



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Rochester

**For reporting year
1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment¹

HMP/YOI Rochester in Kent is a category C training and resettlement prison accommodating both adult and young adult men. The prison contains a mix of accommodation types, some dating back to the late 19th century. In March 2025, Rochester began receiving prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSOs). This significantly increased the complexity of the establishment, as two parallel regimes were required for safeguarding purposes. To manage this, the prison adopted a split-site model, with the top site designated for PCoSOs and the bottom site for the mainstream population (Mains). In this report, for ease of drafting, prisoners who are not convicted of a sexual offence are referred to as 'Mains' prisoners. (This is the term used at the prison for those located on the bottom site, differentiating them from the prisoners convicted of a sexual offence, who are located on the top site.) The prison has an operational capacity of 766 prisoners, with 401 places on the top site and 365 on the bottom site.

Built on the historic site of the UK's first borstal (a detention centre for young offenders focused on rehabilitation and training), the prison spans a large area, giving prisoners plenty of opportunity for fresh air and outdoor activity; each wing operates as a separate stand-alone location. There are four Edwardian-built wings on the top site, which are challenging to maintain, and four newer wings on the bottom site, which have recurring ventilation and heating problems. Most cells are double occupancy, except for one side of H wing (a high-risk wing), which has single cells. All cells have in-cell telephony. There is also rapid deployment single cell accommodation for 60 prisoners on a street-based design (known as pods). This has improved facilities for selected, incentivised prisoners.

There is a dedicated wing for induction on both the top and bottom sites. The incentivised substance free living (ISFL) wing is on the bottom site, along with one wing that supports a cohort of neurodivergent prisoners and those who are care-experienced. The care and separation unit (CSU), where prisoners are kept away from other prisoners to maintain safety, security and good order, or to protect them or others from harm, is set apart. It has 21 bed spaces, two special accommodation cells, where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety (used when a prisoner's behaviour is so erratic and unstable that a regular cell would not be appropriate), one constant supervision cell and four holding cells. Maintenance is provided by Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL).

As a resettlement prison, the regime is intended to give prisoners training through a structured sentence plan, preparing them for release and ensuring resettlement back into the community. Rochester appears to actively engage with prisoners to address their offending behaviour and offers opportunities to engage in behavioural programmes, training, education and work, linked to employment where possible. Increasing the links to real employment vacancies is a continuing aim.

Substance recovery at the prison is operated by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust through the charity, Change, Grow, Live (CGL). Healthcare support for prisoners is provided by the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust healthcare team, for both primary and mental healthcare. The physical wellbeing of prisoners is catered for through two

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.

well-run gymnasiums, offering competitive and recreational activities. The chaplaincy provides assistance across all faiths. The family services provider, the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) charity, is involved with visiting arrangements. More generally, there is community support from various external organisations, including the Shannon Trust charity and National Prison Radio. Education provision is provided by Milton Keynes College.

Following the re-rolling of HMP Cookham Wood in August 2024, it was agreed that the two prisons would merge. This change has had a significant impact on the operation of both prisons and, 18 months after its introduction, implementation is still ongoing. Progress has been made, however, and the two prisons now share a senior leadership team and sit under the one Governor. For the purposes of this report, the scope will remain focused on HMP/YOI Rochester.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

The reporting period follows on from a period of considerable instability. There have been notable improvements, which have been reflected in this report. However, HMP/YOI Rochester remains a challenging environment, with several core issues continuing to impact the smooth running of the prison.

Over the first four months of the reporting period, the prison was acclimatising to a partial new cohort of prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSOs), which brought considerable long-term challenges. These included changes to the regime to ensure the separation of the two cohorts, as well as the older age profile of the PCoSOs and the associated impact on healthcare needs. The prison also faced additional demands on staff working with the new cohort and required refurbishment and adaptations to its infrastructure to accommodate the men. The changes were completed by July 2025 and the Board felt they had been carried out with commendable flexibility. However, the ongoing management of two different cohorts continues to place significant demands on staff and create tensions among prisoners.

Safety

- The HMIP (HM Inspectorate of Prisons) Independent Review of Progress inspection team noted improvements in safety and self-harm prevention, and the Board's own monitoring supports this assessment.
- There has been no notable decrease in incidents of self-harm over the year. The Board has observed that appropriate care is being taken by prison officers with those identified as being at risk of suicide.
- The Board notes that the number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans (used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) opened each month, fluctuates, but the overall trend for the year shows a downward trend.
- The Board notes that violence levels on the top site, where the PCoSO prisoners are housed, is virtually non-existent; however, on the bottom site, violence continues to be an issue. The general view across the senior leadership team and staff is that these issues are largely driven by the illicit economy
- The Board is pleased to report that use of force is steadily reducing.
- The prison's large open footprint continues to make it vulnerable to illicit items being thrown over the fences, and there have been some drone sightings. The Board recognises the proactive work of the security department to counter these risks, with search dogs once again appearing to prove particularly effective.
- Although the Board was initially concerned about the impact of changes at the prison, its weekly monitoring visits indicate that Rochester has adapted well to its new cohort and continues to provide a safe environment for prisoners.

Fair and humane treatment

- At the beginning of the reporting period, most wings had a failing infrastructure and offered only a minimal standard of accommodation. With the introduction

of the split-site arrangement, the Board has noted considerable improvements to the top-site accommodation, where overall standards of cleanliness and order are now well maintained and vermin has been eliminated. Conditions on the bottom site are more inconsistent. The Board notes some accommodation units and communal areas fall below acceptable standards.

- The Board's judgement is that adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner has broken prison rules) are being conducted correctly, with reasonable conclusions and outcomes that appear fair and proportionate. However, far too many hearings are adjourned due to missing paperwork or prisoners not attending. This undermines effective discipline and the smooth running of the prison. GOoD (good order or discipline) reviews, where the prison determines whether a prisoner is to be or to remain segregated, continue to be undertaken within the required timescales.
- The Board has seen many positive conversations between prisoners and staff and is satisfied that prisoners are treated fairly and humanely. Early in the reporting period, key-working activity (where each prisoner is paired with a named officer for regular support) was limited, although procedures were revised in February 2026.
- The chaplaincy team is fully staffed and all faiths can be accommodated. From our observations, the team deals considerately with all prisoners, irrespective of their faith background.
- Prisoners' property remains a problem area and items still go missing far too often, particularly during transfers. The reduction in property-related complaints over the latter months of the reporting year reflects improved staffing rather than the introduction of the new systems and technology that are still urgently needed.
- The Board notes that a diversity lead was appointed at the beginning of the reporting year, following a 12-month gap. However, staffing levels in this area remained low at the end of the reporting period. Since the appointment, diversity and inclusion initiatives have taken place more regularly, including the re-establishment of forums covering protected characteristics including, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation (areas where discrimination is unlawful).

Health and wellbeing

- Prisoners continue to tell the Board that they are dissatisfied with the primary healthcare services provided, despite some improvements following the 2024 Urgent Notification (issued by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, which highlighted serious concerns requiring immediate action by the Ministry of Justice) and the 2025 Independent Review of Progress (carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons, which assessed whether the prison had made sufficient improvements in response to those concerns). The Board considers mental healthcare support to be satisfactory and notes that drug recovery systems are operating well.
- From the Board's observations, opportunities for exercise are good, with both gyms well used and offering a wide range of activities.
- The incentivised substance free living (ISFL) area proved very successful on H wing prior to the change of cohort. However, when the site was split, a number of Mains prisoners from the top site were moved to the bottom site,

with some placed on H wing despite not meeting the ISFL criteria. This temporarily compromised the stability of the unit. Since relocating the ISFL provision to another wing later in the reporting period, it is once again operating successfully.

- The renewed focus on neurodiversity has been strengthened by having a diversity lead who supports staff training and awareness. In the Board's view, this has led to a deeper understanding of prisoners' needs and more positive, informed interactions across the establishment.
- The arrival of the new PCoSO cohort brought a much older and more disabled population into the prison, creating new pressures on healthcare and social care. Previously, Rochester had very limited demand for social care and had never required formal packages from the local authority. This recent increase in prisoners with complex care needs has therefore presented a significant new challenge for the prison.

