



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Winchester

**For reporting year
1 June 2025 to 31 May 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, and
- 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 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 Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment¹

His Majesty's Prison/Young Offender Institution Winchester is a complex all-male reception and resettlement (local) prison operating within the South Central group of prisons. Approximately 19% of the prisoners are young adults aged between 18 and 25 years. The prison serves the criminal courts of Aldershot, Basingstoke, Bournemouth, Portsmouth, Salisbury, Southampton and Winchester.

The main fabric of the prison was built in 1846, in a radial design whereby wings emanate from a central area. Prisoners are either remanded in custody awaiting trial, convicted and awaiting sentence, or serving a custodial sentence. The prison had an operational capacity² of 664 in May 2025.

In a separate block from the main building, 120 (127 operational capacity) category C prisoners are accommodated in two resettlement units: Westhill and the Hearn. These units are adjacent to, but separate from, the main prison. An extensive programme of refurbishment to replace poor-condition showers and spruce up the cells on Westhill was commenced in February 2026, temporarily reducing operational capacity to 94.

While the prison is designated for category B prisoners, it holds B and C category prisoners on the four main wings. The largest part of the population during the reporting year consisted of prisoners on remand and those convicted but not yet sentenced. Although they were managed as category B prisoners, they are not truly categorised as such. The lower ground floor of D wing temporarily houses the care and separation unit (CSU) until a purpose-built facility is completed. Work to build a new CSU started in 2022, with all footings/foundations put in place. However, following a stall in work while the design was modified to make it fully 'fit for purpose', the main building contractor went into administration. Although a new contractor has been appointed, no progress in the work has occurred during the reporting period.

A healthcare unit (HCU) is also situated on the prison complex, accommodating 16 beds in a separate unit from the wings. E wing houses administrative services, the Governor's and other offices, the chapel and multi-faith room and the temporary control room.

Background to the report

The October 2024 inspection by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) triggered an Urgent Notification³, or UN, resulting in a formal improvement plan implemented through 2025. In February 2026, HMIP returned to assess the prison's progress

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

² The operational capacity is the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the prison.

³ An Urgent Notification is a formal warning issued when inspectors identify serious concerns about the safety, treatment, or conditions in a prison that require immediate action from the Secretary of State for Justice.

against the agreed improvement areas and targets. Highlights from this latest inspection, which led to the termination of the UN, include:

- Stronger oversight and planning through more effective leadership.
- Increased staffing and responsive and adaptive behaviour from staff.
- Early signs of improvement in safety and wellbeing.
- Localised and remedial improvement to physical environment.
- No significant systemic improvement in regime and purposeful activity.
- Violence remained very high and among the worst in similar prisons.
- Drugs remained widely available.
- Overcrowding and infrastructure issues persisted.

According to Charlie Taylor, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons: *'Winchester remains a very busy reception and resettlement prison, receiving large numbers of new arrivals each week. The high turnover presents inherent complications, which makes effective early day's processes, purposeful activity and timely preparation for release vital. Substantial investment, however, is still required to bring the establishment up to an acceptable standard. Leaders, with continued support from HMPPS, must now build on recent progress with increasing urgency.'* [Report on an announced inspection of HMP Winchester by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 9-19 February 2026.]

3. Key points

HMP Winchester faces many challenges, which are outlined in the main findings below, supported by the evidence sections. However, the Board wishes to highlight three issues arising that affect the fair and humane treatment of prisoners in an overcrowded, dilapidated institution.

- i. **Safety concerns** - HMP Winchester is operating within a high-risk environment with areas of repeated instability, where violence, self-harm and drug misuse are widespread and interrelated. During the reporting year, 532 self-harm incidents were reported, serious assaults increased significantly, and drug availability was evidenced by a 114% rise in finds and positive drug tests of up to 50%. Weaknesses in infrastructure and mixing of vulnerable groups further increased risk (4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 6.6)
- ii. **Staffing** - these challenges are compounded by systemic staffing shortages and resource constraints, which undermine almost every aspect of prison delivery. These include delayed reception processes, inconsistent use-of-force oversight, an ineffective key worker scheme with fewer than 10% of sessions delivered, disrupted complaints handling, restricted healthcare access due to escort shortages, limited time out of cell, and under-resourced offender management with, in some areas, only half the required staff in post (4.1, 4.4, 5.3, 5.7, 6.1, 6.5, 7.3)
- iii. **Rehabilitation and resettlement** - regime limitations, poor infrastructure and insufficient purposeful activity significantly hinder rehabilitation and resettlement. This is reflected in the following elements: an inadequate education offer with low attendance, too few meaningful work opportunities, constraints on activity caused by staffing pressures and population churn, deteriorating living conditions and delayed capital investment. These factors culminated in poor outcomes, with up to 36% of prisoners released without accommodation and very low employment rates post-release (5.1, 5.2, 6.5, 7.1, 7.2, 7.5)

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- Reception staff were observed to be welcoming, reassuring and professional, helping to create a positive first impression for new arrivals (4.1).
- A very high level of self-harm risk persists, with 685 assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT)⁴ plans opened in 2025-2027 (up from 276 the previous year) and around 25% of new arrivals presenting with known or historic self-harm risk (4.2).
- Although total self-harm incidents fell by 36% to 532, the rate per 1,000 prisoners remains among the highest in comparator prisons, at 15% above the group average (4.2).
- Violence levels remain significantly high, with around 27 assaults between prisoners each month (a 17.5% increase) and serious assaults more than doubling compared to the previous year (4.3).

⁴ ACCT is a formal process used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide.

- The prison experiences approximately 80 use-of-force incidents per month, with systemic issues such as inconsistent body-worn video camera (BWVC) usage limiting accountability and oversight (4.4).
- Illicit substances continue to be a major concern, with drug finds increasing by 114% (to 1.56kg per 1,000 prisoners) and positive results among the mandatory drug testing reaching up to 50%, indicating widespread availability (4.5).

Fair and humane treatment

- Living conditions are inconsistent, with some areas well maintained but others affected by water leaks, vermin, vandalism, and extreme temperatures, including cells that are 'stiflingly hot' or 'particularly cold' (5.1).
- The CSU operates under severe strain, often near capacity, with damaged cells, dirty protests⁵ and delays in mental health transfers undermining safe and decent operation (5.2).
- CSU staff demonstrated professionalism and compassion when supporting prisoners with complex needs, despite difficult operating conditions (5.2)
- Staff and prisoner relationships are variable, with examples of both positive engagement (e.g. staff preventing potential violence through skilled engagement), as well as poor communication, and frustrations linked to unmet needs, contributing to violence, self-harm, and use-of-force incidents (5.3).
- The key worker scheme is largely ineffective due to staffing shortages, with 75% of prisoners allocated a key worker but fewer than 10% of sessions actually delivered (5.3).
- Complaints systems are under pressure, with 1,120 complaints processed but delays and procedural issues (including rejections and staffing gaps) increasing prisoner frustration and repeat submissions (5.7).

Health and wellbeing

- Healthcare staffing and retention improved significantly, reducing vacancy and turnover rates and strengthening service delivery (6.1)
- Escort shortages and prison staffing constraints continue to delay appointments and disrupt care delivery (6.1).
- Mental health services face demand pressures, with additional support provided for men on ACCTs; however, delays and gaps remain, both within the prison and on release, for other men struggling with their mental health (6.3).
- Time out of cell remains limited, with some prisoners receiving as little as three hours per day due to overcrowding, staffing shortages and the need to separate conflicting groups (6.5).
- Drug rehabilitation provision has improved staffing (from 1.5 to 8 FTE) and engagement, with over 200 referrals to the unit each month on average in 2026; however, initiatives such as the substance-free landing remain limited in effectiveness (6.6).

⁵ A dirty protest is where prisoners have chosen to defecate or urinate in a cell without using the facilities provided.

