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

For reporting year
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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/YOI Sudbury is an open, category D prison for young adults and adult men, south of Ashbourne, Derbyshire. The prison is located in a rural location, but is well connected by road to several large towns.

Prisoners at Sudbury have been assessed to be trustworthy in open conditions, and include men serving both long and short sentences. The main aim of the prison is rehabilitation and resettlement, and men are encouraged to take opportunities available for education and vocational training, as well as applying for full-time work outside of the prison.

The population at the end of the IMB reporting year was 514[1], with 33 prisoners under the age of 25. The operational capacity of the prison (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) is 661. A number of prisoners are housed in two new living accommodation units and in single pods (small, separate, self-contained housing units), and these have single rooms with individual shower and toilet facilities. However, it remains the case that most dormitory buildings date from the time of the Second World War, with shared toilet and shower facilities. These are extremely challenging to maintain in good repair and in line with modern standards. Most of these rooms house two prisoners. While the new accommodation has phones in rooms, prisoners in the older blocks have to share phones situated in the dormitory corridors.

Prisoners have access to a gymnasium and outdoor exercise equipment, and there are open spaces in the grounds with seating. Education and some vocational qualifications are provided by People Plus, and healthcare is provided by the Practice Plus Group. The Secret Diner caters for the public and provides training for prisoners in catering and hospitality, while the Secret Garden sells garden produce grown in the prison's market garden.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- The reception and induction of prisoners arriving at Sudbury is carried out in a professional and considerate manner.
- The levels of self harm and violence continue to be low, with prisoners reporting to the Board that they feel safe in the prison, and the use of force is rare and proportionate.
- The ingress of illicit items to the prison continues to be a challenge.

Fair and humane treatment

- Despite the programme of refurbishment, the general standard of accommodation in the older blocks remains unsatisfactory, with facilities that are poor by comparison with many of the prisons from which prisoners have come.
- While there has been some dissatisfaction with the revised dietary requirements, the kitchen continues to provide good-quality food and varied menus. However, the kitchen has faced ongoing equipment failure that has not been sufficiently quickly rectified.
- The Board is concerned at the lack of regular contacts between officers and prisoners through the initial point of contact (IPOC) process. Board members do not often see interaction between officers and prisoners around the prison site.
- The response to prisoner complaints continues to be generally prompt and appropriate, but the Board notes that many prisoners express concern about submitting complaints and DIRFs (discrimination incident reporting forms for reporting on discrimination complaints).
- The Board notes the attempts made to incentivise compliance and good behaviour, with a higher proportion of positive referrals and a higher number of prisoners gaining enhanced status.
- Support for neurodivergent prisoners, and staff awareness of their needs, is good.

Health and wellbeing

- As in previous annual reports, the Board notes that the number of prisoners arriving who have complex health and mental health needs continues to increase.
- The Board continues to have no concerns about the waiting list for primary healthcare appointments and other healthcare services, although missed appointments are causing frustration.
- Prisoners struggling with substance misuse continue to receive good support from the prison, through rehabilitation programmes, regular drug testing, and the incentivised substance-free living area (ISFL).

Progression and resettlement

- Despite the challenges imposed by contractual changes, the delivery of functional skills and of qualifications in other training areas has remained at a

high level. However, the loss of staff due to these changes has had an adverse impact in other areas of delivery.

- The library is a welcoming area that provides a range of imaginative experiences for prisoners, both to encourage reading and writing, and to provide recreational activities.
- In the opinion of the Board, digital provision remains inadequate. Information technology (IT) experience and use is not an everyday experience for prisoners, due to the loss of a tutor, the limited number of computers available for prisoners, and IT not being incorporated within all work areas or able to be used for administrative tasks.
- The Board is concerned at the number of work areas during the reporting year that have suffered temporary closure, leading to a number of prisoners having little or no purposeful activity.
- While workplace instruction and support in many, but not all, areas are of a good standard, it remains the case that in many areas prisoners can gain no qualifications from the work that they do, and the loss of staff in some areas has led to the suspension of qualifications.
- The time taken for many prisoners to achieve release on temporary licence (ROTL) remains high and is a cause of frustration to prisoners. The Board recognises that staff in the offender management unit (OMU) deal with complex individual cases professionally, but are handicapped by the slow response to requests made to outside agencies. It also recognises attempts made to improve communication with prisoners.
- Once again, the Board commends the resettlement teams for their successful preparation of so many prisoners for release, and for the efforts made to retain and extend places for prisoners to work in the community.
- Prisoners have continued to receive excellent support from the staff and support workers of the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), and family visit days (which bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings) have been imaginative and successful.
- Phone provision for most prisoners remains limited and lacks privacy.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The length of time required for newly appointed prison staff to receive security clearance impacts seriously on the delivery of services to prisoners. Can steps be taken to address this?
- Inadequacy of community provision, such as probation services and approved premises, is impacting upon the rehabilitative programmes for prisoners both before release, through delays to ROTL approval, and after release. This will become exacerbated by the releases planned through the Sentencing Act. Will the Minister exert pressure to ensure that resources are provided to address this?

TO THE MINISTER and TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- As reported in previous years, the quality of the decades old accommodation remains, despite cosmetic refurbishment, well below an acceptable standard in terms of both structure and facilities. When will this issue be addressed?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Following the successful trial of pin-linked mobile phones at HMP Leyhill, how soon will these be rolled out across the open prison estate?
- What can be done to speed up the training of Instructors to enable them to deliver qualifications?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- It is to be hoped that a resolution of the issues that are continuing to delay the implementation of the IPOC system can be resolved.
- What is being done to improve the visibility of officers around the site, and their positive interactions with prisoners?
- What is being done to reduce the number of prisoners being sent away from work areas?
- Can steps be taken to improve the operation of the General Application system, whereby prisoners submit enquiries to staff, to ensure that these get responded to promptly?
- What can be done to provide further incentives to attract prisoners to peer support worker roles, given their acknowledged value to the prisoners?

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister Provision of resources through staffing in the prison, education and the broadening of training opportunities and preparations for release to meet challenges caused by changes to prisoner categorisation, with some arriving for relatively short lengths of time.	No response given.	Cuts to education provision and training have occurred due to the contractual changes in 2025. There has been no extension of training opportunities, and some qualifications have had to be suspended due to staff shortages.
To the Minister Addressing the poor quality of the elderly accommodation remains.	Prison conditions are continually monitored and all funding requests from prisons to undertake improvements are being considered, noting that demands for maintenance are much greater than the available funding.	Despite a programme of redecoration by the prison, which has made some cosmetic improvements, the general fabric and facilities in the older accommodation remains of a poor standard.
To the Minister Provision of adequate services in the community, such as probation services and	the Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) are currently procuring new contracts which go live in Spring 2027 and will enhance	Delays in responses from community agencies remain the biggest cause of delays in prisoners gaining ROTL.

approved premises to ensure that prisoners are not delayed in their rehabilitative programmes, both before and after release.	the rehabilitative services provision for men leaving prison and in the community. Regarding Approved Premises, it is acknowledged that demand for places currently outstrips supply, and we hope to expand the number of places in due course. A digitalised approach to Approved Premises referrals has been developed, as well as there now being a National Central Referral Unit.	
To the Prison Service Despite some improvement during the reporting year, the provision of equipment and connectivity to support digital training and web-based learning remains limited.	The Digital Education Platform project successfully installed Wi-Fi coverage across educational areas at HMP Sudbury in November 2024. This installation included 24 Wi-Fi access points, 50 desktop PCs for prisoner use, three career laptops, two printers, and five MoJ laptops for staff to share, enabling a more seamless operation of educational services. Currently, there are no plans to roll out Launchpad (prisoner in-cell self-service) at HMP Sudbury.	Prisoners' day-to-day access to information technology remains limited, leaving insufficient opportunities and equipment to help them develop the digital skills needed for life on release or to access everyday services online.
To the Prison Service The proposed changes to the kits being used to test for substance misuse should not lead to the loss of effectiveness of, and confidence in, the testing regime.	The new test kit was selected through an open competitive procurement exercise and was evaluated to ensure it meets HMPPS specifications and demonstrated compliance with our technical requirements, whilst offering value for money. While the new test kit and process is different from the previous one, it enables HMPPS to continue to deliver CBDT and Voluntary Drug Testing in prisons to maintain a critical part of recovery and release functions. The new kits will	There have been no reported issues with testing during the reporting year.