Progression and resettlement

- The Board notes that the offender management unit (OMU) remains fully staffed, which has helped to ease previous pressures. However, a significant backlog of OASys (offender assessment system, the national tool used to assess a person's risks, needs and sentence-planning requirements) assessments remains.
- Nationwide reductions in prison education provision came into effect midway through the reporting period. This has only exacerbated the continuing shortage of trainers and tutors in education and skills.
- The Board reports that behavioural programme provision designed for PCoSOs only became operational in January 2026, ten months after they first arrived in the prison.
- The Board considers it essential that more activity is made available to prisoners and strongly supports the prison's intention to increase meaningful occupation.
- In our view, the library continues to be a well-managed resource that is highly valued by prisoners.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The Board is concerned that the Independent Review of Progress of June 2025 found that illicit drug availability at HMP/YOI Rochester posed a major threat to safety and security. What further national support will the Minister provide to help the prison reduce the supply and use of illicit drugs, including through strengthened security measures, improved testing capacity and stronger collaboration with relevant partners, and how will the effectiveness of these interventions be monitored and evaluated?
- The new cohort of PCoSO prisoners at HMP/YOI Rochester has led to a sharp increase in social care needs among older and more vulnerable prisoners. There is an urgent need for a social care provider to be in place to provide the care and support that some of these prisoners need to maintain their dignity, manage daily life safely and take part meaningfully in their rehabilitative activities. What reassurances can the Minister give the Board that the local authority will put this in place?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- The Board welcomes the progress made in improved living conditions at HMP/YOI Rochester, including refurbished wings, cleaner communal areas and reduced vermin levels. However, living conditions, particularly in the care and separation unit, remain below acceptable standards in many areas, according to the findings of an HMIP Inspection. What assurances can HMPPS provide that the necessary investment will be made available to complete these essential improvements and ensure that all accommodation meets acceptable standards of decency?
- The Board notes that property complaints once again remain the most common issue raised by prisoners and that the lack of effective volumetric control during transfers continues to cause avoidable loss and frustration. Whilst these concerns have been acknowledged and some improvements made; progress has been slow. When will HMPPS implement the fundamental and systematic changes needed to ensure property is handled accurately, consistently and with proper accountability across the estate? If such changes are not planned, could HMPPS explain why this is the case?
- The Board remains concerned about the limited rehabilitative provision available to PCoSOs and the consequent impact on their rehabilitation. What steps is the Prison Service taking to increase programme availability and ensure that prisoners can complete their sentence plan requirements, and provision to meet identified need?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Whilst the Board acknowledges that officers are using body worn video cameras (BWVCs) more frequently, their use is still not routine. On occasion, video cameras are not activated in time, resulting in crucial evidence being missed. What action will be taken to ensure that moments of conflict are captured consistently and that BWVCs are used routinely?
- What specific actions will the Governor take to reduce the widespread availability of drugs and other illicit substances across the site, and how will the effectiveness of these measures be monitored and demonstrated?
- Too many adjudications are remanded because of missing paperwork, absent BWVC footage or prisoners refusing to attend. These avoidable delays waste time and resources and compromise the smooth running of the prison. What action will the Governor take to prevent these issues from continuing to undermine the adjudication process?
- The Board remains concerned about delays in prisoners receiving their PIN numbers allowing them to stay in touch with family, friends, and legal representatives. What action will the Governor take to ensure delays in approving numbers and technical glitches are minimised to ensure prisoners have access to their PIN numbers on arrival in the prison?
- The Board has observed on several occasions that Mains prisoners and PCoSOs arrive at the prison in shared transport. With only one holding area in reception, this mixing of cohorts creates difficulties in managing new arrivals and increases the risk of unrest. What assurances can the Governor provide that all reasonable steps are being taken to prevent this occurring?

3.3 Response to the previous report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister		
The pace of change at HMP/YOI Rochester and its impact on the prison's ability to deliver improvements following the Urgent Notification.	Problem and disruption it caused acknowledged. Prison identified as requiring targeted support from a range of external agencies. Commitment to restoring stability and delivering meaningful change.	Permanent appointment of a Governor. Positive changes in the senior leadership team. Appointment of dedicated lead in supporting senior team in progressing the inspection action plan and permanent head of education, skills and work.
The low number of prisoners in employment after six weeks after release and the continued need for hostel accommodation in the south east for released prisoners.	Concern acknowledged. Reply noted, various initiatives undertaken to improve employment opportunities. Recognition of the need for single placements, expansion of service bed allocation.	Improvements have been made. Two employment fairs and various employment events have taken place. Relationships built with outside organisations. Continued challenges in providing accommodation for those who need it on release.
To the Prison Service		
Lack of volumetric control of property on transfer.	Concerns have been acknowledged, leaders have been reminded of effective property-handling principles and consultation is underway to identify improvements.	This continues to be an issue; there has been some progress, but it is slow.
Logistical issues created by cohort transition and regime stability.	Cohort transition was completed effectively and safely. Two separate regimes are now in place with the aim of providing equality of access to education, work and other activities. Healthcare was identified as requiring further attention.	A negative impact of inaccurate roll calls throughout much of the year; improvements as the reporting year came to an end.

Barely acceptable standards of infrastructure and accommodation.	The Board's concerns were noted. There have been no plans for full-redevelopment; however, bids have been submitted to improve infrastructure and living conditions.	Improvements have been made, in particular on the top site; living conditions in the CSU remain below acceptable standards.
To the Governor		
Concerns relating to leadership, staff capability and culture raised by the Urgent Notification.	Chair discussed with the Governor.	Increased visibility of leaders, improved communication, improved training and development for staff.
Lost or misappropriated property when prisoners transferred to the CSU.	Discussed with Governor.	Cell clearance procedure in place, but the issue persists.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 From our observations, we are satisfied that both functions continue to operate effectively overall; however, we note a mixed picture across the establishment, with prisoners on the top and bottom sites experiencing differing standards. Whilst the induction process has undergone a complete overhaul during the reporting year, induction on the top site is smoother, more structured and better organised, whereas provision on the bottom site is less effective, with prisoners not always receiving clear, accessible information about the process. Appropriate healthcare checks are being undertaken in both areas. The Board remains concerned about delays in prisoners receiving their PIN numbers (the system that allows prisoners to access approved phone contacts).

4.1.2 When monitoring, the Board notes that on arrival, prisoners are supported by staff who deal compassionately with all individuals, particularly those entering custody for the first time. Reception staff identify immediate needs and make appropriate provision, including dietary and religious meal options and toiletries or clothing for transgender prisoners. Late-night arrivals receive a reheated, from frozen, meal.

4.1.3 The Board is concerned that, on several occasions, we have noted Mains prisoners and PCoSOs arriving in shared transport to the prison.

4.1.4 The prison continues to use The Big Word interpreting service for prisoners whose first language is not English.

4.1.5 The Board is reassured that prisoners arriving on an ACCT document appear to receive appropriate and timely support during the induction period.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 There were, regrettably, three deaths at the prison during the reporting period, all currently understood to have been from natural causes, pending the conclusion of the associated PPO investigations and inquests.

As far as the Board is aware, the recommendations arising from the reports received to date have been implemented. These included recommendations relating to the use of body-worn video cameras and the need to ensure that staff understand that a 'code blue' - the radio call used when a prisoner is experiencing a serious breathing-related medical emergency - must be initiated when a prisoner reports chest pain.

The Board also notes that the end-of-life care provided to one prisoner, together with the communication and support offered to the prisoner's family, was of an exceptionally high standard.

In addition, the PPO report relating to a death that occurred during the previous reporting year was received during the current reporting period.

4.2.2 Self-harm figures remained low in early 2025; however, as the new cohort arrived, these figures increased. There was a significant spike in November 2025, falling again in December. This is likely due to a higher number of prolific self-

harmers. The reporting period saw a total of 233 incidents of self-harm, carried out by 95 individuals, with one individual accounting for 11.6% of all incidents.

