



# Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP The Verne

**For reporting period  
1 August 2024 to 30 September 2025**

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## **Introductory sections 1 – 3**

### **1. Statutory role of the IMB**

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

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

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

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

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

## 2. Description of the establishment

2.1 HMP The Verne is located on the Isle of Portland in Dorset. The Verne citadel, constructed using convict labour between 1857 and 1881, served as Portland Harbour's primary defensive fortification. Many of the original buildings are still in use today and are Grade II or II\* listed by Historic England. These buildings require constant upkeep and attention and cannot be altered without consent of Dorset Council.

2.2 The Verne operated as a prison from 1949 until October 2013. It then housed an adult male immigration removal centre (IRC) from March 2014 until December 2017. On 28 July 2018, The Verne re-opened as a men's category C (for those who present a moderate risk) adult training prison, operated by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), for people convicted of sexual offences (PCoSO).

2.3 In the last month of the reporting period, Fleet wing began to be occupied; whereupon the certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded) increased from 596<sup>1</sup> to 636; the operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) increased from 608 to 648. The prisoner accommodation is described in 5.1, below.

2.4 Weston College provided most of the vocational and educational opportunities (see 7.1.1). These included tiling, bricklaying and a barber shop, as well as art and music. These are housed in the older 'casemates' (that is, rooms in the wall of the original fortress) part of the estate, as are the art room, library and multi-faith centre. Sports facilities at The Verne include:

- a large playing field for football and cricket; and
- a well-equipped gymnasium and other outside exercise equipment.

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

### **3. Key points**

#### **3.1 Main findings**

##### **Safety**

- The Board again observed that The Verne remains a prison in which the great majority of its residents generally feel safe. Some disorderly behaviour during the reporting year may be attributed to the increased intake of recently sentenced and younger men, who have little or no experience of prison.

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

- As in the previous report, the Board's view is that prisoners are treated in a fair and humane way. Particular attention continues to be paid to the needs of those with protected characteristics (such as age, disability, race, religion, sex, gender reassignment and sexual orientation, against which it is unlawful to discriminate).
- The Board is appreciative of the efforts made to increase the number of key work (one-to-one) sessions. However, this came at the cost of some loss of association time for some prisoners who were retired or not in work or education. This was unfortunate and the Board hopes that a solution can be found soon.

##### **Health and wellbeing**

- Consistent with last year's findings, the Board's observations indicate that Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust continues to provide effective healthcare.
- The Board recognises that the social care suite, in Dorset wing, continues to make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of elderly prisoners. The Board believes that 24-hour clinical care could make a similar contribution.

##### **Progression and resettlement**

- The Board is pleased to note that a programme aimed at reducing the risk of re-offending is now offered at The Verne.

#### **3.2 Main areas for development**

##### ***TO THE MINISTER***

- Will the Minister commit to making the exemption for prison officers from the new visa extension salary requirement permanent? The current temporary exemption, which expires at the end of 2026, risks prolonged uncertainty for the workforce.

##### ***TO THE PRISON SERVICE***

- Will HMPPS consider funding 24-hour on-site clinical cover at the Verne, provided by a nurse or paramedic? (See 6.5.2)

##### ***TO THE GOVERNOR***

- What steps will the Governor take to ensure a swift and lasting solution to the continuing problems with the clothes dryers on D wing? (See 5.1.5)

### 3.3 Response to the previous year's report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
<p>Will the Minister consider establishing an end-of-life care facility at HMP The Verne?</p>	<p>HMPPS and NHS England co-produced the 'Dying Well in Custody Charter - Self-Assessment Tool', which was published in 2024. NHS England have been in discussion with HMPPS regarding developing a plan to further enhance the end-of-life care offer regionally, with the aim of creating more bespoke pathways for prisoners requiring complex care.</p>	<p>The Board is no longer calling for end-of-life provision. However, it is now more concerned to see 24-hour cover by a nurse or paramedic.</p>
<p>Will HMPPS ensure funding for an alternative accommodation for the healthcare unit?</p> <p>Will HMPPS expedite the introduction of a sex offence programme at The Verne?</p>	<p>Considerable work has been undertaken to improve the existing healthcare facilities, including a complete re-roof to prevent water penetration and eliminate dampness.</p> <p>Funding has been agreed for The Verne to implement the next generation of offending behaviour programmes (OBP), 'Building Choices'.</p>	<p>The Board is pleased to note that sufficient repairs were completed to allow healthcare staff to return to their offices and clinics early in the reporting period.</p> <p>The first OBP was offered in September 2025.</p>
<p>Will the Governor ensure that the kitchen roof is repaired as a matter of urgency?</p>	<p>No direct response.</p>	<p>The Board understands that repairs to the kitchen roof have yet to be completed.</p>

## Evidence sections 4 – 7

### 4. Safety

#### 4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 Prisoners arriving at The Verne are escorted to the reception building. The process remains broadly the same as last year: they are introduced to the prison ethos of respect for the individual and zero tolerance of anti-social behaviour; their property is collected and stored; and a light meal may be offered. Those with obvious mobility issues are transferred to Dorset wing, whilst the majority move to the induction wing, Chesil (C1).

4.1.2 The two week-long induction programme continues, as in the previous year, to instil further the prevailing ethos of The Verne regime: mutual respect between staff and prisoners, intolerance of violence and the development of a supportive and caring community. The programme offers the opportunity to become acquainted with all aspects of prison life: education, healthcare, work, gym, library and chaplaincy. They receive talks from representatives of protected interests (see 5.4.1), from Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to offer peer support) and, where possible, a member of the IMB. Prisoners should be given the name of their key worker during induction, although it tends to be some time before the first meeting takes place.

