



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI East Sutton Park

**For reporting years
1 November 2023 to 31 October 2025**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

The Optional Protocol to the 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 establishment¹

HMP/YOI East Sutton Park (HMP ESP) is an open prison² located six miles from Maidstone in Kent. The main house is a Grade 2 listed Jacobean mansion set in 84 acres of land, which provides 26 rooms of shared accommodation, plus a kitchen, a dining room and communal rooms. There is additional accommodation in four flats, each housing four prisoners, plus 20 individual modular accommodation units.

The prison is the only female open prison in the south of England.

The certified normal accommodation, or CNA (this is the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded), threshold is 137, and the operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the prison) is 100.

On arrival, prisoners are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves, their sentence plans and their progression. They do so through education, voluntary work and, when possible, outside paid employment.

HMP ESP is a working prison, with a farm, gardens and a farm shop that is open to the public twice a week.

The prison shares a Governor with HMP/YOI Downview.

¹ Figures stated in this report include local management information. These 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.

² An open prison has minimal security and allows eligible prisoners to spend time away from the prison, working or in education.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- It is the Board's view that HMP ESP is, generally, a safe place for both prisoners and staff. There have been no serious incidents, four incidents of self-harm, four assaults and one use of force in the two years 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2025. The Board has seen no evidence to suggest that drug or alcohol use is prevalent.
- From the Board's observations, staff and prisoner relationships are generally good. However, we have observed friction between some prisoners at times, and inappropriate behaviour by a minority of staff has occasionally been noted. Due to the open nature of the prison, prisoners can readily interact with staff, and staff and prisoners tend to know each other well.
- Incidents of prisoner-on-prisoner bullying and intimidation have been observed during the reporting period and, at times, were not addressed with sufficient speed, in the Board's view. This allowed some types of behaviour to persist and adversely affect the wider prison atmosphere. The Board is, however, pleased to note that the prison took steps from autumn 2025 to improve the effectiveness of responses.

Fair and humane treatment

- The Board considers that prisoners are generally treated fairly, with an efficient key worker scheme in place and all levels of staff interacting, for the most part, positively with prisoners.
- The prison offers women extra support when needed through key workers, residential staff and the challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) mechanism. This is used at HMP ESP to ensure that welfare plans are in place, when needed, for vulnerable or distressed prisoners or for those who have exhibited challenging behaviour.
- From the Board's observations, there is considerable support to enable prisoners to maintain family and social ties, with release on temporary licence (ROTL) a major focus. Ongoing issues include transferred prisoners expecting quick ROTL approval and those with little time left struggling to complete ROTL clearance before release.

Health and wellbeing

- The Board considers that healthcare works well at HMP ESP and is one of the services frequently praised by prisoners when speaking about the establishment.
- From the Board's observations, healthcare staff collaborate well with prison staff to ensure that prisoners with complex and challenging health and social care needs are supported.
- The Board observes that HMP ESP's open conditions, positive prisoner relationships, good staff and prisoner relations, access to outdoor space, work, and ROTL opportunities all contribute to prisoners' wellbeing. Prisoners frequently report in exit interviews with the Board that their mental health has improved, often significantly, since arriving at HMP ESP.

Progression and resettlement

- Prisoners are, generally, prepared well for release. The Board is not aware that any prisoner left HMP ESP during the two years, November 2023 to 31 October 2025, without accommodation to go to.
- Prisoners arriving with several months left to serve undertake a structured programme, with an emphasis on improving their education, obtaining accommodation and gaining employment. Some prisoners, however, arrive with insufficient time left to serve to allow them to be properly prepared for release.
- Prisoners are encouraged to take more responsibility for themselves and their future than is generally the case at closed establishments. The Board notes that, while this can initially be challenging for some, it is reflective of life in the community to which they will return, and that most individuals adapt well.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan on the number of women receiving short custodial sentences? Has the plan contributed to any reduction such sentences?
- Will the Minister support the Board's request for the Prison Service to actively encourage closed women's prisons to transfer eligible prisoners with at least six months left to open establishments, in order to improve outcomes and help alleviate capacity pressure in closed establishments?
- When will the Minister issue updated guidance on the placement and management of transgender prisoners in women's establishments?
- When will the Minister review the treatment of civil offenders within early release schemes to ensure they are properly considered in future? When the SDS40 early release scheme was introduced in September 2024, HMP ESP had one prisoner serving a one-year sentence for a civil, rather than a criminal, offence. Despite posing minimal risk to the public, she was excluded solely because she was not serving a criminal standard determinate sentence, while prisoners with criminal convictions and similar sentence lengths were eligible. How will the Minister address this disparity to prevent civil offenders being unfairly disadvantaged in future schemes?
- When will the Minister require the Prison Service to implement a reliable and effective system for managing prisoners' property? IMB Boards nationwide have long reported issues with property management and transfers. The ESP Board notes that a related KPI once existed but was discontinued. What plans does the Minister have to reinstate this KPI, or introduce an equivalent measure, to ensure sustained improvement and proper accountability?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Could the Prison Service work with closed women's establishments to ensure that prisoners arriving at HMP ESP have a minimum of six months left to serve to enable them to benefit from release on temporary licence (ROTL) and be properly prepared for release and resettlement?

