



# Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Aylesbury

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

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# Contents

<b>Introductory sections 1 – 3</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the establishment	4
3. Key points	6
<b>Evidence sections 4 – 7</b>	
4. Safety	11
5. Fair and humane treatment	16
6. Health and wellbeing	23
7. Progression and resettlement	30
<b>The work of the IMB</b>	
Board statistics	36
Applications to the IMB	37
<b>Annex A</b>	
Purposeful activity and education results	38

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## **Introductory sections 1 – 3**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2. Description of the establishment

HMP Aylesbury, in Buckinghamshire, is a category C training prison, taking prisoners who meet the following criteria: men aged 21 years and older, with 16 months or more left to serve of their sentence, who have not committed a sexual offence. The prison changed from a young offender institution in 2022.

The prison has a mixture of buildings, from Victorian to early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The seven residential units are of differing sizes and ages, five with open galleries and netted atria, and two constituted by closed corridors. There was a limited modernisation programme in most of the wings 2019-2020. The age of the building can present challenges to maintenance, but wings are generally kept in an orderly condition. The prison has only one cell suitable for the use of wheel-chair users and that cell is not fully adapted for a disabled prisoner. The layout of the prison is not easily adapted to the needs of prisoners with mobility problems, and this is likely to become more problematic with the increasing number of aging prisoners.

The segregation unit (known locally as the 'seg' and nationally as the care and separation unit, CSU) – is 12 years old. The current healthcare building, including the reception unit, dates from 1996. Changes were made to the health centre in the year, creating a larger, more secure pharmacy.

There is a modern, well-equipped, gym, a reasonably well-stocked library, books and DVDs, an education block and a range of workshops. Many of the workshops are in poor repair and often space in them is underused for this reason.

All the cells are designed for single occupancy, a benefit to the overall wellbeing of prisoners. The accommodation is generally kept clean. On one wing, the refurbished showers are beginning to show problems likely to have been caused by poor workmanship during the works of 2019. Infrastructure functions reasonably well, but heating in winter is not reliable across the accommodation. The cells in the segregation unit are frequently very cold in winter. Hot weather can make some cells unbearably stuffy and hot.

Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL) holds the contract for maintenance of the prison. Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust took over the healthcare contract.

The prison is not designed as a resettlement prison, but 114<sup>1</sup> prisoners left custody directly from Aylesbury in this reporting year. 432 prisoners arrived throughout this year.

Full occupancy is 402 prisoners. Target staffing levels remained the same through this period. Actual staff numbers were close to target and there was improved stability in staffing across all grades. The senior management team remained relatively stable through the year.

The number of experienced staff working on the wings remains considerably lower than the number of inexperienced newly trained staff, but, as the year progressed,

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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.

with a reduction in violence and in the use of force, there was less evidence that this was impacting negatively on the lives of prisoners.

The prison had been operating fully as a category C prison for a year at the outset of this reporting year. At the start of the year many aspects of the prison still needed significant change to better meet the needs of the older, and more diverse, population. The category C population includes many who are already experienced in prison life, often with medium length sentences. They required and expected a very different regime to that which the prison was delivering. Contracts that were originally commissioned for the provision of education, and for health, to a youth offender population, were still adapting only slowly to providing service for prisoners over the age of 21. Despite successful efforts to bring in small improvements last year, the lack of relevant purposeful activity remained woeful. The availability of time-tabled activity fell below what is needed to ensure prisoners are out of their cells, as required, morning and afternoon 4.5 days a week.

The first few months of this reporting year saw little change but by September 2024, with the arrival of a new Governor, a marked increase in ambition and pace became evident. The prison developed a strategy for 2024-25. This recognised the positive steps that had been put in place in the previous year whilst setting out the ambition to become a 'leading training prison', with clarity about the improvements that would be needed to achieve this.

The strategy was developed by staff across the grades, with input from prisoners. It lays out a path, is flexible and dynamic. It helps to give the prison overall coherence. It does not guarantee that things improve. For example, we observed great efforts expended to improve the availability, and relevance, of purposeful activity. Whilst some change was achieved, the absence of the proper resourcing frequently undermined the very best of efforts.

Significant work is done to keep prisoners safe. A serious problem persists with the incursion of unauthorised items, specifically illegal drugs and mobile telephones.

In the Board's view HMP Aylesbury showed overall improvement as a category C training prison over the reporting year.

### **3. Key points**

#### **3.1 Main findings**

##### **Safety**

- Strong interdepartmental working underlies HMP Aylesbury prison's commitment to ensuring prisoner safety.
- Incursion of illicit items continues to create a challenge to safety. The prison makes the prevention, detection and management of illicit items a priority and works to keep the most vulnerable prisoners safe, both from the use of such drugs and from the debt and bullying that develop alongside the distribution of illegal items.
- A change of policy toward regular drug users saw some reduction in the amounts of illicit goods circulating, but this reduction was not sustained.
- There was a continuing reduction in violence across the prison in this reporting year.
- There was a reduction in self-harm across the year.

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

- The prison is kept clean and orderly, and the safety of prisoners is prioritised.
- An improvement in staff numbers at all levels helped to ensure a more regular and predictable regime.
- Noticeable improvements were made to reception and induction during the reporting year helping prisoners make a better start in their time in HMP Aylesbury.
- Staff on F wing, designated as incentivised substance free living (ISFL) or drug free wing, brought creativity to the enrichment of the environment for prisoners on that wing. This provided an excellent example for other parts of the prison.

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

- Improvement in the predictability of the regime, more time out of cell, the availability of some more activity slots and wing doors open onto exercise yards during the light summer evenings, all contributed to a better sense of well-being for prisoners this year.
- From the Board's observations, those few prisoners who self-isolated received well organised and consistent care from the appropriate professional departments across the prison and were supported to reintegrate as soon as possible.
- With more permanent staff on the health team, prisoners were more likely to receive consistent care.
- The use of illicit drugs continued entrenching health issues for users and wider issues for the whole population, including an increase in bullying and debt.

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

- The prison's 2024-25 strategy, introduced mid-year, put a clear emphasis on supporting prisoners' efforts to learn and progress. Work and training became a more explicit focus. Celebration of prisoner success was more evident.

- Concerted efforts were made in year to increase the number of work and training places available for prisoners and serious attention was also paid to the quality of training and work overall. Improvements were evident but then diminished by the reduction in the education and training budget allocated to the prison.
- Aylesbury is a training prison. It is not resourced to prepare prisoners for release. Despite this, 114 prisoners left from the gate with inadequate preparation. This was an even higher number than last year.
- Owing to staff shortages, career guidance was only available for five months of the year.

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

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

- Will the Minister advocate, with courage, for a long-term change in sentencing, supported by the recommendations of the 2025 Independent Sentencing Review?
- Recognising the increased number of prisoners being released in the coming years, under the early release schemes, will the Minister secure the necessary new resourcing for those services that will be most relied upon by former prisoners as they rebuild their lives outside prison?
- How do you plan to improve the structure and supervision of third-party contracts, and bear down on excessively high pricing and delays in delivery? Will the Minister put more rigorous controls in the hands of those who hold contractors to account locally?

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

- Provide the prison with more sophisticated technical resources to tackle the incursion of illicit substances. The use of, and trade in, illicit substances in the prison continues to impede the stabilisation of an improved regime, and other ambitious changes. Security is as much about vigilance and process as it is about kit, but more modern resourcing would unquestionably help staff to tackle this problem.
- Extend structured support to newly qualified officers through a nationally funded scheme to be accessed through the first 12 months on the job. Reward participation in the scheme.

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

- Continue to disrupt the supply of, and trade in, illicit items by all means available.
- Maintain and extend the current gains in the variety of purposeful activity on offer and further increase the overall capacity.
- The first phase of the strategy has engendered a new sense of purpose and ambition across the prison. To ensure that this translates to coherent improvements in the lives of all prisoners maintain a balance of associated support and challenge across all types and grades of staffing.

### 3.3 Response to last report

Issue raised in 2023-24	Response given	Progress
<b>Minister</b>		
<p>Champion sentencing reform, including accepting the recommendations of the Justice Committee on the resentencing and licensing of imprisonment for public protection (IPP) prisoners. Establish more appropriate penalties for lawbreakers. Reducing the number of people sent to prison, particularly those being sent on recall, would allow the prison system to achieve better results within current resourcing constraints.</p>	<p>The Minister noted that a full review of sentencing had been commissioned, led by David Gauke, to report in spring 2025. He added that this government would not action a recently recommended resentencing exercise for IPP prisoners. Other reforms to the IPP licence have been put in place. Recall is considered a public protection measure, and the Minister indicated no changes to the current regime.</p>	<p>As the year unfolded the crisis in prison capacity set in train early release schemes and some changes to sentencing. The 2025 Independent Sentencing Review was delivered but was not implemented within the reporting year.</p>
<p>Prioritise pre-release welfare and employment planning by establishing and funding stronger statutory links between prisons, external agencies offering ex-offender support and employers.</p>	<p>The minister noted that 100+ prisoners were released from Aylesbury in 2024, despite the fact that it is a training prison and should not be releasing prisoners. He added that 94% were housed on their first night, but information about their accommodation in approved premises often reaches them just before release. There are no plans to develop a resettlement service at Aylesbury.</p>	<p>Aylesbury drew help from HMP Bullingdon to provide resettlement planning for those prisoners affected. Prisoners continued to have a mixed experience of resettlement preparation and often to receive information about their proposed accommodation very close to the day of release.</p>
<p>Improve the structuring and supervision of third party contracts so that they can be more successfully managed at the point of delivery. In turn, this should raise the quality of services delivered to prisoners in particular in health,</p>	<p>The Minister noted the improvements made to the NHS contract for HMP Aylesbury, recognising that category C prisoners have different needs compared with the youth offenders for whom the contract was originally designed. He noted the</p>	<p>The IMB continued to observe that 3<sup>rd</sup> party contracts, commissioned by the prison service, appear to have weak controls built into them, with the main point of accountability left unclear. Delivery of services can be slow, appear</p>

