Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Bullingdon

For reporting year
1 July 2025 to 30 June 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 Bullingdon, opened in 1992, is a local and resettlement category B prison for adult males and is situated near Bicester in Oxfordshire. At the end of June 2026, about 50% of prisoners were on remand or had been convicted but were awaiting sentence. The remainder were either serving custodial sentences or had been recalled. Around 19% were foreign national prisoners. In the six months to June 2026 a total of 4,995[1] prisoners arrived in reception. This continued high level of churn led to significant problems in the prison (for the same period in 2025 there were 4,243 prisoners processed through reception).

On the 30 June 2026, the prison's operational capacity (its permitted maximum number of prisoners) was 1,112. The average operational capacity for the six months to 30 June was 1,088, the difference being explained by a number of cells not being available to house prisoners during this six-month period. Its certified normal capacity (the number of prisoners the accommodation is designed to hold) is 865. The difference between these numbers means that the prison is overcrowded and that many prisoners share cells designed for single occupancy.

The prison has had a rolling programme of wing upgrades, which has been delayed until the completion of a major building project to create a new wing and associated facilities.

As in many previous years, the prison has had staff shortages and a significant proportion of inexperienced staff. These factors continue to have an impact and are set out in the key concerns raised below.

The prison should have had 216 band 3 officers as of 30 June 2026, but the prison was operating with a total workforce of 172 officers. This is a shortfall of 21% at band 3 level (the majority of prison officers). There were 41 band 3 officers within their first year of employment at the end of the reporting year, 30 June 2026.

HMIP (HM Inspectorate of Prisons), working with inspectors from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission, conducted an unannounced inspection of the prison from 28 July to 7 August 2025. They reported that the prison had not made sufficient progress since their last inspection in 2022, noting that there were several key areas in which outcomes for prisoners had deteriorated and that many concerns they had raised remained unaddressed. They identified six priority concerns requiring immediate attention in the form of an action plan, and eight key concerns.

HMIP returned to the prison from 13 to 15 April 2026 to review progress against their 2025 report and the prison's response. They reported disappointment at finding little progress overall. They noted that the use of illicit drugs remained high, that remedial work to address weaknesses in physical security had not yet begun and that officer shortages continued to limit meaningful interactions with prisoners, including key working, and that more than half the prisoners remained locked up during the working day. Through its regular monitoring, the Board had also not observed any progress on these issues, and these concerns are discussed in this report.

[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

In May 2026, the IMB carried out a prisoner survey to understand their views and experiences, which can be seen in Annex C. Out of a total of 1,096 prisoners, 613 responded, which represents 56% of the prison population. The survey will be used throughout the report to triangulate the Board's findings. The Board recognises that, whilst it is a valuable source of evidence, statistically, it does not necessarily represent the views of all the prisoners at HMP Bullingdon.

Safety

- The high level of prisoner turnover affects the stability and safety of the prison and its rehabilitative work.
- In the Board's view, the prison remains violent and unsafe, with levels of violence and self-harm continuing to be high.
- Three wings are covered by CCTV systems and three still have no CCTV coverage.
- Levels of illicit items such as drugs and mobile phones remain high.
- In the IMB prisoner survey of May 2026, fewer than half of the 613 prisoners who responded reported feeling safe.

Fair and humane treatment

- Much of the prison continues to show dilapidation, particularly in cells in the main accommodation blocks, the segregation unit and the healthcare unit.
- One prisoner has been in segregation for 517 days.
- Many cells designed for single occupancy house two prisoners.
- Many cells do not have the correct furniture.
- Key work sessions have been de-prioritised because of staffing shortages.
- Staff shortages continue to have an impact on the amount of time some prisoners spend out of their cells.

Health and wellbeing

- In the Board's view, healthcare remains a significant concern. The contracted healthcare provider continues to face challenges in maintaining satisfactory staffing levels, and the inpatient unit remains in poor condition. The Board has not observed any significant improvement during the reporting period.
- From the Board's observations, medication queues on wings are often unsupervised by prison staff.
- The fabric of the healthcare unit has deteriorated in the past year.
- Heatwave mitigation plans are not implemented effectively.

