



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Berwyn

**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

Berwyn is located on Wrexham Industrial Estate in North Wales. It was envisaged as a reception, category C resettlement (45%) and training (45%) prison for men, but now also accommodates remand and category B prisoners (10%; who do not require the highest level of security, but still need to be kept in secure prisons to prevent escape, and includes four vulnerable prisoner (VP) communities. It is a modern prison, with an operating capacity of 2000 (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the prison). The prison consists of three main houses, or residential blocks: Alwen, Bala and Ceiriog, plus Ogwen, a care and separation unit (CSU), which can hold 21 prisoners. Each house is divided into eight wings. About 30% of cells are single occupancy and 70% are double occupancy. The double occupancy cells were designed as such.

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

- In common with the rest of the prison estate, HMP Berwyn experiences continued ingress of drugs. While measures are being taken to counter this at HMP Berwyn, even very small packages can contain enough drugs to last a prisoner weeks or months. Our monitoring has shown that a great deal of work is being carried out at the prison to address and manage the situation.
- Incidents of prisoners being found under the influence (UTI) of an illicit substance, as well as violent incidents, remain high, although they have fallen from a spike early in 2025. Fear of violence and boredom exacerbate this. In particular, use of illicit substances fuels both debt and violence, which is often referred to in segregation (good order or discipline, or GOoD) reviews and adjudications (hearings when prisoners have been charged with rule-breaking).
- HMP Berwyn has introduced a new BASICs approach (a structured framework setting expectations for staff behaviour, consistency and safety) to managing the wings (see section 5.3), with the aim of improving safety for both men and officers. However, our monitoring confirms reports from the Governors that there remain issues of consistency and culture among less experienced officers.
- The Board is seriously concerned about the designation of HMP Berwyn as the receiving prison for young people in the youth estate and secure children's homes on turning 18 years old. In our view, the sheer size of Berwyn means that providing the necessary support for and ensuring the safety of individuals is a potential challenge.

Fair and humane treatment

- Accommodation is generally good and is kept clean. Population pressures have meant that the rolling programme of cell redecoration is difficult to sustain. Repairs and general maintenance can take too long to complete. However, there are low numbers of applications, also known as apps (these are prisoners' written representations to the IMB) about accommodation.
- It was reported last year that heating issues had been resolved, but that is no longer the case. The need to install temporary boilers has resulted in significant costs and the problem is still outstanding.
- New healthy food menus have been introduced and have been well received. The kitchen makes every effort to meet special dietary requirements.
- From the Board's observations, substantial effort has gone into improving the opportunities for Welsh speaking prisoners, including access to TV and radio channels in Welsh. The appointment of more Welsh speaking staff and officers is a priority.
- There have been problems with delays in the complaints system. This has been the subject of a large number of applications to the IMB.
- During the year, the number of VP wings increased to four as a result of the decision of the Prison Service to transfer more VPs to Berwyn. This has had

an impact on how the prison manages their movements and what can be offered in terms of courses and activities.

Health and wellbeing

- The scale of turnover in the population has a significant impact on healthcare and wellbeing services. On-site paramedics have improved care in emergency cases, reducing the numbers needing hospital admission. The health and wellbeing helpline, operated by prisoners, appears to be effective and is much appreciated.
- Although Berwyn is in Wales, a large proportion of its prisoners come from England. The IMB has noted that this can cause delays and difficulties with the provision of healthcare services, as they transfer from one system to another.
- The continued long waits for specialist mental health accommodation are stressful for prisoners and staff, who are not equipped to deal with severe mental illness. However, additional training is being introduced for staff and there is a move to pro-active, rather than reactive, management.
- Building Choices is the new generation suite of offending behaviour programmes (see section 6.3) and offers moderate and high intensity strands of the programme to different offending cohorts. It follows a national prioritisation criteria including consideration of parole or release dates. Due to the population turnover this can create issues for men who are on the waiting list. New arrivals with a closer release date may take priority, which can result in complaints and applications about perceived unfairness.
- From our observations, drug and alcohol rehabilitation is a priority for the prison and an ongoing challenge. The independent substance free living programme is due to replace the drugs recovery programme. There is great concern on the part of the substance Misuse service and the Board about the health impact of homemade chemical compounds used in psychoactive substances; staff are seeing symptoms similar to ketamine use, which is very serious.

Progression and resettlement

- Population turnover is continuing to create problems in addressing meaningful preparation for release and resettlement. This has been exacerbated by the sequence of early release and short-term recall schemes.
- Probation services are still not fully staffed and are unsettled by the current OMIC (offender management in custody) review, which aims to rebalance resources between prisons and the community.
- The resettlement hub continues to maintain and develop relationships with local authorities and charities in Wales and England to help ease the difficulties of securing accommodation and accessing services on release. However, Wrexham Borough Council continues to be the exception (see section 7.5).

