Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Ashfield

For reporting year
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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Ashfield is a privately managed prison run by Serco, located in the village of Pucklechurch in south Gloucestershire, around 10 miles from both Bristol and Bath. It is a specialist training and treatment category C establishment (which houses prisoners who cannot be trusted in open conditions, but who are not considered dangerous enough to require maximum security) for adult men, exclusively for prisoners convicted of a sexual offence (PCoSO).

The prison has a baseline certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being overcrowded) of 416[1], with an operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) of 412. Throughout the reporting period, it has typically accommodated between 400 and 416 prisoners on site at any one time, although increasingly at the upper limit of this range.

Accommodation consists of two main residential units, Avon and Severn, each with four wings accommodating between 40 and 60 prisoners. In 2025, a therapeutic community (TC) was set up to house a small group of 16 prisoners and dedicated staff. It is the only TC in the UK working solely with men convicted of a sexual offence. The aim of the TC is to reduce the risk of reoffending by providing an environment in which people live together as a community, with change brought about through talking therapy and interpersonal experience.

Population figures remain similar to last year, with prisoners aged 50 and over making up the majority group (just over 40%), with the next biggest group (aged 30-39) at 26%. Overall, the population has remained relatively stable in comparison with many HMPPS prisons.

As a contracted-out prison, HMP Ashfield has a Director and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Controller.

[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

This has been a year of relative calm and consolidation following all the changes reported by the IMB last year. Compared with many other prisons, HMP Ashfield appeared to remain a generally safe establishment during the reporting year, and the Board observed the continued commitment and dedication shown by staff in caring for those in their custody.

A full HMIP inspection took place in April 2026, following the previous inspection in October 2023. Overall, the conclusions were positive. At the October 2023 inspection, they found purposeful activity to be 'poor', but in 2026 this had improved to 'not sufficiently good'. Ofsted graded the education, skills and works provision as 'inadequate' in 2023, but found that this had improved to 'requires improvement' in the inspection in 2026. The IMB has observed that real improvements have been made this year, primarily by simplifying timetables and the pay structure. Better qualified staff have also been employed, raising the quality of teaching. We look forward to seeing further improvements in the year ahead.

For more than ten years, since HMP Ashfield began housing men convicted of sexual offences, the population has remained relatively stable, with little violence and most prisoners appearing to focus on serving their time. However, this year, the IMB has witnessed a change in the type of prisoner arriving. Younger, more volatile prisoners with complex needs have been sent to Ashfield at the start of their sentences. In the past, a prisoner would not expect to go to a category C training prison until they had served many months, or even years, in other prisons. Category C prisons typically house adult male sentenced prisoners who are considered unlikely to attempt escape and focus on education, work and rehabilitation. Time will tell if the emergency early release scheme due to start in autumn 2026 helps restore the 'normal' balance at Ashfield.

The provision of social and of end-of-life care remains an ongoing concern for the IMB, as those over 50 still make up more than 40% of the population and many elderly prisoners may never be released. HMIP reported that the needs of those requiring social care have been met, with outside agencies providing help. The IMB broadly agrees with this observation, but our weekly monitoring visits have allowed us to witness the impact of advanced dementia on individual prisoners, as well as on the 'buddies' who look after them and on the whole wing.

This year, more prisoners required longer-term hospital treatment, which meant that a greater number of officers were needed for bed watches. That, together with days taken for sickness and annual leave, led to fewer officers on the wings. Prisoners were often locked up for longer, which led to frustration throughout the prison.

The exceptionally hot summer in 2026 also created extremely challenging conditions for prisoners in their cells. The only relief from the hot, stuffy conditions came from small fans that prisoners could buy.

Safety

- The number of self-harm incidents and corresponding ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) documents (used to support prisoners who are

at risk of self-harm and suicide) was slightly lower this year compared with last.
- There was a marginal increase in the number of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, but levels remained very low when compared with the majority of other prisons in England and Wales.
- There was an increase in the number of incidents resulting in segregation, with some staff expressing concern that a different cohort of prisoners was being transferred to HMP Ashfield earlier in their sentences (see section 5.2).

Fair and humane treatment

- From our observations, overall standard of cleanliness and organisation of accommodation remains good.
- In the Board's view, fluctuating staff numbers, due to hospital bed watches, staff turnover, illness and holiday leave led to regular low staff morale and more restricted regime.
- The introduction of a new roll call reconciliation system was unsuccessful, as prisoners were being locked up for much longer than normal. The system was eventually replaced.

Health and wellbeing

- The over 50s still represent more than 40% of HMP Ashfield's population. The IMB remains concerned about provision for end of life and social care for PCoSOs in custody, as well as access to hospital and specialist care homes.
- There were more than 1000 hospital appointments and 40 hospital admissions, an increase on the previous year.
- The number of prisoners seeking mental health support for anxiety and depression doubled during the reporting year.

Progression and resettlement

- There has been a slight increase in the number of prisoners released without accommodation, including one individual thought to be high risk (see 7.5).
- This was the first full year of operation for the small therapeutic community (TC), which is now around half full, with permanent residents and a number of temporary 'lodgers', and remains on track to reach full occupancy during 2026-2027.
- There were some improvements in the provision of education, skills and work (ESW), including the simplification of timetables and the pay structure.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Last year, the Board asked whether prisons would be included in government plans for better social care. What progress has been made since then, and what further action is planned?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Is the need to manage overcrowding resulting in prisoners being allocated to category C training prisons before they are ready for progression to that stage of their sentence?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- What plans are in place to recruit sufficient officers to reduce the regular shortfalls in staffing levels?

3.3 Response to the previous report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister Urgent need for a comprehensive national older prisoner related strategy. HMP Ashfield's over 50s population sits at more than 43%. Is the Minister considering a strategy and, if not, why not? If you are thinking about a strategy paper, what is the timeline for it to be published?	I recognise the urgency of the Board's request for a comprehensive national strategy for older prisoners, noting that men aged fifty and over comprise more than 40% of the population at HMP Ashfield. The rise in the number of older prisoners over the past twenty years has created challenges across the estate, particularly in meeting complex health and social care needs. Following the recommendation from the Independent Sentencing Review, we are working with prisons to develop an older prisoner strategy over the coming months. This work will draw directly on operational experience. In the meantime, a number of initiatives to	A strategy has not been published.

	support the older population at HMP Ashfield have been implemented including weekly creative arts and wellbeing groups, one to one cooking, a weekly memory group and cognitive stimulation sessions. Physical adaptations are also being made where possible, HMP Ashfield has altered seven cells to accommodate specific physical needs, such as widening doors for wheelchair users.	
Inadequate social care, including end-of-life and dementia care, for people convicted of sexual offences. With an increasing older population, what additional measures will be taken to assist prisons such as HMP Ashfield?	I appreciate your concerns regarding social care, dementia care and end-of-life care for men convicted of sexual offences. Work is underway with NHS England and Oxleas to strengthen dementia and end of life care across prisons in the South West. This includes negotiations with memory services in South Gloucestershire and plans to embed palliative care skills within the nursing workforce. Social care remains the responsibility of local authorities under the Care Act and is delivered at HMP Ashfield by South Gloucestershire Council under contract with Serco.	No progress to report.
Pressure on probation services inside and outside prison.	I share the Board's concern about the small	This problem is likely to get worse, at least in

Concern about prisoners being released without appropriate accommodation. What further measures are being taken to address this problem?	number of prisoners who leave HMP Ashfield without suitable accommodation and I recognise the ongoing pressure on probation services in custody and in the community. HMPPS continues to expand the Community Accommodation Service (CAS) at tier three, which provides up to twelve weeks of basic accommodation for prison leavers at risk of homelessness. In addition, all prisons and probation services in England must comply with the statutory Duty to Refer under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, ensuring individuals who are homeless or at risk are referred to a local housing authority of their choice. Strategic Housing Specialists and Homelessness Prevention Teams are working closely with local authorities and partners to identify appropriate pathways for those who would otherwise be homeless. CAS providers offer specialist support with housing applications and benefits, tenancy understanding, rent arrears, access to rent deposit schemes and liaison with accommodation providers to help sustain placements. The New Commissioned	the short term, as prisoners are being released earlier in their sentences.