	continue to be monitored closely and feedback provided where necessary.	
To the Prison Service It is a source of concern that prisoners are still arriving at HMP Sudbury with very low educational levels, despite having been in prison for a length of time, with resulting delays in their rehabilitative experience.	The new Prisoner Education Service contracts which launched on 1 October 2025 set clearer expectations for screening and assessment. New digital systems will reduce repeated assessments; and improve recording of previous achievements and tracking of learners' progress.	Prisoners are still arriving at Sudbury with a low level of educational achievement which affects the experience they can gain at an open prison.
To the Prison Service Improvement of the phone provision for prisoners at HMP Sudbury.	There are currently no specific projects or timelines in place to extend in cell telephony in open prisons. While this does create a disparity compared to the closed estate, where in-cell telephones are available, and with the newer house blocks at HMP Sudbury, prisoners in open prisons typically have greater freedom of movement which can allow easier access to communal phones on wing landings and more opportunities for family contact during ROTL. The strengthening of family ties for those preparing for release remain important and HMPPS is committed to exploring all viable options to improve telephony provision across the open estate.	No improvement.
To the Governor The resolution of the issues delaying the functioning of the initial point of contact (IPOC) system.	There continue to be challenges with operating a Personal Officer/IPOC scheme at Sudbury. In November/December 2025 there were concerns raised by the POA (Prison Officers Association) at a national level regarding these schemes and the direction from the union was to cease	The issues have not been resolved during the reporting year.

	operating these schemes in all open prisons. Collaborative work is ongoing and progress is being made in the development of a 'Designated Officer' scheme which is expected to be introduced during the 2026/27 business year.	
To the Governor Extension of enrichment and recreational activities.	There were 36 tier 2 activities in December 2025 showing a slight reduction because of some drop off in commitment, but also from a review of quality. In the last year, we have introduced new groups and closed old ones that are no longer effective/quality groups. All tier 2 activities are reviewed at least annually against Ofsted objectives and in line with the needs analysis outcomes from the current population.	Efforts have been made to provide increased leisure facilities, and a number of popular activities are provided by the library. However, the implementation of some other enrichment opportunities has been repeatedly postponed during the year.
To the Governor Steps planned to reduce the length of time taken for prisoners to achieve ROTL (release on temporary licence) to meet the advised target of 12-14 weeks.	Additional resources have been put in place to hasten second sign off for standard cases and first sign off for restricted cases. The national task force has been utilised to support with addressing the OASys backlog where required, and this has led to some improvements in timeliness. Individual cases are discussed and escalation carried out where required. If there are delays getting information back from external agencies for standard risk prisoners, prisoners will be able to progress to outwork prior to domestic ROTL.	It remains the case that a high proportion of prisoners have to wait considerably in excess of the target to gain ROTL. However, delay is most frequently due to factors beyond the control of the prison, and it appears through conversation and through the reduction in complaints that prisoner satisfaction with the work of their offender managers has improved.
To the Governor Ensuring that all prisoners receive digital technology assessment on their arrival and, if	Following the re-organisation in education a considerable backlog in the ‘Do-it’ assessment developed, with consequent impact on the identification of prisoners	There has been a significant improvement in digital assessment of new arrivals during the reporting year, with most prisoners now receiving an assessment promptly.

necessary, adequate digital training.	requiring particular interventions. Extra resources have been allocated for January to try to address the low level of initial assessments.	

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Adjusting to the open environment is a steep learning curve, which some prisoners find challenging. An induction programme is designed to familiarise prisoners with their new environment; however, this requires prisoners to grasp a large amount of information in a short period of time. New arrivals are generally complimentary about the reception process.

- Receptions observed by the Board have been conducted in a professional and welcoming manner, with prisoner concerns and enquiries being addressed. Most prisoners spoken with commented positively on the considerate attitude of staff in reception and in the induction dormitory to which they are initially allocated, and have praised the assistance given by prisoner support workers in helping them adjust to their new environment.
- Many prisoners speak to IMB members about the difficulties they face in adjusting to the environment, the regime, and the expectations of an open prison, particularly the expectation that prisoners will develop self-reliance. This adjustment is particularly challenging for prisoners with neurodivergence. Despite attempts made by HMP Sudbury to familiarise prisoners with what to expect on transfer, prisoners arriving frequently say that they have received little information from their previous prison, and that some of what they do receive is inaccurate. It is also the case that some of the impressions they receive prior to arrival come from prisoners who have been returned from Sudbury to a closed establishment.
- New arrivals undergo an induction programme in their first week which provides information about key aspects of the prison from personnel from different departments. Most induction talks observed by the Board have been informative, with staff positive and approachable. However, there is a danger that the presentation of necessary information can overload prisoners with too much detail at this stage, in particular prisoners whose ability to grasp information is more limited. Prisoners do not receive an information booklet for reference.
- At the beginning of the reporting year the IMB observed that there were a number of occasions when the failure of staff to appear at sessions caused considerable frustration, both for prisoners and for induction officers. This appears to have improved markedly during the year, although on occasions the brevity of talks leaves prisoners with time on their hands, and prisoners have observed to the Board members that they would appreciate a more compressed period of induction.
- As part of the induction programme the charitable organisation Remedi, which works in prisons to support prisoners with debt issues, offers assistance for debt inside prison. There has been good engagement from prisoners, with a high proportion of their referrals coming from contact at induction.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There have been no deaths in custody at Sudbury during this reporting year. Self-harm incidents continue to be infrequent and are well managed. It was noted in the Board's last annual report that the implementation of the assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) process (for supporting prisoners who are considered to be at risk of self-harm or suicide) was not always robust but members have observed an improvement during this year. Board members continue to ask prisoners they encounter about the extent to which they feel safe at Sudbury. There has not been any increase in those who report they do not feel safe.

- All arrivals at Sudbury are screened for any previous history of self harm or having been subject to the ACCT process. The proportion of prisoners with this background remains low. Between January and June 2026 just over 89% of prisoners arriving at Sudbury had no history of self harm or being the subject of an ACCT.
- In the period April to June 2026, there were two reported incidents of self harm. One of these related to a prisoner who had taken too much paracetamol for pain relief but this was not intentional.
- The Board has noted that ACCT documents which should accompany the prisoner across activities and locations are now doing so which represents an improvement on observations noted in the 2024 to 2025 annual report.
- In this reporting year there have been 34 ACCTs opened. This is six additional prisoners compared to the last reporting year. It is clear that this slight increase is not related to an overall increase in the population at Sudbury. The most frequent contributory factor in the opening of ACCT documents has been mental health issues.
- ACCT documents seen by Board members have been thoroughly completed and the required observations made satisfactorily.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The low levels of violence between prisoners and between prisoners and staff contribute to the prevailing feeling of safety experienced by most prisoners. Board members have been able to monitor, from evidence presented to the prison use of force meeting, the effective management by operational staff of those incidents which do occur.

