



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Woodhill

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

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- 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 Woodhill is a category B men's high-security training prison first opened in 1992. All cells are single occupancy and have in-cell phones. It is situated on a large site in a densely populated area in Milton Keynes.

Accommodation consists of four house units, each with two wings housing 60 cells (120 cells per house unit), one house unit of 50 cells, a two-wing healthcare unit holding 12 cells each, a 12-cell care and separation unit (colloquially and hereafter referred to as segregation) and a specialist unit that consists of a close supervision centre (CSC), a separation centre and a discrete unit¹. The separation centre was closed throughout most of the reporting year.

A new Governing Governor came into post in September 2025 and a new Deputy Governor in January 2026. Both provided a renewed focus on meeting the standards and requirements placed on the prison. The Board commends the Governor for his visibility on the wings throughout the year.

The prison's operational capacity varied between 551 at the start of the reporting year and 523 at the end of the reporting year.

The prison's priorities: 'keep the peace'; 'get education going'; and 'value our people' were revisited, in line with other prisons in the long-term high security estate (LTHSE), with a particular emphasis on the security, order and control plan. This report focuses on the development and implementation of that priority, which necessarily impacted aspects of regime delivery.

In March 2026, an unannounced visit from HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) described a number of concerns and poor outcomes. These findings represented a deterioration since the 2023 inspection and resulted in an Urgent Notification being issued. The subsequent Urgent Notification confirmed the findings of the Board throughout the reporting year within the headings of safety, health and wellbeing, progression and resettlement.

The Board supported the Governor in the view that changes had been instigated before the inspection and an opportunity to embed and further develop them might have prevented the Urgent Notification.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- An overriding concern of the Board is that there is almost no progression for prisoners at Woodhill. The Board has received many comments throughout the year from prisoners who said they would do almost anything to be transferred out.
- The Board has repeatedly reported on the lack of scrutiny and imposition of incentive scheme penalties for prisoners who block the observation panels in their cell doors. This had been further identified to the prison in an action plan from a PPO (Prisons and Probation Ombudsman) report, following a previous death in custody.
- The rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults has remained among the highest in the long-term high security estate (LTHSE), with debt and gangs cited by prisoners as the main reasons. From the Board's observations, the safer custody team has been proactive in supporting self-isolators and men who identify as being at risk of harm and self-harm.
- The rate of assaults on staff was the highest in the LTHSE, with a lack of regime and staff relationships cited as the main reasons.
- The provision of adequate staffing has been, and will probably continue to be, a significant factor in the provision of a safe and stable environment.
- Chaplaincy services are highly regarded by prisoners and officers.
- The number of ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) plans, which are used to support prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide, remained high. The Board noted with concern the number of men in the segregation unit on an ACCT, at times as many as seven out of 18 men. The focus on improving the use of the ACCT process, with increased training and quality assurance checks, seems not to have had the anticipated improvement, and a renewed focus is planned for the forthcoming year.
- Approximately 28 men were on CSIPs (challenge, support and intervention plans) at any one time, which continued to raise the question about whether the process is fit for purpose.
- An average of 22 men were self-isolating at any one time during the reporting year.
- The number of adjudications (disciplinary hearings held when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules) for violent offences was very high at the beginning of the reporting year but reduced throughout the year.
- Not all prisoners have a named key worker and target numbers for contact were still not achieved. The Board had witnessed key working to be at its most effective in the segregation unit in previous years. However, this was not the case during the reporting year, as the high numbers of prisoners held in the unit at any one time had such a great impact on the delivery of regime that all aspects of individual care suffered.
- Gang culture continued to impact the location of prisoners in the prison.
- The presence and trade of unlawful substances created high levels of debt, particularly the use of vulnerable prisoners to 'test' substances and pay off their debts by committing assaults.
- A disproportionate amount of resources continues to be needed to deal with false fire alarms, the setting of fires and the misuse of cell bells. However, a collective

effort by staff led to a considerable reduction in the number of fires and malicious fire alarms towards the end of the year.

- The Board has found it hard to unravel many aspects of data collection and presentation and has concerns regarding its accuracy and reliability. Hopefully, the appointment of a safety data analyst and a redesigned safety manager's role will strengthen quality assurance and support a more meaningful understanding of outcomes.

Fair and humane treatment

- Following on from implementation of a revised core day towards the end of the previous reporting year, the Safety, Control and Order Strategy was a limiting factor in the delivery of a full regime. Throughout the autumn, staffing issues limited prisoners' access to education and activities.
- From our observations, property issues led to resentment, discontent and disorder.
- Regrettably, the Board noted again the continued failure of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to adequately maintain the infrastructure and fabric of the buildings. This is depriving prisoners and staff of a decent environment in which to live and work.
- The Board again reports that the showers in the majority of the house units remain at an unacceptable standard.
- The segregation unit struggled to provide a fair and safe regime. For most of the reporting year, this designated 12-cell unit utilised an adjacent annexe to hold between 14 and 18 challenging men. This resulted in a logistical inability to provide the daily regime.
- When men in segregation are identified as being suitable and ready for reintegration, an effective process of liaison with the custody managers of other wings prepares them.
- There continued to be over-representation of prisoners with mental health issues and/or neurodiversity in adjudication panels (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules).

Health and wellbeing

- The appalling condition of showers on the wings has not changed; refurbishment was repeatedly deferred and is now scheduled for August 2026.
- The provision of basic cell furniture improved during the year, but delays in repairs and maintenance continued, resulting in cells being out of action. Prisoners' actions continue to be the main reason for the poor state of cells. Laundry facilities on the wings were compromised by poor electrical supplies so that washing machines and driers could not be used at the same time.
- The care of prisoners with physical illnesses alongside those with serious mental health needs is not appropriate, in the Board's view. On the healthcare unit there were always two or three cells out of action throughout the year; this necessarily affected the waiting list for transfer into this facility.
- Mental health services appeared to be valued and trusted by prisoners, but healthcare struggled to cope with demand. Prisoners with severe mental health needs waited too long for formal assessment of their secure hospital suitability and transfer.
- Together with healthcare professionals, the social visits team organised several Saturday afternoon 'neurodiversity' sessions, designed to help prisoners and their

families, including children, understand more about neurodiversity and how to adjust to it.