- Could the Prison Service do more to incentivise closed establishments to identify those suitable for open conditions and transfer them to open establishments?
- Could the Prison Service implement an effective system for managing prisoners' property and transfers? The ESP Board notes that a related key performance indicator (KPI) once existed but was discontinued. Could this KPI be reinstated?
- Could the Prison Service develop specific ROTL guidance for civil offenders for use by offender management units? In 2024, the Board noted that, due to a lack of ROTL guidelines for civil offenders, criminal offender procedures were applied at HMP ESP, even though the civil offender posed minimal community risk. This led to unnecessary offender management unit (OMU) work and delayed ROTL approval.

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Could the Governor investigate making greater use of the incentives scheme, including warnings or other sanctions, to more quickly and effectively respond to instances of challenging behaviour or situations where behaviour falls short of the standards expected by the prison?
- Could the prison improve communication with prisoners to reassure them that raising issues or submitting complaints will not result in being sent back to a closed establishment? While weekly forums are helpful, the Board suggests periodically republishing a Notice to Prisoners to reinforce this message.
- Could the prison develop comprehensive guidance for prisoners preparing for reintegration into the community, outlining the required steps and associated responsibilities to be completed prior to release, as well as identifying the appropriate contacts for assistance? The Board recommends establishing an orderly role to support prisoners nearing release.
- Could the Governor investigate whether more external job opportunities can be found for prisoners and whether additional support can be provided to professionally qualified prisoners to search for and obtain work on release? More job opportunities outside the local area and more clerical and administrative opportunities would benefit many leavers.
- Could the Governor investigate improving the range of internal job offerings, particularly those suitable for prisoners who have a disability or limited mobility?
- Could the Governor investigate the provision of an accessible, ground floor space for private prayer, which can be made available to disabled and mobility impaired prisoners?
- Could the Governor ensure that the kitchens in the modular accommodation living area are adequately and sufficiently equipped for the 20 pod residents and, where there is faulty equipment, this is remedied without undue delays?

3.3 Response to previous report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
<p><u>To the Minister:</u> Urge/direct the Prison Service to continue to ensure that prisoners coming to HMP ESP have enough time left to serve, to ensure that the greatest benefit in resettlement can be achieved and, therefore, representing value for money.</p>	<p>There are complex and wide-ranging issues involved in transfers and allocation decisions, which must reflect both the specific needs and circumstances of the individual, whilst balancing this alongside keeping capacity within the women's estate in the right places.</p>	<p>This remains an issue and is raised, again, in this report.</p>
<p><u>To the Minister and the Prison Service:</u> To ensure that closed female establishments progress women, who are suitable for the resettlement regime, to come to HMP ESP</p>	<p>See above.</p>	<p>This remains an issue and is raised again in this report.</p>
<p><u>To the Governor:</u> Make greater use of the incentives scheme to help address instances of behaviour that do not meet expected standard.</p>	<p>Unknown by the current Board.</p>	<p>Effectively responding to instances of challenging behaviour remains an ongoing challenge.</p>

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

- HMP ESP only receives transfers from other prisons, according to a planned schedule. Reception and induction are thorough, with a reception orderly (a trusted prisoner who takes on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison) guiding new prisoners and introducing them to prison departments and the IMB's role. When the Board has been able to observe, we have found handovers between orderlies efficient, with no negative impact on arrivals.
- The Board has observed the induction process to be efficient, and in exit interviews conducted by the Board with prisoners before they leave the establishment, no serious concerns have been raised.
- As an open prison, HMP ESP's reception handles not only new arrivals and permanent departures but also manages daily prisoner movements for ROTL, ensuring all paperwork and logistics are in order. The Board has observed that reception officers perform these tasks efficiently and collaboratively. Exit interviews indicate that prisoners view reception management positively.
- A continued cause of frustration, and one for which the Board receives many applications (prisoners' written representations), is the failure of property transfers to HMP ESP. This is the case both for physical possessions and for monies. Such issues can be exacerbated when a prisoner has lodged overnight on the journey to HMP ESP and, in the case of monies, when she has arrived from a privately run establishment.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

- During the reporting period, there have been no suicides or deaths in custody. There were four instances of self-harm, although no serious injuries were recorded. Assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans, which are used to support prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide, were opened for the four women.
- Key worker engagement and the open nature of the prison help ensure that many emotional and other problems (which, if left unchecked might lead to negative behaviours) are identified and managed.
- At the time of reporting, the Listener scheme has three trained Listeners in the prison, who provide confidential emotional support to their peers who are struggling to cope or feel suicidal.
- Prisoners who are suspected of experiencing mental health difficulties are identified and supported by the mental health team and prison staff, as well as through the weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM).

