



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Maidstone

**For reporting year
01 March 2025 – 28 February 2026**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Maidstone is one of three prisons in England and Wales designated exclusively for foreign national prisoners. It accommodates adult male category C prisoners.

The prison's operational capacity was reduced during the reporting year from 613 to 553 as a result of essential in-cell fire safety improvements. At the time of reporting (end February 2026), the average population was approximately 550.¹

As a foreign national prison, HMP Maidstone experiences specific operational pressures including significant language barriers and cultural differences; high levels of anxiety linked to sentence management, uncertain immigration status, and the prospect of deportation or removal; a notably younger population profile; and a complex mix of prisoners, including a notable proportion of prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCOSOs), who live alongside the wider population.

Almost all prisoners are of interest to Home Office Immigration Enforcement (HOIE), which maintains an on-site team. During the reporting year, 87% of prisoners were either removed from the UK directly from the prison or transferred to an Immigration Removal Centre (IRC), compared with 85% in 2023/24. Between March 2025 and January 2026, 13% were released or granted bail into the UK (15% in the previous reporting year 2023/24).

HMP Maidstone is located in the town of Maidstone, with much of the estate comprising Victorian-era buildings, alongside additional structures built in the latter part of the twentieth century. Both its location and the condition of the buildings present ongoing challenges in maintaining a secure, safe, and humane environment.

Executive Summary

HMP Maidstone remained a generally stable and effectively managed category C foreign national prison throughout a challenging reporting year. Despite significant external pressures, including immigration status uncertainty, Home Office case processing delays, language barriers, a younger-than-average population profile, and the management of a notable cohort of PCOSOs within the mainstream population, the prison continued to deliver a safe and effective regime.

Violence and self-harm have reduced significantly, alongside strengthened safer custody arrangements. Oversight of use of force also improved. However, use of force incidents increased significantly, from 120 in 2023/24 to 191 in the 2025/26 reporting year. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) noted the increase during its December 2025 inspection but reported that it was still low compared with similar prisons. HMIP also found that the incidents it reviewed were handled well, demonstrating good, professional communication with prisoners as incidents unfolded.

The Board observed positive staff-prisoner relationships, effective partnership working, and a consistent focus on rehabilitation and key work, supported by innovative initiatives including the AI monitoring tool used to quality assure key work.

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.

The Board's principal concerns continue to relate to factors largely outside the prison's control. Persistent delays in Home Office decision-making remain a significant issue, undermining prisoner wellbeing, progression, and release planning. Continuing staffing pressures within the offender management unit, limited access to offence-focused interventions, and gaps in mental health provision further constrain outcomes for some prisoners. Drone-related security threats also remain a notable risk, despite ongoing mitigation efforts.

Reduced Board membership significantly limited the Board's monitoring activity, particularly in high-priority areas such as reception, education, vocational training, and resettlement. This constraint, combined with the need to prioritise core safety and wellbeing oversight, has reinforced the Board's request to the Minister for prioritised support with recruitment and retention (see section **3.2**). The Board nevertheless maintained constructive engagement with the Governor and senior leadership team.

Overall, the Board considers HMP Maidstone to be a safe, stable, and well-managed establishment, where the principal risks arise from wider systemic pressures rather than local operational failings.

3. Key points

Due to significant challenges with Board complement and limited support, the Board sought and received ministerial approval not to submit an annual report for 2024/25. In making this request, the Board took account of the fact that HMP Maidstone is a safe establishment with effective risk management systems in place.

HMP Maidstone was inspected by HMIP in December 2025, with the report published in March 2026. Following positive feedback from inspectors on the prison's culture, the Governor commenced a secondment in January 2026 to lead a national project on prison culture and effective change. An interim Governor was appointed for an anticipated six-month period. At the start of the reporting year, the Governor was also on secondment, with the prison led by the deputy governor until April 2025.

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- The Board considers HMP Maidstone to remain a safe, stable, and well-managed prison with effective safer custody arrangements.
- Violence and self-harm incidents have reduced significantly compared with the previous reporting year (2023/24).
- Demographic analysis shows that young adults aged 21–29 represent approximately 39–40% of the population at HMP Maidstone, exceeding the national baseline. This younger population profile creates localised demands for targeted young-adult regime interventions (see section 4.3).
- Oversight of use of force has strengthened, supported by a constructive and learning-focused review process.
- Use of force incidents nevertheless increased significantly, from 120 in 2023/24 to 191 during the 2025/26 reporting year. HMIP noted the increase during its December 2025 inspection but reported that use of force was still low compared with similar prisons. HMIP also found that the incidents it reviewed were handled well, demonstrating good, professional communication with prisoners as incidents unfolded. The Board considers the strengthened oversight and learning from local disproportionality analysis important in understanding and responding to this increase.
- Preventing the entry of illicit items, particularly those delivered via drones, remains a significant safety threat despite ongoing security improvements.
- The dedicated foreign national offender (FNO) specialist role has strengthened induction processes and coordination with external agencies.

Fair and humane treatment

- A substance misuse specialist key worker scheme and AI monitoring tool have enhanced internal support capacity and quality assurance (QA) of key work.
- Language barriers and limited access to translated official information may hinder prisoners' understanding of prison processes and equitable access to services.

Health and wellbeing

- The Board's principal healthcare concern continues to be the gap between mental health demand and service capacity, resulting in significant waiting times for psychological intervention and reduced timely access to therapeutic support.
- National shortages of medium- and high-secure mental health beds continue to delay transfers for prisoners requiring specialist care.

Progression and resettlement

- The introduction of SDS40 (the early release scheme for eligible prisoners serving standard determinate sentences after having served 40% of their sentence) and recent changes to the early removal scheme (ERS) have significantly increased pressure on offender management processes.
- Staffing constraints within the offender management unit (OMU) have reduced capacity for timely sentence planning, case progression, and proactive release work.
- Access to offence-focused and risk reduction work remains limited, with inconsistent availability of structured progression pathways, particularly for prisoners serving shorter sentences and those facing immigration uncertainty.
- Backlogs in OASys (the offender assessment system used to assess risk and needs of prisoners) assessments, combined with delays in external decision-making, continue to restrict access to reliable risk information needed for effective release and resettlement planning.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The Board has operated significantly below its recommended complement of 13 members since 2020. At the end of this reporting year, the Board had only four members, two of whom remained within their induction period. This position was significantly worse than that of some Boards serving smaller or less complex establishments in the region and constrained the Board's ability to fulfil its statutory monitoring role. Direct monitoring was particularly constrained in high-priority areas such as reception, education, vocational training, and resettlement (see section 8). The Board therefore asks the Minister to review the fairness and consistency of Board complement (the maximum number of members on Board allocations) across the estate and to direct the Secretariat to provide prioritised and effective support for recruitment and retention in persistently under-strength Boards such as HMP Maidstone.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- What action is being taken to support the establishment of a dedicated drug strategy lead at HMP Maidstone, recognising the benefits this would bring by strengthening strategic oversight of, and accountability for, the prison's drug strategy (see sections 4.5 and 6.6)?
- Can the Digital Prison Service (DPS) platform be updated to include a clear and visible alert identifying prisoners and detained people who require translation support, enabling effective communication and equitable access to services (see sections 4.1, 5.4 and 7.3)?
- What action is being taken to address staffing and wider operational pressures in foreign national prisons arising from the high number of prisoners subject to immigration enforcement, particularly in relation to offender management capacity, sentence planning, and progression through the prison estate (see section 7.3)?
- What plans are in place to ensure category C foreign national prisons have access to accredited offence-focused and risk reduction programmes for prisoners with language barriers and those convicted of sexual offences (see section 7.3)?

TO NHS ENGLAND

- Staffing shortages, alongside increasing levels of trauma-related need and complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD), are reported to have contributed to significant delays in access to high-intensity psychological intervention. What action will be taken to improve capacity and reduce waiting times (see section 6.3)?
- Given the national shortage of medium- and high-secure mental health beds, what measures are being taken to support compliance with the statutory 28-day transfer requirement under the Mental Health Act (see section 6.3)?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- While this report identifies several ongoing concerns, the Board has no additional matters requiring action beyond those highlighted above. Issues raised during the reporting year were addressed promptly, with constructive engagement and positive responses from the Governor and senior leadership team where matters were within their control.

3.3 Response to last report

To the Minister:

Issue raised	Progress reflects the published ministerial response to the 2023/24 report, including the HMPPS comments on matters raised in that report, and the Board's assessment of progress.
¹ To work with the Home Office to ensure that prisoners are only asked to sign official documentation that has been provided in their own language, or in a language they understand.	Some progress. Interpreting is available during appointments, and some information leaflets have been translated. Legal documents are translated into the prisoner's/detained person's preferred language by HOIE staff. The Home Office requires the prisoner/detained person to sign the English version of the document; they are then provided with both the translated document and the English version at the time of signing. The Board will continue to monitor this area (see section 7.3).
² Support to reduce drugs and other illegal items across the estate.	Some progress. Window grilles have been fitted on all wings except the top floor of one wing (see section 4.5). Enhanced gate security remains outstanding, and staff searches remain low (six this year). The Board would welcome an increased frequency of staff and key holder searches as a deterrent measure. The Board notes this as an ongoing vulnerability in physical security controls.

³ Plans to improve purposeful activity offerings and resettlement services for prisoners.	Some progress. The Education Advisory Board (EAB), established in autumn 2024, has yet to deliver visible improvements. The new Creative Woodwork shop and Ragstone Renovations team are positive developments; however, while participation compares favourably with similar prisons and exceeds the local target, this is not yet matched by consistent access to progression pathways, accreditation, and higher-skilled employment opportunities across the population. Resettlement support for UK releases is adequate. However, support for foreign national prisoners facing deportation remains an ongoing issue due to limited validated reintegration information in receiving countries and uncertainty linked to late immigration decisions.
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To the Prison Service:

Issue raised	Progress reflects the published ministerial response to the 2023/24 report, including the HMPPS comments on matters raised in that report, and the Board's assessment of progress.
⁴ Plan to reduce the demand and supply of drugs within the prison estate (including provision of guidance and resources).	Some progress. There is currently no dedicated drug strategy lead at HMP Maidstone. Responsibility for the prison's drug strategy remains within the remit of the head of safety (see sections 3.2 (To the Prison Service) and 6.6). The Board has observed increased emphasis on rehabilitative approaches to adjudications and on expanded therapeutic activity.
³ Provide more meaningful and purposeful activity and resources to expand the soft skills offering.	Some progress. Reading areas have been established and are well stocked on some wings, although usage for prisoner-led activity is unclear. The planned call centre was cancelled, and the bicycle repair shop has not commenced. Planned expansion of functional skills from April 2025 and digital design in the print shop are positive developments. However, overall access to meaningful progression opportunities remains inconsistent across the population and is influenced by staffing and regime constraints (see sections 7.1 and 7.2).
Enable HMP Maidstone to provide a ROTL facility.	No progress. The planned release on temporary licence (ROTL) pilot was not implemented (see section 7.5).
Provide funding for CCTV across HMP Maidstone and enhanced gatehouse security.	(see To the Minister ² , page 8). Some progress. Funding for CCTV upgrade has been approved, with work due to start in summer 2026 and completion expected in June 2027 (see section 4.5). Window grilles have been installed on all wings except the top floor of one wing due to cladding issues. Enhanced gate security was not selected by HMPPS for consideration.
Improve access to translation services for foreign national prisoners.	(see To the Minister ¹ , page 8) Some progress. The digital translation trial ended without replacement (see section 3.2 (To Prison Service)). The Board will continue to monitor this area.