4.2.3 Assessment, care in custody and teamwork processes continue to be regularly reviewed by the Board and a sample of ACCT reviews attended for observational purposes. These were consistently found to be conducted fairly and with empathy, with referrals to the mental health team made where appropriate. The Board recognises that swift and commendable action by prison officers has, on many occasions, prevented attempts at self-inflicted death. However, the Board observed that ACCT documents were not always being checked consistently by custody managers and Governors in line with required guidelines. We will continue to monitor this.

4.2.4 The coordinated approach to safeguarding continues, with weekly safety intervention meetings (SIMs) to which staff from safer custody and other relevant stakeholders are invited. They play an important role in managing prisoners with complex safety needs, ensuring vulnerable prisoners are identified early, monitored appropriately and managed collaboratively.

4.2.5 The Board notes the introduction of the new tamper-proof vape pens in October. These devices cannot be opened and therefore cannot be used to inhale illicit substances. Being disposable and fully sealed, they have significantly less value within the illicit economy than the previously used vape models and present a reduced fire risk. The Board notes that since the introduction of these devices there have been fewer cell fires (12 reported this year and 26 in the previous year), a reduction that may be associated with the new vapes, although other factors may also be relevant.

4.2.6 There are 11 Samaritan-trained Listeners (prisoners who offer confidential emotional support to other prisoners, night and day) operating in the prison.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 Since the arrival of PCoSOs in March 2025, the prison is now, in effect, operating as two distinct establishments. Levels of violence on the top site, where the PCoSOs are housed, reduced significantly on their arrival and remain virtually non-existent. In contrast, the bottom site continues to present challenges. Violence here is occurring in specific pockets, often linked to the illicit economy. Drug-related debt, along with the bullying and intimidation that often follow it, unfortunately remains a big part of life on the bottom site of the prison. In March 2026, at the end of the reporting period, the prison held 34 OCGs (prisoners who are associated with an organised crime group).

4.3.2 A total of 55 weapons were found during the year, compared with 131 the previous year, with the majority recovered on the bottom site, where Mains prisoners are housed. This reduction coincided with the arrival of the new PCoSO cohort, although the Board is unable to determine whether the two are directly connected. The weapons of choice are heavy items inside a sock, sharpened plastic cutlery, and metal objects that appear to have been obtained by prisoners damaging the fabric of their cells.

4.3.3 The Board has seen that challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIP), a safeguarding and behaviour-management process used for prisoners who display

violent, aggressive, or otherwise concerning behaviour, or who are at risk of being harmed by others, are effective. The Board is encouraged to hear that conflict resolution training from the charity Belong is to be delivered to staff. This training will be used to support managing CSIPs. In addition, the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Forensic Psychology Service has undertaken a detailed needs analysis of staff relating to use of force incidents, skills and techniques. A training package focused on de-escalation techniques, legitimate authority and skills practices has been developed locally and delivered with groups of staff. The training is currently being evaluated and adapted for continued delivery.

4.3.4 There were 82 assaults on staff during the reporting period, eight of which were classified as serious, compared with 90 assaults in the previous year, 14 of which were categorised as serious. The most commonly reported reasons for violence against staff were prisoners experiencing mental-health difficulties, bullying and intimidation linked to prisoners' tensions, and incidents arising when where prisoners refuse to comply with staff instructions.

4.3.5 Data shows that 40 prisoners have self-isolated during the reporting period. These are men who choose to remove themselves from the main population for reasons such as being in debt, facing threats, fearing rival gang members or experiencing bullying. When visiting those who are self-isolating, the Board checks that the support arrangements in place are appropriate and being followed. Opportunities to exercise appear to be offered, although they are not always taken up.

4.3.6 Despite the statistics outlined above, the Board's observations continue to indicate that Rochester remains a safe environment for the men living there. During monitoring on both sites, the Board regularly finds an unthreatening atmosphere, with groups of prisoners talking comfortably with each other and engaging positively with staff.

4.4 Use of force

4.4.1 Analysis of incidents involving the use of force (UoF) indicates an overall annual reduction, with 409 incidents recorded this reporting year compared with 503 in the previous year. Of these, 373 were classed as spontaneous incidents (compared with 448 last year) and 36 planned incidents (compared with 55 last year). This reduction, as anticipated by the Board, appears to be linked to the arrival of the new cohort of PCoSOs at the beginning of the reporting period. The Board notes with interest that young offenders (YOs) - men under the age of 25 - make up 3% of the prison population but account for 9% of UoF incidents. PAVA (a synthetic incapacitant spray) was drawn on seven occasions but only used twice, while batons were drawn three times over the year but never used. Data collected by the UoF team shows that the main triggers for UoF incidents are threats (both prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff), refusals to return to cell, fights between prisoners, and assaults on staff. The Board does its utmost to attend an incident, for observational purposes, once it is notified, irrespective of whether it occurs when the Board is on duty or called in from home. The Board's view remains that the use of force during incidents is proportionate to the circumstances and that individuals involved are given clear warnings before force is used.

4.4.2 Members of the Board regularly observe the weekly UoF monitoring and evaluation sessions and notes that they are well managed and effective. The

effective use of body worn video cameras, where cameras are worn and activated as needed, has increased steadily throughout the reporting period. The prison continues to review 100% of all UoF incidents and, encouragingly, the number of cases requiring higher-level scrutiny is falling.

4.4.3 The National Training and Response Group (NTRG), a team of specialist prison officers deployed nationally to handle complex incidents, supports the UoF team in conducting these evaluations and provides targeted training to staff as needed. The Board remains concerned about the inconsistent completion of F213 injury forms, the mandatory healthcare reports that must be completed following any UoF incident incurring an injury.

4.4.4 The NTRG was not called to the prison during the reporting year; this compares with once last year and three times in the previous year.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

4.5.1 Rochester's open and dispersed layout continues to pose the greatest challenge for the security team in its efforts to prevent illicit substances and mobile phones entering the prison. There was a reduction in the number of 'throw-overs' this year, with 76 parcels recovered compared with 103 in the previous year, likely reflecting effective joint work between the security department and the police. Many of these incidents were linked to prisoner debt and associated violence, and were aimed at reaching men on the bottom site. There were also three suspected drone sightings, compared with 16 in the previous year. All incidents involving throw-overs and suspected drone activity are referred to the police. The Board notes that prisoners on the bottom site continue to account for the highest levels of drug use. Prison managers believe this may be linked to the rising proportion of prisoners involved in serious and organised crime, together with the lack of full-time activity places.

4.5.2 Since the arrival of the PCoSOs, the overall amount of drugs entering the prison has decreased. However, illicit substances continue to enter the prison through prisoners' mail on drug-laced paper, including items marked as Rule 39 solicitors' letters (confidential correspondence between a prisoner and their legal adviser). These mail-based drugs are predominantly directed towards Mains prisoners on the bottom site. To mitigate against this risk, all items are now scanned and all paper mail is photocopied before being delivered to prisoners.

4.5.3 Rochester has a full-time dedicated dog handler based on site. The prison operates a zero-tolerance approach to visitors identified by the search dog as potentially carrying illicit items; such visitors are denied entry and issued with a warning letter. In addition, there were 15 incidents involving visitors conveying, or attempting to convey, illicit items during visits. The Board regularly monitors visitor searching procedures and remains satisfied that they are carried out fairly and with due consideration for those being searched.

4.5.4 The Board remains concerned about the demand for, and production of, illicitly fermented liquid ('hooch'). Hooch is often discovered in large volumes, and the ingredients required for brewing are readily obtainable, often from the servery. The increased quantities found in cells, together with the number of prisoners found to be under the influence (UTI), bring associated risks of drunkenness and violent behaviour. Of particular concern is prison managers' expectation that, as the

establishment moves towards a more conventional drug-free model, the production of alcohol is likely to increase. The Board will continue to monitor this.