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

4.2.1 There were seven deaths in custody during the reporting period: six appeared to be through natural causes or illness

4.2.2 As in last year's report, prisoners who threaten and/or carry out self-harm are placed on an ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) order. They are carefully monitored (hourly if necessary) and frequently reviewed by a multi-disciplinary staff team until it is felt safe for the ACCT to be closed. Members of the IMB attend these reviews whenever possible, to observe the monthly audit of the relevant documents, ensuring they are completed fully and correctly completed.

4.2.3 There has been a rise in the number of ACCT orders (see table 4.2.3, below) over the past two years. We have been told by prison staff that this continues to be attributed to the increased intake of recently sentenced and younger men who have little or no experience of life in prison.

*Table 4.2.3: ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) orders; BM (behaviour monitoring); and CSIPs (challenge support and intervention plans)*

	2024-2025*	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-0222
ACCT	134	138	109	53
BM	145	94	108	133
CSIP	320	248	214	16

*\*The 2024-2025 reporting period consisted of 14 months: 1 August 2024 to 30 September 2025.*

### 4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 Table 4.3.1 summarises the instances of finds of illicit items or substances that were reported to the security department.

*Table 4.3.1: Finds reported to the security department*

Type of find	No. of incidents recorded	No. of prisoners involved
Alcohol/Hooch/Distilling Equipment	20	19
Charger (incl. mobile charger)	5	5
Drug/Drug Equipment	65	47
Mobile Phone/Related Items	16	12
Other Digital Items	42	37
Other Reportable Items	83	59
Tobacco	1	1
Weapons	22	19

4.3.2 In the reporting period, there were 222 recorded incidents of self-harm, attributed to 51 individuals (compared with 227/55 in 2023 and 2024, respectively). The most incidents recorded by an individual was 78, with the next highest being 24 incidents.

*Table 4.3.2: Adjudications*

Rule	Charge	Total
12	In possession of an unauthorised article	183
20	Threatening, abusive or insulting words/behaviour	70
23	Disobeys or fails to comply a rule which applies to them	69
22	Disobeys a lawful order	61
9	MDT/VDT failure	53
1	Commits any assault	37
5	Intentionally endangers the health and safety of others	26
4	Fights with any person	20
17	Destroys or damages any part of the prison	16
19	Disrespectful to any officer	6
18	Absents themselves	5
25a	Attempts to commit	4
20a	Racially threatening, abusive or insulting words/behaviour	4
15	Takes improperly articles belonging to others	3
14	Sells or delivers without permission articles which only they have permission for	2
6	Intentionally obstructs an officer in the execution of their duties	1
11	Consumes Alcohol	1
10	Intoxicated by Alcohol	1
24a	Displays, attaches or draws on any part of the prison not authorised	1
16	Intentionally or recklessly sets fires	1

4.3.3 The more serious type of reportable incident result in a prisoner being charged, subject to adjudication (see table 4.3.2) and, if the charge is upheld, sanctions are applied. Sanctions include cellular confinement, forfeit of privileges and loss of earnings.

The outcomes of the 565 adjudications held during the reporting period are listed in table 4.3.3.

*Table 4.3.3: Adjudication outcomes*

<b>Decision</b>	<b>No.</b>
Proven	370
Dismissed	113
Not proceeded	62
Adjourned	17
Referred to police	3

4.3.4 As in last year's report, a CSIP may be initiated following a referral and subsequent investigation of an incident. A referral by a member of staff can arise from a range of triggers, including arguments on the wing, challenging or negative behaviour, or the need to provide additional support to prisoners who are vulnerable, have been victims of alleged assaults, or may be at risk of bullying. Following an investigation by the Safer Communities team. The same three possible outcomes apply this year as in the previous report:

- Mediation: if no new information is brought to light, the staff member will speak to the prisoner(s) involved and will mediate the situation.
- Behaviour monitoring (BM in table 4.2.1): staff monitor a prisoner's associations and their interactions with staff for an initial period of 14 days. BMs are used primarily to gather further information about allegations made, to keep an eye on vulnerable prisoners, to track alleged bullies, to monitor interactions between prisoners who have had issues with each other and to gauge the suitability of prisoners who arrive at The Verne with security concerns.
- A CSIP is opened when a prisoner requires longer periods of support, has displayed frequent challenging behaviour, or has been involved in an incident such as sexual assault or violence that has resulted in a prolonged stay in the care and separation unit (CSU).

4.3.5 Each wing has a violence reduction representative. They, along with staff, seek to de-escalate incidents as soon as they arise. From discussions with other IMBs, the Board remains satisfied that the data presented in this section are indicative of a prison in which acts of violence and indiscipline are relatively rare.

#### **4.4 Vulnerable prisoners, safeguarding**

4.4.1 As in last year's report, there are vulnerable groups. Unpaid debt (especially in respect of vapes) can give rise to bullying and such behaviour, and when staff suspect this, they initiate covert behaviour monitoring (BM). Moving the bully to another wing can be effective. Occasionally, prisoners who do not adhere to the non-violent regime established at The Verne are transferred to other prisons.

#### **4.5 Use of force**

4.5.1 Force is defined as 'the amount of effort required to compel compliance by an unwilling subject'. Such force was used on 48 occasions in the reporting period. The increase on last year is believed to be due, in part, to the national introduction of

handcuffing all prisoners when being moved to the CSU during patrol state, even if compliant.

*Table 4.5.1: Use of force*

	<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>2023-2024</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	48	32	15

#### **4.6 Preventing illicit items**

4.6.1 The position is unchanged from last year: the finds of illicit items are listed in table 4.3.1 are not regarded by the Board as excessive or indicative of any systemic failings by the prison authorities.

## 5. Fair and humane treatment

### 5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 Constructed in the early 1970s, the greater part of the residential accommodation consists of three blocks, each divided into two wings. Each of the six wings houses at least 80 prisoners, on the first and second floors (see table 5.1.1). The cells do not have sanitation, but prisoners have 24-hour access to WCs, washbasins and showers. Each cell is equipped with a small television and a kettle. On the ground floor of each unit is a laundry, servery, dining area, communal area and prison staff office. Those prisoners employed in cleaning continue to maintain a very high standard of hygiene within all wings.