To the Governor:

Issue raised	Progress
Increase the number of officers trained to quality assure UoF incidents to avoid delaying the scrutiny of incidents.	Progress. Use of force (UoF) incidents are now regularly quality assured by a custodial manager. Meetings to review UoF incidents, led by the safer custody governor, are generally up to date (see section 4.4).
Reduce illicit substances and items entering the establishment.	(see To the Minister ² , page 8, and Prison Service ⁴ , page 9) Some progress. Mesh grilles have been installed on all wings except the top floor of one wing. CCTV installation is due to begin early in the next reporting year (see section 4.5). Adjudications (the process used to maintain order and discipline within prisons) now place greater emphasis on rehabilitation, although the impact on drug use is unclear. Supply reduction measures remain partial pending completion of planned security works.
Improve relationship and collaboration with HOIE to ensure better communication with prisoners.	(see To the Minister ¹ , page 8) Progress. The FNO specialist now works between HOIE and prisoners, including inductions, to improve communication (see sections 3.1 and 7.5). HOIE records contact with prisoners and detained people on DPS (see section 7.3).
Continue to increase the quantity and quality of key work sessions and to produce quality assurance information.	Some progress. The Board welcomes initiatives introduced at HMP Maidstone and will continue to monitor their impact on key work delivery (see section 5.3).
³ Work with the Prison Service to secure resources to provide more purposeful activities and expand the education offering.	(see To the Minister ³ , page 9 and Prison Service ³ , page 9) Some progress. Education and industry places have expanded, with improvements in quality and allocation rates. New workshops and the Ragstone Renovations team are positive developments. However, the proposed call centre and bicycle repair workshop have not yet been implemented. Purposeful activity participation is above target and comparable with similar establishments. Access to higher-skilled employment pathways and accredited training opportunities remains variable.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Reception and induction processes are critical for ensuring new arrivals are safely integrated and their needs identified promptly.

Direct monitoring in this area was significantly limited during the reporting year due to the Board's reduced membership. With only four members (two in induction), the Board was unable to maintain the level of routine presence in reception that is possible with a fuller complement (see section 3.2 (To the Minister)). Findings are therefore drawn from visits undertaken, prison information, IMB applications, and targeted discussions.

Reception processes

- Reception continued to manage a high turnover of foreign national prisoners, many subject to immigration enforcement following serious convictions. Around 15% of the population had been convicted of sexual offences and were accommodated within the general population.
- Against this population profile, the Board observed that safety and stability on the wings remained good throughout the reporting year, with prisoners managed effectively within a fully integrated regime.
- Reception is overseen by a custodial manager.
- On one occasion observed by the Board, the duty governor intervened appropriately when missing paperwork was identified during a prisoner's departure. An incoming prisoner reported the reception process had been managed smoothly.

Translation and safeguarding concerns

- Direct monitoring of translation services in reception was limited by the Board's reduced capacity.
- Prisoners arriving with limited English may not fully understand key information provided during reception and induction, including safeguarding-related information. This has the potential to limit the identification or disclosure of safeguarding concerns during the early stages of custody (see section 5.4).
- The Board will continue to monitor the use and consistency of translation services in reception, including whether the need for and provision of translation support is clearly documented (see section 3.2 (To the Prison Service) and section 4.2).
- The Board is concerned that four prisoners arrived without completed assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documentation or evidence of prior review at sending establishments. This gap in documentation may compromise continuity of care and risk management.
- The safer custody governor escalated the issue regionally but was advised that there was limited scope for action within existing arrangements, leading to local implementation of additional arrival checks by custodial managers and enhanced liaison with sending establishments.

Induction arrangements

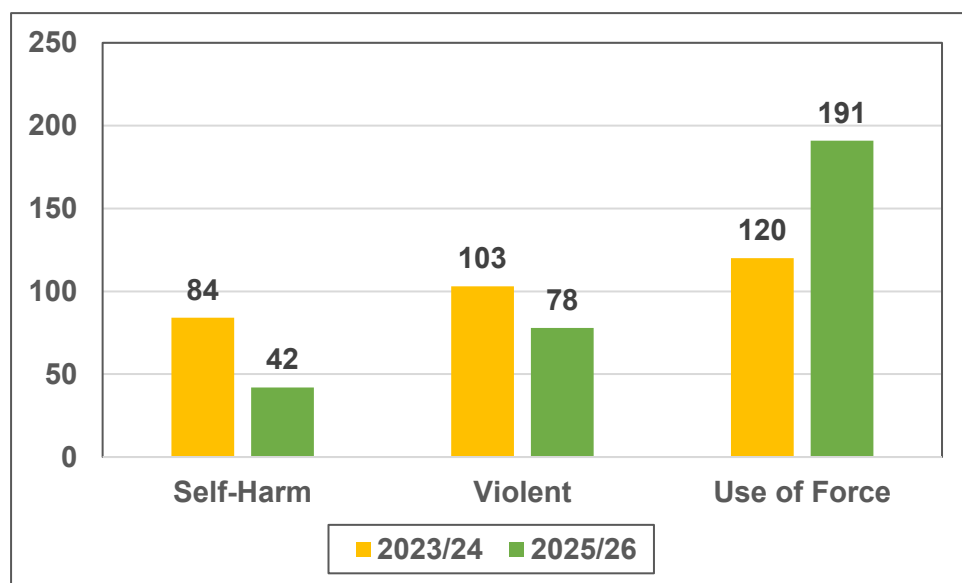
- Induction is managed effectively. Arrivals transfer to the induction wing and attend a full briefing the following morning.
- Briefings include contributions from a range of departments including peer mentors, OMU, Change Grow Live (CGL), safer custody, immigration, resettlement, Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), and activities.
- The FNO specialist role, introduced in April 2025, provides valuable support to new arrivals and contributes positively to induction.

Security measures

- Intelligence-led x-ray body scanning has been introduced. Between March 2025 and January 2026, 484 scans were completed, resulting in three findings of prohibited items.
- The low number of positive findings may reflect deterrence effects or reduced ingress of prohibited items.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Table 1: Key Safety Incident Trends (2023/24 vs 2025/26)



Source: HMP Maidstone local incident records, reporting years 2023/24 and 2025/26.

Self-harm and ACCT trends

National comparator data in this section are taken from the Ministry of Justice's *Safety in Custody Statistics: England and Wales – Deaths in Prison Custody to December 2025, Assaults and Self-Harm to September 2025*, published January 2026.

Threats of self-harm were appropriately responded to, with the well-led and approachable safer custody team working effectively alongside prison and healthcare staff to provide support.

- Recorded self-harm incidents reduced significantly from 84 (reporting year 2023/24) to 42 during this reporting year and remained below the national rate for the male prison estate (652 incidents per 1,000 prisoners).
- ACCTs increased slightly from 121 in 2023/24 to 128, which may reflect earlier identification of risk.

Drivers of risk

- Key triggers included prisoners' statements of self-harm (66 cases), immigration-related uncertainty (32 cases), adjudications (20), wing or cell moves (12), frustration or stress (9), and mental health concerns (7).
- Immigration-related uncertainty remained a significant underlying trigger (see section 7.3), with prisoners reporting that uncertainty around ERS and immigration decisions was, in a number of cases, more distressing than the custodial sentence itself.
- Nine ACCTs were opened for IS91 detainees, individuals who have completed their custodial sentence but are still of interest to the Home Office, indicating heightened vulnerability within this cohort. These cases were discussed at the weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM).

Disproportionality

- Muslim prisoners were disproportionately represented in the ACCT process (57% of cases despite comprising 46% of the prison population), requiring further local analysis.

Quality of ACCT management

- ACCT reviews observed were professional and supportive, with generally good multidisciplinary involvement.
- The Board will continue to monitor the appropriate use of translation services and whether the need for, and use of, interpreters is clearly documented at ACCT reviews (see section 3.2 (To the Prison Service) and section 4.1).
- ACCT documentation quality remained generally good and was subject to weekly QA by a functional governor, and review at the SIM.
- On a small number of occasions, nightly observation patterns appeared to follow predictable routines, which may reduce their effectiveness as observations are intended to be irregular.

Governance and prevention

- The weekly SIM schedule was revised to ensure the relevant audience could attend, with the session duration extended to one hour. The information circulated ahead of each SIM session has also been enhanced to include a trigger spreadsheet highlighting key risk dates, such as significant anniversaries and immigration hearings. The Board notes this as a positive development in preventative risk management.
- The Board regularly attends the weekly SIM. Meetings are well attended with strong multidisciplinary and cross-agency input. Staff demonstrate detailed knowledge of prisoners, and Board members have observed effective collaboration, constructive professional challenge, and reflective discussion. This supports proactive risk management.

- The absence of IMB applications relating to ACCT administration suggested no widespread prisoner concern regarding the process during the reporting year.

Deaths in custody and learning

- The Board records with sadness that there was one apparently self-inflicted death in custody during the reporting year (in April 2025). The Board was notified promptly.
- At the time of reporting, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) report had not yet been published.
- A death from natural causes, which occurred during the previous reporting year (2023/24), was subject to an inquest completed in February 2025. The PPO review identified learning around appropriate referral and care planning for persons with serious long-term medical conditions, review of repeated medication non-collection, effective information sharing between healthcare and custodial staff, and clear arrangements for considering self-sharing for prisoners with life-threatening long-term conditions.
- A near-miss incident reviewed at the subsequent SIM highlighted the importance of effective communication, particularly where language barriers exist, and reinforced the need for appropriate use of translation and interpreter services.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Violence and behaviour management

National comparator data in this section are taken from the Ministry of Justice's *Safety in Custody Statistics: England and Wales – Deaths in Prison Custody to December 2025, Assaults and Self-Harm to September 2025*, published January 2026. Figures represent recorded incidents per 1,000 prisoners and include both minor and serious assaults. One prisoner may be involved in multiple incidents.