4.5.5 Data indicates that 28% of prisoners at Rochester report problematic drug misuse. Each month, an average of 5% of the population is selected for computer-generated mandatory drug testing. The tests are used to assess the prevalence of substances in the prison population. Refusal to take the test is treated as a positive result and leads to a disciplinary charge. The Board has observed adjudications (disciplinary hearings) arising from such refusals and is satisfied that these cases are managed appropriately. Prisoners found to be diverting their prescribed medication have that medication withdrawn immediately, with healthcare staff reviewing their treatment as soon as practicable.

4.6.6 Enhanced gate security, including airport-style screening, together with regular staff searches and the use of search dogs, continues to act as a deterrent to staff potentially attempting to convey illicit items into the prison. The Board remains concerned about the lack of searches at the gate when staff numbers are low.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 With the exception of Invicta wing, the newly built 'pod' accommodation, all wings continue to need ongoing maintenance, particularly in relation to plumbing, heating, ventilation, structural issues, CCTV coverage and flooring. The Board can, however, report that in March, during the drafting of this section there have been some improvements to some of the wings, predominantly on the top site, where accommodation areas were, clean, orderly and generally well maintained.

5.1.2 With the new cohort of PCoSOs arriving at Rochester, improvements to the top site wings were made. All four wings were refurbished using the transformation team (a group of prisoners working under the guidance of GSFL).

5.1.3 Accommodation fabric and decency checks are now carried out regularly by Rochester's heads of residence. The Board is pleased to report that privacy when using in-cell toilets is now assured through the provision of privacy curtains in every cell. All cells on the bottom site have in-cell showers; however, not all cells on the top site do, and prisoners there continue to rely on communal shower facilities.

5.1.4 At the beginning of the reporting period, many cells across the prison had broken window vents. This was a source of frustration for both prisoners and staff, as it restricted airflow within cells and contributed to smoke alarms being activated when prisoners used vapes. The Board is pleased to report that a rolling programme to replace window vents has been in place throughout the year.

5.1.5 Throughout the year, frequent pest control measures and improved levels of cleanliness has significantly reduced, but not eliminated, the vermin problem at Rochester. Where wing custodial managers (CMs) take a proactive approach to cleanliness, the Board has seen substantially fewer vermin issues. A new regime, introduced in the first quarter of the year, now provides designated time for wing cleaners and this helps. However, as previously mentioned in the report, hygiene lapses, mainly on the bottom site, such as food debris left around toasters and prisoners feeding the birds and ducks, continue to attract pests.

5.1.6 The enhanced-status pod accommodation on Invicta Wing - the highest level within the prisoner behaviour incentive scheme - continues to be of a high standard. It is well managed, clean and remains free from vermin.

5.1.7 In the Board's view, the kitchens continue to perform well despite ongoing difficulties in recruiting qualified external staff and the need to rely on agency staff to cover gaps. The introduction of the PCoSO cohort presented significant challenges for the kitchens, as meals prepared by Mains prisoners for PCoSOs were at risk of contamination or tampering. To mitigate against this, kitchen roles were transferred from Mains prisoners to PCoSOs early in the reporting year. The Board received eight catering-related applications (prisoners' written representations to the IMB) during the year, five more than in the previous year, yet still considers this a low number and indicative of an effectively run service. Based on judgements made from ad-hoc sampling by Board members meals appear to be consistently good in quality and health-related and religious dietary requirements seem to be met. Despite the pressure of providing varied, nutritious and calorific meals on a daily budget of £3.29 per prisoner, the kitchens continue to manage resources efficiently.

5.1.8 Canteen day at Rochester (when prisoners place weekly orders for goods using their prison accounts) takes place on Fridays, and appears to work well. Applications to the Board relate to refunds occurring when a prisoner transfers between prisons and items are lost or not delivered. The Board notes that prices for canteen goods have risen, while wages for some activities appear unchanged or have even decreased. There is a continued association observed between canteen delivery days and increased self-harm or violence, driven by debt and pressure on prisoners to surrender goods.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 The care and separation unit (CSU) accommodates prisoners for several reasons: those serving cellular confinement (CC) following an adjudication; those placed there for their own protection or who pose a risk to staff or other prisoners; and those awaiting an adjudication. It is an old building where both the heating and showers can fail despite regular repair work on the boiler. Throughout the reporting period, conditions remained below HMP expectations, with graffiti observed in some accommodation, poor levels of cleanliness and only basic furnishings in certain cells. Prisoners are often unaware that they must ask staff in order to access phone facilities, which makes maintaining contact with family and external support networks more difficult. In spite of this, some prisoners, almost exclusively from the bottom site, are still committing an offence in order to gain access to the CSU and escape from the drug and debt culture prevalent at the prison. There were three dirty protests (where a prisoner has chosen to defecate or urinate in a cell without using the facilities provided) this year, down from five last year, and two cell fires, down from four. The Board notes that some prisoners remain in the CSU for extended periods of time, awaiting transfer to another suitable prison (see 5.2.3).

5.2.2 The Board monitors the vast majority of good order and discipline (GOoD) reviews. These reviews remain well attended by a member of the healthcare team, a mandatory requirement of the PSI (prison service instruction).

5.2.3 The Board noted 15 occasions in the reporting year when the 42-day segregation limit was exceeded, a reduction of five compared with the previous year. Population pressures account for part of the delays, but some transfer waits, whether due to a category change or concerns for a prisoner's safety, continue to be concerningly long. The Board deems this to be unacceptable. Once a transfer has been approved, it is unfair for a prisoner to remain in segregation, and the resulting delays often create challenges for CSU staff.

5.2.4 The CSU benefits from a team of experienced officers whose skills are essential in managing prisoners with complex and challenging needs. Despite some changes in personnel during the year, the team has maintained a high standard of work. The Board recognises and commends the professionalism, patience and commitment consistently demonstrated by segregation staff, both past and present.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 Rochester continues to hold a full establishment of officers. However, high levels of sickness absences, long-term absences and temporary promotions mean the number of staff actually available on duty is, at times, reduced. The consequences of this are a limited regime and less time out of cell for prisoners. The Board notes, once again, the substantial number of inexperienced officers, many

with less than two years' experience. More positively, the Board is encouraged to note the increased visibility of the senior leadership team at key times, such as movements and lock-up.

5.3.2 The introduction of PCoSOs initially created significant challenges for both staff and prisoners, not least because staffing allocations remained unchanged and officers had to adapt to supporting a markedly different prisoner cohort. The arrival of this older cohort has resulted in a noticeably higher age profile on the top site, bringing additional pressures on the healthcare provision. Headcorn wing, on the lower site, predominantly comprises single-cell accommodation and houses prisoners presenting higher levels of risk, including those whose behaviour can be more challenging. It therefore remains one of the most demanding areas of the prison to manage. Over the course of the year, the Board observed a clear difference between the two sites; relationships on the bottom site were often strained, whereas prisoners on the top site consistently reported respectful, professional and constructive engagement from staff.

5.3.3 Throughout the reporting period, the prison operated on a system of mass movement, where prisoners leave at dedicated times to go to education, work and activities, thus replacing the need to have all moves escorted. With the site split and the need to keep Mains prisoners and PCoSOs apart, this was initially challenging. It frequently affected the accurate recording of roll call, causing delays in prisoners reaching appointments, activities, or returning to their wings. The Board notes this is now much improved.

5.3.4 The Board noted that, for a significant part of the reporting year, key work was minimal and delivered little value. A full revision of the process took place in February, introducing a requirement for every prisoner to receive at least 60 minutes of meaningful key work support from a named officer each month. The Board intends to monitor this carefully.

5.3.5 Despite the continued challenges facing the prison, the Board's day-to-day monitoring indicates that the general atmosphere at Rochester is still positive and unthreatening. Relationships between staff and prisoners appear good most of the time. The IMB has observed staff managing incidents involving prisoners with complex needs in a professional manner. Efforts are made to explain what is happening and why, with due care for both the prisoners and the staff involved.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 The ethnic make up of Rochester shows little change from the previous year. The prison population is predominantly white British (68.8%), with black prisoners accounting for 11.9%, Asian prisoners 4.1% and prisoners all other ethnic groups combined making up 15.2%.

5.4.2 Over the reporting period, around 89% of population were adults and 11% were young adults, compared with 84.7% adults and 15.3% young adults in the previous year. This expected reduction in young adults reflects the arrival of PCoSOs in March, a cohort largely made up of older white men.