	Rehabilitative Services contracts for men to support them with their accommodation needs are planned to go live in 2027.	
To the Prison Service Last year, it was suggested that individual prisons would be provided with information about reoffending rates in the near future. Has there been any progress with this?	Proven reoffending statistics are published nationally and cover offenders who were released from custody, received a non-custodial conviction at court or received a caution or reprimand. These figures are published on a regular basis by the Ministry of Justice. However, at present, reoffending data is not routinely available at individual prison level. Historically, limitations in data quality and changes to offender management arrangements have meant that reoffending rates could not be robustly attributed to specific establishments. While improvements to underlying data have been made, prison-level reoffending figures are not currently published. At HMP Ashfield, it is recognised that prisoners typically move between establishments during their sentence and often progress to open conditions prior to release. This makes it difficult to draw direct conclusions about the impact of interventions delivered at a single site.	There has been no progress.

	Nonetheless, reoffending data remains a valuable source of insight at a system level, and work continues nationally to improve the quality and use of data to inform rehabilitation policy and practice.	
How will the Prison Service improve the situation, whereby category D prisoners are being transferred to HMP Ashfield without prior adjudication or being placed on report and with no opportunity to put their case prior to transfer.	Decisions on categorisation and re-categorisation are overseen by the Head of Offender Management Services, who ensures that decisions are fair, consistent and evidence based. Staff use the Digital Categorisation Service, and all decisions are subject to quality assurance, including countersigning and checks for compliance with policy and monitoring of any disproportionate impact on protected characteristics. The Security Categorisation Policy Framework was republished on 28 April 2025 to strengthen and clarify processes and remains under review. Locally, the Director reports that returns from open conditions have not affected regime stability. In some cases, categorisation or adjudication paperwork has followed the prisoner after transfer rather than in advance. Where this occurs, the receiving establishment raises the matter with the sending prison to ensure documentation is	There have been fewer cases in this reporting year.

	provided promptly. Complaints from prisoners in such circumstances have generally been resolved quickly.	
To the Director With the introduction of the split work week and related pay structure in the new contract, what improvements are being made to simplify and make this fairer for all?	The split working week has been removed upon review to ensure that all opportunities for any activity are available to all prisoners located here at HMP Ashfield. This was implemented in early 2026.	The split week has been abandoned.
The impact of key work reporting, providing escort staff in hospital and occasional redeployment to other Serco prisons has meant fewer wing officers available, all of which has resulted in low staff morale. What steps are being taken to relieve these pressures?	A Staff Resourcing Review was conducted in the last quarter of 2025 and resources were re-distributed according to where the identified needs were. This means that some additional resources were identified for safer custody, management cover and hospital escorts. There may be times when bed watch and escort requirements place pressures on the overall staffing picture but these will be exceptional in nature due to the increase in resources for this area and is a usual prison pressure.	The wing staff situation remains very challenging despite regular recruitment drives.
The charity shop has been closed, initially due to building work and then staff shortages. Are there plans to re-open it?	The charity shop was re-opened and has been operating well serving the needs of the prisoners.	The charity shop is regularly open.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

The IMB regards HMP Ashfield as a generally safe prison, with low numbers of prisoners complaining about bullying, assaults, violence or committing acts of self-harm. This observation is based partly on comparisons with other similar prisons and from what we have seen on our weekly monitoring visits.

The number of self-harm incidents is slightly lower than last year, as are the corresponding number of assessment care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans. IMB members often observe ACCT reviews, when staff from healthcare, probation, psychological services, chaplaincy and senior officers talk to the prisoner to try to find out why they are feeling distressed and what can be done to remove the risk of self-harm. We have seen that these meetings are carried out in a professional manner.

From the Board's observations, the safer custody team of senior staff and prisoner orderlies (trusted prisoners who take on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison) work hard to ensure that the most vulnerable prisoners are identified and that anyone believed to be a danger to himself or others is monitored.

A major safety audit was carried out in March 2026, followed by a full inspection by HMIP in April, with most prisoners reporting that they feel safe at HMP Ashfield.

4.1 Reception and induction

Last year's relocation of the early days centre (EDC) has been successful, and the unit is now settled in Avon D wing. Incoming prisoners are placed here, and an induction process is completed before they are transferred to Severn or Avon wings. This process typically lasts two weeks but can be adjusted if necessary. The induction process includes an initial assessment for education, skills and work, taking into account if any prisoner is neurodiverse and may therefore need extra support.

Briefings on prison routine, administrative procedures and rules and regulation are also given. Prisoners are briefed on ways to contact their friends and families, and this is possible soon after arrival. Prisoners have told the IMB they are generally pleased with the reception process. The induction orderly is seen to have a good understanding of the needs of incoming prisoners and an enthusiasm for his work. When the IMB asked a member of staff to help locate some missing property for a new prisoner, they were most cooperative. In mid-March, one instance of an eight-week delay was recorded on property coming from another prison. Where there is a delay in releasing prisoners' belongings, prison issue clothing is available.

This year, an attempt to send in drug-impregnated papers into the prison was detected and illustrates the challenge in providing sufficient resources to search incoming property as soon as possible.

Where there have been periodic complaints about incoming prisoners' property, the IMB has seen that a genuine attempt to resolve issues has generally been made. The most common complaint that takes longer to resolve remains the same as in previous years, namely when property is left at the transferring prison or when mail-order items are delivered to prisoners' former prisons after transfer. The latter delays

are exacerbated when goods arrive at the originating prison after a prisoner's property card has been forwarded to the receiving prison. Of 16 applications (prisoners' written representation to the IMB) relating to property, 10 concerned incoming property rather than property already registered at HMP Ashfield.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There has been a slight decrease in the number of ACCTs being opened this year (96), compared with last year (108), of which 12 were opened in previous establishments. The lowest number of ACCTs was recorded in July 2025, with only one ACCT opened. The highest reported figure was 26, between October to December 2025.

There are currently no prolific self-harmers at HMP Ashfield (a prolific harmer is defined as someone with 20 or more incidents in the previous 12 months). Most of the reported incidents were minor and usually involved cutting or scratching.

IMB members regularly visit prisoners on an ACCT, and most report that they receive good support from staff. The processes and documentation observed by IMB members are generally of a good standard, and the routine assurance process conducted by senior staff highlights issues and ensures that action is taken to address them.

Safer custody staff appear to be proactive in providing additional support through personal improvement plans (PIPs) for those with complex needs and at risk of self-harm. Also, in the Board's view, Ashfield should be commended for the effective multiagency approach to safer custody exemplified by the safety intervention meeting (SIM), which is well attended by relevant departments every two weeks. Additionally, prisoners support safer custody work in a variety of ways and help with violence reduction by offering the Here to Hear (H2H) service i.e. a listening ear for fellow prisoners who need extra support during the day or at night.