Progression and resettlement

- Education provision is inadequate for the population, and the Board agrees with inspectors finding that the curriculum does not meet the needs of a high-churn reception prison and remains too limited in scope (7.1).
- Attendance and completion rates are poor, with average attendance of around 49% (62% when adjusted for acceptable reasons for non-attendance) and many prisoners are unable to complete courses due to short stays and transfers (7.1).
- Purposeful activity is insufficient, and feedback from prisoners to the Board is in line with inspectors identifying too many prisoners as unemployed or allocated to activities that do not match their needs or aspirations (7.2).
- Offender management is under-resourced, with only four prison offender managers in post instead of eight, each managing around 40 cases, which is limiting effective progression planning (7.3).
- A broad range of resettlement support was available, including housing, employment, benefits advice, CV workshops and disclosure and employability workshops (7.5).
- Resettlement outcomes remain weak, with 20%-36% of prisoners leaving without accommodation and employment rates six weeks post-release fluctuating between 7% and 36% (7.5).

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Given the longstanding deterioration of the estate, repeated delays to essential capital projects, including the care and separation unit, what specific funding commitments, delivery milestones and completion dates will the Minister set out to ensure that HMP Winchester is brought up to a safe, decent and sustainable standard, and how will progress be monitored and reported?
- What national measures will be implemented to address chronic staffing shortfalls, including the persistent gap between budgeted headcount and staff in post, which continue to undermine safety, access to healthcare, offender management and the delivery of a meaningful prison regime?
- How will Government policy support the prison system, including prisons such as HMP Winchester, to manage prisoners numbers and flows more effectively so that overcrowding can be reduced and prisons are better able to deliver safe rehabilitative regimes and improved resettlement outcomes?

TO HMPPS

- What system-wide interventions will HMPPS implement to reduce persistently high violence and drug availability across the prison estate?
- How will HMPPS ensure sustainable staffing levels so that key services (e.g. the key worker scheme, healthcare escorts, bed-watches and time out of cell) are delivered effectively and consistently?
- What steps will HMPPS take nationally to ensure that education, work and purposeful activity provision in high-turnover local prisons are fit for purpose and contribute to successful rehabilitation and reduced reoffending?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- What short-term operational actions are being taken locally to reduce violence, self-harm and the impact of drug misuse within current constraints?
- How will you improve daily staff deployment and engagement to ensure consistent delivery of, for example, the key worker scheme, complaints handling and prisoner support?
- What changes will you make to increase time out of cell, education attendance, and effective resettlement planning, given the current limitations in staffing and infrastructure?

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister		
1. Will the Minister work with his team and HMPPS to ensure necessary prison building and repair works, previously agreed, are fast-tracked to satisfactory completion?	1. Following the invocation of an Urgent Notification (UN) by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) on 24 October 2024, a comprehensive action plan was developed, which included clear timeframes for all remedial works.	1. Temporary control room completed. Refurbishment of Westhill started and ongoing. Remedial work on education admin block about to start in June 2026. Work on the CSU continues to stall.
2. What can be done further to monitor effectively the work of outsourced prison service contractors to ensure they continuously improve their performance for the benefit of prisons leadership, staff and prisoners alike?	2. In terms of monitoring contractor or supplier performance and delivery across the prisons estate, Regional Property Operations Manager (RPOM) and Area Property Operations Manager (APOM) review performance data, which includes analysis of Key Performance Indicators on a monthly basis. A monthly tripartite is held between the service provider, establishment and APOM to discuss regular business and any concerns with delivery.	2. Not monitored.
To HMPPS		
1. What solution can be offered by the prison service to resource the regular need for constant	1. No response received.	1. Key work continues to be adversely affected due to staff pressures arising from

watches without having an impact on delivery of regime? 2. What can be done to accelerate the implementation of longstanding capital investments urgently needed at Winchester – for example, building the new care and separation unit and the new control room? 3. Can means be found, as a matter of urgency, in a temporary measure, to repair and replace the mesh window grilles on B wing, which have been damaged or removed (pending a full project to overhaul mesh window grilles throughout Winchester)? 4. What further steps are being taken nationally to support prisons in addressing the problem of the ingress of illicit substances and items into prisons?	2. With introduction of new contracts through the Property Transformation Programme (PTP), the new contracts will introduce measures aimed at streamlining processes and enhancing service delivery. 3. Temporary grilles have been installed on B wing to address immediate security concerns. 4. A capital bid has been submitted for the Incentivised Substance Free Living (ISFL) area segregation. Window grilles are to be installed to prevent ingress via B wing windows. The prison aims to recommence ISFL testing.	constant watches and escort duties. 2. Temporary control room completed. Refurbishment of Westhill started and ongoing. Remedial work on education admin block about to start in June 2026. Work on CSU remains stalled. 3. Work to repair/replace mesh window grilles was swiftly undertaken and completed under the auspices of GFSL in the summer of 2025. 4. The ingress and presence of illicit substances in the prison continues to be a major concern, with spikes in certain types of ingress (e.g. throwovers) noted. The installation of grilles over the B wing windows produced a positive effect. ISFL accommodation separation work complete.
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To the Governor		
1. How will the challenge of managing regime be further improved to enable prisoners more regularly to have greater time out of cell? 2. What are the forward plans to further improve education and activities for prisoners at Winchester? 3. What additional steps are being taken to reduce self-harm and violence in Winchester?	1. Through the introduction of a core day. This is designed to increase engagement at education, skills and work and provide more time out of cell. It went live on 16 June 2025 and needs to be embedded. 2. Explore opportunities to stretch activity spaces via Activities Review Board meeting. Continue to plan for short courses offered AM and PM. Continue to press for increased Career, Information, Advice and Guidance provision. Embed changes to deconflicted core day that supports better attendance. 3. The introduction of a core day with its associated measures (see above) is expected to improve safety outcomes. There is also an increased focus on key work.	1. The regime changes introduced during this period have resulted in some improvement in the time out of cell. There are plans to expand this further through the deployment of additional staff. 2. Education continues to be singled out as unsatisfactory by HMIP. However, the head of education, skills and work is working hard to improve the uptake and relevance of the education offering to the diverse and rapidly churning prisoner population. 3. Incidents of self-harm have reduced in the current reporting period. Violence continues to be a problem, with periodic spikes observed. These occur especially when there is an unforeseen change in the composition in the prisoner population, for example in relation to gangs, which can result in external conflicts being carried on in the prison.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Reception is the first point of contact for all men arriving at HMP Winchester, whether as newly remanded prisoners, transferring from another establishment, 'overnighting' on route to another prison, or returning from court. As such, reception represents a crucial 'first impression' of the prison, its culture and prison officers. Despite some operational issues, the Board observed on more than one occasion that staff were welcoming and reassuring, and the processes of obtaining and recording prisoners' personal information, when observed, was efficiently handled, in a timely and professional manner. All men are searched, including usually being required to enter a body scanner. Officers are well supported by red-band orderlies (trusted category C or D prisoners, who have earned the right to have a position of trust through good behaviour), who engage well with new prisoners and provide microwave meals and hot drinks and issue prison kit.

The Board also observed that the reception team were at times short-staffed, which led to frustrations and delays in processing for new prisoners. All prisoners should have arrived at, or be returned to, HMP Winchester by 8.30pm.

Prisoners arriving after 8.30pm may be accepted at the discretion of the Duty Governor, who can also escalate the matter to the on-call regional manager to determine whether the prisoners should be received at Winchester, transferred to another prison, or, in exceptional circumstances, held in police custody. The Board understands that these late arrivals are largely due to the escort provider having insufficient drivers to fulfil its contractual obligations.

The Board reviewed data from three non-consecutive months - January, March and May 2026 - about the times the last escort van arrived at reception and when newly received prisoners left reception to go to the wing. This shows that the percentage of prisoners arriving at reception at, or after, 8.30pm was 32% in January, 15% in March and 9% in May, which suggests an improving situation. However, even when men arrive before 8.30pm, when there are a significant number of new receptions, the time taken to process the men individually can still result in men not arriving on the wing before 9pm. In January, 72% of all newly received men left reception after 9pm and of these, 44% were after 10pm. Similarly in March, 74% of men left reception after 9pm, of which 33% were after 10pm. In May, 48% of men progressed to their wing after 9pm, of which 26% were after 10pm. Both reception officers and the orderlies are then required to work very late into the evening.