*Table 5.1.1 Numbers accommodated in the various cell types*

WING		Single cell		Double cell	Ground floor
A1	Abbotsbury	80		4	
A2	Arne	80			
B1	Bincombe	80		4	3
B2	Blandford	80		8	
C1	Chesil	80			1
C2	Corfe	80		8	
D	Dorset	80	Cubicles		
E	Evershot	24	Pod		
F	Fleet	40	Pod		

5.1.2 Dorset wing, situated in the old casemate part of the prison, consists of ten dormitories on the ground floor, and houses prisoners with mobility issues and social care needs. Two of the dormitories have been reconfigured for enhanced social care accommodation. Each consists of eight separate rooms with hospital-style beds and lifting hoists. These two dormitories have their own shower, WC and wash basin. Similar cells have been constructed on the ground floor in Bincombe and Chesil.

5.1.3 Evershot wing comprises 24 modular units, each with a WC and a shower. It has its own kitchen area and day room, as well as a staff office. Evershot is occupied by trusted prisoners. Fleet wing finally opened in early September 2025 after a year's delay. It accommodates 40 men in modular rapid deployment cells. Most of the prisoners are close to release and attend re-settlement sessions. The resettlement office is located adjacent to F Wing. From the Board's observations, the new accommodation appears to be working well.

5.1.4 The Board is pleased to report that there were fewer heating/hot water failures during the reporting period than last year, although there remain serious ongoing problems with boilers. The boilers are old and the senior management team (SMT) have put forward a major replacement project for the financial year 2026-2027. Temporary boilers have been used throughout the reporting period.

5.1.5 Most prisoners on the enhanced (top) or standard (middle) levels of the incentives scheme continue to be allowed to wear their own clothes. Each wing has its own laundry, run by one or two prisoners. Each man is allowed two bags of laundry per week. In the Board's view, the laundry system has generally worked well

and there are few complaints. However, since November 2024, D wing laundry has experienced serious problems with equipment failures and ventilation. Elderly and infirm prisoners based in D wing have been receiving clean but damp washing. This serious issue has continued for 12 months. The Board regrets that this problem has not been rectified.

5.1.6 The kitchen, situated in the main accommodation block, provides three meals per day, per prisoner. The Board continues to be impressed with the variety of menus offered, catering for all prisoner requirements on an allowance of £3.12 per head, as of September 2025. These still include allergen-free, gluten-free, halal, kosher and vegan meals. The kitchen also provides food for religious festivals. The food is of a high standard and is regularly tasted by the Duty Governor and Board members. There are few complaints, although these still tend to concern portion sizes. The catering manager continues to hold regular meetings with prisoner wing representatives.

5.1.7 Good progress was made during the year in ordering and replacing kitchen equipment, which included new boiling pans and trolleys and the refurbishment of the trolley area.

5.1.8 Temporary repairs to the fabric of the building were carried out, including the replacement of tiles where rainwater leaking through the flat roof had caused extensive mould and peeling paint. The Board continues to urge that more permanent repairs should be undertaken as a matter of priority.

5.1.9 As in the previous reporting year, the Verne is fortunate in having extensive grounds, some of which are given over to growing vegetables. The greenhouses and raised beds enable disabled prisoners to join in with the production of food. Over the summer growing period, an average of 400 lettuces per week and five other salads and vegetables were provided. More than 250kg of produce was supplied to the kitchen. A total of 24 prisoners were involved in the growing of the produce. This contribution continues to be most valuable, especially given the recent, sharp increase in food costs. Evershot wing supplied salad and vegetables for their own consumption.

## 5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 The arrangements in the care and separation unit (CSU), or Swanage unit, are much the same as last year. It consists of eight cells with in-cell sanitation, one of which is reserved for constant supervision. The unit has a shower, an outside exercise yard and a small library. Board members visit the unit during their monitoring visits and speak to any men detained there. Prisoners located on the unit under Rule 45 (segregated for the maintenance of good order or discipline, or for their own protection) have access to a television, if appropriate. IMB members are alerted by email of any new arrival. The IMB checks documents in the CSU, which record the visits from staff mandated to attend (such as the Duty Governor, the chaplain and a nurse).

*Table 5.2.1: Segregation: numbers held in the 14-month reporting period*

Rule 45 (GOoD)	74
Rule 53 (waiting for initial adjudication)	50
Rule 55 (segregation after adjudication)	29

Table 5.2.1 shows an average of 11 segregations per month, which is a considerable increase on the previous year's 6.5. However, this is due to the increase in those moved to CSU because they needed constant supervision.

5.2.2 Most prisoners now arrive at The Verne from remand prisons such as Bristol, Exeter and Winchester after only a short time in custody, which may account for the increase in disruptive behaviour. The age profile has also shifted, with more prisoners in the 30-39 age group. This cohort tends to include a higher proportion of neurodiverse individuals, and the overall percentage of prisoners with these needs has risen from 36% to 39.5%. Although still very low, the number of violent incidents has also increased over the past year.

5.2.3 The 74 GOoD (good order or discipline) segregations involved 40 individuals. The majority were placed there to safeguard their physical and/or mental health, and 39 of the detentions related to self-harm and required constant watch. Of the 40 individuals, one was detained on eight occasions, another on seven, and another on five.

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

5.3.1 The Board is satisfied that staff and prisoner relationships remain as good as previously reported. Most prisoners agree that, generally, there is a good atmosphere of trust and mutual respect between staff and prisoners.

5.3.2 According to the charity, Prison Reform Trust: *'Your key worker is a member of prison staff whose responsibility it is to support you throughout the custodial period. They should meet with you an average of 45 minutes per week.'* However, the Board notes that the Governor has subsequently set a more realistic target of one session every four weeks.