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- How will the Minister reduce or mitigate the systemic disruption to release planning and preparation caused by early release schemes, and the increased workload on already over-stretched staff resulting from by sentence recalculations and pre-release checks?
- Does the Minister consider that sufficient progress has been made to meet the needs of men with significant mental health needs in the prison system? If not, what further action is planned to address the remaining gaps in provision?
- What urgent action will the Minister take to address the persistent cross-border issues that adversely affect English prisoners who are jailed in Wales?
- What concrete steps will be taken to secure the resources needed to address long-standing infrastructure failures? For example, the heating system required expensive hired temporary boilers all winter in every building despite previous attempts to repair it. It is now understood that the original contractor is no longer engaged.
- How will the Minister ensure that the design and specification failures experienced at HMP Berwyn (including the heating system and lack of facilities for prisoners on the enhanced level of the incentives scheme) are not replicated in future prison developments? What accountability measures are in place to prevent this?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- How can the very high turnover of prisoners be reduced and the prison population stabilised, thereby supporting a more settled experience for prisoners and allowing them to complete meaningful training, self-development and resettlement?
- How can the adult prison estate be made safer for vulnerable young people who are being transferred from the youth estate aged 18, so that they experience an appropriate regime and support?
- How can the facilities management processes and performance of the third-party contractor be improved so that services are more responsive and the prison is maintained to a higher standard?
- How will the Prison Service address the failure to locate prisoners closer to their families, and what measures will be put in place to expedite compassionate transfers for those experiencing significant family changes?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- What assurance can be given that all prisoners receive medication on time in every area of the prison, including on arrival, on residential wings, and in the care and separation unit, and that this is consistently achieved in practice? In particular, how will effective management of medication queues be enforced to minimise behavioural issues while ensuring no prisoner misses required medication?
- How can standards be improved by supporting experienced staff, stabilising staff turnover and roll changes, and by developing staff at all levels within their roles, so that both productivity and expertise improves, thereby improving the daily experience of prisoners?
- How can all aspects of the complaints system perform responsively?

- How can consistent provision of safety and protective equipment be ensured? This includes whites for serving food, sunscreen and hats for men working outdoors, safety boots and protective equipment for men in workshops.

3.3 Response to the previous report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
The rate of release and recall of IPP [imprisonment for public protection] prisoners.	Refreshed IPP Action Plan and annual report.	The Board notes the plans, but this has not had any significant effect on current IPP prisoners.
Reduction in the number of prisoners serving short-term sentences.	The Sentencing Bill aims to do this.	The Sentencing Bill did not come into operation in the reporting period. The high recall rate of prisoners released early has effectively increased the number of short-term prisoners at Berwyn and there has been insufficient time to prepare them for release again.
The differences between post-release arrangements for prisoners returning to Wales and England.	No response.	Differences remain in services and the experience of English and Welsh prisoners prior to release. This remains a source of significant stress for some prisoners.
Insufficient transfers to secure mental health facilities.	The new Mental Health Bill creates a statutory time limit of 28 days for the transfer from prison to mental health facilities.	The time limit does not come into effect until 2027-2018. 16 prisoners were transferred in the 2025-2026 reporting year compared with 20 the previous year. At the time of writing, in February an, March 2026, a further seven are awaiting transfer.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

The courts served by the prison and the routes taken by prison transport vehicles often results in prisoners arriving later in the day after a long journey, as late as 7pm. The prison is well prepared to receive them, healthcare staff and food are available. However, late arrivals can result in delayed provision of medication. IMB observations have shown that they are well cared for on arrival and supported by a small group of committed trustees. One of them is a Listener, that is to say, a prisoner trained to talk to and support other prisoners.

We have observed that there can be shortages some items in reception, which persist as prisoners move onto the wings. There have been lengthy and repeated delays in the repairs to toilet doors in reception and toilet paper needs to be requested from staff.

Berwyn provides every prisoner with a laptop. However, there have been significant delays in this provision, sometimes as long as two months. Our observations have shown that a sustained effort has been made to reduce these delays and significant progress has been made. New arrivals receive laptops within a couple of days. We receive frequent reports that it takes too long for phone numbers to be approved, although this can be for reasons beyond the control of the prison.

The IMB was advised towards the end of the reporting period that Berwyn has been designated to receive 18-year-old prisoners transferring from youth custody and youth secure accommodation. Familiarisation visits are planned before transfer takes place, but we remain concerned, as does the prison and the Probation Service, about how these transfers will be managed and how to ensure the safety of those arriving. Such young men require additional support from officers and this may be unsustainable if there is a significant increase in numbers. Discussions are going on with the Youth Justice Board and Youth Custody Services about the suitability of Berwyn for this purpose.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There has been one death in custody during the reporting year and a coroner's report is pending.

Incidents of self-harm have fluctuated significantly month by month, but the overall total has fallen compared with the previous reporting year; published figures for January and February 2026 were not available at the end of the reporting year.

Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
151	122	129	201	139	168	87	93	124	118	1333

The most common reason given for self-harm is issues with either the regime (the daily routine, rules and conditions of life in prison) or the community in which the prisoner is located. Governors seek to accommodate changes of community wherever possible. The second most frequently cited reason is mental health and stress.

The Board’s monitoring of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents (used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) shows that prisoners are generally monitored appropriately, although record keeping is not always complete in all respects. A total of 800 ACCTs were opened in 2025, which is a continuation of an increasing trend, in part owing to an increase in the number of prisoners.

There are trained Listeners throughout the prison, although they are not always evenly dispersed across all communities and releases have impacted on the total number.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The Board remains concerned about violence, both between prisoners and towards staff. Self-harm also continues to be a concern. Strategies are being put in place and, towards the end of the reporting period, levels of violence had decreased and were significantly below those seen in the summer of 2025. However, they remain higher than in the previous reporting period, with a 4% increase to 879 reported incidents.

Monitoring of adjudications has shown that mental health issues are prevalent and contribute to rule-breaking and prisoner-on-prisoner violence. Other factors include violence driven by debt. Prisoners who feel unsafe or who are victims of violence are relocated by the safety team where appropriate.