The Board observed induction sessions provided to all prisoners. On arrival, new prisoners are given a brief, first night (level 1) induction by an orderly, comprising a slide-show presentation outlining the key details of prison life. The more detailed (level 2) induction is provided to new prisoners in the days following their arrival. While these sessions were generally delivered well by orderlies, with enthusiasm and confidence, the presentation relied heavily on text-dense slides that could be difficult for new prisoners to understand and absorb, particularly when delivered at a fast pace or to those whose first language is not English or who have learning difficulties. Additional input was also provided by services such as Ingeus, which

helps prisoners find accommodation on release, the Department for Work and Pensions, the offender management unit (OMU), the chaplaincy team, the gym and Spurgeons, a charity that offers family and prisoner support services.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

A total of 685 assessment care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) cases (for prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide) were opened in 2025-2026. This was an increase from 276 in 2024-2025 and above the 600 opened in 2023-2024. The ACCTs opened in any one month ranged from 52 in September 2025 to 73 in October 2025, with an average of 57 opened each month. The majority of ACCTs were opened in reception, as prisoners entered HMP Winchester, with staff noting that approximately 25% of prisoners arriving at HMP Winchester had a history or known risk of self-harming.

A total of 532 self-harm incidents were reported for 2025-26, down from 784 incidents reported for 2024-25. Although self-harm incidents fell by 32% in 2025-2026 compared with 2024-25, HMP Winchester had among the highest number of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners in its comparator group, with 14% more than the whole comparator group on average.

A total of 25 individuals were involved in self-harm incidents each month (approximately 4% of the prison population) with each individual involved in 1.8 self-harm incidents on average. Some self-harmers were involved in as many as nine incidents in a month. Most of the self-harm (almost 80%) was identified by the prison as being low level and primarily involved making minor cuts to arms and legs. Towards the end of the reporting period, there was an increase in incidents involving ligaturing.

The reduction in the overall number of self-harm incidents is welcomed. However, the ongoing level of self-harm remains of great concern to the Board.

The prison continued to offer access to the Samaritans and the Listener scheme, which allows prisoners trained by Samaritans to provide confidential emotional support to fellow prisoners. However, concerns were expressed by prisoners about their ability to access Listener support and the handling of the programme by the prison.

Five deaths in custody were reported during the reporting period, one of which occurred within 14 days of release from custody. Two of the deaths were from natural causes. The causes of the remaining deaths had yet to be confirmed as of 30 June 2026.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The frequency of all forms of violence fluctuated throughout the reporting year. On average, there were around 13 assaults on staff by prisoners each month, slightly higher than in the previous year. However, during the reporting period there were 13 serious assaults (defined as sexual assaults, assaults requiring hospital treatment, or assaults resulting in concussion or fracture), more than double the number recorded in the previous year.

On average, there were 27 assaults by prisoners on other prisoners each month, a 16% increase from last year, although the total number of serious assaults was unchanged.

The number of assaults at Winchester was considerably higher than in the comparator group of similar prisons, when measured as incidents per 1,000 prisoners.

Board members either witnessed eight serious and complex violent incidents as they occurred or observed their immediate aftermath. Discussions with the officers, Governors and prisoners involved indicated that the causes of violence were varied, but included drug debts, gang culture, boredom and disputes over cell moves.

One of the most serious incidents involved an assault on B wing, which resulted in a serious injury to a prisoner. The incident rapidly escalated, requiring the deployment of multiple officers, dog handlers and emergency command procedures.

C wing presented challenges due to inadequate separation between landings. Residents of C1 landing (neurodivergent prisoners) and C4 landing (prisoners on a substance-free living contract) were not supposed to access C2 and C3 landings, and vice versa. However, the absence of physical barriers made this difficult to enforce. As a result, individuals involved in debt collection or intimidation were able to access vulnerable prisoners, contributing to violent incidents and placing neurodivergent prisoners at greater risk. Staff sought to manage these risks through observation and informal separation, but their effectiveness was limited by the physical layout. Barriers separating the landings were installed in May 2026, although staff continued to play an important role in managing movements between them.

Information sharing issues also affected violence reduction. During one adjudication review, the Board observed that the adjudicating Governor had significantly less information than that discussed in the security meeting regarding the same incident. This inconsistency can undermine proportional adjudication outcomes and hinder accurate tracking of violent behaviour.

Despite the challenges, violence reduction staff and wing officers appeared to remain committed to reducing harm. From our observations, trusted prisoners and safer custody representatives contributed constructively to discussions about violence, drugs and debt during consultation forums. However, in the Board's view, without improvements to physical infrastructure, better control of drug availability and increased staffing levels, violence is likely to remain a significant operational concern.

4.4 Use of force

Prison officers are authorised to control prisoners through the use of force (UoF), employing methods ranging from low-level guiding restraint to high-risk planned interventions requiring full personal protective equipment (PPE) and rigid handcuffs. It should be noted that the figures below include low-level uses of force, such as guiding holds and the use of rigid bar handcuffs on compliant prisoners. These incidents are nevertheless reportable as UoF, and the Board has been unable to separate them from the overall figures. On average, there were 80 such incidents per month during the reporting year, similar to the previous year, although numbers

fluctuated considerably from month to month. HMP Winchester recorded a considerably higher rate of use-of-force incidents than its comparator group of similar prisons, measured by incidents per 1,000 prisoners.

There were a variety of causes of such incidents, including non-compliance with an order, prisoners unwilling to relocate, or assaults and fighting between prisoners.

All incidents involving the use of force are subject to scrutiny by senior officers at weekly meetings, which the Board observed about six times through the year. At these meetings, all close circuit television (CCTV) and body worn video camera (BWVC) evidence is viewed, along with the written reports of the incidents from the officers involved.

The Board was impressed by the thoroughness of the reviews, the knowledge of, and consideration for, individual prisoners, and the detailed feedback that was given to officers either to improve their performance or to compliment them on good performance. For example, some less-experienced officers were judged to be using force too quickly at the start of an incident, rather than taking time to try to defuse it by engaging with the prisoner. On the other hand, some waited too long before using force, allowing the situation to get too far out of hand.

During the reporting year, a process was introduced to review with prisoners who had been subjected to UoF whether they considered the force used to have been reasonable. This encouraged some prisoners to reflect on their actions and their consequences. Unfortunately, the initiative had to be suspended due to staff resource pressures, but it has since been reinstated.

While many interventions were conducted professionally, several systemic issues affected UoF assurance and governance. Most notably, BWVC activation remained inconsistent. The Board observed adjudications where footage was entirely absent, preventing Governors from verifying accounts or proceeding with charges. UoF scrutiny panels repeatedly highlighted this issue and reminded staff of mandatory activation requirements.

The Board was also concerned about incidents at height, on the netting between wing landings. Prisoners climbed onto netting or beams for extended periods, often motivated by fear, frustration or while intoxicated. These situations required skilled negotiation and carried substantial risk. In some cases, the National Tactical Response Group (NTRG), a team trained to intervene in dangerous, high-risk situations were called in but, in all incidents the Board observed, the NTRG was not required to get actively involved in the removal of the prisoners from the netting. Their presence on its own, along with engagement by officers, enabled incidents to be resolved without escalation.

Planned interventions varied in effectiveness. In one case, the Board observed that officers required considerable time to set up translation equipment for Albanian speaking prisoners during a planned removal, only to discover the technology was not working. This resulted in reliance on speakerphone translation and extended the duration of the incident. Other planned removals were managed smoothly, with officers demonstrating control, clear communication and de-escalation.

Despite these difficulties, the Board observed that officers demonstrated professionalism, debriefs were reflective and constructive, and leadership emphasised the need to embed consistent standards.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Illicit substances entered HMP Winchester via various routes including being smuggled in by prisoners, dropped in by drones, throw-overs (where people from outside the prison throw parcels over the walls), social visits, Rule 39 mail (legal letters) infused with illegal substances, cuckooing (the coercion of vulnerable prisoners to handle illicit items) and staff or contractors. A prominent illicit substance was 'hooch', alcohol illegally brewed in the prison.