education and vocational training whilst bearing down on cost.	flexibility built into the education contract allowing the prison to make appropriate local changes.	expensive against market norms, and this can hinder wider improvement across the prison.
<b>HMPPS</b>		
Put in place centrally funded continuing support for the newly trained officers who begin work after just 10 week foundation training. We welcome the new recruits but the short length of training they undergo is insufficient to meet the many challenges on the wing. In turn new recruits lean too heavily on the more experienced staff and this diminishes overall efficiency.	HMPPS noted that they continually try to improve the training provision for operational staff. They described the review of training undertaken by Lord Timpson. They also mentioned the ENABLE programme designed to improve foundation training. Neither of these two 'projects' had become live at the time of writing. They also mentioned the core capability package of learning still under development.	HMP Aylesbury prioritised support, retention and development of new staff by investing in an additional 'new colleague mentor'. Additionally, the prison ran focus groups with new staff, to learn from their experience in order to make purposeful improvements.
Improve the quality and range of purposeful activity, so that the offer is meaningfully related to the development of skills useful in the job market on release.	HMPPS recognised the insufficiency of activity for prisoners at HMP Aylesbury, and that quality is poor. They mentioned local initiatives including the new Employment Advisory Board and the partnerships being developed to improve provision. They added that new careers, information, advice and guidance contracts will be in place from April 2025.	As described in this report we saw an immediate improvement in the provision of practical workshops and some new purposeful activity opened on the back of new partnerships. Given national resource constraints, much of this improvement was not sustained.
Create a wider range of secure custody settings to meet the needs of: neurodiverse prisoners, those with severe mental illness, some of whom may be suffering from age related dementia and those with marked intellectual disability. Prisoners with extreme	HMPPS provided an extensive description of the legal framework that is currently in place to support vulnerable prisoners with complex needs. They also acknowledged that prisoners already in prison, who meet the threshold for detention	Despite a comprehensive set of professional interventions available to the most vulnerable prisoners, experience continues to reveal how very difficult it is to secure a bed in a secure hospital for the prisoners with highly complex needs.

<p>needs divert disproportionate amounts of staff time and effort from the majority of prisoners. At best, this approach simply manages a bad situation, but fixes nothing. More places, and different places, are needed for some of these prisoners with extreme needs.</p>	<p>under the Mental Health Act, and require a transfer to hospital, continue to experience delays.</p>	
<p><b>Governor</b> The Governor went on to a new job shortly after our report was published. We did not receive a formal response from him. The newly arrived Governor set in place the strategy 2024/25 for HMP Aylesbury some months after arrival. The Board draws on relevant content from that below.</p>		
<p>Continue to disrupt the supply of illicit items by all means available.</p>	<p>A new fully integrated drug strategy was introduced. This put emphasis on the optimum use of data and intelligence reports. To better disrupt the supply of drugs, punishment was focused on prisoners found to be dealing drugs. Prisoners found to be using drugs were supported to get jobs or take courses. For about half the reporting year, evidence suggested a reduction in the availability of drugs. (see section 6.6)</p>	
<p>Make consistent and visible celebration of prisoner successes a core part of the HMP Aylesbury culture.</p>	<p>An academy wing it was established for those studying and the distance learners. This provided a dedicated regime and appropriate facilities to support their educational goals. Further there was mention of the introduction of best practice celebrations for prisoner achievements.</p>	
<p>Build on the improvements that have recently been made to the prisoner experience with a greater focus on the quality of activity and education. Further engage third sector and private sector resources to expand the offer.</p>	<p>Two immediate objectives were fulfilled. The development of new quality employment pathways for prisoners. And commissioning, staffing and opening up of two new workshops with practical/construction skills training.</p>	

## Evidence sections 4 – 7

### 4. Safety

#### 4.1 Reception and induction

425 prisoners arrived at Aylesbury during the reporting year. On arrival, new prisoners are screened in reception and by healthcare. They spend time with a peer support volunteer before being passed over to induction staff and moved to G wing. Initially there is an amnesty period where any prohibited/illicit items can be declared. Following that, if unauthorised items are discovered, prisoners will be placed on report and subject to the adjudications policy (a disciplinary hearing when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules). If items are found to be secreted after a full body scan, prisoners will be moved to the segregation unit until they are clear. Prisoners do not have to wait too long to move to the induction unit, where they are provided with support and information. Issues sometimes arise when prisoners arrive late and are moved through to the induction wing without any of their own property. Property will reach the prisoner the next day. In the meantime, emergency packs for the first night are available. Only one complaint reached us this year about the absence of such a pack for a newly arrived prisoner.

During this reporting year, most prisoner transfers were organised through a team in HMPPS due to population capacity issues. Transfers were usually carried out by Serco and their buses, except for one-to-one transfers which were by taxi or vehicle provided by the receiving establishment. During the reporting period, IMB members noted that the transfer process does not always run smoothly. Most prisoners are given very little notice of upcoming transfers, and transfers are often postponed. We observe that this is usually due to logistical or staffing issues concerning the third party facilitating the transfer, rather than the prison itself.

IMB members conduct weekly induction rounds, meeting new arrivals one-to-one to check how they are settling in and provide an information leaflet about the IMB. The prison completely redesigned the induction process during the reporting period. Prisoners now remain on the induction unit for up to two weeks to allow them to settle into the establishment, familiarise themselves with most departments, and begin work or education. Staff/prisoner interaction is more thorough and is documented in the induction book. Prisoners should be provided with a prisoner handbook which covers all aspects of life in HMP Aylesbury; however, these are not always available.

An induction fair is held twice weekly on the induction wing. Departments set up tables and engage with new arrivals. Prisoners are informed about all activities before they leave the induction wing to inform them of their employment path whilst in HMP Aylesbury.

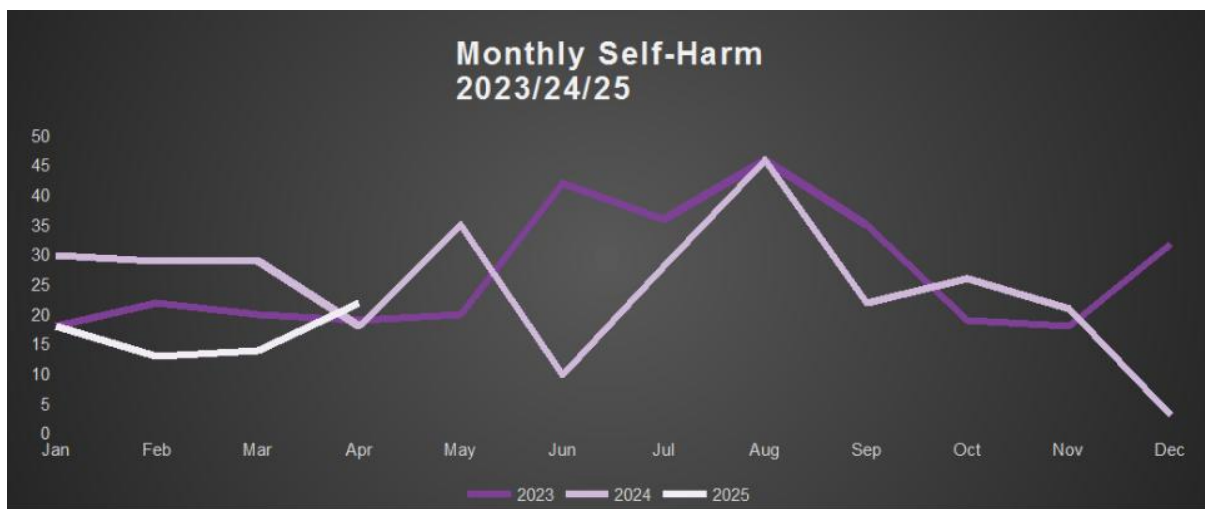
IMB Board members observed, and the prison management reports, that the new induction process is running well and receiving positive feedback. Monthly prisoner forums and exit questionnaires provide opportunities for feedback and highlight areas of improvement. IMB members have received very few complaints about the induction process in comparison to previous years. The improvement during this reporting period is notable. During the reporting period, Board members have

encouraged new arrivals to attend the induction fairs and the majority have indicated that they are settling in well.

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

There were no suicides or other deaths in custody in HMP Aylesbury during the reporting year. The reports for the two of the three deaths in custody of the previous reporting year have been completed and are available on the Prison and Probation Ombudsman website.

Overall, there has been a reduction in self-harm during the reporting year. This is the chart of data collected by the safer prisons department in HMP Aylesbury.



The total number of incidents in the reporting year was 254 versus 355 in the previous reporting year. A single prisoner, whose physical and mental health deteriorated badly in the early summer of the reporting year, clearly contributed to the spike in June to August.

The prison now holds prisoners between 21 to 70+ years of age. The average age has settled at around 30 years, older than in the recent years of HMP Aylesbury. This has contributed to stability, and to a reduction in incidents.

