



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Wealstun

**For reporting year
1 June 2025 to 31 May 2026**

Published September 2026



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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Wealstun is a category C training and resettlement prison (which houses those whose escape risk is considered low but who cannot be trusted in open conditions), for men, situated in a semi-rural area near Wetherby, West Yorkshire. The operational capacity, or OpCap (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime), increased from 908¹ to 920 at the end of 2025.

There are 11 residential units, built at different times, and a segregation unit (where prisoners are kept apart from the main prison population, usually to maintain safety, security or good order). The units include 40 rapid-deployment cells, which opened in January 2024. The site also comprises a kitchen, visitors' centre, chaplaincy, gym, library, healthcare centre and college, plus a number of workshops. A reception area for prisoners' visitors is located outside the main gate.

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

3. Key points

There have been a number of changes in Governors during the reporting year which may have had an impact on the stability of the prison. The Governor was moved to temporarily support HMP Leeds in early September 2025 and the Deputy Governor covered temporarily. The posting to HMP Leeds was made permanent and the Deputy continued to cover the Governor role whilst the permanent Governor was recruited, which he managed admirably, in the Board's view. In January 2026, a Deputy Governor was brought in to cover the Governor role temporarily. Following a recruitment campaign, the appointment was made permanent. The new Governor appears to have already made their mark on the prison and the Board has seen changes and improvements. One of their priorities is cleanliness and decency and the Board is pleased that issues in this area has been acknowledged.

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- The number of receptions has increased again, which continues to put pressure on reception and other areas of the prison. However, the Board has observed a well organised reception process and a clean and tidy reception area.
- The induction process appears to be well managed.
- Whilst the number of prisoners on open assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans (used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) remains high, the level of violence has increased.
- Illicit substances are still widely available and seem to be contributing to the violence and debt problems despite the work undertaken by the prison.
- It is hoped that the introduction of restorative justice to the disciplinary process for those found under the influence which includes mandatory drug testing, will help reduce the prevalence of illicit substances.

Fair and humane treatment

- The Board remains concerned about the condition of the older wings and the plan to increase more double cells across the prison.
- From our observations, the segregation unit continues to be generally well managed, with prisoners having clear reintegration plans in place. The length of time that prisoners are segregated continues to be low.
- The Board is pleased that despite the significant churn of prisoners, prison complaints relating to property and residences have continued to reduce.

Health and wellbeing

- The Board continues to be satisfied that the healthcare provision is generally good.
- We continue to be concerned about the length of time that prisoners are out of their cells, as a lack of staff means regimes need to be regularly curtailed.

- The Board is satisfied that the drug and alcohol recovery service (DARS) provides a good support to prisoners with drug and alcohol issues. However, we believe it could benefit from further funding to help increase their reach.

Progression and resettlement

- The prison has a significant number of individuals recalled to prison. Many are subject to a 56-day fixed-term recall (FTR56), meaning that they remain in custody for a short period. The Board is pleased to see that recalled prisoners have been housed on a separate wing, which allows the prison to concentrate on their preparation for release.
- The extended working week began in October 2025, with prisoners working for longer hours and new workshops being opened. It was disappointing to note that the improvements have not been able to continue as expected, as there are a shortage of officers and instructors due to delays in the recruitment and vetting processes.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The Board is concerned that reductions in education funding, both locally and nationally, have impacted the ability for the prison to run some classes and support for prisoners. What was the reason for this and what steps will the Minister take to restore funding to a level that enables prisons to deliver effective educational provision?
- The Board recognises that this year has been extremely busy for the offender management unit, with numerous changes to sentences and release arrangements. It also impacts prisoners, as they are unable to speak to OMU staff who are trying to recalculate sentences again. How does the Minister intend to ensure that future changes are better planned and implemented in a way that allows sufficient time for prisons to prepare and respond effectively?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Despite being informed, following the last annual report that, after feasibility studies, a preferred £32 million option had been identified for A and B wings, together with a separate scheme to refurbish all showers on those wings, no progress has been made and work has yet to commence. It is increasingly apparent that this accommodation, built in the 1960s, requires significant remedial investment and does not provide a sufficiently decent environment for prisoners. Given the urgency of these issues, what is the timetable for the commencement of these works?
- The Board remains concerned about delays in the vetting process, which appear to be affecting both the recruitment of IMB members and staffing across organisations working at HMP Wealstun. What action is the Prison Service taking to resolve these delays, and by when does it expect vetting times to return to an acceptable standard?
- The Board is concerned that the ban on band 4 recruitment for several months during the reporting period has adversely affected the ability of the

prison to recruit the necessary staff, especially in workshops. What were the reasons for this recruitment restriction, what impact assessment has been undertaken and what action is being taken to address staffing shortages and prevent further disruption to prison operations?

- The Board is concerned that the lack of places on the new accredited Building Choices course is impacting prisoners' ability to progress. What action is being taken nationally and at HMP Wealstun to increase the availability of places and reduce waiting times for eligible prisoners?
- The Board has observed considerable lengths of time to recruit new officers, which have severely impacted the regime and the treatment of prisoners. What is the Prison Service doing to address these delays, and what measures are in place to ensure that prisons can recruit sufficient staff in a timely manner to maintain safe and decent regimes?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- As referenced in previous reports, when and how will the Governor ensure that ACCT files contain only the most recent week's paperwork, with older records archived and stored separately? The size of some files makes them difficult to navigate by staff and IMB members and may hinder the effective tracking of risk, care and continuity.
- The Board is disappointed to see that the farm and gardens are not being utilised as they had been previously, when produce would be used to help the kitchens with preparing food within their minimal budget. What plans are in place to improve this situation?

TO THE HEALTH COMMISSIONERS

- The Board is pleased with the work that the prison and DARS are doing to tackle the use of illicit substances. When will the budget be increased so that DARS can work with more prisoners in the future?