Illicit items discovered through searches continued to include drugs, mobile phones and accessories, hooch, smoking paraphernalia and improvised weapons. The number of drug finds and mobile-phone related finds were at broadly similar levels and accounted for almost 60% of all finds. Drug finds increased to 1.56kg per 1,000 prisoners, compared with 0.73kg in the previous reporting period, an increase of 114%. Hooch finds increased from 276.9 litres to 331.7 litres, ranging from 4.5 litres in June 2025 to 62.5 litres in December 2025. The high prevalence of illicit substances continued to be reflected in 'code blue' alerts (emergency code for when a prisoner is not breathing) involving prisoners under the influence, as well as in prisoners' reports of the ease with which illicit substances could be obtained.

Detection methods included searches, x-ray body scans and testing. Nearly all prisoners underwent an x-ray body scan on entry to the prison and were searched on departure where intelligence indicated a need. Mandatory drug testing (MDT) was carried out throughout the reporting period, with positive results ranging from 18.7% in December 2025 to 50% in February 2026. HMP Winchester's positive test rate was generally higher than that of many prisons in its comparator group.

The replacement and subsequent monitoring and repair of window grilles on B wing was thought by staff to have reduced access to illicit items. Steps were also taken to work more closely with the police, while reports of possible drones and throw-overs increased.

The incentivised substance-free living (ISFL) landing, opened in the previous reporting period, continued to operate throughout the reporting period. However, the lack of physical separation between the landings allowed ISFL prisoners to mix with other prisoners on the wing, reducing the effectiveness of the unit. A barrier was installed in May 2026, but due to technical issues was still not fully operational at the end of the reporting period.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Accommodation quality is variable across the prison, from clean and well-maintained areas to locations suffering from significant deterioration, such as water leaks, scaffolding on outer walls to prevent injuries from falling masonry, and vandalism to windows, walls and observation hatches. Rubbish, including food waste, was thrown from damaged cell windows, encouraging rats, which are common visitors to the establishment. B wing had regular checks on its new window grilles, and any damage led to the cell being removed from use until repaired, to prevent drone deliveries being intercepted by prisoners. Efforts to enhance cell standards have improved this year, with the appointment of a clean and decent lead.

Main wing cells were put on a rolling refurbishment plan. These were dealt with when unoccupied, so the SWIFTS (small Winchester improvement and fixing team) staffed by prisoners, were able to renovate, paint and remove graffiti. This work is ongoing but has had to be reduced from eight cells out of action at a time to five to aid national capacity problems.

Decency boxes have been placed on the wings, containing basic hygiene items such as toilet rolls, deodorant and toothpaste. These allow prisoners to take what they need during association periods, reducing demands on already stretched staff. Cells on the main wings were, at times, observed to be excessively hot in summer and cold in winter. When checking complaints on a warm day in April, Board members found cells on C wing to be stiflingly hot, with little or no airflow from the vents. In late autumn, a prisoner in the CSU complained that his cell was extremely cold despite wearing several jumpers and using blankets. The Board concurred that the area felt particularly cold. At that time, the prison heating system had not yet been switched on for winter conditions.

C wing has new flooring, which involved stripping the old surface from each landing before replacing it, improving the wing environment. The work had to be undertaken at night, when prisoners were locked up, although each cell had to be accessed individually to lay flooring across the threshold. In May, gates were installed to prevent access of non-residents to landings C1, for neurodivergent prisoners, and C4, for incentivised drug free living prisoners. Unfortunately, they were installed incorrectly so were not working at the end of the reporting period.

The concrete of the outside wall of the building housing offices, the sports hall and part of reception is in a dangerous, crumbling, condition and has been cordoned off by exclusion barriers for months. Work to fix it started at the very end of the reporting period.

Westhill and Hearn

These units, which have both single and double occupancy cells, are used to house category C prisoners - men considered lower risk, who are preparing for release and resettlement. Young offenders are not placed here, nor remand prisoners. It is intended to focus on work, education and rehabilitation. In the Board's view, overcrowding across the prison estate challenges this aspiration, often not giving the occupants sufficient time or preparation for the outside world.

Two landings at a time are being closed for refurbishment, putting extra pressure on spaces. These renovations are making marked improvements to the previous states, particularly the shower areas.

Hooch was regularly made on Westhill and the Hearn, typically using fruit served with meals. In February, 28.3 litres of hooch were found in the prison, most of it being in Westhill. The more relaxed regime, with increased time spent in communal areas, meant that finds of illicitly brewed alcohol could not easily be attributed to an individual prisoner.

Officers on the Hearn reported that there had been no running cold water in the staff area for several months. Staff were required to rely on bottled water, although maintaining supplies was sometimes difficult. The men's urinals and the women's toilet were also out of use, requiring female staff to use the male facilities. The underlying cause was the presence of asbestos in the Westhill plant room. A specialist contractor had been scheduled to attend and, once this issue is resolved, repairs or replacement of a leaking water main should enable the water supply to be restored.

Control room

In December, the prison was finally provided with a new temporary control room on the first floor of E wing, a significant improvement from the previous rat-affected basement location. The lack of vermin and better visibility of the screens represent an improvement, but a third of the cameras were still not working and the control Room, which must be secure at all times, has no toilets or kitchen facilities, making for extra, previously unnecessary, exits and entries.

Kitchen

Kitchen workers' staffing levels have steadied since the jobs were allocated to D wing prisoners in early 2025, although it is still sometimes understaffed. Food budgets remain extremely tight with a daily allowance of £3.29 per prisoner, a factor limiting portion sizes and menu variety.

In February, a new Food in Prisons Policy Framework was introduced following consultations with prisoners. Its aim is to support prison catering teams in providing nutritious and safe meals, with a balance of healthier and standard menu options, including more soy-based products, grains and pulses. This new menu includes soup instead of biscuits and crisps for lunch on weekdays, the removal of sugar from breakfast packs and the addition of fruit and a cereal bar. Prisoners had mixed reviews about these changes, although the soup appeared popular. The Governor indicated that full compliance with the policy would require an increase in the prison's food budget, which had not been provided.

Government Facility Services Ltd (GFSL)

Government Facility Services Ltd (GFSL) undertakes repair and maintenance work within HMP Winchester. The Board found GFSL to be generally effective and responsive, reacting promptly to the numerous issues arising from the age of the prison's infrastructure and damage caused by prisoners. Vandalism during the reporting year cost approximately £39,000 and included broken cell windows, damaged observation panels, doors, walls, fixtures and equipment, as well as

incidents involving fire-setting and flooding. Prisoners found responsible for such damage can be required to contribute towards repair or replacement costs; in practice, however, recovery was often only partial, or not possible where the prisoner had little or no money in their prison account. GFSL's recruitment challenges have eased following recognition that it operates in an area where recruitment is difficult, with additional incentives introduced to encourage successful applicants to take up posts.

Larger projects are managed by the Ministry of Justice Property Directorate, but securing Government funding can be difficult and often requires sustained effort over an extended period. Even when funding is approved, schemes can become subject to lengthy and complex procurement processes, resulting in significant delays before work begins. Both the new CSU and the permanent control room have been awaiting progress through this process for approximately seven years.

On a positive note, funding has been secured for the installation of the Launchpad system. This secure and tightly controlled platform will provide prisoners with access to a limited range of approved digital services, reducing some routine administrative tasks currently undertaken by already stretched staff. Installation of the network cabling was ongoing as of June 2026.

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit, or CSU, where prisoners are segregated for disciplinary or safety reasons, continues in its temporary location on the ground floor landing of D wing. The state of the unit has fluctuated between periods of being clean and orderly and periods of being very poor (including frequently smashed observation panels, damage due to flooding, uninhabitable cells due to dirty protests, or poor temperature controls, leading to cold cells). As far as the Board has been able to ascertain, most of the periods of the unit being in a poor state were related to prisoner vandalism. The latest update on the progress of the planned (and partially started) purpose-built segregation unit elsewhere in the grounds of the prison is that the whole project is under review.

The CSU operated under persistent strain, frequently nearing or reaching full capacity. The unit regularly accommodated prisoners on Rule 45 (good order or discipline), those requiring special accommodation (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety), and individuals assessed as too unsafe to themselves or others to remain on the wings. At times, particularly during November and December 2025, the Board observed that out of nine available cells in the CSU, up to eight were occupied by prisoners on Rule 45, resulting in limitations to the unit's capacity to serve as a place of punishment. The Board observed a number of cases where segregation was used as a refuge by prisoners who felt unsafe due to drug debts, bullying or gang-related pressures. One prisoner explicitly described the CSU as his 'happy place', preferring it to normal location despite its restrictive regime.