Progression and resettlement

- Difficulty in prisoners getting to activities reduces attendance.
- Opportunities for education and employment are limited, covering only 50% of the population.
- Access to support for prisoners on release appears to be limited.
- A high proportion of prisoners appear to be released without accommodation.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The continued high turnover of both prisoners and staff, with large numbers of prisoners on remand, creates difficult circumstances for staff to work towards the rehabilitation of prisoners. For example, key working targets are missed. How will the Minister address this issue to ensure prisoners are properly rehabilitated?
- How will the Minister address the continued overcrowding of the prison?
- One prisoner has been in the segregation unit for a continuous period of 517 days as of the 30 June 2026. What will be done to address this situation, and will the Minister provide a timeline?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- The prison continues to be a violent and unsafe environment for prisoners and staff; there remain significant areas of the prison not covered by CCTV systems, and illegal drone activity continues. What will the Prison Service do to improve safety in the prison?
- The Board continues to be concerned at the shortage and high turnover of staff at all levels. How does the Prison Service plan to address these issues?
- The Board remains concerned about the ongoing issues in healthcare services such as staff shortages, turnover and continued use of agency staff. What action will be taken to improve the situation?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- There is a shortage of suitable furniture in cells, such as, for example, one chair between two prisoners and missing lockers, etc. What will be done to resolve this situation?
- What steps will staff take to make it possible for more prisoners to attend activities?

3.3 Response to the previous report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister		
The high turnover of prisoners, with large numbers on remand, makes it difficult for staff to work towards the rehabilitation and progression of prisoners rather than simply detaining them. How will the Minister address this issue to ensure prisoners are rehabilitated?	Increase in key working sessions. A new audit process and a national review of sentencing. Locally, the prison introduced a short stay pathway for men in custody for six weeks or less. Increased activity offering. Strengthening of pre-release planning.	The turnover of prisoners remains high. Staff shortages impact the regime. Only 49% of planned key working sessions were delivered.
How will the Minister address the overcrowding of the prison, with a significant number of prisoners sharing	Work undertaken to improve conditions in cells with the deployment of decency	The prison remains chronically overcrowded.

cells designed for single occupancy?	teams. Cell sharing is governed by safety and decency policies and cell sharing is a consequence of overcrowding nationally. More capacity in the estate, and Sentencing Bill and reforming recall procedures is intended to deal with capacity pressures.	
How will the Minister work with others to find accommodation for men at risk of being homeless upon their release from Bullingdon?	Minister recognised concern that the Board has raised this issue once more. At HMP Bullingdon, Prison Offender Managers and Resettlement teams screen prisoners at induction and during sentence planning to identify those at risk of homelessness. The prison works with strategic housing specialists and local authorities to explore options. The prison-run departure lounge provides practical support on release day.	The level of prisoners released homeless remains at a high level.
Issues raised with the Prison Service		
The Board continues to be concerned about the ongoing shortage and high turnover of staff, which has an impact on almost every aspect of the prison. How does the Prison Service plan to address these staffing issues?	The prison's staffing level has improved, rising from 92% of target in September 2024 to 95% of target in September 2025. Tactical resourcing measures are available through the Operational Resourcing Panel, which can deploy additional support where required. HMP Bullingdon has completed a retention deep dive and is implementing targeted	The key position of Band 3 officers remains understaffed.

	actions based on its findings.	
The prison continues to be a violent and unsafe environment for prisoners and staff (for example, there are some significant areas of the prison which remain uncovered by CCTV systems and the use of illegal drone activity is increasing). What more can the Prison Service do to address these issues to ensure every prisoner is safe?	Reducing violence and improving safety remains a priority for HMPPS. Bullingdon has bespoke contingency arrangements for serious incidents and concerted indiscipline. Restricted no-fly zones introduced in 2024 strengthen enforcement against illegal drone use. The refurbishment programme includes installing CCTV on wings currently without coverage.	The prison remains violent and unsafe. CCTV has not yet been extended.
The Board is concerned at the continuing issues in healthcare services, such as staff shortages, waiting times for appointments and medication delivery. How will the Prison Service resolve these matters with the outsourced providers?	Improving access to healthcare is a shared priority for the prison, provider and commissioners. Bullingdon holds regular operational meetings with the provider to review performance, address staffing issues and agree improvement plans. A systemic review of pharmacy operations is being planned.	Healthcare remains a concern for the Board. The inpatients unit is not in good order. The Board has not observed any significant improvements. A new head of healthcare has been appointed.
Issues raised with the Governor		
How will the levels of prisoner attendance at education be increased?	No written response received.	
How will the levels of key working be improved to meet the targets set?	No written response received.	