Progression and resettlement

- There is almost no progression at Woodhill. The Board has received many comments throughout the year from prisoners who said they would do almost anything to be transferred out.
- There is no in-cell education for men who are self-isolating. In November 2025, particularly patchy delivery of activities was recorded, principally due to the emphasis placed on regaining control of the prison and an ongoing response to unforeseen reductions in education provision. However, prisoners could apply to access learning materials and occupational activities through the Launchpad laptops.
- In the Board's view, the contract workshops need more interesting and purposeful work contracts.
- Reduced education provision significantly affected access to learning and activities and risked undoing much of the progress achieved by the new head of education.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Given that many of the actions required to address the Urgent Notification depend on additional funding, resources and staffing, what further support will the Minister provide to ensure that the Governor can deliver the action plan effectively and sustainably?
- What steps will the Minister take, working with relevant Government departments, to improve education and activity provision within the prison and address the impact of recent reductions in provision?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- What action is underway to secure quality work contracts so that prisoners are provided with a sense of achievement alongside fulfilling employment and training?
- What steps is the Prison Service taking to work with partners to secure higher-quality contract workshops?
- When will the Prison Service radically overhaul the property system?
- When will the Prison Service provide a digital service to replace handwritten property records, which will help reduce the current frustrating processes?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- What steps will the Governor take, and by when, to ensure that data collection is standardised, reliable and sufficiently robust to enable effective monitoring of outcomes and performance?
- What measures will the Governor put in place to reduce delays in the movement of general supplies, deliveries and prisoners' property between RIDS (the prison facility for receiving and processing items) and the prison?
- When, and through what specific measures, will the Governor strengthen the integration of education, vocational training and work within the regime to reduce the impact of officer shortages on the delivery of these activities?

- How will the Governor encourage effective implementation of strategies for prisoners with complex needs, to consolidate awareness and training?

3.3 Response to the last report

The responses below from the Minister and the Prison Service were provided in a letter from Lord Timpson, Minister of State for Justice, dated 22 December 2026.

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister		
Will the Minister work with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to proactively monitor the progress of the new Mental Health Bill through Parliament and lobby for appropriate funding?	The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Department of Health and Social Care will continue to work together on the implementation of the Mental Health Bill, and wider mental health provision in prisons. The Bill continues to progress towards Royal Assent, having now been through all three readings in both Houses. NHS England's national team have completed the initial scoping work to ensure there is clinical leadership throughout the pathway to and from prison and secure hospital	The Mental Health Bill received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025. It sets out a statutory time limit of 28 days for the transfer of prisoners to hospital for the treatment of a mental disorder, but commencement of the provisions of the Act will be phased in.
Will the Minister work with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to provide education and training material to address the needs of neurodiverse prisoners?	Neurodiversity Support Managers (NSMs) have been rolled out across the prison estate. NSMs are responsible for implementing a whole-prisons approach to neurodiversity. This includes providing training and guidance for prison staff to equip them better to support neurodivergent individuals in their prison. A neurodiversity resource booklet for prison staff, aimed at showcasing the	Neurodiversity training has been underway across the prison during the year.

	prisoner voice aims to increase awareness and understanding of neurodiversity within the prison population, as well as providing practical tips for improving support, and links to additional resources.	
What steps will the Minister take to ensure the fabric and infrastructure can be raised to a decent standard and maintained thereafter?	There are a number of planned projects, including refurbishment of shower facilities, in-cell improvements and drone resistant wiring system (due to commence in January 2026), all of which will improve conditions. A project is also currently in development to upgrade and extend the existing CCTV infrastructure. In respect of ongoing maintenance of such improvements, the Governor will work collaboratively with the National Estates and Facilities Management Team to help ensure this.	There is a major drive on cleanliness on the residential units, concurrent to the ordering of a full set of bedding for each prisoner to enable the prison to move to an organised one for one kit exchange system. The process for ordering cleaning and in-cell equipment on the residential units has been reviewed to make it more efficient. There is an additional initiative to set up a central painting party and yard cleaning party to further improve standards on the residential units.
How does the Minister intend to work with Government departments to facilitate and provide appropriate training and resettlement for prisoners?	New Commissioned Rehabilitative Service contracts are currently being procured and will go live in spring 2027. These future services will be commissioned as combined services that bring together support for different rehabilitative needs, including housing.	Nil to date.
Will the Minister work with colleagues to provide more approved accommodation in order to support the parole	A digitalised approach to Approved Premises referrals has been developed offering	Nil to date.

boards' recommendations for prisoners to be reintegrated into society?	welcome improvements. A National Central Referral Unit oversees assessment for suitability and eligibility, matching individuals to placements, whilst maximising occupancy and use of national capacity.	
To the Prison Service		
To review the daily spend for prisoners in the light of the rise in the cost of living.	No response.	No progress.
To review how capital budgets can more effectively be used to maintain the fabric of the prison estate.	No response.	The projected on-site start date of May 2026 for the refurbishment of showers was deferred until August 2026.
To radically overhaul the property system within the Prison Service.	No response.	Local issues delay distribution of property that has been transferred from other prisons - only designated drivers can move the property from the external goods reception to within the prison.
To the Governor		
To ensure practical plans are in place to increase access to meaningful activity for all prisoners within the current resources.	Revised core day was implemented 27 April 2025.	No progress.
To work with partners to improve access to suitable programmes for long-term prisoners.	Building Choices High Intensity Course became available during the year.	There was a long waiting list, with participants prioritised according to their expected release dates.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

During this reporting year, 523 prisoners transferred into HMP Woodhill. Additionally, throughout the year, a small number of category A prisoners were held at Woodhill while attending court.

A new prison induction booklet was well received by prisoners; it is now being reviewed to see whether any amendments are needed.

All prisoners arriving at Woodhill undergo body scanning and searches. Items such as drugs and small mobile phones are still frequently discovered. Observations by the Board confirmed that relevant checks, processes and assessments are still appropriately implemented and documented during the reception process. Staff demonstrate a high level of professionalism and care, particularly in identifying and supporting individuals who appear suicidal or struggling with the adjustment. They are asked several times during the induction process in reception how they are coping.

From our observations, new arrivals are promptly seen by both the healthcare and the chaplaincy teams. Where feasible, the induction house unit retains a core team of officers to ensure continuity and familiarity. A monitoring visit in April recorded the induction unit as being exceptionally clean and tidy. Support is further reinforced by Insiders (experienced prisoners trained to assist and mentor new or vulnerable prisoners by providing guidance on establishment procedures and daily routines as well as addressing queries or concerns). The men usually settle well in this smaller induction unit, often expressing wariness and reluctance to move from there onto the main wings. In the Board's view, the layout and organisation of the induction unit create a safe and secure environment, and we commend the officers for their work in achieving this.