Maintenance and cleanliness issues within the CSU significantly impacted its capacity. Dirty protests resulted in cells becoming uninhabitable and requiring specialist bio-cleaning. In one case, the bio-cleaning of a single cell cost approximately £3,000, yet residual contamination and odour remained, rendering the cell unsuitable for occupation by anyone other than the prisoner responsible for the

contamination. This reduced the overall number of operational cells, creating a cascading effect on placement decisions elsewhere in the prison.

Mental-health-related placements were another complicating factor, in the Board's view. Several prisoners with severe mental-health conditions temporarily located in the CSU were clearly unsuited to such an environment. Staff expressed concern about the CSU's inability to provide an environment conducive to stabilisation for individuals experiencing acute psychological deterioration.

From the Board's observations, operational challenges included communication gaps between CSU and the healthcare unit, particularly regarding medication refusal, mental-health review scheduling and escalating risk. Staff also highlighted issues with damage to observation panels and the suitability of exercise yards for prisoners experiencing a mental-health crisis. On one occasion, a prisoner placed on constant watch required relocation to Healthcare because the CSU lacked an appropriate cell with a television or other distraction aids.

The Board has continued to raise the cases of prisoners whose lengths of stay on the unit exceeded 42 days (the limit allowed without external authorisation). CSU staff responded well to those enquiries and offered reasonable justifications. We observed discussions regarding the reintegration of these individuals into the regular regime on the wing. Good Order or Discipline (GOoD) reviews (at which the prison determines whether prisoners, other than those segregated as a punishment, should remain in the CSU), observed by the Board on 15 occasions, were conducted thoroughly and fairly.

The Board continues to observe and note the impact of the CSU being used to manage prisoners experiencing an acute mental health crisis or significant mental health difficulties who, in the judgement of healthcare professionals, do not meet the threshold for inpatient treatment in the healthcare unit. CSU staff continue to report feeling overwhelmed by this responsibility, particularly as they receive little or no specialist training.

Despite these challenges, CSU staff demonstrated professionalism and compassion, often engaging constructively with prisoners who presented with complex behavioural needs. However, the Board remains concerned that the demand on the CSU, combined with damaged infrastructure and issues around dealing with prisoners experiencing severe mental-health issues, compromises the unit's ability to operate safely and decently.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

From our observations, staff and prisoner relationships remain variable. The Board has witnessed and received reports from prisoners regarding both excellent and poor examples of staff actions and communication. Potential violent acts are being prevented by positive staff actions. For example, on one occasion, an officer successfully negotiated with four prisoners reacting to a problem by protesting from the wing netting. With skill and patience, the officer persuaded them to leave their dangerous position and return peacefully to their cells. On the other hand, there are problems with prisoners' behaviour caused or partly caused by poor communication. For example, another incident on the netting was caused by a prisoner not having been told that he was being re-remanded rather than being released on the day of

the incident. In a notice to staff in September, it was pointed out by the prison leadership that 'frustrations around getting things done are a key driver of violence, self-harm, and use of force incidents'.

Staff on B wing reported feeling 'burnt out' due to spikes in violence, drug-related incidents and the emotional strain of deaths in custody.

In May, a wellbeing morning was held for staff. This included the opportunity for health tests and to relax with conversations, snacks, soft drinks, yoga and games. This meant that there was no off-wing work, education or healthcare clinics that morning. Rotation in and out of the staff wellbeing event gave maximum opportunity for attendance.

The key worker scheme is a system where a prison officer is assigned to support a small number of prisoners on a regular basis, becoming the prisoner's main point of contact for welfare, behaviour, rehabilitation and day-to-day concerns. The aim is to build trust, improve safety, and help prisoners prepare for release. Unfortunately, because of poor staffing levels, HMP Winchester's ability to find time for this is limited. Figures from February to May 2026 show that 75% of prisoners were allocated a key worker, but fewer than 10% of scheduled key worker sessions took place. It is expected that promised extra staffing due to start arriving in the second part of 2026 will revitalise the scheme.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The diversity and inclusion (D&I) post was not in operation for about half of the year, so activity in this area was limited and plans that had originally been made did not come to fruition. A new D&I manager has now been recruited and will start work in the beginning of June 2026. Despite the lack of resource, the prison has continued some activity in this area, particularly regarding discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs). A total of 82 DIRFs were recorded, an increase from 68 in 2025 but very much in line with 2024 when 86 were recorded. The increase can be attributed partly to multiple DIRFs being submitted by the same prisoners. As was the case last year, race was the most common issue referenced (44 DIRFs), with disability (24 DIRFs) and religious beliefs (17 DIRFs) accounting for most of the remainder.

The Board was approached on five occasions regarding discrimination issues, which were mainly linked to problems with the fabric of the historic building offering restricted access to the outside for a small number of prisoners with disabilities. In the Board's view, there is unlikely to be a resolution to this. The Board also received some feedback regarding bullying on the wings by both staff and prisoners, including organised groups of prisoners. The Board recognises that bullying is likely to be under-reported.

With the arrival of the new D&I manager, the prison hopes to recommence focus groups, review the Young Adult Strategy and set up young adult councils on each wing. There is also a plan to train equality orderlies and to increase the number of diversity related celebrations.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

With the appointment of a Roman Catholic chaplain for two days a week, the chaplaincy team was able to restore staffing levels and continue delivering a service

that remained in high demand, although it was still short of one full-time member of staff. Provision was reduced following the discontinuation of established programmes such as the Sycamore course, for which no replacement had been identified.

The following faiths are represented: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Jewish (with a Rabbi attending as required), Pagan (with a priest attending one day a week), Humanist (with a nominated chaplain awaiting security clearance), Sikh (attending one day a week), and Jehovah's Witness, supported by volunteers who attend on Sundays.

Highlights this year include the Eid celebrations in March, where all attendees were given a gift pack from Rainfall - a National Muslim charity - which comprised a bag with a bottle of scent, clock, book and sweets. The Imam commented that the food provided by the kitchen was excellent and it was passed on to those Muslims who did not attend.

The Good Friday service in April, which was run by a Chaplain from the Free Church, was attended by about 30 prisoners. The service included prayers, hymns and readings, as well as time for personal confession and communion.

Buddha Day was celebrated on 7 May with a curry cooked by the team in the kitchen served to all those that attended. The chaplaincy team hosted Buddhist visitors, who were very impressed by the quality of the food.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The new Incentives Policy Framework (IPF) at HMP Winchester has been, according to the prison leaders, designed to provide a fair, open and accessible tool for promoting positive behaviour, whilst providing clear consequences where behaviour falls below the expected standards.

There are three incentive levels: basic, standard, and enhanced. Prisoners are placed on standard on arrival and can move up or down the levels, depending on their behaviour. Ongoing levels are reviewed, based on factors such as following prison rules, respecting staff and other prisoners, attending work, education or treatment programmes, progress towards rehabilitation goals and remaining free from drugs and alcohol.

An IPF forum was held in January 2026, with prisoner representatives from all wings across the main prison. Their suggestions were discussed by the senior leadership team and, where relevant, applied. For example, a policy to remove television sets from misbehaving prisoners has been removed, as it was accepted that this showed no evidence of success. Extra earned benefits were agreed, where possible, including a 'ready for work' payment if no job has yet been allocated, additional evening time out of cell and the ability to receive additional funds from private accounts.

A new prisoner pay profile was introduced in January and includes a 'ready to work' pay scale for prisoners who are willing to work but are unable to do so through no fault of their own. The aim is to reduce debt arising from borrowing between prisoners. However, the changes have proved unpopular with some prisoners, including those working in reception, the serveries and recycling, whose pay has

been reduced to accommodate the new system without increasing costs to the prison. For example, a reception orderly whose weekly pay was £29 now receives £15.50. Prisoners attending education can earn a maximum of £6.19 per week, as full-time classes are not available. Following concerns raised at a prison council meeting, Governors committed to reviewing the policy.

5.7 Complaints

Prisoners can submit complaints to the Governor through a process coordinated by the complaints clerk. During the reporting year, the clerk dealt with 1,120 complaints, of which over 20% related to property, 10% to canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries and other essentials using their allocated funds) purchases and 10% to residential issues.

