



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP The Mount

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

Published August 2026



Contents

Introductory sections 1 – 3 1

1.	Statutory role of the IMB	1
2.	Description of the establishment.....	2
2.1	Accommodation as of 28 February 2026.....	3
2.2	Prisoners by length of sentence	3
3.	Key findings	4
3.1	Progress since the last report	4
3.2	Main findings.....	5
3.2.1	Summary.....	5
3.2.2	Safety.....	5
3.2.3	Fair and humane treatment	6
3.2.4	Health and wellbeing	6
3.2.5	Progression and resettlement.....	6
3.3	Main areas for development.....	7
3.3.1	For the Minister	7
3.3.2	For HMPPS.....	8
3.3.3	For the Governor.....	8

Evidence sections 4 – 7..... 9

4.	Safety.....	9
4.1	Reception and induction	9
4.2	Suicide, self-harm, and deaths in custody.....	9
4.2.1	Safer Custody	10
4.2.2	Deaths in Custody.....	10
4.3	Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation.....	10
4.3.1	Assaults	10
4.3.2	Self-isolation	11
4.4	Use of force	11
4.5	Preventing illicit items	12
4.5.1	Reception.....	12
4.5.2	Mobile phones.....	12
4.5.3	Drone activity	13
5.	Fair and humane treatment.....	14

5.1	Accommodation, clothing, food	14
5.1.1	The kitchen	14
5.2	On-wing laundries.....	15
5.3	Segregation	15
5.3.1	Summary.....	15
5.3.2	Population	16
5.3.3	Rehabilitation	16
5.3.4	Activity.....	16
5.3.5	IMB monitoring	17
5.3.6	Infrastructure	17
5.4	Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers.....	17
5.5	Equality and diversity	18
5.5.1	Discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs)	18
5.5.2	Accessibility	18
5.6	Faith and pastoral support	18
5.7	Incentive schemes	19
5.8	Progressive Regime.....	20
5.8.1	Introduction	20
5.8.2	Accommodation	20
5.8.3	Progression.....	21
5.8.4	Current status.....	21
5.8.5	View of the Board	22
5.9	Complaints.....	22
5.9.1	Procedures.....	22
5.9.2	Performance	23
5.10	Applications to the IMB	25
5.11	Property	27
6.	Health and wellbeing.....	29
6.1	Healthcare - General.....	29
6.2	Hospital appointments	29
6.3	Physical healthcare.....	29
6.4	Dentistry	30
6.5	Mental health	30
6.6	Social care	30
6.7	Time out of cell, regime.....	30

Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP The Mount

6.8	Drug and alcohol rehabilitation.....	31
6.9	Soft skills	31
7.	Progression and Resettlement.....	33
7.1	Education & Library	33
7.2	Vocational Training, Work.....	33
7.2.1	Summary.....	33
7.2.2	Education	33
7.2.3	Library	34
7.2.4	Workshops	35
7.2.5	Vocational Courses	35
7.2.6	Prison Mentor Initiative Group	35
7.3	Offender Management & Progression.....	35
7.4	ROTL (Release on temporary license).....	37
7.5	Family contact.....	37
7.6	Resettlement planning	38
	The work of the IMB	39
8.	Monitoring involvement.....	39
8.1	Board statistics	39
8.2	Applications to the IMB	40
	Data.....	41

All IMB annual reports are published on www.imb.org.uk

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 IMB Board at HMP The Mount (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 as well as to the prison's records.

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

2. Description of the establishment

HMP The Mount ('The Mount') is a category C¹ men's prison, built on one side of a disused airfield adjacent to the village of Bovington in Hertfordshire. It is at the edge of a residential area, just over a mile from a mainline railway station, and is well served by bus routes. This makes it a very open and accessible site for walkers, but it also creates opportunities for anyone to throw packages containing illicit items over the fence for prisoners to pick up. It is also vulnerable to drones.

The prison's residential accommodation is sometimes viewed in two 'halves':

- The 'bottom half' opened in 1987 as a young offender institution (YOI) and has five wings, of which four (Brister, Fowler, Ellis & Lakes/ISFL) are configured in a four-spur design on two landings, making it difficult to observe prisoner behaviour. The fifth (the Annexe) has no toilets in its cells and is used to accommodate 'super-enhanced' prisoners (those on the top level of the prison's incentives scheme), who are unlocked and thus able at all times to access shower and toilet facilities, as well as a lounge and kitchen.
- The 'top half' was opened after the prison was re-categorised as an adult prison in 1989. Two wings built in the 1990s, Howard and Dixon, have a two-landing galleried design that allows for better observation of prisoners. Narey opened in 2007 and has larger cells with their own showers. It is used to house older prisoners (over 50 years of age). Nash was opened in 2015, with a mix of purpose-built double cells and single cells spread over two wings (Nash A and B), again with a galleried design.
- The 50 room Horizon wing (see §5.8.2) came on-line in February 2026.

The prison's character has changed in recent years through the combined effects of a growing prison population and continued delays in the criminal justice system. In particular, as the category B² local prisons filled up with prisoners on remand awaiting trial, prisoners serving very short sentences have been sent to The Mount. Space has been created by doubling up single cells and sending prisoners who previously might not have been deemed suitable for open conditions to category D prisons.

The resettlement service offered by The Mount is intended for prisoners from Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. But, in practice, prisoners are also released from The Mount to other areas, especially London.

-
1. *Category C prisons are for those who cannot be trusted in open prison but who have been recognised as being unlikely to make any attempt at escape. They are training and resettlement prisons; most prisoners are located in a category C. They provide prisoners with the opportunity to develop their own skills so they can find work and resettle back into the community on release.*
 2. *Category B prisons are either local or training prisons. Local prisons house prisoners who are taken directly from court in the local area (sentenced or on remand), and training prisons hold long-term and high-security prisoners.*

2.1 Accommodation as of 28 February 2026³

Operational capacity	Cells out of action	Spaces available	Roll
1,098	10	26	1,062

2.2 Prisoners by length of sentence

Length of original sentence	Number of prisoners			
	28 Feb 23	29 Feb 24	28 Feb 25	28 Feb 26
Less than 12 months	42	26	38	29
12 months to 2 years	64	55	53	71
2-3 years	107	82	105	111
3-4 years	120	87	112	90
4-10 years	367	398	322	369
More than 10 years	182	237	235	270
Prisoners serving life sentences	101	102	112	94
IPP (imprisoned for public protection) prisoners	29	33	27	28
Sentence expired	8	2	2	2
Total	1,020	1,022	1,006	1,064⁴

The breakdown by length of original sentence is considered to be important by the Board because prisoners with different sentences – and at different points in those sentences – require different degrees and types of support, so a material change in either of these would require a response from the prison and/or HM Prison and Probation Service (“HMPPS”).

- 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.
- It has not been possible to reconcile the difference between the roll of 1,062 shown in §2.1 above and the sum of the Prisoners shown by length of Sentence in §2.2 (1,064). The issue of data quality and reliability, mentioned in last year’s report, is reprised at the end of this report

3. Key findings

3.1 Progress since the last report

“Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose” (The more things change, the more they stay the same), an observation by French critic Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr, neatly sums up the situation at HMP The Mount.

For the Minister	Comment on Progress
1. IPP prisoners.	There have been some notable successes with IPP prisoners, but it remains the view of the Board that there are still too many IPP prisoners in HMP The Mount and in prisons as a whole. Nonetheless, we welcome the refreshed IPP Action Plan, published on 17 July 2025, with the commitment to ensure that IPP prisoners have robust sentence plans and are located in establishments appropriate to their current needs, with the target that 95% of IPP prisoners will be located in a prison appropriate to their priority needs by July 2026.
For HMPPS	Comment on progress
1. Support of IPP Prisoners.	We still believe that the Prison Service should take more action to support these men, leading up to and following release into the community.
2. Property.	No improvement. It is disappointing that nothing seems to have been done to implement the findings of the learning lessons bulletin from the Prisons & Probation Ombudsman (March 2025), ideally supplemented by a (limited) number of sanctions for failure to comply.
3. Transfers.	From the viewpoint of the Board, the process of transferring prisoners around the country can appear chaotic, driven by short-term (albeit pressing) capacity pressures, with little or no evidence of strategic analysis or oversight.
4. Improve use of data.	No change.
For the Governor	Comment on progress
1. Carry on with the good work.	Broadly achieved.

3.2 Main findings

3.2.1 Summary

As noted in the introduction, The Mount has seen minimal change throughout the timeframe discussed in this report. The overall atmosphere remains consistent, with no major improvements or setbacks in most areas of prison life described below, other than the addition of the Horizon wing within the new Progressive regime (see §5.8).

Despite ongoing and varied challenges at The Mount, similar to those faced by many prisons, the Governor (appointed in April 2025), the management team and the staff appear to have worked hard to address issues such as drugs, overcrowding, and early release schemes, as well as introducing a progressive regime designed to facilitate a pathway for prisoners, often with – in the opinion of the Board - little or inadequate support from HMPPS and/or the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

3.2.2 Safety

Drugs in prison result in addiction, debt and crime, driven by the significant profits available to organised criminal gangs (OCGs) that facilitate and manage the infiltrations. From our observations, management of vulnerable inmates has improved through regular multidisciplinary meetings. However, criminal gangs continue to supply drugs and mobile phones via drones, posing ongoing challenges. Despite better local police co-operation, the Board believes these issues will persist, as gangs' technological capabilities, finance and determination surpass those of HMPPS.

However, in the Board's view, there are actions that HMPPS could take to help reduce the inflow of drugs and other illicit items such as mobile phones, many of which have been outstanding for some considerable time. The physical impediments could be increased by:

- Undertaking a swift, but managed, programme of renovations to replace the windows on the wings with those of 'Mark 10' level. It is simply far too easy for prisoners to circumvent the protective grills, which are only as good as the fixings used and the bricks and masonry into which they are secured, and which, in the view of the Board, are currently inadequate.
- The working perimeter cameras currently cover only a minority of the prison grounds, and the Board is surprised that the timetable for addressing this shortcoming keeps being put back. The addition of a number of motion sensors is welcome, but if there is one thing that past experience shows, it is that OCGs will find a way through any weak spots – which the Board believes this is.

It is the view of the Board that the cost of establishing the new Horizon wing, which we understand to have been well in excess of £10m, would have been better employed in dealing with these security shortcomings and would have led to a materially better situation for the prisoners. But this would have required a broader and more strategic (as well as highly politically courageous) approach to the role of prisons in the UK.

3.2.3 Fair and humane treatment

The staffing issues faced in the past are better than we have seen recently, though there remains an overhanging issue of the UK Skilled Worker Visa minimum salary, which exceeds the pay of many foreign staff on which The Mount depends. There are also staff shortages in areas including the offender management unit, or OMU (see §7.3), training and the Forward Trust charity (see §6.8). We are aware of the difficulties that The Mount faces in recruitment generally, whereby similar positions in nearby towns, such as Watford, attract London weighting allowances, whilst The Mount, being outside the M25, does not.