- Board members have noted that there are multiple factors affecting levels of violence within the prison. These include the consumption of illicit substances some of which are psychoactive and can result in mental health issues. Prisoner debt can lead to bullying and this in turn may drive violent behaviour. The prison is soon to finalise a debt strategy which is aimed at supporting prisoners with debt problems.
- The challenge support and intervention plan (CSIP) system is used to challenge unacceptably aggressive behaviours and also to support victims of such behaviour. From January 2026 to June 2026 there were 52 referrals made for prisoners to be made the subject of a CSIP. All referrals are investigated though this does not necessarily result in a CSIP being initiated if matters can be addressed through discussion and support from staff. For example, in May 2026 there were six referrals investigated. There was no

further action in four of those cases once issues had been explored between prisoners and staff, therefore only two CSIPs were initiated in that month.
- Reasons for CSIP referrals over six months from January to June 2026 included mental health issues, consumption of illicit substances, debt and bullying. Bullying behaviour was the most frequent trigger for CSIP referrals and accounted for almost 40% in this period.
- It is rare for prisoners at Sudbury to require or request to be located in the secure accommodation unit for their own protection.
- Violent incidents are low at Sudbury. For example, in the three months from April to June 2026, there were three prisoner assaults on another prisoner and one prisoner assault on a member of staff.

4.4 Use of force

Incidents requiring comprehensive use of force actions are rare at Sudbury. The majority of incidents which occur require only the use of rigid bar handcuffs. The most frequently occurring reason for use of force is the need to reduce the possibility of absconds when locating prisoners in the secure accommodation unit (SAU).

- Data seen by Board members indicates that use of force is not often necessary at Sudbury. For example, between January and March 2026 use of force was applied on only six occasions. Rigid bar handcuffs were deployed in all cases. In five of the six cases the prisoners were subsequently returned to closed conditions. Batons were not drawn in any of these cases and PAVA (synthetic pepper spray) was drawn once but not used. No weapons in the possession of prisoners were reported in any of these cases.
- The primary reasons reported for the use of force in this period were to prevent abscond, to prevent assault, refusal to comply with transfer and dealing with a prisoner under the influence.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

There continue to be regular incidents of prisoners being found with prohibited items. These are frequently associated with mobile phones and illicit substances. With substantial numbers of prisoners working in the community every day and accessing release on temporary licence (ROTL) for other reasons the challenge of ensuring nothing illicit is brought back into the prison is difficult and ongoing.

- The challenge to prevent ingress of prohibited items remains substantial. This is in part a consequence of the rehabilitative function of the open prison, with large numbers of prisoners leaving and returning to the prison in order to attend paid employment in the community and visit their homes and families. This issue has been raised by the Board at its regular meetings with the Governor and it has been noted that there has been some increase in the attendance at Sudbury of the regional search team.
- It has also been noted by the Board that there has been some increase in the closed circuit television (CCTV) camera units during this reporting year.
- While many illicit items are discovered as a result of systematic and random searching of accommodation units and social areas, it is also the case that some items are found through the effective operation of information reporting systems to the security team.

- The prison monitors finds of illicit items and their locations carefully and has acted to make changes when new routes for their ingress emerge. For example, it was recently noted that red wheelie bins provided in the car park for staff and visitors were being used to conceal items for collection by prisoners authorised to empty the bins. Swift action was taken to ensure that only staff are now authorised to empty these bins.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The newly built wings offer accommodation of a good standard, but despite a programme of redecoration a high proportion of prisoners are still housed in unsatisfactory, aging, prefabricated buildings. Prisoners are generally complimentary about the food prepared by the kitchen, which the Board has observed to be varied and of a good standard. However, national changes to the dietary guidelines through the Food in Prisons Policy Framework of 2026 have caused dissatisfaction among prisoners.

- Two modern wings each contain 60 ensuite rooms with phones. Some of these are allocated to prisoners on the substance-free living scheme (ISFL). There are 80 pods in use, which are single units with ensuite facilities. 20 of the pods are occupied by neurodivergent prisoners; the rest are occupied by prisoners whose sentences are for life or over 10 years, or have indeterminate sentences (a sentence that does not have a fixed date) for imprisonment for public protection (IPP), or are outworkers.
- The remaining accommodation is situated in 80-year-old buildings which, as has been reported in previous years, are in many respects unsatisfactory, suffering problems with damp, leaks and drainage, especially in the winter months. The prison has implemented a programme of refurbishment, including the installation of stainless-steel surfaces in communal kitchen areas and the provision of more robust equipment, but prisoners frequently complain to the Board that facilities at Sudbury are poor in comparison with other prisons, and that cooking facilities are inadequate; for example, one toaster and microwave shared by up to 40 prisoners.
- Board members have observed that the communal areas of most wings are kept clean and tidy by wing cleaners, but despite there being a cleaning schedule which is signed off, the standard of cleaning is variable, and it is not clear that supervision is in all areas sufficiently rigorous.
- In some wings the communal shower and toilet areas are of an unsatisfactory standard, with poor ventilation and broken tiling.
- Maintenance issues are addressed by Amey, the building maintenance contractor, with a small team of prisoner ‘handymen’, but the Board is concerned that maintenance issues are often slow to be addressed, and there remain snagging issues with the new blocks which have not been addressed due to the building company going into administration.
- While single accommodation is provided by the temporary pods, two modern wings, and P1-4 dormitories, most prisoners in their early period at Sudbury share rooms in the older accommodation block. The IMB is frequently approached by prisoners who have previously had single cells and are unhappy with shared facilities.
- Most prisoners do not have in-room telephony but have to use shared telephones on the wings. Complaints regarding lack of privacy and lack of access are not uncommon. Prisoners in the pods can now apply to use telephone after 8.30pm.
- As has been noted in previous reports, the electricity supply to the older accommodation blocks is unsatisfactory, being inadequate for the operation of equipment in the communal facilities.

- There have been fewer issues with laundry equipment during this reporting year, and Board members have observed that laundry areas are generally clean and tidy and efficiently run.
- Food continues to be of good quality and is regularly sampled by Board members. However, the introduction of new dietary guidelines in February 2026 restricting the quantity of red meat, fat and sugar, which Sudbury implemented in advance, has led to some dissatisfaction among prisoners, although the IMB has observed that kitchen managers have made every effort to work creatively within the new requirements. Maintenance issues with some kitchen equipment (for example, the repeated failure of the blast chiller) have been a challenge during this reporting year. The IMB monitors the food comments book held in the dining hall and has noted very few complaints.
- The kitchen caters well for religious festivals and special events, supplying appropriate menus which are well received. Care is also taken that prisoners with specific dietary requirements have their needs met.
- The weekly supply of items purchased from canteen (a purchasing service provided by the private supplier DHL) including fresh foodstuffs, is of considerable importance to prisoners. For much of the reporting year the IMB received frequent complaints about the failure to supply goods ordered, poor quality of fresh food (especially fruit and vegetables) and difficulties in obtaining refunds for goods not supplied. Observation of the distribution of canteen by Board members found that the quality of fresh food was patchy and, in some cases, poor, and the system for distributing goods was rushed and offered little opportunity for prisoners to check their parcels against their original orders. Following a meeting between prison staff, prisoner representatives and DHL, some improvements were made. Subsequent observation of the process has revealed that the distribution system and the quality and range of food has improved. The Board is pleased to note that the number of complaints regarding canteen has fallen.

5.2 Segregation

The SAU (secure accommodation unit, which accommodates prisoners who are segregated from the main population) consists of three cells. Prisoners are rarely held more than 24 hours in the SAU before either being transferred or returned to their normal location in the prison. Prisoners who have breached rules are located in the SAU pending adjudication or transfer following suitability review, which can result in return to closed conditions. Adjudications have been regularly observed by Board members to be conducted fairly, professionally and with understanding. Prisoners whose rooms are being searched are located temporarily in the SAU.

- The cells in the SAU have a toilet in the room, which is screened off. Cells inspected by the Board have been stocked with linen, towels and other basic items. There is no exercise yard. The area is clean and showering facilities are available.
- The IMB requires staff to inform them when prisoners are located to the SAU for reasons other than room searches, and when prisoners abscond. There have, however, been occasions during the year when staff have had to be reminded of this requirement.
- The Board is satisfied that prisoners located receive proper care and attention, and that protocols are correctly followed. Prisoners are seen

regularly by the healthcare and chaplaincy teams. Prisoners spoken with by Board members have not expressed any complaints about their treatment in the SAU.