3.3.1 Response to the last report

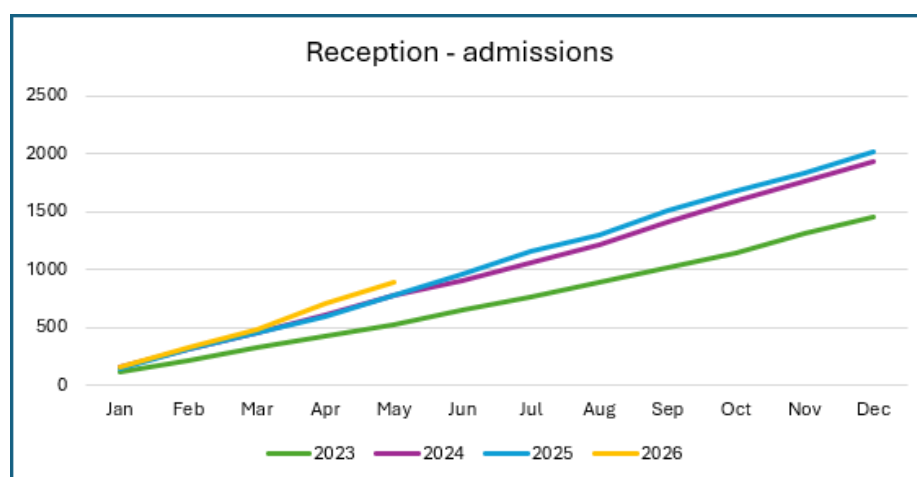
Responses to the areas for development for the Minister and the Prison Service were broadly as expected, given the current population crisis across the Prison Service and long-standing issues. The Board remain concerned that there has been no progress on the planned refurbishment of A and B Wings despite concerns having been raised previously.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 There have been 2125 receptions in the reporting year, which is an increase from 1933 in the previous reporting period. With an operating capacity at 920, the number of receptions continues to be more than twice the prison population. Many prisoners arrive with very short sentences remaining (2-4 weeks in some cases). The high turnover of prisoners, coupled with short sentences, has a major impact on the prison in terms of stability and operations.



4.1.2 Unlike during the previous reporting period, the prison now has a mostly local population of mainly Yorkshire and Humberside prisoners, with many being transferred from HMP Leeds. There are considerably fewer coming from the north east and the north west.

4.1.3 The reception is well organised and the officers are always willing to assist the Board with any queries. Prisoners' property is checked and they try to get it to prisoners the following day.

4.1.4 Prisoners are moved quickly to the induction wing, whereas previously they would typically remain there for a week. However, due to the increased number of receptions, prisoners remain on the induction wing for two days to ensure they complete their two-day induction. Where possible and safe to do so, the prison now moves prisoners serving short sentences, including those who have been recalled, to G wing. This wing is specifically intended for recalled prisoners, as the limited time before their release often restricts opportunities to engage in work and other activities. The focus is therefore on resettlement. At least 30% of prisoners have been recalled, of whom 25% have been recalled under FTR56.

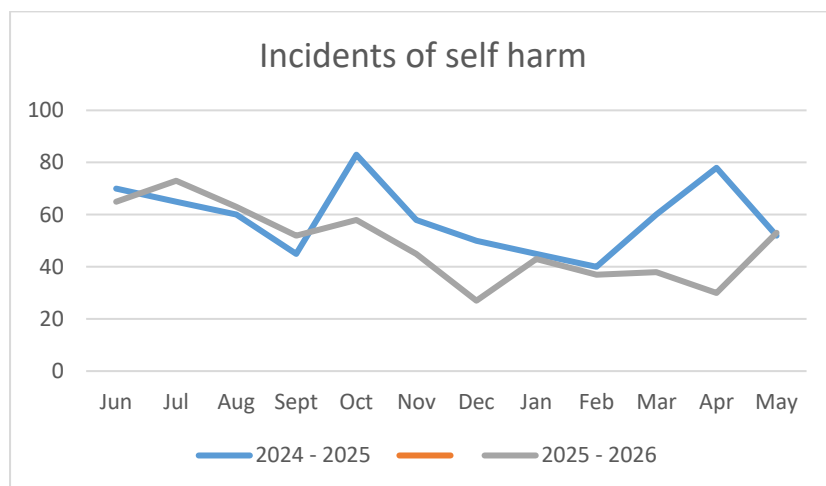
4.1.5 In addition to the increase in new receptions, there are other movements through reception that also need to be managed. These include hospital, court appearances, transfers and releases. The Board remains concerned that the considerable churn of prisoners continues to impact on the smooth running of the prison, with minimal additional resources to manage the additional intake.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 There were three deaths in custody and four deaths following release, all with causes that are yet to be determined.

4.2.2 The number of ACCTs in the prison throughout the year has remained similar to the previous reporting period, with between 13 and 29 ACCTs open each month. The Board has had the chance to observe a few ACCT reviews (which assess and manage the risk of self-harm or suicide for a prisoner on ACCT monitoring) and we noted that they have been performed with respect, allowing the prisoner to speak. A number of open ACCT documents have also been observed, and appear, in the main to be completed correctly but still contain information that should be filed in by the safer custody team.

4.2.3 Levels of self-harm have decreased in the reporting but still remain high. The Board has noted that there are a considerable number of prisoners who are prolific self-harmers and require additional support. Their needs are discussed at the weekly safety intervention management (SIM) meeting, which Board members have occasionally observed.



4.2.4 The new safety strategy published at the end of the reporting period by the prison includes a priority to achieve a sustained reduction in self-harm and suicide and improve the quality, consistency and effectiveness of the ACCT processes. The plan includes a number of actions and the Board will be interested to see whether they lead to a reduction in self-harm in both the short and long term.

4.2.5 There are seven trained Listeners and 10 being trained, who are managed by the safer custody team. Listeners are carefully selected prisoners who have received eight weeks of training from Harrogate Samaritans so they can offer peer-to-peer support. Listeners are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the prison appears to make every effort to meet prisoners' requests.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 The Board continues to be concerned that the number of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased again during the reporting year, rising from 213 to 267 and remaining the second highest in its comparator group. There were a total of 267 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and 69 assaults on staff. There has also been an increase in in-cell violence, which has led to the introduction of a locked-door policy

on individual wings where incidents of violence have occurred. Prisoners are locked out of their cells during association periods (when prisoners are unlocked from their cells and can spend time with other prisoners on the wing). These arrangements are reviewed regularly at governance review of incidents and prevention (GRIP) meetings.