Property delivered to the prison, rather than accompanying prisoners, undergoes security checks prior to being sent to reception or wings. This frequently leads to delays in its issue, causing frustration for prisoners.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

The Board regrets to report there were two deaths in custody during the reporting year. There were 766 recorded cases of self-harm by 156 men, a reduction in the number of incidents of self-harm was recorded during the last quarter of the year.

The reports from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), an independent organisation that investigates deaths in prison, had not been published by the end of the reporting year.

Staff receive initial and refresher training aimed at reducing self-harm and suicide attempts. Self-harm remains ever present within the prison, and staff frequently found men who appeared to be under the influence of illicit drugs or alcohol.

The Board occasionally observed the weekly safety intervention meetings (SIMs), which reviewed all active ACCT and CSIP cases. Prisoners with complex needs and self-isolators - those who self-isolate for more than 72 hours - are discussed individually. Board members reviewed ACCT documentation during monitoring visits and found that most care plans and records were up-to-date and informative. Cell cards identifying the

occupant, with additional information if appropriate, were still not displayed outside all the cell doors on the wings, which the Board considers to be a safety risk.

The Board previously reported that it was rare for PEEP (personal escape and evacuation plans for prisoners who are identified as requiring assistance to exit the prison in an emergency) documentation to be readily available in wing offices. However, work undertaken during the final quarter of the reporting year led to improvements, and these plans are now kept in clearly identifiable folders.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

In September 2025, an unannounced three-day Tier 3 lockdown enabled a dedicated search team to access the whole prison: 350 cells were searched and over 70 finds were recorded, including 29 weapons. Weapons were constructed by prisoners, often by crafting them from broken ceramic sanitary ware or dismantling and using television components.

From April 2025 to March 2026, there were 194 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, 35 of which were classified as serious; the HMIP findings confirmed that the prison had the second highest rates of violence among similar prison. However, the number of incidents recorded during the quarter ending in March showed a 30% reduction over the previous quarter.

There were 233 assaults on staff, of which 29 were considered serious, another significant increase from the previous year and the highest in the LTHSE. The figures for the quarter ending in March showed a reduction of 19% over the previous quarter. The HMIP inspection in March recorded prisoner perceptions about their safety had not improved, with 61% saying they had felt unsafe at some point and 39% saying they currently felt unsafe.

The CSIP process provides a framework for managing violence and supporting both perpetrators and victims. There was an average of 28 CSIP plans open at any one time during the reporting year, a notable increase from the average of 16 in the previous year. Self-harm remained an area of concern, with 156 men responsible for a total of 766 self-harm incidents, often involving the reopening of existing wounds.

The Board noted a reduction in the number of prisoners entering wing offices (where confidential documents may be accessed) following a Governor's order issued at the end of November 2025. In addition, a Governor's order issued in January 2026 required men involved in incidents at height (such as climbing onto roofs, railings or other elevated structures) to be placed on report and referred to the independent adjudicator, alongside management through the incentives scheme.

The number of prisoners self-isolating at any one time during the year reduced from around 30 in the previous year to the low 20s. Reasons for self-isolation included debt, concerns for personal safety and a desire to avoid the temptation to use drugs or engage in other inappropriate behaviour. The Board observed throughout the year that efforts were made to encourage these prisoners to shower and exercise. Significant work was also undertaken to support them in leaving their cells, including regular visits from the safer custody team, efforts to resolve underlying issues and, where appropriate, consideration of a transfer to another prison. Nevertheless, for some prisoners, the pattern of self-isolation can be difficult to overcome.

4.4 Use of force

There were 1,312 incidents of use of force (UoF) in the year to March 2026, attributable to 363 prisoners. This represented an increase compared with the previous reporting year. The Board noted that UoF can be a regular feature of managing prisoners in the segregation unit and close supervision centre (CSC), where refusal to comply with segregation protocols or staff instructions may result in the controlled use of force.

The primary reasons for the use of force on the wings were prisoners refusing to comply with a lawful order or declining to return to their cells. Pre-planned interventions were carried out in accordance with established procedures, involving staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE), and were recorded on body worn video cameras. Prisoners were provided with an explanation for the use of force, and a debrief was subsequently recorded.

Use of force (UoF) records are monitored and should be completed within 72 hours. Records indicate that around 90% were completed within this timeframe. UoF incidents were also reviewed by the prison to monitor compliance with policy and procedures, provide follow-up guidance to staff and identify any lessons to be learned.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

As in all prisons, preventing illicit items from entering the establishment is a challenging task and significant resources are devoted to this work. The dedicated search team carries out both random and intelligence-led searches. Visitors are monitored, including with the assistance of trained dogs, and may be searched where appropriate. The visits hall is also monitored to help prevent illicit items from being passed to prisoners. New arrivals are X-ray scanned and searched for illicit items concealed either internally or externally. Staff are searched when they arrive for work; while it is concerning that 428 unauthorised items, including mobile phones, were discovered during these standard searches, it is reassuring that they were found through established security procedures.

Nevertheless, it appears to remain relatively easy for prisoners to obtain drugs. Spice (a synthetic cannabinoid) appears to be the drug of choice. In addition to being smuggled in as a liquid, it can be impregnated in almost any material, including paper and cloth. Vapes appear to be used in imaginative ways to take drugs. Fermentation of alcohol is achieved using any foodstuff that can be made to ferment; storage can be in a variety of vessels, although officers should ensure all empty containers are rendered unusable.

The prison reported 13 sightings of drones over, or near, the prison in the reporting year. Detection of illicit items thrown over the prison walls had become relatively rare, but an increase from 9 to 29 instances was reported in the year. Improved security systems on house units as a part of a national agenda have reduced both of these routes for illicit items. Mobile phones continue to be detected on some new arrivals. There have been instances of mobile phones being detected on men being transferred out of the prison.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

A 'big clean up' initiative began in November 2025, focusing on staff areas. The Board noted its continuation across the prison throughout the year.

However, throughout the reporting year, the Board observed that, due to underspending and lack of investment, maintenance had not kept pace with requirements. This has impacted staff morale. The need to upgrade and replace floors, the poor condition of the showers, main servery counters, laundries, staff offices and welfare facilities are all noted frequently in our monitoring reports. Flooring and showers have been replaced in some areas, but progress remains slow in getting all areas to a decent living standard. Many showers have been unfit for use on some wings or closed, despite renovations elsewhere. The flooring in many areas, including cells, remains poor, with unrepaired damage and/or missing flooring remaining for months without repair.

Painting of house units is undertaken by wing workers. Towards the end of the reporting year, there was an improvement in communal areas and cell doors. The interior decoration of cells is ongoing.

