

Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Lowdham Grange

**For reporting year
1 February 2025 to 31 January 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 Lowdham Grange is situated nine miles north east of Nottingham and is part of HMPS long-term high security estate (LTHSE). It has a capacity for 888 male prisoners, many serving life sentences or indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPP). A significant number have been convicted of offences such as murder, drug supply, violence, and gang-related activity.

The accommodation is spread over 14 wings in five house blocks. The cells are intended for single occupancy. Eight wings have shared shower facilities while the six, newer wings have showers in the cells. There is a separate segregation unit, with 24 cells. For several months of the reporting year, two wings have been closed for refurbishment, reducing the capacity by around 130 prisoners.

The prison receives category B prisoners (who do not require maximum security but for whom escape must be made more difficult) from other establishments, where they will have received basic induction into the prison system after sentencing.

The prison was built under the private finance Initiative and operated for the first 25 years by Serco. At the end of the initial contract period, a new contract was awarded to Sodexo in February 2023. It was the first time a privately run prison had undergone a change of contractor. Following concerns from the IMB and an unscheduled inspection by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP), a step-in process was initiated by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to assist the contractor before the prison was taken back fully under HMPPS control in August 2024.

Healthcare is provided by Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, which took over in July 2025 after Nottinghamshire NHS Foundation Trust withdrew from its contract. The Trust caters for physical and mental health with a staff of qualified nurses and is contracted to provide a full-time GP and the services of a psychiatrist.

Prisoners are expected to be in employment or education unless they are beyond working age or incapacitated in some way.

Workshops provide opportunities for prisoners to engage in activities such as producing clothing for the NHS and the Prison Service, manufacturing furniture for a major retailer, and building bamboo bicycles.

The education service continues to be provided by Novus, a private operator, which was initially contracted to Sodexo.

There is a psychology service providing courses intended to help change behaviour and aid prisoners' sentence progression.

Recreation facilities include a well-equipped gymnasium and sports hall, fitness equipment in the wings and exercise yards, and an all-weather sports pitch.

Religious observance is conducted in a multifaith centre. Most major faiths are catered for by full-time or part-time representatives, who conduct services and engage regularly with prisoners on the wings.

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

From the Board's observations, the prison has continued to make progress after significant problems encountered during the change of private contractors, which led to the prison being taken under HMPPS control. According to the Ministry of Justice parameters, it was, at that time, the worst prison in the country.

The IMB at Lowdham Grange has closely monitored conditions at the prison and provided feedback to the leadership team on what we see and hear when engaging with prisoners around the establishment.

Safety

- A stable and focused leadership team with clear priorities appears to have driven improvements in many areas.
- Stronger leadership in the segregation unit has helped answer many of the criticisms raised by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) in their report.
- Increased security at the gatehouse appears to have cut the number of drugs and other contraband entering by that route.
- Drugs are still widely available and a serious hazard to health, as well as a contributor to threats and violence among users and dealers.
- The induction programme for prisoners arriving at Lowdham Grange appears to be much better regulated.
- The Board remains concerned about staff shortages and high levels of absenteeism. Prisoners complain about the resulting regime restrictions at short notice and report to us that it contributes to self-harm and disruptive behaviour.
- From our observations, our monitoring of daily log sheets and feedback from prisoners, levels of violence are still high, especially prisoner-on-staff assaults.
- The Board is seriously concerned about the number of prisoners resorting to self-harm, some of which is extreme and requires emergency hospitalisation.
- The figures for using force on prisoners are still high, although the prison has introduced better auditing of incidents.

Fair and humane treatment

- From the Board's observations, the poor handling of prisoners' property on transfers between prisons and within the prison is causing anger and frustration among the prisoners affected, leading to instances of self-harm and anti-social behaviour, including attacks on staff and cell damage.
- The 'cohorting regime' introduced across all high-security prisons, which divides prisoners into groups and limits when they can leave their cells to mix with others (to maintain control and reduce risk), has been poorly received by prisoners. They complain to the Board about reduced time out of cell and less time in work and education.
- Social visit bookings now appear to be much better managed, allowing improved family contact.
- Expensive calls from in-cell phones, particularly for foreign national prisoners contacting family abroad, are being addressed by an imminent change in the contracted provider.
- Major refurbishments on several wings have enhanced comfort and safety due to improved beds and windows.

- Prisoners say the number of new and inexperienced staff has led to challenges in getting assistance with queries and problems. They have also raised concerns about communication barriers with foreign national custody officers on short-term work visas. (In recent years, the Government has recruited staff from overseas to address workforce shortages in prisons.)
- The prison council has been re-established, with representatives from all wings allowing prisoners' issues to be discussed directly with senior leadership.

Health and wellbeing

- The Board's monitoring indicates that access to healthcare provision has improved significantly since the contract was transferred to Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust.
- There appears to be a shortfall in mental health staffing, but recruitment efforts are being made to fill vacancies.
- A new neurodiversity support manager (NSM) has been appointed and custodial staff are receiving support in awareness and managing neurodivergent prisoners.
- Lack of provision in secure hospitals has resulted in prisoners with severe mental health problems remaining in the segregation unit for many months.

Progression and resettlement

- There appears to be greater provision of work and education opportunities.
- Many courses now achieve recognised qualifications to help prisoners seeking employment on release.
- Key worker sessions have resumed, encouraging better relationships between prisoners and staff and addressing concerns raised by prisoners.
- From the Board's observations, preparation for release arrangements within the prison has been enhanced and liaison with organisations in the community improved.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- What urgent action is the Minister taking to provide appropriate treatment for prisoners with severe mental health problems who are being held for long periods in segregation unit?
- What steps will the Minister take to improve recruitment and retention of custodial staff, given that 40% of staff at HMP Lowdham Grange have less than two years' service.
- What does the Minister intend to do about resources to tackle the availability of drugs and high levels of violence in prisons, and what is the expected timeline for delivery?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- What evidence do you have that the cohorting regime imposed on prisons in the long-term high-security estate will reduce violence?
- What plans do you have to address the problem of prisoners' property going missing during transfers between establishments and between cells within the prison?
- Does HMPPS believe staffing levels at prisons in the long-term high-security estate are adequate, given the high levels of staff sickness and the number of

officers engaged in constant observation and hospital bed-watch duties. If not, what action will be taken to address these shortfalls?

- What is HMPPS doing to make sure there are enough stable, long-term staff, given that some custody officer jobs are currently filled by foreign staff on short-term visas?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- What further plans do you have to reduce the availability of drugs, which are taking a toll on prisoner's health and contributing to the high levels of violence in the prison?
- What is being done to reduce the number of prisoners resorting to self-harm, evidenced by the very high level of ACCTs across the establishment?