Evidence is gathered and reported more consistently for the adjudication process, including through the use of body-worn video cameras (BWCs). This has led to a reduction in the number of cases dismissed.

Breakdown of violent incidents

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Total
Assault - Prisoner	48	54	58	63	62	55	38	36	40	46	50	35	585
Assault - Staff	17	16	16	25	17	18	13	15	14	10	5	8	174
Serious Assault - Prisoner	4	3	5	10	9	3	2	4	4	4	4	6	58
Serious Assault - Staff	3	6	6	6	1	5	1	2	3	1	1	2	37
Sexual Assault - Prisoner	1	1		1	1			2		1	1	1	9
Sexual Assault - Staff			1				2				0	0	3
Unexplained Injury		1	1	1			3		2	3	1	1	13
Grand Total	72	81	87	106	90	81	59	59	63	65	62	53	879

4.4 Use of force

There was a spike in use of force (UoF) incidents during April to June 2025, but this has dropped back to more consistent levels. The use of force coordinator has been tracking both prisoners and officers involved in incidents; action is taken, as necessary, to address prisoner issues and ensure officer support and training. In January 2026, the team received a 'green' audit (which means they are meeting the required standards and working effectively overall) from the external auditor. We have observed that body worn video cameras (BWVCs) are still not consistently used.

There were 144 incidents in December 2025, of which 26 were planned and 118 were spontaneous. BWVCs were not used in 21% of these incidents. Prisoner debriefs were completed in all cases, with 123 debriefs of staff (85%). As in last year's report, the main reason for incidents was a refusal to locate to cell (20%), followed by risk reduction applications (15%), prevention of harm or assault (14%), and being under the influence of illicit drugs or alcohol (11%).

In one incident, the use of force resulted in a prisoner sustaining serious injuries. The matter was referred to the police, and a number of staff were suspended from the establishment. Those staff have since returned to full duties following the conclusion of internal disciplinary processes; however, the police investigation remains ongoing.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Psychoactive substances are readily available throughout the prison, despite the strenuous efforts of staff to control both entry to the prison and manufacture from materials available in the prison.

The availability of psychoactive substances has a significant impact on the mental health of prisoners. This can lead to transfers to the CSU to remove access and allow mental health to stabilise sufficiently before returning to residential accommodation, sometimes in a different location to reduce the risk of recurrence. Boredom, combined with the ready availability of these substances, is a commonly cited factor in relapse. Our observations have shown that the use of these substances also contributes to debt which, in turn, fuels violence and other harmful behaviours.

Use of psychoactive substances is a significant cause of emergency calls to the prison's healthcare services.

The type of vape available has been changed, with a view to reducing the ability of prisoners to access batteries and to use them with illicit substances. There is a concern that recently proposed taxes on vaping products will increase prices and cause difficulties with the affordability of canteen (the system prisoners use to purchase goods and supplies).

The Board does not have any evidence of a meaningful reduction in the presence of psychoactive substances in the reporting year compared with the previous one. Reduction of these substances is a major priority for the prison. Narcotics Anonymous (a support group where people help each other recover from drug addiction and stay drug-free) is now being trialled as encouragement to reduce addiction.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The prison has operated throughout the year at virtually its maximum capacity; this has inhibited programmes to redecorate cells but, generally speaking, accommodation is in an acceptable condition. The uniformity of accommodation prevents the prison from offering a more progressive regime with improved facilities for prisoners on the enhanced (top) level of the incentives scheme. Such facilities were not part of the original design of the buildings. Repairs and maintenance take too long to be completed, in the Board's view. Cleaning materials have been in short supply on occasion, as they have been used as raw materials for making psychoactive substances, but generally the prison is cleaned to an acceptable standard. Outside areas appear well maintained and cared for.

Despite the repairs to the heating system reported last year, problems have continued, particularly with the distribution of hot water around the site from the central boilers. This has necessitated the installation of hired temporary boilers for each building at very significant cost; their operation has been satisfactory, apart from some prisoners complaining about exposure to fumes in their cells. The possibility of extending the flues was considered but was not necessary because the emissions were not dangerous. Complaints about heating have fallen.

During the year, there was a major unplanned power outage, which impacted the prison when the back-up generators were no longer able to run. IMB monitoring established that prisoners were still able to raise an alarm and that the prison was safe. Some non-urgent healthcare appointments were missed and social visits were cancelled.

Our monitoring of food has shown that it is of good quality and flavoursome. A new healthy menu has recently been introduced, built around healthy food options. The introduction of this appears to have gone smoothly and the Board has received few complaints about the change. The kitchen staff have worked closely with gym staff to ensure general support for the new approach. Their hard work with this transition is commendable, especially as they work within tight budgetary constraints.

Temperature probes are not always used on the wings to check the temperature of food on serveries, in part because batteries are stolen. Whites are not always available to the men serving food. On occasion, those with special food requirements for religious and health reasons have not always been accommodated, and this was particularly significant in one case. On the first day of Ramadan, food was not served before dawn, although problems encountered on the first day were quickly resolved.

Only 5% of applications to the IMB relate to accommodation, and these often concern issue with kettles and laptops. A further 2% relate to food, mainly regarding quantity and individual dietary needs.