The availability of illicit items, most particularly drugs, plus the associated debt have a negative impact. The prison has been active in tackling this through closely coordinated cross departmental working. A tripartite meeting system was introduced where safer prisons, security and drug strategy teams co-ordinate their activities, see Section 6.6.

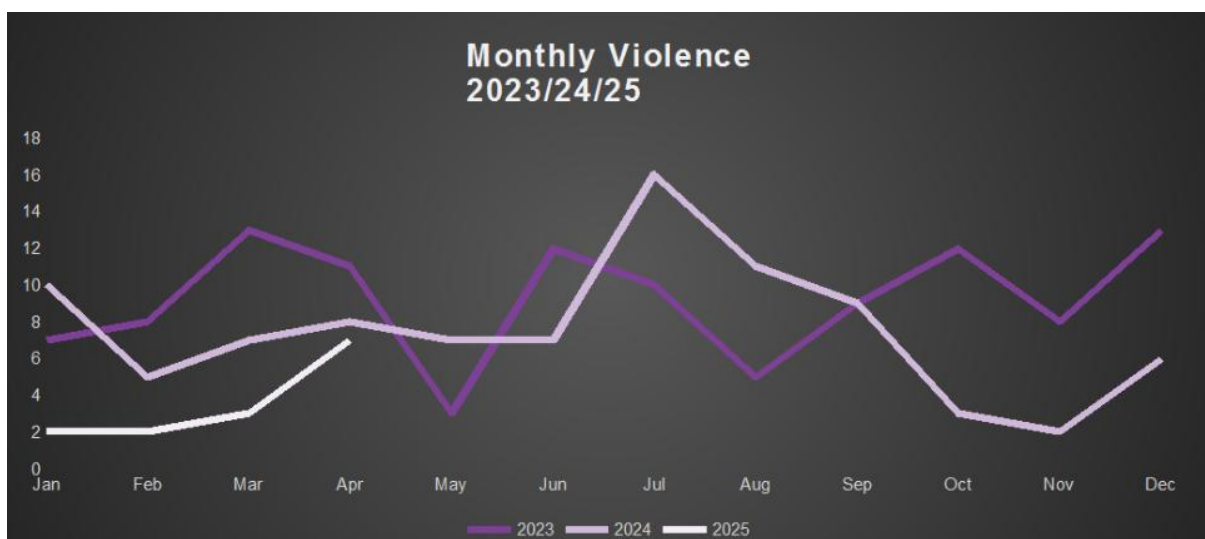
The assessment, care in custody and teamwork, (ACCT) process is used both proactively and reactively to reduce self-harm in the prison. IMB regularly reviews ACCT documents and also receives status updates on prisoners on ACCT from wing staff. ACCT documents are subject to review and audit by custody management staff. All ACCT cases are reviewed weekly at the multidisciplinary safety intervention meeting, (SIM), where suitable interventions are planned and resources allocated appropriately. A watchlist of prisoners who frequently self-harm is maintained and monitored by the SIM.

For those struggling to cope, the mental health team remains active and supportive. The prison emphasised the need for more widespread ‘trauma aware handling’ of prisoners and introduced training for this within the prison. Similarly, a greater awareness of the impact of neurodiversity began to be seen. Any prisoners can call on the Listener service. Listeners are volunteer prisoners, trained by Samaritans, to provide a non-judgmental listening ear. The Samaritans helpline is also available by phone to all prisoners.

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

The amount of overall violence, including gang related violence, has reduced significantly since HMP Aylesbury moved from being a Young Offender Institution (YOI) and became a category C training prison during 2022.

Here is a chart collected by the safer custody department covering violent incidents for the last two reporting years:



The total number of violent incidents has fallen to 77 for the reporting year from 107 for the previous year.

Violence has many of the same causes as self-harm, discussed in section 4.2.

Debt is one of the many causes of violence. This may be monetary but will include other ‘assets’, for example, vape capsules, food and/or other personal items. Many of the items stolen will have come in legitimately through ‘canteen’. Canteen allows prisoners to buy goods such as vapes, snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials from an approved list using their own funds.

Illicit items, such as drugs, phones, USB memory sticks, all of which have a high value, makes debt an ongoing problem. The Board has been told of the practice called ‘double bubble’, where a loan of, e.g. a vape capsule, requires repayment of two vape capsules within a week. It can be easy to get into significant debt quickly.

The weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM), the monthly safer custody meeting, the monthly security meeting and the recently introduced tripartite meeting bringing together security, safety and drug strategy all contribute to identifying the root causes of violent incidents and putting in place actions to prevent and reduce

them. This cross departmental coordination shows just how determined the management is to sustain a reduction in violence.

The violence reduction strategy at Aylesbury offers a range of interventions. Challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs) are used to assist prisoners get better control of tendencies towards violence. Violent incidents are reviewed to determine if the protagonists would benefit from the multidisciplinary approach CSIP offers. All CSIP plans are reviewed at the multidisciplinary SIM meeting weekly. As of the beginning of April 2025 there were ten prisoners who had CSIPs. Throughout the year we observed that data and observation played a stronger role in determining use of CSIPs: the overall number of prisoners on these plans was lower than the previous year.

There were few self-isolators in Aylesbury this year, most were short lived. One, whose self-isolation extended over four months, led the IMB to monitor particularly closely. He self-isolated through fear of other prisoners; his fear was so acute that for much of the time he would not even accept the opportunity to exercise when no other prisoner was on the yard. The prison staff, at all levels, worked hard to protect him, offer him appropriate opportunities to get out of his cell and ways to rebuild his confidence. It took several weeks but the results were positive and he was ultimately able to move wings and mix a little more.

#### **4.4 Use of force**

There were 326 use of force incidents in the year to 31 March 2025, a decrease from 389 in the previous year. The number of incidents was highest in May, June, August, December and January.

PAVA, an incapacitant spray, was not used at all in the year to 31 March 2025, compared with 10 uses in the previous year.

Body worn video cameras were used in 93% of incidents. Senior prison staff do a weekly review of footage from body worn cameras and CCTV recordings of all incidents. They provide advice and guidance to staff where needed and share good practice.

The prison holds monthly use of force meetings to review data and identify learning. An IMB member observed most meetings. Prisoner representatives are invited to the meetings. However, on several occasions, there were not enough staff to bring them to the meeting. The IMB saw good engagement with the prisoners. Prison staff asked for and listened to the prisoners' views and were open and honest about areas for improvement.

Data on the age, ethnicity, religion, disability status and sexual orientation of prisoners involved in use of force incidents is reviewed at the meetings. The prison now compares this data with the breakdown of the general population of the prison so that they can see whether any groups are disproportionately involved. If there are, they discuss the reasons for this and whether any action is required. From use of force meetings. In April, there was a 'deep dive' on neurodiversity. This looked at how neurodivergence can impact use of force including how modifying communication can be effective in managing non-compliance.

The prison aims to hold a very short interview (post-interview review) with all prisoners after force has been used on them to get their feedback. In March 2025, they carried out interviews in 64% of cases.

#### **4.5 Preventing illicit items**

At the gate, where staff and visitors enter the prison, there is a walk-through metal detector and an airport-style baggage scanner. There is also a baggage scanner in reception where all arriving prisoners' property is scanned. Dogs are used to search visitors and sometimes staff in the visitors' reception area adjacent to the prison gate.

Drugs and phones are examples of illicit items, with the risk from drugs assessed as serious and from phones as significant.

HMP Aylesbury intercepts packages thrown over the walls.

The prison holds amnesty days when prisoners can hand in drugs, weapons, phones and other illicit items without punishment. These have mixed success.

The prison carries out intelligence led cell searches and has a mobile phone detector. The Board saw the regular use of dogs in cell searches and in patrols around the prison.

There was an increase in finds of alcohol brewed by prisoners, and of incidents of prisoners who had drunk alcohol.

The prison has started to move those suspected of distributing or dealing drugs to a different unit, then monitoring whether this reduces the number of prisoners found using drugs.

The prison does mandatory drug testing on a random sample of 10% of prisoners each month. An average of a third of prisoners tested positive, which is high. Psychoactive substances ('spice') was the drug most frequently detected, followed by cannabis.

## **5. Fair and humane treatment**

### **5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food**

#### **Accommodation**

Aylesbury can accommodate up to 402 prisoners. They are housed in small, single-occupancy cells, only one of which is accessible for a wheelchair. Cells have a single bed, toilet, washbasin, storage and a phone.

During the reporting year, wings were in reasonable working condition and the prison maintains a 'clean and decent' environment policy. Ten prisoners per wing are employed for cleaning and maintaining interior of the wings and this seems sufficient to keep wings clean and tidy.

The buildings are maintained by Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL), an adequate but reportedly slow and expensive 'in-house' maintenance service for the tasks within their remit. The prison has benefitted from the addition of a further maintenance team. This was new initiative within the reporting year. The team is staff led and employs prisoners with suitable skills; it tackles small routine maintenance and decorating across the establishment.

Inside temperatures are inconsistent; the age of the infrastructure making some cells hard to heat, especially in the segregation unit. As with previous year, prisoners complain of being too hot or cold at different points. Complete wing refurbishment would be required to resolve building temperature issues.

In the new strategy, the prison committed to establishing all wings as areas of purpose and best practice. F wing is now established as an incentivised substance free living (ISFL) wing. G wing has been repurposed as an induction unit and B wing is developing as an academy wing focused on educational opportunity.