5.3.3 Key work is an essential part of supporting prisoners' wellbeing and progression. It involves most of the prison officers, with each being allocated five or six prisoners. In practice, key work appointments are often cancelled to provide cover for staff shortages, particularly when staff are required for hospital bed-watches. For example, on 23 July 2024 there was a compliance rate of only 11.5%. With the appointment of the new Governor in September 2024 and a custodial manager to oversee key work, there has been a substantial improvement in compliance. In the 14-month reporting period, there were 111 active key workers providing 5,161 sessions and a compliance rate of 56%.

5.3.4 However, from April 2025, prisoners were confined to their wings to free up officers to undertake key work (see 6.6.3). This was seen as a temporary measure. Since education, industries, gardens and wing work continued as normal, these restrictions only affected retired and unemployed prisoners, which was around 20% of the population.

### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

5.4.1 In October 2017, the [Lammy Review](#) recognised that, besides black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners, other groups, namely the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller

(GRT) communities, also required a voice<sup>2</sup>. A wide range of minorities is represented at The Verne, including those referred to above, as well as LGBTQ+ prisoners.

5.4.2 Each of the nine protected characteristics (age; religion or belief; race; sexual orientation; sex; disability; marriage and civil partnership; and gender reassignment) is overseen by a senior manager, a liaison officer and at least one prisoner representative. Forums are held regularly for all protected characteristics groups, and also for armed services veterans; each forum is chaired by a Governor. Prisoners are encouraged to organise special events and religious festivals, often bringing in outside groups. The diversity and integration action team (DIAT) committee meets bi-monthly. The main concerns during the reporting period are listed in Table 5.4.2.

*Table 5.4.2: Complaints raised in DIRF (discrimination incident reporting form) submissions*

COMPLAINT	
Disability	52
Race and ethnicity	17
Religion	16
Gender re-assignment	12
Age	7

5.4.3 Reports of discrimination incidents are investigated by means of the discrimination incident report forms (DIRF) system and are considered at bi-monthly DIRF scrutiny panel meetings. For the 14-month reporting period, Table 5.4.3 lists the outcomes of the DIRF submissions.

*Table 5.4.3: Outcomes of DIRF submissions*

OUTCOME	
Upheld	12
Partially upheld	15
Rejected	44
Referred to ordinary complaints	41

5.4.4 Each DIRF is fully investigated by a scrutiny panel, which includes prisoner representatives, and the results are checked by the IMB and the senior management team (SMT). There is still work to be done on educating prisoners about what constitutes a DIRF. However, the Board is aware that a prisoner representative for DIRFs has been appointed, whom other prisoners can consult to determine whether their concern should be submitted as a DIRF or redirected as a complaint. Some multi-submissions by individuals are spurious. The IMB observes DIAT and DIRF meetings.

5.4.5 In Annex B, Table B1 gives the age profile at the mid-point of the reporting period. The median age was approximately 52, reflecting little change from last year. Ethnicity is recorded in Table B2: the proportion of prisoners identifying as White has

<sup>2</sup> [Equality and Human Rights Commission: Protected Characteristics](#)

also remained largely unchanged. Declared sexual orientation is shown in Table B3. Seven prisoners are at different stages of transition from male to female.

5.4.6 From its observations and analysis of data, the IMB remains confident that HMP The Verne effectively monitors and addresses the needs of all communities represented in the prison. The staff appear to be conscientious and humane in their respect for prisoners with protected characteristics.

## **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

5.5.1 The managing chaplain and the Catholic and Muslim chaplains are full-time employees, while the Anglican and Free Church chaplains are part-time. They are supported by Anglican, Sikh, Free Church and Hindu contracted staff. There are also several volunteers, including those from the Catholic and Anglican churches, plus the Salvation Army, amongst others. They work as a multi-faith group, with each chaplain supporting prisoners of all faiths and none.

5.5.2 The Prison Service recognises 18 different religions. Every prisoner who has registered as a particular faith is entitled to one hour per week corporate worship and one hour study, for which they can be excused from work. The breakdown of religious affiliation declared by prisoners at the mid-point of the reporting period can be found in Table B4 in Annex B.

5.5.3 The Catholic and Muslim chaplains have, again, been successful in obtaining external donations to subsidise extra food for Christmas and Eid, as well as the Traveller Festival and Black History Month. The Ramadan fast was observed by prisoners, with customary communal gatherings to break the fast. The Eid feast also entailed a meal taken together. All special meals were prepared by the kitchen.

5.5.4 Chaplains are highly visible, walking around the wings every day. Their duties include: looking after the welfare and spiritual needs of prisoners; attending ACCT reviews (to check a prisoner's risk of self-harm or suicide and update their support plan to keep them safe), adjudications (disciplinary hearings held when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules), inductions and visiting prisoners in the CSU. The chaplaincy is usually involved when there is a death of a family member. Around 6-8 phone calls are received each month about the death or end-of-life stage of prisoners' family members. One of the chaplains informs the prisoner concerned as soon as possible. Where possible, close family member funerals are attended by the prisoner and an escort.

5.5.5 From January to September 2025, there were 6,671 attendances at acts of worship. Attendance averaged 171 people per week, meaning that around 27% of prisoners regularly took part in worship services. This is a 2% increase on the previous year. There are also regular faith classes and social events.

5.5.6 The Board is aware of the very high regard that The Verne prisoners have for the work of the chaplaincy. The multi-faith approach is impressive, in the Board's view. We would like to place on record our appreciation for the team's dedication.

## **5.6 Incentives schemes**

5.6.1 The Verne is committed to implementing the revised incentives scheme in line with the national Incentives Policy Framework (IPF).

5.6.2 The enhanced (top) incentive level offers greater privileges for prisoners not on standard (middle) and basic (bottom) level to reflect the commitment made in engaging with the prison's values. Extra privileges offered to prisoners on enhanced status include access to family visits; two social video calls; entitlement to increased spends; and access to wearing their own clothes. A prisoner on the standard level is one who complies with expected standards and engages in purposeful activity but without going above and beyond this requirement. A move to basic level will result from an individual failing to conform to the behaviour expected of a standard prisoner. The Board remains unaware of any major dissatisfaction in the way the scheme is operated.