5.2 Segregation

The facilities on Ogwen, the CSU, are clean and generally in good repair, although there are reports of slow window repairs and occasional problems with the water. From our observations, staff are experienced, humane and aware of the needs of prisoners, many of whom have challenging behaviour. Ogwen is frequently full and

sometimes prisoners cannot be accommodated, so appropriate arrangements are made on the normal residential wings.

Some prisoners with complex needs have been transferred to secure units that are more appropriate for them, although there still appear to be delays.

Our monitoring of GOoD reviews has shown that they are timely, that Governors and officers understand each prisoner, and they seek to transfer them onto normal wings without undue delay. Initial segregation of prisoners taken to Ogwen unit after allegedly assaulting staff presumes a 14-day segregation, subject to adjudication results. However, our monitoring shows that such prisoners are reviewed again after the adjudication and may often be returned to normal accommodation before the expiry of the 14-day period.

Monitoring of adjudications has shown that Governors take care to understand the evidence and listen to the prisoner before making a determination, and determinations are designed to incentivise improved behaviour, prevent recurrence and deal with any issues that prisoners may identify as contributing to the behaviour. Despite some improvements in casework ahead of adjudications, cases are still being dismissed due to insufficient preparation.

Despite the efforts of Governors and officers, some prisoners refuse to return from Ogwen to residential wings because they feel safer and prefer the calmer environment; this can lead to lengthy stays. The regime for these prisoners is being made more basic to incentivise them to leave. This has had a positive impact and the roll in Ogwen has reduced as a result. The prison is in the process of prohibiting vaping in Ogwen.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Each prisoner should be allocated an officer who is their dedicated key worker, with whom they can build a relationship. The new key worker initiative introduced last year has not been as successful as hoped, because of a lack of allocated time. Prisoners say that they do not know who their key worker is and the prison acknowledges that the current profile of the prison (effectively, the daily timetable) does not allocate the necessary time. A reprofile is currently in train, which seeks to address the problem. Where relationships have broken down, IMB monitoring shows that Governors and senior officers seek to understand and resolve issues. Conversations are constantly taking place between prisoners and staff, but there is no time built into the day for writing up notes. Administrative support has been reallocated from the business hub into each of the houses, so this should also bring benefits in dealing with complaints, laptops, monies and phones.

From our observations, staff and prisoner relationships are generally good, but there are weaknesses in certain groups of officers. For instance, some less experienced staff can be more reactive and less pragmatic in pressured situations. This can cause difficulties with both prisoners and other staff. Relationships with key workers are strained on occasion and problems arise when unrealistic expectations cannot be met or key workers are over stretched due to staff shortages and high workloads.

The recently appointed head of residential is implementing a BASICS approach, which makes clear to both staff and prisoners that policies and procedures exist for a

reason, must be clearly explained and underpin the safety of prisoners, staff and the prison as a whole.

In our view, there is still a huge knowledge gap in understanding prisoners who are neurodivergent and how to support and manage them more flexibly. In the more acute cases, there are good plans in place. The problem lies with the less acute cases, where men are managing their own situations. There is effective coaching and mutual support between residential/security and residential/safety, alongside increased informal upskilling of staff. However, the prison is aware of this and is working to address it (see 5.4 below).

The prisoner council seems to run well and is now bolstered by monthly prisoners' forums on residential areas. This removes some of the detail from the council so that there is more focus on the broader issues.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The prison actively monitors matters relating to diversity and equality and feedback is sought from prisoners of their experiences. Provision is made for the range of protected groups, including Gypsy, Romany and Traveller (GRT) prisoners, prisoners from other countries and male prisoners identifying as female. The latter can access the only gender-reassignment clinic in Wales, but the distance to its location in south Wales can be an impediment.

A priority for the prison is to ensure that Welsh speaking prisoners can use their own language rather than having to communicate in English. Welsh-speaking staff are identified to use their skills. Progress is being monitored by the Welsh language commissioner. Welsh-speaking staff are encouraged to use their skills, there are classes for Welsh learners, and the prison wants to appoint more Welsh-speaking staff. Equipment has been installed recently taken to ensure that television and radio channels are available in Welsh.

Neurodiversity is recognised and increasingly catered for. A neurodiversity week took place in March 2026 and staff training and development is ongoing.

More VPs have been transferred by the Prison Service to Berwyn so that the number of VP wings has doubled to four out of a total of 24 wings. The increase in numbers poses challenges in terms of movements around the prison and the ability to access a full range of workshops and training; this reduces the probability of post-release employment.

The IMB does receive applications relating to equality matters, but these are relatively few, accounting for 1.5% of all applications – and mostly alleging discrimination.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy is active in Berwyn and supports prisoners of all faiths and none. There are regular services, including separate services for vulnerable prisoners.

There are three full-time members of staff and a further eight part time, together with ten volunteers. The team has been without a managing chaplain for much of the year. Monitoring has shown that all chaplains and staff are well informed and responsive to the needs of prisoners.

Our observations show that support is offered to all prisoners on arrival. Those with close relatives near to death receive particular support, with external visits being facilitated, which is much appreciated. Other functions are also supported, such as, for example, assisting in the kitchen by providing information on dietary needs and supporting religious festivals or cultural requirements..

Listeners are prisoners who support other prisoners at times of distress. Training for Listeners takes place in chaplaincy and is run by Samaritans from local branches. Regular meetings are held to support Listeners, again run by Samaritans.

5.6 Incentives schemes

A total of 7% of applications to the IMB relate to discipline and we regularly receive applications about the incentives policy (IP) and changes to prisoners' status.