#### **Clothing**

The IMB hears about clothing mainly in association with the rules about parcels sent by family and friends, or when clothes are lost, missing or damaged whilst being laundered. Newly sentenced prisoners are allowed a parcel within 28 days of being sentenced. To reduce the number of parcels coming into the prison, some of which contained prohibited items, Aylesbury stopped all clothing parcels at other times. Some prisoners express frustration at the restriction. In place of the previous birthday parcel, prisoners are allowed a one-off 'drop down' from their private accounts to their spends, the amount of which is determined by their incentive scheme level.

The prison provides suitable health and safety guidance about the clothing standards prisoners must meet when carrying out various activities within the prison, and on their residential wing.

#### **Food**

A new Band 6 kitchen manager was appointed during the reporting period. 16 prisoners work in the kitchen on a rotational basis, allowing for adequate cover during rest periods, but it is difficult to fill vacancies when they arise.

Catering management report that portion sizes and distribution have largely stabilised, with ongoing monitoring to ensure consistency. Feedback from prisoners has been generally positive, though occasional concerns are raised.

The IMB is still hearing complaints about portion size and fairness of distribution. Food should be served on prison-issued plates to ensure equal distribution. Unfortunately, this does not always happen. IMB members observe prisoners bringing a variety of containers to the lunch queue, some with high sides and some flat. This makes even distribution of food difficult.

The daily budget for food was £3.12 per prisoner in the reporting period, with an optional uplift of £3,000 per month to meet special dietary needs. This allowance, which is set nationally and makes no allowance for establishment variation, is fully utilised to maintain nutritional standards and accommodate dietary requirements, which have increased over the past two years due to the transition to a category C prison.

## **5.2 Segregation**

The segregation unit is clean, orderly, and well run. It has a capacity of 18 cells, a number are out of action on occasion due to damage, however, they have been quickly repaired and put back into use. Staffing levels remain constant, with a group size of 10: Four detailed for the morning and three for the afternoon.

IMB members aim to make an open-door round of the segregation unit weekly, and this target was only missed seven times during the year. IMB members observed 32 good order or discipline (GOoD) review sessions. Healthcare attends regularly. The conversations in GOoD reviews vary in quality. Some of the best conversations IMB members observed saw senior staff offering positive motivation, supportive and challenging analysis of the prisoner's position, and informed encouragement toward improvement.

Whilst in the segregation unit, members observed the patience and professionalism of staff on the unit. Relationships with prisoners are generally positive, and officers demonstrated appropriate aptitude and understanding for their role in a challenging and special environment.

Prisoners in the segregation unit are afforded care and attention from different departments within the prison. Daily rounds by Governors, chaplaincy and healthcare, including support for mental health, are undertaken. In addition, a weekly department drop-in has been restarted that includes education, library outreach, safety, gym and the offender management unit (OMU). Shared exercise and access to a gym room have been added to the regime.

Average stay on the segregation unit through the year was 9.4 days. A few individuals were there much longer, but the Board observed their cases were managed with care and attention. There was a total of thirty 42-day and 84-day reviews.

Despite being held away from other prisoners, with few privileges and limited daily purposeful activity, this attention can make life in the segregation unit more comfortable for some prisoners who feel safer than when resident on a busy wing.

Some prisoners have complex needs, including mental health concerns and self-harming behaviours. The Board remains concerned about delays in transferring prisoners with severe mental health or neurodiversity concerns.

In the first half of the reporting year one prisoner, with severe mental and physical health needs, deteriorated badly. He was placed on the segregation unit for his own protection. He remained there for over 60 days before a suitable secure hospital place could be found for him. His case demanded extra work of the segregation unit staff and at times it was also distressing. IMB members observed that the prison made all efforts to have this prisoner moved to suitable accommodation. Despite this the prisoner was left suffering further distress, for far too long, in an environment where he could not receive fully appropriate care. This takes a toll on all involved, and on the whole prison system.

It is not recommended for prisoners on an ACCT to be placed in segregation. During the year, there was a small increase in the number of prisoners on an ACCT moved to the segregation unit. IMB checks showed that when this happened, staff have diligently maintained ACCT observations.

Prisoners can be held in the segregation unit for their safety or safety of others. This is often due to having 'non-associates' (individuals who are identified as needing to be kept apart from specific others within the prison, due to risks of bullying, intimidation or violence) on the wings. Despite the best efforts of staff, these prisoners can be hard to move back on to wings, as they feel safer there than on the wings.

If no suitable move within the prison is found, then a move to another establishment is sought. In the reporting year such moves remained hard to arrange, due to severe capacity issues across the prison estate. The stated standard time of 28 days for transfers was regularly exceeded.

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

Staff numbers-uniformed staff and operational support grades (OSG) staff- were at full complement for the whole of the reporting year. This improved stability in the relations between staff and prisoners. Across the year, incidents of violence diminished and applications to the IMB, citing concerns about staff prisoner relations, reduced considerably.

Many of the prisoners in HMP Aylesbury have prior experience of prison. They purport to know the rules and are often keen to compare the regime in HMP Aylesbury with their experience elsewhere. This can be challenging to less experienced members of staff, and over 60% of the staff on the wings had less than two years' experience. But this sort of behaviour is unlikely to end in violence.

However, the increase in the incursion of, and use of, illicit substances, create more demanding situations for staff to manage and resolve. It is credit to the staff that violence is lower, and wings retained a positive atmosphere overall.

Whilst monitoring, IMB members frequently observe positive relations between staff and prisoner. Prisoners with complex needs, who stay any significant time in HMP Aylesbury, are usually well known to staff. They are supported by staff from many different departments and the skilled interdisciplinary working, much encouraged by management, makes a significant difference to their lives.

When the prison introduced strategy 2024-25, management prioritised an improvement in both the quantity and quality of key working. The quantity of key work improved significantly but the quality does not seem to have shifted. The write-ups often seem formulaic, showing very little build between key work sessions with the same prisoner. When IMB members suggest to prisoners that they turn to their key worker to help resolve a problem, we encounter few positive responses.

Wing staff need to have a strong grounding in how the prison works, both in their daily interactions with prisoners and when acting as key workers. Where this is absent, particularly with newer staff, extra pressure falls on staff from the professional departments and often disproportionately upon staff from the OMU.

#### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

The shift in the population demographics due to the transition to a category C prison has stabilised during the reporting period. At the beginning of this reporting period, the population was comprised of 22% young adults (aged 18-24) with the majority (56%) falling into the 25-39 age group, and 22% aged 40-60 plus. The oldest recorded age was 73. By the end of this period the population was made up of 12% young adults (age 21-24), with the majority (56%) falling into the 25-39 age group, and 31% aged 40-60 plus. The oldest recorded age was 74. Notably, there were no young adults (18-20 age group) and an increase of 9% in the oldest group. Prisoners with a recorded disability remained constant throughout the reporting period. During this period, the number of prisoners recorded as being of ethnic minority increased from 37% to 41.5% of the population.

Adapting to accommodate the needs of an older prison population remained an ongoing process, including introduction of specialist wings, improved vocational employment offers, adjustments to activities, health and social care. Fifty+ forums continued to be scheduled biannually. The equalities action team, (EAT), reports that feedback from older prisoners through discussions on the wings has been mostly positive, however, there is no recorded data to evidence this to date.

Several faith festivals and wider markers of diversity were celebrated throughout the year for both prisoners and staff. These were organised by diversity and inclusion (D and I) with support from chaplaincy and other departments, working with no operational budget. Festivals were advertised by colourful posters and community notices displayed on wings and staff noticeboards.

Black history month (BHM) is delivered with no specifically allocated resources. During the month IMB members noted that there was little, if any, content creation by the prisoners themselves. Fairly mundane events were timetabled *for* ethnic minority prisoners and not *by* them, and there was a widespread sense that BHM is designed for ethnic minority prisoners only, rather than for the whole community.

Ramadan ran smoothly in 2025, with very few complaints heard by IMB members. More Muslim prisoners were employed in the kitchen in meal preparation. The Eid celebration was very successful.

Black prisoners continued to be disproportionately represented in dismissed adjudications during the reporting period, raising the question of whether adjudications are being used inappropriately. This is receiving continued analysis by the EAT team.

EAT, comprised of the senior leadership team (SLT), meets bimonthly to review the establishment procedures and analyse data relating to diversity and inclusion. Each governor is responsible for championing awareness and actions in the establishment for a particular protected characteristic, which are also reviewed during SLT meetings.

Secure boxes are located on each wing for prisoners wishing to submit confidential discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs). The DIRFs are collected by D and I and allocated to a relevant team member to address. During the reporting period, IMB members monitored an incidence when several DIRFs were submitted by prisoners, all relating to the same issue, but not acknowledged by D and I. This led to discontent on a wing. The situation was de-escalated by the personal intervention of the D and I manager. This highlighted the importance of following procedure and acknowledging DIRFs, regardless of their outcome, to reassure prisoners that their concerns are being taken seriously.

The prison is continuing to work in line with its diversity and inclusion delivery plan. This outlines the priorities, challenges, and goals of the prison. The IMB received a full briefing on this during the year. Since the Zahid Mubarek Trust (ZMT) withdrew its services during this reporting period, recruitment for D and I wing representatives is ongoing, with lots of interest shown.

## **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

The chaplaincy team continued to hold weekly Friday prayers for Muslim prisoners and services for Roman Catholic and Church of England prisoners. They also led the celebration of festivals for a wide range of faiths through the provision of information, events and special meals. They marked Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Pagan, Rastafarian, Hindu and Sikh festivals.

Muslim staff in the chaplaincy take an active role in the preparations and observance of Ramadan and this went ahead successfully.