- Violent incidents decreased significantly from 103 (reporting year 2023/24) to 78 during this reporting year and remained below the national rate for the male prison estate.
- Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults remained stable at 63 incidents, nine of which were classified as serious. National rate: 248 per 1,000 prisoners (male estate).
- Prisoner-on-staff incidents reduced markedly from 40 (including five serious) to 15. National rate: 119 per 1,000 prisoners (male estate).
- Prisoners under the age of 30 were involved in 61% of violent incidents. Demographic analysis shows that young adults aged 21–29 represent 39–40% of the population at HMP Maidstone, exceeding the national baseline of 22.74% for the same age group. Local disproportionality analysis confirmed that this age group was overrepresented in violent incidents and related disciplinary matters. Both prisoners and staff attributed this mainly to adjustment challenges, greater impulsivity, and reactivity to authority.
- This younger-than-average population profile creates localised demands for targeted young-adult regime interventions. The local disproportionality analysis identified the need for targeted support, including enhanced de-escalation training and five-minute intervention techniques, to improve behaviour management among younger prisoners.

Risk management and intervention

- The Board observed proactive management of gang-related non-associations, including mediation facilitated by a dedicated officer. Improved intelligence gathering and oversight have contributed to effective management of associated risks.
- Sixty-two challenge, support, and intervention plans (CSIPs) were opened and subject to regular review.
- There were no incidents of concerted indiscipline, indicating continued stability within the prison.
- Five prisoners were managed through the complex case review process. Board members attended reviews and observed effective multi-agency collaboration and constructive professional challenge.
- This was particularly evident in the case of a prisoner in segregation for their own protection (see section 5.2), where decision-making remained consistently focused on safety and the prisoner's best interests.

Self-isolation and enhanced supervision

- Sixteen prisoners self-isolated voluntarily, primarily due to perceived threats or following assaults.
- While most cases were managed effectively, prisoners' access to the regime was occasionally limited due to operational constraints or prisoner reluctance to engage. All self-isolators are supported through a CSIP, an approach the Board considers to be positive practice.
- DPS recording of self-isolating prisoners improved during the reporting year.
- The Constant Supervision Unit (CSU), which provides continuous one-to-one supervision for individuals assessed as presenting a serious risk of self-harm or death, was used for 25 individuals, including five who required placement in the unit on two occasions.
- Board observations indicated appropriate use of the CSU and was informed of most admissions and subsequent moves.

Peer support

- The number of peer listeners increased from two to four during the reporting year. While this represented a small increase, overall peer support capacity remained limited and may have restricted availability of informal peer support during periods of heightened need for some prisoners.
- Recruitment remained challenging due to Samaritans eligibility criteria and the impact of early release schemes.

4.4 Use of force

Overview and trends

- Despite reduced violence, use of force incidents increased significantly from 120 in 2023/24 to 191, comprising 33 planned and 158 unplanned incidents.

Disproportionality

- Between October and December 2025, prisoners aged 21–29 accounted for 67% of UoF incidents, despite representing approximately 39–40% of the prison population (see section 4.3).

- Muslim prisoners were over-represented, accounting for 56% of incidents compared with 46% of the population.
- Black prisoners were over-represented, accounting for 30% of incidents compared with 25% of the population.
- White other prisoners were under-represented, accounting for 37% of incidents compared with 43% of the population.
- Local disproportionality analysis identified overrepresentation in use of force incidents among younger prisoners and certain ethnic groups. This may partly reflect an age–ethnicity interaction, with black prisoners more heavily represented in younger age cohorts (59% of black prisoners vs 34% of white). Younger or less experienced staff were also noted as more likely to use formal interventions, while experienced staff favoured de-escalation.
- The Board notes that the repeated involvement of a small number of individuals was an important contextual factor. This does not diminish the value of the analysis. The Board welcomes the prison’s local disproportionality analysis, supports the actions being taken to address overrepresentation, and will continue to monitor how these findings inform future practice (see section 4.3).

Reasons for use of force

- Use of force was primarily reactive, driven by the need to manage immediate risk. The principal triggers were prevention of harm or assault (50 incidents, or 26%), refusal to locate (29, 15%), prisoner-on-prisoner fights (26, 14%), self-harm (14, 7%), and risk reduction application of handcuffs (13, 7%). The "other" category accounted for 59 incidents of UoF (31%) and included incidents involving assaults on members of staff, physical or verbal threats, individuals under the influence, attempted concerted indiscipline, prevention of damage to prisoner property, refusal to transfer, and prevention of escape or absconding.

Restraint techniques and oversight

- Guiding holds were used in 123 incidents and rigid bar handcuffs (RBH) in 90 incidents.
- During the reporting period, all staff had completed retraining in its use, which the Board considers important given the frequency of deployment.
- There were no hospital attendances resulting from UoF incidents, indicating that most incidents were managed without serious physical harm.
- A baton was drawn (but not used) once, and PAVA incapacitant spray was discharged once. The post-incident review concluded that PAVA was deployed appropriately, providing assurance that higher-level force options are used sparingly and subject to appropriate oversight.

Governance and monitoring

- Planned control and restraint interventions observed by the Board were conducted in accordance with the required procedures, with no concerns identified.
- Body-worn video camera (BWVC) was used in 160 incidents, with daily briefings reinforcing correct use and supporting post incident reviews.
- The Board attended UoF meetings, now chaired by the safer custody governor, and observed a developing “*just culture*” approach focused on learning, reflection, and continuous improvement (see section 3.3 (To the Governor)). UoF

reviews are generally up to date, and governance of the process has been strengthened through the introduction of a formal agenda and agreed terms of reference.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

The Board remains concerned about the availability of illicit substances and items within the establishment. This was also identified as a priority in the December 2025 HMIP inspection.

Based on Board observations, attendance at SIM, review of intelligence processes, and operational outcomes, the Board considers the security department to be well managed and effective within a challenging operational environment.

The Board recognises that reducing the availability of illicit substances remains a significant challenge. The prison's drug strategy arrangements are considered further in section 6.6.

Security threats and trends

- Drones replaced throwovers as the primary method of illicit entry, with 24 sightings recorded during the reporting year.
- Significant quantities of contraband continued to be recovered, including mobile phones, drugs, and improvised weapons, indicating ongoing and varied methods of entry and production.

Physical security measures

- Window grilles have now been installed across most of the estate.
- Full coverage on some wings appeared to have reduced drone-related activity, though one area remains vulnerable.
- Full CCTV coverage of the estate remains outstanding and is not expected to commence until summer 2026.

Searching, detection and intelligence

- Dedicated Search Teams (DST), regional search teams, and local intelligence-led searches continued to generate regular finds.
- Intelligence-led searching remained the most effective and proportionate approach to mitigating illicit ingress, particularly given the range of potential entry routes.
- Intelligence sharing and coordinated operational responses were observed during daily briefings and weekly safety intervention meetings (SIMs).
- The Board also observed that the security team was responsive to concerns raised during monitoring activities.
- Cannabis remained the most commonly seized substance, with ongoing evidence of supply linked to drone activity.
- Positive tests for new psychoactive substances (NPS/Spice) averaged 5% and appeared concentrated within a small cohort of individuals.

Mandatory drug testing and trends

- Mandatory drug testing and operational intelligence indicated that illicit drugs remained present within the establishment. While staff were effective in

identifying and targeting suspected users, evidence suggested supply continued, albeit concentrated within a relatively small cohort.

Partnership working

- A range of countermeasures is in place, including a prison-operated drone, window grilles, wall patrols, external signage, and liaison with police, which has resulted in arrests linked to illicit activity.

Staff corruption prevention

- The Board remains concerned about the low frequency of staff and key holder gate searches (only six conducted during the reporting year), which may reduce deterrence (see section 3.3 (To the Minister²)). However, the staff and key holder search observed by the Board in February 2026 was well organised and thorough, and routine visitor searches on entry, also observed by the Board, were conducted in a thorough, courteous, and respectful manner.

Remaining vulnerabilities and concerns

- The visits hall is monitored through CCTV and patrols. Despite these safeguards, visits remain a recognised route for contraband entry. Two finds were recorded during the reporting year: one involving cannabis and tobacco, which resulted in a visits ban, and one involving a charging lead.
- Incomplete CCTV coverage and uncovered areas continued to present security risks.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Accommodation

- The age of significant areas of HMP Maidstone continued to have an impact on the level of maintenance and upgrading required. However, the Board notes a continuing emphasis on cleanliness and decency (including privacy, dignity, and the condition and suitability of accommodation) across the establishment.
- Following a fire audit, operational capacity was reduced from September 2025 pending completion of fire safety works.
- The average population fell from 602 between March–August 2025 to 529 between September 2025–January 2026.
- Operational capacity at the end of February 2026 stood at 553 and was expected to return to 613 once works are completed.
- Accommodation arrangements, including the continued use of double cells, remained unchanged from the previous reporting year (2023/24).
- Wing staff demonstrated a good understanding of which prisoners had personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) in place. However, the Board observed that PEEP information was displayed within wing offices for staff awareness but was also visible to prisoners. The Board is concerned that this compromises prisoner confidentiality and privacy.
- Incremental improvements continued during the reporting year, although much of the estate remains subject to reactive maintenance due to its age and condition. These included Ragstone Renovations (prisoner-led minor works), refurbishment of Thanet wing showers, installation of window grilles on Kent and Medway wings, and commencement of an in-cell fire detection system on Weald wing (from February 2026).
- Five IMB applications relating to accommodation were received. Investigation identified no recurring themes or systemic concerns.

Food

- The per-prisoner meal budget is £3.12 per day (an increase of 12p from April 2025), in line with national policy. This budget covers the prison population and has not kept pace with wider cost-of-living pressures or supplier price increases. This continued to place strain on kitchen resources and limited planning flexibility.
- The kitchen equipment budget remained under pressure due to new food packaging regulations, creating additional constraints on planning and replacement cycles. The Board remains mindful of the potential impact of these pressures on food provision for prisoners.
- Prisoners raised concerns through the community council regarding portion sizes, vegetarian options, menu choice, and occasions where menu selection issues resulted in the default allocation of standard meals.
- Feedback on food quality remained mixed. HMIP survey results (December 2025) found that just over half of respondents felt they had enough to eat most or all of the time, while 21% rated the food provision as very poor. This level of dissatisfaction was also reflected in community council feedback. Food provision will remain an area of ongoing Board monitoring.
- Eight IMB applications relating to food were received. No clear themes were identified given the low volume and varied nature of complaints. However,

prisoners frequently reported supplementing their diet through canteen purchases, particularly those engaged in regular gym activity, suggesting that standard meals may be insufficient for some individuals.