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

- During the reporting period, the Board was aware of four assaults at HMP ESP.
- During the reporting period, there have been occasional reports of bullying and other non-violent intimidation. The Board observes that levels of low-level

negative behaviour fluctuate with the prison population and that a small number of individuals can have a disproportionate impact on the wider community. The Board further notes that responses to such behaviour have not always been timely or effective, allowing issues to persist.

- A challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) is used to offer additional, structured support to prisoners to help them address a particular difficulty and make the most of their time at HMP ESP. A total of nine open CSIPs were recorded between November 2023 and October 2024, and 29 between November 2024 and October 2024³, perhaps indicating an increasing use of the system.
- Prisoners at HMP ESP are informed of the consequences of behaviour that does not meet expected standards. If prison rules are breached, disciplinary hearings (adjudications) are heard by a Governor, with Board members observing when possible.
- The Board has observed many adjudications and ROTL risk assessments and considers that they are, in most cases, conducted properly and fairly.
- During the reporting period, there were 125 adjudications.
- During the reporting period, the Board raised occasional concerns about the consistency of penalties awarded for similar offences by different adjudicating staff. We are pleased to note that regular adjudication standards meetings are held to review awards and update adjudication guidance where appropriate.
- A total of 42 prisoners were returned to closed prisons in the reporting period. The reasons included serious risk management issues, significant breaches of prison rules and the need for more secure medical or psychological support than could be provided in HMP ESP's open conditions.

4.4 Use of force

- There was one incident of use of force during the reporting period, when a prisoner was held to prevent her from harm after she began to bang her head against a wall.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

- Mandatory drug and alcohol testing is carried out and reported in the daily briefing. This, and investigations into suspected lapses in behaviour, help ensure that prisoners are aware of the consequences of behaviour that does not meet the expected standard.
- Prisoners may be screened for illicit substances and unauthorised items, or volumes of items, when they return to HMP ESP from ROTL, for example. The effectiveness of screening at reception has been questioned by some prisoners, who have told the Board that determined prisoners can, and have, evaded detection.
- Prisoners at HMP ESP have access to PIN phones on site and take a mobile phone with them when on ROTL, returning it on entry to the prison. As a result, trading of phones and contraband, common in closed prisons, is rare and does not seem to be a significant issue.

³ Please note that CSIP numbers for two months in this period are unavailable to the Board and the total reported here may, therefore, have been greater.

- The Board concludes that, during the reporting period, HMP ESP did not have a significant problem with the entry or use of illicit items in the prison and that measures to prevent these are mostly proportionate and effective.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

- Accommodation consists of 26 shared rooms in the main house (two or three residents each), plus four flats and 20 single-occupancy modular accommodation units for up to 36 residents. Flats have private kitchens and living rooms, while modular accommodation residents share kitchen and laundry facilities. Most residents in flats and modular accommodation hold outside jobs and can bring limited food back to prepare their own meals.
- New arrivals at HMP ESP are assigned shared rooms, a change from single cells common in closed prisons and sometimes a source of difficulty. Prisoners can request room changes, but most adjust to sharing and see it as worthwhile for the benefits of open conditions. The Board observes that many even form friendships with their roommates, viewing it as a positive aspect of house life.
- Rooms in the house are on the ground and first floors. The main building is old and has accessibility issues, such as the number and steepness of some stairs. This can create issues for prisoners with physical disabilities and mobility issues.
- Many prisoners want to move from the house to modular accommodation or a flat, but the Board has observed that the allocation process has caused frustration, due to a lack of clarity. In April 2025, the Independent Living Policy was updated to make accommodation allocation more transparent. Eligibility criteria, application and appeal processes, and the waiting list for flat and modular accommodation housing were also revised. Both the Board and prisoners (who expressed an opinion) viewed the changes positively.
- Flat and modular accommodation residents often tell the Board that they appreciate living in this more relaxed environment, where they can take more responsibility for themselves. Responsibilities include keeping their areas clean and tidy, arranging cleaning rotas and managing their laundry.
- Prisoners provide their own clothing and those who go out on temporary licence can purchase items for their use, subject to volumetric limits.
- Underwear and basic clothing items are provided by the prison when required. There is also a selection of clothing, donated by prisoners and staff, which prisoners can use if they need something appropriate for an outside interview or meeting. Prisoners are sometimes transferred from other prisons without their property, including clothing. In this case, prison clothing and/or items from the donated items store are made available.
- During the reporting period, the Board received no applications relating to issues with property management, including clothing, within HMP ESP. In contrast, applications regarding problems with property not being transferred from other prisons was the third highest category of application received by the Board.
- Prisoner feedback on food provided by the prison is overwhelmingly positive. Dietary requirements for health and religious needs are usually met, and the Board has observed that the kitchen is willing to try different menus and work with the prisoners to cater for specific needs. During the reporting period, the Board only received two applications concerning food issues.