Having said this, prisoners are spending more time out of their cells, although the opportunities for work or education are limited, especially whilst the workshops are being renovated, whilst the turnover of prisoners further limits the chances of men to study for a prolonged period. Staff continue to appear more confident in their interactions with prisoners, which has contributed to improved relationships between them. The prison remains generally clean and well-maintained, although some showers still need refurbishment.

As noted in our previous report, the Board continues to be concerned by the doubling up of single cells, albeit at a lower level than previously, a process which is aided by the fact that the promises made to the Governor that the introduction of the new Horizon wing, with 50 cells, would allow 20 cells with two prisoners to revert to single occupancy (i.e. a net roll gain of 30) were kept, albeit taking effect after the end of the year under review.

3.2.4 Health and wellbeing

In the view of the Board, the physical healthcare provided to prisoners is broadly equivalent to that available within the community, with hospital appointments now less likely to be cancelled due to improved escort arrangements. Mental health services are also of a reasonable standard, in our view, and the need for referrals is reduced, as prisoners benefit from increased time outside their cells.

3.2.5 Progression and resettlement

The prison offers a range of education courses, vocational training and offending behaviour programmes, but there are still not enough places for all prisoners to take part in full-time activity. This is unlikely to improve in the short term for two main reasons:

- The continued closure of many workshops, and the delays in reopening them, are regrettable. We continue to welcome the Governor's decision to review activities to ensure the prison offers the right opportunities, rather than simply continuing existing provision; and
- We remain concerned about the future of education provision, particularly suggestions that teaching hours may be reduced significantly in a service the Board already considers insufficient to meet prisoners' needs.

Prison offender managers (POMs) develop sentence plans and support prisoners in completing them but remain under pressure because of the increase in short-term prisoners.

Prisoners nearing the end of their sentences receive support with reintegration, and the new Progressive Regime has an important role in this. Support includes help with opening bank accounts, obtaining identity documents, contacting Jobcentre Plus and finding housing. However, because of the housing crisis, too many prisoners (sometimes 50% or more) are homeless on release, and many face rough sleeping.

3.3 Main areas for development

3.3.1 For the Minister

In the two years since the current government was elected, we have noted a change in tone, clearly driven by the Minister, whose focus on the training and rehabilitation aspects of the prison estate comes across as long-standing and genuine. Those members of the Board who have met him have been struck by his clear commitment to the role, by his interest in the work of the IMB and the various initiatives, such as the Railtrack training module, that The Mount has introduced.

However, there remain many areas, many long-standing -where necessary action has not been taken, and shows no sign of being taken, whether as a result of lack of political will, shortage of funds, or simply different priorities. These include:

- Overcrowding – the Board would encourage the Minister to take a radical look at (a) the reasons why the prison population has doubled within the working lifetime of a number of the staff at HMP The Mount, (b) whether there are better alternatives that prison for those who steal to feed their drug addictions so remain on a ‘hamster wheel’ of committing a crime, being sentenced, incarcerated, released, etc, and (c) why there are so many people in prison whose primary issue is their mental health.
- Drugs – the ‘epidemic’ (as we see it) of drug taking on the wings, mainly NPS (new psychoactive substances)/Spice, continues, blighting the lives of prisoners, challenging the staff, and frequently placing demands on the NHS/Ambulance Service. Some steps appear to have been taken, and the security team does a sterling job, in our view, in identifying and pursuing those involved. But until such time as the flaws in the decaying physical infrastructure are addressed, we fully expect the problems to continue at current levels – which we consider unacceptable.

Review of scrutiny bodies – the Board, it is fair to say, is sceptical about the outline proposal to “[bring] together monitoring and inspection into a single organisation”.

We believe that the functions, whilst complementary, vary too much in terms of roles, responsibilities and modus operandi to fit neatly within the same functional body – though as prisoners have remarked to us: “Maybe they would listen to [the IMB] more

carefully if you were part of HMIP.” We are not blind to the improvements that are possible (or, in the case of the IMB Secretariat, urgent and necessary) but suspect that the driver for the review is primarily cost.

3.3.2 For HMPPS

- **Security:** when will the Prison Service take the necessary action to address the deficiencies in the (physical) prison estate that means, in the words of Charlie Taylor, the Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, that the Prison Service had “ceded the airspace above many of our prisons to serious organised crime”?
- **OMU:** the Board views the ongoing shortage of OMU staff, the attendant high caseloads and the number of prisoners without a POM (more than 20% of the roll – see §7.3) as scandalous, and it is our view that action should be taken. We recognise, for example, that securing London weighting allowances for staff at The Mount may be challenging, but we would ask that HMPPS think ‘creatively’ to address these issues.
- **Property:** we remain of the view that the Prison Service should adopt the recommendations contained in the learning lessons bulletin of March 2025 from the Prisons & Probation Ombudsman, supplemented by a (limited) number of sanctions for failure to comply.
- **Procurement:** the saga of the contract for the provision and maintenance of the on-wing laundries (see §5.2) was in the view of the Board, wholly avoidable. It raises serious questions for us about the processes and procedures that are followed within HMPPS. We would welcome a detailed explanation as to why (i) the decision to go with JLA took so long and (ii) a recommendation was apparently made by the Ministry’s [contracts] team to go with a company that, by all accounts, had little or no experience in the sector

3.3.3 For the Governor

- **Progressive regime:** we welcome the implementation of this ‘staircase’ to rehabilitation and release but note that the prison is restricted in terms of what it can offer in terms of training (on site) and ROTL (off site).
- **Workshops post-renovation:** the delay in the work is disappointing but, in the view of the Board, not a surprise. The improvements – at least from the outside – appear significant, and we look forward to seeing them come back online with an appropriate mix of training opportunities. We are concerned, however, that there will still not be enough places for prisoners to learn and /or train, even once this is completed, and with a roll is now up to 30 prisoners higher as a result of the creation of Horizon.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

As noted in our previous annual report, the number of movements through reception has continued at a historically high level. Movement from local remand prisons and transfers to category D prisons (often called "open prisons") continue apace. The continuing shortage of cell spaces throughout the country has led to prisoners being moved more frequently and over greater distances.

Reception also manages the daily temporary release and return of prisoners, as well as officer escorts for outside hospital appointments and emergency treatment.

It is again necessary to report the ongoing issue of a reception that was not designed for the number of prisoners passing through or the frequency, and the volume of property that comes with them. Although aware of the difficulties in making any alterations, financial and practical, it is the duty of the IMB, in monitoring this area, to highlight it. Reception staff are well aware of the deficiencies but continue to do an excellent job within these boundaries, in the Board's view.

On arrival, prisoners are searched, scanned and issued with ID cards. They then meet with healthcare staff to discuss any medical conditions and medication. Every item of property is then recorded, whilst some is taken to their accommodation and some stored, pending their release. This is a very time-consuming job that should be (but shows no sign of being) brought into the 21st century through electronic recording and monitoring. Even moving to a simple computerised logging system would help.

Prisoners are collected from reception by staff from Brister (the wing used for all induction) and provided with an information pack detailing what they can expect from their stay in the unit. Individual interviews are carried out once they are on the wing, ideally as they arrive. However, when arrivals are late, due to transport delays or high numbers, these interviews take place the following day.

4.2 Self-harm, suicide and deaths in custody

The number of men self-harming remained fairly consistent with last year's figures, ranging between 10 and 19, largely depending on the issues of those individuals. For example, there was a rise in incidents in July to 35, 17 of which were attributable to a single prisoner who was in the segregation unit and was on an ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) plan (used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide).

Management identified deficiencies in some staff's ability to follow the completion of Assessment, Care in Custody & Teamwork (ACCT) paperwork. There has been a considerable intake of new and inexperienced staff, so work was done to improve

knowledge in this area. Assurance checks were also put in place, with a view to developing knowledge and aiding improvement.

4.2.1 Safer Custody

The dedicated team co-ordinates with other areas within the prison, notably Probation, Mental Health, Drug Treatment, Chaplaincy & Healthcare to ensure that those prisoners who are struggling in the environment are supported. Wing moves can be put in place where prisoners fear for their safety due to a variety of reasons, debt being one of the most frequent.

4.2.2 Deaths in custody

During the reporting period there have been two deaths in custody, the same as in the reporting year to 28 February 2025.

The first death occurred outside the prison, in hospital, and the second death occurred inside the prison. Investigations into both deaths have been commenced by the PPO and are still in process at time of writing.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 Assaults

Our monitoring of violent incidents has shown a similar pattern to that of last year, with fluctuating figures and occasional higher peaks.

Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (POP) remained consistent through the reporting period and occurred mainly due to gang issues, debt, drugs and cell sharing. The latter can be aggravated where one prisoner in a cell is UTI (under the influence) of synthetic cannabinoids (such as Spice), which can result in vomiting and aggressive behaviour.

April and August saw slightly higher figures, and in October there was a very serious violent incident involving a weapon, which resulted in a prisoner sustaining a serious wound. Staff and paramedics responded promptly to the incident and provided emergency medical care.

Prisoner-on-staff (POS) incidents are generally in single figures, although some months see an increase, with 11 incidents recorded in September 2025.

Assaults on staff are usually at times of heightened tension, such as during cell searches, restraint, reduction in status (for example, from the enhanced (top) level of the incentives scheme to the basic (bottom) level), drug use and wing moves. They can take many forms, examples being punching, spitting, throwing of various liquids and biting.

The number of Incidents of violence are relevant to the makeup of the population of the prison and the overall environment and management therein. In the case of HMP The Mount over the last year, although there has been violence, the culture that is being introduced and maintained by staff has improved the general atmosphere to the extent that the prison does not emanate a feeling of violence as you walk around.

4.3.2 Self-isolation

The Board also monitors those prisoners who choose to self-isolate. Numbers vary over the year but average at eight. Examples for choosing to self-isolate are debt, the nature of the index offence, detox, family issues and non-associates also in The Mount. The figures for February, the end of IMB reporting period, were eight. Two had been isolating since December, one since January and five commenced during March. The safer custody team is in the process of introducing an 'isolation compact', the aim being to support the prisoner while isolating and ensure safe transition and assistance during reintegration into prison community, thus helping to reduce the risk of harm.

4.4 Use of force

Prison data shows that use of force incidents have increased considerably in the reporting period, from 52.5 incidents per month during the period of 2024-2025 to an average of 74.5 incidents for the period of 2025-2026, although this is in line with experience in other similar prisons in the estate and the trend is now downward. Statistics show that this has been a trend for the past few years, as set out below:

Year	No. of incidents
2022	25.3
2023	37.0
2024-25	52.5
2025-26	74.5

This could be attributable to an increase in gang-related incidents as more prisoners arrive from the London area, as well as an increase in the quantity of drugs available in the establishment, most likely due to ongoing drone activity and throwovers.

