: all units are being painted and showers, toilets are being refurbished, with completion expected by early 2026, and there are plans to upgrade kitchens, including self-catering facilities. New televisions have been installed,

The Board has received complaints about the phone facilities at HMP Prescoed, where phones are located in the residential units. There are queues for the phones and, in some units, prisoners' phone conversations can be overheard. There is significant demand for an improved solution, with in-cell telephony being the optimal outcome.

From the Board's observations, the external areas for both HMP Usk and HMP Prescoed are well maintained.

The kitchens at HMP Prescoed continue to provide food for both sites and are staffed by prisoners who can gain catering qualifications. There was an impact on availability of workers due to the early release scheme that was introduced during the reporting year.

Inevitably, the Board receives a range of comments regarding food. Over the reporting period, there were 77 complaints at HMP Usk, with 46 in one month. There were 19 complaints at HMP Prescoed. The catering manager has started a feedback session regarding the food with the prisoners at HMP USK, which has been very well received. The Board has observed the preparation and serving of food and considers it to be varied, fairly served and of reasonable quality, especially reflecting the volume of food being produced and the budget available. The fruit and vegetables grown on site are well utilised.

During the previous reporting year, some food preparation and cooking was introduced into HMP Usk, and was further extended during the reporting year. This provides further employment opportunities for prisoners and reduces the reliance on HMP Prescoed.

Prisoners have repeatedly voiced concerns to the Board about rising canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries and other essentials using their allocated funds) prices, and they have suggested expanding the selection at HMP Prescoed so that packed lunches can be prepared for those employed outside the prison.

HMP Prescoed has five IPP (imprisoned for public protection) prisoners, who are usually accommodated in one of the two residential houses, which offer the best accommodation on the site. Similarly, at HMP Usk, IPP prisoners are located in D wing, alongside 'lifers' (men serving life sentences), where communal living facilities and the most comfortable accommodation are provided.

5.2 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

The Board continues to observe productive, positive relationships between staff and prisoners.

At HMP Usk, prisoners are allocated key workers, who they generally describe as supportive. However, not all prisoners have a key worker, due to resourcing constraints. To address this, measures have been put in place to ensure support is available when needed. At HMP Prescoed, prisoners are allocated personal officers, who provide a more low-key form of support.

Communication between staff and prisoners has been observed to be respectful and consistent. There are multiple opportunities for prisoner representatives to meet with managers to raise issues or offer suggestions. As an example, 'chainbreakers' were introduced at both sites during the reporting period to improve the handling of complaints.

During our monitoring visits, we have heard only a small number of prisoners make adverse comments about the regime or attitude of prison officers.

Both prisons, following enabling environment standards, ensure that prisoner representatives sit on various boards and forums related to the regime and are encouraged to take an active role. In addition, the Governing Governor has

introduced a 'lifers' meeting, which he chairs, an initiative that is valued by the prisoners concerned.

The prison council continues to meet monthly at HMP Usk, promoting a strong sense of community and collaborative problem-solving. At HMP Prescoed, the frequency has been more variable, due to lack of commitment from the prisoners, which is reflective of the rapidly changing community.

The Board has observed effective communication and support for prisoners with ACCTs in place. Prison officers show concern for those affected, and the multi-disciplinary meetings seem to have a positive impact.

5.3 Equality and diversity

The Board continues to observe good relationships between staff and prisoners and notes the efforts made to support prisoners with protected characteristics (which include, among others, age, disability, race, religion, sex and gender reassignment), as defined by the Equality Act. Whilst the prison population across both establishments is predominantly white, there are diverse members of the population, with good integration and support provided.

The Board considers equality, diversity and inclusion issues to be well managed by the prison. Prisoners with protected characteristics report that their specific needs are met. The prisoners seem well informed about the process for raising concerns and discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) are readily available on both sites. Prisoners continue to tell the Board that they feel safe.

All staff receive regular training and seem to be familiar with the Equality Act and the needs of prisoners. The Board notes there are regular awareness-raising events, with displays and literature available in different languages on a range of topics. This includes religion, LGBTQ+, dementia, mental health and disability awareness, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month and World Suicide Prevention Day.

Prisoners participate in the quarterly forums related to the characteristics in the Equality Act.

The education department at HMP Usk includes a sensory room. Recently, they have also created a sensory garden, featuring a water element designed to promote mindfulness and wellbeing.