5.6.3 At the end of the reporting period and, after the full commissioning of the new Fleet Wing, the prison roll was 645; five prisoners were on the basic level (1%), 93 (14%) on standard and 547 (85%) on enhanced. This reflects the generally high standard of behaviour at The Verne.

## 5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 In the reporting period, 1552 complaints from prisoners were logged. This is an average of 110 per month (compared with 105 per month and 97 per month, respectively, in the two previous years). This shows a small increase year on year. Complaints boxes continue to be emptied daily, with various complaint forms and confidential access envelopes available. From the Board's monitoring, the process is still well managed by the complaints clerk. General complaints should be answered in five days, with complaints against a member of staff in ten days. Each complaint should be acknowledged on the day of receipt.

*Table 5.7.1: Most numerous subjects of complaint*

Subject	No.	%
Residential	347	23
Reception and property	184	12
OMU	170	11.5
Staff	112	7
Food	99	6

5.7.2 Over 94% of the complaints were responded to be within the allocated timeframe. This is a 3% improvement on 2023-2024. As with our previous report, a sample of responses seen by the Board were invariably courteous and considered.

5.7.3 Complaints against the offender management unit (OMU) have dropped from 15% in the previous reporting period to 11.5%, which likely reflects improved staffing levels and performance. Complaints about residential accommodation have increased from 14% to 23%, which is probably due to prisoners objecting to being moved to different wings.

## **5.8 Property**

5.8.1 An additional 130 complaints were submitted by The Verne prisoners for the attention of other establishments, mostly regarding property going missing after transfer. This is a continuing problem for the whole Prison Service. These complaints are difficult to deal with, as they involve communications with other prisons, often with limited success, in the Board's view.

5.8.2 The property that prisoners are allowed in their cells is defined at a national level, with local variations specified by The Verne Governor. No devices are allowed that might give access to the phone system or the Internet. All wings, other than Dorset, have in-cell phones, with the calls strictly controlled and monitored. Television sets are provided as standard, except for the very few prisoners on basic regime.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare in general**

6.1.1 The Board's monitoring continues to indicate that the healthcare provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust has generally been of a very high standard throughout the reporting period. This is despite some serious challenges because of urgent repair work needed for the premises. The entire centre had to be evacuated, as it required a new roof. Most of the rooms were damp due to the leaking roof, and the building needed redecoration and 'drying out'. For several months, temporary accommodation was provided across the prison site, but this proved very difficult for the staff to work as a unit or to have easy computer access. In addition, the temporary consulting rooms were not adequately equipped as clinical areas. Despite these problems, a full healthcare service continued to be provided, although privacy for 'telemedicine' consultations (appointments carried out remotely by video link instead of face-to-face) and phone calls all proved problematic. The work on the healthcare building was completed in February 2025.

6.1.2 The prison's operational capacity increased to 648 prisoners in September 2025, when Fleet wing was opened and housed an additional 39 prisoners. There has been a small increase in the number of nurses employed to accommodate the rise in prisoner numbers, but there are still unfilled posts or staff awaiting security clearance (one of whom is an advanced nurse practitioner, who is able to prescribe medication).

6.1.3 As many of the prison population at The Verne are elderly (around 53% are over 50 years of age and 33% are over 60 years of age), there are many men who have complex health and social care needs. Several have multiple diagnoses of long-term illnesses. The Verne is fortunate to have a 16-bed care unit, staffed by a dedicated group of carers, for the very sick and physically limited prisoners; it offers 24-hour care, much as a care home in the community would do.

### **6.2 Physical healthcare**

6.2.1 One part-time GP works for 29 hours per week. The nursing staff work from 7.30am to 5.30pm on weekdays only. The prison has facilities on site for both X-rays and ultrasound scans. Other visiting clinicians provide services for dentistry, optometry, physiotherapy, podiatry (for those with diabetes) and psychiatry and are all in demand. There are plans to train prisoners (resident support assistants) to help elderly men who are unable to trim their toenails.

6.2.2 An increasing number of prisoners need hospital appointments with a specialist consultant. Although many of these are booked as 'in person' with the local hospital, a telemedicine call can be arranged with Airedale NHS Foundation Trust. This helps to reduce the number of officers required for hospital escort duty. Any hospital admission requires a 24-hour bed watch by two prison officers. During the reporting period, this amounted to 20,151 hours of officer time (excluding time travelling to and from the hospital). Regrettably, there are still occasional cancellations when officers are not available as escorts.

6.2.3 Healthcare offers all vaccinations according to NHS guidelines and there is usually a good uptake. Screening is offered for bowel cancer, abdominal aortic aneurysm, diabetic eye conditions and chlamydia. All prisoners are eligible for

annual testing for blood-borne viruses (HIV, hepatitis B and C); and the healthcare teams work hard to offer this to all prisoners. Genitourinary clinicians visit monthly to see those with longstanding conditions; prisoners can also self-refer. Condoms are available if requested.

### 6.3 Mental health

6.3.1 The mental health team at The Verne has a caseload comparable to that of similar prisons. While many prisoners require individual appointments and are seen by a mental health nurse, group work is also available. Psychiatry and psychology are included in the team's employed provision, ensuring access to specialist clinical support.

6.3.2 Many of The Verne prisoners who suffer a mental health crisis are placed on an ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) plan. The reviews of these, to assess progress, appear to take place frequently and are attended by the prisoner and a mental health nurse, as well as wing staff. Mental health nurses are also available at very short notice to support prisoners experiencing a severe mental health crisis or suicidal thoughts. In the Board's view, the mental health staff need more dedicated consulting space to assess prisoners privately, as frequently there are few rooms available.

