



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Low Newton

**For reporting year
1 March 2025 to 28 February 2026**

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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 establishment¹

HMP/YOI Low Newton, near Durham, opened in 1965 as a remand centre, with four wings for young men up to the age of 21 and a separate wing for women of all ages, both on remand and sentenced.

The prison was re-roled as a women's prison in 1998, when it was refurbished. It now consists of seven residential wings, with general prisoner use areas, such as, for example, healthcare, education, gym and workshops.

One wing is for the induction of new prisoners. Another houses prisoners taking part in programmes designed to address mental health and personality disorders, in a psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE) pathway.

A third wing, which opened in 2022, consists of 24 individual modules within an outdoor area for low-risk prisoners who are judged ready for greater autonomy. One wing is for prisoners serving longer sentences. Two wings have recently been merged into one, and that, along with a further two wings, serves a general purpose. There is a small segregation unit, the care and separation unit (CSU), with capacity for three prisoners.

HMP/YOI Low Newton holds women aged 18 and over, including those on remand and those who have been sentenced. This includes women serving short sentences, those on licence sentences and those with restricted status (high security).

At the time of reporting, the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime, known as the operational capacity, is 298.

The actual number of prisoners has fluctuated during the year. At times, the prison has been full and unable to take more prisoners. However, for most of the year, numbers have been at more acceptable levels.

Most cells are single occupancy, with a small number designed for double occupancy. Adult prisoners and young offenders are integrated, and risk assessments are carried out to decide which wing a young offender should be placed on.

The senior management team (SMT) is in its second year of instigating and evaluating changes to the regime and culture of the establishment. These are generally well accepted and have been recognised in the recent inspection by HM Inspectorate Prisons (HMIP) as Low Newton 'setting the benchmark to which other prisons should aspire'.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- From the Board's observations, the reporting year has presented challenges for both staff and prisoners, including ongoing issues with unclean conditions in the care and separation unit (CSU).
- There has been an increase in both prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff assaults.
- The Board is concerned about the significant rise in self-harm, violence and use of force over the reporting year.

Fair and humane treatment

- The Board noted a short period of improvement in the transport of women to the establishment; however, there continue to be ongoing issues.

Health and wellbeing

- In the last weeks of the reporting year, a major gas leak in the establishment resulted in the loss of heating and hot water, though the prison managed to provide hot water and heating from other sources.
- There has been an increased number of family visits to support women maintaining family contact.

Progression and resettlement

- Board members have observed further improvements in how women are encouraged to maintain contact with their families and children, as well as a high level of support provided to help them cope with life outside prison. Nevertheless, we still have concerns about the number of women who are released without accommodation to go to.

Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The IMB at HMP/YOI Low Newton has, for several years, raised concerns about the number of severely mentally unwell women sent to prison. We are aware of the *Health of People in Prison, on Probation and in the Secure NHS Estate in England* report and have read the executive summary and recommendations published in November 2025. When will these recommendations be implemented in full, and what steps are being taken to ensure this happens without further delay?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- The Board has continued to closely monitor transport of women to the prison. Whilst there was a short-lived improvement in the service, there continue to be

issues, resulting in the Board writing to the Acting Director of PECS detailing our concerns. GeoAmey appears to operate to tight targets, but when these are not met, the consequences can be catastrophic, in our view. Mixed-sex transport continues to be used (a recent HMIP inspection report of the establishment recommended single-sex transport), toilet and sanitary provision remains inadequate and some women continue to experience lengthy journeys of up to seven hours. When will the Prison Service take decisive action to address these longstanding failings and commit to including operational staff and others with direct experience of women's transport in any review of transport and before the next contract takes effect?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Building on the last two years of change and innovation, will the Governor and the senior management team provide the Board with a clear and candid assessment of what has been achieved and where significant progress is still required?

Response to the previous report

To the Minister		
Issue raised	Response given	Progress
When can the Board expect severely mentally unwell women to be redirected to a more suitable environment?	A Mental Health and Justice Strategic Advisory Group is being developed, alongside a joint NHS England and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Women's Health and Social Care Review.	A Women's Justice Board has been created, and the Mental Health Bill is progressing. The Compass programme is also showing promising signs in reducing the frequency and the severity of acts of self-harm.

To the Prison Service		
Issue Raised	Response given	Progress
Can we expect the improved level of service in transport to be sustained?	HMPPS has placed emphasis on the performance of the transport provider to meet contractual obligations.	Improved tracking continues and local measures to ensure robust accountability to address unacceptable delays and behaviours.

To the Governor		
Issue raised	Response given	Progress
Will the Board be kept updated as to areas of success and those areas where further work is needed?	The Governor will continue to keep us aware of progress.	Board members observe briefings and meetings, which helps to ensure oversight of issues within the establishment. Good working relationships and transparency also continue.

Evidence Sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

Over the past two years, Board members have participated in live hostage events. These are realistic training exercises in which prison staff respond to a simulated hostage situation to practise procedures, test responses and improve preparedness for real incidents. They provide both staff and the IMB with valuable opportunities to practise and learn from these scenarios. We have also carried out night visits to the prison to observe night-state conditions, noting a generally calm and quiet atmosphere, with regular checks made by staff. Board members attend safety intervention, use of force, security and SMARG (segregation monitoring and review group) meetings periodically to observe how the prison addresses key issues and to understand the learning that arises from these discussions.

Safety survey 2025

During the summer of 2025, the Board member whose area of special interest (ASI) is safety conducted a comprehensive prisoner safety survey. Clear objectives were set, key tasks identified and an appropriate methodology established. The survey was carried out across the entire establishment, including residential wings, education areas and vocational workshops.

A total of 150 prisoners were interviewed individually, representing 54% of the prison population. In the Board's view, this provides a credible and statistically meaningful sample.

Summary of key findings:

Q1 – Experiences of threat or intimidation

- 99% (148 prisoners) reported that they had never been threatened at HMP/YOI Low Newton.

Q2 – Safety in the exercise yards

- 93% (140 prisoners) felt safe, or very safe, when using the exercise yards.

Q3 – Safety on residential wings

- 95% (142 prisoners) felt safe, or very safe, on their wing.