4.3.2 There were 1058 challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) referrals, used to help and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence, of which 292 were related to violence. This is a considerable decrease from the previous reporting period, during which there were 2385 referral, including 481 that were violence-related. The safety strategy has identified CSIPs as a key priority, with the aim of achieving a sustained reduction in violence and improving the quality, consistency and effectiveness of CSIP processes. The Board will be interested to see the impact of this work.

4.3.3 The prison has in place 18 staff members who are safety champions, together with 13 violence-reduction prisoner representatives. There is at least one safety champion on each wing and they are the link between safety teams and prisoners. They appear to be having a positive impact, particularly in identifying prisoners at risk.

4.4 Use of force

4.4.1 As expected, given the increase in violence, the total number of use of force (UoF) incidents, including the use of handcuffs, rose to 690 during the reporting year, compared with 543 in the previous year. This increase occurred despite the rise in operational capacity. Batons were drawn on one occasion. PAVA incapacitant spray was drawn five times, involving a total of eight prisoners across those incidents.

4.4.2 The Board has observed a sample of monthly use of force meetings and a number of the weekly scrutiny meetings. They were generally well attended. Advice is given to officers when there are any concerns or opportunities identified for improved prisoner control or restraint.

4.4.3 The use of body worn video cameras (BWVCs) in incidents involving force has fluctuated throughout the year, with an average usage of 71.6%, representing an increase from the previous reporting period. Although there has been an improvement, this remains a priority area in the safety strategy, which aims to 'support staff through increasing the effective and confident use of body worn video cameras (BWVC) to enhance professionalism, procedural justice, deterrence, and evidence capture'.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

4.5.1 The Board continues to be seriously concerned about the availability of Illicit items, which affects the stability of the prison. They can also lead to bullying, debt and increased violence towards other prisoners and staff. Such items include drugs, particularly synthetic cannabinoids (known as spice), brewed alcohol (hooch), tampered vapes and mobile phones. The Board remains concerned that, despite the effort s made by the prison during the reporting year, illicit items are still being found.

4.5.2 Items are known to enter the prison in a variety of ways, including through staff, throwovers, drones and visits. A multi-agency response continues to operate to reduce the entry of illicit items, involving West Yorkshire Police, a dedicated search

team, specialised dog handlers, and regional HM Prison and Probation Service teams.

4.5.3 There have been increased night patrols and ground searches to help tackle drones and throwovers, and other strategies such as a new policy ensuring all internal solid doors are kept closed. The Board remains concerned that the netting does not cover all the areas that prisoners are able to access during periods of outdoor activity. The upgrade to the external fence is complete, with better lighting.

4.5.4 Searching of visitors takes place, with a system to offer closed visits (where physical contact between the prisoner and visitor is not permitted) if there is any indication of suspicion. Gate searching for staff does not appear to be carried out for every entry, and the Board is of the opinion that all staff should be thoroughly searched on every occasion.

4.5.5 In October 2025, the type of vape available to prisoners was changed to one that can no longer be tampered with, removing its ability to be used to smoke illicit drugs or start cell fires. However, despite the withdrawal of the old vapes, which are now prohibited items, some continue to be found during searches.

4.5.6 All prisoners arriving at HMP Wealstun undergo body scanning to check for concealed items. If prisoners refuse to be scanned, they are held in the segregation unit until their scans are clear.

4.5.7 Drug use throughout the reporting year has fluctuated, as shown by the number of reports of under the influence (UTI) and the results of mandatory drug testing (MDT). Positive results of random MDT tests have varied between 14% and 44%. There have been occasions where there has been a sudden increase in drug use, with numerous prisoners appearing to be under the influence on the same wing on the same day. Where this has occurred, the Board witnessed immediate action to undertake detailed cell to cell searches.

4.5.8 When a prisoner is suspected of being under the influence of an illicit substance (UTI), this should be reported to healthcare. However, the Board is aware of occasions when this has not occurred.

4.5.9 A new strategy to incentivise and support prisoners giving up using drugs has been implemented. Previously, a prisoner was placed on report, pending adjudication (a disciplinary hearing when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules), if suspected of being under the influence. Now they are offered a suspicion MDT. If they refuse, they are sent for an adjudication, but if they agree and the test is positive, they are offered the opportunity for a rehabilitative adjudication. This gives them the option to engage in drug support services and submit to further MDT tests to incentivise not using drugs rather than the process always being punitive. Results are available within a week and there have been high positive rates of the suspicion MDTs. The system is in its infancy, and the Board looks forward to seeing if there is a positive outcome to this innovation. The MDT suite has been extended to increase capacity.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Accommodation

5.1.1 The Board continues to be concerned about the fabric of some of the wings and cells, particularly the older A and B wings. Despite being informed in the response to the 2024-25 annual report that, following feasibility studies, a preferred £32 million option had been identified for A and B wings, alongside a separate option to refurbish all showers on those wings, there has been no progress and the work has yet to commence.

5.1.2 There are difficulties with temperature control across the prison, as the whole heating system has to be either on or off. With variable and rapid weather changes, this causes issues with temperature control. In addition, the inner solid doors on wings and the roof vents are required to be kept closed at all times for security reasons, reducing ventilation. The windows in the cells are plastic and are often poorly fitting, with leaks and limited opening. Prisoners regularly complain to the Board about it being too hot or too cold.

5.1.3 Decency inspections are carried out approximately every six weeks on each wing by the senior management team. The Board still hears concerns from some prisoners who, for example, have not been provided with a pillow on arrival at the prison or after moving to segregation. Complaints about the thinness of the mattresses are common.

5.1.4 There has been a mixed picture around day-to-day maintenance issues. Occasionally, the Board has been under the impression that faults have been reported and attended to rapidly, such as when some showers were out of order. On other occasions, the Board believes there may have been issues for a couple of days, including a blocked toilet. A leak with one set of roof vents took some time to fix.

5.1.5 The Board has observed prisoners vaping on the landings of wings, which is against prison rules and despite regular notices and reminders to prisoners being published. This has been variable across wings, as some officers appear to be unwilling to challenge prisoners.