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

The high number of arrivals into reception - some 4,995 prisoners in the six months to June 2026 - places significant pressure on reception and induction. Many prisoners arrive at the prison late in the evening, despite the prison having an agreed cut-off time with the Prison Service. From the Board's observations, it is a regular occurrence that the last prisoner to be located onto a wing is after midnight. This can affect the process of induction and moving prisoners onto the wings, which may have a negative effect on the safety of newly arrived prisoners.

The Board has monitored a number of prisoners who have been through the process from reception to the induction wing and onto the main wings. Overall, outcomes have been satisfactory. However, pressures on accommodation, particularly with the increased number of vulnerable prisoners, have on occasion meant a reduced period of induction for some prisoners before transfer to a wing.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Recorded levels of self-harm at Bullingdon remain high when measured against its comparator group of prisons. A total of 641 incidents of self-harm were recorded in the reporting year.

Most self-harm is caused by cutting. Recorded levels of self-harm had previously reduced with the introduction of electric razors and the withdrawal and prohibition of wet razors; however, the numbers have risen again, with the main reasons given for self-harming being wing moves and frustrations with aspects of the prison regime (the daily routine, activities and services available to prisoners, including work, education, healthcare, exercise, visits and time out of their cells).

Not all self-harm is observed and recorded, as incidents may take place unobserved when men are locked in their cells. It remains the Board`s view that the recorded incidents would be much higher were it not for the attempts to reduce self-harm through collaboration between operational and healthcare staff and the use of assessment care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans to support prisoners at the risk of self-harm or suicide and other interventions overseen and monitored at the weekly safety intervention meetings (SIM).

The prison keeps the ACCT process under review and safety custodial managers sample test ACCT documents weekly. The Board has monitored this issue through observing safety intervention meetings (SIM) and through reviewing sample ACCT documentation on the wings and other units.

The Board has noted that the number of ACCTs opened in the year to 30 June 2026 was 708; the previous year, it was 678, itself an increase from 597 in the year before.

During the reporting year, there were two deaths in custody and two deaths in the community, which occurred within 28 days of release from the prison.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The Board continues to be concerned at the high levels of violence in HMP Bullingdon, despite efforts to reduce them using the challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIP), used to manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence, and the multi-team discussions at the weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM).

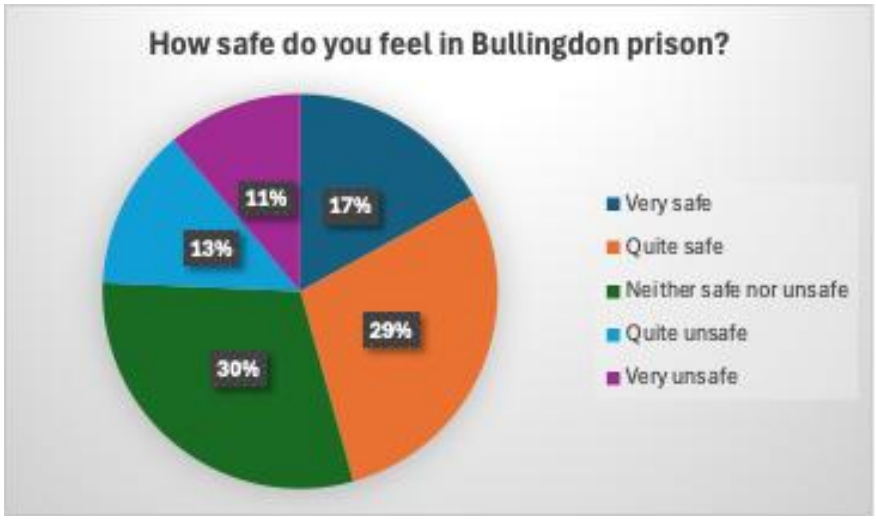
Violent incidents, totalling 612 during the reporting year, increased further compared with 570 reported in 2025. Of the 612 incidents, 67 were recorded in May 2026 and 44 in June 2026.