Q4 – Safety in showering areas

- 94% (141 prisoners) felt safe, or very safe, when using the showers.

Q5 – Overall feelings of safety

- 93% (139 prisoners) felt safe, or very safe, overall in the prison.

There was no evidence of any specific hotspots within the areas surveyed, and **no** significant differences were identified in the responses between locations across the prison. The survey sample was carefully balanced to reflect the profile of the population, ensuring that the findings provide a fair and representative picture of how women experience safety within the establishment.

4.1 Reception and induction

Reception has been painted and is kept clean and tidy by two very conscientious cleaners. There is a seating area, plus a kitchen where hot meals can be provided for late arrivals and tea and toast are provided for women being released each morning. Board members have continued to closely monitor arrivals to the prison. The recording system set up at the end of the last reporting year to monitor transport issues has continued to be used and a monthly copy sent to the IMB for its monthly meeting. In our view, it does not make for happy reading. Too often, women are transported on mixed-sex journeys, despite some showing physical signs of abuse and others travelling with male co-defendants. Toilet and sanitary provision is inadequate, and some journeys to the prison can last for several hours.

Some success has been achieved by joint working between the prison and IMB. The monthly reports from the Operations Governor made available to the board, weekly monitoring of reception (including speaking to staff and newly arrived women) and interviews conducted by two Board members provided sufficient evidence. This enabled us to escalate our concerns.

Although the Board has written to the Acting Director of the HMPPS Prison Escort and Custody Service (PECS) outlining these concerns, it has been left to the prison to contact two local male establishments. At meetings with these establishments and GeoAmey representatives, observed by Board members, some local protocols have been established. These have eased the situation slightly but they rely on the goodwill of governors at the other establishments.

The Board believes that contractors rely too heavily on statistics and may overlook the fact that a small percentage of failures can result in a significant number of women experiencing poor transport conditions to the prison.

Releases take place from the reception area. The Board considers these are well managed and various members of staff are present to provide and arrange support after release. The Board is concerned that women are given a large amount of information verbally at a time when they may be excited or anxious about their release, which may affect how well they understand what is being said, particularly in relation to licence conditions.

The Board acknowledges that the early days in custody are a critical period for the safety and wellbeing of women entering Low Newton. From our observations, the prison's management and frontline staff demonstrate a clear understanding of the heightened vulnerability associated with this stage and work proactively to ensure that new arrivals are supported appropriately.

The reception area is designed to be calm and non-intimidating, with a focus on meeting immediate welfare needs. From our observations, women are provided with essential information, reassurance and access to support services from the outset. The Board has observed that the environment is generally well managed and conducive to reducing anxiety during what is often a distressing transition.

A range of support mechanisms is available to women during their first hours and days in custody. These include:

- Community and safety representatives, who provide peer support and practical guidance.

- Healthcare staff, who conduct initial assessments and identify any urgent physical or mental health needs.
- Listeners, trained by the Samaritans, who offer confidential emotional support to other prisoners.
- The Board understands that a body scanner is ready for installation when the Government makes a policy decision on their use in the women' estate.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm

The Board remains concerned about the continued rise in self-harm at HMP Low Newton. During the reporting year, the prison recorded 1,595 incidents of self-harm, compared with 999 incidents in the previous year - an increase of almost 60%. The average number of incidents per month rose from 93 to 133, with a further escalation in the final quarter of the reporting year to an average of 192 incidents per month.

This sustained upward trend places significant pressure on staff and specialist services and highlights the ongoing challenges of managing a population with complex mental health needs and trauma histories.

Month	Incidents
March 2025	74
April 2025	42
May 2025	90
June 2025	115
July 2025	173
August 2025	81
September 2025	91
October 2025	193
November 2025	161
December 2025	184
January 2026	202
February 2026	189
Total	1,595

The percentage of total incidents attributed to the most prolific self-harmers remains consistently high throughout the year, reaching 95% in October and remaining above 80% for most months.

Month	% of total incidents
March 2025	68%
April 2025	55%
May 2025	70%
June 2025	84%
July 2025	76%
August 2025	67%
September 2025	77%
October 2025	95%
November 2025	80%
December 2025	81%
January 2026	85%
February 2026	83%

The Board notes that the prison manages an average of 12 women per month who self-harm frequently, often to a severe degree. Many present with entrenched trauma, personality disorders, and complex mental health needs, which exceed what a custodial environment can safely or effectively manage.

Managing this cohort places considerable demands on staff time, resilience and resources. Staff across the prison continue to demonstrate professionalism and compassion in extremely challenging circumstances. The Board has observed high levels of staff engagement in care and planning, consistent use of trauma-informed approaches, and strong multidisciplinary collaboration, with significant emotional demands placed on frontline staff.

Despite these efforts, the Board remains concerned that some individuals require specialist therapeutic care in secure hospital settings or other facilities better equipped to meet their needs.

The Board regularly observes both weekly and monthly safety intervention meetings (SIMs). These are consistently well attended by representatives from: residential units, healthcare, psychology, safer custody, chaplaincy, education and activities.

The Board finds that SIM meetings are effective in identifying women at heightened risk, reviewing and updating individual care plans, ensuring actions are followed up, sharing information across disciplines, monitoring patterns and emerging concerns. This structured approach contributes positively to the management of risk, although the scale of need continues to outstrip available specialist provision.

In the Board's view, the management of young offenders at Low Newton remains a notable strength. Behavioural issues have been minimal throughout the year, and young women identified as being at risk of self-harm or harm to others are monitored closely through the SIM process. Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of the distinct

needs of this age group and the Board commends the prison for maintaining a safe and supportive environment for them.

The Board is increasingly concerned that: the prison is being required to manage women whose needs are clinical rather than custodial and that the rise in self-harm is closely linked to unmet mental health needs.

The number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents (used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) opened during the reporting year increased to 439, compared with 337 in the previous year. This represents a significant rise and reflects the broader increase in self-harm, violence and use-of-force incidents across the establishment. Given the close relationship between these factors, the increase in ACCTs is consistent with the wider safety challenges faced by the prison.