There are themed events that celebrate faith, neurodiversity and sexuality. Notable examples include Ramadan, ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and autism awareness, Pride Month, and Gypsy and Romany heritage months, all of which receive good support.

The Board appreciates the efforts of the two neurodiversity support managers (NSMs). They identify prisoners with additional needs, such, for example, ADHD, dyslexia, autistic spectrum disorder, acquired brain injuries and learning disabilities.

HMP Usk offers several exclusive support groups for neurodiverse individuals, including crochet, yoga, therapy dogs, football, and gym activities. Many participants use a 'passport' that details their specific neurodiversity, its effects, and preferred communication methods. The Board has noted positive outcomes from these passports at HMP USK.

At HMP Prescoed, the support mainly focuses on providing practical help so individuals can benefit from the various opportunities available. These include obtaining ROTL, finding outside work, accessing job options on site or at the farm, and pursuing educational opportunities.

At HMP Usk, there are around 80 neurodivergent individuals, seven of whom have a formal diagnosis. At HMP Prescoed, there are approximately 65 neurodivergent individuals.

During the reporting year, 14 DIRFS were submitted, compared with 26 in 2023-2024 and 34 in 2022-2023.

There are 77 men with a registered disability at HMP USK and 107 at HMP Prescoed.

5.4 Faith and pastoral support

The prisoners have a range of faiths and beliefs. These include Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, Paganism, Jehovah's Witnesses and various forms of Christianity. The Board welcomes the provision of sessional support for the spiritual needs of prisoners to reflect this wide range.

The chaplaincy team at HMP Usk welcomes all prisoners to the chapel and multi-faith room, regardless of belief. A weekly schedule begins with daily morning prayer and includes various religious, spiritual and meditative activities, along with wellbeing sessions, including the mental health music group, organ and choir practice, and Welsh conversation.

A wide range of religious festivals are celebrated. These often require amendments to the regime and meal provision, which is appreciated by the prisoners.

The chaplain is involved in many aspects of prisoner life, such as supporting prisoners on ACCTs. From the Board's observations, faith and pastoral issues are integral to the work of the SMT.

When there is a death in custody, the chaplain offers support to families to arrange funerals or will arrange the funeral in cases where there are no family members to do so. Memorial services are held in HMP Usk for prisoners and staff, following a prisoner's death.

The chaplain is working with the charity, Age Cymru, to offer support with will writing and end-of-life planning.

5.5 Complaints

The Board monitors how complaints are managed and has ensured that prisoners are informed about the procedure. Complaint forms (COMPs 1 and 2) and relevant information are accessible at both sites.

From our observations, we believe that the process is well managed, with responses generally respectful and timely. However, there is a continuing concern regarding the timeliness of replies to complaints associated with other establishments. In cases where delays occur, prisoners are reportedly kept updated on the status of their complaints.

During the reporting period, a total of 471 complaints were submitted across both establishments (371 at HMP Usk; 84 at HMP Prescoed), representing the lowest number recorded over the past four years. By comparison, there were 583 complaints in 2023-2024, 689 in 2022-2023, and 483 in 2021-2022.

5.6 Property

The Board has noted a marked decrease in property-related complaints (Comps 1 and 2). At HMP Usk, complaints fell from 54 in 2023-2024 to 15 in the reporting year, while at HMP Prescoed, they dropped from 27 in 2023-2024 to six over the same period. This overall reduction of 50 complaints reflects significant improvement in property management processes and outcomes. We will continue to monitor this area over the coming year to ensure sustained progress.

6. Health and wellbeing

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board provides all health services for both HMP Usk and HMP Prescoed. They directly manage the healthcare department, comprising nursing, pharmacy and mental health services. The health board is also the provider of inpatient and outpatient hospital services accessed by prisoners. The Board welcomes the continued placement of trainee nurses in the prison.

The health board awards and monitors contracts for independent contractors, including general medical services, general dental services and general optometry services. The IMB has no concerns regarding waiting times for these services.

The head of healthcare retired in March 2025. An existing member of staff has taken on the responsibility. Staffing levels across healthcare have improved since the last report, and the Board welcomes the consistently good feedback from prisoners regarding the service.

The Board notes the SMT's support for the healthcare service and the positive communication and integrated working among healthcare staff, the chaplain and prison officers.