- We have observed that staff in the SAU have a good relationship with prisoners, despite some challenging situations, and are attentive to the welfare of the prisoners held there. On the rare occasion when a prisoner is held in the SAU overnight, the IMB has been satisfied that the welfare of the prisoner is ensured.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

The key worker system does not operate in open prisons. There have been ongoing difficulties during this reporting year in implementing the IPOC (initial point of contact) arrangements which are intended to operate instead of key work in open prisons, and these continue. The Board has noted some inconsistencies in relations between operational staff and prisoners both from observations made during reporting visits and from some concerns raised by prisoners themselves.

- The visit reports made by Board members often comment on observations of effective and supportive interactions between prisoners and staff, and many prisoners have commented to the IMB about positive assistance received from members of staff. However, Board members consistently encounter prisoners who comment that not all operational staff are approachable and helpful. Whilst not a frequent occurrence, it remains the case that some written and verbal applications to the IMB from prisoners indicate that they feel they have been treated unjustly by some members of staff.
- It is also a regular comment made by prisoners to Board members that they believe that if they complain through the complaints system or submit a DIRF (discrimination incident report form) there will be negative consequences for themselves and so they tend not to use these channels to address issues where they feel they have been unfairly treated. The IMB has also observed reluctance to act as a witness at adjudications.
- Board members regularly comment in their visit reports that whilst some supervisory staff in work areas are interacting effectively with prisoners, this is not always the case and staff in some areas are observed to be remaining largely in offices and communicating very little with prisoners.
- The Board has received comments from workplace staff that operational staff visit workplaces infrequently, and Board members have regularly recorded in reports that few operational staff are observed around the site and are not often seen talking with prisoners outside of an office situation.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The prison continues to monitor performance in terms of ensuring that prisoners are treated fairly and with respect. The diversity, inclusion and engagement lead appointed during the reporting year has brought improved vigour and oversight in this area.

- The neurodiversity support manager (NSM) receives much praise from both prisoners and staff for the support they provide and for work conducted in this area. For example, the NSM provided critical assistance to a prisoner arriving with avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID) but no accompanying

clinical information. The manager supported him significantly by arranging a town visit to an eating establishment and establishing a monthly cooking class, which the prisoner regularly attended with other prisoners.

- The Board has been informed that the number of prisoners with identified neurodivergent needs has stabilised since January 2026, though this figure can change rapidly.
- Men are selected according to their specific needs by the neurodiversity support manager (NSM). Prisoners initially see a mental health nurse, who is only available on weekdays. The NSM schedules individuals with high level needs for an appointment within three weeks, though most are seen within one week. Referrals coming directly from education, the mental health team, the substance misuse service, or wing staff are prioritised and seen sooner.
- Ongoing efforts ensure that staff understand neurodivergent (ND) needs, and the management team remains highly supportive of the work undertaken by the NSM. Board members have noted that most workshop instructors demonstrate awareness of individuals with neurodivergent needs within their training areas.
- Two recent £40,000 bids have been successful in this area. The first is a digital project that will be rolled out across all prisons and the probation service to bridge inequality gaps. The second bid will fund a ‘calm hub’, a dedicated neurodiverse space at Sudbury. This room can be booked for meetings with individual prisoners or cohorts with neurodivergent needs, such as for mental health consultations or parole hearings.
- Prisoners can report alleged discrimination to the prison based on any protected characteristic, by completing a discrimination incident reporting form (DIRF). The prison's DIRF log was monitored by the Board from the 1 June 2025 to the 31 October 2025. During this period, 15 DIRFs were logged, with five not responded to within the required timescale, and of those five, interim letters were sent to four of the prisoners. A sample of final written responses to prisoners was monitored by the IMB in Spring 2026 and these demonstrated that DIRFs had been investigated, and answered appropriately and respectfully. The IMB notes that following the withdrawal of the Zahid Mubarak Trust from external scrutiny of DIRFs, the prison is working to develop a new partnership for that role.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

In the opinion of the IMB the chaplaincy team offers good support to prisoners of all faiths and none. Regular worship and religious festivals are celebrated in the multi-faith centre, and chaplaincy staff regularly carry out wellbeing visits to individual prisoners.

- There is a full-time imam, who is the managing chaplain, and a Catholic chaplain, while all other chaplains are sessional. There has been a vacancy for an Anglican chaplain throughout the entire reporting year, although at the time of reporting a new appointment has been made and is undergoing vetting.
- Muslims represent the largest religious group in the prison, but all faiths are catered for. There have been no applications to the IMB regarding issues with religion.

- Religious festivals and events are regularly celebrated and on these occasions chaplaincy staff organise worship events and liaise with the kitchen to provide appropriate meals for prisoners. The IMB has occasionally attended these events, and observed that they are very popular with, and appreciated by, prisoners.
- Analysis of recorded interactions between staff and prisoners shows that chaplaincy staff are conscientious in their visiting of prisoners both at key points (post-admission and pre-release, for example) and in support of prisoners in particular circumstances. Entries reveal a good knowledge of prisoners' needs and a high level of support. Chaplaincy staff are very visible around the prison.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The incentive scheme allocates prisoners to basic, standard or enhanced levels, with each level prescribing various privileges available and is a means of incentivising positive prisoner behaviours. It remains the case that most prisoners at Sudbury quickly acquire enhanced status, which will only be reviewed in the event of behaviour which does not comply with prison rules.

- Data available to the Board on a daily basis shows the numbers of prisoners on each of the three levels of the scheme. During this reporting year the proportions of prisoners allocated enhanced status has increased. At the end of the reporting year 1.1% of prisoners were on basic level (2% in July 2025), 13.6% were on standard level (20%) and 85.1% were on enhanced level (78%).
- As a result of the prison trying to emphasise positive behaviour, during the last quarter of the reporting year the proportion of positive to negative behaviour referrals by staff has been considerably higher than during the equivalent period in the last reporting year. This is despite prisoners stating that they believe the opposite to be the case, between March and May 2026 nearly twice as many positive referrals were awarded for every negative one as in the same period in 2025.
- The early release schemes which operated during the last IMB reporting year resulted in some prisoners arriving at Sudbury who were perhaps not ready for open conditions, with some subsequently displaying non-compliant behaviour. The prison continues to monitor a range of issues to see whether there are potential differences between the early release categories of prisoners and those at Sudbury prior to these schemes. Whereas in the first quarter of the reporting year the proportion of positive to negative behaviour referrals for these prisoners was lower than for the overall prisoner group, by the last quarter of the year, it exceeded it.

5.7 Complaints

In most months a high percentage of complaints are responded to punctually, although there are delays to some responses to complaints from prisoners who have been transferred to other prisons. Sampling suggests that most responses are courteous, considered and constructive. Within the prisoner population in HMP Sudbury, the highest number of complaints overall during the reporting year related to the offender management unit (OMU) and to canteen (a facility where prisoners

can buy snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials, using their allocated funds).

- Prison responses to complaints that have been sampled by the Board met the criteria laid down for responses, with decisions adequately explained in a courteous manner.
- As in previous years, the majority of complaints from prisoners in Sudbury have been focused on offender management (26%) and canteen issues (22%). Complaints about offender management decreased in the period from February to April 2026, having been higher between June and November 2025.
- There has been no apparent disparity between the proportion of prisoners of different ethnic backgrounds submitting complaints and the population of the prison as a whole. During the 12 months of the reporting year the majority of complaints from prisoners in Sudbury were submitted by prisoners of white ethnic backgrounds (60.7%), with 18.2% from prisoners of Asian ethnic backgrounds, and 12.9% from prisoners of black ethnic backgrounds. These figures are comparable in proportion to the average daily prison population by ethnic background in May 2026.
- Prisoners have on occasion told the Board that general applications to prison staff have not been responded to, and there appears to be no mechanism for the recording of submissions and responses to ensure that this does not occur.

6. Health and wellbeing

Healthcare service is commissioned from Practice Plus Group, a private provider of healthcare.