Wing cleaners are employed to ensure that rubbish is cleared, floors are mopped and general cleanliness is maintained. Standards can vary considerably between wings; however, a recent monitoring report noted that the induction wing was maintained to an exceptionally high standard of cleanliness. Restricted access to fire exits from prisoner areas remained a recurring issue in monitoring reports, often due to rubbish awaiting removal or deliveries of supplies and canteen items to the unit. This could pose a risk to those in the building in the event of an emergency.

There are washing machines and dryers on each wing. Prisoners on the standard or enhanced incentive levels can have their personal clothing washed by designated wing workers. However, poor electrical supplies mean that, on some wings, washing machines and dryers cannot be used at the same time, resulting in washing being hung over landing railings, a safety risk that blocks the officers' viewpoints.

On the wings, prisoners have access to limited cooking facilities: an air fryer, a toaster, a flat-style cooking grill. Prisoners can order a range of food items from the external canteen, including a limited variety of refrigerated items for use in the cooking areas.

Meals are served by wing workers from a wing servery, with officer supervision. The servery workers should wear the correct PPE to serve the meals. The Board reported increased availability of this kit, but that it was not always worn. A servery log should complete records of food temperatures and that cleaning checks having been completed. The Board frequently noted that these were mostly incomplete or missing.

Three meals are provided each day: a breakfast pack, a cold lunch option and a hot evening meal. The daily food budget of £3.29 per prisoner inevitably places constraints on the range and quality of food that can be offered. The Board observed that some meals appeared to rely on lower-cost, pre-packaged frozen ingredients. However, some meals are prepared in the kitchens, and vegetables and salads grown in the prison's market gardens are also used.

Food is transferred to the wings in heated trolleys. All diets appear to be catered for, but some specific diets and sealed meal requirements are costly and put additional financial pressure on the catering budget.

5.2 Segregation

The segregation unit has 12 cells and two special accommodation cells (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety). An adjacent annexe, which should be closed, has a constant watch cell and a further 11 cells. It should be used only when an urgent addition to the main unit is required.

A nationwide review of safety across the LTHSE led to an increase in the minimum number of officers required to open a prisoner's cell in segregation from two to three officers. A requirement was introduced for all officers to wear a body armour jacket while interacting with a prisoner. There was a very frequent need for four or even six officers in full PPE to unlock prisoners with the most challenging behaviour. The Board observed that officers treated prisoners with respect and understanding, particularly throughout their period of change from recalcitrance and challenge to compliance and progression.

The condition of the unit is poor, with the sewage system often becoming blocked and a lack of good heating in winter months. The showers need replacing to bring them up to the required standard for use. Cell call bells and phone ports are often damaged, with long wait times for repair, putting cells out of use.

Throughout the reporting year, the annexe was in near-constant use, either because of the high number of prisoners being held in segregation or due to damaged cells in the main unit. At the start of the reporting year, 19 prisoners were being held in segregation. This number increased to 21 in August, and levels remained high until the middle of the year before stabilising at an average of 14 prisoners for the remainder of the reporting period.

The unit has two exercise yards and a shower on each floor. When the population exceeded 16 prisoners it became increasingly difficult to deliver a full regime, and showers and exercise were offered on alternate days. This was further complicated by the frequent need to manage several men requiring four- or six-officer unlocks in PPE, placing additional pressure on the delivery of the regime.

The Board continued to observe that the environment was not always well suited to the management of neurodiverse prisoners, whose behavioural responses could sometimes be triggered by unintended staff actions or verbal interactions. Support and training from the neurodiversity support manager helped staff to engage positively with prisoners in this challenging environment, where relatively minor issues could escalate quickly. Staff working in segregation also received mental health awareness training.

Reviews of men held in segregation appeared to be completed in line with legal requirements. GOoD (good order or discipline) boards were held twice weekly, with the IMB attending most meetings to monitor process and procedure. The boards appeared to be consistently attended by a member of the healthcare team and, at times, by representatives from the psychology, chaplaincy, addictions and security teams.

During the reporting year, the special accommodation cell was used infrequently, usually for just a couple of hours until extremely the challenging behaviour of a prisoner was resolved.

There were number of occasions during the year when prisoners were held on Rule 45 (exclusion from association for the maintenance of good order or discipline or in the

prisoner's own interests) on the main residential wings and in the healthcare's clinical assessment unit (CAU) due to lack of space in the segregation unit. The number reduced during the year to reflect a reduced pressure on segregation occupancy.

The monthly SMARG (segregation management and review group) meeting monitored the progress of prisoners on the segregation unit, with particular reference to time spent on the unit and progression. A snapshot showed that, in September 2025, one prisoner had been in segregation for 286 days and 20 others for more than 42 days (the limit allowed without external authorisation), with the average length of stay being 21 days. By the end of the year, these figures had not substantially changed; in April, one prisoner had been in segregation for 257 days and 22 prisoners had been held for more than 42 days. Data recorded age, ethnicity, religion, previous location and the identified reason for segregation. The length of time spent in segregation was often dependent on suitability and appropriateness for a return to normal residential location or availability of a transfer to another establishment. Considerable efforts appear to have been made to relocate men and reduce the time they spent in segregation.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Staffing levels and staff retention improved over the year, with a gradual reduction in the number of officers on detached duty from other prisons. Staffing continued to be affected by long-term sickness, other absences and suspensions. However, a reduction in sickness of 30%-40% was recorded in May, which had a positive impact on the prison's ability to deliver a more consistent regime of daily activities

The Board often noted officers being moved between units to cover for vacancies. This resulted in a lack of knowledge of the prisoners and a reduced awareness of increased risk of violence and disorder, leading to an increased risk of assaults on staff.

The Board remains concerned that there are too many blocked observation panels and missing cell cards. During the year, a Governor's order regarding observation panels established that non-compliance by prisoners would result in an incentives scheme warning. Improved compliance has been noted, with the exception of isolators whose panels are almost always obscured.

Every prisoner should be allocated a key worker and have regular meetings to support progression and address any concerns. However, the allocation of key workers was not always consistent, with some prisoners either not being allocated a key worker or not receiving meetings at the required frequency, leading to frustration. The expectation is that key workers hold two sessions each month with their allocated prisoners. Our review of data indicated that this target was not consistently achieved.

Each wing should hold weekly wing forums, with the results being fed back or escalated to the monthly prison council meetings, which are chaired by the Governor or Deputy. These meetings are regarded by the prison as being effective, but they have not consistently taken place.

From the Board's observations, the established Listener scheme (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide peer support) works effectively and is frequently requested by distressed prisoners. The 'peace promoters' scheme successfully reduces low-level incidents.