- The prison farm and gardens provide quality meat and vegetables to the kitchen, with any excess being sent to other local prisons and the HMP ESP farm shop.
- Maintenance of the establishment is performed by Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL) under a central contract managed by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). The Board has observed that while repairs are mostly performed well, some can take a long time to implement.
- In 2025, the single cooker for prisoners in modular accommodation living area was broken for several weeks before being replaced. Suspected deliberate damage may have delayed repairs, which were the prison's responsibility. The Board believes replacement should have been faster.

5.2 Segregation

- The prison has no facility for segregation. Prisoners are returned to a closed prison if they need to be segregated.
- A total of 19 prisoners were returned to closed conditions during the period 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024, and 23 during the period 1 November 2024 to 31 October 2025. Most were returned because of security concerns, including breaches of release on temporary licence conditions. A few were returned because of health issues that could not be safely managed in open conditions.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

- The Board considers the general prison atmosphere to be welcoming and positive and has observed mostly good relationships between prisoners and staff; and that staff, in most cases, treat prisoners with respect and courtesy.
- There is ready access to many staff, including duty custodial managers and Governors. The Board has observed that most staff engage positively with prisoners and, in many cases, make notable efforts to assist them.
- During the reporting period, a total of 3527 key work sessions were recorded, which is an average of 147 per month against a target of 180 per month, giving a compliance rate (actual versus target) of 81.4%. Prisoners are often complimentary about their key workers and value the key worker system when in discussions with the Board.
- A full-time neurodiversity support manager (NSM) was appointed to HMP ESP in May 2023. Their role is to raise awareness of neurodiversity in prison and help strengthen approaches for identifying and supporting those with neurodivergent needs. This includes supporting prisoners in accessing and engaging in education, skills and work programmes in the prison.
- The prison has faced ongoing challenges in maintaining an effective prison council. Recruitment of prisoners both willing and capable of coordinating council matters proved difficult, largely due to the number of prisoners employed externally in employment. The Board has heard from prisoners who have said they were reluctant to raise issues, not out of fear, but because they preferred to concentrate on preparations for their life after release.
- Prisoner drop-in sessions were trialled, and have evolved into weekly open forums, each with a focus topic but at which any issue can be raised. Attendance at forums fluctuates, but they are generally well attended by senior staff and prisoners. The Board has observed open and collaborative

discussions between staff and prisoners, with actions agreed and tracked, and we believe the forums work well.

- Many prisoners at HMP ESP tell us they are afraid that submitting complaints or reporting issues could lead to a return to closed conditions, even though this has never happened, according to prison data shared with the Board and prisoners. The Governor has published notices reinforcing this but, due to the rotation in prisoners, the Board considers that this information needs to be frequently re-published by the prison. Prisoners now meet with the complaints clerk as part of induction to help dispel this view.
- A small number of prisoners reported to the Board that some staff used threats of being returned to closed conditions to discourage complaints. Such incidents seem to be rare and are difficult to verify but have been reported to the Governor. The Board believes the prison does not tolerate these actions; however, limited evidence can restrict any response.

5.4 Equality and diversity

- The prison holds quarterly equality and diversity meetings with prisoner representatives and maintains a diversity and inclusion events calendar. Events such as Black History Month, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Month, and Pride are celebrated, with prisoners encouraged to plan and lead activities, often including culturally appropriate meals.
- A prisoner or a member of the prison staff may submit a discrimination incident reporting form (DIRF) if they believe they have been discriminated against, based on a protected characteristic (including age, race, religion, disability, sex and gender reassignment).
- In the reporting period, 28 submitted DIRFs were logged by the prison. Of these, 14 were prisoner-on-prisoner discrimination (10 upheld), and 13 related to staff-on-prisoner discrimination (one upheld).
- The Board received one application relating to equality in each of the reporting years 2023-24 and 2024-2025.
- In 2024, the Board identified problems with DIRF logging and response monitoring, but these were addressed by the prison. The initial external quality assurance (QA) provider for DIRFs was unresponsive; a new organisation is now effectively fulfilling this role.
- During Ramadan, appropriate arrangements were made to save meals for women who are practising Muslims, and the prison adjusted its approach after taking into account prisoner feedback.
- The Board notes no serious concerns with the prison's management of equality and diversity considerations. As in any community, individual staff members and prisoners have a range of views and, occasionally, discriminatory language or actions may result. The Board considers that, where these are reported, the prison deals with them proportionately.
- The Board notes that the prison building may be unsuitable for prisoners with disabilities, especially mobility issues, in that there are no lifts and many staff locations, activity rooms and the multi-faith room are on the first floor. In addition, internal jobs suitable for prisoners with disabilities are limited.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