The IP policy is designed to manage behaviour, whereas adjudications decide on punishments for specific behaviour. In our view, this is not always explained clearly to prisoners, who believe that dismissal of a charge will automatically result in recovery of status, but their general behaviour may still not merit such a step. IP data is monitored at the monthly equality meeting.

The Board is concerned that there is no real incentive to aim for enhanced (top) status, because the improvements from the standard (middle) level are not significant enough. It is proposed to review this later in 2026. The prison is actively exploring better accommodation as an incentive for enhanced prisoners, although the design of the building does not facilitate a move to a community with, for example, self-catering options. In the meantime, enhanced wings may develop a different regime and greater trust in the men.

5.7 Complaints

In the Board's view, the Governors acted effectively to rectify the breakdown of the non-confidential complaints system reported last year and the backlog of outstanding unanswered complaints was addressed. The IMB monitored the performance of the complaints system in depth in the summer months and found that complaints were taken seriously and responses addressed the issues raised and were handled in a timely way. However, at the end of 2025, staff changes once again led to breakdown of the system and complaints did not receive timely responses, leading to a new backlog. This also resulted in increased applications to the IMB about unanswered complaints and our monitoring shows them to be justified. This is a major source of frustration for the prisoners, particularly when they are advised to submit a Comp 1 (ordinary complaint) form to make a simple non-controversial request.

The lack of reliable access to complaints records, owing to changes to IT permissions, has been a recurrent problem for the IMB throughout much of the reporting period and remains the case. It is hoped that the new Teams-based channels will address this, while also enabling IT support to be delivered from within the prison rather than relying on a remote helpdesk.

The IMB also closely monitored the Comp 2 system, which is for serious and confidential complaints. This showed that they are taken seriously. Complaints accepted into the Comp 2 system are addressed well and replies are detailed and

appropriate; the remainder are transferred directly into the normal complaints system to expedite their handling, although this breaches guidelines.

Complaint forms should be available to prisoners on each wing in holders adjacent to the complaint boxes. We have found the holders are empty on as much as 50% of our rounds to the 24 residential wings. The offer from staff to get one from the office is not well received by prisoners, because they do not want to reveal to officers that they want to submit a complaint.

The number of applications to the Board increased by 150%, to 559, from 223 in the previous year; ; two years ago, there were 462 applications. There were notable increases in concerns about staff relationships and bullying (270% increase), sentence management (160%) and discipline (180%). A few prisoners submit applications prolifically. After lengthy delays, the maintenance contractor, Amey, fitted universal locks on IMB boxes so that only one key is now needed instead of 25 (three houses totalling 24 wings, plus the CSU).

5.8 Property

The Board receives a steady stream of applications about property. In this reporting year, 35 related to transfers within Berwyn as prisoners change cell. The process is that property should be placed in a bag and the contents of the bag certified both by an officer and the prisoner. The IMB receives applications about items going missing during this process. The increase in applications, from 20 in the previous year to 35 this year, can be explained by the increased turnover of prisoners at Berwyn and is not reflective of a material deterioration of performance.

We are aware that when prisoners relocate in Berwyn their canteen (items that can be ordered and paid for to supplement a prisoner's food, equipment and clothing) can sometimes go missing and cannot be found. This is addressed through the complaints system and the prison issues refunds where it is established that canteen was not delivered to the prisoner. However, there can be delays in payment, which is a problem, even when only small amounts of money are involved, as it may represent a significant amount in the prisoner's circumstances.

The IMB also received 21 applications about property transferred from other prisons, double the number from the previous year. Again, this can be put down to the significant increase in the number of transfers. Property is listed and placed in bags, some of which travel with the prisoner and some of which travels separately. Once the prisoner arrives in reception, the property travelling with him is checked by the prisoner and also by reception staff. Property travelling separately is not opened in the presence of the prisoner. There have been cases when the property travelling separately is claimed to have not arrived or is incomplete. On occasion, it has been necessary to liaise with the IMB at the dispatching prison to help resolve this. The missing property can be of great importance, such as legal papers or ID documentation.

There have also been occasions when funds have not been transferred or an incorrect amount sent when a prisoner is moved to Berwyn, and these transfers are often subject to significant delays.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Healthcare is provided on site by the local NHS organisation, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB). All medications are reviewed by the GP and medication are optimised to the most appropriate clinical treatment. All men receive first night screening and a medication review by the GP and medications are supplied as needed so there is no delay during the weekend. The Board is aware that nurses are available when prisoners arrive. This applies to transfers from other prisons, as well as prisoners arriving from the courts.

The IMB has been made aware that medicine queues are not always managed sufficiently well by officers; this can lead to behaviour issues, which cause medication to be withheld. Also, medication is not always issued in time to vulnerable prisoners ahead of morning moves.

There are frequent no-shows for healthcare appointments. The IMB notes that one of the issues is that prisoners are not always taken to appointments on time. In addition, healthcare staff are not consistently aware when VPs are waiting to be seen, resulting in missed appointments.

On-site medical services attend emergencies when prisoners are taken unwell, often because of psychoactive substances. From our observations and data collection, responses are timely and backed up by ambulances when needed. The frequency of emergency ('code blue') events has risen to the point that prisoners are returned to cells when three or more occur at the same time, owing to the pressure on staff.

Berwyn is one year into a paramedic pilot. Three paramedics are based at Berwyn and can respond rapidly to urgent cases. This reduces the need to call an ambulance and allows for a more rapid ambulance response if it is necessary.