The complaints process experienced considerable disruption at times due to staffing shortages in the business hub and some flaws in the administrative standard procedures. For instance, in August alone, 26 complaints were rejected because prisoners incorrectly indicated that their issue involved discrimination, even when no protected characteristic (which include age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation) was referenced in the narrative. This automatic rejection contributed to frustration, with some prisoners submitting repeated complaints. Senior management action led to changes to the procedure, which appeared to mitigate this problem somewhat.

Nevertheless, from our observations, staffing pressures continued to affect timeliness. At one stage, the member of staff covering complaints was reassigned to cover cashier duties, meaning that no dedicated resource was available. Automatic email responses reflecting staff shortages heightened prisoner expectations that delays would occur. In turn, this led to a short-term increase in applications to the Board for help resolve issues.

Despite these issues, staff demonstrated a willingness to engage with the Board's concerns. The complaints clerk (or anyone deputising) collaborated with Board members to trace missing or incomplete submissions, and efforts were made to improve record-keeping. Nevertheless, without sustainable resourcing and a more accessible process for prisoners with literacy challenges or learning difficulties, the complaints system risks remaining under strain.

5.8 Property

Property continues to be an issue at HMP Winchester. Staff shortages led to a backlog of parcels awaiting delivery to prisoners during 2025, with processing times sometimes reaching up to three weeks. Although the situation improved in 2026, prisoners can still experience delays in receiving their parcels.

The prison received a total of 230 complaints regarding property, a small decrease from the 255 recorded in the previous reporting period. Around half concerned items that prisoners believed had been stolen, while the remainder were broadly divided between property thought not to have been forwarded from a previous establishment and property that had been lost, sometimes through the laundry system. In addition, the prison received 124 external complaints about property, mainly concerning items that had not been forwarded following a transfer.

In total, the prison paid out nearly £4,000 in compensation to prisoners regarding property, covering 33 separate cases.

The Board received 46 applications relating to lost property, representing a significant area of work and a substantial increase on the previous year's figure. These applications covered a wide range of issues, including delayed or missing parcels, items lost through the laundry system, property removed from cells and possessions going missing during transfers between establishments.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Practice Plus Group (PPG) continues to be the healthcare provider commissioned to operate at HMP Winchester. The prison's self-contained healthcare facilities were routinely monitored by Board members throughout the period, and no concerns were identified. The Board received 55 applications relating to healthcare and these broadly fell into two categories: (i) concerns about speed and quality of attention and (ii) issues around changes or delays to prescription medication.

Formal complaints to healthcare are dealt with internally by PPG in what can be a four-stage process. All complaints received are recorded as 'concerns' through a face-to-face discussion, which aims to try to resolve the matter as soon as possible. All complainants should receive a reply. If the complainant is unhappy with the response, they can follow up and escalate the matter to 'stage 1'. In 2024-2025, there were 166 concerns, resulting in eight stage 1 complaints. In 2025-2026, however, 118 concerns were raised, resulting in 25 stage 1 complaints. The head of healthcare explained that this increase reflected a change in process whereby concerns are now reviewed on receipt, with those requiring further investigation being escalated to Stage 1 complaints.

If a stage 1 response does not resolve the matter, it can be escalated to stage 2 (involving the Managing Director of PPG). Beyond stage 2 there is a further level – stage 3 – which would involve the PHSO (Parliamentary Health Service Ombudsman). During the reporting period, there was only one healthcare complaint at HMP Winchester reaching stage 2.

During the reporting period, the Board observed that prison staffing shortages and escort limitations impacted service delivery. In May 2026, against an establishment of 81 full-time equivalent (FTE) healthcare staff, the vacancy rate across healthcare was less than 10%. The head of healthcare attributed this improvement to better staff retention, changes to the recruitment process introduced at a national level and strengthened leadership within the healthcare team at HMP Winchester. In May 2025, PPG reported a staff turnover rate of 33%, which had fallen to 17% by May 2026.

PPG has a budget for three escorts per day, two in the morning and one in the afternoon. Previously, PPG provided the prison with a list of appointments for the following week, but these were often subject to disruption. A new system, under which two escorts are pre-arranged for each morning and afternoon slot is kept available for short-notice requirements, initially led to longer waiting times for appointments. However, the reduction in disrupted appointments helped to lessen prisoners' frustration arising from delayed or cancelled appointments. Arrangements for escorts continue to be managed through a paper-based system, and afternoon appointments can still be disrupted by a prisoner's refusal to attend or by a lack of prison staff available to provide an escort. PPG staff also continue to negotiate with the prison to secure escort staff for urgent appointments.

The Board noted that Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reports following a number of deaths in custody highlighted issues relating to healthcare practice, particularly in relation to substance use support and pre-release screening. The Board has neither observed concerns nor received applications relating to either of these areas.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Physical healthcare is delivered on site by PPG, which has an establishment of 81 FTE staff. In May 2026, the majority of posts were either filled or in the process of being onboarded. One issue raised during a number of Board observations was the lack of availability of urgent escorts to medical appointments, particularly for X-rays and scans. While prison staffing shortages have contributed to these delays, the new escort arrangements appear to be improving the situation.

The complexity of the prison population's needs added to service demands, such as treating prisoners who refuse food or have significant mental health issues. However, the Board has observed that healthcare and prison staff treat these cases with sensitivity and professionalism.

The HMIP inspection in February 2026 again highlighted issues with cleanliness in healthcare clinical delivery areas, something the Board has also monitored and commented on. The head of healthcare commented that the healthcare building is not fit for purpose to deliver clinical care, especially in the cells. PPG has been in negotiations with HMPPS for major works to upgrade the facility, with local agreements in place with GFSL for the appointment of a healthcare cleaner and an annual deep clean.

PPG has established an 'early days pathway', bringing together representatives from a range of healthcare specialisms to focus on the first 14 days after a prisoner's arrival at HMP Winchester. A multi-disciplinary new arrivals meeting is held daily, supported by a 'healthcare navigator' who ensures that all actions identified are completed within 14 days before handover to the wider prison population. Healthcare representatives have also been introduced on A wing, where they support wing staff with the logistics of medication administration and respond to queries from new arrivals. It is hoped that this initiative will help reduce the number of healthcare-related queries.

6.3 Mental health

Mental healthcare support ranged from GP oversight, with medications such as antidepressants typically prescribed by a GP, to specialist mental health services. Specialist support included one-to-one access to psychiatrists, psychologists and mental health practitioners, as well as group interventions such as the Making Sense programme. Healthcare staff advised that prisoners on ACCTs were automatically given access to the specialist team, such as, for example, through urgent referral when first placed on an ACCT and by the attendance of a mental health practitioner at the prisoner's initial ACCT review.

By early 2026, it was the healthcare unit's policy that prisoners subject to the prison's induction process should be screened for potential mental health concerns, with one mental health practitioner specifically focused on prisoners during their early days in custody. Healthcare staff noted that urgent referrals, including prisoners identified via

the court process or as having particularly complex needs, were assessed by practitioners within 24 hours, with non-urgent cases assessed within five days. Arrangements were also made for ongoing provision of appropriate medication.

Not all positions within the specialist team were fully staffed throughout the reporting period, particularly during the first few months. By the end of the period, recruitment was underway for a team lead and 1.6 FTE senior practitioner posts (out of a total establishment of 6.2 FTE). Monthly referrals to the specialist team ranged from 197 to 284, averaging 244. Between 1 February and 31 May 2026, the number of one-to-one appointments attended with a psychiatrist ranged from 49 to 70 per month, with an average of 60. One-to-one appointments with a psychologist ranged from 13 in May 2026 to 31 in July 2025, averaging 23 per month.

Between late 2025 and May 2026, waiting times to see a psychiatrist were typically three to four weeks, with approximately 10 to 20 prisoners on the waiting list. Waiting times for a psychologist increased from around 10 weeks at the start of the reporting period to approximately 12 weeks towards the end, although the number of prisoners waiting fell from around 15 to closer to nine over the same period. Throughout the reporting period, the proportion of prisoners whose cases were being managed by the specialist mental healthcare team was typically around 10%.