5.2 Segregation

General management and regime

- The segregation unit was well-led, with respectful staff-prisoner interactions and a clear focus on progression and integration.
- Segregation staff demonstrated a good understanding of those in their care and ensured appropriate engagement with external agencies such as CGL, HOIE, and OMU where required.
- Staff endeavoured to facilitate prisoners attending education and other activities, subject to risk assessment and staffing levels.
- Communication with the Board was timely and informative.

Length of stay and performance data

- The average stay in segregation was 8.4 days, a reduction from 10.45 days in the previous reporting year.

Complex cases and system pressure

- At the time of reporting (end February 2026), the longest current stay was 64 days and involved a prisoner with complex needs who had chosen to self-isolate for personal protection and was unwilling to return to a wing. Over time, with staff support, the prisoner progressed from refusing to leave their cell to engaging in showers, exercise, and education and gym attendance under escort. This case illustrated how segregation can, in certain circumstances, provide a stabilising environment that may support gradual re-engagement (see section 4.3).
- Reasons for longer stays included complex needs prisoners, additional or extended cellular confinement days, and prisoners re-categorised from C to B (a higher category for those who are assessed to pose more risk) while awaiting transfer out. Wider system transfer pressures contributed to extended stays.
- The number of prisoners re-categorised from C to B increased from seven (reporting year 2023/24) to 11, with staff mitigating the impact by offering a non-punitive regime, including access to in-cell television, to maintain some normality.

IMB applications

- Four IMB applications were received relating to placement in the segregation unit following either adjudication outcomes or Rule 45 (which allows a prisoner to be separated from the general population for their own protection or to maintain good order or discipline) placements. In all cases, prisoners were directed to follow appropriate formal processes (including adjudication appeals where applicable). Following investigations by the Board, no concerns were identified and all matters were considered appropriately managed. None of the applications related to treatment within the segregation unit.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Wing surgeries

- The on-site HOIE team continued to offer regular wing surgeries. Staffing issues reduced the frequency of surgeries from fortnightly to monthly in January 2026. This reduced prisoners' opportunities to access the team. Subject to recruitment, there are plans to relocate HOIE staff onto the wings to improve accessibility and direct prisoner engagement.

Community council

- Following the end of Kinetic Youth's contract with HMPPS, the business hub manager voluntarily assumed responsibility for the community council and continues to manage it effectively. Maintaining this function has created a substantial additional workload, requiring time to be divided across functions; the resulting workload impact is therefore relevant to note.
- Meetings observed by the Board demonstrated positive interaction, with open and productive dialogue between prisoners and the senior leadership team (SLT). The SLT actively encouraged prisoner participation, including consultation on facilities such as the prisoner information desk area.
- Issues raised during the reporting year included food hygiene, property parcels, delays in outgoing communications, employment pay rates, incentives under the Incentives Policy Framework (IPF), healthcare, ERS queries, regime access, and laundry. Many of these issues resulted in tangible operational changes, including improved food hygiene reinforcement, clarification of parcel policy, and streamlining of outgoing mail processes. The Board considers the community council to be an effective mechanism for prisoner feedback and engagement with the SLT.

Key work

- The Board observed a strong focus on key work (one-to-one sessions to build supportive and motivational relationships between prisoners and their designated staff member) delivery throughout the reporting year, with activity monitored and reported in daily briefings.
- The AI-supported monitoring tool developed at HMP Maidstone has increased quality assurance (QA) coverage from 10% to 100% of sessions, significantly improving oversight of recorded key work quality.
- Monthly QA meetings reviewed challenging cases, and prisoners were invited to provide anonymous feedback. Staff identified as requiring improvement received additional support and supervision, while examples of good practice were recognised at full staff meetings.
- The prison aims to deliver one quality key work session per prisoner per month, subject to staffing availability. Priority is given to prisoners in induction, those with limited English, and those recently moved to segregation (where a session should be arranged within 72 hours), reflecting a risk-based and needs-led approach to key work delivery.
- As part of efforts to strengthen support-focused practice, the prison introduced a substance misuse specialist key worker initiative in September 2025 to supplement external agencies support (such as CGL). This is intended to increase internal support capacity for prisoners with substance misuse needs.

- By the end of February 2026, four officers, including one in segregation, had been trained in addiction and substance misuse awareness. Prisoners requiring additional support were identified through the weekly SIM.
- IMB applications provided one useful indicator of the effectiveness of key work arrangements. Some prisoners and detained people chose to raise concerns directly with the Board rather than through their key worker, despite evidence of regular engagement and recorded sessions. This may reflect varying levels of awareness of the key worker role, a lack of confidence that concerns will be addressed, or a perception that the IMB can provide a quicker resolution. The Board will continue to monitor IMB applications as part of its oversight of key work arrangements.
- Recording of key work sessions on DPS improved in both quality and detail during the reporting year, supported by the enhanced QA arrangements described above.
- The December 2025 HMIP survey found that 61% of respondents rated their named officer/key worker as very or quite helpful, while 19% reported not having a key worker. The Board's observations suggest this most commonly affected recently transferred or newly received prisoners.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Outcomes for prisoners are generally positive, with low numbers of upheld discrimination complaints and evidence from prisoner engagement of awareness of, and confidence in, the discrimination incident reporting form (DIRF) process. The Board considers that issues relating to diversity and inclusion (D&I) are taken seriously across the establishment and that the equalities team is well managed. The Board's assessment is based on its monitoring of complaints, engagement with prisoners and the equalities team, and review of relevant D&I data and reports. The low number of upheld complaints is considered alongside this wider evidence rather than in isolation.

Unless otherwise stated, the information below is drawn from the D&I team's third quarter (Q3) report covering October to December 2025.

Population profile

- The prison population remained diverse, averaging 89 nationalities, with eight nationalities accounting for half of the population. Albanians formed the largest group (15%).
- Data limitations remained in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) identification, as individuals may be reluctant to declare themselves within this protected characteristic. This may reflect previous experiences, perceived stigma or other factors influencing an individual's decision to disclose. However, during the reporting year, the Board received no GRT-related applications, nor were any concerns of this nature raised directly with Board members. This was consistent with the positive feedback received through the prison's protected characteristic forums, including the GRT forum, as noted later in the report (pages 23 - 24).
- Language data remained limited due to inconsistencies in recording dialect variation. However, language information is accessible to staff via DPS.

- The prison has a predominantly younger adult population, with young adults aged 21–29 representing 39–40% of the population. This profile was reflected in violence and UoF data (see sections **4.3** and **4.4**).
- Ethnicity data from February 2026 showed the population comprised: white other (43%), black (25%), Asian (13%), mixed (8%) and other ethnic groups (11%). Disproportionality was evident in use of force incidents across some ethnic groups (see section **4.4**).

Equality monitoring and complaints

- Equality considerations are embedded within adjudication and UoF oversight processes. During Q3, the highest proportion of proven adjudications involved prisoners aged 50–59 (46%). Muslim prisoners accounted for 54% of proven adjudications, compared with 46% of the prison population, while Christian prisoners accounted for 33%, compared with 37% of the population. The Board notes these differences and will continue to monitor potential disproportionality through the prison's equality processes.
- Prisoner location decisions took account of individual circumstances, including wing and cell placement. Where prisoners were the only representative of a particular nationality or language group, this was taken into consideration when deciding their placement, with the aim of reducing isolation.
- Translation services are available to staff, although usage was not fully standardised. This issue is highlighted in section **3.2** (To the Minister, Prison Service) and remains an area for continued monitoring. The Board remains concerned that inconsistent use may affect some prisoners' access to information and services.
- Three DIRFs were submitted during Q3; one was upheld, and all were responded to within the target timescales. The low volume, together with positive feedback from protected characteristics forums, provided supporting evidence for the Board's assessment of the management and handling of DIRFs at the establishment.
- DIRFs were clearly displayed on the wings and in the segregation unit. Plans are in place to introduce orange DIRF boxes to further aid identification and visibility of the process.
- A robust quality assurance process is in place for DIRFs. Cases are reviewed by the equality manager, quality assured by a functional governor, and subject to additional sampling by the deputy governor. All cases are also independently reviewed annually by Seetec (an HMPPS-contracted service provider, providing careers information, advice and guidance to prisoners).
- Prisoner complaints were independently monitored for trends, providing an additional safeguard against potential systemic bias (see section **5.7**).
- The Board received four equality and diversity-related applications during the reporting year. No recurring themes were identified. Where appropriate, prisoners were advised to submit a DIRF if they had not already done so.

Prisoner engagement and inclusion

- Protected characteristics forums operated across the prison and fed into the community council where appropriate. Feedback from these forums was positive and indicated confidence in the DIRF process.

- Conversations with prisoners during Board monitoring also provided positive evidence. For example, some prisoners with neurodiversity needs appreciated being able to talk openly without feeling judged, while some younger prisoners valued the opportunity to suggest ideas for provision that would better suit them, including the reintroduction of art.
- D&I materials, including meeting minutes and presentations, are available in the prison library to support prisoner access to information.

Good practice and developments

- In 2025, the D&I team and digital media team received recognition for joint-working initiatives including a Holocaust Memorial presentation, Black History Month, Mental Health Awareness, and wellbeing events. This included recognition through the Koestler Awards (a charity recognising arts in criminal justice).
- HMIP auditors identified aspects of HMP Maidstone's approach to equality presentations and meetings as examples of good practice.
- HMP Maidstone continues to support foreign national offender veterans, an area of work not commonly represented elsewhere in the prison estate. The prison hosted a visit from headquarters veterans' staff during the reporting year to review and better understand this work.
- Cultural awareness posters and "returning home" leaflets have been introduced in partnership with Seetec to support staff awareness and provide practical information for prisoners returning to their home countries.
- Prisoners requiring social care support were referred to external agencies (see section 6.4).

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Chaplaincy provision

- The chaplaincy team is a visible and consistent presence within the prison, providing structured religious services alongside informal pastoral support. This contributes positively to prisoner wellbeing and the wider prison environment. The service is responsive and engages effectively across departments, reflecting the complexity of meeting the faith and pastoral needs of a highly diverse foreign national population.

Access and prisoner engagement

- HMIP survey data (December 2025) indicated that 76% of prisoners had spoken to a chaplaincy team member, 61% had done so in private, and 89% reported that they could attend religious services if they wished. These findings indicated good levels of access to chaplaincy provision.