### 6.4 Neurodiversity

*Table 6.4.1: Prevalence of various neurodiverse conditions*

Dyslexia	124
ADHD	77
Autism	73
Learning difficulties	7
Brain injury	29
Dyspraxia	10
Speech and language difficulties	9
Learning disability	7
Dyscalculia	6
Dementia	4
Social and emotional difficulties	0

6.4.1 Not all these prisoners are formally diagnosed as neurodiverse, but all are asked to complete a questionnaire on arrival. In the previous reporting period, 100% of new arrivals did so. Healthcare validation can be challenging, due to the confidentiality of medical records and because, where a prisoner was diagnosed in childhood, records are often unavailable even with consent, as many were not digitised until recently. Currently, there is no formal pathway for medical assessment of neurodiversity, as this is not commissioned within the HMPPS health provision.

6.4.2 There is a monthly support group for prisoners with autism and attendance is very good. There are plans to launch a Lego workshop in October 2025, as similar groups in other prisons have been shown to support improved socialisation, communication, and cooperation among neurodivergent prisoners.

Table 6.4.2: Neurodiverse conditions and support needed

Condition	Primary support	Secondary support
Cognition and learning, including dyslexia	130	38
Social, emotional and mental health, including ADHD	63	12
Communication and interaction, including autism	54	19
Sensory and physical, including hearing and visual conditions	1	5
Others, including dementia and non-neurodiverse conditions	3	1

6.4.3 Unfortunately, despite the large number of neurodiverse prisoners, the neurodiversity support manager (NSM) does not have an assistant. Recently, one of the prisoners has been employed as a neurodiversity support mentor, whose role is prisoner liaison. He will attend inductions and explain the role that neurodiversity support can offer. Neurodiverse prisoners are offered a neurodiversity lanyard (a daisy design) to wear. This helps staff and other prisoners recognise when someone may need a bit more time, clearer communication or adjusted support. The support levels (primary or secondary) offered for the various conditions are listed in Table 6.4.2. Many prisoners have more than one area of need.

6.4.4 Prisoners with poor literacy skills can be referred to the Shannon Trust (a charity that assists adults with literacy and numeracy) or a reading referral can be made to the prison's education department. It is not envisaged that this will be affected by the planned cuts in prison education.

6.4.5 All staff in the prison are offered the opportunity to undertake training in the understanding of neurodiversity.

## 6.5 Social Care

6.5.1 The 16-bed social care wing, which opened in September 2023, continues to be a well-used facility. The unit offers 24-hour care, provided by a team of 10 dedicated care workers, plus a shift lead, and has been at capacity since it opened. Prisoners have their own small room with a television, accessible call facilities, an armchair and a hospital-style bed. There is a fully accessible bathroom. Originally, these units were not intended to provide full nursing care, but due to severe pressure on NHS hospital beds it has occasionally been necessary to nurse very unwell prisoners on this wing and to provide end-of-life care. This can require equipment for which carers need specific training. The absence of trained nursing staff at night can also disrupt the administration of analgesia or other medication if the prisoner cannot safely manage his own prescribed medicines (only trusted or fully aware prisoners are permitted to hold their own medication, as many prescribed drugs are considered 'desirable' by others).

6.5.2 If there is an emergency during the night, staff use the 111 or 999 service for advice or an ambulance, as they would in the community. Many calls are made during the night, and hospital admission is often required, resulting in two officers escorting the prisoner and leaving the prison short of staff cover overnight. **The Board is of the opinion that a resident nurse or paramedic employed overnight**

**would save many of these calls to the emergency service. This would, however, require additional clinical staff.**

## **6.6 Time out of cell**

### **Regime**

6.6.1 The Verne accommodation (see 5.1.1) consists of, mostly, single-occupancy cells, the majority of which are grouped in spurs of 20 cells. Although locked into their spurs at night, prisoners can associate freely with others on that spur. While this offers a more 'normal' life for most prisoners, the Board understands that it can lead to bullying, coercive behaviour and some grooming of more vulnerable prisoners for drugs, vapes and sexual favours. This, in turn, has led to more instances of debt and an increased number of distressed prisoners being placed on ACCT plans.

6.6.2 Before 22 April 2025, time out of the wings was restricted to two hours each morning and 1 hour and 45 minutes in the afternoon each day of the week. During these times, the prisoners could mix with prisoners from other wings and benefit from the gardens in the accommodation block area. Prisoners are also allowed a short period of association in the evenings, from Monday to Thursday.

6.6.3 In order to devote staff to address the backlog in key work sessions, the morning association period was, from 22 April, suspended on most wings. When a wing is subject to these restrictions, prisoners can still associate on the landings and ground floor area but not outside. Morning visits to the library were seriously affected. However, association in the afternoons and evenings continued as usual. The Board views this change to the regime as a regrettable necessity but it recognises that Verne prisoners still enjoy far more association than in other category C prisons (for those who can't be trusted in open conditions but who are considered unlikely to attempt escape).

6.6.4 When allowed out of their cells, most prisoners will be at work or in education. Others are free to use the library, attend religious services or join in activities organised by the physical training instructors (PTIs). Each Monday afternoon, they offer a 5K or 10K timed run and, on bank holidays, an organised, timed 10K run takes place. A running course of 1K is offered to get the men started. The PTIs would like to offer an organised, timed 'Park Run' on Saturday mornings, similar to those held nationwide and in many prisons. However, Park Run's organisers do not permit affiliation with establishments that hold PCoSO (prisoners convicted of sexual offences).

6.6.5 As many of The Verne prisoners have lengthy sentences, it is important to keep them physically and mentally fit for as long as possible. A full programme of activities is available to assist in keeping them occupied and stimulated during the day. The older men are encouraged to walk outside each day, and chair exercise classes are held in a large community room. There are also activities and easier classes specially designed for older people, organised in the gym by the PTIs.