Prisoners identified as requiring specialist secure accommodation were, by 2026, typically being assessed and transferred to such accommodation within the required 28 days. Prisoners released into the community with ongoing mental health support needs appeared to be more of a challenge. For planned releases, and where prisoners engaged with the process, steps could be taken to co-ordinate with parties in the community, such as GPs, probation officers, the charity Crisis and NHS Reconnect, to facilitate the transfer. For unplanned 'immediate' releases, of which there may have been as many as 20-30 a week, it appeared difficult for the prison to ensure appropriate support and accommodation was in place.

HMP Winchester continued to operate its specialist neurodiverse landing, which opened in December 2024, and prisoners accommodated there reported positive experiences of the unit. The Board notes that on-site mental health services are not commissioned to undertake formal autism or ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) assessments and diagnoses. It also notes the risk that the behaviour of prisoners experiencing mental health difficulties may, at times, be wrongly attributed to deliberate misconduct rather than underlying mental health needs, resulting in sanctions under the prison's disciplinary procedures.

6.4 Social care

Under the Care Act 2014, local authorities are responsible for assessing prisoners' care needs and providing eligible social care support (e.g. personal care and daily living assistance).

At HMP Winchester, social care needs are assessed and funded by Hampshire County Council Adult Social Care Services, with PPG responsible for delivering care provision. Prisoners are assessed on reception by healthcare for physical disabilities, sensory impairments, neurodiverse needs and any injuries that may require support, such as broken bones. Reasonable Adjustments are made according to individual and immediate need. Referrals for Care Act assessment inform how unmet needs

may be supported such as the installation of grab rails, or bed guards. National frameworks require prison healthcare services to work in partnership with social care services. In practice, this means that healthcare staff, and in some cases wing staff, may identify and refer social care needs, which are then assessed by the local authority, with any necessary care package put in place.

The arrival at HMP Winchester of a prisoner with significant care and support needs presented a considerable challenge for the social care function. There was universal agreement that the prison was not an appropriate environment for the individual. The decision was taken to accommodate the prisoner in the healthcare unit, as that was regarded as the safest environment under the circumstances while the appropriate accommodation for his needs was identified.

What followed were concerted efforts by the prison and PPG, led by the neurodiversity support manager (NSM) holding several multi-disciplinary meetings involving outside agencies such as Hampshire County Council Social Care, the police and other social care services in the area to ensure a joined-up approach in the attempt to find more appropriate accommodation. The Board was pleased to observe the efforts of healthcare staff, prison officers and fellow prisoners to ensure that the individual was well cared for throughout their time at HMP Winchester.

6.5 Exercise, regime

This is always a problematic area. The main prison has four wings, but only B wing and two landings on C wing are available as standard location, rather than for newly arrived prisoners, vulnerable prisoners, or those with specific needs or incentives.

Some prisoners housed here have local street gang affiliations. Rivalries from outside can carry over into custody, sometimes leading to violence between groups. Others may be associated with serious and organised crime groups and seek to continue directing drug trafficking, fraud or smuggling operations from within the prison. From the Board's observations, the prison strives to keep apart rival gangs and individuals with known grievances or debt-related issues in order to reduce the risk of violence. However, with overcrowding, limited staffing and few location options, it is challenging and, at times, impossible to keep all prisoners who are in conflict or who have concerns for their own safety, separated. This can limit the amount of time that prisoners can safely spend out of their cells.

Prisoners who are employed or attend education classes have time out of cell for these activities, as well as additional time for relaxation, showers, phone calls and gym sessions. Those who are not engaged in work or education have more limited out of cell time in smaller groups. Currently, prisoners on B wing and C1 and C4 landings are unlocked in the afternoon, while those on A wing, D wing and C2 and C3 landings have time out of cell in the morning, with the regime reversing later in the day. As a result, the minimum time a prisoner spends out of cell is approximately three hours per day.

The regime is kept under continual review, with the expectation that additional staffing will enable more time out of cell. Recently, gym equipment, including rowing machines, cross-trainers and pull-up/knee raise/dip stations, has been installed on the wings, providing increased opportunities for exercise. Gym staff reported that the regime is operating more effectively, enabling gym time to be maximised.

6.6 Drug rehabilitation

The prison's specialist substance misuse services ('recovery') team increased from 1.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in June 2025 to eight FTE by December 2025. Running alongside this was a separate clinical team responsible for prescribing and managing medications such as methadone and buprenorphine.

Prisoners at HMP Winchester used a range of substances, including opiates, cannabis (and their synthetic equivalents), ketamine, alcohol and nicotine. During the reporting period, a new screening process was introduced to identify, on reception, all prisoners who might benefit from support from the recovery team. A more robust approach was also adopted to ensure that prisoners who could benefit from the service were identified and referred following induction. Within 14 days of arrival at HMP Winchester, prisoners identified as likely to benefit from recovery team support should have received one-to-one engagement with the team, a needs assessment, and either a bespoke care plan or one in development, unless they chose to opt out.

The number of referrals to the recovery team arising from the prisoner induction process reached 202 in January 2026 and averaged 174 per month in the five months to 31 May 2026. Over the same period, referrals from prison officers following induction, for example where a prisoner was found to be under the influence of substances, peaked at 43 in February 2026 and averaged 32 per month. Combined, these referrals represented, on average, approximately 30% of HMP Winchester's prisoner population each month.

Harm prevention steps were also strengthened during the reporting period to include, for example, one-to-one engagement with all prisoners by the recovery team, where practicable, to advise prisoners about potentially fatal new psychoactive substances circulating in prisons.

Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous also continued to operate, although, at times, only on a sporadic basis. The incentivised substance-free living (ISFL) landing also remained in place. However, with limited incentives available and ISFL landing prisoners able to mix freely with other prisoners on the wing, the initiative had yet to achieve its potential.

6.7 Soft skills

Soft skills development contributed positively to the wellbeing of a small number of prisoners during the reporting period. The Board noted activities such as a music workshop and pottery classes, which provided structured opportunities for individuals to engage in some purposeful activity. During one observed session, six prisoners played instruments, including drums, guitars and keyboards, while another practised independently on a smaller keyboard. Participants described these sessions as enjoyable, calming and conducive to building a sense of community.

These activities, while beneficial, were limited in capacity and frequency, and were dependent on staff and volunteer availability.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education and library

The report from the HMIP Inspection in February 2026 stated that leaders had not developed a curriculum that met the needs of a reception population, a view shared by the Board based on its observations of lessons. Despite introducing some new courses, the overall offer remained too limited to support prisoners' personal, academic or professional development effectively. This follows the introduction of a new curriculum in October 2025. The head of education, skills and work designed the curriculum against a backdrop of extensive cuts to provision. As a result, HMP Winchester reduced the formal Maths and English provision with the intent of delivering a curriculum focused on settling men into a custodial setting and providing opportunities for personal development.

There was an increase in the number of art sessions and in the availability of Painting and Decorating Level 1 and Level 2 courses. The decision was also taken to maintain digital skills qualifications, expand the cooking provision to include allergen training, and introduce a suite of online learning opportunities leading to Awards in Personal and Social Development at Levels 1 and 2. These include modules on personal finance, interpersonal skills, drug awareness and alcohol awareness. In addition, all prisoners are now required to attend an education induction on arrival at HMP Winchester.

It is the Board's view that the education service provided under contract by Milton Keynes College does not meet the needs of a local prison with high churn and a large remand population. Functional Skills Maths and English courses require 55 guided learning hours to complete. Since the introduction of the new contract in October 2025, 127 men have been enrolled on English courses, 69 of whom have completed a module of the course. Full Functional Skills qualifications are rarely completed at Winchester due to the number of guided learning hours required. For Maths there were 131 enrolments and 52 completions. For those who did not complete, this was generally because they were released or transferred, reflecting the prison's high churn.

Allocation rates from October 2025 to February 2026 were around 80%. However, attendance rates remain a concern, averaging 49%, although this increases to around 62% when allowable absences are taken into account (for example, attending court, sickness and visits). Board members have observed education classes with less than 50% attendance. Prisoners have also complained that those who do attend education or work miss out on time for domestic task and association.