If requested, members of the chaplaincy team support prisoners at ACCT reviews and in GOoD reviews. They offer pastoral support daily, including for those who are bereaved. In extreme circumstances they support requests for compassionate visits or moves.

Staffing of the chaplaincy was a concern to the IMB throughout the year. The experienced Roman Catholic lay chaplain retired early in the reporting year. IMB members asked about the recruitment plan. There is extensive evidence that many efforts were made to fill this vacancy, and that of the Free Church cleric also. Help was requested from the centre and from other prisons. The vacancies persisted.

Around 25% of the prison population is Muslim, whilst a slightly larger number are designated Roman Catholic, Church of England and a generic category 'Christian'. With the staffing gaps described above, flexibility was required in providing pastoral care to the Christian population.

## **5.6 Incentives schemes**

The incentives scheme is the main formal means of incentivising positive behaviour. Prisoners are rewarded by attaining the higher levels, standard or enhanced. Negative behaviour, depending on the seriousness, results in them being

downgraded to standard or even basic. On arrival a prisoner retains the privilege level he has from his previous prison, so those already enhanced when they arrive at Aylesbury stay enhanced, and so on.

Incentive levels are changed following incentives scheme reviews where the prisoners' overall behaviour, including positive and negative comments in his NOMIS record are taken into account. Downgrading of an incentives scheme level generally follows a serious infringement or crime, such as assault or multiple repeated smaller infringements.

Seven days after being on basic, a prisoner will attend a review with the option of upgrading them to standard. If they do not achieve the upgrade at that time, they will be reviewed again after a further seven days, and so on, until they become standard. The review to move up to enhanced will happen three months after achieving standard.

There are only a small number of prisoners on basic. The majority are enhanced with the remainder on standard. The benefits of the enhanced status improved in the reporting year and now make attaining and keeping that status worthwhile for the majority of prisoners. These benefits include access to newly provided facilities like toasters, microwaves and air-fryers and therefore the possibility of adding variety to their diets. Furthermore, enhanced prisoners on the wing during the morning and afternoon work period are allowed out of their cells.

Additionally, officers are encouraged to spend time talking with prisoners, to get to know them and to informally advise them on good behaviour versus poor behaviour. These positive interventions help prevent loss of status and privilege and diminish the need to curb poor behaviour.

## **5.7 Complaints**

The number of complaints made in the year showed a slight decline, and the prison continues to keep on top of them. The prison's electronic system shows that replies are usually sent in a timely manner but not all responses close down complaints. The percentage of appeals submitted grew noticeably through the year. Data drawn from complaints can help indicate where change might be needed in the system but using data in this way was not formalised until late in the reporting year.

The prison then instituted a monthly complaints review, sharing the data, and associated suggestions for improvement, widely. The numbers and types of complaints were expressed clearly and concrete suggestions were made for staff on how to avoid complaints, and how to deal with them better, both in content and tone. This is clear evidence of the prison using data to improve practice.

The IMB received the same number of complaints this year as last. The highest number remained in the area of sentence management, including recategorisation, and preparation for parole boards. Property came a close second.

Compensation for lost property paid to prisoners in Aylesbury in 2024 was the highest for four years, at £8,638.

## **5.8 Property**

Property is the single most complained about issue in the prison. It also takes considerable time and effort by the prison to monitor and manage. The prison made

efforts within the year to improve the handling of property, which began to show in the data late in the year. But still there needed to be reminders issues to staff about care in cell clearances and in accurate recording on 'prop cards'.

During the reporting year, the prison received 446 complaints about property, 29%, just under one third of the total number of complaints.

Prisoners are limited in the property that they have on the wing, both by volume and by rules which specify the number and types of items that they are allowed. The property each prisoner has in their cell is then documented on three property cards, for clothing, in-possession property and stored property.

There are many things that can go wrong with property, hence the number of complaints.

Prisoners can sell, loan and/or barter their property, all of which is forbidden, and property can be stolen. Cells doors are open for longer periods now than previously in Aylesbury, with more free flow of prisoners. IMB expected this might result in more applications about theft but this has not happened.

When prisoners are moved between prisons, often the bulk of their property may not travel with them. Occasionally this property is never located. On arrival, a prisoner's property must be searched and sorted in reception. Rules on property allowed vary from prison to prison. This can lead to complaints. Property is sorted into allowed and non-allowed and the property cards for clothing, in-possession and stored property are completed.

Consumable canteen items do not appear on property cards and are therefore more difficult for wing staff to monitor. So vapes, food items and other consumables are relatively easy to steal or trade with limited consequences.

Property can also go missing in the laundry. Each prisoner puts his washing for the week into a net sack on the designated day and it is sealed with an identifiable tag. It is rare for items within bags to go missing but it is not unknown for whole bags to disappear.

Prisoners re-locating within the prison, either to segregation or to another wing can also result in property complaints, especially if control and restraint has been used.

If the prisoner can prove that he took proper care and the missing property is not down to his action or inaction, then he can claim compensation from the prison, and ultimately from the prison service through IPCI (Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations) service.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare general**

The healthcare provider at Aylesbury is Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWLFT) with a five year contract, which began on 1 October 2022.

The biggest challenges to the team during the reporting year were: the lack of senior staff in post; ongoing recruitment, with associated training for new staff, many of whom had never worked in a prison environment before; and the high volume of 'spice' being used by prisoners.

There was also disruption to the healthcare building during this period, with refurbishment work to create a larger and more effective pharmacy taking longer than originally anticipated. During this time staff were moved to different offices, and the dental service was put on hold for a period of time.

Staffing was, however, in a better place than the previous year with permanent staff at over 73%. Although primary care and mental health did use agency staff, the total hours dropped significantly and continued to reduce as new starters were inducted into the prison.

In April 2024 15 agency nurses were employed; in April 2025 there were eight. In April 2024 the total number of shifts covered by agency was 101, totalling 1,020 hours. In April 2025 the total number of shifts covered by agency was 71, totalling just over 728 hours.

There were regular recruitment drives, and staffing problems did not impact on the care given to prisoners as the trust had contingency plans to ensure continuity of service with clearly defined minimum staffing requirements. Staffing levels were consistently maintained at or above this threshold.

Most of the new recruits to primary care, and two in mental health, had no or minimal previous prison experience. For this reason, induction time periods were extended to ensure staff competency within their roles.

The IMB noted concern for the health of staff, working in such a high stress environment, with a number going on extended sick leave.

Senior healthcare appointments were made in September 2024 and January 2025, but the IMB did not always find these new appointees easy to meet and talk to.

In line with national requirements mandated by NHS England for all prison healthcare providers, new prisoners to HMP Aylesbury were screened by a nurse on arrival, with a second assessment the following day. This was followed by an early days in custody (EdiC) assessment from the mental health team.

Prisoners who arrived whilst on medication typically arrived with a seven day supply from the transferring prison. This medication was continued upon arrival and the pharmacy promptly placed orders to ensure uninterrupted treatment.

Most complaints received by healthcare related to waiting times, and this was mainly external hospital appointments.

Two GPs worked across three full days a week in the prison. The average waiting time for a prisoner to see a GP was 25 days. In the reporting period the GPs had 1,669 appointments with prisoners.

Dental services were provided by Time For Teeth, with services provided 2.5 days a week which alternated as two days one week and three days the following week. This had increased from the previous year when dental services were provided only one day a week. The average waiting time to see the dentist was 93 days, and there was a backlog during part of the reporting period due to the ongoing refurbishment taking place in the healthcare building which resulted in the dental service being put on hold for several weeks. The total number of dental appointments during the reporting period was 672.

Two dentists worked in the prison, each supported by a dental nurse, in an excellent surgery. The service was equal to NHS services provided in the community, but prisoners received all their treatment free. Although encouraged to do so, it was rare for prisoners to visit the dentist for a general check-up, they usually visited for a specific complaint. This could be fillings, trauma to the teeth (due to fights), removing a tooth or bridge work. An average of eight to 10 prisoners were seen on each of the dental days. Many prisoners were substance misusers and this had consequences on dental and oral health.

It was possible for prisoners to take good care of their teeth at their own expense. Toothpaste, Fixodent for dentures, dental floss sticks, interdental brushes and other things pertaining to oral care were available to buy on their weekly canteen. Any emergency, facial swelling or risk of septicaemia, was seen on the day.

Pen Optical provided optician services on one day a month.

A physiotherapist visited on one day a month. 67 prisoners required physiotherapy, primarily for musculoskeletal issues.

The psychology team provided by CNWL consisted of two senior psychologists, one cognitive behavioural therapist, one art therapist and two assistant psychologists.

During the reporting period the service shifted from providing one locum psychiatrist one day a week, to a permanent psychiatrist in post on site two days a week and half a day off site.

Naloxone is a drug that counters the effects of opioids on a short-term basis, but as an injection it has to be administered by a clinician. The current healthcare contract in Aylesbury is not 24 hours, so alternatives needed to be sought to cover the night period. Forward Trust, within the prison, was involved in a training programme to enable staff to learn how to administer nasal naloxone when healthcare staff were not on the premises. More than 130 staff including officers, education staff and workshop instructors volunteered to be trained. Forward Trust is described in section 6.6 under drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

During the reporting year there were discussions about providing additional pharmacy space within the prison, on the wings – this remained a work in progress.

The relationship between healthcare and the prison remained good, with daily meetings and open dialogue. The relationship between the IMB and healthcare,

which had previously been good, dipped slightly towards the end of the reporting year, with some difficulties arranging meetings and exchanging information.