- During 2025, a new part-time managing chaplain was recruited to HMP ESP. He currently has a team of 15 sessional chaplains, representing nine religions, including two Christian denominations, and consists of volunteers and sessional chaplains.
- The chaplains visit the prison regularly and the managing chaplain tells the Board that there is usually a chaplain on site each day.
- Muslim prayers and a multi-denominational Christian service are held weekly, as are a Buddhist meditation session and Islamic and Bible studies.
- The chaplaincy team runs several courses, including Flourish, which was developed specifically for women, as well as parenting, understanding forgiveness and understanding loss. Women who have attended a course or otherwise engaged with chaplains have noted in exit interviews with the Board that they have found these engagements helpful and religious prisoners note that they appreciate the services and religious studies.
- A multi-faith room is available on the first floor and is generally accessible to prisoners. The Board notes that at least one Muslim prisoner with mobility issues was unable to access the room for daily prayers, and no suitable ground-floor alternative was available for private prayer.

5.6 Incentives schemes

- The incentives scheme has three levels - basic (bottom), standard (middle) and enhanced (top) - offering increasing benefits based on prisoner behaviour. Most women at HMP ESP are on the enhanced level, usually achieving this status before transferring from a closed prison. Open conditions at HMP ESP are not suitable for basic level prisoners. Those demoted to basic are typically transferred back to a closed facility but may return if they regain acceptable status.
- During the reporting period, a few prisoners have been demoted to the standard level, which limits the amount of spend they have and reduces time permitted on ROTL (both resettlement day release/RDR and resettlement overnight release/ROR) and may involve individual sanctions. Those noted by the Board typically regained enhanced status within weeks.
- Incentives level warnings (i.e. any recurrence of negative behaviour within a defined time will lead to an incentives scheme demotion) are frequently used to forestall negative behaviour and can be effective. However, the Board is concerned that warnings and the incentives scheme system are not always used effectively to counter instances of negative and intimidatory behaviour.

5.7 Complaints

- From our observations, the Board believes that the business hub at HMP ESP manages the prison complaints system efficiently and with care and that, in most cases, prison staff respond properly and within target response times. Complaints statistics including any late responses are regularly reported at daily morning meetings.
- The head of business administration issues a monthly complaints analysis that reviews monthly and year-to-date trends, focusing on timeliness of response, the demographics of complainants (age, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, religion and disability), the subject of the complaint, the

complainant's location (house, flat or modular accommodation) and the outcomes.

- The Board undertook a quality assessment of 42 complaints from 22 prisoners in 2025 and found responses to be acceptable and written with care.

5.8 Property

- From our observations, we find that prisoners' property at HMP ESP is generally well managed. However, persistent problems remain with missing clothing and money during transfers from other prisons. Despite ongoing concerns raised by IMB Boards nationwide, some prisons frequently fail to transfer property properly. The Board urges HMPPS to take effective action to address this issue.

Over the reporting period:

- There were no applications to the Board about property within HMP ESP but 23 were received about property not being transferred from other prisons.
- A total of 45 complaints were submitted to the prison concerning property, 39 of which were about property not transferred from other prisons, with 16 not responded to by the other prisons within the target response time.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

- The healthcare team consists of a head of healthcare, with a background in mental health, two registered general nurses (RGN), a senior registered mental health nurse (RMN), two nurse associates and an administrator. All work full time, except for the administrator, who works three days a week. There is also a nurse associate who is progressing through her nursing training programme. The healthcare department is in separate premises from the main building. There is a lack of space in the building, which consists of only one consultation room, some offices and a small waiting area. Having only one consultation room significantly restricts capacity and makes timetabling up to 15 clinics each month challenging. The waiting area for prisoners attending clinics is adjacent to the RGN's office and lacks sound-proofing, risking loss of confidentiality. Options to expand the available space either within the department or to relocate it within the estate are underway.
- Healthcare is provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. It provides integrated health and wellbeing services at HMP ESP, including primary care, mental health and clinical substance misuse services. See Annex A.
- Pharmacy services are provided by Oxleas Prison Services Ltd (a private company and subsidiary of the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust). Medications are dispensed from healthcare. Most prisoners collect their medication weekly or monthly, following an assessment to establish if it is safe for the prisoner to have medication in their possession.
- Prisoners on oral controlled drugs receive their medication daily from healthcare during normal hours. If prisoners requiring controlled drugs on a Sunday or Bank Holiday, a member of the healthcare team attends HMP ESP and dispenses the medication. The introduction of buprenorphine prolonged-release monthly injection (Buvidal), as part of a drug withdrawal programme, has reduced the number of residents taking oral controlled drugs and the need for medication to be dispensed out of hours.
- From the Board's observations, the healthcare department works well at HMP ESP. Staff work closely with prisoners, picking up and dealing with wellbeing issues quickly and efficiently. In recent years, several changes and improvements to the delivery of healthcare have occurred:
 - The healthcare service contract with Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust commenced on 1 April 2022.
 - Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust was assessed as 'good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in 2019, but there has not been a formal assessment of services at HMP ESP. From 14 June 2024, HMP ESP is registered with the CQC and a registered manager is in place.
 - The healthcare team is managed within the healthcare department at HMP ESP.
 - Previously, services were provided from Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm. Prisoners on ROTL were frequently off-site and, therefore, unable to attend appointments. A quality-improvement project was undertaken, and a six-day healthcare service was implemented during the reporting period,