5.1.6 The plan to move all prisoner laundry facilities to a centralised laundry is still pending. Once this work takes place, the existing laundry spaces on wings will become extra cells. The Board remains concerned that moving laundry to a centralised system may create issues such as missing items; prisoners share these concerns. The prison has completed a trial on one wing and the results will feed into ensuring that there should be a clear process in place that is understood by staff and prisoners.

5.1.7 Additional gym and leisure equipment has been supplied to some wings, such as the incentivised substance free living wing, and has been well received. Gym equipment has been ordered for the remaining wings.

Clothing

5.1.8 Prisoners are permitted to receive one clothing parcel within two months of their sentence and thereafter once per year. Prisoners who are on a life sentence or have enhanced privilege status (on the prison's incentive scheme) are entitled to an extra parcel once per year. All clothing and shoes must be purchased directly from approved suppliers and cannot be sent in by relatives or friends. This is due to security concerns and it presents difficulties for prisoners who do not have access to additional funds.

5.1.9 The prison continues to run a clothing charity for prisoners struggling to afford items. This is commendable but, unfortunately, it does not always appear to meet prisoners' needs. For example, the Board has observed a prisoner being given shoes several sizes smaller than he needed, as there were no larger sizes available.

Canteen

5.1.10 The majority of prisoners continue to be employed only on a part-time basis, resulting in lower wages than those working full time. With continued inflation, the prices of goods on the canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials using their allocated funds) continue to rise and not all prisoners have access to additional private funds. This makes it difficult for some prisoners to afford basic items such as vapes, phone credit and additional food.

Food

5.1.11 The catering manager continues to drive forward standards and innovation, despite ongoing budgetary pressures. The daily food budget remains at £3.12 per person, per day, despite national inflation. The number of prisoners on special diets has halved, which has reduced the additional costs for these meals, but there remains huge pressure on the food budget.

5.1.12 Despite the budget pressures, the kitchen continues to offer themed dishes in support of diversity. Black History Month, Eid and Christmas are examples of feature menus that seem to be received well.

5.1.13 The new Food in Prisons Policy Framework was introduced in February 2026. The changes include a reduction in processed foods, sugar and red meat, as well as an increase in the breakfast allocation to 500 calories. There is an increase in the requirement for fruit, vegetables and protein, including plant-based protein. Pasta and rice are now, by default, brown; however, due to the sudden increase in demand, there have been wholesaler supply issues. Not only have these changes caused budget and logistical issues but they have also required innovation in their delivery to help the prisoners accept and adjust to the new diet. The Board has heard of many innovative strategies that the catering manager has employed for this.

5.1.14 Food is delivered from a central kitchen via trolleys. On occasion, the Board has witnessed these trolleys appearing dirty and it was not always clear who had responsibility for cleaning some of the equipment.

5.1.15 The serveries on the wings should be supervised by officers to ensure equal, fair and hygienic delivery of food to prisoners. The Board has witnessed occasions when this has not occurred. There have been allegations of unfair portioning. The serveries workers have not always been wearing whites.

5.1.16 Menus are preselected by prisoners and include nutrition and allergy information. However, this information is provided in written form and may present difficulties for prisoners with low literacy levels. Prisoners have complained to the Board that they have sometimes not received their correct meal choice. The prison explained that if the form is incorrectly completed (if, for example, the tick goes outside the box), it cannot be scanned and the prisoner receives the default meal instead.

5.1.17 There appear to have been inconsistencies across the wings in the provision of cooking equipment available to prisoners. A new policy started towards the end of the reporting year, stating that each wing should have two microwaves, two toasters and two sandwich makers, one of each to be kept for halal cooking. The Board hopes this will provide clarity and consistency to prisoners.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 Overall, the Board considers the segregation unit to be quite well run, with an experienced core of officers most of the time. Reintegration plans are in place for all prisoners early in their segregation. Officers inform the Board when prisoners are segregated and provide a weekly report for Board members, which is very useful. The segregation unit is kept tidy, clean and pleasantly decorated. In hot weather, it is cool. Ants and mould have caused problems, though, and appear to have been dealt with by the prison.

5.2.2 There are usually between four and 12 prisoners segregated when monitoring visits are made by the Board. Computer lists provided to the Board prior to the visit have, occasionally, not been accurate when compared with the office wall noticeboard. Officers should explain any discrepancies and correct as appropriate. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for prisoners to be on open ACCTs when in segregation.

5.2.3 The Board is rarely unable to speak to the prisoners in the unit, but there have been a few occasions when it was too busy and unsafe to immediately open doors. There was a disturbance during one visit and the Board and members of the healthcare team were told that it was unsafe to enter.

5.2.4 Prisoners often describe the officers as 'sound' and the Board has noticed several kind and thoughtful officers who deal with prisoners with patience and sympathy. Prisoners have complained to the Board about the lack of items such as pillows, and officers have dealt with such issues speedily.

5.2.5 The Board is aware that, sometimes, prisoners prefer to be in the unit, as they get more attention than on wings where they feel threatened. However, some prisoners are reluctant to return to their normal location and will use bad behaviour again to ensure a return to the 'safety' of the unit.

5.2.6 The adjudication process appears to be generally well organised. However, the Board raised concerns about the number of adjudications being adjourned and the resulting backlog. The Governor explained that this issue had also been identified by the prison and that responsibility for completing hearings remained with the original Governor. This appears to have reduced the backlog considerably since January 2026.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 As anticipated, the new Governor has taken the opportunity to make improvements within the prison and has implemented a Good Prison Culture Strategy to help improve staff morale and engagement. It is hoped that, in turn, this will help with prisoner interactions. New staff training in procedural justice and trauma-informed training has also been introduced.

5.3.2 The lack of officers has meant that prisoners rarely see their key worker and the actual delivery is very low. Many prisoners tell the Board that they do not know their key worker or have ever met them, although the prison state that all prisoners are told who their key worker is at their induction. Key worker sessions are often cancelled due to staff shortages requiring last minute redeployment. Audits have shown that where key worker sessions are delivered, the quality has improved. The Board believes that many more prisoners should benefit from key worker sessions. The Board is pleased that this is a priority area for the new Governor and is discussed at each morning meeting.