Whereas previously the majority of use of force incidents related to prisoners in the 25-30 year-old-age group, now 40% of all incidents relate to the 30-39 year-old age group. The same change in demographic applies to adjudications (disciplinary hearings held when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules).

The reasons for the use of force are recorded, with the following the most common:

Reasons	Incidents in Year
Threatening and aggressive behaviour	136
Medical reasons	121
Refused to return to cell	105
Escort to CSU/cell move	104

Pava incapacitant spray is carried by 227 prison officers and was used five times during the reporting period, compared with one in the previous reporting year.

Use of force incidents are recorded on body-worn video cameras (BWVCs), and these are reviewed in weekly meetings to ensure good practice and for training purposes. The IMB is invited to observe these meetings where possible. All prisoners involved should be seen by healthcare and de-briefed, with a post-incident review completed with the prisoner and a member of staff not involved in the incident.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

As noted in three previous annual reports, The Mount continues to face issues with illicit items entering the prison. Items such as mobile phones, cannabis, tobacco, SIM cards, USB sticks, and Spice (a psychoactive substance) possess significantly increased value within the prison environment. Their presence fuels a profitable market for organised criminal gangs, often resulting in prisoners accumulating debt.

4.5.1 Reception

Everyone, including staff and visitors, must pass through a secure entry point. There are two airport-style body scanners, as well as X-ray machines for bags and belongings. Individuals also undergo physical searches, aided by specially trained dogs. Visitors are required to store all personal items in lockers at the visitor centre before being escorted to the main building, where they are searched and scanned.

Incoming prisoners are checked with a body scanner at reception, which has detected many men attempting to bring in prohibited items. While these instances involve fewer items than those smuggled in by drones, the scanner helps reduce the amount of drugs and number of mobile phones within the prison.

4.5.2 Mobile phones

Items are being directed into the prison using drones, making it extremely difficult to prevent illegal goods from entering, even though several have been discovered.

Upgrading windows to a more secure design is still pending financial approval from the Ministry of Justice, as highlighted in the annual reports of 2023-2024 and 2024-2025. During regular cell inspections, prisoners continue to loosen window grills to catch and retrieve items, largely because of the deteriorating external walls and inadequate fixings. In our opinion, this should be a priority for the MoJ and HMPPS.

From our observations, the Board considers that the security department remains diligent in ensuring all staff recognise signs of involvement in smuggling items, with searches of wings and cells conducted at appropriate intervals.

The amount of illicit fermenting liquid, or 'hooch', produced in the prison overall has decreased. This change appears to be due to the removal of canteen items commonly used to make alcohol, such as sugar. Additionally, demand for hooch may be reduced thanks to the widespread availability of drugs such as Spice, which is easier to conceal than the large containers used for brewing.

4.5.3 Drone activity

The rise in sophisticated, commercially available drones has created a major challenge, enabling significant quantities of drugs and mobile phones to be smuggled into prisons, even at night. For example, in one incident, a drone carrying a significant quantity of contraband was 'captured' by a determined officer who lay on the drone! Despite advances in technology-enhancing anti-drone measures, the number of 'code blue' incidents - where prisoners suffer collapse due to drug use - remains high.

Staff appear to maintain constant vigilance for drones overhead and have achieved some success in detecting their arrival. Collaborative efforts with Hertfordshire Police have led to several arrests, and ongoing teamwork continues to address the issue. Although the apprehension of a drone operator associated with The Mount in December 2024 meant that the frequency of drone-related activity dropped significantly, this appears to have been temporary, with reports of drone activity being an almost daily occurrence.

The Mount faces this growing problem alongside other facilities. Its proximity to residential areas requires any security response to be carefully balanced against wider operational, legal and community considerations and limits options such as signal blocking. Its rural location further complicates matters, as it allows individuals launching or controlling drones to remain out of sight.

Given the potential profit for organised criminal gangs, including those members held inside The Mount, it is unlikely that either supply or demand will drop, so preventive measures need to be taken. In the opinion of the Board, these must include the repair of the non-functioning security cameras and the replacement of the inadequate windows by ones that are more secure (and provide better insulation).

From our observations, the security team works closely with the new National Drone Taskforce, forging a strong, working relationship, resulting in continued collaboration, good practice sharing and tangible intelligence gains around drone activity.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The prison is generally well-maintained, clean and tidy. During the year, there has been an improvement in the internal environment of most wings with a redecoration programme using passive colours. The programme of redecoration and repainting cells and common areas in the wings is carried out by trained prisoners from the Clean Rehabilitative Enabling and Decency (CRED) team. We are disappointed that the CRED team cannot be used in the common areas of the administrative blocks, although the building's main corridor and communications/gate area have had investment this year, including new flooring, and the redecoration of the walls and doors. From our observations, the gardens team does an excellent job of keeping the prison's outside areas tidy, with spacious grounds, flower beds and lawns. The farms and gardens area offers not only meaningful employment but provides the kitchen with significant quantities of vegetables and herbs all year round.

Outside the prison perimeter, there has often been a lot of litter, due to the lack of bins and the fact that no prisoners are authorised to clean outside, even though there is no external contractor. Also, car parking is a major problem, with cars parked on, and cutting up, the grass verges. Local residents complain about the damage to the environment. Action needs to be taken to address this problem, in the Board's view.

The Board continues to be concerned by the doubling up of single cells, notwithstanding the opening of the new Horizon wing. Prisoners in these double cells have no privacy; there is often not even enough space for prisoners to put away their personal possessions. It is not uncommon for Board members to see single cells converted to double cells simply with the addition of bunk beds, with no space around the in-cell toilet except for some temporary material being hung (although the prison does re-order and issue proper curtains from time to time).

In previous reports, the Board expressed specific concerns where single cells are turned into double cells, with long-term prisoners ('lifers') sharing with short-term prisoners. This disrupts the daily life patterns of the long-term prisoners, who have served many years, particularly where there are mental health issues.

It is clear that showers on some wings need urgent refurbishment. There is an ongoing programme, but it does not keep pace with wear and tear given the constant use.

5.1.1 The kitchen

The Board commends the manager and team, who continue to provide adequate meals on a limited budget of £3.14 per prisoner, per day, representing a 9% increase to cover previous overspending. Additional food comes from the prison's kitchen garden, and prisoners report general satisfaction with portion sizes and food quality.

5.2 On-wing laundries

In our previous report, we highlighted numerous incidents of washing machines on the wings being out of commission for long periods. In the most extreme example, *both* washing machines on one wing were out of commission for an extended period (reportedly 3 months). During this time, the clothing for a wing housing 120 prisoners was being washed using a domestic machine, with a fraction of the capacity of the two installed machines. During this period while the two commercial machines were out of action, a number of prisoners on this wing were diagnosed as suffering from scabies.

In our last report, we were pleased to be able to acknowledge (in a post-year-end update) that The Mount was seeking approval to move to a 'total care' contract with JLA, the UK's leading provider of commercial laundry equipment. The contract would cover all The Mount's current requirements, allow for additional machines to be added if required, and provide maintenance seven days a week. If a machine could not be repaired, it would be replaced, all for a fixed monthly fee.

This is designed to ensure that the time(s) when machines are out of action reduces significantly but also allow for a much greater degree of certainty in financial planning, without the need periodically to purchase new machinery. We understood that that this had been approved by the Prison Group Director and the Board welcomed the change, which we believed would improve the lot of the prisoners.

Twelve months on, the approval of HMPPS' [contracts] team has only just been given, despite the fact that the agreement reached with JLA was based on one already in place with HMP Chelmsford. We are told that The Mount's proposal was submitted to HMPPS on four separate occasions, only to be rejected in favour of a competing proposition from a company which, apparently, has no track record in the sector. In the meantime, the laundry services on many wings are intermittent or inadequate.

Procurement in the public sector has, at best, a mixed reputation, and the National Audit Office has reported on it. The passing of the UK Procurement Act was intended to improve matters, but from an independent perspective we suspect that many of the flaws identified still exist, and are endemic, within HMPPS. For this reason, we are seeking a detailed explanation from HMPPS of delays and decisions in the process that led (eventually) to the contract being awarded to JLA.

5.3 Segregation

5.3.1 Summary

The CSU (care and separation unit) is used to house prisoners who have been given cellular confinement (CC) following an adjudication, or for their own protection, or if they are a threat to staff or other prisoners (Rule 45: GOoD). Prisoners who are entitled to reviews (those on GOoD and own protection - OP) get regular reviews in the presence of a Governor, an IMB member and a healthcare representative.

From the Board's observations, the officers working in the CSU are very supportive of prisoners. They appear patient and caring and do their best for some prisoner with

challenging behaviour, even though we are told that they receive no special training in the management of the (many) prisoners with mental health issues.

5.3.2 Population

At times, some prisoners present with extremely challenging behaviour and require a considerable degree of supervision and care. The CSU has also been used to accommodate prisoners for a range of other reasons, including those awaiting transfer, those with severe mental health needs, and those seeking or requiring detoxification from heavy drug or alcohol use.

The CSU is not considered a suitable environment for these groups. Staff have therefore been working actively with colleagues across the prison, particularly safer custody, mental health and addiction services, to help prevent unnecessary admissions to the unit and to facilitate prisoners' prompt return to more appropriate locations, often on different wings from their previous placements.

From our observations, systems are in place to ensure that prisoners get regular exercise, showers, phone calls and meals.

5.3.3 Rehabilitation

Prisoners are also offered two new initiatives to support them:

- They can sign up for frequent drug testing following adjudications or failed MDTs (mandatory drug tests) to help them monitor their own drug use.
- Also available for low-level offences is community payback where a prisoner can agree to do unpaid work for up to eight hours in the prison. This system can also be used to help a prisoner pay back any debt to the prison for damage they have done to prison property.

These initiatives have reduced the turnover in the CSU, with the number of R45 reviews reducing considerably. A new initiative has recently been introduced, whereby those on R45 may be considered for in-cell laptop use. This is dependent on an individual's circumstances and behaviour. Requests and recommendations are discussed at the weekly CSU meeting. To date, this has been utilised this on two occasions with positive impact.

5.3.4 Activity

For the year to 28 February 2026, two prisoners have been held in the CSU for over 42 days (the limit allowed without external authorisation), with one related to safer custody matters and the other for violence towards others. The latter was subsequently re-categorised to category B.

Two were held in the CSU due to violence towards others, both re-categorised to category B (one was also located for an excess of 42 days). Six prisoners have commenced a dirty protest (where a prisoner has chosen to defecate or urinate in a cell without using the facilities provided), two of whom committed this on three separate occasions. The reasons for those in special accommodation (where items

such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety) is because they had displayed excessive violence towards others, staff and prisoners.

During the period of this report, the remand adjudications have reduced considerably and currently stand at 27 (of which nine are for legal advice and MDT confirmation reports).