## **6.2 Physical healthcare**

A total of 534 prisoners went to outpatient appointments during the reporting period. As all these appointments required officer escorts they were restricted to one in the morning and one in the afternoon, so as not to detrimentally affect the prison regime.

Hospitals were chosen on a number of criteria: distance, hospital availability, prison escort availability and the specialist required.

140 emergency hospital visits were made. 17 prisoners stayed at least one night in hospital. The longest period a prisoner spent in hospital was 64 days.

The IMB visited one prisoner who was in hospital for surgery. A team of two officers on 12 hour shifts was constantly on duty with the prisoner in hospital, with one handcuffed to him on a long chain. As the prison does not have 24 hour healthcare facilities, the prisoner had to remain in hospital post operatively for a prolonged period. This proved difficult for the hospital, their staff and other patients, who were not used to having prisoners for this length of time.

HMP Aylesbury was not a suitable prison for men with significant mobility issues, and there were minimal mobility issues within the prison population. Two men used walking sticks, but no one used a walking frame or wheelchair.

Clinics at the prison included diabetes, hypertension, asthma, sexual health and smoking cessation. A new epilepsy clinic was being reviewed to commence. A daily triage was conducted to cover a variety of health-related concerns.

A large number of men met the criteria to have medication in possession in their cells, related to their medical condition. This included insulin, hypertensives, topical creams, antihistamine and inhalers.

The pharmacy closed at 5pm each weekday, with nursing staff, who could administer medication, on duty until 7.30pm.

Drop-in clinics were held on the wings and vaccination uptake was reasonable.

There were prisoners with cancer, and their diagnosis was stable. Healthcare was able to safely manage all the health conditions on site during the reporting period, with support from external healthcare providers.

## **6.3 Mental health**

**6.3 a** Mental health provision in the prison was dealt with by a multidisciplinary approach including nurses, psychologists and a psychiatrist. An integrated clinical services meeting was held once a week, including the mental health in-reach team, Pathways, Forward Trust, HMPPS Psychology Services and the HMPPS neurodiversity manager, to discuss referrals and allocate the correct service.

There were five team members in the Central and North West London mental health in-reach team including assistant psychologists. Recruitment took place during the year for an additional psychologist.

The most common mental health problems were depression and anxiety, which was GP managed.

GPs and the psychiatrist were able to prescribe medication for sleep problems, but these were not prescribed long term, with sleep hygiene always advised. Prisoners were offered cognitive behavioural therapy and had a choice whether to accept or refuse.

Prisoners presented with complex mental health needs, this included psychotic disorders, personality disorders, neurodevelopmental conditions, and cases involving dual diagnoses, where substance misuse coexisted with mental health issues.

One prisoner in Aylesbury required transfer to a specialist mental health unit.

HMPPS Psychology Services department in HMP Aylesbury had five working members during the reporting period – one senior psychologist, three registered psychologists and five trainees, only three of whom were able to work due to maternity and sick leave. Their work included: assessments for parole boards; delivery and treatment management of programmes designed to give the men strategies to manage their own behaviour in times of need; and IQ and brain injury assessments. The majority of the work in programmes was around violence and intimate partner violence. One man completed work around extremist offending and another man completed work around sexual offending.

### **6.3b Pathways**

The offender personality disorder (OPD) pathway is jointly commissioned by HMPPS and NHS England and was delivered by HMPPS and the North London Foundation Trust to offer a therapeutic approach for offenders with personality disorders.

Prisoners did not necessarily need a diagnosis of personality disorder to be included in the work of Pathways. A number of factors are considered when screening prisoners for engagement with the work of Pathways and the team there. Examples of these factors: a violent or sexual offence, a high risk of harm, significant social and adjustment difficulties often related to childhood experience, and trauma. Pathways is a long-term service that aims to work with men for at least a year to learn how their experiences impacted their offending and behaviour and to work through it. One man, who left the prison in December, had been working with Pathways for five years.

Lots of prisoners self-referred into the service, but others came as a result of the clinical services referral system. There were also referrals from other prisons.

Pathways had a multi-disciplinary team with a mix of prison officers, psychologists (forensic and clinical), psychotherapists, occupational therapists, art therapists, movement therapists and music facilitators. The team is strongly led, purposeful and dedicated. Prisoners leaving Aylesbury prison, who have engaged with Pathways, often receive follow up visits from a member of the Aylesbury Pathways team in their new prison to help them in their successful adjustment.

Each prisoner has two named workers, one is always a prison officer and one is one of the other clinical professions.

There were five prison officers of various ranks working in Pathways – their work was ringfenced and they were paid for by OPD, meaning they were only used in

other areas of the prison under operational emergency circumstances, for example, if a negotiator was required. They all engaged in clinical work, including delivery groups and working with the clinicians in keywork, and they had a high level of training in therapies.

Therapies offered to the men were in group sessions and one to one and included: life patterns; cooking and gardening groups; animal, art and family therapy; music production; and sensory work.

The biggest challenge for Pathways was getting used to the change from a high security Young Offender Institution to a category C adult male training prison. Although this change occurred in October 2022, the change in the prison population was slower to filter through to Pathways as they already had a caseload of young men, who stayed until they progressed. As they did progress, they were replaced with category C prisoners, who had been in the prison system a lot longer and brought complexities that had not been seen in the younger prisoners. This was sometimes emotionally draining on the staff. Work progressed to bring the service into line with the needs of the category C population.

It was also recognised that there was a gap in provision for those in prison who were seen as unstable and problematic, with the prison and other services finding it difficult to know how to help and manage them. Pathways worked successfully with some of these men and subsequently put in a successful bid for extra funding and resources. This resulted in the implementation of the Pathways Support Service, an outreach service to help stabilise and support some of the most difficult to manage men in the prison. The aim was to get them to a place where they could engage in the full Pathways service.

Having previously been the first male prison unit in the country to achieve an award from One Small Thing for 'being trauma aware', the unit was working towards the next level of 'being trauma informed'.

#### **6.4 Social care**

Efforts were made to bring in social care for at least one prisoner in need in the year, strongly backed by the Governor. This was not successful. IMB members are not aware of any agreements with the local authorities having been put in place during this year.

#### **6.5 Time out of cell, regime**

With improved staffing the regime stabilised significantly. Time out of cell was more predictable. Roll accuracy remained an intermittent problem but overall, a serious effort to improve accuracy resulted in fewer shortened regimes. The introduction of 'mini moves' meant that a prisoner, required to visit healthcare for example, did not then lose a full activity session but could catch up with his work or education midway through the morning or afternoon.

But there still remains a statistical shortage of places for prisoners to be engaged in purposeful activity for the total of nine sessions a week, which is the national requirement.

From snapshots of purposeful activity, made by the IMB throughout the reporting year, and ignoring the impact of monthly staff training days, when almost the entire

population spends the day locked up, the IMB calculates that an average of 63% of the prison population is either working or in education, or is engaged in some other form of purposeful activity in any one session. To be able to occupy 80% of the prisoners in purposeful activity would require the prison to create 100 more spaces.

Recreational facilities on wings improved through the year. Each wing received some cooking kit including air fryers and toasters, and some gym kit including a static exercise bike. Cooking is a popular and social activity and the bikes are used. There are some more board games available. It was good to see prisoners laying out temporary tables along the length of their wings, where the hot meal could be eaten together. This adds a feeling of community, a contrast to eating alone in a cell.

## **6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

The prison's strategy is to support rather than punish drug users, to disrupt the supply of drugs and punish prisoners found to be dealing drugs. Prisoners found to be using drugs are supported to get jobs or take educational courses. The prison has found that purposeful activity is much more effective in discouraging drug use than punishments such as removing TVs, which leave prisoners bored and more tempted to use drugs.

In appropriate circumstances, punishments for using or possessing drugs or alcohol are suspended if the prisoner agrees to undertake treatment and to stop taking or handling drugs.

Prisoners' need for support is assessed when they arrive at the prison. They are also referred to the drug and alcohol rehabilitation team when they are found to have used drugs or alcohol and they can themselves decide to seek support at any time. The team was supporting 82 prisoners at the end of the reporting year. The team initially give advice, then offer further support if the prisoner wants it. This includes one on one sessions to understand prisoners' issues and what support they need, workbooks for prisoners to complete then discuss with support staff, and groups.

The range of support groups increased during the year. By March 2025, the prison was running Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous groups run by external facilitators. Up to 20 prisoners attend. There is also a relapse prevention course, which includes more mentor support and is conducted at a slower pace. The prison ran half-day workshops with Goose Theatre, which had very good engagement from the prisoners, with some seeing a breakthrough from this alternative approach that they didn't get from the standard courses.

The number of prisoners found under the influence of drugs or alcohol each month increased slightly in 2024-25, averaging 26 compared to 21 in 2024-25. There was a spike in October, November, January and February, which the prison attribute to large packages of drugs making it into the prison.

The drug and alcohol rehabilitation team train prisoners to be peer workers, supporting other prisoners. They aim to have two peer workers on each wing.

Aylesbury has a 'incentivised substance free living' wing with 47 spaces. Prisoners on the wing sign a voluntary drug testing and behaviour compact. They have more free time out of cell than on other wings and a greater range of facilities and activities. There is more kitchen equipment such as air fryers and a good range of exercise equipment. Activities include yoga, a Dungeons and Dragons game, pool

competitions, video nights, and book and creative writing clubs. A recent addition is the raised beds in the yard where prisoners can grow fruit and vegetables for their own use. This encourages responsibility and healthy living.