resulting in healthcare being available on site from Monday to Saturday, 8am to 4pm.

- Out-of-hours healthcare issues are managed through the ambulance service (111 and 999, as appropriate) and, where necessary, through ROTL to A&E.

6.2 Physical healthcare

- The GP attends on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. A first-contact practitioner (FCP)/physiotherapist attends weekly. The dentist comes in on a mobile unit every two weeks. Optician and podiatrist clinics operate once per month. Regular sexual health clinics take place.
- On arrival at HMP ESP, prisoners should have a health screening assessment within 24 hours. Newly transferred residents are informed about healthcare by the reception orderly. Health and mental wellbeing are discussed at sentence planning boards.
- In the event of a pregnancy, healthcare refers patients to Maidstone Birth Centre. Midwife and neonatal support services are also available, as well as smear tests.
- From our observations, appointments for assessment and treatment are timely, and the only waiting list is for dental assessment, which is currently nine to ten weeks. A healthcare peer worker is in place and non-attendance at on-site clinics is less than 1%.
- Prisoners over the age of 50 have their breast screening requirements coordinated and they attend the breast screening unit at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, as needed.

6.3 Mental health

- Prisoners arriving at HMP ESP with mental health needs are assessed by a mental health nurse, provided with a care plan, which appear to be regularly reviewed, and can be referred to psychological or counselling services, as required.
- Follow-up clinics, led by a mental health nurse, occur regularly. The psychiatrist visits once a month. The counsellor and clinical psychologist visit regularly. EMDR therapy is provided for appropriate residents.

6.4 Social care

- As part of reception screening, prisoners with specific needs are identified and referred for a social care needs assessment. If a prisoner feels it necessary, they can request an assessment themselves or through the safer custody team.

6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

- Clinical substance misuse is being managed by the primary care team, which works collaboratively with Change, Grow, Live (CGL), a charity that offers psychosocial intervention and attends medical reviews on a regular basis. Prisoners with a history of substance misuse are encouraged to attend appropriate meetings to give them the tools to avoid relapsing on release.

East Sutton Park IMB health applications

Code	Subject	2023-2024	2024-2025
G	Health	6	2

The Board has reviewed healthcare-related applications to the IMB and did not find any themes or trends.

6.6 Soft skills

- The prison provides spaces for arts and craft activities and works with prisoners to encourage those with skills to mentor others and run activity groups. Occasional events involving both staff and prisoners are arranged, and the Board has observed that these are very popular. Prisoners frequently praise them to Board members and say they would welcome more such opportunities.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

Education

- HMP ESP provides education, skills and work activities, intended to support employability and resettlement outcomes. Provision includes functional skills English and Maths; vocational training; careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG); distance learning; reading and literacy provision; and structured, work-based learning across the establishment.
- The contracted education provider is Milton Keynes College. Additional educational support is provided by a number of charities (see Annex A).
- During the reporting period, the prison transitioned from a cohort-based delivery model to a rolling (roll-on/roll off) enrolment model, enabling prisoners to access education shortly after arrival rather than waiting for fixed start dates. The Board considers this change effective in improving access, responsiveness and alignment with sentence length and release planning.
- Attendance and engagement with education remain generally good, despite the competing priorities inherent in an open prison focused on employment.
- A 99.3% pass rate for those who completed their functional skills Maths/English courses was achieved in 2025.
- In 2025, HMP ESP achieved a 94% course-completion rate, measured as the proportion of prisoners who finished their course compared with those who started. Withdrawals were primarily due to prisoners finding full-time work or being released.
- There is continued engagement with distance learning, with up to 14 prisoners actively enrolled at any one time.
- Access to Open University study, PET-funded (Prisoners' Education Trust) courses and external college provision is supported where appropriate.
- The Board considers achievement outcomes to be strong.