The police referrals are also reducing. The process appears to have become streamlined and more manageable for staff. There is now a regional crime team within The Mount and monthly meetings are chaired by security, with the local constabulary in attendance, to discuss caseloads and issues the prison is encountering. The process is in its infancy; however initial interaction and feedback has been positive.

5.3.5 IMB monitoring

The IMB is informed when prisoners are located in the CSU and if transferred to special accommodation, i.e. unfurnished cells.

All prisoners in the CSU are visited by a member of the IMB so they have an opportunity to make a complaint or otherwise, although these are very infrequent. All prisoners are visited by a Governor every day, as well as healthcare and the chaplaincy. In the Board's view, the staff in the CSU are admirable in the manner in which they deal with the prisoners in their care, with meticulous access to showers, exercise, the phone and meals, as well as sorting out their concerns, often to do with property left in their cells.

5.3.6 Infrastructure

The CSU is in need of a major refurbishment, in the Board's view. Windows need replacing as cells become cold and draughty in the winter and very hot in the summer. This is not a suitable environment for prisoners who are isolated for over 23 hours a day. It is also worth noting that there is no provision for TVs or the use of laptops. This may be acceptable for prisoners who are in the CSU on CC or otherwise as punishment, but many are there for other reasons, and they should have access to these facilities, not just a DAB radio.

5.4 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

During the year the IMB has noticed a considerable increase in staff and prisoner interactions, with our monitoring reports noting that staff are seen to be available on the wings engaging freely with prisoners. The Key Worker initiative has been affected by staffing levels and staff being redeployed at short notice, which has impacted the effective delivery of the scheme. However, the prison is committed to improving staffing levels so that the programme can be expanded throughout the establishment. Officers are encouraged to engaged with prisoners during time out of cells on the wings are in the exercise yards, a more informal engagement. Prisoners being managed under processes such as an ACCT plan or a challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP), for prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence, reviews

are carried and there has been an improvement in the paperwork recording actions and plans moving forward.

Prisoners that chose to self-isolate in their cells are monitored and a record kept of their care. Officers on the wings support these prisoners with their meals, showers and time out of cells for fresh air. IMB members often visit these prisoners to check on the care they are receiving, nearly all are waiting for a transfer but often not seen as a priority. Generally, prisoners are happy with the care and support they receive.

5.5 Equality and diversity

5.5.1 Discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs)

In the year to 28 February 2026, 17 DIRFs were submitted. Of these, 12 did not meet the criteria for discrimination and were, therefore, redirected to the complaints department for further investigation. The remaining 5 were processed in line with the appropriate procedures. Throughout the reporting period, the prison could be seen running a proactive and wide-ranging programme of events to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

5.5.2 Accessibility

The Board remains concerned about accessibility. It is clear to the Board that facilities for disabled prisoners are very limited, with poor wheelchair access across the majority of wings and the estate in general. Prisoners with mobility needs are faced with long distances between wings, healthcare, the visits hall, while some education classrooms and the library are all located on the first floor. There are no disabled showers available on the wings, except for the wheelchair cells on Nash wing.

As reported previously, any prisoner who uses a wheelchair or has mobility issues and is prescribed medication is required to attend the medical hatch on the first floor to receive it, despite there being no lift. In speaking to the healthcare team, we were informed that their staff are not allowed to attend a prisoner's cell to dispense medication or make alternative arrangements. On occasion, disabled prisoners have had to be carried up the stairs by other prisoners, as there is no provision for wheelchairs. This is totally unacceptable and falls well short of a duty of care.

5.6 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy team supports both staff and prisoners in their faith, belief and pastoral care. It provides a non-judgemental space where everyone is welcome to access support.

There are 12 chaplains, including a full-time Free Church managing chaplain, two full-time Imams, a full-time Roman Catholic priest, a part-time Pagan chaplain, and sessional representatives for the Buddhist, Sikh, Rastafarian, Jehovah's Witness and Jewish faiths. In addition, there is a volunteer Christian Science chaplain, a volunteer Orthodox chaplain and a Free Church volunteer in training. Posts have also been offered to a part-time Church of England chaplain and a full-time Free Church chaplain.

There is volunteer support through the Prison Fellowship and a volunteer who offers bereavement support and who runs a Living with Loss course. A member of staff from the London City Mission helps those leaving prison who are locating to London. Various courses are run to support prisoners in their rehabilitation.

The chaplaincy team runs coffee mornings for IPP prisoners (those imprisoned for public protection) and weekly wing drop-in sessions as well as the statutory duties;

- Induction - prisoners are seen within 24 hours of arriving.
- Segregation - prisoners located in the CSU are seen daily.
- Discharges - chaplaincy visits every prisoner before their release.
- Visiting those on ACCTs.

Services are held regularly throughout the week.

In 2025, the chaplaincy team saw an average of 475 people per week.

5.7 Incentive schemes

The prison operates the regular incentive scheme, with prisoners classed as standard (middle level) or enhanced (top level), albeit with some being placed on a basic (bottom) regime for short periods in response to poor behaviour.

The IMB receives few complaints about the incentives scheme, suggesting it is generally accepted and fairly managed. Issues sometimes arise when prisoners are moved to the basic level and lose their television, but these disturbances are usually brief. The Board finds that most complaints from those on the basic regime are unjustified. Feedback from prisoner forums is positive, especially as new incentives have been introduced for those on enhanced status.

However, during the reporting year, the prison moved beyond this usual arrangement to institute a so-called 'progressive regime'. Under this scheme, prisoners start on standard wings but can, if their behaviour merits it, progress to wings reserved for enhanced prisoners, which offer some additional facilities, and ultimately to one of two wings (Horizon or Gateway) where they benefit from substantially more time out of their cells. The progressive regime (see §5.8) offers strong incentives for prisoners to achieve and maintain enhanced status. Prisoners on these two wings have told us about their appreciation of the more relaxed regimes and often show a sense of pride that they have successfully navigated the prison system to achieve a place on these wings.

5.8 Progressive regime

5.8.1 Introduction

The Mount has developed its progressive regime by aligning desistance theories to the prison's culture. Desistance theories⁵ recognise how housing, employment and proximity to family or significant others are the foundations for a successful release and how this can support a reduction in recidivism rates.

The Board frequently hears from prisoners that they feel unable to demonstrate to the Parole Board that they had progressed, due primarily to a lack of offending behaviour programme courses available within The Mount. The progressive regime is something that the Governor had introduced at HMP Hollesley Bay and is designed to address or at least alleviate some of these concerns.

5.8.2 Accommodation

Initially, the prison began by identifying four progressive steps in accommodation, aligned with the range of behaviours observed across the prison. The incentives scheme policy levels helped to inform this judgement.

- As of April 2025, 60% of the prisoners in HMP The Mount were either on the standard or basic level, so 60% of the accommodation was allocated to them.
- Stage 2 is more nuanced, with prisoners engaging in targeted interventions and their participation should be recognised as an important step. This resulted in two wings (CFO/Willow and IFSL/Wellbeing) designated as Stage 2 regimes, able to accommodate both standard and basic level prisoners. The expectation is that they will progress to stage 3 or 4 - the only condition being that they had to attain enhanced status. In total, stage 2 accounts for 30% of the prisoners.
- Stage 3 is Gateway and accounts for 5% of prisoners, who need to have at least one month at enhanced level and be in work. They are also risk assessed for that environment through security. This wing offers communal living and self-cooking, with no staff during the night state. This environment is best suited for those who are more social but seek to create a community ethos.
- Stage 4 is Horizon and accounts for the remaining 5%. This area is insecure (within its perimeter), with prisoners able to exit their rooms at any time and step outside. The rooms are all single, with ensuite facilities, independent heating, self-cooking provision and regular community forums. This accommodation is closely aligned to the Approved Premises many will move on to on release.

5. *Desistance is the process of abstaining from crime by those with a previous pattern of offending. It is an ongoing process and often involves some false stops and starts. The process recognises that each individual's experience is different – the process is influenced by an individual's circumstances, the way they think, and what is important to them.*

<https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/our-research/evidence-base-probation-service/models-and-principles/desistance-general-practice-principles/>

5.8.3 Progression

All prisoners arrive and start on Stage 1. The Stage 1 units have a good range of facilities but are not self-cook. The accommodation is broadly acceptable, but there is a clear benefit in progressing to a stage 2, 3 or 4 unit.

Progression from Stage 1 is based on conduct and levels of engagement, which relates to attendance at groups, activity and employment as required. Once a prisoner attains enhanced status, which can take up to three months, they become eligible for Stage 2. Selection to Stage 2 is through an application or referral to the progressive regime custodial manager.

Stages 2, 3 and 4 residential units have all been redecorated, received new furniture and an extended regime. These units have had money spent on indoor and outdoor facilities. The prison has been able to do this as there are higher levels of trust amongst these communities. As a result, they tend to look after the equipment and have a better relationship with the staff.

All enhanced-level prisoners can apply for a sofa visit. These are sofas in the visits room that only enhanced prisoners can apply for. These sofas sit in pride of place at the front of the visits hall, for all to see. They promote to all visitors the option of a better visiting experience that can be accessed if the person they are visiting demonstrates positive behaviour and complies with the regime. This offers a blend of pro-social modelling and peer pressure, also an easy opportunity to provide for their family.

The prison is building its evidence as a proof of concept and can clearly demonstrate a reduction in ACCT documents, self-harm, violence, UTIs and adjudications on the progressive units.

5.8.4 Current status

The three guiding principles to reduce recidivism (accommodation, employment and contact with family and significant others) all face significant challenges. The Mount is attempting to shape the prisoners to what they would want on release: a better home, a better job, more privileges, better time with their family and a better lived experience. This requires a high level of compliance and engagement, which is rewarded through public recognition, achievement, status and trust.

The incentives policy reflects a similar pattern, with the proportion of enhanced prisoners rising from 41% to 48% over the year under review and reaching 50% in May. If this figure exceeds 60%, consideration will be given to converting an additional Stage 1 unit into a Stage 2 unit.

The latest evolution is a review of the prisoner pay policy, which now better rewards progression and engagement. Those who attend, achieve and become qualified for their role now earn more. This includes completing functional skills first (in English, Maths and IT), followed by access to a range of vocational courses in trades or pathways aligned with a person's employment ambitions on release.