Wider pastoral role

- Chaplaincy staff also play an important role beyond formal religious activity, including identifying and supporting prisoners affected by notable global events.

Religious profile and demand

- During Q3, the prison recorded an average of 17 different religions within the population. Muslims formed the largest group at 46% (up from 43% in the

previous reporting year), followed by Christians at 37% (down from 46%). This reflected both changes in population composition and the sustained predominance of Muslim prisoners within the establishment. The religious profile, with Muslims forming the largest faith group, is reflected in the current chaplaincy provision, with an Imam now having overall responsibility for the chaplaincy team. The Board will continue to monitor chaplaincy provision to ensure that the needs of all faith groups represented within the prison are appropriately addressed.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The scheme is designed to encourage and reward good behaviour and constructive engagement with the prison regime. It has three levels – basic, standard and enhanced – with different privileges attached to each level. Prisoners can progress or be moved down between levels according to their behaviour and engagement.

- Q3 2025 D&I analysis indicated that prisoners at enhanced and standard levels broadly reflected the overall population.
- Local disproportionality analysis identified that younger prisoners, particularly Black prisoners in the 21–29 age group, received a higher proportion of negative entries and downgrades, often for minor issues. This younger profile was also over-represented in violence and UoF incidents (see sections **4.3** and **4.4**). Prisoners reported that less experienced staff tended to issue warnings quickly rather than using mediation or five-minute interventions. Staff observed that older prisoners demonstrated greater self-regulation and willingness to engage constructively.
- An incentives forum continued to operate, led by a SLT member, and attended by prisoner representatives from each level. The Board considers the forum a useful mechanism for raising and discussing fairness concerns directly with SLT.
- The Board received one application relating to the incentives scheme during the reporting year, compared with three in the previous reporting year. This may indicate a reduction in issues being escalated through the IMB route. No substantive concerns were identified.
- Low complaint volumes make it difficult to assess perceptions of fairness through formal data alone. The Board therefore places greater reliance on qualitative feedback from forum discussions and wing-level engagement.

5.7 Complaints

Overview and improvements

- The Board welcomes the sustained improvements in complaints handling since the appointment of the current business hub manager in October 2023. Late responses have reduced from 17% to 7%, and overdue complaints are reported in daily briefings, supporting active performance management. These arrangements reflect a well-led and effectively managed business hub.

Volume and nature of complaints

- A total of 1,490 complaints were received during the reporting year (2025/26). After exclusions (healthcare, duplicates, incorrect forms, inappropriate language), 1,404 were deemed valid. Of these, 917 were internal complaints, representing a 39% increase from 660 in the previous reporting year. The increase was largely

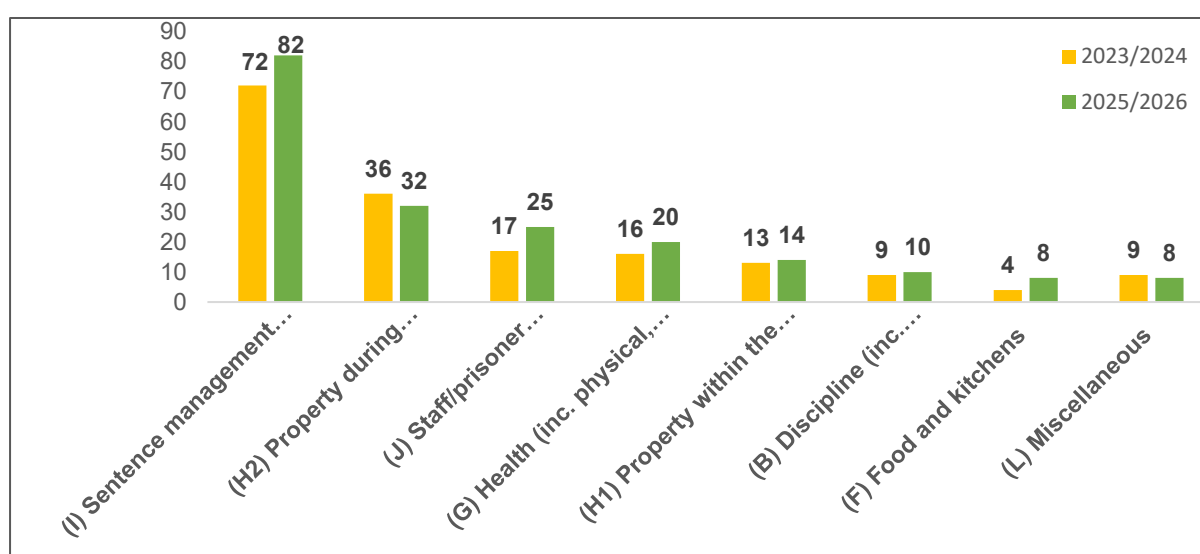
attributable to changes in sentence planning and ERS processes, which generated a significant proportion of the additional complaints.

- 487 external complaints were received.
- External complaints related mainly to other prisons or DHL issues, reflecting the prison's reliance on external services and the movement of prisoners between establishments.
- Local disproportionality analysis showed prisoners aged 30–39 submitted the highest proportion of complaints. Younger prisoners submitted fewer complaints, citing poor written communication skills, lack of understanding of their rights, and perceived ineffectiveness of the process.
- Prisoner complaints are subject to regular quality assurance and trend monitoring. The deputy governor reviews a 10% sample of complaints each month to provide assurance that responses are fair, appropriate and compliant with policy, and to identify any errors requiring action. Monthly complaints data is analysed for trends and reported to the SLT, while the equalities team undertakes quarterly analysis of the complaints database to identify any equality-related trends, with actions assigned to the relevant area where required.
- 15 IMB applications relating to the business hub included private monies (4), post (5), and complaints process issues (6). No clear themes emerged. Responses to Board enquiries about complaints were timely and appropriate.

IMB Applications and themes

- A total of 224 IMB applications were received during the reporting year.
- 85 (38%) were submitted without prisoners and detained people first using the prison's formal general application or internal complaints process. This may indicate varying levels of understanding of the role of the IMB, with some prisoners using it as an alternative route before pursuing formal prison processes.

Table 2: Top 8 IMB Application categories – Comparison Between Reporting Years (2023/24 vs 2025/26)



Source: Independent Monitoring Board for HMP Maidstone monitoring database, reporting years 2023/24 and 2025/26.

5.8 Property

Reception and backlog

- Efforts to clear the backlog of prisoners' property in reception and improve reception processes continued. The backlog, which occurred during the summer period, has since been resolved.

IMB applications related to property

- 14 applications relating to missing property within the establishment (up from 13 in the reporting year 2023/24) were received. No thematic issues were identified.
- 32 applications related to property missing during transfer (down from 36 previously) were received, of which four concerned property missing from police stations, with prisoners directed to Citizens Advice support within the prison.

Wider issues in property management

- Most cases related to property loss during transfers between establishments or during handover between agencies. These cases are often difficult to resolve due to disputed responsibility between agencies, alongside delayed or inconsistent responses, limiting the prison's ability to secure a timely resolution.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Healthcare services are well-led and effectively managed, with provision remaining professional and well delivered. Staff were observed to be approachable, respectful and mindful of patient confidentiality, supporting prisoners to access healthcare in a safe and appropriate environment.

At the time of reporting (end February 2026):

- Confidential healthcare complaints remained low (26 in the reporting year) relative to the population. The Board is not aware of any evidence of systemic clinical concerns. However, it recognises that language, literacy, and awareness may influence reporting levels.
- The total number of IMB healthcare-related applications increased slightly to 20 (from 16 in 2023/24). Following review by the Board, none raised concerns regarding the relevant healthcare processes or provision. Of the 20 applications, three concerned delays in external hospital appointments, compared with five in the previous reporting year (2023/24). Daily oversight by the head of healthcare (HOHC) and prioritisation of urgent two-week pathways continued to support the effective management and timely access to external hospital appointments, although limited external NHS capacity continued to impact timeliness. Further details of the remaining applications are provided in sections **6.2** to **6.4**.
- There were 29 open hospital appointments, of which 11 were still awaiting dates. Waiting times remained variable in some specialties (e.g. 4–6 months for rheumatology and haematology).
- Healthcare supported 520 external hospital appointments during the reporting year, with 512 attended as planned. The eight appointments that were missed were due to escort availability, an operational factor outside the control of healthcare. Healthcare responded appropriately to each missed appointment, with the HOHC providing clinical oversight to assess any potential impact on the individual's care and determine whether further action or an alternative arrangement was required. This provided appropriate clinical assurance and helped minimise any impact on prisoner care.

No healthcare safeguarding referrals were made during the reporting year, and no related concerns came to the Board's attention through its monitoring of healthcare provision.

The Board observed timely and effective responses to Code Red (e.g. severe bleeding/burns) and Code Blue (e.g. collapse, seizure, or loss of consciousness) emergencies. Two prisoners required medical isolation on their wings.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Access to healthcare is good, although language and communication barriers can affect some prisoners' ability to access and understand healthcare, particularly where written information, translated materials or interpreting services are required (see section **5.4**).

Written information and translated materials

- Provision of translated materials remained limited and was largely dependent on national NHS and HMPPS commissioning arrangements, reducing the prison's ability to respond flexibly to local need.
- Healthcare forms and applications were available only in English. Some materials (e.g. vaccination information) were provided in the 10 most common languages, but this did not fully reflect the range spoken within the prison.
- Attempts to introduce multilingual forms have not been successful due to translation requirements for responses.

Interpreter services and clinical consultation

- Consultations (including first night health screens) could not be directly observed due to confidentiality. Assurance was drawn from prisoner feedback, IMB applications, healthcare reporting, and translation logs. The Board therefore relied on indirect evidence and will continue to monitor the consistency and effectiveness of provision.

Clinics and services

- A broad range of physical healthcare services was available, with waiting times within or better than national guidelines. Provision included GP services, routine screening programmes, specialist sexual health clinics, long-term condition management, vaccinations, nurse-led clinics, and daily triage arrangements. Referral pathways were clear and functioning effectively, with access routes varying according to clinical need and service type. The Board considers the provision appropriate to the population at HMP Maidstone, with specialist respiratory/TB (tuberculosis) and hepatitis clinics providing valuable additional support.
- The Board received six healthcare-related applications during the reporting year. Following review by the Board, none raised concerns regarding the relevant healthcare processes or provision.

Preventive screening and vaccination uptake

- Vaccination uptake remained low and is understood to be influenced by cultural factors, health beliefs, and communication challenges, requiring targeted engagement and health promotion activity.
- Secondary sexual health screening uptake was approximately 60%, with most prisoners already screened prior to arrival.