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Reception was identified as a key concern in HMIP's inspection of March 2025 (published in June 2025), which found that 'Reception and first night risk assessments were not always completed or sufficiently thorough when they were done'. The Board agrees that this was an area of concern and we are pleased to see improvements. We have monitored this throughout the year and noted that all new arrivals are now met by the safety team in reception and interviewed in private, identifying any risks or concerns whilst informing the prisoner about the support available in the prison.

New policies and procedures have been implemented on the dedicated wing where all prisoners are housed for a period of about two weeks. During this time, various induction interviews and assessments are conducted by specialists from the healthcare, education, safety and other teams. The involvement of peer mentors (trusted prisoners who help others by offering guidance, support or advice) in this period is valued by prisoners. Several prisoners have reported that they have been moved off the induction wing without completing their induction. This was confirmed by prison management as being due to an increased security risk assessment.

Reception and induction wing staff have advised IMB members that prisoners frequently arrive without appropriate assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documentation. ACCTs are used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide.

Prisoners frequently express frustration at being unable to access their property, which is stored in reception. This can include paperwork for appeals, family photos and important personal documents. This can often lead to increased frustration and, in some cases, to violent or disruptive behaviour, as prisoners perceive that induction wing staff are not helping them resolve their issues.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Some prisoners are at such high risk of suicide or serious self-harm that they are put on constant watch, with an officer observing them 24 hours a day. As many as six prisoners at a time have been under this level of supervision.

4.2.1 Self-harm

The Board notes that the number of self-harm incidents recorded during the reporting year increased to 922, involving 176 individuals. This represents an increase of 99 incidents compared with the previous year.

Board members noted that prisoners reported self-harm was driven by anxiety arising from uncertainty and the restricted regime, as well as bullying, debt and difficulties in getting help with basic requests.

HMIP reported in May 2025 that rates of self-harm were high and that support for those at risk was inadequate, reflecting the Board's ongoing concerns.

During the year, the Board has noted some improvements, including the monitoring and sharing of key trigger dates for prisoners at risk of self-harm with relevant staff. Two

officers in the safety team have been ring-fenced from cross-deployment to ensure that minimum staffing levels are maintained each day to support prisoners identified as being at risk.

Board members who have concerns about the risk to prisoners have noted a supportive response when raising concerns with the wing officers and the safety team.

The safety team monitors calls from relatives raising concerns about prisoner welfare, responds to and records these concerns, and returns calls to those who have raised them.

4.2.2 Deaths in custody

The Board notes, with great concern, that there have been seven deaths in custody in the reporting period, bringing the total number of prisoner deaths at the prison to 27 in seven years.

Although the causes of the deaths in the reporting year are yet to be confirmed by the coroner, several of them appear to be the result of illicit drug consumption. One of the deaths was apparently due to natural causes.

There have also been a number of very serious incidents of self-harm, where the prompt and commendable actions of staff have prevented attempts by prisoners to take their own lives.

The 2025 HMIP report stated that the response to death in custody recommendations was inadequate. The Board acknowledges that the prison has been addressing those concerns.

Throughout the reporting year, the coroner's inquests were conducted concerning prisoners who died at the prison in 2023-2024, when the prison was managed by the previous operator, Sodexo. Members of the IMB attended several days of proceedings as observers.

HM Coroner criticised the culture and systems in the prison, commenting on a 'legacy culture' of laziness and bad practice, compounded by staff passing on these behaviours to new recruits.

The coroner was also heavily critical of the failure to learn from previous deaths in custody at Lowdham Grange and to embed safe practices for prisoner care. The Board has noted that one of the responses has been the issuing of lengthy policy documents and Governor's Orders by email. However, Board members have expressed concerns that, due to the pressure of activity on the wings and in other operational departments, these messages may not always be getting through to staff or consistently reinforced by managers.

4.2.3 In-cell fires

The Board notes that the number of in-cell fires set by prisoners has declined again in 2025-2026.

- 2022-2023: 21
- 2023-2024: 162
- 2024-2025: 113
- **2025-2026: 92**

In-cell fires put the prisoner, staff and other prisoners at significant risk of harm and cause damage to cells. Prisoners have told Board members that they are taking this action as a protest against the restrictions of the regime.

In October 2025, tamper--proof vapes were introduced, which may have contributed to a reduction in in-cell fires.

4.2.4 Assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans

The assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) process is the system in prisons to support prisoners at risk of self-harm or suicide.

	2025-2026	2024-2025	2023-2024	2022-2023
Average number of prisoners on an ACCT at the end of a month	37	37	50	18

This figure is constant but, during the reporting year, the roll has fallen from over 800 prisoners to 660, so there is a significant increase in the proportion of prisoners needing this support.

The Board has noted an increase in the number of prisoners subject to ACCTs in November and December 2025, and into January 2026, following the introduction of the HMPPS cohorting regime.

The Board visited prisoners subject to ACCTs when on the wings and around the prison. We generally found that prisoners were receiving limited support, and observations were being carried out. Board members have observed that the high number of prisoners on an ACCT on some wings, together with the presence of unfamiliar staff, may have contributed to poor quality support for these vulnerable men.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

High levels of violence have continued at the prison throughout the reporting period, although Board members have generally felt confident that they could continue to safely carry out monitoring duties on the wings.

	2025-26	2024-25	2023-24
Total number of incidents of assault	477	450	462
Incidents of serious assault	69	51	86
Total number of assaults on staff	289	261	209
Total number of prisoners assaulted	192	196	262
Total number of prisoners seriously assaulted	36	23	52

The Board notes that these assaults have resulted in some serious injuries to staff and prisoners.

The level of assaults on staff has contributed to increased absences and a reduced number of officers on the wings. This has, in turn, has restricted the regime and limited the availability of escorts to healthcare appointments, work, and education.

4.3.1 Actions taken by the prison to reduce violence

Lowdham Grange accommodates male prisoners serving extended sentences for offences such as violence or threats to life, arson, possession of firearms, drug-related crimes, and robbery. A significant proportion of prisoners require mental healthcare or present with developmental or behavioural disorders. The facility has limited discretion regarding the prisoners transferred to its care, some of whom have prior records of assault and gang involvement.

In November 2025, Lowdham Grange implemented a 'cohorting regime' under HMPPS instructions, dividing the upper and lower landings to reduce wing violence. On average, 20 prisoners were managed through challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs), which are used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence, at the end of each month.

4.3.2 Self-isolating prisoners

Board members visit self-isolating prisoners, many of whom express fears about violence and drug debt and have mental health needs. Due to staff shortages and inexperienced officers, these prisoners often go unidentified and may miss basic necessities such as food, showers and exercise.

The Board has noted that the safety team records prisoners who are self-isolating more systematically, but this information is not consistently shared or used by wing staff to support these men.

4.3.3 Serious incidents

Prison management is required to notify the IMB of serious incidents; however, in some cases, the Board was either not informed or was notified only after the incident had concluded, preventing members from observing incident management and prisoner wellbeing.