5.8.5 View of the Board

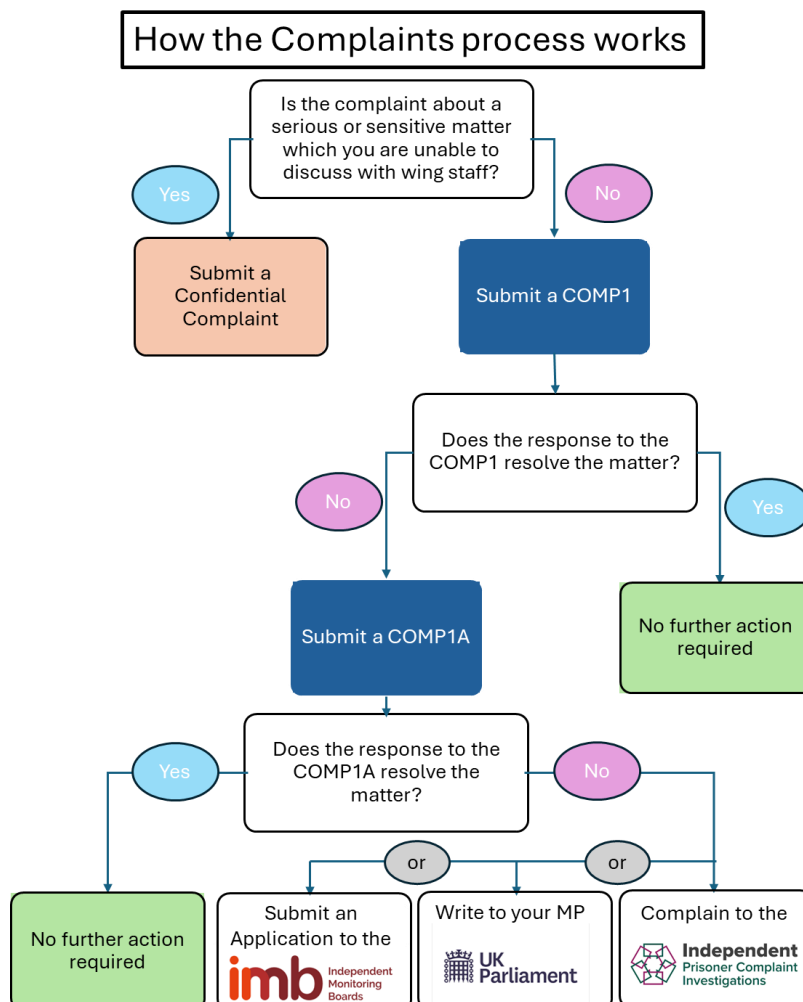
The Board welcomes the introduction of the progressive regime. We were concerned that moving the best behaving prisoners on to dedicated wings might result in the remaining wings becoming more disorderly but, as yet, this does not seem to be a problem. Challenges remain, especially given the lack of employment opportunities within the prison due (largely) to the renovations being undertaken on the workshops and the lack of ROTL (release on temporary licence) places.

5.9 Complaints

5.9.1 Procedures

Prisoners should first talk to a key worker or officer before filing a complaint. COMP1 forms are available on all wings and are collected on weekdays, with responses expected in 5 days. If dissatisfied, complaints can be escalated within the prison.

The Mount has produced, (in conjunction with the IMB) an explanatory chart that sets out the complaints process, which is to be welcomed. It is reproduced below:



Notes:

1. A Confidential access complaint is not a 'Stage 2' or a 'Comp 2'.
2. A Confidential access complaint which does not meet the criteria will be returned to you or logged as a Comp 1 if appropriate. This may add further delays as there is more handling involved.
3. A confidential access complaint cannot be used to as an appeal against a Comp1 or Comp 1A response

5.9.2 Performance

During the reporting period, 3,241 complaints were recorded, a 3.2% increase on the previous year (3,141) but a markedly lower increase than the previous year (23%).

Of the logged complaints, 82% received responses within the prescribed time (2024/25 – 83%), although this includes 82 outstanding complaints with other prisons, where the proportion of on-time replies is significantly lower than for The Mount.

We would highlight and comment on the following:

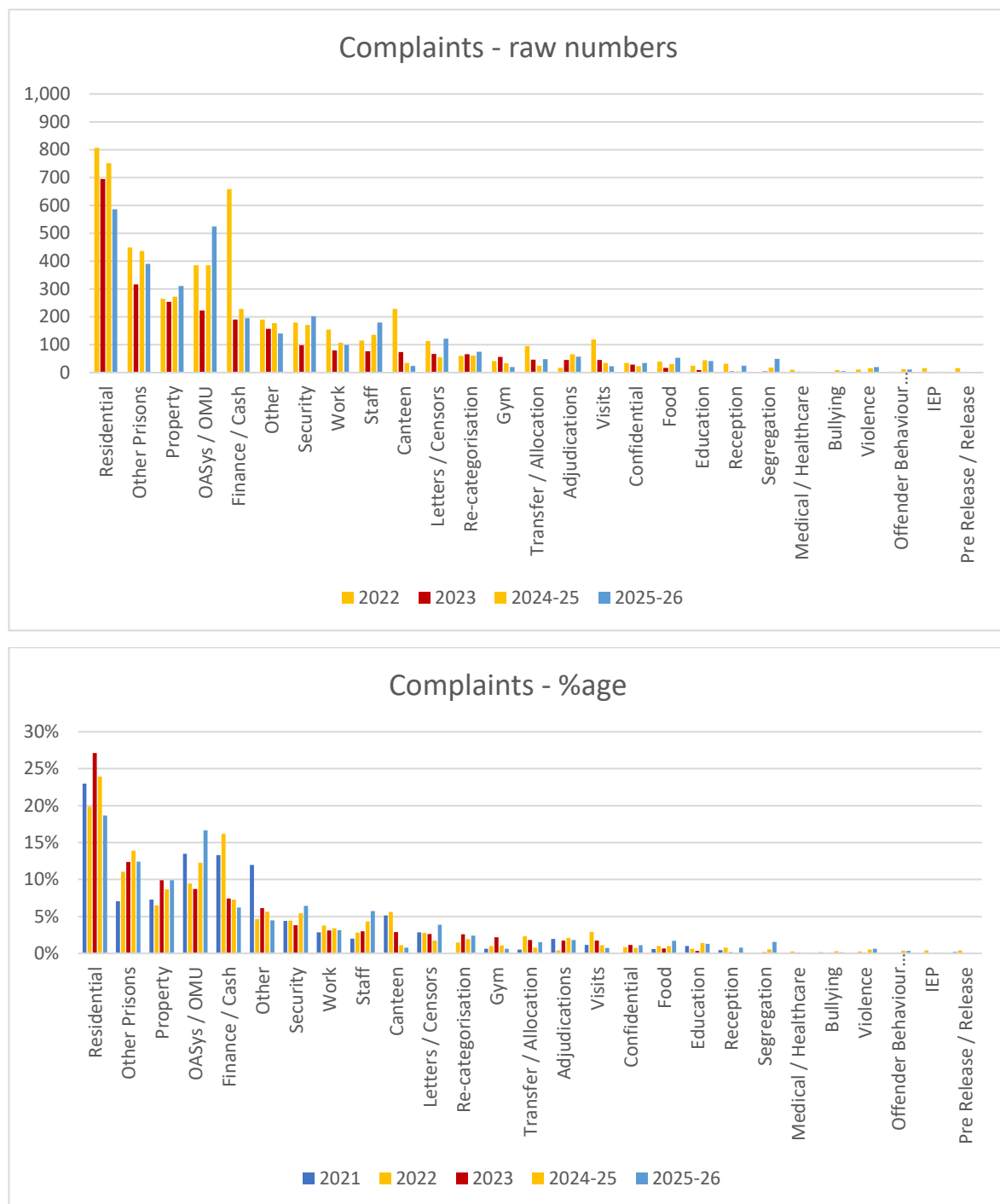
- **Residential** – remains the leading category, with 586 complaints (18.7%), although this has fallen materially since 2024-2025, when there were 752 complaints, then representing 23.9% of the total.
- **Other prisons** – complaints have fallen by 10.6%, but as this includes a number of sub-categories, including canteen that has not been transferred or property that has not followed the prisoner after a transfer, it is difficult to determine the underlying reasons for the change. What we see from our own observations is that the number of applications (prisoners' personal or written representations) to the IMB regarding the latter category has increased (see §0) and we would have expected this to be reflected in complaints.
- **OASys/OMU** – up by 36% from the previous year, reflecting the same pressures and challenges as we have observed and set out (see §7.3), especially in relation to the availability/accessibility of POMs and their attendant workload.
- **Letters/censors** – generally complaints about the delays experienced in sending or receiving letters, as well as e-mails. This does appear to be a growing issue, and one that we believe should be investigated, given how important it is that prisoners maintain their contacts with friends and family on the outside.
- **Staff** – the increase in complaints of nearly one-third is in direct contrast to the improved interactions and relationships that we have seen during the year.
- **Reception** – a significant increase in percentage terms (more than 500%), but the number of complaints (25) is low. It is the view of the Board that this should be regarded as a success, given the significant increases in receptions, releases and transfers that have taken place as a result of the various changes in sentencing and release schemes made by HMPPS and the MoJ.
- **Violence and bullying** – remained at 25, the same as in 2024-2025, compared with a historically low level of four in 2023-2024.

Complaints about healthcare are treated separately.

Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP The Mount

Category	Year				Annual change
	2022	2023	2024-25	2025-26	
Residential	807	695	752	586	-22.07%
Other Prisons	449	317	436	390	-10.55%
Property	265	254	273	311	13.92%
OASys / OMU	385	223	385	524	36.10%
Finance / Cash	659	190	229	195	-14.85%
Other	190	157	178	140	-21.35%
Security	180	98	171	202	18.13%
Work	154	80	107	99	-7.48%
Staff	115	77	136	180	32.35%
Canteen	229	74	35	24	-31.43%
Letters / Censors	113	67	55	122	121.82%
Re-categorisation	60	66	61	75	22.95%
Gym	41	56	34	20	-41.18%
Transfer / Allocation	95	46	25	48	92.00%
Adjudications	17	45	66	57	-13.64%
Visits	119	45	35	23	-34.29%
Confidential	35	29	23	35	52.17%
Food	40	17	31	53	70.97%
Education	25	9	44	41	-6.82%
Reception	32	4	4	25	525.00%
Segregation	-	4	18	49	172.22%
Medical / Healthcare	10	3	3	3	0.00%
Bullying	2	2	9	5	-44.44%
Violence	11	2	16	20	25.00%
Offender Behaviour Programme	3	1	12	11	-8.33%
IEP	16	-	3	3	0.00%
Pre Release / Release	16	-	-	-	0.00%
Total	4,068	2,561	3,141	3,241	3.18%