5.4.3 A full-time equality and diversity lead was appointed four months into the reporting period and initiated work on many outstanding issues from the Urgent

Notification and the HMIP Independent Review of Progress. Staffing within the department remains low, which impacts negatively on how it can operate.

5.4.4 Forums for all protected characteristics have been set up, with Governor leads appointed and monthly meetings scheduled across both sites. The Board is concerned, however, that these meetings do not take place consistently, meaning that the needs and experiences of prisoners with protected characteristics are not systematically identified, monitored or acted on.

5.4.5 Rochester has three transgender prisoners being supported. Clothing, make-up and toiletries are sourced when needed from HMP East Sutton Park, a category D prison for women that is close to Rochester.

5.4.6 Approximately 2.9% of men in the prison are from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities, a slight decrease on last year. Regular GFT forums are held throughout the year. A celebration of GRT culture was held in June, which included traditional food and entertainment.

5.4.7 The Board received 17 applications relating to diversity issues, representing a 31% increase on the previous year. The vast majority of these were related to race and were taken up with the prisons equality and diversity team.

5.4.8 The Board monitors the discrimination reporting system. Prisoners experiencing racial, religious or disability-related discrimination are encouraged to submit a discrimination incident report form (DIRF) to the diversity team. The prison received 192 this year, compared with 48 last year. This rise can be attributed to a number of serial litigants in the last reporting year. The Board notes that some prisoners remain reluctant to use the DIRF process, often perceiving it as ineffective.

5.4.9 The Board notes that adjudications continue to support the equality strategy and align with the 'Lammy' recommendations, which focus on tackling racial disparity, improving trust and ensuring fair treatment for black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners. Last year, the Board reported a higher proportion of adjudications involving black and minority ethnic prisoners compared with white prisoners. Data to establish whether this pattern continues was not available for the reporting period.

5.4.10 The arrival of PCoSOs at Rochester brought a significant shift in the age composition of the prison population. Previously, there had been very few men over the age of 60; as of March 2026, there were 90 men in this age group, 12% of the total prison population. This change has introduced notable challenges (see 6.4).

5.4.11 The Board notes that approximately 8% of prisoners reported having been looked after by a local authority or been in care at some point in their lives. Forums for care-experienced prisoners are planned across both sites, although lack of attendance from prisoners has prevented them from becoming a regular part of the regime.

5.4.12 As of February 2026, there were 47 foreign national prisoners at Rochester, representing 33 different nationalities, an increase of 24% from last year. The Board has observed that foreign national prisoners are treated fairly and given appropriate assistance, such as use of The Big Word phone translation service, where necessary.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy team is fully staffed, with all faiths and religious festivals, such as Ramadan and Passover catered for. The team provides pastoral care to any prisoner and visits every prisoner in the CSU daily, offering support to those experiencing bereavement or domestic difficulties. The Board notes that this one-to-one care is of a high standard and particularly commends the team's work with prisoners with challenging behaviour. The Sycamore restorative justice courses remain unavailable, although it is hoped that links can be established with the Kent Restorative Justice Service. With the introduction of PCoSOs, the chaplaincy team arranged separate services where necessary, a practice that continues.

5.6 Incentives schemes

An updated Incentives Policy Framework for the prison was approved by the Governing Governor at the end of the reporting period. The Board notes that the system appears to work well and it is understood by prisoners and staff. The Board has sample-checked some of the incentives scheme warnings and negative entries, noting that these were managed correctly.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 The complaints team logged 1968 complaints during the reporting period, an increase of 703 from the previous year. Of these, 1646 related directly to HMP/YOI Rochester, 89 concerned DHL (the provider of purchased items for prisoners) and 233 for other prisons. Of the 1646 Rochester complaints, 57% were rejected, 22% upheld and 21% partially upheld. The distribution of complaints broadly reflects the ethnic makeup of the prison. The numbers do not include DIRFs (complaints related to diversity or equality issues) or healthcare complaints, which are handled separately.

5.7.2 Residential and property matters accounted for the highest number of complaints. Rochester-related complaints met the target time in 88% of cases, while 89% of DHL and other prison complaints achieved the required standard, an increase of 33% on last year. The Board welcomes the significant improvement in the timeliness for non-Rochester complaints this year. We retain the view that the complaints team works effectively and efficiently; during our regular dealings with the team, they are always helpful.

5.8 Property

5.8.1 Property issues persisted for the first eight months of the reporting year, although the Board noted a small but noticeable reduction in applications towards the end of the period. The Board received 210 property applications, a 50% increase on last year's 107. As in previous years, many related to items that went missing during transfer. The Board believes that the arrival of a new cohort of prisoners during this period goes some way to explaining this increase. The Board encourages prisoners to follow the complaints process initially rather than take it forward to the IMB. The property office team are always helpful to the Board. We note that prisoners have been observed to be treated with consideration and understanding by the property office staff when asking about missing items.

5.8.2 Property in possession remains problematic, even with the three-bag limit. Many prisoners arrive at Rochester with substantial amounts of property, creating

pressure on storage. While there was some improvement late in the reporting year, the property office often operates at full capacity with a continuing backlog. Items left behind on release are donated to charity.

5.8.3 Mail delivery from the post room to the wings remains slow, inconsistent and insecure, causing understandable frustration for prisoners, especially those who buy newspapers and magazines they are not able to read while still current. In one case, a prisoner's family photos were signed out by the post room but never arrived on the wing. This situation is unacceptable.

5.8.4 The Board is again flagging up the following:

- Too many transferring prisoners arrive without their possessions, including family photos (the loss of which is detrimental to their wellbeing). This has been raised in point 3.2. The Board retains its view that it is a needless source of frustration for both prisoners and hard-pressed wing staff who are left to deal with the consequences.
- The Board notes that property loss frequently results from the absence of a prompt cell-check after a disciplinary incident, leaving possessions vulnerable unless the cell is immediately secured. Expected improvements have not materialised and several prisoners transferring from the CSU have departed without their property. While acknowledging the pressures on wing staff, the Board remains concerned that securing personal items is still not prioritised. CSU staff do pursue missing property, but it is disappointing to report that the problem persists.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

6.1.1 Healthcare and pharmacy services are provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. Throughout the reporting period, the pharmacy department suffered severe staff shortages, putting the service under significant strain and affecting the timely dispensing of medication.

6.1.2 The Board aims to attend monthly healthcare delivery board meetings as observers. Healthcare forum meetings take place every six weeks and include prisoner representatives. They are held separately for PCoSOs and Mains prisoners. The meetings provide a useful platform for prisoners to voice their concerns, which are then reported to the healthcare department.

6.1.3 Attendance at in-prison healthcare appointments has continued to improve over the reporting period. However, despite the best efforts of both the prison and healthcare teams and some improvement on last year, escorts to external hospital appointments and treatment transfers remain an issue. Over the year, an average of 21 healthcare appointments were cancelled each month. Most cancellations resulted from prisoners declining to attend, although some were attributable to healthcare providers, the prison or the hospital. The Board remains concerned about these missed appointments, given the anxiety and frustration they can cause for both prisoners and staff, as well as the resulting waste of prison time and resources.

6.1.4 Following the review of the roll-reconciliation process, the Board notes that progress has been made in medicine management. However, in the Board's view, medication supervision arrangements on the bottom site remain inadequate,

6.1.5 The Board received an average of six healthcare applications per month this year, totalling 75, compared with a total of 110 last year. Applications typically relate to delays in seeing the GP, concerns about prescribed medication and perceptions of inadequate care. The Board follows up on all healthcare applications, and staff in both primary and mental health services are generally helpful and responsive. Healthcare staff regularly interact with prisoners who may be anxious or frustrated and who, at times, display unacceptable behaviour. The Board is concerned that such behaviour is not always challenged consistently, potentially affecting staff wellbeing. At the same time, the Board continues to monitor allegations from prisoners, and occasionally incidents witnessed directly, suggesting that some healthcare staff can be offhand or abrupt in their interactions with prisoners.