Prisoners can also call the Samaritans from their cells. In the reporting period, more than 1800 calls, although just over 40% of calls were registered to just one prisoner.

4.3 Violence, violence reduction and self-isolation

There was a marginal increase in the number of reported assaults this year, with 16 recorded, compared with 15 in the previous year. None were considered serious. There were no assaults made against members of staff.

These figures are well below the national average where, in the 12 months to September 2025, the rate of assaults in prisons was 364 per 1000 prisoners - a 6% increase on the previous year. As a comparison, the rate for HMP Ashfield was 38 per 1000 prisoners.

Challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs) are used to identify, manage and support those who pose a risk to others in custody. CSIPs can also be employed to support victims of harassment, bullying and assault. In the reporting period, CSIPs averaged 2-3 per month and prisoners arriving at HMP Ashfield with active CSIPs averaged one per month. When a prisoner arrives on a CSIP, a review is carried out to determine if it is still relevant. In many cases, it will be removed and the prisoner is allowed a fresh start.

The most common reasons for initiating a CSIP are prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and failed mandatory drug tests (MDTs).

4.4 Use of force

In the year to April 2026, there continued to be a low number of use of force incidents, with 19 incidents compared with 11 last year. This remains below the 2023-2024 figure of 21.

Control and restraint techniques were used occasionally, with rigid-bar handcuffs (RBHs) used 17 times. PAVA incapacitant spray and batons were not deployed at any point.

Any use of force incident is subject to scrutiny by senior managers and a member of the chaplaincy team. IMB members are invited to examine such cases where evidence is available. Where such a review was undertaken, use of force appeared necessary, proportionate and properly managed.

Staff training emphasises the use of de-escalation tactics at HMP Ashfield with use of force seen as a last resort. This approach is validated by the outcomes above.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

HMP Ashfield's excellent record of preventing illicit items entering the establishment has continued. From our observations, it has been achieved mainly through robust procedures and effective intelligence gathering and analysis.

During the reporting period, a total of 319 routine cell searches were carried out, together with a further 70 intelligence-led searches, which was similar overall to last year's figures. Finds from cells were mostly inappropriate material, including explicit writings and pictures. However, other finds included hooch (illicitly brewed alcohol), unauthorised medication, a secure digital card, lighters, three X-rated games and one ligature.

During the reporting year, a total of 507 random mandatory drug tests (MDTs) were conducted, with only one failure. However, 55 suspicion-led drug tests were conducted, with 10 failures (a slight increase on last year). All failures were caused by the detection of non-authorised opiates.

An X-ray body scanner is routinely deployed to screen prisoners returning from open conditions. This is due to the increased risk of obtaining and secreting illicit items in a more relaxed prison environment. However, only one illicit item was detected using the scanner in the reporting year.

Another key process in maintaining security is the routine scanning of mail. This is done using an X-ray machine. In the reporting period, 17 positive indications were recorded for incoming mail, which is an increase on last year's five.

Visitors also present a risk to the prison, but thorough searches and the use of a passive operational dog have contributed to reducing the risk of illicit items being smuggled into the prison.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Throughout the reporting year, the IMB's weekly monitoring reports have reflected the overall high standard of cleanliness and organisation of prisoners' accommodation. The facilities are well maintained, and the wings are kept clean, organised and free from rubbish. The wing orderlies appear to be motivated and hardworking.

Changes to the accommodation following the implementation of the new Serco contract in 2024 saw the establishment of a therapeutic community (TC) and an assisted living wing for older prisoners and those with disabilities, as well as the incentivised substance free living wing (ISFL). These remain distinct and separate areas within the residential blocks. A total of 12 cells on the assisted living wing have been fitted with a call bell system linked to the gatehouse. This is useful for vulnerable prisoners at risk of falls or seizures.

Maintaining the required ratio of staff to prisoners (Serco policy requires 1:30) on residential blocks was challenging at times during the reporting year. High numbers of hospital bed watches, staff turnover and illness all contributed to the fluctuating staff numbers and occasional low morale amongst officers, in the Board's view. At times, this all led to a more restricted regime and prisoners being locked up for longer. Understandably, the IMB received several complaints from prisoners during our monitoring visits. See section 5.3 for further details.

All cells have specially adapted information technology called PICS. This allows prisoners to stay in touch with family via text messages and they can access all the functions of the kiosks (self-service computer terminals that allow prisoners to manage their daily affairs), available in the main area of the wings. They can see food menus, send messages and complaints to various prison departments and read useful information about health and wellbeing activities.

Throughout the reporting year, both residential blocks reported broken washing machines and concerns about the efficiency of clothes dryers. Older models were replaced with more environmentally friendly machines, but they seemed to struggle with the volume of laundry produced by so many prisoners. The IMB heard many complaints from laundry orderlies and prisoners about the cleanliness and dryness of clothing at times.

The record high temperatures experienced during the first half of the 2026 summer highlighted the challenge of keeping cells cool. At times, the heat was extreme and the air stuffy. Residential leads tried to alleviate the impact of the heat with distribution of extra water. Prisoners were also encouraged to buy small fans. Regular temperature checks were carried out in the residential areas by the maintenance team.

In the Board's experience, the quality of food is generally considered good at Ashfield. During the reporting year, there were 125 positive comments sent via the internal digital prison kiosks and 79 negative comments.

Serco has chosen to implement the HMPPS Food in Prisons Framework, even though it was not included in the Ashfield contract. There will be a cost attached to this, but managers say they want to align with other prisons so that prisoners receive

the same higher quality food across the whole prison estate. The framework is being phased in, with the final phase anticipated in 2027. It should help to ensure that diets in prison support health and rehabilitation and that menus are nutritionally analysed and offer choice for diverse needs, including ethical and religious requirements. Initial feedback has been positive, with one prisoner observing that the new healthier lasagne was virtually indistinguishable from the previous recipe.

5.2 Segregation

HMP Ashfield is different from many prisons in that it does not have a separate segregation unit. During the reporting year, there were a small number of occasions when a prisoner had to be segregated in a shared cell because the prison was full. The IMB questioned how this arrangement works, particularly for the prisoner who was not being segregated, but was assured by staff and prisoners that, although not ideal, it can work. For example, the non-segregated prisoner can use headphones to watch television and listen to music, while only the segregated prisoner is confined to the cell.

Between July 2025 and June 2026, there were more incidents leading to segregation than in the same period in the previous year, with at least 38 cases reported. Senior prison staff have told the IMB they suspect this may be due partly to a different type of prisoner arriving earlier in their sentence. In the past, any prisoner arriving at a category C training prison would have experienced many months, or even years, in other prisons. However, there were cases this year of several younger, more volatile prisoners with complex needs arriving with only a few weeks in the system. Consequently, much less was known about them than would usually be the case. By chance, the IMB observed a new, clearly distressed prisoner cause serious damage to his cell. He was restrained by highly trained officers and placed in another cell, only to continue to lash out. A further example of this increasingly volatile behaviour included staff having faeces and urine thrown at them. The IMB recognises how difficult - and sometimes dangerous - a prison officer’s job can be.

A rising number of failed drug test charges have resulted in segregation during the reporting year. Additionally, aggressive behaviour and breaking other prison rules, such as possession of unauthorised items, sexual activity and damage to prison property, have also been cited as reasons for segregation.