Assaults on staff averaged 12 per month, with over 30 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults recorded each month on average, levels that were similar to the previous year. A total of 83 incidents of violence were classified as serious, some of which required hospital treatment.

Only three wings have CCTV coverage. The absence of CCTV on the remaining wings can make investigations into violent incidents and the illicit passing of contraband more challenging to conclude.

The reasons for violence are complex. Prisoners have stated that causes include frustration at poor responses from staff, being in debt and gang issues. The Board has noted that some prisoners use violence in an attempt to gain single cell accommodation. The prison is supporting wing staff with safety analysis to assist in identifying the issues.

The IMB prisoner survey conducted in May 2026 highlighted that fewer than half of respondents reported feeling safe, and 24% of the 613 prisoners who responded said they felt quite unsafe or very unsafe. These findings are broadly consistent with the Board's observations through its monitoring.



4.4 Use of force

Use of force (UoF) incidents in the prison remained at a high level during the six months to June 2026, averaging 118 per month. Bullingdon had the highest rate of use of force among its comparator group of prisons, at 121 per 1,000 prisoners in

May 2026. Prisoners on recall were disproportionately represented, accounting for 24% of incidents while comprising 9% of the population. The main reasons for the use of force were non-compliance (31% of incidents, including refusing to return to a cell or follow instructions), fights and assaults, escorts between locations, damage to cells, and the prevention of self-harm.

The drawing and use of PAVA (an incapacitant spray similar to pepper spray) has increased year on year. The spray was drawn and used 32 times and drawn but not used on 22 occasions in the year to 30 June 2026.

Special accommodation, comprising two bare cells in the segregation unit with no furnishings that can be damaged, provides a safer environment for prisoners at risk of severe self-harm. It was used on 15 occasions in the year to June 2026, compared with 20 occasions in the previous year. There were no instances of a body belt, a restrictive restraint used in exceptional circumstances, being used.

The Board has observed planned interventions, where prisoners are forcibly relocated. The pre-briefing, the intervention and the de-briefing have been conducted satisfactorily.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

The volume of illicit items entering the prison, including drugs and mobile phones, appears to remain high. The number of incidents involving illegal drones is at significant levels and is identified by prison management as the primary method of delivering illicit items into the prison. Drones have delivered mobile phones, SIM cards, drugs and USB devices (all of which can facilitate unauthorised communication and criminal activity).

The prison continues to work with the local police force to counter the increase of drone incursions.

Only one wing has had ‘drone proof’ windows installed, and funding has reportedly been allocated to convert windows on other wings.

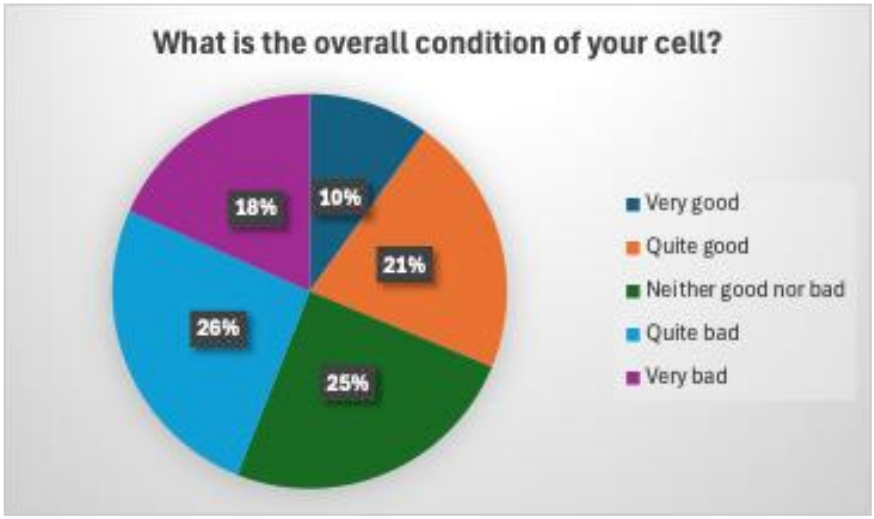
The prison uses a range of intelligence-led measures to detect illicit items, including cell searches, specially trained dog teams and mobile phone detection technology.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The Board has not noted any improvement in the condition of prisoner cell accommodation, and many areas of the prison are showing continued signs of dilapidation. A decency team, consisting of prisoners who under supervision are responsible for the provision of cell furniture, installation and repairs, has been established (see also 7.2). The Board has observed that they are often unable to keep up with demand. Some cells have sparse furniture, often lacking chairs, meaning food is eaten seated on the bed.