6.1 Healthcare general

Overall, there have been no major changes to healthcare provision during the reporting year. As in previous reports, the number of prisoners arriving who have complex health and in particular mental health needs continues to increase. The Board has no concerns about the waiting list for primary healthcare appointments and other healthcare services. A significant number of prisoners continue to miss medical appointments at Sudbury, though healthcare services are taking steps to address this issue.

- Healthcare services remain available daily, staffed by 21 substantive personnel, including a healthcare manager. Prisoners can access a nurse each day through a triage system, and the IMB has regularly observed prisoners awaiting triage. An evening surgery is held on Thursdays. A contracted GP (doctor) service is provided, supplemented by additional hours through the Society of Emergency Medicine Pharmacists (SEMP).
- There is a room in the dormitories to which prisoners can drop in to monitor their weight and blood pressure, although there have been times during the reporting year when there have been gaps in the operation of this. This is run by healthcare champions and prisoners have been observed by Board members to use the facility. The trained peer mentors also encourage awareness of broader health issues within the prison community, such as testicular and prostate cancer.
- In addition, one healthcare champion, working alongside a gym instructor, has developed a 12-week gym programme called the Healthy Living Club for prisoners who are not comfortable with normal gym sessions. Its aims include goal setting, weight loss, nutritional advice, and gym-based cardiovascular and circuit sessions.
- Towards the end of the reporting year, healthcare services have focused attention on addressing the number of prisoners failing to attend appointments across all primary care pathways. Healthcare champions walk around the prison the week before, and the day before, to remind their peers of these appointments. If an individual misses a GP appointment, the doctor reviews their medical notes to assess clinical urgency. Based on this review, the GP will either send a letter advising the prisoner to rebook or will find them within the prison if immediate care is required.
- Another new initiative is Navigating the NHS App, designed to help prisoners preparing for release use the application effectively. Staff received implementation training in January and subsequently invited 20 prisoners by letter. However, only two responses were returned, resulting in a single acceptance.
- A dedicated collection box for complaints and compliments is situated within the healthcare department, to which the IMB has no access. The Board has received no complaints from prisoners about healthcare at Sudbury during the reporting year and has been advised that the volume of submissions to the department remains very low. Patient complaints must be acknowledged

within a 20-day window; however, the healthcare team at Sudbury prioritises proactive dispute resolution by arranging to meet individuals face to face to address their concerns directly.

- There are three mental health nurses forming part of the health team at Sudbury. The number of prisoners with more complex mental health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is increasing. A psychiatrist continues to visit twice weekly, with bookings made up to two months ahead. A regular psychologist service is provided, which is considered by the healthcare manager to be sufficient.
- Prisoners requiring hospital treatment receive prompt attention, and the healthcare department was praised for their regard to his hospital appointments by a prisoner with a serious medical condition, in contrast to his experience at previous prisons.

6.2 Physical healthcare

There has been no change to physical healthcare provision. This includes dental, physiotherapy and chiropody services. The Board has no concerns about waiting times for appointments. The gym is a well-equipped facility which prisoners can access up to five times each week; however, staffing issues have led to broader gym provision being limited at times during the reporting year.

- The gym has been observed by the Board to be well used during working hours, when each prisoner receives an allocated time slot. While many prisoners enjoy the opportunity to do weight training, some prisoners have commented to the Board that they regret that at times of staff shortage they are unable to use cardiovascular equipment because weight training is prioritised.

6.3 Social care

Social care provision continues to be delivered by Derbyshire County Council. At the end of the reporting year, there were no prisoners receiving daily social care support. A prisoner with limited mobility has access to a walkie talkie so he can communicate with staff.

6.4 Time out of cell, regime

Prisoners express their appreciation of the opportunity to walk around the site, especially in the summer months. Staffing shortage has meant that the external environment, whilst being maintained to a generally clean and tidy standard, has not been developed as much as in previous years. Outdoor gym equipment is available in three locations, and some prisoners can be seen running during their free time. The Board does receive comments from prisoners as to a perceived lack of activities, leading to boredom, particularly at weekends, but efforts have been made during this reporting year to increase the leisure facilities available.

- Prisoners at Sudbury enjoy the freedom provided by an open establishment. The open grounds and the opportunity to sit and to walk around are commented on positively by new arrivals. The prison makes positive efforts to improve the external environment; however, the lack of a gardens instructor for a large part of the reporting year has meant that a minimum of ground

maintenance has been carried out, with an impact on the physical appearance of the site.

- Individual prisoners have commented on the wellbeing effect of nature around the prison: prisoners who submitted entries to the national Mass Observation Diary Day commented on the mental health benefits of being in the grounds and observing the wildlife and flowers. However, as has been noted in previous annual reports, nothing is offered by way of exploring the potential offered by the rural site through, for example, a link with local wildlife trusts, or through the development of education and training activities suitable for the conservation sector. The proposed allotment area for older prisoners has not been developed, and the so-called 'wildlife garden' has fallen into disuse.
- All prisoners have the opportunity to attend gym sessions. Frequently, this seems to be restricted to weights work, although various activities, such as badminton, are offered in the evenings. There is a regular park run, and a group of prisoners was able to carry out a hike in the Peak District, which was praised highly by a prisoner for both its physical and mental benefits. However, this and other activities have been affected by staffing issues during the reporting year. Staff have expressed frustration that prisoner interest in gym activities other than weights and cardiovascular exercise is limited or fleeting. A wheelchair rugby activity was reported as having had good participation, but there was little prisoner interest in a proposed five-a-side football competition.
- A football team has again played in the local league, and with time now allocated for mid-week training, results have improved. Matches are reported to have drawn good numbers of spectators. Prisoners are observed to be using outdoor gym equipment. The recreational playing of anything considered to be a contact activity such as, for example, football or basketball, is not, however, permitted, the reason given being that these might lead to possible confrontations between prisoners.
- The library continues to be an active recreational hub, with evening quizzes and other competitions (for example, chess) being popular. A new librarian has sought to expand activities, and the library is a focus for art activity and creative writing, as well as providing games and jigsaws for prisoners.
- Board members are told by prisoners that they can face boredom and a lack of recreational activities when they are not at work or in training. The dining hall has been developed during the reporting year as a recreational hub, with table-tennis tables and a well-used games machine. However, delays to the implementation of various other proposals suggest that this is not an area of high priority: there is no choral activity and the music room has been barely used for much of the year, with a proposed guitar club still awaiting resources at the end of the reporting year. Similarly, the provision of a new television in the dining hall, the development of a board games resource, a debating club and a planned wellbeing hour to encourage engagement in activities were all still awaiting finalisation six months after their planned delivery date.
- The prisoner council (Comcil) has functioned under the new prison equality and diversity lead; prisoner representatives at a meeting observed by the Board engaged in thoughtful and considered discussion of issues of concern. Meetings are held with members of the prison management, although at a meeting observed by the Board, only one member of the management team attended. However, many prisoners appear unaware of the prisoner council

and are unsure of its membership, so do not consider it as a vehicle for their own concerns and grievances.

6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The prison continues to provide a supportive environment for prisoners struggling with substance misuse, utilising regular drug testing alongside the now well-embedded incentivised substance-free living (ISFL) scheme. Feedback collected by Board members indicates that those interacting with the support team hold the assistance they receive in high regard. Building on progress made during the reporting year, the prison continues to incentivise rehabilitation. Additionally, the compact based drug testing (CBDT) system is now utilised across the entire prisoner population.