Month	ACCTs
March 2025	27
April 2025	33
May 2025	38
June 2025	31
July 2025	43
August 2025	35
September 2025	35
October 2025	47
November 2025	39
December 2025	36
January 2026	46
February 2026	29
Total	439

The average number of active ACCTs remained broadly stable, at 36 per month, and the Board did not identify any specific seasonal or behavioural trends. Instead, the figures reflect a consistently high level of need among the population.

The Board continues to observe proactive and timely identification of women who may be at risk of harm to themselves or others. Staff demonstrate a strong understanding of the ACCT process and its importance in safeguarding vulnerable prisoners. The Board has seen that ACCTs form a central part of the SIMs where individual cases are reviewed in detail. These meetings ensure that risks are monitored, actions are followed up, and support plans remain responsive to changing needs.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction

Breakdown of violent incidents

Month	Assaults on staff	Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults	Fights
March 25	11	2	0
April 25	3	8	0
May 25	0	4	0
June 25	11	8	0
July 25	8	4	6
August 25	7	3	1
September 25	7	4	3
October 25	27	4	2
November 25	15	5	1
December 25	17	3	2
January 26	13	9	2
February 26	14	4	2

During the reporting year, a total of 210 acts of violence were recorded within the establishment. This represents a significant increase compared with the previous year's total of 132 incidents, with 78 more incidents noted.

Assaults on staff have risen sharply, increasing from 81 in the previous year to 133 in the current reporting year - a rise of 52 incidents.

The Board notes a concerning rise in violence at HMP Low Newton during the reporting year. Incidents of prisoner-on-prisoner violence increased from 36 in the previous reporting year to 58 in the current year, representing a significant escalation. Recorded fights also rose, from 15 to 19, continuing an upward trend.

Violence was not evenly distributed across the year. The first six months accounted for 76 incidents, while the second half of the year saw a sharp rise to 134 incidents, almost doubling the earlier period. This pattern indicates a sustained and worsening challenge in managing violent behaviour.

The escalation in violence is largely attributable to a small number of repeat offenders. On average, 64% of violent incidents each month were linked to the same individuals. Two prisoners in particular were responsible for a disproportionately high number of incidents and were assessed as having very high violence-related risk ratings.

The Board has observed that a small, entrenched cohort is responsible for nearly two-thirds of all violence. Several of these women present with complex personality disorders. Their behaviour is often unpredictable and resistant to standard interventions

and staff are frequently required to use necessary and, in the Board's view, proportionate force to prevent harm.

This group does not consistently respond to the support and behavioural interventions offered, despite the prison's efforts to provide structured and trauma-informed support.

The prison continues to use challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs) as its primary framework for managing violent or high-risk behaviour. CSIPs are tailored to the individual and involve close collaboration between custodial staff, psychology services, healthcare teams and safer custody personnel. This multidisciplinary approach aims to understand the underlying causes of violent behaviour and develop personalised strategies to reduce risk. The Board has observed that CSIP reviews are generally well attended, well documented and focused on achievable actions.

Board members have increased their monitoring of violence-related processes during the year, including frequent attendance at CSIP meetings and safer custody reviews. Through this engagement, the board has seen strong multidisciplinary cooperation, consistent efforts to manage high-risk individuals, staff professionalism in challenging and sometimes volatile situations and a clear commitment to reducing violence despite limited specialist resources.

The Board acknowledges the significant pressure placed on staff by the small cohort of highly violent prisoners and recognises the sustained efforts made to maintain safety across the establishment.

4.4 Use of force

During the reporting year, use of force (UoF) was administered on 574 occasions, representing a significant increase of 270 incidents compared with the previous year's total of 304. The Board has identified that this rise is largely attributable to the behaviour of two prisoners, referred to in this report as prisoner A and prisoner B, whose combined actions accounted for 371 incidents. Excluding these exceptional cases, the remaining 203 incidents provide a more representative picture of the establishment's overall UoF incidents.

Prisoner A

An individual presented with complex and high-risk behaviours over an extended period, requiring frequent staff intervention to prevent self-harm. These behaviours became increasingly challenging to manage over time. More recently, concerns have escalated further, including issues relating to living conditions.

The Board has frequently observed, through weekly UoF meetings and body worn video camera (BWVC) footage, that staff have acted promptly and professionally in extremely difficult circumstances, undoubtedly preventing loss of life, in the Board's view.

Prisoner B

An individual displayed consistently challenging and aggressive behaviour, resulting in repeated incidents requiring the use of force. These situations often required immediate staff intervention to prevent escalation and maintain safety on residential units.

The reasons for UoF during the reporting year fall into three principal categories:

- Prevention of self-harm: 52.3%

- Refusal to relocate: 23.3%
- Prevention of assaults or harm to others: 24.4%

The high proportion of incidents linked to self-harm reflects the complex needs of the population and corresponds with the Board's findings from our monitoring.

The Board notes a notable year-on-year improvement in the timely activation of body worn video cameras. BWVC footage was captured at an early stage in 91.3% of incidents, providing clear evidence of staff decision-making and proportionality. This represents good compliance with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) expectations and improves transparency and accountability. Use of force incidents are analysed in detail each week. Attendance at the meeting includes the Governing Governor, operational managers, frontline staff, healthcare, chaplaincy and other relevant personnel. A Board member attends these meetings regularly and has observed consistent identification of training needs, with appropriate follow-up actions.

The Board also observed that staff are commended for actions that prevent serious self-harm or harm to others, often in circumstances where they themselves have been subjected to assaults.

From our observations, staff act promptly and appropriately to prevent self-harm and serious harm to others. Prisoners are given opportunities to comply with instructions wherever time and risk levels allow. De-escalation techniques are used wherever possible, and any use of force is proportionate, necessary and justified.

The Board acknowledges the professionalism and resilience of staff, particularly in managing the exceptionally challenging behaviour of Prisoners A and B.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing and food

This reporting year has presented challenges for both staff and prisoners. These included ongoing unclean conditions in the care and separation unit (CSU) and, in the last weeks of the year, a major gas leak in the establishment, which resulted in the loss of heating and hot water. The senior management team (SMT) was able, through good management and support from other establishments and organisations in the region, to provide hot meals, showers and heating, but the leak has highlighted an establishment-wide issue that requires ongoing work.