6.1 Healthcare general

The healthcare service is predominately primary care and operates between 8am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, at both sites. The Board notes this is extended in HMP Prescoed, until 7pm on alternate Wednesdays, to offer routine appointments to the prisoners working off site. Outside of these hours, prisoners who report being unwell are supported through 111 or taken to an NHS hospital's accident and emergency department.

There is a dentist on site two days a week and a dental therapist one day a week, in the dental suite in HMP Usk. Prisoners from both sites attend this. Men are encouraged to access their local dentist when they are on ROTL. Prisoners have access to the emergency dental service outside of these hours.

All ACCT documents confirm full participation with healthcare staff for reviews.

During the reporting period, as in the previous year, several new receptions arrived late in the afternoon, sometimes without their prescribed medication and occasionally unwell. In such cases, they were transferred to Malpas Brook Health Centre or a local hospital.

The Board has noted an increase in the number of prisoners being transferred to hospital, both as inpatients and outpatients. While national escort policy allows for variation in staffing levels following a risk assessment, the Board's monitoring at HMP Usk has consistently shown that PCoSOS are escorted by two officers for hospital visits. From our observations, prison officers are required to escort these prisoners and remain with them throughout their hospital stay.

6.2 Physical healthcare

The healthcare department offers a full primary care service, with prisoners having routine comprehensive health checks and being offered treatment and support where indicated. Prisoners are actively encouraged to participate in national screening programmes, including those for hepatitis B and C and bowel screening.

The department encourages immunisation take up and has promoted Covid boosters, pneumococcal and influenza campaigns and easy access for prisoners working outside the prisons. The uptake of Covid and Flu vaccinations has reduced, as reflected in the wider community. Annual blood-borne virus testing is offered at both prisons for new arrivals, the objective being to eradicate hepatitis B and C. The RSV vaccination (for a common respiratory virus) is offered for the over 75s. A vaccine hesitancy pilot project was undertaken at HMP Prescoed, which is now a host site for this work.

The Board also notes the health promotion information and support available to prisoners on both sites.

The Board is concerned about the increasing demands on the healthcare department due to the increasing age profile of the prison population. There are 115 prisoners over 50 at HMP Usk and 37 at HMP Prescoed. In addition, there are a significant number of prisoners who are registered disabled. These prisoners have increasing health needs, including cognitive decline, which increases both the number and length of consultations with staff. This, and the planned increase in 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 HMP Prescoed, will need a review of the staffing establishment and consultation space.

Experienced Listeners, trained and supported by the Samaritans, are available for all prisoners

6.3 Mental health

The mental health service is provided four days a week, for both sites, by a job share between a psychiatric nurse and an occupational therapist. During the reporting year, the staffing establishment was reviewed by the Health Board but not increased, which concerned the Board. Prisoners are referred to secondary care mental health services, where necessary.

6.4 Social care

The age profile of the prisoner population in both prisons continues to rise. As previously reported, the accommodation at both sites leads to difficulties for prisoners with limited mobility.

HMP Usk is an older establishment and is not unsuitable for those with mobility issues. Adaptations are limited, with only a stair lift available. Double occupancy in cells restricts space for handrails or other support features, and older prisoners are unable to access top bunks.

There is some concern about physical care needs of elderly prisoners and how these are being met, with apparently limited social care input.

The Board welcomes the SMT plan for a reconfiguration of accommodation at HMP Prescoed to provide an enhanced facility for those with limited mobility and other disabilities. This is due to commence work in 2026.

The Cameo (come and meet each other) suites, for older prisoners, are well established on both sites and are appreciated by the prisoners. These services are managed by the Salvation Army and are responsive to the needs of this prisoner

group, providing consistent support. The Board notes the range of activities to provide support and recreation for prisoners past retirement age. We also note the extension of support to those serving life sentences, IPP prisoners and veterans through monthly breakfast clubs, with guest speakers, held in the Cameo suites. The Cameo suite in Prescoed has moved into larger facilities, with some catering facilities, an air fryer and hot plate.

A team of 'buddies' (peer supporters) has been trained by Monmouthshire County Council to provide support to prisoners with limited mobility. Whilst this does not provide personal care, this service does help with general mobility and meal collection, etc. This support is appreciated by the prisoners.

The Board is concerned about the provision of personal care for prisoners with mobility or cognitive challenges, as our discussions with frailer men indicate that very few have access to such support.