There **were 178 incidents at height** (which includes prisoners climbing the bars or roofs) during the reporting period, a slight reduction from 185 in the previous year; however, this should be seen in the context of a reduced prisoner population over much of the reporting period.

	2025-2026	2024-2025	2023-20204
Incidents of concerted indiscipline (when two or more prisoners act together in defiance of an instruction or the regime)	17	7	16
Incidents of disorder (barricade, prevention of access, hostage-taking)	10	13	15

4.4 Use of force

The Board notes that the use of force (UoF) on prisoners has increased significantly in the reporting year:

	2025-2026	2024-2025	2023-2024
UoF incidents	1221	762	414

The HMIP inspection in 2025 found that the use of force had risen substantially and was very high, and noted that governance and oversight were poor. This has been an ongoing concern for the Board and is reflected in feedback from prisoners.

Weekly use of force (UoF) assurance reviews have been introduced, with a multi-disciplinary team assessing incidents from the previous week. These reviews identify both good practice and areas for improvement, with learning shared with relevant staff.

Board members have, where possible, attended these meetings; however, they have frequently been cancelled or moved at short notice to a different day/time, which has meant that members could not attend as observers. The Board welcomed an initiative that operational managers should be checking on prisoners who have been subject to the use of force in the 24 hours after the event.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

The Board reports that thorough searches of all prisoner areas throughout the year have led to the recovery of a significant number of illicit items, although this amount is lower than last year's total.

Type of Illicit item found	2025-2026	2024-2025
Drugs	248	410
Mobile Phone (including USBs, chargers and SIM cards)	254	309
Weapons	290	319
Fermenting Liquid ('hooch')	136	189

The HMIP Inspection found that, although security measures had improved, a significant quantity of illegal drugs continued to enter the prison, resulting in four suspected drug-related deaths over the past two years. The widespread issue of drugs entering prisons through a variety of methods, including drones, is well recognised at a national level. The Board has serious concerns about the impact on prisoner safety and staff wellbeing, given the high availability of illicit substances and associated weapons.

In response, the prison has introduced a range of measures and training aimed at reducing the entry of prohibited items. Steps have also been taken to strengthen physical security and improve detection capabilities. The Board has observed enhanced access control procedures, including more rigorous searching and monitoring of entry points for staff and visitors.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 Accommodation

Accommodation at Lowdham Grange is relatively modern by prison standards and consists of five house blocks divided into 14 wings. All cells include a toilet and washbasin, and those on six wings also have in-cell showers. The remaining eight wings have communal showers located on the landings.

All cells have phone points and handsets for use by prisoners. All calling numbers must be approved for individual prisoners and calls are monitored. The IMB has received a number of complaints about difficulties in getting approval for numbers for family members. Prisoners pay for phone credits, although free credit may be issued by the prison at times of distress or difficulty.

TVs are provided for prisoners on the standard (middle) and enhanced (top) levels of the incentives scheme. These give access to a range of in-cell activities, including education material, pastoral support and religious services, as well as a selection of entertainment channels.

Each house block has an exercise yard and there is a large sports field and a well-equipped gymnasium at the prison.

During the reporting period, extensive work and renovation has taken place. Windows and beds have been updated, and several wings have been decorated.

Members have seen a general improvement in cleanliness around the prison, but observed poor hygiene in the serveries and communal facilities on wings.

5.1.2 Clothing

Prison-issue clothing is provided, but prisoners are allowed to wear their own clothes, except in certain circumstances. Each wing has its own laundry room, with a full-time (prisoner) worker having responsibility for operation and cleaning. There have been no significant complaints about machine breakdowns or maintenance.

5.1.3 Food

Meals are prepared in a central kitchen and food is delivered to the house blocks in heated trollies, towed by a truck. Each wing has a servery with heated stations, where food is distributed to prisoners. The Board has received complaints about food quality and portion sizes across the prison, but this seems to have improved towards the end of the reporting period. Some prisoners have complained about specific diets not being catered for, but the kitchens and healthcare have engaged with members and undertaken to rectify these issues.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 Segregation unit

The segregation unit (formerly known as the care and separation unit) is housed in a purpose-built block, which contains 24 individual cells, two showers and outdoor exercise areas, as well as a kitchen servery and a laundry room. Meals are prepared in the servery by staff or prison orderlies (trusted prisoners who take on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison) and are either distributed by staff, or

prisoners attend the servery to collect their meals. Members have seen both systems operating throughout the year. Prisoners eat in their cells.

Some cells have in-cell phones, and prisoners on the unit are allowed television sets, where this is considered to be in their own interest.

The unit has been full for most of the year. Senior management have tried to cap numbers at 18, to allow staff to run the unit efficiently, but numbers rose above this towards the end of the reporting period.

The segregation unit has had a particularly challenging year, managing prisoners with complex and demanding needs, some of whom have caused significant damage to their cells. We have never before observed so much damage through acts of dirty protests (where a prisoner has chosen to defecate or urinate in a cell without using the facilities provided), smashed observation panels, fire, flooding and graffiti. For much of the reporting period, at least one prisoner has been on a dirty protest.

There has been significant refurbishment on the unit, despite ongoing damage. It has been repainted, signage has been replaced and new in-cell phone connections have been installed. Throughout the reporting period, the areas outside the unit have also been well maintained.

Use of force incidents have increased on the unit during the reporting period.

5.2.2 Segregation staffing

The Board is pleased to report that the unit appears to be led by experienced custodial managers. They and their staff demonstrate strong knowledge and understanding, even during particularly challenging periods, including times of heightened disruption involving multiple prisoners.

Staffing issues across the prison often led to segregation staff being deployed elsewhere during the earlier part of the reporting period. Resources were particularly stretched when two prisoners spent extended periods on constant observations, and two prisoners were placed in special accommodation (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety) on the unit. Staff told Board members that, at times, they were unable to comply with ACCT checks and run a full regime. There have been as many as ten prisoners on ACCTs in the unit requiring checks by staff, sometimes as frequently as five per hour.

Members believe the staff have maintained professional standards in very challenging circumstances. There have been many occasions where several prisoners have required the presence of three or four officers when unlocked, because of their behaviour. The unit has experienced smashed observation panels, spitting, dirty protests and the throwing of fluids at staff at times, reflecting a concerning pattern. A number of staff have been assaulted, and IMB members have observed female staff being subjected to offensive and inappropriate language. Staff began routinely wearing stab vests in November 2025.

During one period of severe disruption, the IMB observed a prison chaplain helping staff to deliver meals to cell doors and support prisoners, despite not wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). Healthcare staff were unable to deliver medication to cells during this time.

5.2.3 Segregated prisoners

Many of those detained in the segregation unit have complex mental health and behavioural issues. Some prisoners have arrived in the unit with secreted weapons and drugs, and often need support in withdrawing from drugs.