The IMB routinely visits the wings as part of its monitoring and considers them to be generally clean. From our observations, orderlies (trusted prisoners who take on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison) undertake daily cleaning duties and laundry workers work diligently to ensure all laundry is washed, dried and returned in a timely manner. Orderlies have told us that they enjoy their work.

Board members regularly inspect the showers, which have been found to be clean; however, some are ageing and require updating. Some have already been updated, including those in the CSU.

Most of the cells are single occupancy but some have been supplied with bunk beds for double occupancy. It has not been necessary to introduce double occupancy cells during the reporting year. At the time of the HMIP inspection in November 2025, 96% of prisoners surveyed reported they were in a single cell.

As part of the prison's priorities, work is underway to improve cell decency and enhance the lived experience. Alongside this, the prison is replacing furniture and mattresses that do not meet fire-retardant standards.

This is taking some time and because of lack of available storage space, it has had an unfortunate impact on access to the Hive, which is an incentivised association space designed to offer a range of activities. The Board continues to monitor this.

It has not been possible to assess the impact of the Hive during the reporting year. It is hoped the prison can provide this information once access is fully restored and has been operational for an extended period of time without interruption.

The wing made up of modular units, J wing, is for low-risk women, including those who commit to substance-free living and those coming to the end of their sentences. Relationships observed by the IMB are positive, both between staff and prisoners and among prisoners themselves.

A programme of updating and refurbishment continues, with some wings in the main prison building having had floors replaced and redecoration. This work is ongoing and often challenging, given the age and lack of flexibility of an ageing prison building.

The outdoor environment remains popular and is well used, weather permitting. Planting around the grounds is refreshed seasonally by prisoners working in the gardens under instruction. Work is underway to complete a fishpond and raised beds, and prisoners will be involved in the maintenance of these projects.

The prison now has two aviaries, with a number of different bird species. A prisoner has been allocated responsibility for the aviaries. Planting around the aviaries has been improved and provides a peaceful environment for both reflection and enjoyment.

Elected wing representatives attend the monthly meetings of the prisoner consultative committee (PCC). They are joined by the Governor, alongside the head of residential. These meetings provide an opportunity for the wing representatives to raise issues and work together to reach solutions.

When observed by the IMB, there is clear evidence of positive working relationships, with prisoners on the PCC holding officers to account for progress on issues in an open and constructive atmosphere.

The tuck shop, used by prisoners and staff, continues to be popular. Prisoners make an appointment to visit it and access is spread evenly across all wings. The stock is regularly updated and frozen food has been introduced, which has proved to be popular.

The two prisoners who run the shop report brisk business and regularly review stock with a view to introducing new items for sale, some of which are seasonal. They report that they enjoy the added responsibility of maintaining and ordering stock, etc. The success of the tuck shop is to be credited in part to the prisoners working there. The IMB regularly visits the shop and notes positive working relationships.

IMB members visit the kitchen on each monitoring round and find the food to be varied and of a reasonable quality. When sampled, it is generally found to be enjoyable. The menu caters for a range of dietary needs, including vegetarian, vegan and halal options.

The kitchen works with colleagues across the prison to meet the dietary needs of prisoners. Healthcare and the chaplaincy play a key role in this.

Prisoners help prepare the food for other prisoners each day in the kitchen. They are trained in food safety and undertake a wide variety of activities. Kitchen work can provide a basis for a career when a prisoner is released.

There is significant evidence of positive relationships between prisoners and staff, with prisoners reporting that they enjoy the work.

The kitchen manager surveys the prisoners, asking for their opinions about the food and other matters such as portion sizes, whether more healthy foods should be provided and suggestions for future menu choices. There is a well-established food group, which meets regularly; the minutes have been shared with the IMB.

There is a food comments book available for prisoners, which is regularly reviewed by the Board. The last time we checked the book, we noted many positive comments, with words such as 'delicious' and 'fantastic' used to describe the food. Prisoners also reported enjoying the Christmas lunch.

Ramadan and Eid were celebrated, with input from prisoners and the chaplaincy. Other celebrations included Easter, Christmas and Diwali. During the summer, the kitchen introduced a salad bar, which proved popular and promoted healthy eating.

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit (CSU) consists of three cells and has a dedicated team of trained and experienced staff.

Board members now observe adjudications (disciplinary hearings held when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules) and good order or discipline (GOoD), alternative clothing and ACCT reviews when possible. They observe great care being taken in these reviews to ensure that women are included in any decision; that they understand what is happening; and that a fair outcome is achieved.

Unfortunately, the last four months of the reporting year saw the CSU staff having to cope with unclean conditions (this can include excessive dirt or waste, such as bodily waste; blocked or damaged toilets or showers; and strong odours and unsafe living conditions) associated with two prisoners. Specialist cleaning and waste disposal services have had to be used during unclean conditions. This has been a challenging process, and, at one point, Board members decided to monitor the situation by phone for three weeks while work was carried out to replace a damaged shower.

This decision helped reduce footfall in what was an increasingly difficult and unpleasant environment, despite the best efforts of staff. The CSU staff are seen to work well together and are to be commended for their continued professionalism and resilience.

During the reporting year, 80 women have been held in the CSU, with 26 individuals spending a total of 774 days.

Ten women were held whilst an ACCT was open, spending a total of 42 days on this level of support. One prisoner was held in the CSU for more than three months (170 days in total over a 12-month period). Use of force was applied on 181 occasions, including 17 instances to support the relocation of women to the CSU.

Reason for location in the CSU	Number of days
Assaults on staff	70
Assaults on another prisoner	40
Drugs (finds, intelligence)	63
Behaviour (e.g. refusing a direct order)	75
Management decision/awaiting location	66
Involved in unclean conditions	47

More than half of the women held in the CSU were white, of Christian or no faith and in the 30-39 year old age group.

Monthly adjudication statistics are reviewed by members at Board meetings.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships

During monitoring visits, IMB members observe and report that relationships between staff and prisoners are good.

Board members can see that wing staff have good knowledge of prisoners and are happy to share and advise when necessary. At the time of the HMIP inspection, in November 2025, 81% of prisoners surveyed confirmed that staff treated them with respect.