Library

- Senior education staff described the library and reading strategy as one of the establishment's strongest areas. Attendance at the library is recorded daily by Kent County Council and an orderly, The Board consistently observed high levels of engagement and positive prisoner feedback.
- From our observations, we note that the library is viewed as a welcoming, calm and purposeful space. Reading provision is supported by a structured reading strategy, formally reviewed every three to four months, and includes:
 - Book clubs, including events with authors.
 - Creative writing programmes, with prisoners achieving external recognition and published work.
 - Family reading initiatives, supporting literacy and family ties.
- Reading is also encouraged outside the library through reading corners in work areas, although these require periodic refreshing. The Board believes that this support for reading makes a real difference to prisoners' literacy, wellbeing and rehabilitation.

7.2 Vocational training, work

During the reporting period, the following were offered:

- Hospitality
- Barista training 5 day full accredited course.
- Manual handling and first aid at work.
- Construction skills certification scheme (CSCS) card provision via the charity, Shaw Trust.
- Employability skills embedded within work areas using structured task frameworks.
- Introduction to Health and Safety in the workplace.
- Level 1 award in food safety in catering.
- IT skills

7.3 Offender management, progression

- Prisoners arriving at HMP ESP must have risk assessments completed before they can be considered for release on temporary licence (ROTL). This is the case even for prisoners who have previously been released on temporary licence at a previous prison. The Board has noticed that this often surprises prisoners, and some of them have told us that it is contrary to what they were told at the establishment from which they transferred.
- - As a general rule, an OASys assessment (which assesses a prisoner's risks, needs and likelihood of reoffending) is required after a prisoner transfers to HMP ESP. Prison offender managers (POMs) have eight weeks to complete it, with limited extensions allowed for high and very high risk cases. There are a few exceptions: Prisoners who were already on ROTL at their previous establishment and who gained open status from closed conditions do not need a new OASys unless the existing one is out of date or there has been a change in risk. This is known as fast-track ROTL, and an assessment is not usually expected in these cases.
 - Prisoners transferring to HMP ESP who have not previously been in open conditions require a full OASys review, unless there are exceptional circumstances (such as, for example, they are very low risk, have a recent initial sentence plan, or agreement with the community offender manager/COM that a new assessment is unnecessary).
 - Prisoners transferring with CRL (childcare resettlement leave) will continue to receive their allowance, as per HMPPS policy, following a fast-track assessment; however, those transferring with existing RDRs (ROTL Day Release) and RORs (ROTL Overnight Release) still require a full assessment.
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- The target timescale for completing ROTL risk assessments is two weeks for prisoners with previous ROTL approval and eight to twelve weeks for those without, depending on risk complexity. The Board considers the offender management unit (OMU) to be proactive in working to these targets; however, delays remain frequent, although they seem to be tracked, reported and monitored.

- For prisoners with complex risk factors, risk assessments can be delayed by late input from probation, police or social services. During the reporting period, government early-release and extended home detention curfew (HDC) schemes also placed additional priority demands on the OMU, impacting routine work, including ROTL risk assessments.
- The OMU runs a weekly surgery where prisoners can raise issues, and the Board observes that many OMU staff regularly walk around the prison to meet prisoners and take ad hoc queries. Prisoners may not enter the OMU offices but can attend OMU workshops or use the prison applications or complaints systems to raise OMU-related issues. The OMU also has two peer mentors, who can support prisoners with related queries, as well as a noticeboard that is regularly updated.
- Despite these communication channels, prisoners often express frustration to the Board at their inability to access OMU staff or obtain updates on issues affecting their ROTL eligibility or release plans. A ROTL guidance booklet has been published to assist prisoners with the process.
- The Board notes that many delays are beyond the OMU's control, such as those dependent on the Probation Service; however, the Board observes that communication with prisoners during these delays does not always sufficiently reduce stress and anxiety. Sentence management issues, particularly ROTL and release preparation, accounted for the highest number of prisoner applications during the reporting period.
- In exit interviews, prisoners often speak positively about support from their POMs and OMU case administrators. A minority report dissatisfaction, citing delays in ROTL or release preparation, a lack of response from OMU, and, in some cases, poor staff relationships.
- The Board considers that, in most cases, OMU staff work conscientiously to manage a large and complex workload and to facilitate ROTLs, support the completion of sentence plans and assist prisoners towards resettlement.

7.4 Family contact

- Contact with family and friends is considered important for the wellbeing and support of prisoners and phone booths are available in the prison to support this. The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) charity assists prisoners with family contact and organises several family days (which bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings) per year. There are twice weekly social visits sessions that can be booked by family and friends.
- Most prisoners can visit friends and family when out on ROTL. Some prisoners must make long journeys that can consume much of their ROTL time but, as HMP ESP is one of only two open women's prisons, the other being in the north, this seems unavoidable. The prison provides transport to a nearby railway station and to the nearest town, Maidstone. Prisoners on ROTL who have long travel distances are usually given additional time to allow for more meaningful family or resettlement time.
- In March 2025, revised ROTL procedures were introduced, reportedly to bring HMP ESP in line with national policy. The emphasis shifted to risk, need and purposeful activity to support resettlement. As a result, some activities previously allowed on ROTL were no longer allowed, and the geographical

areas prisoners could visit were more tightly defined, with an emphasis on ROTL to home areas.