IMB prisoner survey, May 2026



In the IMB survey, only 31% of prisoners who responded considered their cells to be in very good or quite good condition.

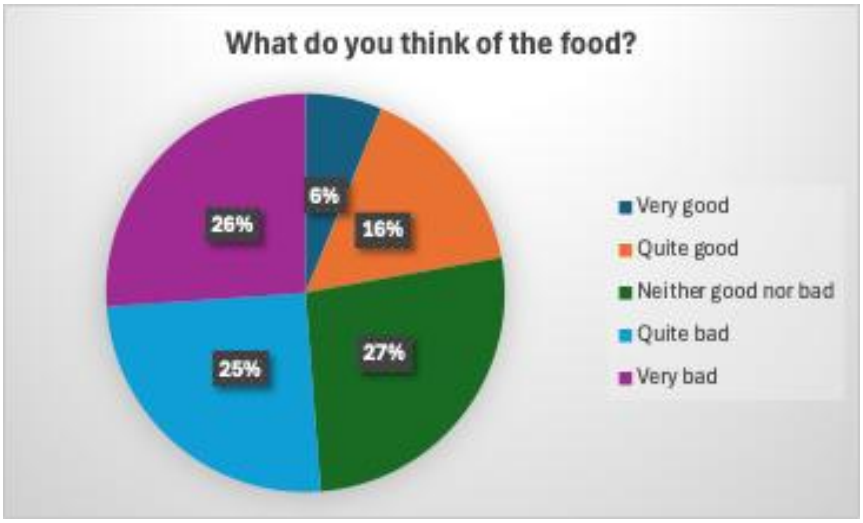
Prisoners continue to share cells designed for single occupancy, with 169 such cells accommodating two prisoners. The Board remains concerned that this arrangement does not provide satisfactory privacy screening for toilet facilities.

Our survey of all the shower units carried out in January 2026 showed that, with the exception of A and B wings, the shower blocks are in poor condition in respect of the building fabric and basic cleanliness. The Board has seen significant mould growth, poor ventilation and the presence of spiders. There is a lack of privacy, peeling paint and poor lighting in the shower blocks awaiting refurbishment.

The Board has noted that several prisoners have incurred spider bites, with one serious situation requiring hospitalisation. We have seen evidence of spider infestation in shower areas and cleaning cupboards. We have also observed evidence of vermin presence on lower walkways. This is despite weekly attendance of pest control contractors.

It has been noted that the level of applications (prisoners' written submissions) to the Board regarding food has reduced. However, many prisoners have complained that the choices are limited and the menu is very carbohydrate heavy. In the IMB survey,

a total of 22% of prisoners who responded consider the food to be quite good or very good.



5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit (CSU) has 22 cells, including two used for special accommodation.

The Board has observed a deterioration in the fabric of the unit, with significant flooding damage to the flooring and damaged windows, observation panels and walls covered in graffiti. These observations by the Board were confirmed in HMIP reports following visits in July and August 2025, which noted poor conditions in the unit, bleak exercise yards and that the regime remained restricted.

The CSU holds some prisoners with very challenging behaviour. The Board has noted that, as at the 30 June 2026, at least one prisoner has spent a prolonged period on the unit, exceeding 500 continuous days. The Board is very concerned about the health and wellbeing of this prisoner.