Board members regularly meet with prisoners subject to ACCT procedures, who are generally aware of the reasons for the ACCT and the support it provides. From the Board’s observations, documentation was reviewed and updated throughout the reporting year.

The Board member who monitors most monthly safety meetings and reports back to the Board each month continues to find that there is in-depth knowledge of the prisoners who are of concern and are discussed in detail at the meetings.

Ongoing staff shortages continue to affect the regime, and this is an issue frequently raised by prisoners during monitoring visits. This can limit opportunities to build and maintain effective relationships and, for some prisoners, may have a negative impact on their mental health and overall wellbeing. Increased time spent in cells as a result of staff shortages further exacerbates this. The Board will continue to monitor the situation.

Whilst access to the Samaritans has been maintained throughout the reporting year, access to the Listener service has not always been available.

5.4 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy team plays an integral role in supporting prisoners through the good and bad times, by carrying people through grief, crisis and change.

The IMB knows from conversations with prisoners during its monitoring visits, how much the prisoners rely on the service and how much it is appreciated.

The chaplaincy's role as a safe, compassionate and non-judgemental space for both prisoners and staff is central throughout the prison.

Support is provided from induction through to release, including early-days care, faith services, wellbeing and therapeutic provision, community partnerships, personal growth initiatives, family and seasonal support and resettlement work.

Key areas include practical and emotional support for new residents, inclusive faith and pastoral care, therapeutic spaces such as the oasis, memorial and remembrance activities and strong links with community organisations to support continuity after release.

The chaplaincy team offers regular services, pastoral care and faith-specific support for: Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Latter Day Saints, Quakers, Pagan communities and more. Additional chaplains have visited during the reporting year for Orthodox Christianity, Hinduism and Judaism.

The chaplaincy team also offers the following:

- Baptism services.
- Groups to explore faith: Alpha course, Grace Course, Battle for the Mind and Methodist way of Life, and Bible studies.
- Live-link services for those unable to attend funerals in person.
- A service on the induction wing.
- A growing choir group supporting expression, confidence and community.

5.5 Incentives schemes

The incentives scheme continues to encourage positive behaviour by focusing less on removing privileges from those who do not comply and more on offering better opportunities to prisoners on the standard (middle) and enhanced (top) level of the scheme. The Board believes this approach is effective, as evidenced by good attendance at evening activities in the Hive, increased association time and improvements in accommodation. However, it is unfortunate that, towards the end of

the reporting year, the Hive had to be used to store new fire-retardant beds, which took it out of use for evening activities. A Board member remains in regular contact with the relevant governor to monitor the prompt return to normal use.

5.6 Complaints

At each of the monthly board meetings, the IMB receives a comprehensive set of data on complaints received by the prison during the month. This identifies the category of complaint; how many complaints were made by each wing; and which prisoners submitted the most complaints.

The report identifies any developing trends that can be explored further; at present, there are no concerning patterns in the data. We use this information, together with our observations, to verify findings. We also use the data to examine complaints in more detail, such as, for example, focusing on a particular category or those raised by an individual prisoner.

The IMB has started to review Comp 1 (ordinary complaints) forms to ensure compliance with policy and procedure. This review includes meeting with prisoners; so far, the majority of complaints have been responded to within the statutory seven-day timeframe.

5.7 Property

If a prisoner arrives at Low Newton without any belongings, clothing can be provided from donated items held in reception, along with women's specific prison-issue clothing, which is restocked on a regular basis. Orderlies manage this stock and prepare packs for all new arrivals, which may include toiletries.

Reception continues to manage prisoner property, although the Board receives a small number of applications (prisoners' written representations) relating to property. Most of these are redirected to reception, and prisoners are encouraged to speak to wing staff in the first instance.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Health and wellbeing are at the heart of the Board's monitoring function at Low Newton. Board members visit the healthcare unit on nearly every monitoring visit. There are usually several prisoners receiving in-patient care at any one time. Where possible, Board members aim to engage with prisoners; however, this is not always feasible, and prisoners are not always responsive.

Usually, prisoners are in-patients because they have serious mental health or behavioural issues. It seems to be the exception for a prisoner to be in the healthcare unit with what might be called general physical health needs. Managing prisoners with mental health or behavioural issues often places significant strain on the prison regime, requiring substantial staff time and frequently disrupting others within the unit. Capacity in the CSU is not always sufficient, and some prisoners in the healthcare unit have caused damage to rooms and property, as well as being verbally abusive. The Governor and senior management team (SMT) introduced several new measures aimed at improving the general wellbeing of prisoners. These included such things as curtains and chairs in the cells and improvements to the internal environment. Improvements have also been made to the external environment, with changes to the grounds and the addition of an aviary.

From our observations, staffing levels are generally good. However, an attempt is being made to recruit more agency nurses, and adverts have been placed for new pharmacy staff.

Healthcare clinics held at Low Newton				
Clinic	No. of clinics	Frequency	No. of patients	Appointment length in minutes
Blood	5	Weekly	5	10
Dressings	5	Weekly	Up to 5	10
BBV*	2	Weekly	8	15
Physio	2	Monthly	8	20
GP	2	Weekly	8	15
Long-term conditions	2	Weekly	5	15
Dental	6	Weekly	Depends on work needed	15-30
CaSH**	2	Monthly	6	30
X-ray	1	Monthly	Up to 10	15
USS***	1	Monthly	Up to 10	15
ANP****	6	Weekly	8	15
Pharmacy	2	Weekly	6	10
Buvidal	3	Weekly	Up to 6	10
Smear	1	Weekly	Up to 8	15
Podiatrist	2	Monthly	8	20
Neurology	1	Bi-monthly	Up to 4	30
Epilepsy	1	Bi-monthly	Up to 4	30
Colposcopy	2	Monthly	Up to 4	30
Opticians	2	Monthly	6	30

Teledent		When needed	Up to 4	30
Weight management	4	Monthly	Up to 8	10

*Bloodborne viruses

**Contraception and sexual health

***Ultrasound scan

****Advanced nurse practitioners

The Board welcomes the report, published in November 2025, on prisoners' health, *The Health of People in Prison, on Probation and in the Secure NHS Estate in England*, by Professor Chris Whitty. From our own experience, we recognise much of what is said, particularly regarding the women's estate, whilst we acknowledge the good work that goes on already in Low Newton.