Prisoners have access to occupational therapy assessment for the provision of any aids they require for daily living. These are usually provided with minimal delay. The Board notes the planned jointly funded physiotherapist post has been withdrawn, which is a concern. Physiotherapy is now only available through outpatient hospital appointments, which places additional demands on resources and can disrupt the daily routine.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

The Board commends the HMP Usk regime, which includes long periods of association and time out of cell. From our observations, there is a real focus by the Governor and SMT to maximise this.

During the week, prisoners have 10 hours' time out of cell, although this is less at weekends. The Board understands this is one of the best figures in the UK, which is exemplary and appreciated by the prisoners.

In HMP Usk, 91.62% of prisoners are engaged in purposeful activity, while this figure is 96.92% for HMP Prescoed.

All prisoners can participate in some form of physical activity. This includes team sports such as football, rugby and volleyball. HMP Prescoed has a team entered in the local football league. The physical education instructors are successful in reaching out to the less active, physically challenged, neurodivergent and older prisoners. The training contract with Newport Dragons Rugby Football Club has not been retained.

The gyms on both sites are well equipped, with timetables for different groups of prisoners. Participation levels are similar on both sites.

The Board notes that some prisoners at HMP Prescoed have commented that there is little to do other than go to the gym and they feel there is a lack of recreational activity available when they are not working.

6.6 Drug abuse and rehabilitation

The Board noted the embedding of the drugs strategy, which focuses on restricting supply, reducing demand and building recovery. A whole-prison approach is

encouraged to create a supportive environment, together with the incentives for substance free living (ISFL) compacts (contracts) with prisoners.

The Gates unit at HMP Prescoed, which operates as an incentivised substance free living (ISFL) wing, opened in September 2024 and is reported to be unique in the open estate. There are 20 places, and the unit appears to be functioning well in addressing substance abuse. There is significant education input. No failures have been reported since opening.

The abuse and illicit trading of prescription drugs remains a concern at HMP Usk. At HMP Prescoed, the drug situation is compounded by steroid misuse, pregabalin, alcohol, and Class A and B substances.

Zero tolerance to Class B drug transgressions has been reinstated, as it was felt 'tolerance' might have been taken advantage of. However, some assessment latitude is allowed. Since the change, the number of cannabis finds on prisoner returns has fallen.

The charity, Dyfodol, has continued to provide specialist drug and alcohol support services in both prisons. They offer a wide range of courses in areas such as coping, motivation, goals and triggers. The 'Towards Recovery' programme is offered at Prescoed. The charity provides services across south Wales Prisons and can helpfully liaise and share information.

A weekly online Narcotics Anonymous meeting is held at Prescoed

The Board supports the introduction of Buvidal programmes to address opioid dependence, while recognising the logistical challenges and associated costs.

A total of 76 staff are trained in the use of Naloxone (a medication that rapidly reverses an opioid overdose), and Naloxone kits have been installed at HMP Prescoed. Prisoners going on home leave are issued with Naloxone to reduce the risk of overdose in the community.

Alcohol testing is intelligence and observation driven.

6.7 Soft skills

The Board notes the generally respectful relationships among prison officers, prisoners and their families. The officer support for the family days (which bring together men and their families outside of their statutory entitlement, usually in more informal settings) and Christmas social visits has been valued by the families and prisoners. At the Christmas family day at HMP Prescoed, all the children were given a present (donated by the Mothers' Union) from Father Christmas. Family photos were taken and given to the prisoners.

The establishment of the café in the visitor centre at HMP Usk has been well received. This enables visitors to share hot meals or snacks with the prisoners. The menu is well advertised in advance. The café also provides the same service to staff and formal visitors to the prison outside visiting hours. The prisoners delivering this service seem proud of what they have achieved.

The Invisible Walls programme, at both HMP Usk and HMP Prescoed, helps prisoners maintain family ties. Prisoners who do not receive an in-person visit can request visits from the volunteer-led initiative.

Both prisons provide exhibitions, information and resources on wellbeing. A range of events take place and are advertised on noticeboards and in prison newsletters.

There are Cameo suites on both sites, managed by the Salvation Army. They provide diversion, socialisation, relaxation and education opportunities, especially for the more vulnerable prisoners, and are highly valued. This now includes IPP prisoners and those serving life sentences, who have organised a rota to access the laundry facilities in the Cameo suite.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

The library is well stocked with books, magazines and DVDs and is adequately resourced. The librarian has worked with the Shannon Trust charity to facilitate monthly book clubs on both sites. This is especially popular in HMP Usk.