### **Gym**

6.6.6 The prison is fortunate to have a well-equipped gym housed in one of the older buildings. The training equipment is modern and well maintained. Many classes are offered and a large proportion of the prisoners are registered for at least one or two activity sessions during the month. Classes, such as basketball, volleyball

and spin, are offered during the day; for those who are working, a session between 6pm and 7pm is arranged during the week. For men who do not wish to take a gym class, walks are arranged each morning around the large field that is used for football or cricket during the summer. The walk is very popular and quite often there have to be two sessions. This walk is 45 minutes long and, as it is supervised, only 30 prisoners can be taken at any one time.

6.6.7 There are plans to open a second gym, in the autumn, in another old building next to the existing gym. Once this has been refurbished and equipped, classes for specific exercise, such as yoga, Pilates and exercises suggested by the physiotherapist, can be held there. From the Board's observations, the PTIs are all encouraging and enthusiastic.

## **6.7 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

6.7.1 Sessions run by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) occur twice monthly and these have a small but regular attendance. Prisoners who are alcoholics and have previously attended AA meetings are encouraged to attend, as are those whose heavy drinking was becoming a serious habit and who would like to try maintaining the total abstinence of the prison regime on release.

6.7.2 Several prisoners, particularly those with a history of illegal drug use, have also been encouraged to train in the use of Naloxone in case they resume drug use after release. Naloxone is a life-saving medication that blocks the effects of opioids and can rapidly reverse an overdose. Prisoners identified as being at risk are provided with a supply when they leave custody.

## **6.8 Soft skills**

6.8.1 Weston College gave all their learners an individual learning plan (ILP), in which they set targets for their course. Included as part of the ILP is a section for embedded employability targets, which are in line with the 10 Ministry of Justice employability skills (such as, for example, communication, teamwork, creativity, adaptability, etc). They set targets to develop these skills within whatever subject they are learning.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

7.1.1 Weston College continued to provide education and vocational training at The Verne during the reporting period. However, the work they do was subject to a tendering process in 2025, which led to uncertainty about the future and the employment of staff. The result is that the successful bidder, Milton Keynes College, will take over the provision of education and vocational training on 1 October 2025. All staff employed by Weston College will initially be transferred to Milton Keynes College and be subject to redeployment or redundancy when the revised programme is known. That programme will be subject to reduced funding, as the training and education budget at The Verne faced a reduction in full-time employment (FTE) of 32% in the financial year. This will inevitably lead to a reduction in the number of programmes delivered. This is against the background of an HMIP report that commented on the need to provide more purposeful activity at The Verne.

7.1.2 There were 28 Koestler Arts (arts in criminal justice) awards of £100 given to prisoners this year, with one being a Platinum for woodcraft. Another entry has been selected for publication in *The Koestler Voices: New Poetry From Prisons* anthology. Four works, two woodcraft and two portraits, have been selected for an exhibition at the Southbank Centre in London. The Shannon Trust helps with Maths and English, but cuts to the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) budget resulted in the loss of the full-time reading specialist.

7.1.3 There are 23 students (3.5% of the prison population) studying for Open University degrees, with law being the most popular subject. A further 53 students (8.3% of the prison population) were accepted for educational and vocational studies through the Prisoners' Education Trust. The Verne submitted the highest number of applications across all prisons, of which 82% were successful.

7.1.4 The library was run by Weston College during the reporting year but will be replaced by Milton Keynes College from 1 October. There are two part-time staff and five orderlies (trusted prisoners who take on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison). It is open all day, Monday to Friday, a half-day on Saturday and two evenings per week. A total of 15 prisoners are allowed in at a time. There continues to be a wide variety of fiction and reference books, CDs and DVDs, which are supplemented by bookshelves on the wings. The librarians endeavour to order in any books that prisoners specifically request.

### **7.2 Vocational training and work**

7.2.1 The prison continues to offer several accredited vocational courses, including mentoring/employability, construction skills, health and safety, Levels 1 and 2 horticulture, food hygiene and catering, bricklaying, barbering, performing manufacturing operations (wood mill), industrial cleaning and waste management. The first anniversary of seven-day working in the wood mill is approaching. This has proved a great success in manufacturing nearly £1 million-worth of furniture to be distributed to prisons across the UK. Stone masonry was a very useful addition last year and pieces of work are for sale at the Jailhouse Café.

7.2.2 The wings offer the largest number of paid jobs (cleaning, servery and laundry), while others include gardening, kitchens, waste management, window

cleaning, wood mill, spray painting, library assistance, mentoring, peer support work, leather work and textiles. Food packing was discontinued at The Verne and other prisons during the year, and an increase in textile work resulted in all the workers at The Verne being successfully redeployed. The television workshop repairs about 400 sets a month, which resulted in a national award. The gardens department has seen the introduction of a third instructor, which enabled the total number employed in the department to be increased to 35. The refurbishment of the polytunnel and the introduction of 10 small greenhouses has extended the growing season and increased the range of crops available to the kitchen. They have also grown bedding plants to enhance the appearance of the prison gardens. The gardens group has also won a National Prison Service Award for its wildlife work in the moat surrounding the prison.

7.2.3 This has been a particularly difficult year for the education, vocational and work teams. Budget cuts and uncertainty the tendering process for education delivery have undoubtedly had a detrimental impact. However, the education department has worked tirelessly to continue to deliver an excellent programme in terms of quality and quantity, and the Board would like to commend them for what they have achieved in very difficult circumstances.

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

7.3.1 The Board is pleased to report that the newly funded Building Choices course opened at The Verne in September with a full complement of eight prisoners for the moderate-level course. This is a new evidenced-based intervention designed to meet the rehabilitative needs of those requiring either moderate or high intensity treatment. Building Choices replaces the Horizon and Kaizen programmes, which prisoners convicted of sexual offences were often required to take as part of their sentence plan. However, they were unpopular because they involved transferring to other prisons to attend, and many prisoners feared they would not be able to return to The Verne on completion.