6.2 Physical healthcare

The healthcare unit has some residential cells and facilities such as waiting and examination rooms. The unit is cleaned by prisoners, who seem to be proud of the work that they do. However, cleanliness is seen as an issue and healthcare staff are completing cleaning work to maintain standards.

Some of the residential healthcare cells share a landing with outpatient waiting rooms and services. It can be difficult to maintain a stable regime if prisoners are disruptive, shouting and misbehaving. It also makes it difficult to introduce regimes to enhance the experience of residential patients, as it conflicts with the movement of the outpatients.

Outpatient services such as the GP, dentist and optician are provided on a regular basis, and the Board has no concerns about waiting times. There is sometimes a tension between the role of the healthcare workers and that of the officers, particularly when staff are dispensing medicines and feel they are being interrupted.

6.3 Mental health

The IMB maintains a good relationship with members of the mental health team (MHT) and is supported when making enquiries. Good relationships with other stakeholders in the prison is a key feature of the work undertaken by the MHT.

Board members still have concerns about the number of prisoners presenting with severe mental ill health or severe behavioural issues. The healthcare unit or the CSU often proves to be the most appropriate place to locate them, as they provide quiet environments with caring staff who work as a team in dealing with the various issues with which they are presented. As noted above, some of these prisoners can be very abusive and disruptive. It is clear that the prison is still, at times, being used as a place of safety for individuals with mental health needs.

Caring for severely ill prisoners requires all staff to work together to achieve the best possible outcome. The CSU and the healthcare unit now have a dedicated team of disciplined staff, who have developed expertise and liaise with healthcare staff and the MHT. Some prisoners still require a move to a mental health bed in the community and waiting times for such a place have been lengthy.

Board members are still concerned about the necessary resources that may or may not be available in the community to support women who are released with such severe

issues or in distress. Prisoners often voice concerns to Board members regarding their worries about potentially having no accommodation to go to when they are released. They also note worries about going to a hostel, which they fear may undo the work done in the prison on their recovery.

The Women's Estate Psychology Service (WEPS) provides a range of programmes across the women's estate to address offending behaviour and support the safety agenda. Specifically in Low Newton, these include the Hope programme, Working with Anger and Compass.

One programme is Hope, delivered to new receptions and designed to give prisoners the basic tools to manage their emotions. As part of this, a 'Me' document is developed, in which the prisoner sets out what, in their view, would help them move forward considering their past. This document is then shared with other relevant staff members. The second programme, Compass, is a trauma-based intervention therapy that looks at emotions and their link to trauma. Places are limited, with two courses delivered each year for six participants at a time. One of the keys to participation is an acceptance by the prisoner of a desire to change.

These programmes and, in general, work with a prisoner to change behaviour depend on the prisoner having sufficient time left on their sentence. Courts sentencing women to short sentences and early release schemes either mean work cannot be started or sometimes disrupt ongoing work.

6.4 Social care

Last year, the prison developed a palliative care service for those prisoners who do not wish to use such services in the community. When visiting healthcare board members monitor the way it operates and appreciate the support and flexibility given to patients.

Board members have noted the positive way prisoners support each other in times of crisis. They are supported by staff who, we note, are extremely knowledgeable about the prisoners and any issues they may be having.

6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The drug and alcohol rehabilitation team (DART) continues to offer a wide range of services each week at Low Newton. Prisoners working with the team are allocated their own co-ordinator, who provides individual support.

A Board member regularly observes the multi-disciplinary drugs strategy meetings and has noted close working relationships among the various departments. Whilst drug finds and positive drug tests continue, every effort is made to identify the substance and encourage prisoners into substance-free living.

DART trains staff volunteers in the use of naloxone (a treatment to reverse opioid overdose) and is extending this training to the families of prisoners. All prisoners are offered naloxone on release and are referred to recovery services in their home areas.

DART staff regularly ask prisoners what could be provided to help with their recovery. The Board understands that funding has been secured to purchase arts and crafts materials for use in self-care and relaxation groups.

6.6 Soft skills

From the Board's observations, an increasing emphasis is placed on soft skills in Low Newton.

The prison has appointed several prisoner mentors, including Listeners and Shannon Trust mentors, as well as mentors in other areas. Some hold 'red band' status, allowing them to work largely independently and with greater freedom of access across the prison.

The gym offers a variety of sessions on dealing with stress and staff are working with psychology to offer the Hope programme, which incorporates yoga and mindfulness.

The charity Junction 42 has been active in the prison for several years, offering creative arts sessions that help with confidence and self-esteem issues. It also helps with 'through-the-gate' resettlement concerns and can offer phones, clothing and transport. In addition, it has been very successful in encouraging participation in the Koestler Art competition (a charity and national arts awards scheme for people in the criminal justice system) and has been awarded platinum status.

The charity Fine Cell Work operates with a small number of prisoners, who spend many hours producing high-quality needlework that is made into cushions. The women involved have told Board members how much they benefit from this activity, which requires close attention to detail and helps to take their minds off other issues. Some spend over 100 hours of their own time on individual projects.

Regular family visits are arranged each month for prisoners' children, partners and other family members. At Christmas, each child received a handmade card and gift.

Unfortunately, funding has been withdrawn for the departure lounge, which was run by the NEPACS (North East Prisoners' After Care Society) charity and provided much needed support in many areas on the day of release.

7. Progression and Resettlement

7.1 Education and library

The head of education, skills and work oversees all education, library and skills-based activities. Provision is monitored through regular quality improvement group (QIG) meetings, supported by themed learning walks and ongoing identification of staff training needs.

Novus provides education and vocational training.

All women should be interviewed and assessed during induction to determine their educational requirements. They are then provided with learning or work appropriate to their needs. Education, vocational training and work opportunities should be available to both remand and sentenced prisoners.