The education facility continues to deliver training and support, particularly around numeracy and literacy skills, with an opportunity to secure accredited certificates. Open University students are provided with laptops to enable them to continue with their studies. Long-distance learning courses are set up by the Prisoners' Education Trust.

7.2 Vocational training, work

HMP Prescoed continues to be successful in providing work placements for prisoners, although we understand that this is proving increasingly difficult. The employment leads in both prisons have enjoyed significant success in assisting prisoners into employment on release.

The Board notes that, at the end of the reporting period, there were 20 companies employing prisoners on ROTL.

At the end of the reporting period, 91.62% of prisoners in HMP Usk were in purposeful activity, with:

- 178 in full-time employment
- 36 in part-time employment
- 17 unemployed

In HMP Prescoed, 96.92% of prisoners in purposeful activity, with:

- 175 in full-time employment
- 25 in part-time employment
- 4 unemployed

For many years, around 120 men were working off-site, on ROTL, every day. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, this fell to around 100 and has further reduced because of the economic climate and subsequent lack of employment opportunities

The Board is impressed with the continual efforts by the prison staff to maximise employment opportunities and prepare prisoners for employment in this increasingly challenging environment. At the end of the reporting period, there were 70 prisoners working off site. These jobs tend to be well paid, and many continue following release.

It should be noted that the number of prisoners available for ROTL and work have decreased. Occupancy at HMP Prescoed was lower through the reporting period, due to the impact of the early release schemes. In addition, some new admissions have insufficient time at HMP Prescoed prior to their release to enable ROTL to be processed and gain outside employment.

There are high levels of employment within the prisons, although prisoner numbers suggest that there may be 'underemployment' in some occupations and high levels of part-time work.

A suite of training and education opportunities are provided at HMP Prescoed and Cilwrgi Farm, including forklift truck training, JCB driver training and telehandler training. There is a small sawmill and train tracks established for additional opportunities. Vocational training is also provided in farm work, horticulture, catering, waste management, bricklaying and roofing. These experiences are further enhanced through participation in accredited programs such as WAMITAB (Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board), HGV, traffic management and forklift operation.

Education is provided in core literacy and numeracy, with diagnostic assessments often used to identify a learners' start points and tailor provision accordingly. Prisoners also have opportunities to build on their education through a wide range of courses, including access to Open University programmes.

The planned Milk Pasteurisation unit will provide further opportunities for prisoners at HMP Usk, who are often restricted in the work that they can secure. The unit will allow prisoners to gain practical skills in food production and hygiene, supporting rehabilitation and improving employability after release.

At HMP Usk, traffic management and CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) qualifications have helped several prisoners.

There are specified rehabilitation programmes that some prisoners at HMP Usk must complete before being considered for release or onward progression to open conditions. Spaces are limited, with priority based on time served and proximity to release. This affects a prisoner's chances of securing a place in an open prison and the length of time they can spend there.

A change to the programmes is planned for 2026. The impact of this is that limited places are now available on the current courses to ensure completion prior to September 2025. The number of men up taking and completing the programmes remains high and in line with the prison targets.

7.3 Offender management, progression

There were 17,009 periods of ROTL during the reporting period. There were 16 failures, due to positive drug testing or concealing illicit items, on return to prison. However, this equates to a 99.91% success rate. Both RDR (resettlement day release) and ROR (resettlement overnight release) are taking place. There were 18,542 periods of ROTL in the previous year, due to the higher number of prisoners achieving ROTL, with a 99.68% success rate.

The OMU (offender management unit) has twice weekly evening sessions for prisoners who work off site and are unable to engage with them during regular working hours. These are well attended by prisoners.

In the reporting year, prisoners are waiting for 16 weeks for ROTL, sometimes extending to 20 weeks. This is causing considerable frustration for the men. The OMU staff and managers are working hard to accelerate the process and set prisoners' expectations, but there are external factors they cannot control.

7.4 Family contact

The SMT encourages family contact and has a range of social visiting opportunities and family days across the year.

The welcoming 'panda' scheme was devised by an officer in HMP Usk and is being introduced in other parts of the prison estate. This provides a welcoming environment for young children from the gatehouse through to the visits' hall, with panda murals on the walls and activity packs for children, featuring pandas. The visits' halls on both sites are clean, bright and welcoming. At HMP Prescoed, there are soft play areas and activities for children of all ages. A range of food and drink is available in both visits' halls and support is available for families from Invisible Walls representatives.