The Board is reassured to see that men continue to provide recognition, feedback and comment on the Launchpad app (an in-cell technology platform that provides prisoners

with secure laptops to access various services) to recognise staff who have helped them; this recognition is shared with staff in the weekly newsletter.

5.4 Equality and diversity

In the Board's opinion, the prison's approach to equality and diversity during the reporting year was more focused and consistent than in the previous year. Positive changes were implemented, notably the process and performance of discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs).

An equality action plan was introduced to address concerns that some DIRFs were overdue and the quality of responses was not always of the required standard. A new process, implemented near the start of the reporting year, recommended all DIRF responses to be scrutinised by the ZMT (Zahid Mubarek Trust) charity, and on occasion, by prisoner equality advocates.

The diversity and equality action team (DEAT) meetings took place monthly throughout 2025, becoming bi-monthly at the start of 2026. Data gathered from different operational departments is presented and discussed by senior leaders and heads of departments in relation to equality, use of force, recategorisation, complaints, DIRFs, adjudications, access to work/pay bands, full searches, foreign nationals, neurodiversity and disability.

The Board has either observed meetings or reviewed the available minutes and presentation slides throughout the reporting year. We observed that, to a large extent, data is not standardised across the establishment, with outcomes often reported in different ways. Departments use different reporting periods, data categories and presentation formats, and snapshots are not always taken on the same date. Consequently, the establishment cannot consistently assure itself or the Board that outcomes are equitable across different groups.

The Board did not receive from prisoners any formal applications relating to equality, diversity or discrimination during the reporting year, although during monitoring visits to the wings there were often repeated (but unsubstantiated) verbal references and claims of racism by officers.

A monthly meeting monitored adjudication standards. Adjudications are disciplinary hearings held when a prisoner is alleged to have breached prison rules. A snapshot taken midway through the reporting year recorded 230 adjudications for adult men and 58 for young adults, attributable to 97 adult men and 30 young men. Of these adjudications, one adult man was subject to 14 cases, another to 11 and another to 10. Among the adult men, 10 others had five or more adjudications, nine of whom identified as neurodivergent. Among the young men, one individual who identified as neurodivergent was subject to five adjudications.

Throughout the reporting year, violent offences accounted for 580 adjudications, although their frequency decreased from an average of 65 in the first quarter to 34 in the final quarter. Overall, adjudications were concentrated among a relatively small number of individuals. For example, prisoners of white ethnicity represented 55% of the population but accounted for 67% of adjudications, around a third of which were attributable each month to a small group of individuals (typically 6 to 16 prisoners with five or more adjudications). Black prisoners represented 24% of the population and accounted for 17% of adjudications. As in previous years, the establishment did not routinely appear to consider outcomes across different groups of prisoners, such as whether some groups were more likely than others to have adjudications proven or dismissed.

The incidence of 'has in possession' offences, where prisoners were found in possession of unauthorised items, increased during the year. In the month selected for review, nine of the 58 adjudications were for assault or fighting. Prisoners aged 26 to 34 represented the largest population group at Woodhill and, proportionately, received the highest number of adjudications.

A number of men declined to attend their adjudications, in some cases those who were self-isolating, without providing a valid reason and also declined to sign the refusal-to-attend paperwork.

The Board found some aspects of data collection and presentation difficult to interpret and continues to have concerns about the accuracy and reliability of the data. While reporting improved compared with the previous reporting year, data was not standardised and only sometimes considered disability, particularly neurodiversity, as a contributing factor. This limited the prison's, and the Board's, ability to gain a full understanding of outcomes.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

From the Board's observations, the chaplaincy department is proactive and dynamic and is involved in all aspects of the prison, including the offender management unit (OMU) and drugs and alcohol family support (DAFS). It consists of:

- 1 x full-time managing chaplain (Free Church)
- 1 x full-time Christian: Anglican (currently pending vetting)
- 1 x full-time Christian: Roman Catholic
- 2 x full-time Muslim imams and one part-time Muslim chaplain

Representatives of the Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Pagan, Rastafarian, Anglican, Buddhist, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness faiths also provide support on an ad hoc basis.

The main religious groups met weekly, while the smaller faith groups met fortnightly. Chaplaincy staff organised well-attended faith festivals, feasts and family days, and were involved in numerous mediations until the mediation service closed in 2025. The department also worked closely with The Prison Fellowship, whose volunteers provided a range of support, including bereavement services, Storybook Dads and visits for prisoners who did not receive regular visitors.

The chaplaincy team continued to develop content for prisoners to access via their laptops and participated in The Big Church Read, becoming the first prison in England to do so.

A new initiative was also introduced to provide a short Christian act of worship for staff on lockdown Wednesday mornings.

Analysis of prisoners by religion

RELIGION	NUMBER	% OF TOTAL
Muslim	229	43.5
Christian *	199	37.8
No Faith or Belief	60	11.4
Atheist	7	1.3
Jewish	6	1.1
Church of Jesus Christ LDS	5	0.9

Pagan	5	0.8
Hindu	4	0.8
Buddhist	3	0.6
Sikh	3	0.6
Jehovah's Witness	2	0.4
Other Faith or Belief	2	0.4
Agnostic	1	0.2
Rastafari	1	0.2
TOTAL PRISONERS	527	100
*includes Anglican, 40; Orthodox; RC; other		

5.6 Incentives scheme

The average percentage of prisoners on each level of the incentives scheme remained largely unchanged, year-on-year. The number of men on the enhanced level averaged 254 (just over 50%), while the number on the basic level increased to an average of 44 men (just under 8%). The drive to restore security, order and control involved a number of Governor's orders which have incentives scheme implications.

5.7 Complaints

The prison received 5,363 complaints in the reporting year. This was a substantial increase of 61% from the previous year, while the prisoner population rose by only around 13%. Adjusted for the larger population, complaints per prisoner increased by approximately 42%, which the Board finds concerning, although it is clear that a number of prisoners were repeat complainers often, apparently, due to a lack of acceptance of the response they received.

Among the many categories and sub-categories of complaints, prisoner property remained by far the most common issue raised. This was followed by residential matters, including accommodation, showers, cleaning and hygiene supplies, and then concerns relating to staff attitude, conduct and engagement.

From the Board's review of data, the prison's response to complaints was inconsistent, and did not always meet key performance targets. During the reporting period, 25% of complaints were returned to the applicant, 58% were responded to on time, and 17% were not responded to on time.

The Board noted that prisoners held in the segregation unit submitted a disproportionately high number of complaints. While the unit typically held around 3% of the prison population at any one time, it accounted for approximately 8% of all complaints.