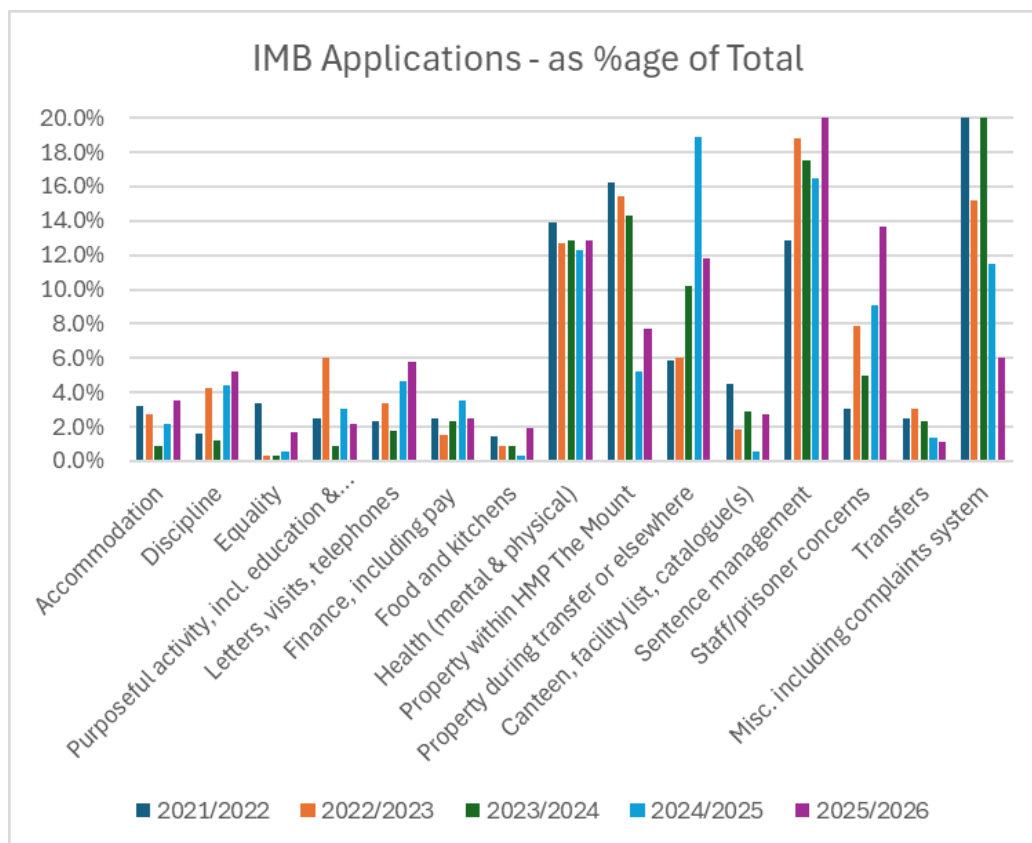
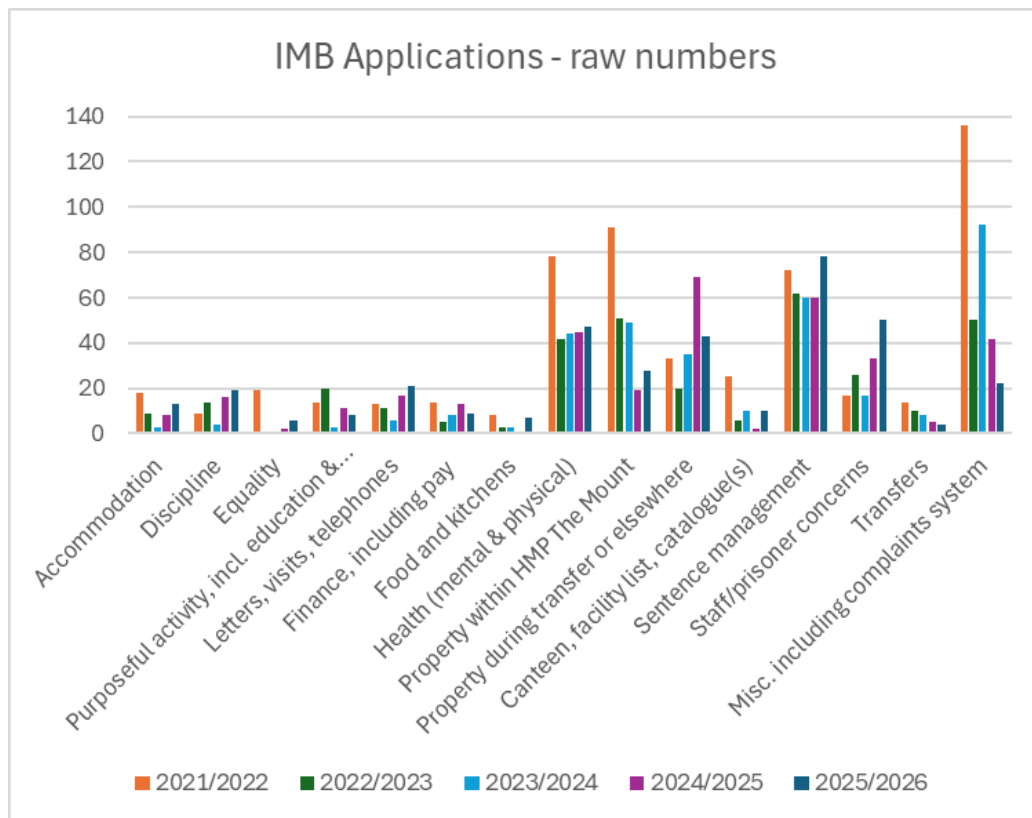
Looked at graphically:



5.10 Applications to the IMB

Applications from prisoners to the IMB have dropped by around 35% since 2021-2022 (from 561 to 365), despite a slight increase over the previous year, including declines in requests about purposeful work (43%), food (88%), canteen (40%), health (40%), and property at The Mount (70%). The only notable increases relate to mislaid property during transfer, and staff/prisoner concerns, which rose 294% to 50 applications

(although this is not evident on the wings), as well as discipline (up 211%) and letters/visits (up 162%).



5.11 Property

Property management continues to present notable challenges, particularly regarding storage, monitoring and maintaining a consistent commitment to the distribution of property to prisoners. Property-related concerns represent the largest proportion of applications submitted to the IMB, with 28 cases involving 'in-house' property - primarily linked to cell clearance during forced removals - and 43 cases related to property transfers. Despite the prison's ongoing efforts, it appears that fundamental difficulties associated with transferring property persist.

Most property complications occur during prisoner transfers between facilities, often due to space constraints within transfer vehicles that prevent property from accompanying the individual. The Board has observed that several institutions, notably private prisons, do not consistently prioritise the efficient forwarding of property. In certain instances, the practices identified have gone beyond mere negligence and, in the view of the Board, should be considered obstructive or lacking transparency.

Interventions involving collaboration between IMB Chairs have occasionally been successful in locating missing property and facilitating its subsequent delivery. However, transferred property frequently remains at other establishments, resulting in loss claims and distress among prisoners. Furthermore, it is important to note that IMB Chairs at locations with the highest frequency of property transfer issues are often reluctant to engage proactively, recognising the potential for being overwhelmed by related inquiries.

Our reports over the last **three** years have stated the following, which still applies in this reporting year:

'The Board hopes that a new national policy regarding the management of transfers of prisoners' property is being developed and would welcome a system where all prisoners' property travels with them when transferred. This would also benefit from a greater degree of tracking, tracing and handing over responsibility for prisoners' property.'

And as we stated in last year's summary:

'We have seen no sign that such a scheme is being considered, never mind implemented. In the opinion of the Board, the time saved and the reduction in compensation that HMPPS would no longer have to pay out for justified claims would be considerable. It is the Board's view that such a system would:

- *ensure that staff at the sending prisons are held responsible for the prisoners' property that is being handed on;*
- *require that any property held at the sending prison after a prisoner is transferred is sent to the prisoner within a reasonable time, e.g. a month;*
- *contractually require the prison transport companies to transport all the property that prisoners are entitled to have in their possession;*

- *include monitoring to overcome the situation whereby problems originating in the sending prison become apparent only in the receiving prison; and*
- *introduce sanctions for those (whether other prisons or the transport companies) that failed to meet their targets and/or deadlines.*

All these problems are fixable without new systems, but as we have said previously, it is the view of the Board that HMPPS should “develop much better systems and procedures for the transfer of prisoners’ property”. The sending prisons should take much more care when clearing cells and forwarding property, while a track-and-trace system, using hardware and software, rather than the paper and card, should be introduced without further delay.’

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare - General

General healthcare services are still provided by Practice Plus Group (PPG). They have their own complaints system, but prisoners can, and do, complain to the IMB. However, relatively few complaints are received, and these are mostly concerned with a lack of information regarding agreed treatments, delays to hospital appointments, consequent treatment and changes in medication.

Most of the 'code reds' (occasions when blood is visible) are caused by a small number of regular self-harmers. There has been a considerable decrease, from 99 in 2023-2024 to 69 in 2024-2025. despite a rise to 115 in 2024-2025.

There was also a decrease in 'code blues', from 288 in 2023 2024, to 512 in 2024-2025, to 390 in 2025-2026.

6.2 Hospital appointments

Out-patient appointments have gone ahead as much as possible, as shown in the chart, below, but there have been regular cancellations due to lack of escort staff.

Category	Mar-23 to Feb-24		Mar-24 to Feb-25		Mar-25 to Feb-26	
Scheduled	1,148		1,265		1,033	
Attended	615	53.6%	666	52.6%	623	60.3%
Cancelled by hospital	185	16.1%	228	18.0%	160	15.5%
Cancelled by prison	69	6.0%	61	4.8%	26	2.5%
Cancelled by prisoner	117	10.2%	129	10.2%	140	13.6%
Clinically reprioritised	162	14.1%	181	14.3%	84	8.1%

6.3 Physical healthcare

Services available for prisoners:

Triage (nurse-led, with prisoners assessed before being referred to a GP, if necessary)			
GP	Sexual health	NHS health checks	Psychology
Long-term conditions	Optician	Medications	Psychiatry
Ultrasound	Physiotherapy	Mental health	Dentistry
Podiatry	National Screening	Vaccinations	Substance Misuse

6.4 Dentistry

Dentistry services are commissioned to Community Dental Services, with the healthcare unit working closely with them. The longest wait for a dental appointment is currently eight weeks.

6.5 Mental health

The service has continued to improve over the reporting year, with more permanent staff in post, and is available seven days a week, to good effect, in the Board's view. Face-to-face consultations take place, and the use of in-cell phones allows for continuing welfare checks on non-urgent referrals and reviews. Mental health staff keep in touch with prisoners using the in-cell phones, which also allow contact with the Samaritans. The number of referrals decreased from 1,016 in 2024-2025 to 738 in 2025-2026, a fall of 27%. Prisoners with a wide range of mental health issues are cared for. Often, these issues lead to self-harm and drug use. Overall, the Board's view is that with a more open prison, allowing prisoners to spend more time out of their cells, in work or education and interacting with their fellow prisoners, prisoners' mental health would generally be expected to improve.

6.6 Social care

The prison offers limited facilities for prisoners with disabilities. Wheelchair accessibility is not accommodated in older wings, and there is no access to showers for individuals with mobility challenges. All medication hatches are located on the first floor, presenting difficulties for those with limited mobility.