Library

The library has lost both a full-time member and part-time member of staff, which has affected the ability to deliver a full service. Recruitment is under way to replace the full-time member of staff, but budget restrictions mean the part-time role has been cut. Library attendance figures varied considerably throughout the reporting year. Attendance was dependent on wing officers unlocking and escorting prisoners and on adherence to the library timetable, which has been updated to provide

improved allocation for all wings. The Shannon Trust charity continued to recruit and train literacy and numeracy mentors for all the wings.

7.2 Vocational training and work

The HMIP inspection in February 2026 scored purposeful activity at HMP Winchester as 'poor' and found that leaders had not secured sufficient activity spaces or made sure that the allocations process operated as an effective route into purposeful activity. This resulted in too many prisoners being unemployed, waiting too long for induction or allocated to activities that did not reflect their starting points or career intentions. The Board agrees with these findings and remains concerned that too many prisoners do not have access to meaningful activity.

The head of education, skills and work appears to have been driving improvements to the allocation and attendance process to improve rates and purposeful activity. During the reporting year, they introduced a new prisoner pay policy, aimed at helping to reduce prison poverty and offering higher rates of pay to those who want to engage in more meaningful activities such as education. Board members received some feedback from prisoners who reported a drop in their rates of pay for orderly work and the head of education, skills and work reported that the policy, which was intended to incentivise participation in education, has not performed as expected. One element of the policy was designed to help reduce debt, but there has been little evidence of this working. The head of reducing reoffending is in the process of reviewing it again. Prisoners now get paid to attend prison induction, education inductions and careers appointments. Work allocation levels have increased since the last reporting period, but these continue to be affected by the high churn of prisoners and ongoing staffing challenges.

Recent statistics show that around 280 work and industries spaces and 197 education spaces are available across the prison, with average allocations between 88% and 93%. Textiles (workshop 4) was closed for three months due to a health and safety issue but reopened in January 2026. It offered 24 spaces per day, split across a morning and afternoon session. Woodwork (workshop 6) has closed and was due to reopen as a flat-packing facility, but instead a wire recycling workshop opened in late January 2026. It provided an activity for up to 10 prisoners, five days a week in the morning and four days a week in the afternoon. The activity involves cutting bulbs, plugs and other 'equipment' from wires supplied by external recycling units and segregating the 'equipment' and wires into separate boxes or bins. Both the instructor and the prisoners admitted that it was an uninspiring activity, leading to no qualifications or obvious work-related skills. However, it provided the prisoners with a focus and an opportunity to leave the wings. It is also used to assemble in-cell furniture, when required, which provides the prison with some revenue.

From our observations, waste and recycling worked well. The manager reported that the facility generates significant financial savings for the prison through the recycling of clothing, shoes, TVs and other electrical equipment. However, the unit continued to experience low staffing levels, limiting the number of prisoners who could be employed.

Kitchen worker allocation was filled with prisoners from D wing, who have displayed a more consistent level of commitment to the task than prisoners from other locations, which has led to a stable workforce.

7.3 Offender management and progression

As a reception prison with high prisoner turnover, the offender management unit (OMU) operates under considerable workload pressures. Two senior probation officers lead the OMU and the pre-release unit (see 7.5). The OMU should be staffed by eight prison offender managers (POMs) but as of June 2026 there are only four, with each POM carrying a case load of around 40 cases and providing support on other cases. Probation officers are seconded to work in the prison from their parent probation delivery unit for up to three years.

The category C site, Westhill and the Hearn, is intended to help men prepare for release. As of May 2026, though, there is insufficient purposeful activity for these men, with an appreciable number neither engaged in work nor education. On visits during the current reporting period, Board members observed prisoners playing games or just chatting during the day. Some had taken part in art and English classes, but others seemed apathetic and were not engaging with education or training.

Figures for May 2026 showed that 90% of Hearn prisoners had jobs or classes to attend, but the figure is 70% in Westhill, with one particular landing showing only 24%. The Board understands that there are not enough jobs available within the prison to meet demand, but also that some prisoners have such a short time left to serve when allocated to the units that the process of placing them in a job would take longer than their remaining sentence.

For prisoners in Westhill and Hearn with a meaningful period still to serve, however, the acute shortage of places in the open estate caused frustrating delays for those eligible to progress. Over a four-week period, for example, only seven prisoners were able to transfer to HMP Ford (an open prison). For lower-risk vulnerable prisoners, these progression difficulties were compounded because, to ensure their safety, they could not be accommodated in Westhill and the Hearn, nor be taken on prison escort vans alongside other prisoners to another establishment.

7.4 Family contact

Family services are provided by the charity Spurgeons through both a publicly funded contract with the prison, focused on prison visits, and additional services funded through charitable grants. Spurgeons staff attend daily inductions for new arrivals, offering prisoners support with any family-related concerns. Board members observed a Time to Connect session for prisoners who do not receive social visits, either in person or via social video calls, continuing a practice reported in the previous reporting year.

Spurgeons also offers monthly homework clubs for prisoners and their children aged four to 16, Storybook Dads (recorded story sessions for children), and Family Days (extended family visits in a more informal setting).

Following the Board's observations in the previous reporting year regarding delays in setting up approved telephone numbers on prisoners' personal identification number (PIN) accounts, improvements were made this year through targeted action to increase access to PIN phones. However, delays in adding approved contacts persisted. Issues were also reported with the addition of international phone numbers and the higher costs associated with calling them.

7.5 Resettlement planning

The pre-release team is led by a senior probation officer and comprises four probation service officers and one administrator, with one administrative vacancy. Specialist advice and support are provided by a range of external agencies. Frequent policy changes and release initiatives, together with an acute awareness of the serious consequences of releases in error and unlawful detention, make the work of the pre-release team particularly challenging. Unlawful detention occurs when errors in calculating or recording release dates result in an individual being held beyond their lawful release date. During the reporting year, the Board was aware of two such instances.

On average, 30 sentenced prisoners are released each month. Formal support with resettlement needs commences 12 weeks before a prisoner's release date. This includes support with housing and employment, as well as advice on the rent deposit scheme and state welfare benefits, plus referrals to support services. CV and disclosure and employability workshops are also available to men nearing release. During the reporting year, the number of prisoners in employment six weeks after release ranged from a high of 36% in August to a low of 7% in April.

A fortnightly resettlement board considers the housing options for men approaching release. Approved Premises (supervised accommodation) are arranged for most high-risk prisoners released on licence, while lower- and medium-risk prisoners may be referred to Ingeus or to Community Accommodation Service Tier 2 (CAS-2) short-term supported housing.

The Board is seriously concerned about the continuing number of men who are released without accommodation. During the reporting year, between a third (36%) and a fifth (20%) of men had no accommodation arranged for their first night after release. These men are directed to charities that may be able to assist with the provision of tents and to food banks. The risk of homelessness is particularly acute for men released directly and, sometimes, unexpectedly from court. HMP Winchester is due to participate in the Immediate Release Pathfinder, which is intended to help identify men on remand who may be released from court and would benefit from resettlement support.

The work of the IMB

The Board at HMP Winchester saw three members resign during the reporting period, with no new members joining. This has significantly reduced the size of the Board and its ability to monitor all areas of the prison.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of IMB members	12
Number of IMB members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of IMB members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the establishment, which includes 10 shadow visits by new members	331
Total number of segregation reviews attended	15

The content of this report is based on observations recorded by the Board during the reporting period. Of the 585 observations logged, 237 were made directly by Board members, with the remainder drawn from staff and prisoner reports, official documents and notifications.

Applications to the IMB

Total applications to the Board increased by 20% compared with 2024-2025 and by just over 9% compared with 2023-2024. Notable increases were seen in applications relating to property, sentence management and prisoner and staff relations, although the overall distribution of applications across subject areas remained broadly consistent with previous years.

Code	Subject	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	33	22	21
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	8	11	8
C	Equality	5	1	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	14	15	15
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	35	39	31
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	11	16	21
F	Food and kitchens	7	5	6
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	64	48	55
H1	Property within the establishment	19	12	22

Code	Subject	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	15	14	24
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	12	5	8
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	25	33	50
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	25	28	35
K	Transfers	0	1	3
L or U/C	Miscellaneous or unclassified	13	10	13
X	Confidential access request	1	1	N/A
	Total number of applications	287	261	314



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