5.3.3 The Board has witnessed examples where officers have dealt with difficult situations with empathy and patience. There remains variability with staff experience and engagement. On occasion, some officers have not been visible on the landings while, on others, the Board has witnessed positive proactive interactions with prisoners. There have been reports from prisoners that some inexperienced staff may struggle more with complex interactions.

5.3.4 The removal of TVs from some prisoners on the basic level (bottom) of the incentives scheme, for poor behaviour, has long been a source of anxiety and has the potential to negatively affect prisoners' mental health. HMP Wealstun has implemented a new policy whereby, before a TV can be removed from a cell, a defensible decision log must be completed and submitted to a Governor for review.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 The Board is pleased that the prison continues to encourage diversity, equality and inclusion through the inclusion, diversity, equality, access and leadership (IDEAL) meetings. The discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs; diversity-related prisoner complaints) are discussed, and considerations are given to ways that the differences might be celebrated across the prison.

5.4.2 The DIRF process remains in place, with a standard 14-day response window, extendable to 28 days with a Governor's approval.

5.4.3 Disability and neurodiversity remain central to the inclusion strategy. A disability forum meets bi-monthly, and there are neurodiversity representatives on all wings. A neurodiversity information pack is offered to better support prisoners with hidden disabilities. The prison employs a neurodiversity support manager (NSM), who meets with prisoners who have additional needs, to establish what reasonable adjustments they may need.

5.4.4 Older prisoners continue to benefit from regular social engagement through coffee mornings and bingo events.

5.4.5 The prison continues not to meet their challenging performance target about the disparity between ethnicity and the use of force. This appears to be due to a

higher use-of-force rate amongst white prisoners, who make up the majority of the prisoner population.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 The Board's view is that the chaplaincy team makes an immeasurable contribution to ensuring that men of every faith (or none) receive pastoral care.

5.5.2 The chaplaincy team represents many faiths, including: Church of England, Free Church, Roman Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish. The prison is working to recruit chaplains to support those of Rastafari, Sikh and Hindu faiths. Of these faiths, there are only eight prisoners in Wealstun at the moment.

5.5.3 The lead chaplain has been instrumental in coordinating a calendar of faith celebrations and is proud that the prison celebrates every faith festival, immaterial of if that religion is represented on chaplaincy staff. Christmas is always a popular festival, and the chaplains work very hard to ensure that Ramadan works well.

5.5.4 The chaplaincy team has worked well with kitchen staff to support those during Ramadan, and there is an ongoing project upskilling servery staff on faith provisions and food handling.

5.5.5 The Board recognises the role that chaplains play in supporting prisoners who are experiencing bereavement or the ill health of a loved one. The lead chaplain reported to the Board that they have worked hard to speed up the referral process for those who might need this one-on-one support.

5.5.6 During the reporting period, the Sycamore Tree Project was deemed no longer to meet the criteria for endorsement under the 2023 National Framework for Interventions, as set out by HMPPS. As a result, this victim-awareness and restorative-justice programme is no longer delivered at Wealstun. The Board was pleased to learn that four of the Sycamore Tree volunteers have continued to contribute at HMP Wealstun in different voluntary roles.

5.5.7 The chaplaincy team is not immune to the prison-wide challenges associated with recruiting and vetting staff. One part-time chaplain told an IMB member that the vetting process took around 12 months, despite having volunteered in a prison for approximately five years.

5.6 Incentives scheme

5.6.1 The local Incentives Policy Framework (IPF) is the prison's approach to managing prisoner incentives and is subject to regular reviews. The Board has received few complaints from prisoners, which suggests that the IPF is not being followed by the prison.

5.6.2 Whilst it is usual practice to remove televisions from prisoners on the basic level of incentives scheme as a consequence of poor behaviour, the prison introduced a change in March 2026. It means that, if an officer wants to remove a television, they have to complete a defensible-decision log and the residential Governor has to sign it. This has resulted in some prisoners on basic status being allowed to keep their TVs. For example, in March, 12 of the 66 prisoners on basic had a TV. The Board has received complaints from prisoners who have not been allowed to keep their TVs.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 The number of complaints submitted to the prison fell by 19% during the reporting year, from 1,787 to 1,452. The Board raised concerns in the previous reviewing period after several prisoners reported not receiving responses to their complaints. The Board was concerned that some responses may have gone missing before reaching prisoners but was unable to independently verify this. In response, the prison undertook an assurance check in November 2025, randomly selecting a number of prisoners and asking how long it took them to receive a response after it had been placed in the post room. The results indicated that delays occurred in distribution rather than collection. Officers were reminded of the importance of distributing responses promptly, and the Board has received fewer complaints from prisoners about this issue since.

5.7.2 The prison has also introduced tamper-proof stickers, which should allow prisoners to be sure that replies have not been opened by officers.

5.7.3 Property and accommodation issues continue to dominate the subject of complaints. Interestingly, whilst still high, the trend for complaints regarding property has shown an encouraging reduction for a fourth year. Complaints regarding accommodation issues have also fallen.

5.7.4 The Board has seen excellent management of the complaints system, which helped to ensure there was minimal disruption when the experienced clerk left the Prison Service. Complaints to the Board about the lack of complaint forms on wings have been addressed promptly.

5.8 Property

5.8.1 Reception was consistently observed by the Board as calm, tidy and well organized, even during busy periods. Officers were often busy with sorting property for new arrivals, opening parcels (a lower priority task) to check for unauthorised items and preparing property for transfer and release. However, the number of complaints to the prison has fallen again.

5.8.2 Receptions, transfers and releases generate a lot of activity for officers when dealing with prisoners' property. There have been several instances of high volumes of activity on one day, with 15 or more prisoners arriving with standard property allowances: three bags up to 15kg, 7.5kg canteen, one oversized item, and a valuables bag. In addition, many prisoners have excess property, which usually arrives separately and also requires processing.

5.8.3 The Board has received a similar number of applications (prisoners' written representations to the IMB) in the reporting period. We were pleased that, in most cases, property arrived with the prisoner and appeared to be processed with little delay. However, prisoners reported delays and frustration about property that had gone missing during a previous transfer.