Over 77% of prisoners have an identified additional need:

% of population with declared need	77.57%
out of this %:	
Cognition and learning	16.68
Social, emotional and mental health	67.65
Communication and interaction	8.33
Sensory and physical	7.35

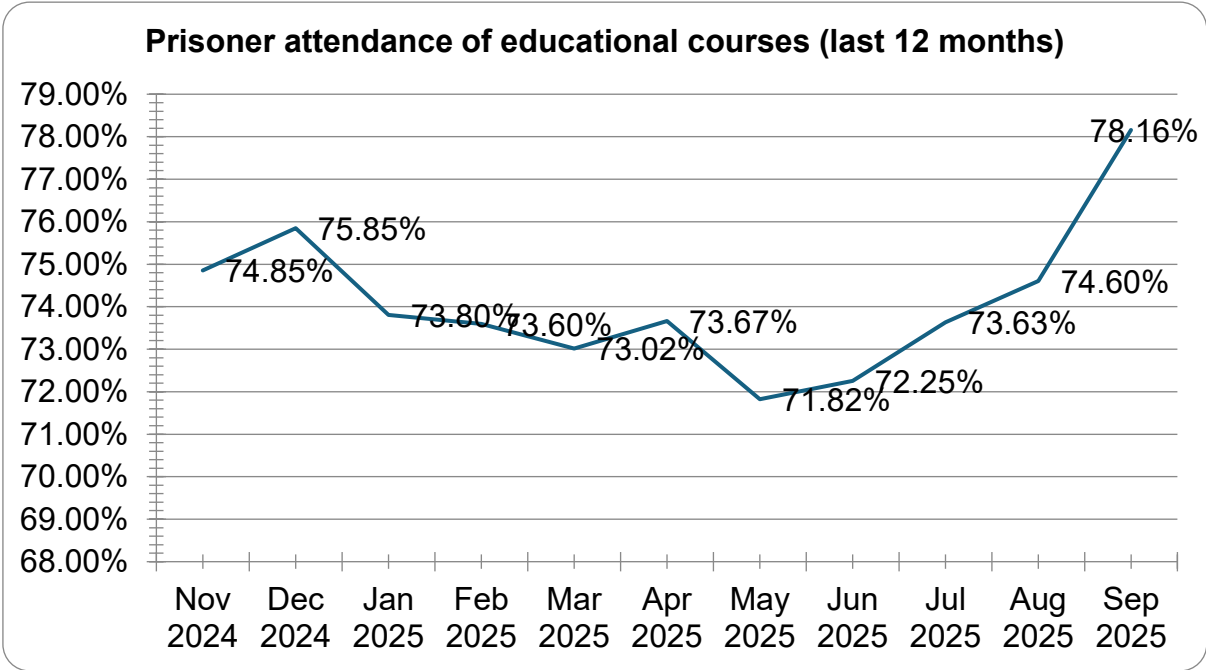
There are 90 places in education, including ten peer mentor roles. Mentors are well trained and support women new to the course, as well as ongoing learners. Average attendance is around 75%, with absences generally due to legitimate reasons such as medical appointments. The Annual Supportive Review (February 2025) reported extremely positive behaviour and attitudes, alongside strong development of wider skills and reading abilities. Current priorities focus on meeting the requirements of the new PES (prisoner education contract) contract and associated KPIs (key performance indicators).

Board members visit the education department regularly and engage with learners, who consistently express positive views about their experience. The atmosphere is calm and orderly. The women speak highly of teachers and instructors. Courses offered include English and maths from Pre-Entry to Level 2, as well as:

- Essential digital skills (Entry 3 and Level 1)
- Business and retail (Level 2)
- Hairdressing (Levels 1, 2 and 3)
- Beauty (Levels 2 and 3)
- LED gel polish technology (Level 2)
- Food production (Levels 1, 2 and 3)
- Hospitality (Level 2)
- Barista skills (Level 2)

A high proportion of women complete their courses and achieve qualifications.

There is also a range of provision delivered by third-party providers, such as employment coaching (People Plus), which provides one-to-one accredited support for prisoners in non-PEF (prison education framework) and non-industries based workplaces, as well as the BEAM programme (employability support). BEAM is a four-week employment-based course delivered across six cohorts, providing targeted support to develop employability skills and strengthen links to employers and housing.



Staff have received training in recognising radicalisation risks, using digital resources in teaching, applying recall techniques to support learning, and supporting women with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities). Interviews indicate a high level of understanding among prisoners regarding radicalism and extremism.

Although education funding reductions from 1 October have led to some reduction in work hours, particularly in English and maths, this does not appear to have significantly affected women’s overall educational experience, and the breadth of courses has been maintained.

The aim is for the curriculum to work flexibly for prisoners on remand or serving short sentences, as well as for those serving longer and life sentences. Prisoners are supported to develop key interpersonal and functional skills, and to identify pathways into employment, with the tools needed to achieve progressive goals during their time at Low Newton.

A summer initiative with a local writer resulted in the publication of *Tales from Low Newton*, which has been submitted for a local cultural award. It is a set of stories written by prisoners. This is part of the Writers on the Tyne scheme.

Reading strategies are in place to help non-readers and emerging readers. Some of these readers are supported by Shannon Trust mentors and by the addition of adult easy readers in the library. Two of the Shannon Trust mentors are trained to support in education and one in the workshops.

There is a Monday morning reading group that prisoners with low reading levels can attend before work or education. Also, there is a new reading room in the education department. This neurodiverse-friendly space provides a calm and quiet environment for women to use. It was set up after Ofsted (the government body that inspects and rates the quality of education, skills and training) praised similar relaxed reading spaces in other parts of the prison, and can also be used as a reward.

Two of the Shannon Trust mentees have now passed their assessments and will have a graduation ceremony in April. They are now working on functional skills in education.

There is a full calendar of events, including as International Women's Day, Holocaust Day, Black History Month and Remembrance Sunday. These help women to develop team working as well as an understanding of diverse cultures. They are supported by Shannon Trust mentors who are also library orderlies. Where possible, Board members observe these special events.

Neurodivergence

The neurodiversity support manager (NSM) helps ensure that all prisoners can access education or work and receive the appropriate level of support for their needs. This enables them to make effective progress. One example of this is the reduced timetable scheme.

The neurodivergence team has developed a learning disabilities and difficulties (LDD) catalogue to help staff access appropriate support for neurodivergent women entering education. A monthly newsletter is produced and is well received by staff. The protocol for use of the sensory room is being revised to ensure consistent and safe access and to mitigate potential issues.