From the Board's observations, there is a supportive approach, with prisoners on the wing encouraged to seek help if they feel they may relapse. Prisoners are offered support if they are found to have used substances and only removed from the wing if they repeatedly misuse substances and do not use the support available. The idea of creating a community seems to be working and there are noticeable individual successes where long term users have achieved long periods of being drug free.

HMP Aylesbury is developing facilities to offer opioid substitution treatments and expects to start receiving prisoners who are dependent on opiates in 2025-26.

## **6.7 Soft skills**

Alongside the overall improvements, we saw in the prison during the reporting year more energy was devoted to the development of soft skills, often extending initiatives introduced in the previous year.

Effort was made to find opportunities for those prisoners on the hospitality course to use their skills. Prisoners on these courses were 'commissioned' to cater the small celebrations that go on in the prison, giving the students real life experience. Customer service and employability were also added to the curriculum.

Listeners are prisoners trained by the Samaritans to be a front-line protection for other prisoners who need immediate support with a problem. The Listener service was extended during the year. Reporting in the prison shows that when a Listener is requested, even late at night, provision is made.

Recruitment for a new Shannon Trust manager took several months, leaving the programme inactive during that time. But by late in the reporting year, the Shannon Trust was up and running again. Training for peer coaches started again and these coaches support those learning to read, or who want to improve their basic maths skills.

There are representational roles open to prisoners in several areas, for example, on the prison council, on wing councils or as equality and diversity representatives. We observed that management gave the prison council more responsibility through this reporting year. They were included in the development of the 2024-2025 prison strategy. Furthermore, it was possible for individual prisoners with specific skills to make a stronger contribution to prison life. For example, prisoners were supported to launch an inhouse newspaper, which they researched, written, printed and distributed themselves.

Outlets for wider creativity remained limited.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

#### **Library**

With the appointment of a new head librarian, the library has seen a gradual renaissance over this reporting year. There was a:

- 30% increase in the number of individual users
- 28% increase in the number of books loaned
- 29% increase in the number of DVDS loaned.

The increased use was facilitated by a change in timetable, more flexible access, and a better induction, as mentioned in section 4.1. Consistent efforts are made by library staff to reach individuals with special needs and prisoners in segregation.

The library became better integrated across the prison, evidently supporting elements of the strategy such as the introduction of the academy wing and the access to wider opportunities for creativity amongst prisoners. Initiatives have been revived and expanded and a new partnership established. Perhaps the most significant improvement is the consistency and energy with which these initiatives have been delivered.

#### **Storybook Dads/Grandads/Uncles**

Extra time has been allocated to this scheme and support is regularly given to individuals who require assistance with their reading so there are no barriers to participation. The activity is meaningful and important, and the final product is high quality. Feedback from participants is often moving and always extremely positive.

#### **Reading Ahead**

Entrants read and reviewed six books of their choice. There were celebratory events. All entrants had chosen to read and review a mental health book, the library's most popular genre. Reviews were read out, anonymously, and the empathy shared amongst the entrants.

#### **Collaboration with the National Literacy Trust (NLT)**

This partnership led to three events being arranged in the library, creative writing and motivational discussions with authors. The NLT started to supply free books which the library distributes to wings, workshops and the education department.

The library suffers a high number of losses, and a fines process is planned to be implemented.

#### **Education**

Milton Keynes College (MKC) provides education at HMP Aylesbury. The education block is fit for purpose, tidy and spacious. The MKC management has been stable through the year, with fewer absences and the deputy head post filled. This helped to maintain focus on changes needed.

Several improvements were made in the year. The development of education and employment pathways helped prisoners to understand their learning progression

whilst in HMP Aylesbury. This was further clarified by providing prisoners an education and employment prospectus at induction, contributing to the improvements made to induction mentioned in Section 4.1.

Despite all efforts to make practical improvements, the serious reduction in the education budget of close to 20%, which occurred within this reporting year, has already caused a reduction in the frequency and diversity of courses available.

There is professional support for prisoners with learning difficulties.

Success rates in both English and maths improved slightly overall, by 9% for English and 12% for maths, to 91% and 80% respectively. More prisoners are achieving a higher level of maths than in previous years, and prisoners specifically speak about the quality of teaching in this area. See Annex A for the results.

The 2024-2025 strategy put in place an academy wing, physically located close to the education block and the library. This signalled a more visible engagement of senior management with education. While this initiative is in place, contingent benefits to prisoners are still to be fully explored.

Alongside the essentials of English and maths, there is a clear emphasis on courses which should build employability skills in advance of release. As last year, courses were run in employability, hospitality and customer service. Warehousing was a new addition, and for part of the year, industrial cleaning was back on the curriculum. The latter, though practical, is not particularly popular with prisoners.

This year the prison lost the music course, which had been very popular with prisoners, emphasising again the lack of creative outlets for prisoners.

Positive developments in the library supported greater cooperation between the classroom and the library. Some classes took place in the library itself and the librarian, being better connected to the education team, could more easily provide support to learners.

The support for prisoners taking more advanced education through distance learning continues to be exceptionally strong. At any one time in the year there were more than 40 prisoners on advanced courses. They are well supported by a skilled member of the MKC team. She helps prisoners to maintain motivation, and navigate the many difficulties encountered when studying in prison. Courses include Open University degrees, higher education diplomas and A levels. The range of subjects includes law, criminology, business management and creative writing.

The use of pre-loaded tablets helps with access to materials for distance learners, but the normal day to day use of technology, which is required for studying at this level, is not available and this is an extra hurdle to be overcome.

Education is usually paid better than most work in the prison. However, moving on to higher levels of education does not seem to bring any extra pay. As a result, some prisoners may choose easier or more familiar options instead of continuing with education, even though further learning could be more beneficial in the long term.

## **7.2 Vocational training, work**

Aylesbury is a category C training prison. It is where prisoners spend much of their sentence and is the place that much of the rehabilitation and reduction of re-

offending would normally take place. The prison should provide sufficient purposeful activity for all prisoners to be out of their cells, learning or working, for a total of nine sessions a week, which is every weekday morning and afternoon, except Friday afternoon. Given the number of spaces available, across work and education, this is simply not possible. For 80% engagement to be achieved regularly, the prison would require an additional 100 learning or work spaces. See section 6.5.

A table of all the available opportunities for taking part in purposeful activity is attached at Annex A.

During the reporting year, the Governor and staff made serious efforts to improve the quality and quantity of vocational training and work available. To aid this, the prison made changes to the daily regime adding in 'mini-moves' morning and afternoon (moves splitting morning and afternoon sessions, giving a potential of four activities a day per prisoner, meaning a prisoner would, for example, be able to attend both a healthcare appointment and join an activity in the same morning). This freed up some extra spaces, and introducing initiatives such as 'red bands' (trusted men who support new prisoners and provide initial peer support).

The Governor established an informal Employment Advisory Board for Aylesbury prison, involving knowledgeable and well connected external advisors. However, for a number of reasons, predominantly financial but including space requirements and risk assessments, the provision of courses offering suitable training for employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century remained poor.

The arrival of Elite Rail to train in-track safety on a real length of track, offering the benefit of a guaranteed job on release, and the introduction of a roofing course, were immediate successes. A serious shortage of resources closed the roofing course after just four weeks, only one cohort of 10 prisoners benefitting from it, and the delivery of the rail course was slowed for the same reasons.

The popular food packing workshop closed mid reporting year. Although this work was undemanding, it offered occupation for prisoners with minimal skills and even for those with limited literacy.

Not all prisoners attending workshops are actually engaged in purposeful work. It is not unusual to see a group of prisoners playing board games during workshop periods. Additionally, since the introduction of mini-moves halfway through workshop periods, a prisoner may return to his wing at that time if his instructor allows. There are no statistics collected by IMB on either of those occurrences so numbers cannot be provided. But the impact of these will reduce the actual amount of purposeful activity below the 63% recorded.

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

#### **Offender management unit**

The OMU at HMP Aylesbury benefitted from strong and committed leadership in the year, and staffing numbers improved, with only one vacancy for most of the year. Presence on the wings visibly increased.

Prisoners rely on contact with their OMU worker to understand the details of their sentence and their route to progression. Prisoners almost always know who their offender manager is and they value support from them. Equally, they are quick to

complain when they feel their questions are not answered fully or when the information they need is slow in coming. OMU on wing surgeries were introduced in year. These surgeries allowed more prisoners to access their OMU workers in a less formal way.

As with last year, prisoners raised concerns with IMB team members when they felt they were missing essential contact with the OMU as pivotal events, such as parole board hearings, or recategorisation, drew closer. The IMB received a significant number of applications in this area. Often, when investigated, it is not the absence of OMU support at the heart of a prisoner's anxiety, but in a few cases, mixed messages from OMU staff had caused problems. Reviewing this type of application requires the IMB to ask detailed questions of OMU staff and this was not always welcomed. However, the head of the OMU remained constructively responsive at all times.

Early on this year, some newly arrived prisoners did not learn the name of their offender manager during their induction. They expressed frustration about this. Once in place, the new system of prisoner induction resolved this problem.

## **Programmes**

The programmes team works with prisoners who have to meet certain goals in their sentence plan. The programmes on offer during the reporting year were Thinking Skills Programme (TSP), Identity Matters (IM), Kaizen and Becoming New Me Plus (BNM+).

In the year there were six completions for Kaizen, seven completions for BNM+, nine IM completions, and 31 TSP completions.

The prison does not offer programmes designed specifically for perpetrators of domestic or sexual violence. In some cases, this has meant that those types of prisoners have been moved to other, more suitable, prisons.