Healthcare representatives have been present at all the segregation reviews that were observed by the IMB.

6.2 Physical healthcare

From our observations, physical healthcare provision is generally good. Demand for services has continued to increase in 2025, owing to the high prison population, the significantly increased turnover of prisoners, the prevalence of illicit substances and mental health issues, and the general complexity of need in an increasing number of prisoners. The transfer of prisoners from England to Berwyn in Wales increases workloads because of the differences in the way the NHS functions in England and in Wales. This transfer results in disruption to external appointments by increasing waiting times for reasons outside the control of the prison, BCHUB or the prisoner. A prisoner transferred to Berwyn from England and waiting for an external hospital appointment in England either has to be transported back to England for that appointment or join the bottom of the waiting list in Wales.

The 160 healthcare staff provide a wide range of services; professions include doctors, nurses, dentists, opticians and other allied health professionals.

Dental provision is disrupted during the summer due to a lack of air conditioning in the surgery; when temperatures exceed 27°C, the surgery must close. This has been

a known issue since the prison opened, although funding has only recently been allocated to address it (with work due in May 2026).

Vulnerable prisoners have a separate waiting area; officers accompanying the VPs do not always inform the NHS receptionists, which has meant that they miss their appointments.

When we have been able to observe, the on-site healthcare team responds promptly to emergencies, and ambulances attend when required. The need for ambulance call-outs is reduced by the presence of paramedics on site.

GP waiting times are between four and six weeks and are being reduced by the appointment of two more GPs. Urgent requests are triaged by nurses and the paramedic practitioners on site. Prisoners request appointments using the online booking system on their laptops, but there is a perception that this system is not working as well as it could be.

6.3 Mental health

A new mental health manager was appointed in 2025 and staffing is nominally complete. However, the pressures surrounding the long waits for mental health beds is stressful for both prisoners and staff. Prisoners' conditions deteriorate and staff are having to manage prisoners with increasingly severe illness. In the absence of timely transfer to appropriate secure mental health accommodation, it is occasionally necessary for a prisoner to be sectioned at the point of release (i.e. detained under the Mental Health Act for compulsory assessment or treatment). This problem is particularly acute for English prisoners, for whom the average waiting time is around eight months. Courts do not always use available psychiatric reports when considering 'hospital orders' (which would allow a prisoner to be diverted directly to hospital for treatment instead of custody), and where men are sentenced to prison, these reports do not always accompany them. This leaves mental health staff at a disadvantage in managing treatment.

IMB monitoring has found that ACCT paperwork is not always in good order and files can have loose and undated documents. Prisoners experiencing poor mental health are often observed in adjudications and segregation reviews and this is recognised by Governors.

The clinical psychology service is run by the NHS and supports men with mental health issues.

The forensic psychology service is run by the prison and has responsibility for risk assessments and delivering courses. The former Kaizen course, which addressed offending behaviour, has been replaced by Building Choices, with groups of eight men participating in a programme of one-to-one and group work. The scale of turnover in the prison population has created real challenges in this area. The course is designed to align with a significant date (either release or parole), with release dates taking priority. However, the high number of new arrivals means that some may be prioritised for places, resulting in men who have already been allocated a course being returned to the waiting list. The IMB has received complaints about this.

Forensic Psychological Services (FPS), HMPPS in Wales has a team based at HMP Berwyn. It has responsibility for completing psychological risk assessments as well as

treatment management and clinical support/delivery for the new suite of accredited offending behaviour programmes, Building Choices which is delivered by the prison's Programmes team. Groups of eight men participate per group which includes group sessions and one-to one support. The scale of turnover in the prison population has created real challenges in this area. However, the high number of new arrivals means that some may be prioritised for places, resulting in men who may have provisionally been allocated a course remaining on the waiting list. The IMB has received complaints about this.

The increase in the number of VPs makes it difficult for the Programmes and Psychology teams to find spaces separate from the general population in which to deliver courses.

6.4 Social care

Wrexham Borough Council provides social care services to the prison. The team consists of an interim manager, two social workers and one social care assessor. Men are screened on arrival and pre-existing care arrangements are extended as appropriate. Good social care, both physical and mental, helps to avoid escalation to hospital. Men can self-refer for assessment and are actively encouraged to take responsibility for their own needs to avoid dependency. There are three social care packages, with two more undergoing assessment. Some informal care is provided by wing buddies (e.g. for prisoners with mobility impairment).

There are men at Berwyn living with dementia who remain largely functional. Where significant deterioration needs to be assessed, there is a lengthy process of gathering evidence to confirm that memory loss is genuine.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

This is an area in which many complaints have been made to the IMB. Part-time workers generally achieve their allocation of one hour of fresh air and one hour of social interaction (association). However, full-time workers often do not receive this, generally because of regime restrictions and staffing shortages. This can limit their ability to use facilities such as wing kitchens, too.

Prisoners seeking work are not always able to obtain it and do not always understand how prisoners are selected and assigned to jobs in the prison. On the other hand, many men do not seek or take up opportunities and may be locked in their cells for longer than others as a result.

Staff shortages, meetings and prison training events can disrupt the regime (i.e. the normal daily timetable).

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

This is a major priority for the prison. Illicit substances fuel debts and violence and are a leading cause of healthcare emergency calls.