The prison no longer tracked the proportion of complaints that were upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. While the Board acknowledges the focus on procedural justice, we are concerned that this is only being applied in part and we question whether sufficient consideration is being given to fairness, disparities between different groups and opportunities for continuous improvement. Analysis of complaints data remains relatively broad. For example, complaints are analysed by ethnicity and any disparities are noted in meeting minutes; however, complaint outcomes are reported differently, limiting assurance that decisions are being applied consistently.

5.8 Property

In the reporting year, there were 596 complaints to the prison about property, of which 284 were referred to other prisons. The Board received 13 applications (prisoners' written representations to the IMB) concerning property at Woodhill and 25 relating to property transferred in or out of Woodhill.

Reception staff were regularly deployed to other areas of the prison to help address staffing shortages, which increased delays in prisoners receiving their property following transfer into the establishment. Prisoners also continued to accumulate large amounts of property throughout their sentences, creating pressure on reception to process and arrange its storage.

Complaints, reports of losses and compensation claims were anecdotally attributable to urgent or unforeseen cell moves, requiring cells to be locked and logged clear by prison staff. Failures to apply the correct procedures during this process led to losses and, consequently, compensation claims.

Property issues remain a national problem. The Board continues to observe that a review and overhaul of the property process across the prison estate is needed to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Healthcare is provided, under contract, by the Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, which sub-contracts to the Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL) for the delivery of the service in the prison. The dental service is provided by Time for Teeth.

The Governor and head of healthcare meet regularly to review operations and progress, and report an improvement in relationships, leading to the development of protocols to manage and follow-up incidents.

Healthcare staff frequently experience verbal abuse from prisoners but are generally respected. Although prisoners may refuse to be examined following incidents, the staff are generally not otherwise abused or attacked.

There were recorded instances of delays in transferring patients who required treatment at A&E. This had the potential to create additional risks and, at times, could affect clinicians' ability to deliver care in a timely manner. These findings were consistent with the Board's observations during the year, particularly where the need for a hospital transfer was identified late in the day or at weekends.

The HMIP inspection report echoed the Board's concerns about the lengthy delays in transferring prisoners to secure mental health hospitals. These men were usually accommodated in the CAU. However, capacity limitations occasionally meant that they were held in the segregation unit. The Board continued to observe that this was not a suitable environment for men with acute mental health needs and that it appeared, in some cases, to worsen their mental health difficulties.

Opportunities to promote health and wellbeing were identified throughout the year, including around International Men's Day, HIV and AIDS awareness, alcohol awareness, Dry January and cholesterol awareness. Working in partnership with the chaplaincy team, the gym and Launchpad, these initiatives were supported through the provision of posters, leaflets and other promotional materials.

Occupational therapy is provided by the mental health team. Physiotherapy is sub-contracted, an out-patient physiotherapy service is provided twice a month. The dental service is provided under contract by Northamptonshire Healthcare Trust.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Prisoners often raised concerns with the Board about waiting times for GP appointments. However, the Board had no concerns about prisoners' access to GP services. An average of 273 GP appointments were offered each month, with a 30% DNA ('did not attend') rate.

Failure to attend appointments remained a significant issue. Reports from healthcare meetings indicated that appointments were frequently missed when they coincided with scheduled activities. The Board noted an expectation that appointments could be arranged around activities and during periods when wings were closed, which was not always practical. Prisoners who were self-isolating were also frequently not brought to appointments, despite the availability of a weekly GP clinic specifically for isolating prisoners.

There were also several instances of external healthcare appointments not being attended due to escort staffing issues and operational constraints.

Throughout the reporting year, there were numerous out-of-hours medical emergencies and patient safety incidents. These often related to self-harm associated with drug use, acts of physical self-harm, medication refusal and the ingestion of foreign objects.

At the beginning of the reporting year, the healthcare department was aware of the need to make national screening programmes more accessible to prisoners. Awareness leaflets and information on Launchpad attempted to address this, but the national screening programmes and NHS health checks were frequently declined by prisoners. For example, in April 2026, 20 health checks were offered, three were declined and four prisoners did not attend their scheduled appointment. One out of three retinal screenings was declined, and seven of the nine bowel screening appointments were declined.

The Board received 24 applications relating to healthcare from 12 prisoners, although three prisoners submitted applications on a regular basis. Other issues raised included delays in accessing mental health services, delays in responses to healthcare complaints, and a concern that a transfer between prisons had resulted in a prisoner having to restart a secondary care referral pathway.

The healthcare department regularly documented and raised, through its risk management processes, concerns about delays in accessing secondary healthcare services following transfers between prisons.

Dental services were described as good in the HMIP inspection report, although non-attendance at booked appointments averaged 38%. The service reported to the Board that a total of 235 dental sessions were delivered during the year, against 246 that had been scheduled. Prisoners were able to self-refer to the dental service, with 246 men doing so during the reporting year. In total, 738 patients were seen and 1,202 appointments were booked.

6.3 Mental health

The mental health team was recorded by HMIP as having delivered a good standard of care; and that, although the waiting time for some psychological therapies was too long, patients were prioritised appropriately and were supported while waiting for the interventions.

The mental health service has two teams: psychosocial and nursing. Urgent referrals are assessed on the same day as referral, although the requirement is 48 hours for urgent referrals and five working days for those that are non-urgent. Self-harm generates an urgent referral to the psychosocial team. Low staffing levels in the first half of the reporting year resulted in high clinic-cancellation rates and, therefore, low programme completion rates. The team had previously identified that a designated 'group room' would have enabled them to achieve more activity, but the logistics of matching appropriate group attendees and getting them to a designated room made this a difficult activity to routinely arrange.

Psychiatry appointments were seriously delayed due to lack of staff. For part of the year, there was only one part-time psychiatrist, with a waiting list of 50 prisoners. The year began with a waiting time of 11 weeks; by November 2025, it had reached 19 weeks, then dropped back to 12 weeks at the end of the reporting year. There was an almost 50% non-attendance rate. Psychology appointments averaged 42% non-attendance rate.

In some instances for both services, non-attendance was attributable to prisoners not being able to access their appointment (for example appointments conflicting with those of non-associates, lack of availability of officer escorts or appointments conflicting with the regime). Prisoners' reduced access to these services is regrettable.

Demand for the specialist care provided by both the clinical assessment unit (CAU) and the Compass unit continued to be higher than could be met and progress out of these units was slow. The segregation unit was required to keep prisoners who would have benefitted from the support of CAU or the Compass unit but who could not be located there. Throughout the reporting year, cells were out of action in the healthcare units awaiting repairs, resulting in considerable operational difficulties and further admission delays. Prisoners were not able to access group work, which could have been beneficial for them. Individual work was done with men on the Compass unit, but prisoners could not always be moved on as quickly as necessary, which blocked places in the unit.