- The SMS (substance misuse service) operating within the prison continues to see all prisoners during their induction to Sudbury. Attendance at these meetings, or acknowledgment of the provided information pack if they do not attend, is required; prisoners face being placed on report if they fail to comply.
- The prison continues to record low numbers of positive drug tests among newly arrived prisoners within their first 72 hours.
- The CBDT system takes an individualised, supportive approach to managing prisoners who use illicit substances, with a range of interventions and group activities to help prisoners address addiction and successfully remain substance-free. These activities are well attended.
- Those who test positive are referred to SMS and invited to monthly group sessions to assess motivation levels. These groups include individuals who are not part of ISFL. In February 2026, 220 prisoners were invited and 159 attended.
- In the opinion of the substance misuse Service (SMS) team, current trends indicate that cocaine has overtaken cannabis as the most frequently used substance. Of particular concern is the recent increase in consumption of crack cocaine and ketamine. The latter is being mixed with cocaine and amphetamines to produce pink cocaine, posing severe health risks.
- The ISFL scheme continues its successful operation. Two dedicated dormitories support the programme: prisoners first join the older wing and later progress to rooms in the newly built block which offer single ensuite rooms where they can stay, provided they remain substance-free. March 2026 data shows that the older wing housed 26 prisoners, and of 54 tests administered only two showed positive for drug use. The new rooms housed 59 prisoners, with six on the waiting list; all 67 tests administered were negative.
- CBDT showed an increase in drug taking in February 2026 with 52 out of 573 tests (9%) showing use of drugs. However, in March this fell to 30 out of 533 tests (5.62%) showing use of drugs, and the SMS team considers the statistical increase in February compared to the rest of the year to be primarily caused by some prisoners using drugs more frequently rather than by increasing numbers of drug users.
- In addition to the CBDT framework, mandatory drug testing (MDT) remains fully operational. MDT testing covers a randomly selected 5% of the population. In addition, prisoners are required to undergo MDT if they are suspected of substance misuse. The testing programme requires a monthly

urine screen for a percentage of the general prison population, supplemented by bimonthly swabs for residents on the ISFL wings. Notably, all 25 positive results in February and March 2026 were identified through targeted, rather than random, testing.

- Overall, positive MDT results have significantly decreased over the past year. In April 2025, 28 positive tests were recorded, compared to 14 in April 2026, though this decline may be linked to a reduction in the prisoner population. For context, in May 2026 the SMS had a caseload of 80 prisoners, whereas the figure stood at 120 in September 2025. The prison administration believes the CBDT regime is successfully contributing to these lower positive testing levels. The commitment to offering second, and occasionally third, opportunities for rehabilitation to individuals who fail drug tests remains in place.
- Comprehensive drug searching for prisoners returning in the evenings (for example, prisoners working outside the prison, prisoners returning from ROTL and van drivers) remains an issue. Currently, insufficient staffing prevents searches from being conducted across the entire return window. Consequently, the timing of these searches has become predictable to prisoners.
- The prison has secured a £37,000 contract with the charity Remedi to help prisoners manage illicit debt within prison, which often stems from drugs.
- The prison has made links with Narcotics Anonymous, a non-profit organisation run by recovering addicts for people who have problems with drugs. Narcotics Anonymous meetings have begun within the prison, enabling prisoners to participate in nationally coordinated support sessions via the computer network. Individuals do not require an active referral or ongoing engagement with the SMS to attend.
- The drug rehabilitation team frequently participates in healthcare events, such as wellbeing days and Disability Awareness Day. The Celebration of Achievement for ISFL prisoners, which took place on 5 May, was highly successful and well-received. Additionally, the team marks International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD) on 31 August each year.

6.6 Soft skills

Prisoners are encouraged to develop self-reliance at Sudbury. A range of enhancement opportunities are in place whereby prisoners can develop specific skills; however, others have during the year been suspended.

- Prisoners are required to complete a work skills programme before their application for release on temporary licence (ROTL) can be approved. The programme includes various aspects considered necessary to become ready for employment, such as timekeeping, respect and communication, and working in a team. Most prisoners will complete this programme whilst attending a prison-based work activity. Punctuality and regular attendance are strongly encouraged, with failure challenged and sanctions applied. However, Board members have observed at times considerable numbers of prisoners standing around the dormitory areas during working hours, having been sent away from work due to the absence of an instructor or the closure of a workshop, or having been dismissed early from their workplace.

- The prison continues to work to develop an enrichment programme, with an enrichment committee holding bimonthly meetings to pursue this. In addition to activities and opportunities mentioned elsewhere in the report, breakfast clubs for various cohorts commenced again towards the end of the reporting year, although they are now only held at quarterly intervals. Towards the end of the reporting year, the lifeskills course for prison leavers was relaunched, but was reported to have received little interest from prisoners.
- Approximately 50 prisoners work as peer support workers (PSWs) in various roles, and the Board has observed the valuable contribution made by these in many department areas. Frequently they possess valuable skills, in some areas providing guidance or advice, while in others contributing to prisoner achievement through practical tuition support, for example, in the painting and decorating workshop and in education. Staff are very complimentary about the PSWs in their departments. PSWs are encouraged to pursue qualifications which are available at different levels. 41 prisoners have gained a level two award in mentoring since October 2025, and one PSW during the year was motivated by his experience of the role to complete the Award in Teaching and Training. However, at times during the reporting year departments have reported a shortage of PSWs, due in part to prisoner release, and in part to the desire of prisoners to earn more through outwork or more highly paid prison work than they receive as a PSW.
- Prisoners have expressed enthusiasm about the 3Pillars scheme, a project which uses sport to transform lives inside prison and beyond. This has introduced them to both physical and leadership training through rugby.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

Despite the serious challenges presented by the imposed cut-backs, the education department has continued to provide a high level of support to prisoners, with functional skills delivered effectively. Prisoners frequently comment positively to the Board about the support they receive from staff. The library continues to be a welcoming and invigorating environment, with imaginative activities being run. The IMB considers, however, that information technology (IT) availability across the prison still fails to provide prisoners with the IT experience that will equip them for leaving prison.

- Education delivery is commissioned from People Plus, an external education provider. Following the cuts to staff necessitated by funding changes, education was consolidated into one building. The environment is welcoming, with attractive and informative display material, and all areas are accessible for prisoners with mobility issues. However, the change of teaching rooms led to a temporary reduction in IT connections, with effects on teaching and the ability of learners to prepare for online examinations.
- All prisoners upon arrival are assessed to establish their competence in functional skills, and whether they have any specific learning needs. At times during the reporting year there has been a backlog in the completion of these assessments, with resources being allocated to address this. However, education data indicates that whereas only two prisoners arriving since October 2025 did not receive an IT assessment, 50% of those who arrived before this date have not been assessed for IT ability. Prisoners receive a more in-depth subject assessment before starting a mathematics or English course, to establish at what level they should be working.
- It remains the case that a significant number of prisoners arrive at Sudbury with attainment levels in English (14% of prisoners) and maths (17% of prisoners) below the level one (L1) that is required for them to achieve employment outside the prison or receive release on temporary licence (ROTL). At the end of the reporting year there were 12 instances of prisoners who had not reached entry level two (E2) in either English or maths before arriving at Sudbury. In both subjects, a disproportionate number of prisoners below L1 at entry were in the white ethnic group (66% in maths and 72% in English). Given the strides forward many prisoners make during their time at Sudbury, it appears that neither the prisoners themselves, nor previous establishments, have realised that without a level of prior achievement many opportunities in an open prison remain inaccessible.
- A focus on improving attendance rates at education and training activities has resulted in an attendance rate of 90.8% in the last quarter of the reporting year. Failure to attend is challenged and, if necessary, sanctions applied, and successful efforts have been made to reduce clashes with other, legitimate regime activities.
- IMB members regularly receive comments from prisoners who have arrived from more modern prisons where their use of IT was more extensive. Sudbury is technologically ill-equipped by comparison. Prisoners are able to apply for access to Open Borders, which allows the use of computers for specific work projects, and machines are available in the education department and the

library. However, the majority of work and training areas do not have a connection to wi-fi. A course in essential digital skills is run, although at times capacity has not matched demand. Prisoners have been observed to be regularly using the computers constructively for tasks linked to study and for writing CVs, although Board members have on occasion observed prisoners to be viewing unrelated materials, in one instance of an inappropriate nature. The opportunity for prisoners to drop-in for IT assistance was curtailed with the loss of a member of staff, due to changes to education funding.