While Narey wing is equipped with showers in every cell, these facilities lack specific adaptations for wheelchair users. Nash wing contains two adapted cells to support accessibility needs. When an assessment is required, the prison consults with the local authority's social services team to address individual requirements. Some assistive aids are available; however, wheelchair access throughout the estate remains inadequate, in the Board's view, and considerable distances separate many residential wings from healthcare, education, visits halls and workshop facilities.

There are no dedicated specialist support units or provision for overnight medical care within the prison. Palliative care services are minimal, with end-of-life care provided externally when necessary.

6.7 Time out of cell, regime

Sometimes, when in the prison, Board members encounter a number of prisoners who are dissatisfied with aspects of their life in prison. At times like these, we often make a point of visiting the gym, where we can engage with prisoners in a more positive setting. The gym and the physical training staff play a vital role in the prison. Many prisoners look forward to their times as a welcome break from the routine, helping to boost their physical fitness and lift their mood. The facility appears to contribute positively to prisoners' overall outlook. To our inexperienced eyes, sessions are well organised, with prisoners supported and encouraged by staff.

The prison also runs a rugby team that plays against other local teams (home fixtures only). This team benefits hugely from support from the professional team, Saracens, which runs courses, with coaches and players offering specialist coaching in fitness, rugby skills and motivation. It is not uncommon to see prisoners walking around wearing Saracen jerseys.

At one time, the Premier League also ran coaching schemes when The Mount was twinned with Tottenham Hotspur. This was hugely popular with prisoners, and it is a shame this scheme has been discontinued.

6.8 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The Mount has two main means to encourage and enable prisoners to recover from drug and alcohol addiction.

First, and most importantly, it has an incentivised substance free living (ISFL) wing that houses prisoners who wish to become drug and alcohol free. At any one time, this wing houses prisoners at various stages of their recovery. Prisoners speak highly of the wing. They say that the staff are supportive but appropriately demanding and not push-overs; prisoners who slip are given additional chances, but patience has its limits. Above all, prisoners say that they support each other as no-one knows better how hard it is to become drug free in a prison than someone who has already done so. From the Board's observations, the ISFL is a definite success.

Second, The Mount has an addiction recovery service provided by the Forward Trust charity. The people working for the Forward Trust appear dedicated, skilled and hard-working. They support the ISFL and reach out into the rest of the prison. However, in the Board's view, there are not enough of them to meet the level of need. Forward Trust appears to be under-funded and under-resourced and it is the Board's belief that the underlying contract may not provide sufficient funding to recruit and retain enough of the right staff. At one time, the Forward Trust was able to run intensive ('12-step' style) programmes that supported prisoners in freeing themselves of addiction, but these are no longer in place.

6.9 Soft skills

During the reporting year, the prison has continued to work with charities and outside organisations. There have been motivational talks from Frank Bruno, Levi Roots, David Dean and the musician Jordan Thomas. Reflective sessions are running and peer mentoring continues.

An away day, a wellbeing day and a beauty day have all been arranged for staff, as well as a cake day sale. There has been a talent show for prisoners and pool competitions on the wings. Park runs around the rugby field are organised for the prisoners by the gym staff and the prisoners continue to enjoy a book club, a games club, fine-cell embroidery sessions and crochet lessons, all arranged by the library. At Christmas, there was a Christmas card workshop where the men created cards for their families, old people's homes and charities.

The PACT (Prison Advice Care Trust) charity offers support for families and courses to develop parenting skills.

CFO (creating future opportunities) runs an eight-week course that includes health and wellbeing, communication skills and relationships. The prisoners donated fidget toys to an education centre for neurodivergent children. Positive cards were made for the elderly focusing on VE (Victory in Europe) Day that promoted a strong connection to the community.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education and library

Very little has changed since last year's report. The contract provider for education is run by People Plus on a four-year contract, and the education department consists of a main block, a small additional skills centre and various workshops.

Education is commissioned for 382 prisoners; however, several workshops have been closed due to major ongoing works, resulting in the loss of 48 spaces. This has occurred at a time when the prison roll has increased following the installation of 50 rapid deployment cells (RDCs)⁶. Currently, 286 prisoners are attending education, which is operating at full capacity.

Courses consist of English, Maths, IT, art and music, as well as a range of other subjects. Most courses are accredited and certificated.

Education scored badly in the Ofsted section of the report of the inspection carried out by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in November 2024 and is being monitored carefully. Ofsted is releasing a brand-new framework in May 2026.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 Summary

Vocational courses in bricklaying, plumbing, plastering, carpentry, multi-skills, decorating and flooring have been delivered up to February 2025, when the workshop closed due to works being carried out. The courses offer Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications, and it is hoped the courses will resume in the new workshops in the second quarter of 2026.

7.2.2 Education

The achievement of targets in English (60%) and Maths (59%), consistent with the previous year, is encouraging. Progress in vocational courses, with a 70% achievement rate, is also positive. Additionally, the overall education achievement rate improved to 86% in the last quarter, marking a significant upward trend.

As in previous years, many prisoners remain on courses beyond their planned end dates. A new Do-It Profiler diversity assessment has recently been introduced and implemented, helping individuals better understand their strengths and areas for development.

We are pleased to see the recruitment of a reading specialist for one-to-one sessions, which is proving very popular among the men.

All prisoners are assessed as part of their induction process and those below Entry Level 3 in Maths and English are offered places in education. Non-readers are

6. *Rapid deployment cells (RDCs) are accommodation units that are built offsite and can be deployed on existing prison grounds. They provide a quicker deployment route and can utilise smaller parcels of land than alternative accommodation options such as houseblocks.*

supported by Shannon Trust prison mentors. Even though mentors have been sourced, they are unable to operate either through lack of access to learners, lack of co-ordination or lack of administrative support in education, skills and workshops, alongside cuts to the dynamic purchasing system budget. However, unlike last year, there is now a specialist facilitator in place to strengthen literacy and numeracy and oversee the mentors new to The Mount.

The neurodiversity support manager (NSM) has been very effective since being appointed last year, assisting prisoners with educational and other needs across the prison. The NSM has also recruited prisoner support workers who offer frontline assistance on the wings, creating day schedules for vulnerable prisoners and has liaised with the CRED (refurbishment) team, leading to refurbished offices across the prison, which is welcome progress.

People Plus is running the Open University courses, with 19 prisoners studying 26 modules. This is supported by access to the digital education service access, which provides learners with course materials via the Open University campus on a secure, restricted prison server.

7.2.3 Library

The library remains consistent through the years and hold around 11,000 books, It also subscribes to a number of magazines, with a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction publications available. It is open from Monday to Thursday, plus Friday mornings, with evening session now on Mondays and Thursdays. The library is well visited and has recently introduced jigsaws starting from 1,000 pieces which is very popular with the prisoners. The library is providing more information via the prisoner's laptops. Content is constantly being added, with Books of the Month and opportunities for prisoners to review magazines and books now far more accessible.

The fine-cell embroidery workshop is gaining popularity. It is based in the library and many of the works are outstanding.

The Storybook Dads scheme continue to be popular from the library. These are videoed with various backdrops so prisoners can read stories to their children.

Last year, a reading strategy was launched to encourage reading not only for functional purposes but also for pleasure. It is closely linked with the Shannon Trust to create a better understanding of the need to improve literacy levels and how reading plays such a vital role in rehabilitation. The Shannon Trust is also partnering with the Children's Book Project – an excellent addition for prisoners. A prisoner will choose one book out of a wide choice for himself, and the duplicate book is sent to their child at home. This enables both of them to read stories together at bedtime, from baby books upwards, with a variety of age-appropriate titles available.

Ronald Dahl personnel are now attending the prison and with further help is given to the prisoners to help them read. The children of the prisoners also get free entry into the Ronald Dahl Museum.

7.2.4 Workshops

The workshops closed in March 2025; however, several key areas have continued to operate. Forklift training remains in place, alongside DHL, which provides employment opportunities assembling canteen packs for The Mount and other prisons and remains a consistently popular work area. Bike repair, woodwork, and DSA (a nationwide IT disposal company offering secure services for businesses and government organisations) have also continued, along with double glazing and waste management. Barbering has remained open as it is based within the skills centre. Overall, there are 246 work placements available per session, maintaining a good level of activity despite the wider closures.

Once the renovation of workshops is completed, the prison is planning to introduce a range of workshop-based training opportunities, including demolition, asbestos training, CSCS and IT testing, as well as site safety qualifications at Levels 1 and 2.

The noticeable addition to the workshop is Railtrack. National Rail (formerly Railtrack) is now a major part of the prison, allowing for many prisoners to learn theory in the classroom for laying tracks. Within the last six months, the rail track was donated along with the tools and has now been fitted outside the skills centre and replicates a real track with overhead lights. This allows prisoners to put theory into practice, with the added benefit of progression into jobs on release.

7.2.5 Vocational courses

These are the most popular with the prisoners, as many of them are given a genuine trade that could lead to a job on release.

The workshop placements initially caused upset within the prison, as fewer opportunities are available, but it is hoped that the workshops will soon be up and running in a new environment by the end of the year. We can also report that some new workshops will be introduced that offer much wider opportunities for prisoners.

New contracts are being drawn up and old workshops that were not taking the prisoners' needs into consideration whilst at prison and afterwards have been removed.

7.2.6 Prison mentor initiative group (PMIG)

This group is still flourishing and is moving into life coaching for all prisoners who require this. Using a 'speed-dating'-style format, participants move around tables giving them the opportunity to meet a range of mentors from all walks of life. Prisoners will soon be able to get to wear a new suit have a haircut and then the group will do role playing to help improve prisoners' interviewing techniques.