5.8.4 The Board would also like to acknowledge the dedication of reception staff. During our frequent visits, we observed staff working hard to resolve issues and support prisoners, despite the high volume of work.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

6.1.1 The Board has seen an increase in applications to the IMB during the reporting period, rising from 18 to 30. These related both to individual prisoner care and to concerns about the effectiveness and timeliness of procedures and processes. Prisoners reported delays in accessing medication and specialist services, as well as receiving insufficient information about the management of their medication. The need to prioritise prisoners believed to be under the influence of illicit substances, together with unplanned incidents, can sometimes have a knock-on effect on routine care. Regime and staffing pressures also continued to affect access to, and the provision of, healthcare.

6.1.2 The Board understands that the healthcare unit is currently fully staffed.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 The Board has received no complaints from prisoners about waiting times for appointments.

6.2.2 Attendance at healthcare appointments continues to be monitored by the prison and reported daily. The information provided daily by the prison indicates that there has been some improvement in attendance.

6.3 Mental healthcare

6.3.1 Mental health, substance misuse services (SMS) and drug and alcohol recovery services (DARS) are currently almost fully staffed. Waiting times for an appointment to see a psychiatrist is about five days, but urgent appointments are generally seen within 48 hours, which complies with The Mental Health Act 1983. A triage system is in place at reception to identify people with mental health needs and ensure they receive care in a timely manner.

6.3.2 There is a significant prevalence of neurodiversity within the prison. Prisoners report mental health-related distress and instability, and several have expressed concerns about the timeliness and availability of support. At times, elderly, disabled, neurodivergent and mentally ill prisoners appear to rely on informal support from other prisoners.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1 Wealstun has an overall youthful prison population so does not attract the social care demand associated with age-related conditions. If a prisoner is in need of social care support, there are two social workers working across HMP Wealstun and HMP Leeds, who complete Social Care Act assessments. These are submitted to Leeds City Council Adult Services and a care package should be subsequently drawn up. There have been 12 referrals for such assessments during the reporting period and three referrals to the occupational health department.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

6.5.1 The Board has observed frequent disruptions to the regime that have been the result of staffing shortages, maintenance issues, staff training and unexpected incidents. This has resulted in prisoners complaining to the IMB on a number of

occasions that there seems to be no consistency across the wings, including, for example, late unlocks, sometimes up to 30 minutes behind neighbouring wings.

6.5.2 There also appear to be instances where officers mistakenly allow prisoners on the basic level of the incentives scheme only one hour out of cell, while other prisoners receive two hours out of cell (one hour of exercise and one hour of association). The Board has raised this issue with the prison on a number of occasions.

6.5.3 Prisoners on standard (middle) or enhanced (top) incentive levels should receive the same amount of time out of cell each day, assuming that the regime has not been curtailed due to a shortage of staff. This generally happens at weekends.

6.5.4 The gym facilities have been a positive aspect of prison life. Consistent access to three sessions per week is a strong foundation for both physical and mental wellbeing.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

6.6.1 The drug and rehabilitation services appear to be well run. The drug and alcohol recovery team (DART) works with around 257 men in relation to drug and alcohol misuse and receives referrals through clinical pathways as well as self-referrals. The team comprises nine staff, including a service manager and administrative support, and works closely with the head of drug strategy. Following the move of the ISFL to C wing, part of the DART service also relocated to C wing to enable more timely support.

6.6.2 While NHSE funding is in place for a clinical psychologist, recruitment to a substantive clinical psychologist post has been challenging. In the interim, psychological input is provided through a clinical psychologist from Leeds who visits the prison on a fortnightly basis. The team is put under pressure when there is a high number of prisoners thought to be under the influence (UTI), as they are referred to DARS, which should then visit the prisoner. This is unplanned. The service should be a voluntary one for prisoners but the offender management unit (OMU) often insists that prisoners attend.

6.6.3 The planned care includes:

- SMART recovery programme (self-management and recovery training). This is accredited and is peer led. The intensity can vary. However, the prison prioritises education and so if the prisoner is attending education, then he cannot attend SMART. DARS tries to accommodate prisoners when possible, but the attendance rate is only 65%. There have to be strict rules of attendance, due to there being long waiting lists. If they miss two sessions, they are not allowed to continue.
- ISPF (Integrated Substance Misuse Programme Framework): a structured five week course.
- Alcoholics Anonymous comes in about once every two weeks. Groups of about 8-10 prisoners attend, depending on a facilitator.
- Narcotics Anonymous comes in about once every four weeks.
- Cooking group, subsidised by the drug strategy department.

6.6.4 In addition, DARS engages with all prisoners receiving OST (opioid substitution therapy), including those prescribed methadone, buprenorphine or

Buvidal. However, engagement can be challenging, as some prisoners spend only a short period at HMP Wealstun, such as those, for example, serving short sentences or who have been recalled to custody. This can limit the time available for DARS to engage with them effectively and prepare them for release.

6.6.5 The prison continues to focus on increasing the number of prisoners accepting naloxone (a medication that can temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose) on release due to the growing threat and use of synthetic opioids both in custody and in the community. Uptake continues to increase. In addition, a number of officers have been trained in the emergency administration of naloxone.

6.7 Soft skills

6.7.1 Soft skills refer to programmes and activities available to prisoners that, for example, help them to communicate effectively, develop approaches to resolving conflict, problem solving, parenting skills and initiatives that support wider wellbeing.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 In the previous annual report, the Board highlighted the success of outreach education delivered on the wings rather than in classrooms. However, due to a 26% reduction in delivery hours, there has been some reduction in provision, but the Governor worked with the education provider to agree the appropriate mix and balance of provision, ensuring that the curriculum and delivery model continue to meet the needs of the prison population.

7.1.2 Staffing issues have caused problems throughout education. Staff sickness and three new Novus education managers hampered consistency. The slowness of the security vetting process contributed to delays in recruitment, with it taking up to a year to get clearance. Another huge problem has been the temporary recruitment freeze by HMPPS for band 4 staff. Most workshop instructors are band 4.