Prisoners have complained to the IMB that staff have behaved aggressively towards them.

Prisoners have expressed frustration at their lack of progress, either towards reintegration or transfer, and this can lead to disruptive behaviour. Prisoners have remained in the unit for long periods because transfers could not be secured. A small number of prisoners remained in the unit for extended periods, including some for more than 100 days and others for significantly longer, due to delays in securing a more therapeutic establishment for him.

There has been a significant number of self-harm incidents, several of which were serious and required hospital treatment. Two prisoners on constant observation continued to self-harm and made repeated visits to hospital, despite the concern and empathy shown to them by staff and observed by members.

Several prisoners have been released into the community directly from the segregation unit, at the end of their sentence. Prisoners told the Board that they did not feel prepared and were scared by what they might experience on release. They refused to reintegrate in advance of release due to fears of returning to drug use and violence on the wings. Members saw segregation staff making serious efforts to obtain clothing, emergency financial support, and engage other agencies in the community, with good support from the chaplaincy team.

Property going missing or stolen has been a particular problem for prisoners transferred to segregation. Cell doors have been left unsecured on occasion, and after investigation several prisoners have obtained compensation.

5.2.4 Segregation review boards

Face-to-face reviews with prisoners are held three times a week and chaired by senior members of staff. Regular staff members chairing reviews have facilitated greater continuity during the reporting period.

During the earlier part of the reporting year, the IMB expressed concern about the lack of input from other agencies. Frequently, there was no one from the mental health team present, and those who did attend displayed little or no knowledge of the prisoners. This has improved significantly since the change in healthcare provider.

The offender management unit (OMU) did not always have information on transfers, frustrating those chairing the reviews.

The psychology and chaplaincy departments appear to have been a consistent presence in reviews during the reporting period, offering support and suggestions of progress.

Prisoners have repeatedly complained to the Board that, despite requests, they were not given their paperwork, justifying further detention. The Board raised this issue with senior staff and reintegration plans are now produced.

Prisoners are now reintegrated only after a location assessment, and their property is placed in their cell before they move. Employment and healthcare appointments are arranged before reintegration, leading to a calmer move for prisoners.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 Staff and prisoner relationships

Staff and prisoner relationships continue to be an area of concern for the Board. We are aware that some staff have expressed fears about entering wings and have reported not feeling supported by colleagues during violent incidents. Due to high absentee rates, the staffing on wings is sometimes less than ideal. Prisoners have also described strained relationships with some staff, including communication barriers where English is not a first language. Prisoners have expressed real frustrations at reduced regime days.

5.3.2 Key workers

Key work is a core part of prison officer's work and it is a central aspect of the HMPPS offender management in custody (OMiC model). It is aimed at improving safety in prisons by building better relationships between staff and prisoners. Members observed key work to be poor or non-existent for the early part of the reporting period. Some prisoners reported not seeing a key worker for an extended period and being unaware who their key worker was. They expressed frustration about sentence progression, difficulty contacting the OMU and obtaining a place on courses to both address their behaviours and which were required to be undertaken before parole. In the second half of the reporting period, a senior member of staff was allocated to address issues around key work and members have been impressed with the progress made.

In addition, the Board understands that a new initiative called 'Encompass' is being prepared, aimed at reducing prisoners' risky or criminal behaviour. The lessons from this will be used during key worker sessions.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 Prisoner representation

The prison population is diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, faith and other protected characteristics.

During the year, a diversity and equality manager was appointed and a team of senior managers was allocated to support and lead inclusivity for both prisoners and the workforce. At the beginning of the reporting year, prisoner representatives had reported to the Board that they had no forum meetings and looked forward to a relaunching of prison council meetings, which are now underway and are well attended by prisoners and senior management.

Among prisoners aged over 50, including those who are retired or medically retired, many have raised concerns with the Board about reduced access to activities and association time under the new regime. RECOOP, an organisation that supports older prisoners, left the establishment during the reporting year. There are plans to reintroduce age-appropriate activities, which should also have a positive impact on provision for younger adults.

5.4.2 Disability

Prisoners' individual needs are assessed at induction, where they can declare any disability or additional support requirement and be referred to appropriate interventions.

Further assessments are carried out in the education department, where rapid screening helps identify specific learning needs. Men are then placed on a register to ensure appropriate follow-up support.

The Shannon Trust charity is employed to help with literacy skills. During the year, a neurodiversity support manager was appointed, working closely with a healthcare neurodiversity nurse. Together, they support a range of conditions, including ADHD (attention deficit disorder), autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's syndrome.

During the year, the Board encountered instances where disabled prisoners, or those returning from hospital with identified special equipment requirements, were not provided with specified equipment.

5.4.3 Foreign national prisoners

The Board notes that support for foreign national prisoners has been patchy, with little foreign language material available. The library has a sparse collection of books in foreign languages. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses started running from April. There have been some staffing challenges; however, course completers have successfully progressed to Entry Level English and from early spring 2026 will be undertaking a new qualification, Stepping Stones. The prison is in the process of recruiting a new ESOL tutor.

There have been ongoing complaints to the Board about the high cost of phone credit for foreign national prisoner. However, we are aware that additional compassionate social video call access has been facilitated for men at times of family crisis. As an indicative proportion of prisoners, 108 out of 742 men were identified as foreign national prisoners in June last year.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy continued to be active and visible around the prison, with a positive and supportive team. Prisoners in the segregation unit are prioritised for daily visits. Prisoners are seen by a faith leader within 24 hours of arriving at the establishment and at segregation and ACCT reviews. Significant religious festivals are recognised across all faiths, and chaplaincy staff meet quarterly to discuss culinary requirements for diverse religious needs.

Overall, around a third of the HMP Lowdham Grange population identify as Muslim, and just under half are from minority ethnic backgrounds, reflecting a diverse, multi-faith community. Congregational worship continued throughout the year. At times, the regime has presented challenges with worship occasionally coinciding with social time. Prisoners have also reported delays in reaching services due to staff shortages and operational changes. However, the Board is aware that the senior leadership team and the chaplaincy have made particular effort to improve access to faith provision over the year. There was no Anglican priest in post during this period.

5.6 Complaints

At the beginning of the reporting year, the Board received ongoing negative feedback about delays within the prison complaints system, and the HMIP inspection in March 2025 also confirmed this. During the year, the Board have been pleased to see a very positive improvement in how complaints are handled, and response is generally provided within expected time frames.

At the beginning of the year, prisoners reported to us that discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs) were not being responded to. The Board notes that much progress has been made in this area, and DIRFs are being addressed.