Long-term conditions management

- Individual care plans were in place to support continuity and monitoring.

Discharge and pre-release processes

- Discharge arrangements were generally effective. However, short notice releases under ERS may limit the time available for coordinated pre-release planning and continuity of care arrangements (see sections 6.6 and 7.5).
- Pre-release processes included review of support needs, with medication continuity supported where possible and medication pre-ordered in advance.
- GP registration was arranged for UK releases, including bail cases.

- Discharge planning was managed through a band 6 role rather than a dedicated nurse.

Did not attend (DNA) rates and follow-up

- DNA rates (12–18%) remained comparatively low relative to similar prison settings, with repeat appointments and follow-up arrangements supporting engagement.
- Repeat appointments were offered, written reminders issued, and reasons for non-attendance explored. Prisoners were returned to waiting lists where appropriate.

Health promotion

- Delivered through written materials and face-to-face engagement; however, difficulties recruiting peer workers limited opportunities for wider prisoner-led support.
- Healthcare staff attended prison forums as required and responded to issues raised.

Pharmacy key processes

- Pharmacy systems appeared robust and continued to support safe prescribing, risk-management of medication administration and continuity of treatment.
- In-possession medication was issued monthly following risk assessment, taking account of compliance, medication type, substance misuse history and other relevant factors. Reviews were undertaken following medication changes, incidents, or at regular intervals.
- Medication queues were observed to be orderly and well managed.
- A missed-dose protocol was in place, with weekly notifications to the HOHC. Missed doses of critical medication triggered clinical review and follow-up where required.
- Weekend non-stock medication and FP10 prescription (standard NHS prescription) arrangements generally supported continuity of treatment requirements, which was particularly important in a prison without inpatient healthcare facilities.
- Monthly pharmacy clinics reviewed polypharmacy (the use of multiple medicines by one person at the same time) and medication suitability, with GP involvement where appropriate.
- Pharmacy staffing included three band 5 technicians (two full time equivalents), supported by a pharmacist based at HMP Rochester who visited monthly.
- Three IMB applications related to medication were received during the reporting period. In each case internal healthcare processes had not been used prior to submitting applications to the IMB, and no systemic concerns were identified.

Dental services

- Three clinics were held weekly, with waiting times of approximately 4 weeks for new prisoners. Two slots were reserved in each clinic for emergencies.
- Two dental-related IMB applications were resolved before escalation.

6.3 Mental health

Mental health services are well-led and well-integrated and continue to be delivered consistently despite rising demand and clinical complexity. The range of interventions has expanded since the previous reporting year (2023/24); however, sustained demand for trauma-informed and specialist psychological support continues to place pressure on provision (see section 3.1 and section 3.2 (To NHS England)).

Staffing and resources

- The mental health in-reach team (MHIRT) is visible, approachable, and actively engaged in ACCT, good order or discipline (GOoD), and complex case reviews.
- Prisoner feedback to the Board was consistently positive.
- In the previous reporting year (2023/24), clinical psychology services commissioned by healthcare providers were fully staffed and waiting times were more manageable.
- At the time of reporting (end February 2026), the service comprised approximately 4.2 full-time equivalent clinical staff. The prison population is around 550 prisoners with complex and varied needs.
- The team included: three mental health nurses; one band 8a psychologist; one band 8c psychologist; one assistant psychologist; one trainee counsellor; and one counsellor/psychotherapist. A band 3 healthcare assistant post remained unfilled due to maternity leave.
- Psychiatrist input was provided weekly.
- Current staffing levels appeared insufficient to meet the volume and complexity of need, as evidenced by lengthy waiting times for some interventions.

Caseload and clinical complexity

- Nurse caseloads averaged approximately 16 prisoners.
- Psychology caseloads for services commissioned by healthcare providers ranged between 19–21.
- Clinical complexity remained high, reflecting the prevalence of trauma histories, immigration-related stress, and substance misuse across the population.
- Five prisoners were managed under the care programme approach (CPA), reviewed every six months.
- The nurse-led neurodevelopmental pathway supported 12 prisoners.
- Demand for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) assessment and support continued to increase.
- A rolling ADHD support group accommodated up to six participants; six prisoners were awaiting DIVA-5 (Diagnostic Interview for ADHD in adults) assessment, and four were either receiving or awaiting medication following psychiatrist review.

Trauma and psychological interventions

- Waiting times for high-intensity trauma treatment (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing – EMDR, minimum 18-week duration) reached up to 46 weeks. The Board is concerned that delays may result in some prisoners not accessing treatment in custody or not completing treatment prior to release.
- Low-intensity individual interventions had a waiting time of approximately 15 weeks.

- Low-intensity group programmes (e.g. emotional coping skills) ran monthly with 6–8 participants but remained heavily oversubscribed with 70–80 referrals.
- Acceptance and commitment therapy groups for immigration-related stress were delivered every two months, with around nine-week waits.
- Waiting lists included repeat referrals following non-attendance. Additional support included psychology reviews by healthcare commissioned psychologists, and one-to-one sessions. Referrals to activities (e.g. gym, yoga) were available via the activities process.

Personality disorder and complex need

- There is no formal offender personality disorder (OPD) pathway.
- Support was provided through a needs-led, trauma-informed multidisciplinary approach involving MHIRT, OMU, and safer custody teams, including ACCT and CSIP processes.

Secure transfers

- No secure transfers occurred during the reporting year, although one referral was pending at the time of reporting (end February 2026).
- The Board remains concerned about national shortages of secure hospital bed capacity and the impact on timely transfers for prisoners requiring acute mental healthcare (see section 3.1 and section 3.2 (To NHS England)).

Systems and governance

- Previous (reporting year 2023/24) systems and prescribing access issues had been resolved.
- Most team members now had access to DPS.
- The Board received four mental health-related IMB applications. While these raised individual issues, none raised specific concerns regarding mental health processes or the provision of mental health services.

6.4 Social care

- Social care provision is generally responsive for the small number of prisoners requiring support, although limited infrastructure constrains longer-term care delivery, particularly in relation to adapted accommodation. At the time of reporting (end February 2026):
- Ten prisoners had been referred for social care assessment during the reporting year, with assessments typically completed within two weeks.
- No prisoners required full ongoing social care packages; however, practical support was provided where needed, including buddy allocation, assistance with meals, hygiene support, and PEEP reviews.
- Referrals were primarily identified through wing staff and D&I processes and were generally responded to promptly (see section 5.4).
- Adapted accommodation remained limited, with only one designated disability cell available, restricting flexibility when responding to changing mobility or care needs.
- Two prisoner buddies were in post, supporting daily living needs under supervision.

- Two IMB applications were received; one was not substantiated, and the other was resolved satisfactorily with input from prison staff and Government Facility Services Limited (GFSL).

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

- The prison continues to make sustained efforts to maintain a consistent regime; however, staffing limitations constrain opportunities for expanded purposeful activity and increased time out of cell. At the time of reporting (end February 2026):
- Unlock times were differentiated by status and activity: prisoners in full-time education or work received approximately 7.5 hours out of cell, those in part-time employment around 5.5 hours, and unemployed prisoners approximately 4 hours. All prisoners received 30 minutes of morning exercise.
- Enhanced prisoners received one additional evening association session per week, with plans to increase this to two sessions, and had access to the gym three times per week, including evenings. Standard and basic prisoners had access to the gym twice weekly.
- Association areas were generally well used and maintained, supporting social interaction and constructive use of time out of cell. Enrichment activities (see section 6.7) were positively regarded but remained constrained by staffing capacity and wider regime pressures.
- PE provision included a gym, sports hall, and all-weather pitch offering a range of sports activities. However, with only four PE instructors, opportunities beyond scheduled sessions remained limited, restricting flexibility to expand provision.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The drug and alcohol service (run by CGL) remains well-led and effectively delivered, providing a range of clinical and psychosocial interventions in partnership with healthcare and prison services.

Staffing, caseload and engagement

- The service is staffed by a team leader and three recovery workers, supported by oversight from the West Kent Cluster service manager. Connecting Communities also provides monthly pre-release support.
- Caseloads ranged from 60 to 85 prisoners (down from the average of 100 in 2023/24). Referrals were typically seen within one week.
- Engagement was good, although some prisoners receiving opioid substitution therapy (OST) declined psychosocial support. Contact with recovery workers was typically monthly and adjusted according to individual need.
- Peer mentor capacity remained unavailable due to recruitment challenges linked to eligibility criteria.
- Security intelligence relating to suspected substance misuse was shared regularly across relevant teams.
- The Board received consistent positive feedback from prisoners about the support they received from CGL.

Clinical and psychosocial provision

- Clinical treatment included OST, managed by healthcare with structured prescribing reviews at 5 days, 28 days, and 13 weeks.
- Psychosocial support was delivered by recovery workers, although uptake varied, with some prisoners engaging only in clinical treatment.
- Clinical pathways were well established, although limited psychosocial engagement may reduce opportunities to support sustained recovery outcomes.

Group work and interventions

- Interventions included one-to-one support, in-cell workbooks, and a broad range of group programmes. These included alcohol brief interventions, foundations of rehabilitation, relapse prevention, substance awareness sessions, pre-release support, criminal records workshops, relaxation and breathwork sessions, and social prescribing initiatives, including virtual reality activities.
- Additional initiatives under exploration included cold-water therapy and practical skills sessions such as soup and bread making.
- The range of interventions had expanded since the previous reporting year. Group attendance remained variable, with some prisoners opting for alternative regime activities such as gym sessions, which may reduce opportunities for sustained rehabilitative engagement.

Mutual aid

- Weekly Alcoholics Anonymous and self-management and recovery training (SMART) continued. Narcotics Anonymous remained paused following a previous security issue, although work is ongoing to reintroduce Cocaine Anonymous.

Naloxone

- Staff uptake of training had improved; however, prisoner access remained limited, largely restricted to those receiving or with a history of OST. This may reduce preparedness for relapse and overdose risk following release.

Multi-agency working and drug strategy

- The Board welcomes the renewed focus on the prison's drug strategy during the reporting period. Responsibility for the drug strategy remains within the remit of the head of safety, with governance strengthened through the introduction of well-attended monthly drug strategy meetings (previously held quarterly), clear action planning, closer joint working with CGL, the rollout of naloxone, and the introduction of work-based drug testing.
- Work-based testing involves the monthly testing of prisoners in red-band positions to ensure compliance with their compact.
- The Governor has advised that he will continue to pursue the case for a dedicated drug strategy lead to build on these developments. The Board will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these arrangements. The absence of a dedicated drug strategy lead is addressed in section 3.2 (To the Prison Service).
- Progress had been made in addressing earlier HMIP/CQC (Care Quality Commission, the independent regulator of health and social care services) concerns (2022). A room within healthcare had been approved for CGL

relocation, with phone lines, IT access, and migration to SystmOne (supporting shared clinical records) underway.