As in previous years, the transfer of prisoners to secure mental institutions generally took far too long, often resulting in lengthy periods in the segregation unit and further deterioration in their mental health.

Medication for neurodivergent conditions is the responsibility of the mental health team, but overall neurodiversity support and advice is provided by the education, skills and work team. Towards the end of the reporting year, delays were recorded in providing reports to prisoners following ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) assessments. Of the men transferred into the prison in the year, approximately 41% declared themselves to be neurodivergent, ADHD being the principal category. Staff training in neurodivergence awareness has been implemented in activity and work areas and is currently underway for wing officers.

6.4 Social care

Social care need is assessed and provided by the adult social care department of Milton Keynes City Council. The assessment of need for specialist equipment and its provision is by the adult community occupational therapy department. Throughout the year, four prisoners had ongoing help and a further three were referred for an assessment.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

The revised core day (the prison's planned daily schedule of activities, including work, education, exercise and appointments), introduced towards the end of the previous reporting year, was revisited in line with a national reconfiguration plan that aimed to address issues of safety, order and control. Work by the prison management and the Prison Officers' Association towards an improved working system for staff should benefit the prisoners. An implementation date of June 2026 is anticipated.

A wing for enhanced status prisoners was opened in May 2026. Any negative reports on a prisoner result in their removal back to a normal wing. The enhanced wing allows for extra time out in the evening, e.g. to go to the gym, and a more stable day-to-day environment.

On other residential units, prisoners on enhanced status and those in full-time work were offered an additional hour during which they could access the gym, library or exercise yards.

The regime in the segregation unit was significantly restricted for much of the year when the number of men held there exceeded 12. For many weeks, between 14 and 18

prisoners were accommodated in the unit, and the unlock arrangements required for some men made it difficult to deliver a full daily regime or, on occasion, to bring prisoners to their GOoD (good order or discipline) review boards.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The addictions team had an average of 150 men registered with it. Its service comprises psychosocial and clinical teams. Prisoners arriving at Woodhill are seen on the first day and given an induction pack. Prisoners who are found under the influence or in possession of an illicit substance are referred to the service, but the team differentiates its approach according to those who are drug users and those who deal in drugs.

The service runs two groups of 10-12 prisoners per group but generally had only 50% attendance (although this is an improvement on 25% attendance earlier in the year). Non-attendance is often related to self-isolation, removal from the wing to the segregation unit or unwillingness to prioritise attendance over paid work. The addictions' team reported that it is hard for them to identify and help the people who are in real need.

The programmes are designed as short-term interventions, followed by guided self-management once the course has been completed. However, many of the men who benefit from the programmes would prefer support to continue throughout their sentence. Re-referrals are common and sustained progress can be difficult to achieve, although positive outcomes are seen in some cases.

The prison has stated its commitment to developing an incentivised substance-free living wing. The Board will continue to monitor the progress of this initiative.

6.7 Soft skills

Wellbeing resources for both staff and prisoners are signposted on noticeboards. Wings have appointed Listeners who work with the Samaritans and Insiders to provide support to their peers. The system is well regarded and works effectively. However, Listeners told the Board that sometimes they were not unlocked to support men in need, which they found very frustrating.

A 'peace promoter' system works well to help prevent low-level incidents and appears to be well regarded by management.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, Library

Education

During the reporting year, education at Woodhill made some progress in the face of substantial operational challenges. The head of education, who recently left after little more than one year in post, is widely credited with delivering major improvements. His tenure saw a complete overhaul of the curriculum, with all courses now extending to Level 3, and the development of close working relationships with the Prison Education Trust. This created a more coherent and ambitious educational framework.

Education is delivered by Milton Keynes College up to Level 3; any higher level learning is accessed in liaison with the prison education team. Workshops and classroom-based education remain central to developing a learning and work ethic among prisoners. There is a clear aspiration that courses should lead directly to employment opportunities on release. At the end of the reporting year, there were 22 active learners, with 18 having progressed or moved on in the previous 12 months.

The Board notes that the wider regime instability has had a profound impact on educational outcomes. From March to October 2025, the teaching element of the education budget was cut by 48%, resulting in the loss of 6.5 full-time equivalent teaching posts. This staffing reduction has significantly constrained the breadth and consistency of provision.

In addition, the restricted regime since September 2025 severely limited access to education. An eight-week closure between December 2025 and February 2026 resulted in no education delivery at all.

Funding for in-cell education for the CSC and self-isolating prisoners has been reduced to one-third of previous levels. Staffing has reduced from three to one, resulting in only 18 in-cell interactions per week. Given the number of prisoners typically out of scope for group activity (approximately 80 across Compass/CAU, segregation, isolators and induction), this is a significant gap in provision.

The Board also notes that many qualified officers have little or no contact with prisoners due to current deployment patterns.

Provision for neurodiverse prisoners is a relative strength. A dedicated neurodiversity support manager holds contractors to account, supported by a financial incentive intended to help ensure that outcomes for learners with additional needs are comparable with those of other learners. Trainers receive specific neurodiversity training, and the Board considers this an area of good practice.

Library services

Library provision underwent significant change during the reporting year. The Board was advised that the contract with West Northamptonshire Council was terminated; there were concerns regarding engagement and the delivery of planned improvements. As a result, there were no inter-library loans, restricting choice to the books physically held on site. Despite this, the library continued to attract approximately 100 borrowers per month and around 200 individual visits.

From 1 May 2026, Milton Keynes College assumed responsibility for operating the library. This change enabled access to inter-library loans across 39 sites, significantly

expanding the range of available materials. The Board welcomes this development and anticipates that it will substantially improve access to reading, study resources and recreational materials.

7.2 Vocational training and work

Vocational training and work opportunities at Woodhill remain constrained by the limited regime, staffing shortages and the need to prioritise stability and security. There remains the constraint of the shortage of work and a lack of instructors. The Board notes widespread recognition across the prison that there must be more meaningful and fulfilling work for prisoners, and that many prisoners are desperate to enrol on training courses but are unable to do so due to lack of capacity. This has contributed to prisoners spending excessive time locked in their cells. The limited regime has also led to a high number of course withdrawals, with prisoners questioning their commitment when the prison cannot reliably deliver sessions.

The Urgent Notification highlighted ‘poor outcomes in purposeful activity’ and the Board’s monitoring confirmed that the restricted regime since September 2025 has significantly reduced access to workshops and vocational training. The eight-week closure between December 2025 and February 2026 was due to a critical staffing shortage, which resulted in residential stability being prioritised. This meant that there was only 39% workshop utilisation across the year.