Prisoners with 24 months of release are accepted onto programmes. This means that those who may expect a resettlement move prior to release should be able to complete the demands of their sentence plan before that move. The IMB team hears from some prisoners about their frustrations at not getting onto a programme as quickly as they wish to, but the number of these conversations certainly diminished a little in this reporting year.

The programmes team in HMP Aylesbury appears to be efficient and effective. In the first half of the reporting year the staffing in the unit was less stable than it had previously been, with some staff moving on to further professional training or leaving the prison service altogether. Successful recruitment meant that in the second of the year the team was staffed and settled. They are preparing for the national roll out of the new and simplified programme offer. The necessary staff training for this, five days online and five days face to face for each of the team, will begin shortly.

## **7.4 Family contact**

Family contact is maintained through the usual means, including 'email a prisoner', face to face visits, 'screen enabled' video call visits and by post. In-cell telephony throughout the jail enables prisoners to keep in touch with family and an approved list of others. Also see 'Storybook Dads' section 7.1.

The visiting hall in HMP Aylesbury is kept clean and tidy but is not an easy space to work with. It is up steep narrow stairs. When in full use, groups of visitors sit near each other and the introduction of the purpose-built booths for 'screen enabled' visits has reduced the overall space further. The IMB has reported previously on concerns regarding the safety of small children in the hall. This has been partially addressed by moving the small children play area to the back, but it is still poorly protected if any trouble should occur during visits. Prisoners with neurodiverse children have also pointed out to the IMB that the noise, business and proximity to others experienced in the visits hall can cause their children so much distress they do not wish to visit.

The charity Prisoner Advice and Care Trust (PACT) runs the visitor centre outside the prison. This is equipped for visitors to drop into before a visit. They also run the café in the visits hall with the help of prison orderlies. The PACT manager is active, and has introduced small improvements especially with children in mind.

As the prison began to improve through the year, four family days were held, with longer visiting hours and more activities provided for all the family to participate in. The most successful of these was the barbecue held in the summer on the field below the gym. Another was held in the gym. When the family days are held inside the visits hall, the problem of space persists. But even here, imaginative efforts from prison management saw the inclusion of a man showing the children live reptiles.

There is provision for disabled family members to visit but this is limited. The designated room is small and far from the entrance to the prison. It appears that, informally at least, priority is given to those with physical disabilities, leaving those with other needs, such as neurodiversity, lower on the list.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

A total of 114 prisoners were released from HMP Aylesbury in the reporting year, compared to 77 in the previous period. The increase may partly be explained by the impact of the government's SDS40 Early Release scheme, freeing prison capacity by releasing eligible prisoners at 40% rather than 50% of their sentence.

Aylesbury is a category C training, not a resettlement prison. Its overall provision is targeted at those in the middle of their sentence. It does not have services to prepare people for release, focusing instead on programmes and training. Furthermore, with the loss of the CFO3 (Creating Future Opportunities 3) funded post, there was no single member of staff responsible for putting in place essential factors, such as an officially recognised ID, for prisoners prior to release.

A December 2024 internal notice stated that the prison had restarted resettlement transfers, enabling prisoners to move to resettlement prisons with strong links into employment, housing and other services, from four weeks up to two years ahead of release. Although HMP Aylesbury is not resourced or staffed to provide more than the most basic preparation for release, the Board notes that prisoners are still being released direct from Aylesbury in increasing numbers and has recorded this concern for four consecutive years.

As a prisoner approaches his release date, responsibility for his ongoing sentence plan, and any external probation arrangements, moves from the probation staff employed within HMP Aylesbury to probation staff in the community, the community

offender manager (COM). The Probation Reform Programme's target operating model introduced changes to the pre-release approach, with the COM having more input to supporting resettlement planning. For people being released to places outside of their home area and/or from non-resettlement prisons, this support should be delivered via visits or by phone/video. Through the commissioned rehabilitative services, this support should include organising suitable accommodation.

This transition seldom appears to be smooth. We have been contacted by prisoners close to their release, not knowing whom their COM will be or having no opportunity to speak to the COM. This adds considerable anxiety to individual prisoners before release and undermines the chances of a smooth resettlement back into the community.

## 8. The work of the IMB

Many of the prisoners in HMP Aylesbury are experienced in the rules of prison and know some, or all, of their own rights. They engage quite freely with the IMB members asking for help with letters, with applications, following up on complaints and resolving wider frustrations.

The number of applications to the IMB showed few differences with last year; a slight increase in concerns within the 'discipline' category and a decrease in complaints about the interaction between staff and prisoner. Regular complaints, formal or informal, continue to arise from loss of property usually during transit, the difficulty with meeting OMU staff in a timely manner, the quality of available work or activity, and, slowly growing, the inexperience of some prison staff on the wings.

The IMB team was well below full complement but effective and we managed regular monitoring. Our monitoring is well organised. Using an electronically shared matrix, we ensure that each month all active parts of the prison are visited systematically. Most departments receive us well and share information willingly.

With the arrival of the new Governor in the summer we found our observations and feedback regularly led to more useful conversations and, when appropriate, clear impact.

Health and medical services continued to be a difficult area to monitor. By dedicating the efforts of a single monitor to this area we built some trust within that department. In this way we understand better what is happening in the health department. The necessity for patient confidentiality to be maintained at all times still means that monitoring health is delicate.

We made 290 visits to the prison in the year compared with 279 in 2023-24.

This small increase has given us a deeper understanding of the prisoner experience in HMP Aylesbury particularly within the early days after arrival. The team has improved the timeliness with which we meet and induct new arrivals.

We ran two recruitment exercises in the year. Three new monitors joined us. Unfortunately two left due to the demands of the role, and one through ill health. At this point one is still waiting to go through vetting. This year it is taking over twice as long to get through vetting than it was last year.

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	290

## Applications to the IMB

<b>Code</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Previous reporting year</b>	<b>Current reporting year</b>
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	2	4
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	7	15
C	Equality	2	4
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	5	7
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	10	8
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	7	1
F	Food and kitchens	4	4
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	14	15
H1	Property within the establishment	17	13
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	22	23
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	2	1
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	38	43
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	34	23
K	Transfers	9	6
L	Miscellaneous	6	13
	Total number of applications	179	180

## Annex A

Purposeful activity table, HMP Aylesbury, April 2024-March 2025. New activities introduced during this period are highlighted in yellow.

### Activity Spaces

Education				Work	
Course	Capacity	Schedule	Wks. /yr	Job	Capacity
English Entry	8	Mon – Thurs pm	45	Bikes	12
English 1 & 2	8	Mon - Frid am	45	Laundry	18
Maths Entry	8	Mon - Fri am	45	Food Packing	15
Maths 1 & 2	8	Mon - Thur pm	45	Signs	20
Barbering	8	Mon - Wed am Mon - Wed pm	42	Waste Management	20
Industrial Cleaning	10	Mon - Fri am Mon - Thur pm	42	Gardens	21
EDSQ/Employability	8	Tues - Fri am Tues - Thur pm	42	Upcycling (not opened until April 25)	10
Hospitality	6	Mon - Fri am Mon - Thur pm	42		
Health & Safety	8	Mon, Tues, Thur am	42	Kitchen	16
Customer Services		Mon, Tue pm		Gym Orderly	4
Warehousing	8	Mon, Wed, Thur, Fri am Mon, Wed, Thur PM	42	Wing Work	77
Reading & More	8	New provision in 2024/25, to give support to low level readers to help them progress into function skills. One day a week.	36	Visits Orderly	2

<b>Peer Mentoring</b>	8	7-8 sessions 4 times a year		<b>Reception Orderly</b>	1
<b>Education Peer Mentor</b>	8	Mon - Fri AM Mon - Thur PM	45	<b>Healthcare Orderly</b>	2
<b>Shannon Trust Learner</b>	8	Mon - Fri AM	Full	<b>Programmes Orderly</b>	1
<b>Shannon Trust Mentor</b>	8	Mon - Fri AM	Full	<b>Induction Orderly</b>	2
<b>Elite Rail</b>	12	Runs quarterly through DWP funding. Teaches and delivers a qualification in rail track safety and guarantees an job on release. Very popular.	20	<b>Chaplaincy Orderly</b>	2
<b>Roofing</b>	10	One off course due to DPS funding cut. Teaches various roofing installation and maintenance. Very popular.	4	<b>Seg Orderly</b>	2
<b>Education Orderly</b>	2	Mon - Fri AM Mon - Thur PM	Full	<b>Community Maintenance Team</b>	6
<b>Library Orderly</b>	1	Mon - Fri AM Mon - Thur PM	45	New initiative to improve the environment and to help improve prisoners' practical skills. Such as painting furniture assembly and general handyman skills.	
				<b>GFSL Orderly</b>	1
				<b>Industries Red Band</b>	1
				<b>Visits Red Band</b>	1
				All three Red band roles are to assist in there respective areas by moving un escorted around the Prison. These roles are to promote and aid	

				the staff these are very trusted positions.	
<b>Library Red Band</b>	1	Mon - Fri AM Mon - Thur PM	Full	<b>DARTs Mentors</b>	14

### Education results

Subject	Starts	Acheved	Transferred	Failed Course
English Entry 1	6	6	0	0
English Entry 2	15	15	0	0
English Entry 3	35	33	2	0
English Level 1	46	40	6	0
English Level 2	28	25	3	0
Maths Entry 1	1	1	0	0
Maths Entry 2	9	9	0	0
Maths Entry 3	34	33	1	0
Maths Level 1	40	29	6	5
Maths Level 2	17	9	4	4



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