7.2 Vocational training and work

Unemployment rates are low, and average attendance is around 81%, with the same caveat as for education attendance, as prisoners may need to attend appointments during the working day.

Horticulture and gardens have recently achieved seven qualifications: five awards, one certificate and one diploma.

Industries, retail, catering and physical education at HMP Low Newton provide prisoners with the opportunity to work to commercial standards and gain valuable sector-based skills and qualifications that can be used when they are released. They have launched Threads of Hope, a community engagement project, which will manufacture bags for life for food banks and kits for the homeless using recycled clothing. Workshop participants have also been producing bags for HMP Deerbolt, which are given to the men on reception for storing toiletries packs and for use by the mental health team.

The main contract involves working with a company that recycles unwanted linens from hotels and hospitals. These are cleaned and made into laundry bags by the women. The bags are then sent to participating organisations to collect unwanted fabrics, which are subsequently recycled. Without this process, these materials would otherwise go to landfill.

The gym remains a popular area, offering a range of accredited courses. Achievements include:

- 14 women completing Level 1 Fitness and Physical Activity
- Women completing Emergency First Aid at Work
- 14 women completing Level 1 Manual Handling

A Bounce Back programme has been introduced, including for neurodivergent women. Each week focuses on a different theme, encouraging reflection and journalling. Feedback indicates the programme has been successful.

Three women completed a Level 3 qualification prior to release. This is an industry-standard requirement for personal trainers. Two have already secured employment as personal trainers, and one was invited to speak at a national gym staff conference, where her contribution was reportedly very well received.

Gym courses from Level 1 to Level 3 include a first aid qualification, helping equip women with skills relevant to future employment. From our observations, staff work to ensure that women have sufficient time to complete their qualifications before release. Emergency First Aid at Work and Manual Handling training has also been delivered to staff.

Date	Qualification	Number of Qualifications
January 2025	STAFF First Aid at Work	9
	Manual Handling and Lifting	6
	EFAAW	6
	Emergency First Aid at Work	6
February 2025	AIQ Level 3	2
March 2025	None	
April 2025	STAFF Emergency First Aid at Work	6
	AIQ Level 1	6
	Manual Handling and Lifting	6
May 2025	STAFF First Aid at Work	6
	Emergency First Aid at Work	6
July 2025	STAFF First Aid at Work	9
August 2025	Manual Handling and Lifting	8
September 2025	Emergency First Aid at Work	8
October 2025	AIQ Level 3	1
November 2025	STAFF Emergency First Aid at Work	3

7.3 Offender management and progression

Work has continued throughout the year to upskill key work officers to improve the quality of recording that occurs. Sessions are recorded on the digital prison system (DPS) using the CRISS ('check-in, review, intervention, summarise, set tasks') model, which was recognised as working well at the HMIP inspection in October 2025. The Board agrees with this assessment from its conversations with prisoners, especially after resettlement boards.

The prison continues to seek release on temporary licence (ROTL) opportunities.

Unfortunately, funding was withdrawn from NEPACS, which had been successfully running the 'departure lounge' outside the prison and provided a wide range of support to prisoners on release. This has been a significant loss, which the prison has sought to mitigate. Board members have regularly observed the release of prisoners and the services currently available to them. The prison has various agencies on hand at release, but it is a process which tends to lack the personal touch of the NEPACS workers.

7.4 Family Contact

NEPACS continues to support family contact and family days, with the prison having increased the number of these over the past year. Play workers are available during all visits.

The family team liaises with social services, schools and families to help maintain and restore women's relationships with their loved ones. It has also made effective use of release on temporary licence (ROTL) opportunities; for example, enabling one woman to meet her child and the child's carer to buy new school shoes for the new term.

7.5 Reducing reoffending

Opportunities across the prison, including DART, education, employment and other support services, are designed to reduce reoffending. These are further strengthened by psychological interventions such as the Hope programme, which supports women in their early days in custody, and courses such as Working with Anger.

The overall provision is closely managed right across the prison, with risk assessments and careful oversight of contractual delivery resulting in around 98% attendance at activities and around 80% of women being offered accommodation on release. Despite these efforts, the Board remains concerned about the number of women who do not have accommodation to go to when they are released and the risk this poses to their safety and stability in the community.

A therapy dog regularly visits the prison to great acclaim and Board members have witnessed the calming effect this has on many women.

The prison has rolled out Behind the Behaviour training for staff, with the aim of supporting staff to gain a deeper awareness about how people respond in crises, as well as to learn skills to enable them to effectively meet the needs of women in distress without escalating the situation.

7.6 Resettlement planning

Board members observe resettlement boards. This process was bedded in during the last reporting year and is well attended by various agencies, either in person or via video conferencing. Women attend in the two weeks prior to release and are

encouraged to participate and discuss how their needs for resettlement are being met. Advice and support are provided to help women obtain photo identification, open a bank account and access addiction treatment, as well as mental and physical health services. Appropriate appointments are also arranged, including with their probation officer in the community. Transport to their home areas seems to be difficult in many cases, as women come to Low Newton from a wide geographical area that is not always well served by public transport.

The Board's principal concern remains the number of women, many of whom are already highly vulnerable, being released without accommodation. This situation often leads to recall to custody. Our discussions with some of these women suggest that, while they recognise the support available, they feel a sense of inevitability about poor outcomes. During the reporting year, 371 of 1,030 receptions to the prison were recalls (36%), many of which the Board believes are linked to the absence of stable accommodation.

8. The work of the IMB

Two new members have completed their training and are now working independently, and a further member joined the Board at the end of 2024. Two members continue to serve on a dual-Boarding basis, also sitting on IMBs at other prisons in the area.

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 reporting period	6
Total number of visits to the establishment	228

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	4	3
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	0	5
C	Equality	2	4
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	4	1
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	3	2
E2	Finance including pay, private monies, spends	2	5
F	Food and kitchens	5	3
G	Health, including physical, mental and social care	9	8
H1	Property within the establishment	3	3
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	0	1
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	0	2
I	Sentence Management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	1	4
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	11	8
K	Transfers	1	0
L	Miscellaneous	1	4
	Total number of applications	46	53



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