7.5 Resettlement planning

The resettlement hub provides support to prisoners during the 12 weeks prior to release. They help with accommodation, applications for bank accounts, Universal Credit and disability benefits. No prisoner should be released without accommodation, although this responsibility only covers the first 24 hours after release. A few prisoners had been released homeless in the reporting period. The Board remains concerned about the lack of sustainable accommodation for prisoners on release, acknowledging that while this is beyond the prison's direct responsibility, it significantly impacts mental wellbeing and increases the risk of reoffending”

In the reporting year, HMP Usk has successfully progressed men from closed to open conditions. There were isolated incidents of bullying, but these have been addressed, and proposals have now been submitted to increase these numbers.

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	8
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	10
Total number of visits to the establishment	146

Applications (prisoners' written representations) to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	0	2
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	0	-
C	Equality	0	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	4	2
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	2	1
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	0	
F	Food and kitchens	1	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	1	2
H1	Property within the establishment	0	0
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	2	3
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	0	3
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	5	3
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	1	4
K	Transfers	1	0
L	Miscellaneous	3	2
Total number of applications		20	24

8.1 Supplementary comments about applications:

Since 2019, the Board has reviewed the number of applications lodged by prisoners. In 2023, it reinvestigated whether the continuing low numbers should be a cause for concern. The spectrum of possibilities considered included the following:

- The numbers suggest that prisoners felt relationships between prisoners and staff were satisfactory. The implication in that case is that prisoners do not feel the need to submit formal applications.
- That low numbers are a negative indicator, implying that prisoners are disengaged with the regime, fearful of possible consequences (such as being

moved to another prison, for example) or so disillusioned with the effectiveness of the Board, they do not bother to submit applications.

Our actions and conclusions regarding applications:

The Board has reviewed what it sees as the key elements. These included:

- The type of relationships that Board members observe between prisoners and staff.
- Feedback we receive directly from prisoners and their representatives, e.g. Listeners and buddies.
- Our review of management information relating to men returned to closed conditions, linked to our observations on site.
- To allow full access to the IMB application process, the Board accepts applications verbally.
- To be GDPR compliant (general data protection regulation), Board members carry spare copies of the approved forms for the men to sign. This ensures that they read the privacy notice and are aware and agree that members need to speak to staff to process applications.

The Board receives comments (both positive and negative) from the men and, when required, these are passed on to the SMT, via our monitoring reports, to be discussed with the Governor at Board meetings. This appears to have reduced the need for applications by resolving perceived problems early.

It has **previously** been suggested that those who submit applications may be 'shipped out' as a punishment for complaining. In the reporting periods 2017-2018, 2020-2021 and, again, in 2021-2022, the Board investigated this and found no correlation between those submitting applications and subsequent removals to other prisons or (in the case of Prescoed) a return to closed conditions.

The Board found no evidence supporting the idea that the small number of applications we receive represents a negative sign. The Board's view is that, in the main, prisoners are comfortable in submitting applications and would do so should they feel the need. Prisoners use the prison Comp1 (an ordinary complaint) system and, in addition, discuss matters of concern with the Board. **Prisoners are always willing to talk to the Board about their experiences in prison.** The Board will continue to keep this situation under active review.

Annex A

Service providers

- Aneurin Bevan University Health Board is the provider of all health services. The Health Board directly manages the healthcare department of registered nurses and the pharmacist, together with mental health and inpatient and outpatient hospital services. It awards and oversees contracts for independent providers, including general medical services, general dental services and general optometry services.
- A substance misuse team is provided by Dyfodol. This is funded by the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner and HMPPS.
- Monmouthshire County Council provides social care and occupational therapy services.
- Cameo is established at both sites and is supported by the Salvation Army charity.

Annex B

Statistics on self-harm and ACCTs: figures from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2025

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Total number of incidents of self-harm	27	8
Number of ACCTs: Usk	46	8
Number of ACCTs: Prescoed	1	3

Statistics on assaults: figures from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2025

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Assaults on prisoners: Usk	10	10
Assaults on staff: Usk	0	0
Assaults on prisoners: Prescoed	8	0
Assaults on staff: Prescoed	0	0



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