All prisoners moving into the CSU are routinely searched, whereas prison rules state that searches should only be undertaken when there is sufficient cause. The Board is concerned that this blanket approach is not appropriate for vulnerable prisoners and those with mental health issues.

The Board has observed that when prisoners with challenging behaviour are in the unit, it is often the case that three or more officers in full personal protection equipment (PPE) are needed to unlock certain prisoners in a manner that is safe. This then impacts on the work of officers in the unit in performing other duties, thereby negatively affecting the regime in the unit.

The Board has observed that prisoners are aware of the reasons why they have been sent to the unit and, where a prisoner is on an ACCT, the documentation reviewed by the IMB appears to be in good order.

The Board also notes that the staff in the CSU undertake complex and challenging work. We have observed this to be undertaken with care and professionalism.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

The Board notes that the prison operates in a highly challenging staffing situation, with under-resourcing and inexperienced staff, in our view. From June to September 2025, the HMP standards coaching team were in the prison, assisting staff to help develop better prisoner relationships and working practices.

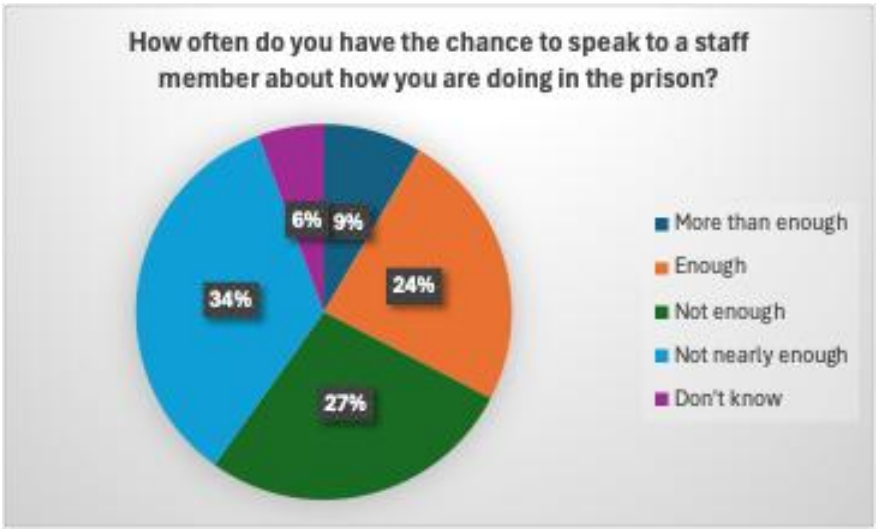
The Board has observed, and is concerned, that the level of key working sessions is below the planned target, with only 49% of the planned sessions delivered. Urgent requests for key working sessions are raised at the weekly SIM meeting.

The Board has been advised by prison management that the delivery of key working sessions is at the prison's discretion. This appears to differ from the response provided by the Minister to the Board's previous report on the issue.

The Board has observed that staff generally display a caring and supportive approach towards prisoners. However, some prisoners have commented to Board members on the relative inexperience of many officers and the time taken to resolve issues or respond to requests.

The prison operates a prison council, where prisoner representatives can raise concerns and issues with the prison management team. Actions are noted and investigated, and a video of the meeting is published on the in-cell technology system, where each prisoner has a laptop issued to them.

IMB prisoner survey, May 2026



In the IMB survey, 61% of prisoners who responded said they don't have enough or nearly enough opportunity to speak to staff.

5.4 Equality and diversity

In the reporting year to 30 June 2026, there were 100 discrimination reporting forms (DIRFS) received by the prison. A total of 59 were investigated, with 14 being upheld and 35 not. A total of 11 were deemed to be healthcare issues, 27 were normal complaints and three related to external matters.

The Board received positive feedback regarding the prison's approach to supporting transgender prisoners, which was described as fair and sympathetic.

Of the five main house blocks, there are few purpose-built cells for prisoners who use wheelchairs and have significant mobility needs. As a result, these prisoners are often accommodated in the inpatients section of healthcare, where they can access adapted bathing and other facilities. The Board noted that up to one third of patients in the healthcare unit could potentially be accommodated on the main wings if suitable facilities were available.