6.1.6 The Board notes that HMIP's Independent Review of Progress in July 2025 highlighted concerns about Oxleas' reliance on supplementary staff unfamiliar with the prison environment. These concerns remain, as while temporary staff may hold the necessary professional qualifications, they do not always have the experience, competence, or prison-specific expertise required to meet prisoners' needs effectively. This inconsistency in staffing and service delivery continues to cause frustration and anxiety for prisoners who depend on reliable and predictable healthcare support. The Board will continue to monitor this closely.

6.1.7 Delays in the provision of medication, together with time spent waiting in the healthcare unit, continued to affect prisoners' ability to arrive at activities, work and education on time, in some cases resulting in lost wages. While complete figures are

not available for the reporting period, a snapshot from one week in March 2026 indicated that approximately 10% of allocated purposeful activity places were unfilled, either because prisoners were delayed in healthcare or were unable to attend their scheduled activities.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 GP services are provided by South London Partnership; requests are triaged by a healthcare nurse and prioritised by urgency. The introduction of the new cohort of PCoSO prisoners has also necessitated the operation of two separate dispensaries and GP clinics across the top and bottom sites, which remains challenging. Despite the healthcare team's hard work to manage pressures, prisoners frequently report frustration and anxiety about waiting times, both for attendance at the GP and to receive their medication. The Board is disappointed that the planned on-wing dispensaries are still to be installed and that they are unlikely to be in place for the foreseeable future.

6.2.2 There is a dental service in the prison three days a week, plus an ad hoc denture clinic. Treatment has been severely limited for several months over the reporting period, owing to the only fully equipped dental suite on the top site often being out of use. The waiting time for routine treatment can be up to three months, although urgent cases are prioritised and referred to hospital when necessary. The prison has explored using a dental van on the bottom site, but this has yet to be implemented. An optician attends weekly and waiting times remain long, although a new top site service was established at the end of the reporting period and is expected to reduce delays. The Board often receives positive feedback from prisoners praising the care shown by both the optician and the dentist. The prison runs clinics for podiatry, physiotherapy, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), sexual health, chronic pain and a range of other long-term conditions. Despite lengthy waiting times in some areas, these services appear to be operating effectively.

6.2.3 The on-call system for medical emergencies functions effectively. As in previous years, a notable number of ambulances called to the prison are later stood down, either because healthcare staff or paramedics are able to provide the necessary care on site or because the prisoner declines hospital attendance. In such cases, the Board understands that a disclaimer form is completed.

6.3 Mental health

6.3.1 Mental health services are delivered by the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust in-reach team. Staffing shortages are still an issue. A psychiatrist attends two full days a week, working across both sites. Referrals are triaged, and urgent cases should be seen within two working days. The mental health team plays a crucial role in assessing prisoners placed in segregation, including determining whether they are fit to remain in solitary confinement.

6.3.2 The Board notes that prisoners present with a wide range of mental health conditions, including psychosis, depression and anxiety, brain injury and dementia. This is in addition to various neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and autism. Many prisoners who present with mental health problems have quite complex issues. At the end of the reporting year, 21% of prisoners identified as neurodivergent. Figures for the previous year are unavailable, as the post was vacant. In October 2025, the Do-It profiler (a secure, digital

screening and support tool) was implemented, with the aim of helping to ensure that all prisoners arriving at Rochester are screened and additional needs are identified in a timely manner.

6.3.3 At the end of the reporting period, 239 prisoners, just under one third of the population, are recorded as having a disability. The mental health team is managing a caseload of 77, with a further 163 men awaiting clinical psychology services (separate to forensic psychology services). The Board is particularly concerned that around 300 prisoners are prescribed anti-depressants, representing almost half of the population.

6.3.4 A psychological therapy team works in partnership with the mental health team to provide counselling and therapeutic interventions, offering both workshops and individual sessions.

6.4 Social care

Following the re-role to the PCoSO population, the prison experienced a marked increase in social care referrals, reflecting the older and more vulnerable composition of the new cohort. The Board notes that, at the end of reporting period, the prison still does not have a social care provider in place, although discussions with the local authority are ongoing. The Board will continue to monitor developments closely.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

6.5.1 The arrival of PCoSOs necessitated several changes to the regime and a period of acclimatisation. Time out of cell for association continued to be affected by staffing levels and varied from day to day. The Board is pleased to observe that when the regime is curtailed for operational reasons, prisoners are kept informed through Governor notices. Essential events, such as social visits, appear to be maintained. For several months at the beginning of the reporting period, frequent delays in achieving an accurate roll negatively affected prisoners' time out of cell. However, following a review of the roll-reconciliation process, accuracy and timeliness improved significantly. The Board acknowledges positive steps taken by prison managers to increase participation in work, education and training.

6.5.2 There are two fully equipped gymnasiums and the facility for indoor sports such as badminton and indoor tennis. From the Board's observations, reasonable adjustments are made to support elderly and/or disabled prisoners who wish to attend gym sessions. Football matches are held regularly and are popular with the prisoners. Prisoners over 25 are allocated one gym session a week and those under 25 are offered two. Throughout the reporting period, evening gym sessions were suspended, which meant men who wanted to exercise after work were unable to. All residential units have exercise equipment in their yards. Staffing levels at the gym have improved this year and instructors remain enthusiastic and committed to their roles.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

6.6.1 The Independent Review of Progress, published in July 2025, noted that while the drug and alcohol strategy had been developed, the accompanying action plan had yet to be finalised. The Board can now report that the action plan has been completed and that clear, measurable progress has been made in the

implementation and oversight of the prison's drug strategy. However, as noted elsewhere in this report, preventing drugs from entering the prison remains a significant challenge. Recent intelligence also suggests that, in some instances, illicit substances may be manufactured on the wings using readily available materials, including hand gel, cleaning products, toilet cleaner and rodent poison.

6.6.2 The Board, which regularly observes rehabilitative adjudications (where punishment for being under the influence is suspended if the prisoner engages with the drug rehabilitation team), found that they were being delivered effectively and used appropriately. We noted a clear shift towards addressing drug-related behaviour, with a greater emphasis on rehabilitation and behaviour change rather than punitive outcomes.

6.6.3 The provider for drug rehabilitation services is the charity, Change Grow Live (CGL). CGL works across the whole establishment and remains a busy department. They have been well-staffed for most of the reporting period, with recovery workers, programme facilitators, community-link workers and family and health specialists. The team delivers wellbeing and yoga sessions on both sites, as well as a monthly recovery café and weekly pop-up sessions where prisoners can ask questions and access support.

6.6.4 The CGL caseload appears to have been broadly stable for the past two years. There were 211 prisoners on structured treatment this year, compared with 201 last year. Care plan objectives, one-to-one and group sessions and clinical treatment form part of the support they receive. The connecting communities team works with prisoners who have drug issues in the last 12 weeks of their sentence. They continue to provide support for up to 12 weeks after release, with the aim of linking them with resources in the community. Of the 200 prisoners receiving structured treatment, approximately 80 actively are engaged with the connecting communities team.

6.6.5 Referrals to CGL are made primarily during induction or via self-referral from the wings. The team additionally follows up with prisoners identified as being found 'under the influence'. Some of these prisoners subsequently enter the 'rehabilitation award' adjudication process (see 6.6.2) and commence work with CGL on the structured workbook to address their addiction.

6.6.6 The ISFL unit, which offers enhanced activities for prisoners committing to remain substance-free, was successfully relocated to the Ridley wing in September. The move placed the unit away from other prisoners and provided its own exercise yard. As part of the programme, additional purposeful activity, such as gym and yoga sessions and enrichment opportunities, quizzes, competitions and model making sessions, were made available to the prisoners, with the ultimate aim of encouraging substance free living and positive behaviour. The Board notes that the wing was cited as an example of good practice in the region.

6.7 Soft skills

The reporting year has seen prisoners taking part in several innovative projects, particularly those involving art and creativity.