At the end of 2025, the average time spent in cellular confinement was around two weeks, although this fluctuated throughout the year. In early 2026, that duration had dropped to just over seven days, although it has since risen again.

The IMB regards visiting prisoners in segregation as one of its most important responsibilities, and has generally found that, at Ashfield, they are treated fairly and humanely.

It should also be stressed that, compared with many other establishments, these segregation figures remain low.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Staffing levels at HMP Ashfield have been challenging at times. For the prison custodial officer (PCO) grade, staffing levels have fallen below the complement of 93 in ten months of this reporting year. For these months, the prison was operating with, on average, seven PCOs fewer than complement. Additionally, two PCOs were

seconded as custodial managers at Ashfield. At times, staffing has been stretched, particularly when there were bed watches (when a prisoner requires hospital admission for at least one night and needs to be constantly observed by a minimum of two prison officers for security reasons), and this has affected the regime. Over the reporting period, there have been several occasions when there has been more than one prisoner on bed watch and occasionally as many as six. It has been observed that when staff are redeployed to bed watches, low morale amongst wing staff increases and restricted regimes are implemented.

A further challenge is the level of experience among PCOs. Around 50% (52% in the previous reporting year) have three years' experience or less, with 26% (17% in the previous reporting year) having two years' experience or less. During the reporting year, 20 new officers were recruited, three of whom had previous PCO experience. In addition, 17 PCOs left HMP Ashfield. A lack of experience can sometimes lead to inconsistency in approach, particularly in responding to behaviour, making the role of custodial offender managers (COMs) in this area especially important.

In other areas, such as interventions, staff numbers have been more stable. However, across the prison, the time between recruitment of external staff and start dates have become less reliable. Security vetting has become more onerous, and at times, new recruits have been unwilling to wait until the process ends and have gone on to find other positions.

The Board has observed that key work at HMP Ashfield continues to be generally well managed. A target of 95% of prisoners being seen each week was achieved, and sometimes exceeded, every month in the reporting year. A sample of key working records is reviewed every week by Serco to comply with HMPPS quality assurance standards.

During the previous reporting period, a few prisoners told the IMB that their key worker had helped them find solutions to their concerns. This year, we note from key worker records that prisoners often seek answers to issues by speaking to their key worker whilst applying to IMB and submitting a prison application or Comp 1 (an ordinary complaint) at the same time.

The IMB is aware that some prisoners do not always see their allocated key worker but another officer instead (known as secondary key working). This is not surprising, as officers may be working nights or be absent on annual or sick leave. The amount of secondary key working varies from week to week and can be affected by bed watches and staff turnover, as well as the usual reasons for absence. Last year, the amount of secondary key working increased due to staff shortages and bed watches, but figures are not routinely collated. It is possible that secondary key working increased again this year because of staff shortages, although the IMB has not received any direct complaints about this.

An audit of key work was undertaken in June 2025. We were told that most actions had been completed, although challenges remained in allocating a key worker within 14 days due to staffing levels. There was also no evidence that key workers discuss prisoners' sentence plans with them every three months, despite the plans being available to staff. However, the recent HMIP inspection did not raise any concerns.

5.4 Equality and diversity

In the Board's view, the attention and care given to ensuring that the prison takes all aspects of diversity, equality and inclusion seriously continues to be a striking feature. There are monthly prisoner forums (one for each of the protected characteristics, plus one for armed forces' veterans and another for buddies) and a selection of organised equality and diversity events. Forums are generally attended by prison management.

The Board has access to all DIRFs (discrimination incident reporting forms) and copies of the minutes and statistics provided for all DEAT (discrimination and equality action team) meetings, along with those produced by all the monthly forums.

Of the 129 applications received by the Board, five were about equality issues. It is also encouraging that remarkably few issues or complaints of a more general nature have been raised at the different forum meetings.

Concerns about racism, homophobia and transphobia amongst a small minority of prisoners were raised during the reporting year, predominantly through DIRFS. These concerns most commonly related to inappropriate language and misgendering. The Board observed that DIRFS were investigated carefully and, where substantiated by the available evidence, appropriate action was taken, including warnings, restorative justice sessions and discussions with key workers. However, it is often difficult to establish the facts when there are no independent witnesses, and 11 of 54 DIRFs submitted (just over 20%) were proven.

As in previous reporting years, statistics presented at the quarterly DEAT and other prison management meetings have indicated that black, Asian and other minority ethnic prisoners were not disadvantaged or disproportionately represented in key areas such as adjudications, incentives scheme status, access to interventions programmes, use of force or segregation or progression to open conditions. A suggestion last year, that it took those from minority ethnic backgrounds slightly longer to gain promotion to orderly posts, was taken on board by the prison and it continued to monitor the situation this year.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy department at Ashfield provides a variety of faith services, as well as pastoral care for prisoners of all faiths or none. The staff is made up of permanent, sessional and voluntary chaplains.

There are also several visiting chaplains; many are voluntary and travel across the UK to serve the smaller faith groups. Efforts are also made to provide online faith sessions if chaplains are not available. Many faiths are followed in the prison, including Christianity (Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Church of Scotland, Quaker, Orthodox), Judaism, Mormonism, Paganism (including spiritualism), Islam, Buddhism, Rastafarianism, Sikhism, and Hinduism. All major religious groups appear to meet once a week for a worship session.

Ashfield now has a Rastafarian representative going through security checks. This has taken longer than expected, as there is a national shortage of approved Rastafarian leaders. Ashfield would like to recruit a permanent Pagan representative, as there is a growing number of pagan prisoners.

Where possible, members of the chaplaincy team attend ACCT reviews for prisoners. They visit prisoners who are segregated and prisoners on hospital bed watch. There are also close links with the family strategy team in the prison. Chaplains recruit volunteer prison visitors and organise the Mothers' Union, a Church of England group that provides refreshments during visiting times.

Chaplains run several events for religious festivals, and they work with the catering team to offer suitable food for celebrations. At the same time, musical instruments can be borrowed from the department for use in services and on special occasions, which is particularly popular with prisoners.

A six-week bereavement course is organised by the chaplaincy team twice a year. This is a group exercise giving individuals tools to manage their emotions around grief and loss. There is also the opportunity to meet one-to-one if a group course is not suitable. The chaplaincy is also part of the staff care team offering regular meditation sessions for prisoners and staff. Additionally, the team plays a vital support role when there is a death in custody.

This year, the chaplaincy team has focused on being more present on the wings and improving support and advice. An important development for the team has been linking with the offender management unit (OMU) to highlight faith as part of an individual's rehabilitative journey. The emphasis remains offering support to all prisoners of any faith and none.

Outside agencies working with the chaplaincy team at Ashfield include Story Book Dads (which enables prisoners to record themselves reading a popular storybook for their children), the Angel Tree project and Partners of Prisoners (POPS), The Salvation Army and two letter writing organisations. Catholic volunteers are due to start a mindfulness group later this year.

5.6 Incentives schemes

Throughout the reporting period, the majority of prisoners (typically 79%-85%) enjoyed the benefits of enhanced status (the top level of the prison's incentives scheme), with around 13%-20% on the standard (middle) level and rarely more than six or seven prisoners on the basic (bottom) level at any one time. Each status is based on behaviour and dictates the entitlement to privileges.