- These changes took some time to be fully understood by staff and prisoners. Some alterations were made following consultations, and after a three month trial period, an appeals procedure for 'exceptional circumstances' was introduced.
- Prisoners were newly required to complete a three-month ROTL diary. The Board observed that while some found this helpful, others reported difficulties planning so far ahead, particularly for unforeseen family events. The prison advised that unplanned events could be addressed through the exceptional circumstances appeal process.
- While some prisoner discontent continues about the new ROTL procedures, the Board's observes that most prisoners and staff work together to support successful ROTLs, and that family contact is well facilitated at HMP ESP and highly valued by the community.

7.5 Resettlement planning

- Most prisoners at HMP ESP are destined to return to the community within two years of their arrival. Planning for prisoner resettlement is, therefore, a key mission for HMP ESP. The Board considers that the prison works hard to fulfil its resettlement responsibilities.
- While most prisoners are released to permanent accommodation, some require temporary accommodation. The Board is not aware of any prisoner being released from HMP ESP without accommodation of some sort during the reporting period. A shortage of temporary accommodation, particularly in London, has, however, caused delays to some prisoner release dates.
- Preparing for resettlement includes helping prisoners achieve basic English and Maths. There are also practical courses to support their return to the community, such as IT skills and money management.
- Prisoners are encouraged to seek community employment prior to release, supported by the prison's employment hub, which recruits local employers. Some continue with their employer after release. The availability of employers and opportunities fluctuates, and securing work can be challenging for some.
- Prisoners have raised concerns with the Board that employment opportunities have not always made available to all who appear suitable, with staff partiality in the allocation of opportunities being suspected. The Board is pleased to note that the prison took steps in 2025 to demonstrate that this is not the case and to provide a more transparent process in this regard.
- For prisoners with professional or specialist skills, not having online access to job sites or email within the prison makes applying for and responding to job offers challenging. Some prisoners in this situation have said they feel frustrated by the limited support from the prison and the difficulties this creates in finding work.
- The Board introduced an exit survey in autumn 2024 for prisoners leaving HMP ESP, to gather feedback for both the Board, on how it monitors, and the prison. Based on exit interviews carried out between February and July 2025, 75% of prisoners said their time in HMP ESP was 'positive', with 17% described it as 'mixed' and 8% rated it as 'negative'.
- The Board's overall findings from the exit survey were as follows:

- Most prisoners reported positive experiences, emphasising respectful staff interactions, good support networks and improvements in their health and wellbeing, particularly those working on the farm. Comments included feeling 'treated like a human being' and becoming the 'healthiest they have ever been'.
- Some individuals described mixed experiences. They often struggled at first to adjust to open conditions or felt that treatment was inconsistent, but many still found value in the progression opportunities and activities. Issues raised included difficulty adjusting to increased freedom, perceived favouritism, and concerns about fairness in modular accommodation allocation.
- A limited number of prisoners reported negative experiences, citing insufficient support, unfair treatment and a need for more consistency in progression and disciplinary processes.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	8
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	Start 2023-3: 4 Start 2024-5: 5
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	2023-4: 122 2024-5: 179

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Reporting year 2023-2024	Reporting year 2024-2025
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	0	0
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	8	6
C	Equality	1	1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	11	9
E1	Letters, visits, phones, public protection, restrictions	4	3
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	7	5
F	Food and kitchens	1	1
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	6	2
H1	Property within the establishment	0	0
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	12	11
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	0	0
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	22	15
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	19	14
K	Transfers	0	0
L	Miscellaneous	1	0
	Total number of applications	92	67

ANNEX A

Main service providers

- Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust: healthcare
- Optometry: The Prison Opticians Trust
- Substance misuse: Change, Grow, Live (CGL)
- Education: Milton Keynes College
- Library: Kent County Council
- Inter-prison transfers: Serco
- Support to find employment: Seetec Plus
- Training provider of skills and education: Shaw Trust
- Support for prisoners and their families: Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)
- Maintenance: Government Facility Services Limited (GFSL)
- Resettlement support: Through the Gate Services
- She Matters: CV/interview/disclosure training
- The Glasshouse: training and advice
- Spark Inside: life and work coaching
- Shannon Trust: helps improve reading and numeracy skills
- Christians against Poverty: life skills
- Blown Fuse Drama Group: drama workshops
- Only a Pavement Away: hospitality jobs



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