6.7.1 Choir, Bible study and the Alpha course continue to take place in the chapel on a weekly basis. The prison has, once again, engaged with the Koestler Arts (an

arts competition for people in the criminal justice system), and submitted competition entries in the fields of art, sculpture and poetry. It has been pleasing to note that the competition has been extended to the whole prison population, rather than being restricted to art class participants. Both top and bottom site gyms offer first aid courses.

6.7.2 The Shannon Trust charity continues to deliver its vital reading support across the prison. Shannon Trust mentors, prisoners who can read confidently and volunteer to help others with reading or basic numeracy, are available on the wings and in the library, offering encouragement and motivation to those who struggle with literacy. Alongside this, the library hosts a range of weekly activities, including guitar and chess clubs, as well as a popular Dungeons and Dragons group, which attracts strong engagement from prisoners.

6.7.3 It is regrettable to note that the previously successful and well-received Duke of Edinburgh Scheme, designed for prisoners under the age of 25, did not operate during the reporting year. The weekly Park Run sessions have also ceased. There remains clear enthusiasm among both officers and senior management to reinstate both schemes and the Board will continue to monitor progress towards their reintroduction.

6.7 Neurodiversity

6.7.1 The prison continues to benefit from having a neurodiversity support manager (NSM) working within the establishment and raising awareness across all areas.

6.7.2 All prisoners arriving at Rochester are assessed during their induction period (see 6.3.2) to see if they meet the Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) (a programme to reduce reoffending) criteria for support. Any prisoner who is motivated to take part and who meets the eligibility criteria is encouraged to complete an application to be considered for enrolment onto the programme.

6.7.3 As a result of the re-roling of the top site early in the reporting period, the neurodiversity unit, CFO, was initially located on one half of H wing. However, the mix of high-risk prisoners and the CFO cohort proved challenging and the unit was finally moved to G wing in February 2026.

6.7.4 With the appointment of a dedicated CFO custodial manager (funded by the CFO programme) and a full complement of staff, the wing appears to be running smoothly and effectively. The CFO programme is a six-week accredited course where men work on issues relating to health and wellbeing, money management, confidence and self-esteem, motivation and personal development.

6.7.5 The Board welcomes the work to support neurodivergent prisoners but remains concerned about the wider progress of the CFO provision, particularly for the PCoSO population, about 70% of whom are neurodivergent.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 Education and skills provision has continued to face significant challenges this year. National reductions in prison education provision have placed considerable strain on the delivery of the curriculum. As a result of this and the split regime which came into effect with the introduction of PCoSOs, much provision has moved to part-time delivery, and most courses, other than maths and English, no longer operate on Fridays. These changes have lengthened the time needed for prisoners to complete courses, increased waiting lists and, in some cases, prevented prisoners from enrolling where they do not have sufficient time left before release to complete a qualification. The Board is concerned that these constraints result in prisoners spending more time in their cells and having fewer opportunities to meet the educational targets set out in their sentence plans, potentially limiting their progression.

7.1.2 Only 59.51% of education spaces were allocated during the final quarter of the reporting period, while attendance was just 57.66%. This means that little more than half of the available education provision was being used, whether due to poor attendance, poor allocation of places, or staffing vacancies within Milton Keynes College. As a training and resettlement prison, the Board finds this unacceptable. The Board observed that non-attendance on courses was not being robustly challenged and, generally, the incentives scheme awards (the system where prisoners can earn, keep, or lose privileges based on their behaviour, attitude and compliance with the regime) were not being issued by the wing staff. By the end of the year, the process for issuing incentives scheme awards changed and it is hoped this will help drive up attendance.

7.1.3 The Board can report that the dynamic purchasing system (DPS) budget, which enables Governors to commission bespoke education quickly and flexibly within their establishments, was maintained at Rochester. It was used to fund courses, such as Film & Media and an Enrichment programme addressing an area of need highlighted in the previous HMIP inspection, as well as short employment courses.

7.1.4 The quality improvement group (QIG) continues to meet monthly to plan and implement changes and review progress. Over the reporting year, there have been multiple vacancies for education staff and trainers, which remains a barrier to consistent delivery. The Board's view remains that, while there is a range of good facilities at Rochester, it is primarily a lack of trainers and tutors that is holding up progress.

7.1.5 The logistics following on from the arrival of the new cohort has added to the challenges faced by the education department. The two cohorts have very different needs, which has meant, in essence, providing two different curriculums using the same budget. Ensuring the prisoners are fully inducted before they commence a course is essential and this is often taking longer than the stipulated two-week timeline. This has caused a large backlog, meaning fewer prisoners can be allocated to purposeful activity.

7.1.6 The library remains a well-used and effective resource, with 2152 books borrowed during the reporting year. This is double the previous year's figure and

reflects the impact of the arrival of PCoSOs. DVD borrowing has also doubled and, at the end of the reporting period, the Board notes that 50% of prisoners are using the library. The library also runs a weekly book club and the Storybook Dads programme, which enables prisoners to record stories and messages for their children. Managers ensure regular access and, for those unable to attend, such as prisoners with disabilities or those in the CSU, books are delivered directly. Blind and partially sighted prisoners have also accessed RNIB Braille materials and audiobooks. Coracle Inside, a secure offline digital learning system that helps build digital skills, also operates from the library and is popular with the prisoners.

7.1.7 The introduction of a coherent, prison-wide reading strategy at the beginning of the reporting period is now making an impact in the prison. Whereas reading had previously lacked coordination and not enough prisoners received sufficient support, leaders and managers have since worked effectively to implement a consistent approach that promotes reading across the establishment. Staff awareness of literacy needs has increased, through, for example, training in Easy Read approaches, enabling them to better support prisoners with lower literacy levels and disabilities in accessing the library. As a result, a more inclusive reading culture is beginning to emerge.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 A range of work opportunities is available in the following areas: the laundry, waste management, visits tea bar, garden and flooring parties (prisoners who assist with the laying and maintenance of flooring across the establishment). Orderly roles (which are reserved for trusted prisoners and contribute to the day-to-day running of the prison) are available in the CSU, library, gym, stores and reception. For the PCoSO cohort, opportunities include the Ministry of Defence camouflage assembly, the windows workshop and the kitchens. Off-wing cleaners and on-wing work are also available to both cohorts. The transformation team employs four full-time prisoners and continues to undertake a range of basic maintenance tasks, with successful results (see 5.1.2).

7.2.2 Vocational training, delivered on a split, half-time basis due to the mixed cohort and the need to keep groups separate, is available in stone masonry, industrial cleaning, bricklaying, carpentry, DIY and painting and decorating, although the latter has not been running since June 2025. Disappointingly, the fully equipped welding workshop remains out of use owing to the inability to recruit a welding tutor, leaving a valuable training resource unused.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 The OMU has seen an improvement and is now fully staffed. This has helped much of the pressure on the team. However, with more than 100 men due for early release under the new sentencing arrangements for individuals serving standard determinate sentences (SDS), the Board is concerned about the exceptionally high workloads and the significant additional pressure that will likely be placed on the OMU.

7.3.2 The Board notes the good work that has taken place within the OMU to improve risk management work and implement new public protection arrangements in line with national guidelines. This includes training, supervision and peer support

to upskill the team in managing a new cohort of prisoners convicted of sexual offences.

7.3.3 Following the re-role of the top site of the prison, approximately 150 prisoners arrived at Rochester without a completed offender assessment system (OASys) plan. This had a significant impact on the overall position of the OASys backlog. The tracker system identifies those prisoners at a ten week point from their sentencing, by which time OASys and other information should be in place. The Rochester OMU do their best to reach this target and keep the backlog at a minimum. As the reporting period closed, there were 79 outstanding assessments.

7.3.4 The Board's view is that the OMU continues to deliver a strong level of performance, despite the additional pressures created by the arrival of a new cohort and the changes this has brought. The positive changes in staffing levels are reflected in the reduction in sentence-related applications received by the Board: these fell to 52, half the previous year's total.

7.3.5 The Board would also like to record its thanks for the patient and consistently helpful assistance provided by members of the OMU, whose support greatly facilitates the Board's monitoring work.