- The impact of the budgeting constraints was considerable. The effect of these, with five members of the teaching staff being lost, was felt across the education department, with class size being increased, and a broader range of academic levels having to be taught within the class. It also affected the delivery of training for catering qualifications in the Secret Diner (a facility which prepares and serves meals to members of the public). It is very much to the credit of the staff in the department that these changes were accommodated with professionalism and positivity, and that a high level of success in all courses was achieved.
- Support within education for prisoners with neurodivergence is strong; the IMB has observed staff giving encouragement and support, and success rates of neurodivergent and neurotypical prisoners are comparable (93.68% and 91.06% across the 12 months April 2025-March 2026). Despite in some cases having been in custody for several years, many prisoners arrive with a low level of functional skills proficiency and a negative attitude to education, and with the encouragement and teaching they receive, make considerable strides forward in their literacy and numeracy. For example, one prisoner who arrived with a very low level of attainment in English achieved levels E2 and E3 and then went on to achieve levels L1 and L2. It is significant that data indicates that only 2% of prisoners starting courses withdrew for reasons other than transfer or release.
- Prisoners in conversation with the IMB are frequently and invariably complimentary about the approachability of tutors and the support and respect they receive from them, and the IMB has observed well run, purposeful and productive lessons. Tutors in the training areas of bricklaying and painting and decorating are also unanimously praised by prisoners for their guidance, tuition, and general support. Staffing has been stable in education across the reporting year, with absences covered competently. Evaluation of staff performance is carried out regularly, with consistently high results reported and support given where necessary.
- The proportion of prisoners from minority ethnic groups taking education courses is comparable to the proportion of these groups in the prison. Whilst attainment of prisoners from minority ethnic groups is comparable to that of white ethnic groups, there are some differences in attainment within that grouping, of which the education management is aware.
- Prisoners for whom English is not their first language are usually supported by the class learning support tutor, as there is no specific provision for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). With the budgeting constraints imposed in Autumn 2025, it is unlikely that there will be any development of a curriculum designed to meet the needs of prisoners for whom activities focused on employment may be inappropriate.

- Prisoners are encouraged to apply for distance-learning courses, through the Prisoner Education Trust (PET). A number of prisoners study for Open University (OU) qualifications, and prisoners have expressed to the IMB their appreciation for the help given to them by staff in accessing these. However, some prisoners have expressed their concern that the personal study required for such courses is difficult given the facilities and conditions, with shared rooms and limited IT access.
- While many prisoners do not go beyond level one in their studies, 27 courses in mathematics or English were taken by prisoners in the education reporting year of April 2025 to March 2026.
- A creative writing class has run throughout the year. This has been observed by the IMB to be well-led, with prisoners well engaged and encouraged to participate fully in activity and discussion. The librarian was impressed that 21 prisoners submitted contributions to 'Diary Day', a national Mass Observation exercise; these were submitted anonymously, with no incentive for doing so. Three prisoners took part in a six-week programme to encourage reading and creative writing called the Second Chapter initiative, and prisoners have submitted entries to the Derby Book Festival.
- The library service is provided by People Plus and provides books, DVDs, newspapers and magazines, as well as a range of materials required by statute to be available to prisoners. The library is now fully staffed and is a welcoming environment with an attractive layout, and imaginative and topical displays which are regularly changed. It is well used, with a high monthly footfall which in December 2025 exceeded 6,500 visits. The majority of library loans are for DVDs. Stock diversification has included Caribbean and Asian periodicals, but there has continued to be difficulty in attracting prisoners from some ethnic groups to the library.
- Prison policy is to encourage reading across all departments, and the library has made considerable efforts to develop interest in reading through providing books in various areas that prisoners can take away and read. The library has also organised visits from authors, which have proved popular. The Board has observed an impressive level of discussion in the book club, although numbers were small. The purchase of 'quick-read' books encourages those prisoners with limited reading skills; enthusiasm for these has been expressed to Board members.
- Prisoners are encouraged to make family connections through the library, either by using Storybook Dads, where they make a video recording that their children can then watch, or by reading poems with their child through a video link. Delays in getting security clearance for this are reported to be frustrating for staff and prisoners. Numbers using the scheme are, however, small, since once ROTL is accessed, most prisoners have other means of contacting their families.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Prisoners comment favourably about the training and support they receive from many, but not all, instructors in work areas. However, the Board has had concerns during the reporting year at the number of work areas that have suffered temporary closure, leading to a number of prisoners having little or no purposeful activity. It remains the case that at times there have been few workspaces in which to allocate

newly arrived prisoners. The Board has been impressed by the efforts made to increase and diversify outwork opportunities for prisoners.

- The training provision at Sudbury remains largely as it was in previous reporting years. The Rail Track engineering course offered through the education department has been discontinued; however, a rail engineering qualification is now offered to prisoners who are able to access outwork and who are approaching their release date. A number of one-off courses have been offered during the reporting year (for example, dumper truck training, construction bootcamps, and leadership through rugby), and prisoners have also been able to undertake courses in traffic management. However, the forklift truck qualification has barely run during the reporting year due to a shortage of staff.
- Prisoners have commented positively to Board members about the training and support offered by the workshop instructors in many areas. Instructors in painting and decorating and bricklaying, where qualifications are gained, invariably receive praise from prisoners, and Board members have observed the purposeful and constructive environment in both these areas. Instructors in most areas have shown in conversation with Board members awareness of the specific needs of neurodivergent prisoners in their work area. However, the IMB has continued to observe that interaction between prisoners and instructors in the carpentry workshop appears very limited, with prisoners frequently complaining Board members about the nature of the work and the lack of purposeful training.
- The IMB has expressed concern throughout the year at the number of occasions on which prisoners have been sent away from work because of staff absence or work area closure. On occasion, for example with the closure of the wood mill and the carpentry workshop for several months, this has been through technical failures, and in other instances it has been because of staff vacancies, for example with the closure of the garden maintenance department. It has also been observed that the market gardens have been closed on a number of occasions. Whilst the effect of this was to an extent mitigated by a falling prison roll, it still resulted at times in large numbers of prisoners being sent away from their work areas, with no alternative occupation being provided. The Board has concerns about the availability of purposeful activity in workplaces should prison numbers rise to their planned capacity.
- The Recycling Lives project involves electrical equipment being broken down for recycling and can lead to supported placements on release; prisoners here enjoy higher remuneration than in other work areas. There is a waiting list for the workshop for the Sunbelt company, where pay is productivity based, and which also provides welding training. Prisoners are also given work in the kitchens, market gardens, wood assembly workshop, laundry, recycling and as dormitory cleaners. Levels of pay in these work areas are frequently criticised by prisoners in conversation with Board members.
- It remains the case, however, that whilst their work does develop life skills, qualifications to improve prisoners' employability are still not offered in most areas of work. Instructors in market gardens, industrial cleaning and welding were by the end of the reporting year still unable to complete the qualification required to deliver assessment. In the last quarter of the reporting year

prisoners in the kitchens and in the Secret Diner have been unable to complete National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or take any qualification higher than a basic food hygiene course.