7.1.3 There has been a disappointing fall in library uptake. Although the prison has a shortfall in prison officers, it has prioritised staffing the library escort role to maintain prisoner access to the library. As noted in last year's report, some officers appeared more enthusiastic than others when calling for prisoners to attend the library while on escort duties, and this appears to have continued, with only one regular user from one of the largest wings. Prisoners on the basic level of the incentives scheme often make use of library sessions when these are facilitated for them. Library attendance is discussed at the daily morning meeting and involves both the residence and education teams. There has been a strong emphasis on reading during the year, with posters displayed throughout the administration areas and on the wings. The Shannon Trust literacy and numeracy charity continues its work, and, as part of their induction, newly arrived prisoners visit the library to learn about the facilities available.

7.1.4 Staff shortages in the library have presented problems, but the Board was assured by the prison that opening times are being the priority even when staff are unavailable.

7.1.5 Distance learning and Open University courses continue to be part of the education offer at Wealstun. This has prompted an increase in prisoners undertaking their Level 2 functional skills in order to access further courses. The prison continues to allocate part of the DPS (dynamic purchasing system) budget to supporting men who are unable to fund their own courses. A recent case highlighted where student loan funding can be more difficult for IPP (imprisonment for public protection) prisoners, as an end of sentence date is required.

7.1.6 The Board is pleased to see that art has been maintained as part of the new education contract. Several prisoners again entered the Koestler for art competitions and two pictures were on display at the Royal Festival Hall in London. Prisoners have suggested more of their artwork should be displayed around visits and children's play area. One work has appeared in the IMB office. The art exhibition held in the art workshop showcased a wide range of art skills and techniques. This event was well received by staff and prisoners alike.

7.1.7 There have historically been problems when prisoners are transferred while undertaking an education course. The Board was therefore pleased to learn of one

case where a prisoner's transfer was delayed by a week to allow him to complete an examination.

7.1.8 Last year's annual report found that more rigorous methods of accounting for daily attendance at activities had improved percentages. There are still concerns about following up on those who refuse or avoid sessions, however. Prisoners refusing to attend education and work are locked behind their doors and need to be motivated to understand the benefits of using the available opportunities. A stronger peer-mentoring strategy is proposed to help encourage attendance. In addition to the accuracy of attendance recording, timely implementation of the IPF policy does still not appear to be completely ingrained on the wings.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 There are a large number of opportunities for prisoners to work. From our observations, it is evident that the head of education, skills and work is very enthusiastic and innovative. Attendance at work or education is monitored daily and prisoners who do not attend without good reason are expected to remain locked up and receive a warning. The Board was aware that concerns had been raised about difficulties managing attendance on one wing, and officers were reminded of the need to ensure that warnings are issued and properly recorded.

7.2.2 The Board observed an enthusiastic traffic management training session. As tests were in progress following the week's training, instructors were unable to explain the scheme in detail. However, a prisoner waiting to sit his test spoke enthusiastically about what he had learned and how the qualification would help him secure employment on release. He explained that there is strong demand for this type of work and that it offers good rates of pay.

7.2.3 The week-long course is delivered at Wealstun four times a year and is funded through the dynamic purchasing spending (DPS) budget. The creative use of this funding, informed by a needs analysis, has helped to offset reductions in other budgets. The analysis showed that few, if any, prisoners secured employment in hospitality following related courses, and these courses were therefore discontinued. Stand-alone laptops are available in the kitchens to enable prisoners to complete their food safety certificates. In addition to the traffic management course, an e-commerce course has also proved successful.

7.2.4 The Board is concerned about delays in the vetting process and the impact these are having on the recruitment of new workshop staff. The Board is aware of a member of staff with many years' experience working in the prison who was successful in securing a workshop role. However, there was a delay of several months before the required security clearance was approved and they were able to take up the post. The impact of such delays should not be underestimated, as staffing shortages can affect the fair and humane treatment of prisoners. There is also a risk that successful applicants may seek employment elsewhere while awaiting clearance.

7.2.5 As part of their induction, all prisoners should have a meeting with CIAG (careers information, advice and guidance). However, this provision has been affected by staffing shortages for much of the year. For most of the reporting period, a single member of staff has covered a role that is intended to be filled by two full-time staff. One staff member appealed a vetting decision and, at the time of writing,

had been awaiting the outcome since December. In addition, the recruitment freeze on band 4 posts has affected the team's ability to reach full staffing levels.

7.2.6 A new pay scale has been introduced that removed bonuses, and a standard full- and part-time pay was put in place. It made rewards for work and education equitable. More pay is available for those who step into quality control, team leading or mentoring work. Rewards are paid on completion of education and skills booklets in workshops. Tutors can also put forward prisoners for reward and recognition by their tutor or instructor.

7.2.7 A pilot Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) disability employment adviser works one day a week in the employment hub, focusing on health barriers to work. The neurodiverse support and activities managers work with neurodivergent men looking for work.

7.2.8 The Board is pleased that the prison secured funding as part of the Extended Working Week project and a new extended working week was introduced in October 2025. This was a positive way forward but, unfortunately, problems with recruiting workshop instructors, because of a ban on recruiting band 4 staff, has resulted in some workshops not being fully opened.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 In the Board's view, it has been a challenging year for the offender management unit (OMU), owing to increased prisoner churn, including some prisoners with as little as 14 days left to serve, and changes to sentencing rules. The unit is nearly fully staffed, and most caseworkers manage caseloads of around 50 prisoners. It is the responsibility of prison offender managers (POMs), as part of their core duties, to help the prisoners they supervise understand their licence conditions.

7.3.2 Prisoners have complained to the Board that communication with the OMU continues to be difficult to navigate for prisoners. They report having been unable to contact their POMs or obtain information about their sentence. There does seem to be a considerable number of applications to the OMU. Staff have seen numerous changes in the sentencing rules, which has placed considerable pressure on the unit.

7.3.3 One of the main concerns raised by prisoners is the limited availability of places on the only accredited programme currently available, Building Choices. The programme is delivered at two levels: medium intensity, comprising 21 group sessions and five one-to-one sessions; and high intensity, comprising 46 group sessions and six one-to-one sessions. Each course accommodates up to eight prisoners and runs for between 11 and 16 weeks, depending on the level of intensity required. The Building Choices programme is managed nationally by the offending behaviour programmes group and delivered locally by the prison, with support from the regional psychology team. Prioritisation for places is determined by national guidelines.