The loss of two external contracts - woodwork, leaving that workshop empty and unused, and party-supply packing - has further reduced opportunities. Only the packing of breakfast packs continues. Other prisons offer internal work opportunities in furniture building, engineering and printing, but these are not currently possible at Woodhill due, we understand, to regime and facilities constraints.

The Board further noted that Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL) does not accept prisoner work parties at Woodhill, unlike other category B prisons. This continues to restrict opportunities for practical skills development and requires the education and industries teams to navigate around GFSL’s reluctance.

Despite these challenges, there have been positive developments. The Industries Group has been authorised to recruit five additional instructors, increasing the team from 20 to 25. These posts are currently being advertised. Courses offered include industry-recognised qualifications in construction, industrial cleaning, gardening, market gardening, creative arts, and painting and decorating, alongside an in-house AQA-validated qualification in laundry and, when staff training is completed, waste management. When appropriate staff are recruited, there will also be courses available in media and barbering. Communication between prisons has improved to support continuity of learning for transferred prisoners.

The Board welcomes initiatives to increase awareness of available courses, including a podcast featuring prisoner interviews and short video reels accessible on Launchpad. However, the limited regime continued to cause significant waste of funds due to last-minute cancellations.

A forthcoming initiative led by the prison industries team, in partnership with Greene King, will enable kitchen workers to gain transferable skills relevant to employment on release. This is a positive step in addressing the recognised gap in preparation for release.

The Urgent Notification also highlighted a 'deterioration in outcomes in preparation for release'. A part-time (50%) prison employment lead has now been funded, which is expected to improve support for prisoners approaching release. Woodhill releases approximately 150 prisoners per year, with 36% achieving employment within six months. However, there was widespread appreciation that prisoners are not currently being adequately prepared for release.

Woodhill can currently accommodate 50% activity for every in-scope prisoner, reflecting a shift in philosophy to expose the maximum number of prisoners to a minimum level of purposeful activity. The prison remains 145 activity spaces short of engaging all in-scope prisoners, though this deficit is expected to reduce by 60 once the new instructors are in post.

Engagement remains a challenge for some reluctant prisoners. The Board supports and acknowledges efforts to increase participation through improved communication, Launchpad content, competitions and the active involvement of key workers, who are seen as vital agents for change in encouraging prisoners to leave their wings and engage in purposeful activity.

7.3 Offender management, progression

At the end of the reporting year, 17 prisoners had not been provided with an OASys sentence plan (which sets out the objectives and interventions intended to support rehabilitation and reduce reoffending) in the agreed timeframe, i.e. within 10 weeks of sentence (or 16 weeks for those serving life sentences). This is an increase from 11 last year. Current improvements in staffing levels will place an emphasis on improving this.

Prison offender managers (POMs) are expected to have three meetings within 12 weeks of a prisoner being allocated to them (this includes the initial OMU induction appointment). There should be a further three meetings in the last three months of their handover date to the community offender manager (COM). The OMU currently has just over half (54%) of the establishment of POMs. Therefore, prisoners are usually receiving only the first two initial POM sessions and rarely the third. The limited POM resource is concentrated on initial sessions and sessions for prisoners in the last three months of their sentence. The position should improve with new OMU clinics to be held on the wings due to start in July 2026.

Access to offending behaviour programmes for sentence progression remains limited. Kaisan and Sycamore Tree have stopped. Building Choices (both medium and high intensity) have now started. These take 3-6 months to complete and there continues to be a long waiting list. During the year, three prisoners completed Kaizen, seven completed the medium-intensity Building Choices course. Eight started the second programme and five completed a 12-session Motivation and Engagement programme.

7.4 Family contact

From the Board's observations, family contact through social visits and social video calls has been effective, especially at weekends. Weekday sessions are offered Monday to Thursday and weekend visits were reintroduced as staff numbers improved. Social video calls seldom reached full booking capacity. The chaplaincy team is working with the Prison Reform Trust to arrange for volunteers to visit men whose families are unable to visit due to distance.

Some prisoners, located far away from their families, were able to resolve this by the use of accumulated visits whereby the prisoner is moved to a prison nearer to their

family and enabled to use their accumulated visit allocations within a condensed timeframe.

Prisoners can now request visits via Launchpad. The men provide appropriate details that allow visitors to book appointments, the first of which must be made by phone so that the rules and procedures can be explained. Subsequent social visits can be booked using an online system.

The visits clerks assist family members to access visits and comply with the rules and procedures, which helps avoid refusals on the day.

During the reporting year, regular father-child sessions and two family sessions allowed prisoners better interaction with their children, enabling them to play games and access refreshments. The chaplaincy is facilitating Storybook Dads, where prisoners can record bedtime stories for their children. One annual social visit took place in the market garden for prisoners working there to enable visitors to see where food used in prison meals is grown. A Saturday afternoon session, in liaison with healthcare professionals, focused on neurodiversity and how to help men and their families use appropriate interactions.

Refurbishment of the visits hall, with new informal furniture and layout, has made it more informal and 'family friendly'.

7.5 Resettlement planning

In the reporting period, 160 prisoners were released into the community (an increase from 99 in the previous period). Woodhill is a category B training prison, not a dedicated resettlement prison.

However, a dedicated probation officer now works to ensure prisoners receive support from 12 weeks pre-release. This work is key to preparing them for reintegration into the community. The prison seeks to ensure all prisoners being released have access to core services such as identification documents and banking. The charity Reconnect provides three volunteers who meet prisoners due for release and then Department of Work and Pensions coaches and prison employment leads provide pre-release careers support.

Regrettably, the prison's education, skills and work self-assessment identified shortcomings in the careers guidance available to prisoners. The 'next steps' programme had not yet sufficiently developed the skills needed to support progression towards employment on release, and the support currently available was not always adequate to prepare men for employment. However, IIRMS (intensive intervention and risk management services) were reinstated during the reporting year and now monitor prisoners one, two and three months before release, which should help strengthen pre-release support and improve outcomes.

The Board is concerned that the resettlement systems in place over the reporting period have fallen short of an acceptable minimum level. We will monitor the steps that are now in place to accelerate improvement.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	18
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	331

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing and ablutions	11	6
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	4	10
C	Equality	2	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	10	4
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	2	18
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	2	4
F	Food and kitchens	2	5
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	18	24
H1	Property within the Establishment	17	13
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	29	25
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	2	2
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	3	8
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	27	18
K	Transfers	2	3
L	Miscellaneous	11	32
	Total	142	172



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