- Prisoners are interviewed by a work allocations board on arrival. Boards observed by the IMB continue to be welcoming, constructive and supportive, with advice and encouragement being offered to prisoners in regard to work and education courses available. Prisoners are generally required to undertake six weeks in an allocated work placement before being able to take a position with greater responsibility, and this has caused friction with some prisoners who arrive at the prison having performed certain roles in a previous establishment. Whilst the prison makes serious attempts to place prisoners in situations that will help them in following a career path, this is not always possible, due to the pressure on work placements and the limited range of placements on offer. At boards observed by the IMB, no staff from healthcare were present.
- As in previous years, the Board has been impressed with the work of staff in the resettlement area in seeking to establish effective collaboration with a range of employers to provide employment opportunities for prisoners who are able to work outside the prison. Efforts by staff ensured that none of the outwork placements occupied by prisoners who gained early release were lost, and new outwork providers have been added throughout the reporting year, including in areas such as catering and construction. Prison policy is to provide incentives to prisoners who have been approved for release on temporary licence (ROTL) to apply for outwork placements. By February 2026 90% of prisoners who were eligible for outwork were in external employment.
- Employment data indicates that a high proportion of outworkers retain their jobs upon release, with most of those not doing so choosing to change employment, for example, because of distance of travel. However, in the later months of the reporting year a number of outworkers were dismissed from their jobs for unsatisfactory performance, and it was reported that some employers had expressed concern about the attitude and readiness for work of some of the outworkers starting with them. The prison is considering how far this is due to inadequate preparation for work; for example, the length and depth of the employability course had to be reduced due to the budget constraints imposed on education.
- Board members have again this reporting year rarely observed uniformed or management staff during their visits to areas of work.

7.3 Offender management, progression

It remains the case that many prisoners are having to wait for a disproportionate length of time before they receive approval for release on temporary licence (ROTL). However, the Board is satisfied that, in general, the staff in the offender management unit (OMU) are diligent in their progressing of applications to outside agencies. It is noticeable that prisoner satisfaction with the OMU has increased during the reporting year, with more favourable reports being received by Board members, and fewer complaints to the prison being made by prisoners, and this appears to correlate with improved communication between prisoner offender managers (POMs) and prisoners.

- Once again, it is difficult to overstate the impact of the early release schemes on the offender management unit (OMU), with almost three times as many prisoners being released to home detention curfew (HDC) in the calendar year 2025 as in 2024, and the IMB commends the efficient manner in which staff in the OMU prepared prisoners for these. Despite these pressures, prisoners have reported to members of the Board that they have been receiving their initial interviews with their prison offender manager promptly and within the required timeframe.
- It continues to be the case, however, that Board members listen regularly to the frustration of prisoners who have had to wait an extensive period of time to gain ROTL, and over half the applications from prisoners to the Board during the reporting year were related to sentence management issues. OMU data indicates that during the three months March to May 2026 an average of 100 prisoners each month were waiting in excess of 20 weeks. Whilst many prisoners recognise that delays frequently occur outside the prison, this causes understandable frustration which is reflected in the high proportion of prison complaints over the year from prisoners relating to issues related to this.
- Whilst waiting times for ROTL did not significantly improve, the level of complaints received by the prison from prisoners fell in the second half of the reporting year, and it is noticeable that more prisoners are now speaking more highly of their prisoner offender managers (POMs) than has been the case in previous years, usually because of the level of communication they are receiving. The OMU has taken steps this year to improve communication channels with prisoners through, for example, drop-in sessions. In their contact with staff in the OMU, Board members have invariably found them to be helpful and informative, and are reassured that the majority of prisoners are dealt with fairly and professionally, with the highly complex work required to securely approve applications to release prisoners on temporary licence being time consuming and frequently delayed by the lack of responses from external agencies. If there is an extended staff absence cases are reallocated, and short-term absence is supported by other staff in the working pod, but the Board does have concerns that the complexity of some individual cases means that they are not progressed during short-term absence.
- In too many cases, prisoners have arrived at Sudbury with inadequate OASys (offender assessment system, which evaluates the risks and needs of prisoners) paperwork, which places further demands on staff in the OMU, and has at times resulted in the highly unsatisfactory step of prisoners having to be returned to their previous prison.

7.4 Family contact

The prison hosts 40 family days annually, which offer informal settings for prisoners and their families to spend time together outside of statutory social visit entitlements. Supported by the Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact) and students from Nottingham Trent and Derby Universities, these events are well-attended and highly successful. Feedback is consistently positive, with particular praise directed toward staff support.

- Family members attending these events have frequently expressed concern about the long distances they must travel for a relatively short visit. They note

that the journey is both financially costly and stressful when traveling with children.

- A dedicated visiting session for prisoners with neurodivergent children is now in its second year. The initiative continues to be highly successful and effectively reduces pressure on standard afternoon visits.
- Prisoners can apply for family social video calls; however, it is not clear that all prisoners are aware of this and PACT is intending to promote it around the prison.
- Whilst prisoners in the newer accommodation blocks have phones in their rooms to help maintain contacts with family, prisoners in the older dormitory areas and in the pod accommodation have expressed dissatisfaction in conversations with the IMB about lack of privacy and the limited access to phones.

7.5 Resettlement planning

The preparation of prisoners for release by staff in the Through the Gate hub (TTG) continues to be of a very high standard. The work of the resettlement teams in preparing prisoners for their release continues to be thorough and effective, ranging across employment and accommodation on release, to help with obtaining personal documentation, bank accounts, and dealing with debt. Prisoners are invariably complimentary about the assistance they receive, and outcomes are good.

- The TTG is a welcoming environment, with staff receiving praise from prisoners for the assistance and support that they provide. The attached employment hub is extremely well presented and very informative for prisoners looking to secure employment on release, with an encouraging 'Good News' section. A range of necessary arrangements for life on release is supported by the team, including help with setting up bank accounts, applications for driving licences and passports, debt cancellation and court fines. A digital skills event was organised for prisoners who were approaching release, and was reported to have been well-attended and very successful.
- Staff are very successful at ensuring that prisoners leave Sudbury with accommodation. From data seen by the Board, only one prisoner in the last quarter of the reporting year was released without accommodation, and he had had accommodation arranged but failed to turn up to it.
- A prison survey into prisoner debt suggests that nearly 70% of prisoners face debt issues, either inside prison or upon release, and the TTG provide support through links with organisations like Remedi (for debt within the prison) and CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) for assistance upon release. The DWP (Department of Work and Pensions) meets with prisoners prior to release to arrange universal credit applications to allow for smoother resettlement on release, and this is reported to be running well.
- Strenuous efforts have continued to be made to establish links with employers, and regular sessions are held whereby employers from a range of sectors have given presentations to prisoners, and met with them to discuss career options. Some of these have been observed by Board members to be well attended, with prisoners interested and involved. Prisoners have the opportunity to visit job clubs in a local library, although take-up has been limited. 'Prisoner journey' events also take place, in which former prisoners outline their career development since their release. Employers giving

presentations frequently comment favourably on prisoners they speak to. In the 12 months from April 2025, over 55% of prisoners released from Sudbury were in employment or training six months after their release (excluding those with medical exemptions); in the last three months of the reporting year this rose to over 60% (although this is likely to be a conservative estimate.

- The IMB has noted in previous annual reports that prisoners often find it difficult to open bank accounts whilst still in prison. Staff work hard to ensure that prisoners acquire a bank account, and have explored links with a range of institutions. The linked bank is now Halifax, but they will not activate an account before release, and this is unsuitable for prisoners on outwork. A local credit union has been approached, but will only open savings accounts. Many prisoners are supported to apply for accounts with other banks and are supplied with an identification letter to confirm in person whilst on ROTL, or upon release. Some long-term prisoners can do this on a resettlement adjustment visit (RAV), accompanied by an officer. It is particularly difficult for prisoners with fraud markers against their name, as high street banks will not deal with them; they are forced to turn to online banks.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	11
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	5
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	5
Total number of visits to the establishment	170

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	1	-
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	1	1
C	Equality	0	1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	3	
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	0	3
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	1	-
F	Food and kitchens	2	-
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	1	4
H1	Property within the establishment	3	2
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	16	4
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	1	1
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	7	22
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	1	-
K	Transfers	0	-
L	Miscellaneous	5	1
	Total number of applications	**42**	**39**

Annex A

Service providers

1	Maintenance	Amey
2	Prisoner transport	GeoAmey
3	Canteen	DHL
4	Education	People Plus
5	Through-the-gate services	• DWP • IAG • Pact
6	Library	People Plus
7	Healthcare	• Practice Plus Group • Time for Teeth (dental services) • PPG MSK (physiotherapy and chiropody) • Derbyshire Social Services (social care) • Inclusion (substance misuse service)



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