HMP Ashfield reviewed and updated its own local incentives policy in April 2026. Notably, the Director requested further changes regarding the differentiation between basic status and enhanced status and the development of a higher enhanced status - 'enhanced two'. The philosophy underpinning this policy and embraced nationally, as well as at Ashfield, is that it shifts the emphasis away from addressing poor behaviour by removing entitlements towards acknowledging and reinforcing good behaviour. Both HMPPS guidance notes and HMP Ashfield's policy state, for example, that there should generally be four times as many positives as negatives recorded. No prison data was available to assess whether this has happened over this period. The Ministry of Justice database shows that, on average, over three times more positive behaviour entries compared with negative behaviour entries were logged during the reporting period. No data was available to assess how many staff issued warnings and whether these were clustered, although this was made available last year.

The IMB received 13 applications concerning the incentives scheme and warnings during the reporting year, compared with 26 in 2024-2025. Two related to the incorrect application of policy; however, the errors had been corrected by the time IMB members visited the prisoners concerned. No particular trends were identified.

HMP Ashfield's local incentives policy includes a separate rewards system (usually in the form of a £2 phone credit) for exceptional contributions or for repeatedly going above and beyond in helping others. Over the reporting period, 62 rewards (75 in the previous reporting period) were given for positive behaviour - an average of about five a month.

5.7 Complaints

Almost 800 formal complaints were received by the prison during the reporting period, a decrease of around 6% compared with the same period last year, and a return to the levels of two years ago. In the reporting period, approximately 85% of complaints were Comp 1s (ordinary complaints); approximately 12% were Comp 1As (appeals); and 3% were Comp 2s (confidential complaints about a sensitive issue, which goes directly to the Director or another senior stakeholder).

The highest number of complaints received in any month was 82 (in July 2025) and the lowest was 50 (in May 2026), with a monthly average of around 66 (compared with 71 last year). The number of complaints was influenced by a small number of prisoners who submitted multiple complaints and applications through a range of channels. However, no particular trends or systemic issues were identified from this correspondence.

During the reporting period, from our review of data, more than 90% of complaints were responded to within the stipulated timescale. The Board appreciated the achievement of responding to complaints in a timely fashion, but would, however, value more recorded detail about all the complaints, in terms of who they are from and what has been done about them. Further breakdown would also help to uncover and, hopefully, rule out any deeper equality and diversity issues regarding different protected characteristics. As they stand, the focus in responding to complaints can seem over-quantitative rather than qualitative. It is noted that this comment is substantially unchanged from the previous reporting period and agrees with the observations of the HMIP audit.

Just over 80% of complaints fell into one of four categories: residence (29%); education, skills and work (24%); external (15%); and security (14%). A trend is noted if there are more than two complaints about the same matter during a month.

Complaints categorised as 'residence' varied considerably. Trends noted within the period included laundry issues, the prisoner information and advice council (PIAC), prisoner inappropriate behaviour, bullying on the wing, delivery of newspapers and sharing cells. However, the most frequent complaint regarded the operation of the incentives policy.

Complaints categorised as 'education, skills and work' were predominantly in regard to the payment of wages (50 complaints over the first six months of the reporting period). See section 7.1.

Security complaints can vary considerably but included internal property issues. These formed about 20% of complaints, on average fewer than two a month.

However just over 45% of external complaints (to other prisons) concerned missing property, an average of about five a month.

In previous reporting periods, the Board had hoped that key worker reports would note when a formal complaint was avoided because appropriate advice was provided. We have not seen any evidence that this aspiration has been achieved. Previously, the Board was told that communication, application and decency (CAD) representatives were recruited on each wing to try to support prisoners by offering advice, guidance, and signposting where required. This may have led to fewer Comp1s (ordinary complaints) being submitted. However, the effectiveness of their work has not be assessed.

During May, a review of the complaints process was undertaken following HMIP's comments on governance and complaints handling. All complaints received during that month were reviewed, and an ongoing process of checking a sample of 10% of complaints each month has been introduced. The Board welcomes this approach, having received a number of applications relating to complaints during the reporting year. Some prisoners reported concerns that complaints had been lost within the system or that complaints about staff had been answered by the member of staff concerned. Prisoners also put forward suggestions for improving the complaints process.

5.8 Property

The Board has observed that (over several years) property at HMP Ashfield has been organised efficiently by a very experienced officer and an orderly. The electronic property recording system continues to be more accurate and reliable than many of the paper versions on which prisoners' property has been recorded at other prisons.

Prisoners use an application to request storage changes and can expect a reply within ten days. In practice, prisoners usually receive a response within two working days. Prisoners collect items on an allocated property day.

Property lost in transfer from other prisons, including legal paperwork and other valuable or sentimental items, continues to be a regular issue. The Board has received 16 applications this year (compared with 24 in the previous year) about property. As mentioned in section 5.7, above, almost all complaints the prison received about other prisons concerned property issues.

The charity shop that was created a few years ago appears to be working well. This enables prisoners to donate items they do not want to take with them when they are released or transferred. Such property is re-sold to other prisoners, and the proceeds are donated to charity.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust continues to provide and commission healthcare services at HMP Ashfield, using external providers for specialist care. A subcontractor of South Gloucestershire Social Services, Fresh Haven Healthcare, provides some personal care packages for prisoners unable to wash, use the toilet independently or dress themselves. Prisoner 'buddies', who work with some of the most vulnerable prisoners, including older and disabled prisoners, deserve credit for their continued dedication and support, in the Board's view. During the reporting year, more than 12% of the prisoner population was aged over 70, slightly higher than in the previous year. The provision of social care remains an ongoing concern for the IMB at Ashfield, given the number of older prisoners.

The end of 2025 and beginning of 2026 was particularly busy, with around twice the usual number of calls to the ambulance service for cardiac and breathing-related concerns, alongside busy flu and Covid vaccination clinics. The number of hospital bed watches also increased during the year, resulting in more prison officers being deployed outside the prison than in the previous reporting period.

Staffing levels within the primary care team have, at times, been described as critically low by the outgoing head of healthcare. However, all positions have now been filled, including that of a new head of healthcare, who is due to start in autumn 2026.

In the reporting period, NHS England funded a new call bell system for 12 cells for particularly frail prisoners who may be at risk of falling at night.

There continues to be a bimonthly health improvement group (HIG) forum, which enables prisoner representatives to meet healthcare staff to discuss concerns and suggest improvements. A local delivery and quality board (LDQB), made up of healthcare professionals, including NHS England and senior prison staff, meets once a month to discuss targets and best practice.

A full investigation of healthcare services at HMP Ashfield was carried out by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), alongside the HMIP inspection in April 2026. The general standard of care was regarded as adequate and in line with similar services in the community. This view is shared by the Board.

The outgoing head of healthcare reported that there has continued to be a strong working relationship between Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and Serco during the reporting year, and that prison leaders have sought to resolve issues in a timely manner.

Overall, the IMB considers that further development of social care provision, alongside closer integration between healthcare, prison staff and external agencies, could help support some of the most vulnerable patients more effectively.

6.2 Physical healthcare

It is important to note that there is no hospital or 24-hour care facility at HMP Ashfield. However, during the reporting period, more than 1,000 planned and emergency visits to hospital took place. The vast majority lasted no more than a few

hours, but each required prison staff to accompany the prisoner. In addition, there were 40 hospital admissions requiring bed watches, usually involving a minimum of two officers at any one time. This was higher than last year's 34 admissions, and the resulting redeployment of officers placed additional pressure on staffing resources. In two months, November 2025 and May 2026, there were six simultaneous bed watches, which resulted in fewer officers than usual on the wings and was reported by senior managers to have affected staff morale.