The prison holds a monthly equality meeting chaired by a Governor.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy provides services to all faiths and to those with no faith. The team is almost fully staffed, although its workload increased during the reporting year, with the number of ACCT reviews and visits rising from around 25 to 40 per week. Prisoners have spoken positively to the Board about the faith and pastoral support provided by the chaplaincy team.

5.6 Incentives schemes

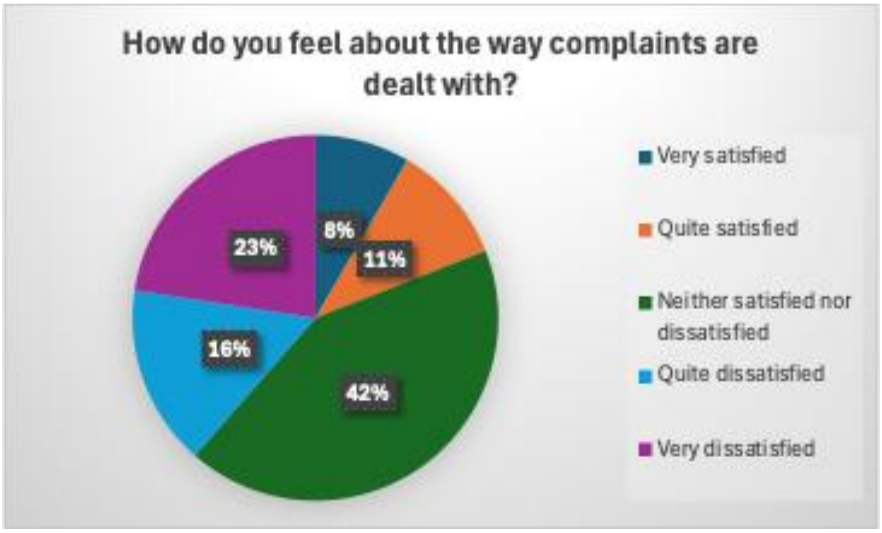
Under the incentives policy, prisoners may be placed on a basic (bottom), standard (middle) or enhanced (top) level. Prisoners start on the standard level and, depending on behaviour, may move to the basic or enhanced level. Moving up to enhanced status provides benefits such as more social visits, more time out of cell and more gym sessions, while moving to basic status may mean, for example, losing access to an in-cell TV.

5.7 Complaints

The prison recorded 2,243 complaints in the 12 months to 31 March 2026. Of these, 30% related to property issues, 21% to canteen issues (the prisoners' shop) and 10% to residential matters.

The Board has noted comments from prisoners that responses to complaints are not always provided within the published timescales, which can contribute to dissatisfaction with the complaints process.

In the IMB prisoner survey,19% of prisoners were either quite satisfied or very satisfied with the complaints process.



5.8 Property

The Board did not observe any significant improvement in the handling or management of property, either within the prison or during transfers between prisons. During the reporting year, the Board received 56 applications relating to property, 20 of which concerned property issues arising from transfers.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The Board has observed that there has not been any meaningful improvement in healthcare since its 2025 report. The unit remains under strain because of staff shortages, in the Board's view, resulting in the use of agency staff and consequent challenges to continuity of care. The findings of the 2025 HMIP inspection reflect these concerns. HMIP identified a lack of meaningful activity to promote physical and mental wellbeing, and through its monitoring the Board has also observed a lack of activities within the inpatient unit.

The Board has observed that the inpatients area is often untidy and dirty, and we are concerned that this situation may lead to increased levels of infection.

The prison has established a new arrivals meeting, which is a multi-disciplinary review of new prisoners' healthcare needs, thereby facilitating more effective planning of care. Frequent late arrivals of prisoners into the prison in the evenings is problematic when healthcare needs are not assessed in a timely manner,

The healthcare unit remains in poor condition, particularly in-cell accommodation.

The Board has monitored the prison during periods of significant hot weather, including heatwaves. It observed that the mitigation measures outlined in the Government Heatwave Guidance issued in 2025 were not implemented, vulnerable prisoners were not always identified, and provisions such as access to cold water were not available across all areas of the prison. Heat-related conditions can be particularly challenging in cells designed for single occupancy but accommodating two prisoners. At the time of reporting, the prison did not have a formal heatwave mitigation plan in place and was awaiting wider estate-led solutions to address infrastructure issues.