- Working relationships between healthcare, mental health, safer custody, and security teams remained strong. CGL attended daily Oxleas (the primary and mental healthcare service provider) handovers, weekly SIMs, and joint reviews.
- Invitations for CGL to attend ACCT, CSIP and GOoD reviews were inconsistent, with some reviews occurring without their input due to late invitations. This may limit fully informed multidisciplinary decision-making.

Release planning

- Connecting Communities discusses community options and makes referrals for last-minute releases, including short notice ERS departures. CGL informs community teams.
- Short notice release arrangements affected continuity of substance misuse support, pre-release harm reduction planning and throughcare. This may increase post-release relapse and overdose risk (see sections **6.2** and **7.5**).
- Information prepared for individuals returning overseas had not yet been fully validated against the services available in relevant countries of return. This may limit its effectiveness in supporting this cohort.

6.7 Soft skills

Provision and purpose

- A range of wellbeing and creative activities support emotional wellbeing, confidence, communication skills, and constructive engagement in custody.
- Current provision included weekly guitar lessons, choir sessions (“Maidstone Jammers”), Storybook Dads, and externally funded creative projects including animation workshops.
- Guitar lessons combined structured teaching with in-cell practice through guitar loans. Choir sessions developed confidence, teamwork, and social skills.
- Storybook Dads and animation workshops supported family relationships and communication skills, which is particularly valuable for foreign national prisoners with families overseas.

Participation and engagement

- Guitar sessions (maximum 12 prisoners) ran weekly and had a waiting list. Choir sessions typically attracted 8–14 prisoners per week. Animation workshops have been delivered as intensive full-day programmes on two occasions.
- The Board received consistent positive feedback from prisoners and staff regarding the value of these activities for self-expression, emotional wellbeing, and constructive use of time.
- Strong prisoner demand has led to plans to reintroduce art provision. Informal peer support was a consistent feature of sessions.

Access and support

- Prisoners accessed activities through applications to the activities department or referrals from internal departments (see section **6.3**) and partner agencies, with no formal eligibility criteria in place. The Board found the range and variety of

activities provided good opportunities to support prisoner well-being, with access open to all.

Challenges and development

- Resource and funding limitations affected the continuity and expansion of activities. These constraints limit continuity of provision (e.g. yoga ceasing in April 2026), replacement of resources such as guitars, and expansion of successful programmes, with particular pressure on equipment availability.
- Despite this, the prison is actively pursuing external partnerships and funding opportunities to sustain and develop this area, with continued support from senior leadership. The Board notes the positive contribution these activities make to wellbeing and rehabilitation and supports the prison's efforts to secure sustainable funding and resources.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

Education remains a significant area for oversight given its importance to progression, communication, and resettlement outcomes (see section 3.3 (Minister³, Prison Service³ and Governor³)). Direct monitoring in this area was limited during the reporting year, reflecting the Board's reduced monitoring capacity (see section 3.2 (To the Minister)). Findings are therefore based on visits undertaken, prison performance data, IMB applications, and stakeholder feedback.

Education provision

- Services are delivered by Milton Keynes College (MKC), with a focus on practical English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and employability provision suited to the prison's short-stay foreign national population.
- Many prisoners arrived with limited English, which may affect communication, access to services, and engagement with education and other regime activities (see section 5.4).
- The curriculum provides learning routes from entry-level ESOL and functional skills through to higher-level accredited and vocational qualifications, particularly in catering and construction. Digital media, digital newsletter (see section 5.4) and mathematics courses are also run.
- The Board noted the reorganisation of prisoner pay rates to incentivise attendance in education and observed an increase in attendance.

Staffing

- At the time of reporting (end February 2026), the prison had been without a substantive education manager for over eight weeks. Interim support was provided by MKC's regional manager, while the deputy manager was serving notice. A new Head of Education, Skills and Work took up post in November 2025.
- While day-to-day course delivery was not reported to have been significantly disrupted, the Board will continue to monitor the impact on operational consistency and outcomes for prisoners in terms of access to education.

Performance

- The recent Ofsted inspection rated overall effectiveness, quality of education, personal development, and leadership and management as **"Requires Improvement"**. Behaviour and attitudes were rated **"Good"**.
- The Board received only one education-related application during the reporting year and, following consideration and any necessary enquiries, identified no concerns regarding the relevant processes or provision.

Library and reading support

- Kent Library Services supplied materials in multiple languages, along with DVDs and music CDs. Prisoners received a free book on their first night in custody.
- Reading levels were assessed at induction, with priority given to non-readers and emergent readers. Literacy support was now embedded across the wings and learning areas.
- Tailored literacy and numeracy support was provided by the Shannon Trust.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Vocational training and work remain important for developing employability skills, supporting progression, and aiding resettlement outcomes. As stated in section 7.1, direct monitoring in this area was limited during the reporting year (see section 3.2 (To the Minister)).

Overall participation and performance

- Purposeful activity performance saw around 79% of prisoners engaged in vocational training or work for at least half their time between April 2025 and March 2026. This exceeded the locally set 63% target and compared favourably with similar prisons (*these figures are based on the establishment's April–March reporting cycle and therefore do not align exactly with the Board's reporting year of 1 March 2025 to 28 February 2026*).
- Attendance was high, often reaching 82–90% on days when workshops were fully open.
- The prison's practice of over-allocating places by around 10% helped maintain numbers despite absences.
- Staffing pressures and regime limitations continued to present challenges to the consistent delivery of activities in some areas.

Vocational pathways and employability

- Vocational provision continued to provide practical workspace experience across a range of areas.
- Roles included grounds/recycling (combined team), Ragstone Renovations, printshop, tailors, creative woodwork, kitchens, staff mess, laundry, and cleaning skills.
- Placements in grounds maintenance and recycling supported skill development in horticulture and waste management.
- Ragstone Renovations developed maintenance and assembly skills relevant to landscaping, facilities work, and environmentally focused employment pathways.
- Many roles remained relatively basic and entry-level, with variable access to accreditation and structured training opportunities.
- The proposed 2025 call centre project did not proceed. The Board notes this would have provided an additional higher-skilled employment pathway focused on communication and administrative skills (see section 3.3 (To the Minister ³, Prison Service ³ and Governor ³)).

Peer support and prisoner experience

- Peer mentor roles continued to provide opportunities for responsibility, confidence-building, and personal development.
- Prisoners spoke positively to Board members about the support provided by instructors in some vocational areas. Recycling, gardens, creative woodwork and tailors were highlighted particularly positively, with prisoners receiving assistance from instructors with completing forms, dealing with immigration matters, and addressing safety concerns.

Wing work and barriers to progression

- Roles included cleaners, servery workers, orderlies, and peer mentors.

- Some wing-based work remained repetitive and offered limited structured learning opportunities.
- The 28-day ban following dismissal from work or education disrupted continuity and affected prisoners' ability to complete longer-term training pathways.

Barriers for non-English speakers

- Limited ESOL provision may affect some prisoners' understanding of job requirements and safety instructions, particularly in vocational areas such as Ragstone Renovations and grounds work.

Sentence length limitations and progression

- Access to sustained activity can be limited for some short-sentence prisoners because of induction periods, waiting lists, or the 28-day rule.
- Longer-serving prisoners fare better but would benefit from clearer routes into external training, ROTL or community placements.
- On average, around 100 prisoners remained out of education or work at any one time, mainly due to refusal to engage, waiting lists or the post-dismissal period.

Overall

- Purposeful activity outcomes compared favourably with many similar establishments, supported by high participation rates and a broad range of vocational opportunities.
- While overall participation in purposeful activity remained high, access to structured progression pathways, accreditation, and higher-skilled opportunities was variable across the population. As a result, participation levels did not consistently translate into progression outcomes.
- Only two IMB applications relating to purposeful activity were received during the reporting year, with no emerging concerns identified.
- Opportunities remain to strengthen ESOL support and links between wing work, accredited training, and structured progression pathways within the prison.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The Board remains concerned about ongoing pressures affecting offender management and progression. These include staff instability, increasing administrative demand, immigration-related complexity, and limited constraints in risk reduction provision. These factors continue to place pressure on sentence progression, risk management and release planning, despite the commitment and professionalism of staff (see section 3.2 (To the Prison Service)).

OMU capacity and staffing pressures

- Staffing levels remain unstable due to turnover, retirements and recruitment difficulties, resulting in reduced continuity within the OMU team. To help alleviate these pressures, the Governor has supported a proactive recruitment campaign aimed at improving staffing stability and resolving longer-term workforce issues within the department.
- Despite these pressures, the Board finds the OMU to be well-led, committed, responsive, and supportive. However, current staffing arrangements appear unsustainable in the longer term. The Board considers these pressures to reflect

structural resourcing issues rather than the performance or effectiveness of the current team.

- The introduction of SDS40 in September 2024, and ERS changes (from 23 September 2025) has substantially increased pressure on the OMU through earlier release eligibility, high volumes of sentence recalculations, and closer coordination with probation and HOIE. Despite this increased workload, the changes resulted in only two additional releases into the UK across both tranche dates, representing limited operational benefit locally relative to the additional administrative and coordination demands placed on staff.

OASys assessments

- Many prisoners continue to arrive without a completed OASys, particularly those transferred early from category B local prisons.
- Although 48 assessments were completed in January 2026, the backlog reduced by only eight, indicating that demand exceeded available capacity.
- Agreement had been reached to exempt most ERS cases from routine OASys completion, except for higher-risk cases, including Schedule 15 offences (a specified serious violent or sexual offence), MAPPA (multi-agency public protection arrangements) cases, and child safeguarding concerns.
- While this exemption may alleviate immediate workload pressures, the Board remains concerned that it reduces the level of formal risk assessment undertaken for some prisoners. As a result, relevant changes or risk factors may not be identified, particularly given the complex case mix.

Risk reduction and sentence progression

- Provision for treatment and risk reduction work remains limited across offence types, including a notable number (around 15%) of PCOSOs (see section 3.1). Access to risk reduction and offence-focused interventions varies and is particularly restricted for PCOSOs due to limited accredited programmes and structured intervention pathways.
- The prison does not deliver accredited programmes addressing offending behaviour, and many prisoners arrive with outstanding sentence plan targets. Staffing shortages have further limited one-to-one work to support progression and risk reduction. This gap is likely to hinder effective risk management and long-term resettlement outcomes.
- The Board has raised this issue as a formal recommendation to the Prison Service (see section 3.2 (To the Prison Service)).