5.7 Property

Missing property during transfers between wings, as well as between establishments, continued to be a source of frustration, stress and anger for prisoners. IMB members are often involved in trying to trace these items. Applications to the Board relating to property on transfer from other prisons increased from nine in the previous reporting year to 21 this year. There was also a notable rise in property issues within the prison itself, with applications increasing from 26 to 39. Board members also received a significant amount of informal feedback and complaints from prisoners regarding lost property. Property issues remain one of the most common concerns raised on wings and continue to be a significant issue for both prisoners and the Board.

6. Health and wellbeing

The main provider for healthcare at the start of the reporting period was Nottinghamshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (NHCFT). Following inspection reports by HMIP and the Care Quality Commission, as well as a number of coroners' inquest findings relating to deaths at Lowdham Grange, the Trust withdrew from the contract.

NHS England (NHSE), as the commissioner of prison healthcare services, agreed a period of transition to a new provider, Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHFT). As an experienced healthcare provider already delivering services to a number of establishments, NHFT was able to address the most urgent clinical and managerial issues quickly.

The IMB was not surprised by the adverse report of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) team, which was part of the HMIP inspection in March 2025. The Board provided examples to the team of poor care and outcomes for prisoners, which we had evidenced during our monitoring. The CQC report aligned with our observations, and the following sections, below, refer to the shortcomings in service quality identified during the inspection.

Following HMPPS taking over responsibility for the prison, there were some improvements in the delivery of healthcare, with better working between the prison and health service management. However, the continuing high level of unfilled posts, reliance on agency staff and poor management support was disappointing, with adverse effects on the outcome for prisoners.

The chief medical officer (CMO) for England has now produced their report on the *Health of People in Prison* (November 2025). The main findings and recommendations provide a framework for the IMB monitoring activity as we move forward.

6.1 Healthcare: general

The CQC report documented the poor services prisoners were receiving. Long-standing vacancies were at 45% and high sickness absence compounded this. There was no effective clinical governance and audit systems in place and prisoners reported inadequate response to complaints.

Since the new provider, NHFT, took over, we have observed strong leadership from the manager, who has extensive experience of working in prisons. Although vacancies remain, new staff have been recruited and there is good support through effective governance and supervision.

The IMB is able to obtain timely responses to complaints and action on issues we pick up on during our monitoring visits.

6.2 Physical healthcare

The CMO's report noted changes in the demographics of the prison population, including an increase in older prisoners, with associated higher levels of chronic illness and a greater need for palliative and end-of-life care. At Lowdham Grange, referrals for secondary care continue to place a strain on escort provision. Two-week wait referrals for possible cancer diagnoses are prioritised and late diagnosis of cancer, which has been noted by the IMB in the previous system, is less of a risk.

There is also progress on telemedicine introduction for remote consultations.

The Board has been pleased to note that waiting times to see a GP or advanced nurse practitioner have significantly reduced over the reporting year.

There is close monitoring of the non-attenders (DNAs) and no access visits (NAVS). These are appointments where it has not been possible to escort the prisoner to the appointment. The prison is aiming to identify custody officers who can work closely with healthcare to reduce these incidents and the associated waste of clinical resource.

The waiting time for dental appointments has fallen and urgent treatment is available. Provision of podiatry, optician and physiotherapy services is closely monitored, and steps have been taken to improve access.

Regular sexual health clinics provide advice, and vaccination for blood-borne viruses is offered. Vaccinations are also offered during initial health assessment on arrival at the prison and to those accessing substance misuse services.

When tuberculosis (TB) cases were identified at the prison, an effective screening and vaccination programme was put in place.

The most significant risk to prisoners' physical health remains the level of substance misuse, which is addressed in more detail later in this section.

6.3 Mental health

The mental health team continued to have unfilled posts, which meant that at the time of the CQC visit the team was failing to meet the high level of need in the prison. A total of 163 prisoners were waiting for assessment and a further 63 waiting to start treatment. In the Board's view, psychiatric provision was inadequate. There had been delays in the use of a wellbeing centre, with recurrent cancellation of sessions.

The segregation unit continued to face challenges in managing prisoners with severe mental health conditions, and none was transferred to hospital under the Mental Health Act within the expected 28-day timeframe. A small number of prisoners who were particularly unwell remained in segregation for extended periods, with some exceeding three months and, in one case, significantly longer.

The high levels of self-harm and the deaths in custody are detailed elsewhere in this IMB report.

Since the new provider has taken over the service, we have noted welcome improvements. As of January 2026, initial health assessments were taking place within five days, with 24 hours for urgent appointments. Staff attend ACCT and segregation reviews and demonstrate knowledge of the prisoner's health, contributing to informed decision making. Additional psychiatric support is now in place. The IMB hopes to see improved team working and the continuation of enhanced input to assist staff managing the wide range of mental health needs at the prison.

Assessments have shown that approximately 49% of the prison population are neurodivergent. A head of neurodiversity was recruited in 2025, following the contract handover back to HMPPS. The position is a strategic role, working closely with healthcare, and is tasked with five key priorities that are being rolled out.

- Identification: To focus on identifying neurodivergent prisoners in need of additional support and resources (with their consent). All prisoners identified and assessed will have a 'one-page profile' that staff will have access to electronically and on the wing. This will be created with the prisoner and will provide key

information on how best to communicate with them. A 'hidden disability' flag can also be used on the Nomis (internal computer) system.

- Staff training: Delivery of neurodiversity awareness training and associated resources is being delivered to all staff on monthly training days, including how to use prisoner one-page profiles. Autism facilitator training will also be rolled out to staff to play a key role in supporting neurodivergent prisoners.
- Supportive environment: Neurodivergent prisoners have access to distraction packs/fidget toys and will have support strategies, including workplace-specific strategies for those in industries. Low-stimulus cells are planned for each wing, including the segregation unit, and separate low-stimulus rooms in house block 4, both secured through NHS funding. Packs will also be available for children visiting the prison.
- Targeted support: The one-page profile and assessment will inform what support neurodivergent prisoners need on a day-to-day basis with specific tasks.
- Preparing for release: Autism facilitators will liaise with family and external agencies/social care providers to facilitate the transition.

The prison now has additional care resources, including representative groups and open forums.

6.4 Social care

The IMB is pleased to note that social care support for prisoners continues. Social care representatives attend meetings to plan early release, helping to identify individuals who may require support. Where appropriate, prisoners are seen by social care prior to release, ensuring they receive advice and guidance, even if they are not eligible for ongoing support in the community.

Buddy support has not been in place at Lowdham for several years. While most individuals seen by social care do not require a formal support package, many would benefit from buddy support with everyday tasks such as prompts to clean their cells, ordering meals or canteen items, and collecting meals. It is hoped that this provision will be reintroduced in the near future.

The system of Listeners, volunteer prisoners who have undergone training by the Samaritans, has been reintroduced. They can be available to prisoners in mental stress at short notice day or night. Prisoners can also contact the Samaritans on their in-cell phones.