7.3 Offender management and progression

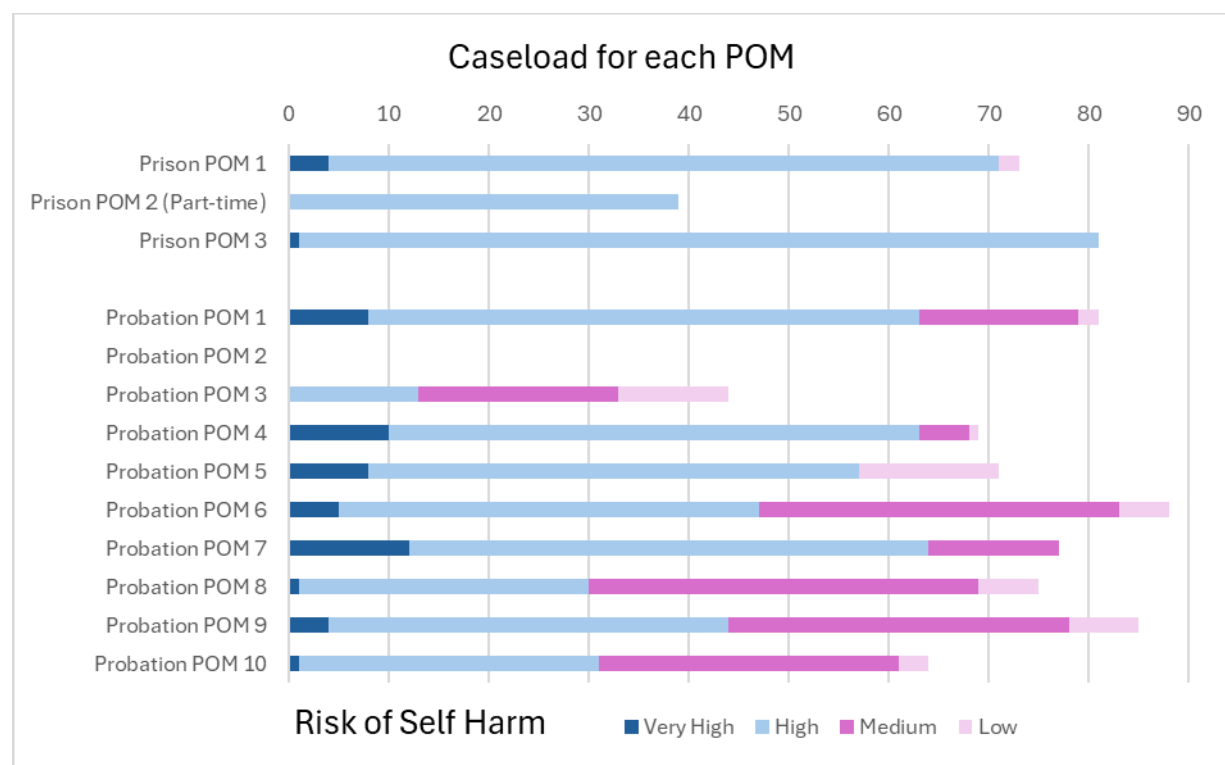
There has been limited change over the past year, with ongoing staff shortages and heavy workloads continuing to impact the offender management unit's (OMU) ability to fully support prisoners' rehabilitation and preparation for release.

Staff shortages remain a challenge, particularly among probation prisoner offender managers (POMs). This is further exacerbated by the fact that people in equivalent roles within probation but based in Watford (less than 12 miles away), benefit from London weighting allowances. However, the prison is in the process of building an OMU drop-in centre, which will enable POMs to support the men towards their rehabilitation and release, offering more structured supervision with the men in a confidential environment that is more in line with OMIC guidelines.

The hub will provide space to deliver group sessions and will enhance video link capabilities to ensure effective handovers with the community.

The OMU has developed a plan to support IPP prisoners and those serving life sentences through the introduction of sentence planning review meetings. These will be held four times a year, following the opening of the OMU drop-in centre.

Recruitment remains a problem, with 6.5 vacancies at the end of February 2026, but simple headcount numbers don't tell the full story. At that time, there were 210 prisoners waiting to be allocated POMs – nearly 20% of those in The Mount. Even though the OMU maintains contact with these prisoners and seeks to keep them updated, increasing numbers of prisoners are approaching us and asking – entirely reasonably – when they will be allocated a POM so that they can progress.



Workloads remain excessive for POMs, with around 80 cases on average, as well as case administrators with 100 cases each. Due to complications and delays with vetting, the prison is not getting staff in a position to make a meaningful impact on the workload. This needs to be set against what the Board considers an 'ideal' caseload of 52-62 for probation POMs and 68 for prison POMs.

It has not been possible to measure the impact on workload following the introduction of initiatives such as fixed term recall (FTR) and early release schemes (ERS). These increased workloads, particularly with regard to sentence calculation, maintaining and monitoring trackers and conducting the necessary checks. Much of this work has to be undertaken manually, often needing to refer to different systems to complete the process.

7.4 ROTL (release on temporary licence)

The Mount aims to release men on temporary license for community work.

The reducing reoffending team has raised the profile of the ROTL scheme, both inside and outside the prison. Local employers offer opportunities that would help prisoners integrate into society before their release, which would be a huge boost in confidence to prisoners.

Visibility is improving and their vision is to develop this further with the use of the drop-in centre and making better use of the OMU representatives. In addition, the management team conducts regular videos on the laptops to share information and answer key questions put forward by the prison unity team.

ROTL is still progressing, but due to the overwhelming demand on the OMU the applications do take time. Prisoners and employers have been identified and many applications put forward.

7.5 Family contact

PACT (Prisoner Advice and Care Trust) continues to provide support to prisoners and their families. They have run family days during the year, including special days at Christmas, Valentine's Day and Halloween. Family days are restricted to 15 families made up of two adults and any number of children. Those serving life sentences and IPP prisoners have their own family visits. Days for children with special needs are also arranged. Healthy food options have been introduced for the family days.

Roald Dahl reading mornings run once a month. After the stories are read to the children, they can take a copy of the book home. Sometimes, craft materials are provided so that the children can create an item relevant to the story.

Storybook Dads takes place in the library every two months; this gives the father an opportunity to read a story onto a CD for their child.

Prisoners can contact their family using their in-cell phones.

The nine weekly visit sessions each accommodate up to 28 prisoners at any one time, with each prisoner allowed a maximum of three adult visitors (aged 18 and over) and three children.

Bookings can be made online or by phone. The phone line is open two hours a day. A children's book project is now underway. Books are donated and a prisoner chooses a category/subject, keeps one book themselves and sends the other to a son or daughter so that they can read together.

7.6 Resettlement planning

In the Board's view, the prison offers good support to prisoners who are within 12 weeks of release. Prisoners are helped to provide right to work documents such as both certificates, National Insurance information, bank account and driving licences.

The weekly pre-release clinic is attended by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), housing services, the OMU, resettlement housing, information, advice and guidance (IAG), Forward Trust and the prison employment lead (PEL). Over the past year, the proportion of men securing employment while on a six-month licence has ranged between approximately 30% and 40%.

At the end of 2025, 780 men were recorded as being on benefits or had DWP applications in progress post-release.

Successful boot camps are in place to help prisoners find employment on release. Railtrack (see §7.2.5) offers a four-week course, while traffic management provides a two-week programme. It is hoped that another rail track with overhead lines can be installed in the near future. However, a lack of funding continue to prevent further courses being run. Employers from the employment advisory board also visit the prison to help those due to be released.

Mentoring sessions have been put in place, with heads of various companies visiting to discuss prisoners' future plans. These take place four times a year. A particularly successful visit from Lord Timpson has generated increased interest from employers and other prisons.

The Forward Trust offers continuing support with substance abuse, alongside help with accommodation and housing. The percentage of prisoners being housed on release is approximately 86%, slightly down on last year, likely due to the large number of releases through the early release scheme.

Throughout the year, a wide range of employment and mentoring events have taken place, offering valuable opportunities for engagement and progression.

The work of the IMB

8. Monitoring involvement

IMB monitoring visits consist of one member on duty each week, typically attending on three days, including observing CSU reviews where required, and two members handling applications on a weekly basis. Rule 45 (good order or discipline) reviews within the CSU have been observed in person on all but a small number of occasions.

One member of the Board left, having reached the 15-year ceiling, and two retired, having completed 12 and 13 years' service to the Board. Two others transferred – to HMP Chelmsford and HMP Pentonville. No new members joined.

8.1 Board statistics

Statistic	2024-25	2025-26
Recommended complement of Board members ⁷	18	18
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	13	11
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11	8 ⁸
Total number of visits to the establishment	417	405
Total number of segregation reviews monitored	85	139

7. This number is historic and does not, we believe, reflect the underlying need. In our view, the ideal number would be 13, allowing each member to undertake four rotas and eight applications per annum.

8. A further two Board members resigned during March 2026, and another will leave in June 2026, leaving just five.

8.2 Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	2022/23		2023/24			2024/25		2025/26	
		Paper	0800	Paper	0800	In Person	Paper	In Person	Paper	In Person
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	3	6	3	-	-	6	1	13	0
B	Discipline, including adjudications, Incentives, warnings and reviews, sanctions	7	7	3		1	14	2	19	0
C	Equality	1	-	1	-	-	2	-	6	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library & time out of cell	10	10	1	1	1	9	2	7	1
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	3	8	6	-	-	17	-	20	1
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	5	0	2	2	4	10	3	8	1
F	Food and kitchens	1	2	2	1	-	1	-	7	0
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	19	23	38	2	4	41	4	43	4
H1	Property within this establishment	39	12	46	1	2	17	2	25	3
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	19	1	32	1	2	63	6	40	3
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	1	5	7	3	-	1	1	10	0
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release, re- categorisation	35	27	50	5	5	45	15	71	7
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	8	18	17	-	-	30	3	49	1
K	Transfers	6	4	3	1	4	5	4	4	0
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	29	21	83	8	1	36	6	22	0
Total applications per category		186	144	294	25	24	297	49	344	21
Total number of applications		330		343			346		365	

Notes 1. The 0800 number ceased operation as of 1 July 2023.

2. In-person approaches resulting in an application previously not recorded separately.

Data

In the view of the Board, little, if anything, has changed during the year, so we simply repeat the principal findings from 2023-2024 and 2024-2025.

- The issues with data collection are not due to any lack of willingness by staff to assist us, but in the way that key information is recorded and stored.
- Much of the information we needed had to be manually extracted from the 12 monthly reports that are prepared by the senior management team (SMT) and added together; each monthly summary was, itself, created by reference to the daily briefing sheets, meaning that 365 separate data points had to be physically drawn out to produce each single outcome.
- It was impossible (for us) to show the operational capacity of The Mount, after allowing for cells that were out of use, and track the number of prisoners on the roll to see how full the prison was over the course of the 12 months under review. This would have required 1,095 manual entries.
- The recording of complaints - on a single spreadsheet - is barely fit for purpose, notwithstanding the generally diligent and professional approach of the team that has to use it. Even the inclusion of simple filtering does not facilitate more than the most basic analysis, and errors and omissions may not get picked up.
- The daily briefing sheet, the key operational document informing senior management of events in the previous 24 hours and alerting them to potential issues in the prison, is created overnight by the night orderly officer, requiring information to be extracted from various systems, none of which appears to be linked in any way.

The creation of such a data platform across HMPPS is necessary and, indeed, vital if prisons such as The Mount are to be able to operate as efficiently and effectively as they should. Properly designed, this platform would, in the Board's opinion:

- ensure that the data is collected, kept and used securely, efficiently and cost-effectively;
- remove many of the mundane tasks of data entry, increasing productivity and reducing inputting errors;
- facilitate the efficient extraction of data, whether for one-off matters or for repeated/longer-term studies; and
- above all, allow the senior management of prisons, including The Mount, and indeed, HMPPS, more generally, to better understand what is going on in the prisons from relevant data and to allow them to make decisions and take actions based on information that is timelier and more accurate and where trends can more easily be identified and understood.



This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit

nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at imb@justice.gov.uk