The reporting year ended with four GP clinics being held each week. The main concern expressed by prisoners to the IMB was their frustration at not being able to see the same GP at each visit. Also, clinics were occasionally cancelled if a GP was ill, which led to a backlog of prescriptions not being signed. The lack of GP cover was highlighted as an issue by HMIP, but assurances have now been sought from the GP provider, Dr PA Secure, to provide cover when necessary.

The Board has not been generally concerned about wait for healthcare appointments. Waiting times varied according to clinical need following nurse triage.

In September 2025, the audiology provider went into administration, resulting in a temporary interruption to the service. During this period, nurses assisted with hearing aid adjustments and more complex cases were referred externally. A new audiology provider was in place by summer 2026.

On average, there were about 12 ‘do not attends’ (DNAs) by prisoners each week across all the health teams.

In the previous reporting year, pharmacy services were sometimes disrupted by the shortage of staff and poor co-ordination with prison officers. At times this led to long queues and prisoners feeling very frustrated. However, an agreement between prison staff and the pharmacy team was reached and the system quickly improved. There were no reports of medication shortages this year.

The health bar, where prisoners can buy a limited range of over-the-counter remedies, continued to operate, although the number of products available was reduced in an effort to lower costs. Basic medicines for minor ailments and eye drops remained available, but other items such as shampoo and toiletries could only be bought through the main prison canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials using their allocated funds).

6.3 Mental health

The number of prisoners requesting help for mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression increased from 15-20 a month in 2024-2025, to 30-40 a month in this reporting period. That means that up to 10% of the prisoner population now regularly seeks support. Mental health staff have told us that they always expect spikes at certain times of the year, such as Christmas and other religious festivals, but they have struggled to cope with this steady rise. The reason for this increase is not clear, but staff suggest it may be better awareness of services or that younger prisoners with more complex needs are being transferred to HMP Ashfield earlier in their sentences. An extra mental health nurse was appointed and will begin work in the second half of 2026.

When prisoners arrive at Ashfield with a diagnosis of dementia or specific learning disabilities such as ADHD or autism, they should receive appropriate support and

medication. However, Oxleas is not commissioned to diagnose these conditions, which may mean that some prisoners have unmet needs that have not been formally identified. Statistics show that more than 40% of prisoners at Ashfield are aged over 50, and just under 50% of the population are assessed as neurodiverse. A senior learning disability nurse within the mental health team provides support to prisoners with conditions such as ADHD and autism spectrum disorder.

A clinical psychologist works two to three days a week and is supported by a full-time assistant clinical psychologist. A psychiatrist visits the prison once a month to diagnose and treat any prisoner with a serious mental illness, but very few prisoners appeared to need this specialist care during the reporting period.

6.4 Social care

The issue of how to provide appropriate care for those with terminal illnesses came into focus again. One case highlighted the challenges involved in meeting complex end-of-life care needs within the prison environment, particularly where specialist facilities are not available elsewhere in the prison estate. The case also raised questions about the provision of social care and healthcare support for prisoners with significant care needs. The Board remains concerned about the lack of dedicated end-of-life care facilities within the prison estate. The prisoner concerned spoke positively about the care and support received from both staff and fellow prisoners.

This case highlights an ongoing challenge for HMP Ashfield, as for many prisons, in finding suitable places in hospitals or care homes for prisoners whose needs become too complex to be managed safely in custody and who require 24-hour healthcare and social care support. The Board understands that this is especially challenging for prisoners convicted of sexual offences.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

Usually, prisoners experience 10 hours a day unlocked, Monday to Friday. However, time out of cell has, on occasion, been restricted due to staff shortages (see section 5.3), notably because of bed watches. Unfortunately, no figures were collated to monitor this, although we have been told that bed watches and staff shortages are becoming more frequent. We understand that this will be monitored from July 2026. In addition, prisoners have complained that they are locked up (sometimes for several hours) because staff are unable to reconcile prisoner numbers.

In the Board's view, prisoners at HMP Ashfield have good access to the gym, recreational provision and the library during the week. At the beginning of the reporting period, more organised activities were being scheduled for weekends, but staff shortages have affected these plans.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

According to the IMB's previous reports, few prisoners at HMP Ashfield arrive with drug or alcohol issues. However, we understand there is a growing concern amongst staff that some prisoners are now being transferred to Ashfield much earlier in their sentences to help ease pressure in the wider prison estate. It means they haven't had the usual time to manage their addictions.

There is little evidence of an illicit substance problem at HMP Ashfield, but there are many prisoners who are concerned about returning to old habits once they are

released. The eight-week Foundations of Rehabilitation course is very popular, with one prisoner saying: It allows time and space to make different decisions.'

The IMB has observed that regular drug testing whilst living on the incentivised substance free living (ISFL) wing, together with support from the specialist team, the charity, Change, Grow, Live (CGL), has significantly helped prisoners cope with and face a future with these addictions.

September 2025 was named 'recovery month' by CGL. Several events were organised over the month to celebrate prisoners' recovery from addiction. Bowls tournaments and a 'recovery café' proved very successful, with good attendance from prisoners. A sports day was also held to encourage the men to make healthier choices.

Other external organisations that support ex-offenders with addictions in the community were also invited to talk to Ashfield prisoners. A peer mentor (former prisoner) from Bristol based group, Horizon, talked to 48 prisoners and was described as 'inspiring', according to their feedback. Further comments from prisoners included how much they appreciated the advice and support and that they had 'really enjoyed' the visits.

6.7 Soft skills

A new occupational therapist (OT) joined the prison in September 2025. She holds regular one-to-one sessions for prisoners needing specialist support and organises group work for those struggling with sleep problems and needing to learn relaxation techniques. She has also focused on strategies for the frail and has acquired more specialist equipment, including a hospital-style bed to assist those in need.

The wellbeing of prisoners and staff has been boosted this year with the appointment of an enthusiastic new wellbeing and social prescribing lead. She has started to introduce a wide range of activities and events that will also assist with the long-term rehabilitation of prisoners and hopefully reduce reliance on medical services.

Ways of living with drug addiction are being addressed with monthly visits from Narcotics Anonymous. Cocaine Anonymous will also be visiting every couple of months from summer 2026. A new forum for prisoners living on the ISFL wing is held regularly to discuss what it is like to live with addiction. It is also an opportunity to decide what events, talks, and incentives might be of interest to prisoners. The wellbeing lead has established a partnership with CGL to help boost provision for this group.

Other group work for all prisoners includes arts and crafts sessions, yoga for both prisoners and staff and the use of therapy dogs. These were being selected at the end of the reporting period and are due to start work in the second half of 2026.

A new app, named Empower, has been added to the in-cell information platform and offers ideas for all prisoners on how to improve fitness, mental wellbeing, learning and everyday life skills. The scope and ambition of this work at HMP Ashfield is to be commended.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 & 7.2 Education, library

HMP Ashfield, as a privately run prison, provides all education, skills and work (ESW) training in house. Therefore, these services are managed by one Serco manager and two curriculum managers and need to be assessed as a whole. In our report last year, there was a reference to the HMPPS and Ofsted inspections carried out in October 2023, which concluded that provision was 'inadequate'. A further inspection was carried out in April 2026, which found there had been a demonstrable improvement since the previous inspections but that the provision of purposeful activity was still 'not sufficiently good'.