Social care have started attending safety intervention meetings (SIMs) on a weekly basis. This has built working relationships with new staff within the prison and allowed discussions to be had around referrals for social care. It is hoped that by continued attendance at the meetings, it reminds staff that social care is available.

An example of good practice is the provision of a falls sensor, provided by the technology enabled care team at Nottinghamshire County Council. This device alerts staff more quickly when a prisoner has fallen in their cell, as it detects changes in altitude, enabling a prompt response and, where necessary, timely involvement of healthcare.

The equality officer is also forming links to ensure that social care is built into the equality offer for new staff going through their induction process.

6.5 Time out of Cell, regime

The overall staffing situation at the prison has resulted in frequent restrictive regimes, affecting all aspects of the prisoner experience. Prisoners report a negative impact on their health and wellbeing due to reduced access to fresh air, exercise and social interaction. This may increase the risk of conditions such as heart disease and diabetes, particularly given the prevalence of smoking, poor diet and genetic factors within the prison population. There is also a risk of vitamin D deficiency. The IMB will continue to seek assurance that prison catering and healthcare respond appropriately to prisoners' requests for special diets.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The greatest risk to prisoners' health continues to be the level of substance misuse. Drug overdose has again been implicated in deaths in custody this year. The availability of naloxone (an emergency medication that rapidly reverses opioid overdoses), together with training for custody officers in its use with prisoners identified as under the influence (UTI), may have helped to prevent further fatal overdoses. While the number of calls to healthcare has decreased slightly in recent months, it remains high - exceeding 100 each month - placing continued pressure on an already stretched service.

The absence of an integrated strategy across the prison had delayed effective action, but this has now been addressed. Waiting times for substance misuse service (SMS) assessments have reduced, with more group activities in place and increased support for the incentivised substance-free living wings now being established. Recruitment to the SMS team has been successful in strengthening this provision. As of the end of January, the team was managing a caseload of over 100 prisoners, with a 15-day wait for assessment, with around a third of those receiving opiate substitution treatment.

Prisoners being discharged into the community are referred to community drug services and are offered naloxone to take with them.

6.7 Soft skills

The IMB will seek views from prisoners during monitoring to identify activities that may help them cope with prison life. The introduction of prisoner feedback on healthcare via the prison's interactive communications system, alongside the resumption of regular prison council meetings, should also provide further opportunities to explore what additional support could be offered.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 Education

Education continues to be provided by Novus, and was the subject of an unannounced Ofsted (the government body that inspects and reports on the quality of education) inspection in 2025. The inspection concluded that improvement was required across all areas. The Board is pleased that several positive initiatives have been introduced.

The Board finds that prisoners are generally happy with the provision and the learning environment is comfortable, clean and welcoming. From our observations, staff are well regarded by students. We have been concerned by the continued impact of regime changes throughout the year, and prisoners have shared these frustrations with us. At times, there have also been delays to classes starting due to staffing issues and prisoners being delayed in their transfer from the wings.

The range of courses has been extended to include more vocational skills qualifications, such as barbering, money management, horticulture and waste management. It also includes a new STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) initiative to engage prisoners in the construction of bamboo bikes. An example of their work will be exhibited at the National Justice Museum in 2026. Art, personal development and media remain a prominent and popular part of the offer.

The Board is pleased to note that a Maths teacher has been appointed, together with an ESOL teacher (English for speakers of other languages) for prisoners who need this support.

Qualifications range from Pre-entry to Level 2. A total of 659 qualifications were achieved at the prison over the reporting year. It is encouraging that Maths and English provision has more than doubled since last year, and tuition is available for non-English speakers. A total of 131 prisoners started courses in these subjects and 113 attained their qualification. The Shannon Trust charity is involved in encouraging reading and developing mentoring skills. Ten peer reading mentors were in place at the end of 2025.

Attendance across education appears to be variable, running at 73% generally after adjustment for operational closures in 2025. We remain concerned about prisoners' engagement with Maths and English courses.

It is positive to note that a multi-skills vocational course covering tiling, brick-laying and plastering is planned for the coming year.

Students continue to engage successfully with Open University courses, supported by the prison. The Inside Media department offers specialised IT training, enabling students to secure employment formatting information and entertainment programmes within the prison and across other establishments.

Board members were encouraged by a presentation given by a prisoner who is being supported to deliver an anti-crime initiative to young people and is actively using his media skills to develop community links.

Several new initiatives to strengthen prisoners' outcomes have been introduced over the year. Provision of an outreach English and Maths teacher, who appears to work with hard-to-reach or isolating learners directly on the wings and the segregation unit, has been notable. It is also positive that a neurodiversity specialist has been appointed. New

arrivals have an advice and guidance session during induction to help determine the most appropriate work or education route ahead.

Access to courses continues to be managed through waiting lists, risk assessment and access to induction training. The men have reported to the Board that waiting times for courses or employment are frustrating.

The introduction of the 'cohorting regime', more training days, and the loss of Friday morning activities has reduced educational opportunity from a potential 22 hours to under 11 hours for most prisoners on a weekly basis, even when the regime is fully operational. However, cohorting means that, numerically, more places are available across the Lowdham Grange prison population.

7.1.2 Library

From the Board's observations, the library continues to offer a staffed service and provides a comfortable environment. The number of prisoners using it continues to be low, and informally assessed as only being used by ten prisoners per week. The library has been a week-day service only, and within the limits of the regime. The Board is encouraged that the library timetable will include Saturday opening from spring 2026. The librarian is proactive in delivering books on request to isolating prisoners on the wings and the segregation unit.

7.1.3 Exercise and sport

The gym, which is under HMPPS supervision, also offered accredited courses during 2025, through a twinning partnership with Mansfield Town Football Club. This provided football coaching and steward training over seven weeks to 15 prisoners with less than three years remaining on their sentences. 3Pillars also ran a rugby- based sports mentoring course during 2025, although continuation is subject to future funding. A Level 1 basketball course is planned for the coming year. Prisoners regularly report to the Board the significant benefits gym-based activities.

It is notable that team sports and team-building activities have been significantly limited by regime instability and cohorting, which make it difficult to assemble sufficient numbers for group-based activities.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Prisoners consistently tell Board about the value of their work and purposeful activity. This year, we have seen periods when they were fully engaged, and others when this was very much diminished due to regime and prison staffing.

The workshop provision continues to give employment for prisoners in commercially aligned workshops. Among the clients are the furniture retailers DFS, as well as local councils, prisons and hospitals. Prisoners engage in professional upholstery, woodwork, sewing, quality control and warehousing activities to facilitate these contracts. They also provide internal distribution services for prisoners' orders. Ofsted inspected the workshop provision during 2025, and it was assessed as requiring improvement

The Board is encouraged that workshop staff are engaged in assessor training, with the intention of the prison offering National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 training to prisoners as part of employment provision later in 2026. This will be a significant step towards vocational readiness for employment on release.