7.3.6 Probation: The reporting period saw an improvement in staffing for probation officers working in the prison and it is now operating at full capacity. The Board is pleased to report that there has been a greater focus on multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), the statutory framework used to assess and manage the risks posed to the public by certain sexual and violent offenders.

7.3.7 Offender behaviour programmes: Programmes continued during the year, but staffing shortages and the change in prisoner cohort created significant challenges. Two Thinking Skills Programmes and one Building Choices course were completed, while two further groups were cancelled due to staffing issues. By the end of the year, the Building Choices course was the only accredited programme still running. The Board draws attention to the fact that, although the new cohort arrived in March 2025, the Building Choices course, designed specifically for PCoSOs, did not begin until January, a ten-month delay. Managers are prioritising places based on risk, need and release date. However, given that these prisoners came from establishments where relevant programmes were available and that attendance forms part of their sentence plan, the Board considers this delay unacceptable. As a resettlement prison, the Board views rehabilitative programmes to be a core function. We are pleased to note that six courses are planned for the coming year. The Board makes every effort to attend certificate presentations and notes the positive feedback and thank-you letters to the course facilitators received from the prisoners.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 Social visits and social video calls are run throughout the year, with family days organised by PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust) during school holidays. The visitors centre is clean and bright and the atmosphere and staff welcoming. The Board monitors the searching of visitors, which is done appropriately and respectfully. There are occasions when contraband is passed from a visitor to a prisoner, so social visits require close staff observation. Family days are always well received, as they provide an opportunity for fathers to meet and play with their

children in a less formal setting. There is a well-stocked café where families and prisoners can buy hot drinks and food.

7.4.2 Having a split population of PCoSOs and mains prisoners has made it necessary to hold separate social visits. While this arrangement works well, it reduces the availability of visiting times for both groups of prisoners.

7.4.3 Social visits for prisoners receiving no personal visitors are held regularly, and are organised by PACT and other visiting volunteers.

7.5 Resettlement planning

This relates to the prison trying to ensure, mostly through other providers, that prisoners have support on release to facilitate their resettlement into the community. This is done through a multi-disciplinary team that meets monthly.

7.5.1 In the Board's view, resettlement provision continues to perform well. All prisoners are contacted 12 weeks before release and offered support with accommodation, obtaining identification documents, opening bank accounts, accessing welfare benefits, and securing employment through assistance with CV preparation, job interviews and employment opportunities. Drug-management support is also available where needed.

7.5.2 SEETEC is the provider appointed by HMPPS to deliver careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) within the prison. It works alongside the OMU, education and resettlement teams, helping prisoners develop the skills and plans needed to leave custody positively, secure sustainable employment and lead purposeful lives within their communities. However, the loss of the Work Ready programme under the new contract has had a negative impact, as the prison no longer benefits in the same way from the structured preparation that previously helped men engage with employment and feel confident about applying for work.

7.5.3 The resettlement team prioritises finding employment for prisoners on release. During the reporting period, two job fairs and several well-attended employment events were held in the prison to strengthen relationships with employers. These included an event delivered by Lower Thames Crossing Employment, a Rift self-employment and business start-up course, an employment workshop run by Wagamama and the Rochester careers and employment fair, which was attended by 62 prisoners. In addition, a Railsafe course was delivered using Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) funding, providing the ten men who completed the course the opportunity, on release, to complete live track training and take up employment. Together, these activities broadened the range of opportunities available to men approaching release.

7.5.4 The employment advisory board, chaired by business leaders, to provide support, challenge and advise prisons on their employment strategy, appears to be operating effectively. Its membership includes representatives from Lower Thames Crossing Employment, Medway Council and Rift Social Enterprise, which supports prison leavers into self-employment and work. The Board notes, however, that the absence of a New Futures Network (NFN) employment broker in the prison, together with the limited number of Kent-based vacancies available through the NFN, has reduced employment opportunities for prisoners on release.

7.5.6 The Board considers employment on release to be a crucial factor, for most prisoners, in achieving successful resettlement. During the reporting year, 14.59% of released prisoners were in employment six weeks after release, compared with the category C national average of 18.22%. This represents a slight decrease from the previous year's figure of 16.34% (national average 16.95%).

7.5.7 While data shows improvement, with 88.39% of prisoners leaving Rochester with accommodation secured, the Board remains concerned. A significant proportion (12%) continue to be released at the end of their sentence without accommodation, leaving them vulnerable to homelessness and associated risks. The Board acknowledges the commitment and hard work of the resettlement hub in supporting successful resettlement and we will continue to monitor this area closely.

8. The work of the IMB

For most of the year the Board had seven members, falling to five for the final three months of the reporting period, less than half the recommended complement. As in previous years, the Board continued to operate a reduced monitoring system. Each member also maintains an area of special interest, reporting back at monthly meetings. This provides the Board with a broader and more informed understanding of key issues across the establishment.

The number of applications remained almost identical to the previous year (655 compared with 654). The Board notes that although property-related applications had fallen significantly in the previous reporting period, this year saw an overall doubling of such applications. Numbers were particularly high in the first half of the year, coinciding with the arrival of the new cohort from multiple establishments. The volume of property applications then reduced as the reporting period drew to a close.

The Board continues to have a constructive and professional working relationship with the prison's management team and staff. Members are welcomed at the meetings they choose to observe and receive open and honest responses to their enquiries. Prisoners are, with very few exceptions, polite during conversations. While maintaining our independence, the Board values the transparent and supportive relationship it has with the Governor and senior leadership team and expresses its appreciation for their continued engagement and assistance throughout the year.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	5
Total number of visits to the establishment	440

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	25	25
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	14	10
C	Equality	13	17
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	39	42
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	68	75
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	Included above	Included above
F	Food and kitchens	3	8
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	110	72
H1	Property within the establishment	117	210
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	Included in H1 above	Included in H1 above
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	Included in H1 above	Included in H1 above
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	104	52
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	42	41
K	Transfers	22	23
L	Miscellaneous	97	80
	Total number of applications	654	655

Annex A

Service providers

- Building maintenance: Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL)
- Education: Milton Keynes College, Shannon Trust
- Library: Medway Council
- Escort contractor: Serco
- Healthcare: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Pharmacy: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Substance misuse programme: Change, Grow, Live (CGL)
- Visitors centre: Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)
- Resettlement support: SEETEC, New Futures Network (NFN)
- National Prison Radio
- Canteen: DHL
- GP services: South London Partnership

Annex B

Glossary and acronyms

- ACCT: Assessment, care in custody and teamwork
- BWVC: Body worn video camera
- CC: cellular confinement
- CFO: Creating Future Opportunities
- CGL: Change, Grow, Live
- CIAG: Careers information, advice and guidance
- CM: Custodial manager
- CSIP: Challenge, support and intervention plan
- CSU: Care and separation unit
- DIRF: Discrimination incident report form
- Do-It Profiler: digital screening tool for neurodiversity and other additional needs
- DPS: Dynamic purchasing system
- EAB: Employment advisory board
- EGS: Enhanced gate security
- F213: mandatory healthcare report to be completed following a UoF incident incurring an injury
- FMI: Five-minute intervention
- GFSL: Gov Facility Services Limited
- GOoD: Good order or discipline
- HMIP: His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
- HMP: His Majesty's Prison
- HMPPS: His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
- IEP: Incentive and earned privilege
- ISFL: Incentivised substance free living
- Mains: prisoners who are not convicted of a sexual offence
- NTRG: National Tactical Response Group
- OASys: Offender assessment system
- OCG: Organised crime group
- OMU: Offender management unit
- OPCAT: Optimal Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- PACT: Prisoner Advice and Care Trust
- PAVA: Incapacitant spray used by prison staff
- PCoSO: Prisoner convicted of a sexual offence
- PIN: Personal identity number
- PPO: Prison and Probation Office
- PSI: Prison service instruction
- QIG: Quality improvement group
- Rule 39 letters: confidential legal correspondence between a prisoner and their legal adviser
- SDS: Standard determinate sentence
- SEETEC: Organisation that delivers careers information, advice and guidance
- SIM: Safety intervention meeting

- UN: Urgent Notification
- UoF Use of force
- YO: Young offender
- YOI: Young offenders' institution



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