The IMB identified some concerns in last year's annual report. The IMB is pleased that steps have been taken to address a number of these concerns. Serco has withdrawn the operation of a split week system, whereby one house block would be required to participate in education, skills or work (tier one activities) for one half of the week and, for the second half of the week, prisoners would be required to take part in social activities that enhance their wellbeing and potentially aid rehabilitation (known as tier two activities). The other house block operated this system in reverse.

Although it is to be welcomed that HMP Ashfield can now provide the contractually required 30 weekly hours of purposeful activities for each prisoner, this is not being consistently achieved. (These 30 hours are made up of 19.5 hours of tier one, and 10.5 tier two, activities.) One possible reason is that, following a review of prisoners' pay, it was decided that, with a few exceptions, prisoners would no longer receive pay for attending tier two activities. The IMB recognises that steps have been taken to encourage engagement. However, the Board considers that the existing balance between these two tiers is not ideal: greater emphasis should be placed on the provision of, and attendance at, tier one activities. It is understood that this issue is currently under review. However, the IMB is pleased to note that, following a review of tier two activities, some have been removed from this categorisation, as they could not be considered to be 'voluntary activities that enhance wellbeing and potentially aid rehabilitation'. This may also have affected the achievement of the target of 30 hours a week of purposeful activity.

The IMB is pleased to note the continuing improvement towards the contractual pass rate target of 90% for literacy, numeracy and vocational courses. At the end of the reporting period, the latest figures available were 82%, 63% and 92% respectively. Serco experienced staffing challenges affecting, in particular, numeracy and electrical courses. In numeracy, this limited the ability to deliver sufficient courses at the desired standard. Electrical courses were suspended for several months but have since resumed. The Board welcomes the steps taken to address these issues, including the successful recruitment of qualified staff, which appears to be contributing to improved performance. Recent observations of a range of classes found prisoners actively engaged in learning, with teachers delivering sessions in an enthusiastic and supportive manner.

During the reporting period, revised individual learning plans (ILPs) held by each prisoner were introduced and training in their use given to all ESW staff. However, as identified in the recent HMIP/Ofsted inspection, there was insufficient understanding of their use by staff based in the house blocks. These staff are equally responsible

for ensuring the effectiveness of ILPs for prisoners whilst undertaking ESW. We understand that work is taking place to address this concern.

Ashfield also appears to be taking steps to help ensure that high-quality teaching is provided. Measures are in place to support teaching staff to achieve, where appropriate, either Level 5 or Level 7 qualifications. Additionally, we understand that periodic observation of classes by managers takes place, with feedback provided to the teaching staff.

In the Board's 2024-2025 annual report, concern was raised about the provision of university degree level courses, given that there was a contractual requirement to provide such opportunities. The Board was told there was no longer a need to provide support to students, and therefore staffing resources reflected this. However, this year, Serco has found ways of supporting students. At the end of the reporting period, there were 17 Open University (OU) students, compared with 28 last year. In addition, Ashfield has engaged the social enterprise 'Doing What Really Matters'. The aim is to support prisoners to undertake courses in up to 75 universities. At the end of the reporting period, two prisoners were undertaking such degree courses.

Sadly, the excellent bakery course ended this year on the grounds there would be limited employment opportunities for released prisoners. This was replaced by additional functional skills and a coffee barista course, offering a recognised qualification for prisoners and providing an additional café service for staff. Released prisoners may still face problems gaining employment, but it is hoped they will at least gain some transferable skills.

The Board is aware that City & Guilds, one of the main awarding bodies for vocational qualifications, previously had concerns about the standards of courses offered. We understand that those concerns now seem to have been addressed.

There has been a slight increase in the proportion of prisoners assessed as neurodiverse, to just under 50% of the population. As well as working directly with prisoners, the neurodiversity support manager (NSM) has continued to play an important role in improving staff awareness and understanding of the needs of neurodiverse prisoners. The NSM provides ongoing training, supported by nine staff champions who have developed a good understanding of these needs. These champions are well placed to refer prisoners to the NSM for additional support, as well as provide suggestions and feedback. The Board is pleased to note positive feedback and signs of improvement in staff understanding of the needs of neurodiverse prisoners. Towards the end of the reporting period, a learning support facilitator was appointed, whose main role will be to support prisoners undertaking ESW.

From the Board's observations, the gym continues to play an important part in delivering purposeful activities for prisoners. It is run by three qualified physical education instructors (PEI) and offers a wide range of sports facilities. It is also an accredited learning centre through the education department. However, we have noted that there can be fewer activities when, for example, gym staff are seconded to other duties. Also, as there is only one PEI on duty over the weekend, the number of activities available is considerably reduced. In the Board's view, the gym would be able to improve its provision if there was an additional PEI.

Horticulture and reclamation are two areas that provide valuable work opportunities for prisoners seeking rehabilitation. Prisoners are able to gain nationally recognised qualifications whilst enhancing the prison's grounds with impressive flower borders. However, the continued lack of an easily accessible outside toilet still severely interrupts this work. The reclaimers learn practical skills such as making furniture from reclaimed wood, and they are responsible for looking after animals, including two honey producing bee hives. They have recently created a quiet garden that can hopefully be used by prisoners. These projects aim to improve prisoners' wellbeing, as well as teaching responsibility and improving skills to help secure employment on release.

The Shannon Trust charity continues to provide library services, including literacy and reading programmes, to support rehabilitation. Prisoners are helped to prepare for their pre-entry level literacy and numeracy courses, and prisoner mentors play a key role in supporting this learning as well as promoting the enjoyment of reading. The mentors themselves gain from the support they provide, as they can achieve an AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) peer-mentoring qualification on successful completion of the training.

The Shannon Trust regularly runs a series of activities in the library. They also support prisoners in submitting entries for the Koestler Awards (national awards that recognise and celebrate creative work produced by people in criminal justice settings). Out of 50 submissions during the previous reporting period (64 were submitted during this year), 22 awards were made, of which two were selected for exhibition.

There continues to be a consistently high level of library attendance each month. One recently introduced initiative is a quiet reading session in the library. There is evidence of a strong reading culture at HMP Ashfield. Overall, the Shannon Trust, working collaboratively with the education department, plays a key role in encouraging prisoners in their rehabilitation journey.

Overall, it is encouraging to see that the Director and her staff continue to focus on improving purposeful activity. The Board considers that HMP Ashfield has continued to make progress and is in a stronger position than in previous years to further develop its provision.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The need to reduce the risk of reoffending is a shared objective throughout the prison and a central part of offender management.

Responsibility for offender management is delivered by the offender management unit (OMU), which comprises a team of both Serco staff and HMPPS probation staff led by a senior probation officer. The OMU is responsible for overseeing the overall sentence plans for prisoners at Ashfield and this involves regularly completing and reviewing risk assessments. This includes on OASys (online offender assessment system), contributing to parole hearings and delivering one-to-one offending behaviour work as required. The OMU liaises with all departments in the establishment of an holistic and multidisciplinary approach to the prisoners' journey throughout their sentence.

During the reporting period, there were two changes to the OMU staff team. There were 161 new prisoner admissions, 44 direct releases and 72 transfers to other prisons. There are 26 prisoners who were given imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentences before the scheme ended in 2012: 27 are serving life sentences and 96 have had their sentences extended.