STEM provision has been increased with the introduction of a practical workshop course run by the Bamboo Bicycle club. Board members were pleased that an innovative fire-

retardant pillow has been designed and manufactured in house, which will be used throughout HMP Lowdham Grange and other prisons. The Board is also pleased that contracts with DFS and other organisations are due to expand in 2026, offering further opportunities for employment. It is also encouraging that the prison's first job fair is planned in spring 2026 for prisoners nearing sentence completion.

Under the cohorting regime, most prisoners in employment are offered around 11 hours per week, although some specialist 'red band' (trusted prisoners who carry out responsible roles) and trusted full-time workers can access up to 22 hours. As a result of cohorting, there has been a notable change in working hours for many, and prisoners have expressed mixed views. Members have been informed that delays linked to regime changes and the completion of risk assessments have affected access to induction courses, leaving some prisoners waiting weeks or months before starting employment or education. The Board recognises that activity placements are kept under regular review by staff and management.

Work opportunities on the wings and grounds are overseen by HMPPS. The Ofsted report in 2025 reflected on how little training or oversight was given to servery and cleaning workers. The Board is pleased to note that, in the interim period, 60 prisoners have qualified for formal Waste Management Training and Advisory Board Qualifications (WAMITAB) in cleaning competencies, and 35 have gained certification in waste management during 2025.

Many prisoners report that they value their roles in the workshops, highlighting the opportunity to develop new skills and the social and structured aspects of work. Similar feedback is received from those working in the kitchen and staff bistro. The Board notes the positive relationships between staff and prisoners in these areas, with many workshop roles held over a sustained period by both staff and prisoners.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 Overview of the offender management unit (OMU)

For the past three years, the Board reported that the OMU was under-staffed, which led to inefficiencies in the unit and substantially high caseloads for the various offender management personnel. This was further confirmed in the report of HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) in May 2025, where it was noted that contacts between OMU staff and prisoners were 'infrequent and often only triggered by key events such as parole'.

The Board is pleased to note that following submission of the HMIP report, the prison Governor prepared and implemented a plan of detailed actions to address shortfalls in the prison, including those related to the OMU. While some of these measures have been completed, a number continue in progress and are becoming established features of the offender management processes in the prison.

A number of additional OMU staff were appointed during the year, bringing the total number of offender managers in all categories to 14 at the close of the Board's reporting year (31 Jan 2026), compared with nine at the start of the year. Also, the prison has appointed a second full-time registered psychologist, with a third psychologist providing weekly clinical leadership support.

In view of the number of high-risk prisoners in the establishment, this is still below the resource level required and continues to result in high caseload levels for each officer. For example, probation offender managers responsible for high- and medium-risk prisoners continue to have, on average, a caseload of up to 80 prisoner files each.

The action plan for offender management included measures to ensure that offender and risk assessments were up to date, backlogs were addressed, reoffending was reduced, education programmes were enhanced, and resettlement support was strengthened. Delivery has been supported by the recruitment and training of additional staff within the unit, alongside improved interdepartmental communication.

The Board is of the opinion that positive steps are being taken to ensure that prisoners are more able to access the support required to meet their sentence plan goals and reduce reoffending.

7.3.2 Progression

The OMU is responsible for delivering progression and resettlement support for all prisoners, including those with life sentences and those imprisoned for public protection (IPPs). It has operational contact with nearly all departments in the prison.

Risk assessment and OASys: The management and updating of the offender assessment system, which measures the risks and needs of prisoners in custody and on release, has shown improvement during the year. A total of 57 assessments were reviewed and, by the end of January 2026, no more than 11 reviews were overdue. However, prisoners from other establishments continue to be transferred in to the prison with incomplete and out of date paperwork (including risk assessments), creating additional work for the unit. For example, in January 2026 alone, five prisoners arrived with outdated OASys and other essential records.

During the year, the OMU introduced a more comprehensive induction checklist for new prisoner admissions. This must be completed within two weeks of arrival and is designed to ensure that all relevant risk and safety needs are recorded and monitored as the prisoner progresses through his sentence. The Board welcomes this as an improvement in the induction process.

Category reviews: It is normal that, as a prisoner progresses through his sentence and is sufficiently advanced and nearer his release date, his category comes up for review mainly through parole hearings.

These are now monitored monthly, and the Board is pleased to note that significant progress has been made in reducing the number of category C prisoners (these are individuals who can't be trusted in open conditions but are unlikely to try to escape) and category D prisoners (these are low-risk men, so are suitable for open conditions), so ensuring they are housed in other appropriate establishments:

	No. at end Feb 2025	No. at end May 2025	No. at end Jan 2026	Annual % change
Category C prisoners	76	92	11	85.5%
Category D prisoners	5	7	0	100%

For much of the year, sentence progression was restrained by a lack of meaningful face-to-face contact with offender managers. Prisoners reported that opportunities to prepare

for release were limited, as necessary risk management plans were not in place and they were unable to develop appropriate pro-social skills. This was raised with the Board during a number of monitoring visits to the prison.

However, this situation appears to be changing for the better. For example, the Board has noted the attendance by Prison Offender Managers (POMs) at some segregation review meetings and more positive steps are being taken to improve the availability of POM's on residence. This has started with the introduction of twice-weekly OMU clinics (two house block wings will be visited each week), where prisoners will be able to seek advice and guidance on matters pertaining to their progression and eventual release.

IPP and life sentence prisoners: There are 20 IPP (indeterminate sentences for public protection) prisoners in HMP Lowdham Grange, a reduction of 20% from the previous year. The 'lifer' prison population fell by 15%, to 241, at the end of January 2026.

The Board is pleased to see that management has introduced a programme of regular discussion groups for these prisoners, with all eligible individuals invited to attend forum sessions. These offer valuable opportunities for prisoners to share their experiences and include visits from the parole board members, who provide information and guidance on prisoners' conduct and presentation through the parole process, including appeal procedures.

Over the past year, four 'forums' were attended by 12 IPP prisoners and two forums were attended by 35 'lifer' prisoners.

Foreign national prisoners (FNPs): Information from prison management indicates that the number of FNPs at HMP Lowdham Grange fell by almost 30% during the year, with approximately 80 FNPs now held at the establishment from the following regions:

Europe: 55% Africa: 12.5% Caribbean: 5% Asia: 12.5% Middle East: 5%

The progress and processing of FNPs is co-ordinated between the Ministry of Justice (HMPPS) and a liaison officer from the Home Office, who attends the prison every six weeks to review the FNP caseload and prioritise individuals for deportation or repatriation on completion of their sentences. During the year, six prisoners were deported.

Progression and education: An important part of the Governor's action plan (see 7.3.1, above) concerns education and the Board notes that greater emphasis is now being placed on strengthening the range of courses providing both purposeful activity and progression.