7.3.4 The Board has received a number of complaints from prisoners who believe they need to complete the programme in order to reduce their risk level and progress through their sentence. While participation may form part of a prisoner's sentence plan and contribute to reducing risk in the community, there appears to be a lack of understanding among prisoners about when, and under what circumstances, they

should attend the programme. The Board is concerned that this is a wider national issue that requires resolution.

7.3.5 When a prisoner is transferred to a new establishment, OMU staff must complete a sentence calculation. These calculations can be complex and, on occasion, errors are identified. Staff must also check sentence calculations again before a prisoner is released.

7.3.6 Facilitating transfers can be challenging due to pressures across the prison estate. Transfers are arranged for a variety of reasons, including security requirements and progression to open conditions, although out-of-area transfers are not usually available. The number of prisoners transferring to open conditions has reduced this year for a number of reasons, including the high proportion serving short sentences and the way places on the Building Choices programme are prioritised.

7.3.7 Work has now started towards the changes in relation to the independent sentencing review, which will mean that all prisoners on standard determinate sentences (SDS) will have their release dates checked again and be given a new conditional release date (CRD). This will be a very large piece of work for the OMU case administrator and the POMs, and will increase frustration amongst prisoners who want information from OMU; however, national instructions are that the OMU should not share any details, to allow all processes to be completed, including consultation with victim liaison teams.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 The Board has observed a number of visits' sessions during the reporting period. The visits hall is set out to be as family friendly as possible, with a children's play area, a cafe, free cereal/juice for children; during family visits (and school holidays), Jigsaw, a charity that works in prisons to support families, is present.

7.4.2 Visits hall trustees work six days a week. Their day includes: providing catering at the coffee cart, cleaning toilets/visits area, making up goody bags, and handling cash. These prisoners appear to take great pride in their work.

7.4.3 During the reporting period, there have been times when social video calls have been cancelled due to IT issues. This causes distress to prisoner, especially those who might only have familial contact through virtual means.

7.4.4 Jigsaw is in prison six days a week, helping in the visits hall at weekends, and their principal objective is to support prisoners in maintaining positive relationships with family. They run an eight-week training course that covers managing emotions and parenting skills. At present, there is an eight-week waiting list for this. Regrettably, Jigsaw still does not have funding to resume Storybook Dads, but it continues to be run by the library team.

7.4.5 Prisoners on the basic and standard incentives scheme levels have reported to the Board that they are disappointed to have to attend visits wearing prison-issue clothing. They report that this causes unnecessary distress for children visiting. The prison have included this requirement in the Incentives Policy Framework so that there is more incentive for prisoners to become enhanced.

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 Release planning generally starts 15 weeks prior to release but given the number of prisoners arriving with very little time left to serve, this creates considerable challenges. The rapid changes to release schemes, such as the fixed-term recall (FTR) periods of 14 and 28 days and changes to minimum custodial periods, have increased prisoner turnover and placed additional pressures on services. Large numbers of releases were seen over short periods of time. A total of 41% of prisoners arriving at HMP Wealstun have less than six months remaining on their sentences, including 19% with less than one month to serve. Release planning for FTR56 prisoners starts on arrival at the local prison and is continued at HMP Wealstun by the pre-release team, with the aim being to provide a service that meets the compressed timescales for this group.

7.5.2 The Board understands that there is a continued shortage of accommodation available to prisoners on release. We regularly hear from prisoners close to their release dates concerned they do not yet have accommodation in place. A total of 16% of prisoners released on licence do not have accommodation on the first night and the prison has set a target to reduce this by 50%. Concerningly, there is no national target for first-night accommodation for prisoners released not on licence, as the Probation Service has no contact with them after release. The prison tries to help them secure accommodation, but there is no available figure for these prisoners.

7.5.3 The new FTR 56-day scheme was introduced towards the end of the reporting year. This has increased churn across the prison estate, as recalled prisoners now spend 56 days in custody rather than 12 to 18 months. The decision to locate all short-term prisoners on a single wing is hoped to help, as staff can immediately start working with them on resettlement planning. However, the number of recalled prisoners at Wealstun is one of the highest in the Yorkshire Prison Group, so this is affecting the stability of the prison.

7.5.4 There is a new wing dedicated to prisoners on recall, with enhanced access to pre-release support and employment advice. This seems to have been received well and the prisoners benefit from a multi-disciplinary team approach.

7.5.5 The creating future opportunities (CFO) programme continues to be well received, with increase opportunity for job training prior to release. The programme has a full wing of 66 prisoners, the Dales Unit, and a caseload of up to 60 prisoners supported through one-to-one outreach work on other wings. Prisoners on the Dales unit have access to the bespoke release planning and resettlement programme.

7.5.6 The Growth Company continues work supporting prisoners who self-refer or are referred by the OMU. They can assist with accessing benefits, setting up bank accounts and offering prisoners advice on wider issues. Due to changes to their funding model, the company can now only offer support to prisoners from the Yorkshire and Humber region, as there is a condition that they must receive follow-up support in the community after release. If the Growth Company does not have staff available in their area of release, a prisoner can now no longer access their support pre-release. This has left a gap for many prisoners. The prison can assist with opening bank accounts but is unable to offer other financial advice.

7.5.7 The DARS team continues to offer support to prisoners with a history of drug and alcohol issues and, where suitable, supply naloxone on release to try and reduce harm in the event of an accidental overdose.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	151

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	4	8
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	15	12
C	Equality	6	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	5	8
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	14	15
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	10	8
F	Food and kitchens	7	4
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	18	30
H1	Property within the establishment	9	10
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	14	14
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	0	1
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	25	23
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	25	45 (14 from one prisoner)
K	Transfers	5	4
L	Miscellaneous	19	44 (19 from one prisoner)
	Total number of applications	176	228

Annex A

Service providers

- Novus: education
- Time for Teeth: Dental Care
- Practice Plus Group: Primary Care, Mental Health and Substance Misuse healthcare provider with subcontracts to:
 - Midlands Partnership (Inclusion) NHS Foundation Trust: Psychosocial Substance Misuse Services
 - Specsavers Optical Superstores Limited: Audiology
 - The Prison Opticians Company: Optometry
 - Cora Health Diagnostics: Ultrasound scan and X-rays
- GEOAmey: escorts
- Amey: facilities management and site maintenance



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