For those eligible, the waiting time to transfer to a category D (open) prison varied throughout this year. However, on the advice of the open prisons, prisoners were told to expect a three-month wait, on average. In reality, some moves happened more quickly. Unfortunately, many prisoners continued to fail in category D prisons, with 19 being transferred to HMP Ashfield.

In February 2026, the OMU held an important workshop to discuss licence conditions. Staff specialising in the management of sexual and violent offenders attended. A further workshop, including staff and prisoners from HMP Leyhill, was held later the same month to discuss living in open conditions, as prisoners from the closed estate are sometimes fearful of moving to an open prison or do not understand the expectations. The OMU continues to run weekly meetings with key workers.

Psychological services

A new cognitive behavioural programme, called Building Choices (BC), was introduced in July 2025 to replace the previously run Horizon and Kaizen programmes. It was designed to help address underlying patterns of behaviour that lead to reoffending. During the reporting year, three high-intensity courses were run, and many other prisoners attended the moderate course. The prison achieved its target for the provision of this programme.

The reporting year ended with 169 men waiting to attend the moderate-intensity programme and 52 men the high-intensity course. Eight men declined to participate or were deemed not ready to engage. These numbers include referrals from other prisons.

The psychological services team also continued to offer one-to-one bespoke intervention work, with places prioritised for IPP prisoners.

Therapeutic community

This has been the first full year of operation for the therapeutic community (TC). From the Board's observations, staff have worked hard to establish this specialist unit. Its aim is to allow 16 selected prisoners time and space to confront the impact of their crimes by living and working together in a separate area of the prison. Once assessed, the residents (currently eight, plus eight 'lodgers' who will return to the wings when other residents have been selected) are expected to attend daily therapy meetings, supported by staff and prisoners from the community. Most prisoners will remain in the unit for four or five years in the hope that full rehabilitation can be achieved.

It is the only therapeutic community in the UK specialising in treating people convicted of sexual offences (PCoSos). The IMB has visited the TC every week and although there have been a few staff changes, including the loss of the clinical lead, we have been impressed by the enthusiasm of staff and eagerness of most

prisoners to engage with this challenging but positive regime. We look forward to seeing how the unit develops with more full time residents next year.

Healthy sex programme

A small number of Ashfield prisoners (three) attended the healthy sex programme (HSP) in spring 2026. The HSP is an accredited cognitive behavioural intervention used within the prison and probation service in England and Wales to help PCoSos understand healthy sexual thoughts, recognise arousal triggers and manage their behaviour. At the end of the reporting period, there were 21 prisoners on the waiting list.

The HSP team has been hindered by a loss of one member of staff, but it remains on course to complete its annual target in 2026.

Medication to manage sexual arousal (MMSA) has continued to be prescribed for a small number of prisoners at Ashfield. In December 2025, a specialist training event, led by an NHS forensic psychiatrist, was attended by two members of staff from the probation team. HMP Ashfield was one of the first prisons in the country to participate in the pilot scheme to assess the impact of MMSA.

7.4 Family contact

Social visits for prisoners are held every Friday afternoon, Saturday morning, and on Sunday mornings and afternoons. Secure social video calls are arranged through an external provider and take place at various times during the week. The social video call service has been extended this year in acknowledgement of the importance of helping prisoners maintain contact with their families, particularly where they are separated by huge distances or cannot attend a face-to-face visit for any other reason.

A number of charities support these visits, including members of the Mothers' Union, who provide refreshments; POPS (Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group), which organises activities for children and also helps with refreshments; and the community bus, the Big Lemon, which operates a free shuttle service between Bristol Parkway railway station and HMP Ashfield.

About 37% of prisoners receive no visits from family or friends. Some are visited by volunteers from New Bridge Foundation, a national charity that seeks to tackle loneliness and isolation in prisons. The chaplaincy team has continued to make efforts this year to recruit more prison visitors and is supporting two letter writing schemes.

The PICS in-cell technology provides another important way for prisoners to stay in touch with approved family members.

Ashfield has continued to organise its highly successful programme called FACT (family at the centre of throughcare). FACT days were held every two months last year. This unique initiative, which is being used increasingly in all Serco prisons, allows the staff team to maintain contact with the 72 families who have signed up to receiving emails every six to eight weeks. Each email provides an update of any positive or negative entries made in the prisoner's sentence management record.

The scheme was developed at Ashfield and has significantly helped the transition of new prisoners into custody, whilst providing an ongoing helpline for family and

friends. When a new prisoner arrives, they can invite their family to join them to watch a video about Ashfield and hear from speakers from probation, key work, security and interventions. The early days centre (EDC) orderly also explains what Ashfield is like from the prisoner's perspective. Any prisoner can agree to their families being kept informed of their progress in custody. The IMB has observed a number of FACT days and remains impressed by how much prisoners and their families appreciate this service, as well as by the enthusiasm of staff.

HMP Ashfield also supports a specific initiative called CAPO (children affected by parental offending), which focuses on the emotional needs of children whose parent is in prison. During the reporting year, the prison hosted an event attended by more than 20 children. The IMB was pleased to hear positive feedback from visitors about the support provided.

POPS (Partners of Prisoners) has two full-time staff based at Ashfield and, in addition to supporting FACT days, also helps to organise family days. There are 12 family days each year, six for adult children and six for younger children of prisoners. Feedback from one family day in April included the comment: 'We all had a good time and enjoyed spending time with him and seeing the children bonding with Dad.'

7.5 Resettlement planning

During the last few months of the reporting period, Ashfield staff carried out a great deal of work re-calculating sentences after the announcement of the HMPPS emergency early release schemes. Those plans were then revised, and the vast majority of prisoners at HMP Ashfield were no longer eligible for early release. It is too early to say what the impact has been on prisoners.

During the reporting year, three men have been released from HMP Ashfield with no fixed address – one more than last year. The IMB remains deeply concerned that anyone is released without somewhere to live but is aware of the continuing pressures on probation services inside prison and in the community.

Public protection remains at the forefront of resettlement planning. During the reporting year, one case highlighted the challenges that can arise when a high-risk prisoner reaches the end of their sentence before suitable accommodation and support arrangements have been secured. Despite considerable efforts by the agencies involved, appropriate provision could not be identified before release. The Board was concerned by the circumstances of this case, although we understand that it was highly unusual. The case underlined the importance of effective joint working between prisons, probation and other agencies to manage risk and support safe resettlement. The Board also acknowledges the efforts made by staff to support the prisoner's release and immediate welfare needs.

HMP Ashfield works closely with a number of external organisations, including Circles UK and NACRO. Circles UK provides a network of trained volunteers who support and monitor the risk factors of newly released prisoners convicted of sexual offences, with the aim of reducing reoffending. In February 2026, nine prisoners approaching release were referred to Circles UK, although not all were subsequently released as anticipated. The team continues to support prisoners released from HMP Ashfield in the community. NACRO continues to accept referrals from prisoners and provides advice on finance, benefits and debt.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	272

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	10	6
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	26	13
C	Equality	2	5
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	11	21
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	8	4
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	9	8
F	Food and kitchens	2	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	12	14
H1	Property within the establishment	10	6
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	14	10
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	1	1
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	12	7
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	15	10
K	Transfers	0	3
L	Miscellaneous	7	19
	Total number of applications	**139**	**129**

Annex A

Main service providers

- Physical health provider: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Mental health provider: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Substance use treatment provider: Change, Grow, Live
- Prison education framework provider: Serco
- Escort contractor: Prison Escort Custodial Service



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