Men are screened on arrival at reception. If they test positive only for their prescribed medication, this is continued. However, if they test positive for additional, non-prescribed drugs, all medication may be suspended for safety reasons, as unauthorised combinations can have harmful effects. This can be difficult for men to

understand, and the IMB receives complaints about delays in receiving prescribed medication, although it is reinstated in due course where appropriate.

The IMB has noted that the recorded level of incidents of prisoners being under the influence (UTI) varies and is currently low (February 2026), although there was a spike in April/May 2025. The substance misuse service considers that recorded numbers may be misleading. Those likely to be recorded are the more vulnerable, using and/or passing out during the day. Others use in the evening, both recreationally and to help with sleep, and are less likely to be observed or tested.

We also note that programmes are being delivered (Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous) to tackle substance misuse among prisoners and to support their families in anticipation of release.

A harm reduction group was established during 2024. Anyone who is identified as UTI is seen by the substance misuse service the next day and invited to the group within seven days. On average, 120 men per week are invited to groups. The number of VPs in these groups has recently doubled, but it is thought that some of this is down to boredom.

6.7 Soft skills

The wellbeing hub continues to provide a range of courses, experiences, support and training. Courses are in strong demand and there are waiting lists to access them. The Board is aware that a new programme started in early 2026, through Novus Cambria (the education and skills provider), to provide bespoke support for men in the resettlement period, alongside a mentor, to develop employment skills for specific types of jobs. This includes CV writing, disclosure letters, money management, interview techniques, recognising qualifications and workplace behaviour.

The prison has also introduced a programme called Stoic, run by the physical education instructors in the gym. In Berwyn, the first course started at the end of 2025. The prisoners verbally request to join the four-week course and do not need to apply in any other way. They can be of basic, standard or enhanced status. At the end of the course, the Governor presents certificates of completion.

The course name refers to the Stoic philosophers of ancient Greece and reflects its focus - developing resilience in negative or demoralising situations. It combines teaching and discussion, covering topics such as positive thinking and managing feelings of anger.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

The education provision is delivered by Novus Cambria, using 51 full-time equivalent staff providing 358 morning spaces every day and 346 in the afternoon. The doubling in the number of vulnerable prisoners has required the curriculum to be reorganised, broadening provision for this group while minimising the impact on the general population.

IMB observations of the education department show that the environment for learning is welcoming and stimulating. Often, those present are experiencing a variety of emotional challenges and these can have some impact on learning. Non-attendance is now being fed back to the houses; therefore, any appointments, sickness and non-attendance are known about and can be validated. However, attendance is adversely impacted by court appearances and health appointments.

Induction appears to run smoothly and is usually delivered to 14 men (morning and afternoon) after ascertaining levels of literacy and numeracy before signposting to suitable courses. There is a focus on skills for resettlement.

In-cell learning is also provided by Ways2learn, a flexible, in-cell learning initiative developed by PeoplePlus in collaboration with Bristol University. Prisoners can access the programme via their TV twice per day.

The library service, provided by Wrexham County Borough Council and employing four staff, continues to be a well-used resource for prisoners, with weekly access. In addition, there is a trolley service for books requested from a booklist on their laptops distributed by a red band orderly (a trusted prisoner peer-support worker). In February 2026, 1,170 books were issued and there were 754 visits.

VPs have separate access times and appear to be among the most prolific users of the library. Legal reference texts (e.g. *Archbold: Criminal Pleading, Evidence and Practice* and *Stone's Justices' Manual*) are readily available at the reception desk and are regularly updated. Legal research sessions are also available and can be booked via prisoner laptops, with staff on hand to support access. Directories of support agencies are now also accessible via prisoner laptops. The library regularly hosts play-reading sessions and encourages men to participate in literary events linked to external libraries, including visits from authors; two authors attended as part of last year's Literary Festival. Neurodiverse prisoners can attend dedicated browsing sessions designed to provide a calmer, more relaxed environment.

The Shannon Trust charity provides a functional peer-to-peer reading programme to those who need it. In addition to the Shannon Trust, there is provision for men to read to their children through the charity Storybook Dads. A library slot is booked during a quiet period, a book is recorded and the audio is uploaded to the Storybook Dads website, where sound effects are added. Families can then download the finished recording through an app.

7.2 Vocational training, work

The workshops include: modular housing skills academy (building homes for the Welsh Government by Williams homes of Bala), welding and fabrication, DHL (picking canteen items for five other prison establishments, breakfast/gym and

comfort packs), recycling, multi-skills joinery (both bench and site), and bricklaying and plastering. The workshops employ 642 prisoners, around 28% of the standard population, which is up from 26% in 2024-2025. Our monitoring has shown that around 70% of men attend their allocated sessions. Reasons given for absence include medical appointments, social visits and going to the gym. However, population turnover is also a significant factor.

In addition to this, three workshops are designated for VP use: textiles, multiskills (manufacturing sandbags) and welding and fabrication. Together, they employ 185 men - around 50% of the VP population.

From our monitoring, several issues have been identified, including men not wearing the correct safety equipment (e.g. safety boots and goggles in the fabrication and bricklaying/plastering areas, where they are mandatory), and in the very warm weather, no protection against the sun for outside workers. In both of these cases, measures were put in place to correct them, and our further monitoring has confirmed this.

In many of these workshops, men have the opportunity to gain qualifications through the education department.

The impact of the early release scheme has resulted in some men not being able to complete their courses.