Release Planning and ERS

- Although the majority of prisoners were deported, 13% were released into the UK, a slight decrease from 15% in the previous reporting year (2023/24).
- Release planning continues to be constrained by late decision-making and difficulties securing accommodation. No prisoner was released with no fixed abode (NFA), but appropriate accommodation in advance of release remains challenging in some cases.
- ERS supports earlier removal from custody but is not an automatic entitlement. Some prisoners are ineligible due to outstanding legal matters, POCA (Proceeds of Crime Act), behavioural issues in custody, or other exclusions.

- Around a third of the population expressed an interest in ERS at any one time, although not all were eligible. In January 2026, 415 prisoners were within the ERS window. Of these, 81 prisoners either left custody through deportation, were released under ERS, or transferred to an IRC.
- Delays arising from unresolved legal matters, outstanding documentation requirements, and late Home Office decision-making continue to affect sentence progression and release planning, particularly where immigration matters remain unresolved close to release dates. For prisoners and detained people, this can create prolonged uncertainty about their future, affecting wellbeing and limiting their ability to prepare for release or removal.
- As noted in section 4.2, immigration-related stress was the most common trigger for opening an ACCT (32 cases), demonstrating the operational impact of immigration processes on prisoner management and support needs.

IS91 detention

- Between January 2025 and January 2026, an average of nine individuals were held under IS91 authority, i.e. for administrative purposes in relation to immigration enforcement, rather than in connection with criminal justice proceedings.
- Continued detention was linked to several factors, including limited IRC capacity, lack of availability of suitable accommodation, and ongoing risk assessment considerations associated with the nature of the index offence.
- These prolonged periods of detention presented management and welfare challenges within this cohort (see section 4.2).

HOIE

- Although HOIE does not fall directly under the Board's monitoring remit, the Board noted the immigration prison team (IPT) to be visible and approachable.
- The Board remains concerned that some prisoners and detained people do not consistently receive or fully understand Home Office immigration documentation in a language they can readily understand. While interpreting services are available, this may limit full understanding of decisions affecting their status and progression (see section 3.3 (To the Minister ¹)).
- Communication with HOIE improved through the recording of prisoner and detainee contact on DPS, providing greater visibility of interactions and actions taken (see section 3.3 (To the Governor)).

IMB Applications

- Applications relating to offender management and immigration matters accounted for the largest proportion of IMB applications received during the reporting year (82 applications, 36.6% of the total).
- Main themes included ERS queries, delays and cancellation of removal flights, clarity of information, categorisation, sentence calculation, appeals, and outstanding charges.
- OMU and HOIE staff were consistently helpful, approachable, and responsive to Board enquiries. However, many applications were submitted directly to the IMB without prisoners first using OMU or HOIE application and complaints processes, making it difficult to distinguish between internal service pressures and wider

external factors (SDS40, ERS changes and Home Office decision-making pressures).

- Only one application relating to prisoner transfer was received, compared with five in each of the previous two reporting years.

7.4 Family contact

Family contact provision is positive and well supported. The Board welcomes the work of the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) and recognises the efforts made locally to support family relationships within the constraints of the prison regime. The Board notes that maintaining family contact can be more complex for prisoners with families overseas, due to factors including the cost of international communication, time zone differences, and regime constraints. While largely outside the direct control of the prison and PACT, these factors can affect the consistency and frequency of family contact for this group.

Service Delivery

- Family support services are delivered by PACT.
- The visits hall is welcoming, well-maintained, and includes a children's play area.
- Social visits take place four afternoons per week (including weekends), lasting two hours.
- Eight Family Days (four-hour extended visits) were held during the reporting year, mainly in school holidays. Demand for these sessions exceeded available capacity.

Staffing

- There was a staffing transition during the reporting year. The previous coordinator left in late January/early February 2026.
- Services were maintained during the interim period by a student placement with one-day-per-week in-person support from colleagues at nearby prisons plus email and telephone cover.

Additional Means of Contact

- In-cell telephony was widely used, although the cost of international calls remained a barrier for some prisoners.
- Video calls are available but were constrained by prison regime hours, which can limit availability for families in different time zones.

Compliance

- The prison achieved full compliance in the February 2026 Family and Significant Other audit (72 metrics), with full marks in every area.

PACT Additional Support

- One-to-one courses relating to relationships, parenting, and resettlement took place.
- Enrichment sessions were held every couple of months for prisoners who do not receive visits.
- Assistance with family court applications and family tracing referrals was available.

- General signposting and practical support were available to help prisoners maintain and re-establish family ties.
- No IMB applications relating to visits or family contact were received during the reporting year.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Resettlement planning at HMP Maidstone remains complex due to the prison's population of foreign national offenders, language barriers, immigration uncertainty, and increasing use of short notice release arrangements, requiring coordination across multiple agencies. Direct monitoring in this area was limited during the reporting year due to the Board operating well below its recommended complement (see section 3.2 (To the Minister)). Findings are therefore based on visits undertaken, prison performance data, IMB applications, and stakeholder feedback. The relatively low number of applications to the Board did not identify any recurring concerns about resettlement provision; however, the limited volume of applications is not in itself a measure of service effectiveness.

Resettlement planning and support

- Resettlement planning begins at induction, supported by the Prep 4 Release booklet, which is used to identify individual needs at an early stage and facilitate referrals across the established resettlement pathways.
- Ongoing delays in Home Office decision-making created challenges for release planning (see section 3.3 (To the Minister³) and section 6.6).
- Short notice releases, including ERS arrangements, can limit opportunities for coordinated pre-release planning and continuity of care, particularly for prisoners and detained people with ongoing mental health, substance misuse, or medication needs. This reduces the time available for structured resettlement preparation and continuity planning prior to release.
- A FNO specialist is embedded within the resettlement team (see sections 3.1 and 3.3 (To the Governor)) supporting prisoners through inductions, ACCT reviews, and applications, and providing general support to prisoners and detained people. The specialist attends SIMs, facilitates focus groups including International Returns and Reintegration Assistance (IRARA), and provides ERS guidance. They also deliver FNO awareness training to staff, and report data to headquarters on barriers to ERS removal.
- Prisoners are managed either as UK release cases or under ERS, with different review processes depending on status. UK release prisoners are booked for face-to-face reviews approximately three months prior to their conditional release date. ERS prisoners are reviewed by peer mentors three months before their early removal scheme eligibility date or as soon as possible after transfer to HMP Maidstone.
- The probation pre-release team provides targeted support to foreign national prisoners with shorter sentences (up to 20 months) who are not managed under Offender Management in Custody processes, acting as an important link between prisoners and external agencies.
- Practical support is provided by the resettlement team and partner agencies, including assistance with phone calls and correspondence with banks, creditors, embassies, and local authorities. Partner agencies include the Citizens Advice

(CA), Prisoners' Advice Service, Bail for Immigration Detainees, Kent Refugee Help, and the Department for Work and Pensions.

- CA services were heavily utilised (around 62% of general applications received), particularly for debt, banking, and documentation issues, although reduced on-site capacity has affected appointment availability.
- The Board received five resettlement-related applications, all of which fell within CA's remit and were referred accordingly. The applications concerned property matters and the retrieval of identification documents from police stations, while one application related to difficulties accessing a bank account.

Employment and accommodation

- Support for prisoners with the right to work in the UK includes CV preparation, disclosure letter support (assistance with drafting letters explaining previous convictions when applying for employment) and interview skills delivered by Seetec, an external support agency that prisoners can still access after release.
- Prisoners and detained people released with no fixed abode (NFA) are supported by the team, who arrange first-night hotel or B&B accommodation in line with PSI 72/2011, typically close to their probation office. Emergency clothing is provided where necessary.

Although the prison is signed up to the HSBC prisoner banking scheme, eligibility is limited due to immigration status, and application timescales often exceed length of stay.

Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL)

- There is currently no ROTL scheme at HMP Maidstone.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended Board complement	13
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	4 (7 in 2023/24) of whom 1 was in their induction period
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	4 (5 in 2023/24), of whom 2 were in their induction period
Total number of visits to the establishment	207 (300 in 2023/24)

The Board's ability to monitor the establishment effectively was significantly affected by persistent under-recruitment. Visits fell to 207 (from 300 in 2023/24), reflecting reduced capacity rather than reduced need, particularly affecting evening and weekend coverage, and scrutiny of education, vocational training, resettlement, and reception processes.

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year (2023/24)	Current reporting year (2025/26)
A	Accommodation (inc. laundry, clothing, ablutions)	8 (3.8%)	5 (2.2%)
B	Discipline (inc. adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions)	9 (4.3%)	10 (4.5%)
C	Equality	5 (2.4%)	4 (1.8%)
D	Purposeful activity (inc. education, work, training, time out of cell)	1 (0.5%)	2 (0.9%)
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	4 (1.9%)	5 (2.2%)
E2	Finance (inc. pay, private monies, spends)	4 (1.9%)	4 (1.8%)
F	Food and kitchens	4 (1.9%)	8 (3.6%)
G	Health (inc. physical, mental, social care)	16 (7.6%)	20 (8.9%)
H1	Property within the establishment	13 (6.2%)	14 (6.3%)
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	36 (17.1%)	32 (14.3%)
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	7 (3.3%)	0 (0%)
I	Sentence management (inc. HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation)	72 (34.3%)	82 (36.6%)
J	Staff/prisoner concerns (inc. bullying)	17 (8.1%)	25 (11.2%)
K	Transfers	5 (2.4%)	1 (0.4%)
L	Miscellaneous	9 (4.3%)	8 (3.6%)
U	Unknown	NR	4 (1.8%)
Total number of applications		210	224

Source: Independent Monitoring Board for HMP Maidstone, 1 March 2025 – 28 February 2026. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Annex A

List of service providers and agency support:

Primary healthcare: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust

Mental healthcare: Oxleas in-reach

Psychological healthcare: Bradley Therapy Services

Dental healthcare: Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust

Substance misuse treatment: Change, Grow, Live (CGL)

Samaritans

Children's visits, family days and parenting courses for dads in prison: Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)

Advice and support for prisoners: Citizens Advice

Learning and skills: Milton Keynes College (MKC)

Literacy help: Shannon Trust

Singing activities: Beating Time

On-wing education activities: Rocketeer Group

Workshop contracts: Public Sector Prison Industries (PSPI); Maidstone has a number of prison industries offering locally sourced work, including creative woodwork & upcycling workshop. Brickworks (teaching bricklaying and building skills), and a print shop

Management of maintenance and repair work: Government Facility Services Limited (GFSL)



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