For prisoners progressing through their sentences, a new all-encompassing programme, Building Choices, is being introduced. This replaces the Kaizen and Thinking Skills programmes and prisoners have given members favourable feedback.

The new programme focuses on offending behaviour, violence and the development of pro-social skills by building on prisoners' self-management abilities. It is designed to be adaptable for individuals with a range of abilities, including those who are highly skilled, moderately skilled, or have learning difficulties. Successful completion is expected to support progression to category C and contribute to a reduction in adjudications (disciplinary hearings where a prisoner is alleged to have breached prison rules). However, specific measurable targets have yet to be established.

The aim is to deliver two Building Choices programmes each year, which would give access to 88 prisoners compared with the previous annual expectations of 22 prisoners attending Kaizen and TSP courses. In time, the intention is to have two officers and two prisoners on each wing to promote and support the aims of the courses. IPP prisoners and those approaching parole are being prioritised, although some prisoners may not wish to engage in this initiative.

Careers advice and guidance is now provided and prisoners are encouraged to prepare their own personal development plans and CVs, with assistance from the CIAG (careers, information, advice and guidance) tutor.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 Social visits, social video calls, legal visits

In an important transition during February 2025, the Prison, Advice and Care Trust (PACT) charity took over management of the visiting provision in February. The Board welcomes the addition of four staff and a manager, including play workers. Security remains a high priority, and is managed by the prison. A total of 25 prisoners can attend each session.

There have been significant changes to social visit provision over the past year. Visiting sessions take place on two afternoons during the week, and two sessions per day at the weekend, following a reduced provision at the end of the last reporting year. Legal visits and social video calls are also offered. Weekend social video calls have been reinstated after a period of removal. The prison employs a part-time family liaison officer as a point of contact for both visitors and prisoners.

The visits hall has been refreshed and new furniture has been installed. However, in the Board's view, the external visitors centre remains in need of improved storage for visitors' belongings. We understand that further refurbishment will take place in 2026. Visitors have reported delays to the Board when going through gate security. Prisoners have also reported late transfer from the wings during the year, which causes frustration.

Members of the Board have attended both ordinary visit sessions and family days (extended visits where prisoners can spend more time with their family members, including children). A total of 16 family days were offered last year. Generally, members have found the atmosphere to be pleasant, with a range of themed activities provided by the PACT team. The provision of play workers at visits is positive, allowing adults space to talk privately while children can enjoy creative activities within an otherwise challenging environment.

The Board has been disappointed that the well-equipped outside play area has remained closed during the reporting year as a result of safety and security concerns.

One of the Board's biggest concerns in previous years has been the inequality of the booking system, which caused issues for both prisoners and visitors. The National Booking Line was introduced to manage and oversee the booking system and now relatives, rather than the prisoners, register to book online or by phone. As a result, complaints about visiting access and fair allocation of visits have fallen substantially. There has been a significant increase in the number of visitors to the prison since the introduction of the new booking system. The HMP Lowdham Grange and PACT website also offers resource information for families.

Visitors continue to buy refreshments from the prisoner staffed snack bar, but the provision of a buffet has been withdrawn on family days.

7.4.2 Phone contact

Most cells are equipped with in-cell phone systems.

Board members have received ongoing complaints throughout the year regarding the provision of family telephone contact. In particular, delays in obtaining a PIN number - required to access external family or legal calls - have caused significant distress and frustration. Prisoners have also reported difficulties in adding additional phone numbers to their accounts.

The cost of calls has been a major issue for prisoners, and many have cited that much of their week's earnings can be spent on phone credit. The contract is due for review in mid-2026.

Foreign national prisoners say they have been particularly disadvantaged by high call prices.

7.5 Resettlement planning

When prisoners are released into the community, accommodation and employment are issues of great importance in reducing reoffending. However, the prison lacks an established, funded resettlement unit. As a result, OMU management implemented a 'resettlement hub' and designated a senior prison probation practitioner to oversee and co-ordinate resettlement arrangements for those being released. Additionally, it is necessary to maintain communication with community probation officers.

Pre-release checklists are completed for prisoners with less than four months remaining on their sentences. Prisoners due for release are reviewed six months prior to release and the completion of the checklists involves very close liaison with education and work, help with personal learning plans and CV preparation, and employment logs highlighting prisoners' skills. This has been in place since July/August 2025, since when there has been greater involvement with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other prison-related organisations.

Employment following release: The OMU is assessed against post-release prisoner employment outcomes, with a target of 12.4% for August and September 2025. In August, the OMU achieved 18%, and in September 33%. The longer-term picture shows the following from data available from OMU management:

The proportion of prisoners in employment six weeks after release was 9% (77 individuals) among those released between June and December 2025. After six months, 10% of prisoners were in employment, based on data for releases between June and August 2025.

Information on the employment status of released prisoners is provided by community probation officers, although reporting is often delayed and may be incomplete.

The OMU liaises with the DWP in various regions throughout the country to organise Job Centre appointments for prisoners released into those regions, which mainly include London, the West Midlands and Yorkshire.

The OMU is organising a job fair to be held in May 2026. Prospective employers have been invited, together with DWP representatives and prison-related charities.

The prison's industries department provides work and training to develop various skills. The Board is pleased to report that a former Lowdham Grange prisoner, who was employed on the DFS furniture contract in the prison, was employed by the company as

a warehouseman on his release. It is understood that the DFS contract is being renewed and it is hoped that more employment opportunities for released prisoners will follow.

Accommodation following release: Data provided by OMU management indicate that more than 90% of the prisoners released during 2025 (375 in total) were discharged into accommodation, either with family or friends or to approved premises (supervised accommodation run by the Probation Service). This figure includes 23 prisoners released on home detention curfew (HDC).

The prison chaplaincy, through its links with faith-based organisations and charities, plays a vital role in helping prisoners secure accommodation on release and avoid homelessness.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	12
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	443

The Board has been very active in monitoring the prison as it works to recover from the contract handover and its subsequent return to HMPPS management.

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	1	2
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	6	17
C	Equality	10	12
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	7	8
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	28	23
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	2	8
F	Food and kitchens	3	7
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	10	25
H1	Property within the establishment	26	39
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	9	21
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	1	2
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	17	24
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	19	59
K	Transfers	3	5
L	Miscellaneous	20	31
	Total (including three 'confidential access')	165	286

A total of 286 applications were submitted by 151 prisoners from across all wings, including the segregation unit. The increase in applications this year may be linked to significant backlogs in the prison's internal complaints system earlier in the reporting period. Prisoners told Board members that they turned to the IMB in an effort to resolve

their concerns. In some cases, prisoners also asked the IMB to intervene where they felt responses received were inadequate. The prison has since made progress in ensuring complaints are dealt with within the required timescales and has introduced audit processes to improve the quality of responses.



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