7.3.2 The current delivery team can only run one course at a time, which equates to around five moderate-intensity or two high-intensity courses per year. There are, at present, 156 prisoners referred for moderate, and 48 prisoners for high-intensity, intervention. It has been estimated that this would take around eight years to complete. However, 107 prisoners were released during the accounting period - around one-sixth of the prison's capacity. While the introduction of the new in HMP Verne is a very positive development, the Board recommends a rapid expansion of staffing and funding to ensure the prison's delivery capacity can meet the need for safe and sustainable resettlement after release.

7.3.3 The staffing levels of the offender management unit (OMU) have greatly improved during the reporting year. A full complement of staff equates to eight probation officers and five prison officers working as POMs (uniformed prison offender managers). The OMU is currently interviewing to fill one POM vacancy.

The Verne is no longer reliant on any agency or loaned staff as probation officers. The workforce is made up of both full-time and part-time staff and are currently one fifth of a position down from full capacity (equivalent to about five working hours per week), which can usually be filled by overtime hours.

7.3.4 The OASys (offender management system) is used to measure the risks of each offender. At the end of the reporting period, the backlog for Start Custody OASys assessments was 12 (down from 21 in the last reporting period). Prisoners often arrive from other prisons without this initial assessment. In addition, there are now only 30 overdue OASys reviews (134 in the previous reporting window), thanks to the hard work of the team and the much-improved staffing levels. The overdue OASys will not impact parole, as those in the parole window will be reviewed by the community offender manager in a timely manner. The team prioritises the completion of assessments to make sure prisoners do not have to serve longer sentences because of delays.

## **7.4 Family contact**

7.4.1 The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) charity continues to be The Verne's family services provider. The Trust supports prisoners and their families to help maintain contact and relationships. They facilitated six dedicated children's family days (which bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings) during the reporting period, organising events and games to encourage positive family engagement.

There are four peer mentors supporting family work in the prison. They engage with prisoners during visits, at induction, and on the wings to encourage them to work with PACT.

The visitors centre moved in April 2025, from close to the Jailhouse Café to the main conservatory area, which has increased its use, particularly for people with mobility problems. There is a visits café, which is run by the prison; all profits are fed back into family and resettlement services, which has been a very positive move.

7.4.2 There has been a steady increase in prisoners participating in Storybook Dads, whereby a prisoner can record a story for their children to listen to at home. This helps to maintain parental relationships and may reflect the current slightly younger average age of the prison population.

7.4.3 'Non-social visit days' have also been introduced. These take place one afternoon a month in the visits hall and are designed for prisoners who do not receive visits from either family or friends. Participants enjoy games, quizzes and hot food. This helps reduce the sense of isolation and encourages inclusion among the prison population.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

7.5.1 The Verne has one staff member who works on resettlement from a purpose-built office and classroom next to the newly opened Fleet wing. This wing is intended for prisoners in their last few months of imprisonment so they can focus on preparation for release.

7.5.2 As per our previous report, prisoners due for release continue to receive review checklists to help them prepare at six months, 12 weeks and four weeks prior to release. They are supported in arranging accommodation, obtaining a citizenship card and birth certificate, and acquiring a National Insurance number. They also receive assistance when preparing a CV and contacting the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) regarding benefits, employment and related matters. Opening a basic bank account can be facilitated through HSBC; however, obtaining or renewing

a driver's licence remains problematic, as a permanent address other than a prison is required. The prison can arrange up-to-date photos when needed.

7.5.3 A weekly resettlement advisory panel meeting continues to take place among interested parties, including community POMS, the police, prison POMs and The Verne resettlement staff members, 12 weeks before a prisoner is released.

7.5.4 The resettlement team is finalising a prisoner release workbook for those nearing the end of their sentence (with an IPP/Lifer specific version) and a resettlement fayre is planned for December 2025. 107 prisoners were released during the reporting period. It therefore continues to be imperative, in the Board's view, that adequate planning is in place to ensure the successful resettlement of prisoners leaving the prison.

## 8. The work of the IMB

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	13
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8 (+ 1 probationer)
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	209
Total number of shifts on the 0800 phone line	0
Total number of segregation reviews observed	21

### Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting period
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	4	25
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	4	4
C	Equality	10	3
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	8	0
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	6	10
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	3	0
F	Food and kitchens	4	0
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	9	17
H1	Property within this establishment	4	18
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	13	17
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	3	6
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	12	9
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	10	4
K	Transfers	5	0
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	9	15
	<b>Total number of applications</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>128</b>

## **Annex A**

### **Service providers**

- Healthcare: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Social care: Dorset Council
- Maintenance and project services: Gov Facility Services Limited (GSFL)
- Vocational and educational opportunities: Weston College

Voluntary organisations regularly attending the prison included: Age UK, Circles South West, the Samaritans, the Shannon Trust, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

## Annex B

### Equality and diversity: further data

**Table B1: Age**

Age	No.	%
18-29	61	10
30-39	113	19
40-49	107	18
50-59	120	20
60-69	111	19
70-79	68	11
80-89	23	4
90+	1	<1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>605</b>	

**Table B2: Declared ethnicity**

	No.	%
White E/W/S/NI	484	80
White Gypsy/Irish traveller	23	4
White other	28	5
Asian	17	3
Black	23	4
Chinese	6	1
Mixed black/white Caribbean	16	3
Not known	8	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>605</b>	

**Table B3: Declared sexuality**

	No.	%
Heterosexual	496	82
Gay/lesbian	19	3
Bisexual	24	4
Not known or disclosed	61	10
Other	5	<1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>605</b>	

**Table B4: Declared religion**

	No.	%
Christian	284	47
Buddhist	39	7
Muslim	29	5
Jewish	3	<1
Sikh	2	<1
Other	53	9
No religion	194	32
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>604</b>	

*NB: the data in these tables were collected at the mid-point of the 14-month reporting period, on 1 March 2025.*



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