7.3 Offender management, progression

As reported last year, the sequence of early release schemes has caused intense and continuing pressure on probation officers, prison offender managers (POMs) and the staff who have been continuously involved in sentence recalculation. The diligence and commitment of staff is to be commended. These changes, together with mandatory recalls of 14 and 28 days, have caused constant turnover of the population.

Each of the changes to the early release schemes results in a complete sentence recalculation, and POMs, who are not involved in sentence calculations, are having to manage prisoner queries and expectations at each change. Sometimes, men are advised by their community probation officer of their release date, which then turns out to be incorrect. POM staffing is still not up to full strength.

Berwyn is impacted by population pressures in northwest prisons and regularly receives transfers from other prisons. The IMB notes that prisoners often arrive both from other prisons and on warrants without their paperwork properly completed. This affects both OASyS (offender assessment system) risk assessments and the quality of warrants and previous sentence calculations. Staff at Berwyn often have to revise this paperwork and may have to advise prisoners that these incorrect calculations mean a later release date than they were expecting.

Berwyn has nine probation officers, although there should be the full time equivalent of 17.5. They have a caseload of 45-50 each. Operational band 4 POMs have caseloads of about 60 each. Recruitment of two Welsh-speaking POMs is a priority.

There are 47 IPP (imprisonment for public protection) prisoners at Berwyn.

A matter of particular concern is that Berwyn has been designated to receive transfers from youth custody and secure accommodation of young men reaching their eighteenth birthday. There is considerable concern, not only on the part of the Board, but also on the part of the prison and the Probation Service, that the sheer size of Berwyn makes it unsuitable for complex young people. However, the probation team works closely with the existing support workers to smooth the transition. Potentially, each young man requires a much higher level of support from his POM than is usual for other prisoners. This could be difficult to sustain, especially if young men arrive in significant numbers.

There are too many occasions when prisoners are not taken to their legal meetings using the video facilities. Reasons include staff not taking them to the video suite, as well as there have been occasions when prisoners have refused to attend.

7.4 Family contact

The Barnardo's charity has continued to provide family services this year. This includes support in the visits hall for families (there is a large store with toys and creative materials, etc) and Barnardo's and prison staff monitor interactions with an awareness of safeguarding issues. There were 40 'blue book' entries in the four months up to the end of the reporting period. The blue book records safeguarding concerns and some of these may result in referral to social services. Themed family days are arranged once a month, with three dates in August for family sports days and three in December for Christmas visits.

Last year's breastfeeding pilot is now permanently in place and has been well received by visiting mothers. This is a positive development as part of wider health-focused and family centred practice during visits.

The system for booking visits has recently changed: instead of men booking visits on their laptops, families now make the bookings. Feedback from families has been positive since this responsibility was transferred to them. A key benefit highlighted is that families no longer need to wait in the holding room before visits, which has been particularly beneficial for children and has improved their overall visiting experience.

The IMB notes that there have been issues during the year with delays in issuing phone PINs and adding family members to calling lists; this does not support family contact during the crucial period when prisoners first arrive at Berwyn. In addition, in-cell phones and landing kiosks have, at times, been out of order, creating further difficulties with maintaining contact. The IMB has also noted some delays in the mailroom, including problems with copying incoming mail and delays in the receipt of legal papers.

Although the number of vulnerable prisoners (VPs) has increased during the year, uptake of social visits among VPs appears to be lower than in the general population and is declining.

Transfers for compassionate reasons are taking place more slowly as a result of issues arising from population pressures across the prison estate.

7.5 Resettlement planning

There are nine Probation Resettlement Practitioners in HMP Berwyn. There are also three people based in Berwyn, employed by the charity Nacro, which provides

community rehabilitative services (CRS) for accommodation. Services are commissioned by region, so Nacro accommodation CRS applies to Welsh prisoners only (unless they are on remand/unsentenced). From the Board's observations, Probation Resettlement Practitioners have worked hard to make links with the North West Probation Region in England. One CRS person comes in once a week to support Greater Manchester prisoners, but this has not been so successful with Merseyside because of contract arrangements. The St Giles charity provides a three-day-a-week personal wellbeing and support service with cover for all of Wales.

In terms of accommodation on release, the local authorities in North Wales and North West England, which were reported last year as coming into the prison to support the process, have continued to do so. However, this does not apply to Wrexham Borough Council, which only carries out housing assessments at the point of release. At present, 10% of men are going out homeless on release. Shelter Cymru helps with some housing issues, but only in Wales.

Staff in both probation and resettlement have expressed concern about the outcome of the OMIC (offender management in custody) review, which will shift the balance between prison- and community-based staff. Much of the positive work underway is driven by sustained efforts to build and strengthen relationships between partners to support men on release.

Population turnover, particularly short-term recalls, has made it difficult to make meaningful interventions, as resettlement windows are too short for prisoners to complete their pre-release programmes. This has impacted reoffending and recall rates.

8. The work of the IMB

The Board wishes to record that it experienced difficulties in discharging its duties due to repeated and prolonged issues in accessing systems and documents, and delays in resolving these problems.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	18
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8, plus one on sabbatical
Total number of visits to the establishment	470

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	20	29
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	15	42
C	Equality	7	10
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	8	20
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	17	42
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	9	22
F	Food and kitchens	4	18
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	26	54
H1	Property within the establishment	20	35
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	10	21
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	1	11
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	21	55
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	20	74
K	Transfers	10	13
L	Miscellaneous	35	111
	Total number of applications	223	559



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