The Board has monitored the medication queues on all wings across the prison, often observing that there is no officer present to check ID cards and to ensure good order. We are aware of an incident during the reporting year in which a prisoner was incorrectly issued medication and subsequently required hospital treatment. The IMB was not notified of the incident.

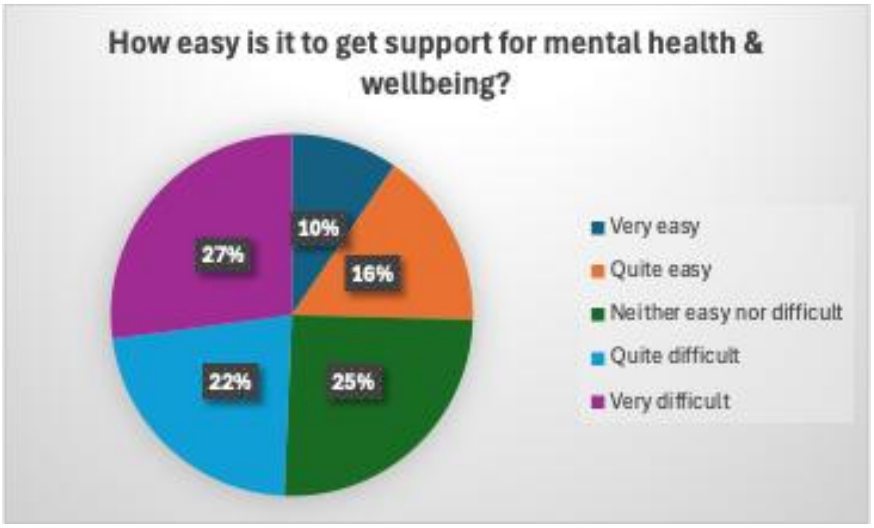
6.2 Physical healthcare

In the IMB survey, 53% of prisoners reported that it was either quite difficult or very difficult to speak to someone in healthcare. This represents no change from the previous year's survey results. Through its monitoring, the Board has observed delays in GP appointments and instances of prisoners arriving late for appointments. In November 2025, the healthcare administration team was still receiving over 200 complaints each morning. By the end of the reporting year, this has dropped, although 110 complaints were still beng received each morning.



6.3 Mental health

In the IMB survey, 49% of prisoners reported that it was quite difficult or very difficult to access mental health support. This represents a slight improvement on the previous year (52%). The Board has noted that there remain lengthy waits for support and continuing difficulty in finding alternative accommodation for prisoners with severe mental health needs.



6.4 Social care

The inpatient unit typically houses seven to eight prisoners for social care reasons. Most are older prisoners with mobility issues who cannot be accommodated on the main wings, where there are limited facilities for those with reduced mobility.

A ‘buddy’ system operates on the main wings, whereby volunteer prisoners provide assistance to those who need support, including help with accessing facilities, meal collection and maintaining cell cleanliness.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

The senior management team in the prison conducts regular reviews of the regime. The Board has observed, through monitoring activities, that staff shortages are the main reason why the regime can, on occasion, be restricted, resulting in delays in unlocking and early lock up and late access to gym sessions and medical appointments.

The prison gym continues to be a plus point for the prison and the recently introduced late gym sessions for incentivised prisoners have been widely welcomed.

The Board has observed that prisoners who are not undertaking activities are often locked in their cells for up to 22 hours per day.

The current building expansion project has restricted access to outside recreational areas and farms and gardens.

All but one wing now has tables on the spur where prisoners can associate and eat communally. Table tennis tables are also available on each spur and are frequently used. The Board has observed staff engaging positively with prisoners, including through participation in games and recreational activities.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The Board continues to be concerned about the number of reported incidents involving prisoners who are under the influence (UTI). Prohibited substances, including fermented alcohol (known as hooch), continue to be found within the prison. The most commonly reported substances remained psychoactive substances (PS) and cannabis. There were 427 recorded UTI incidents during the period July to December 2025.

The Board has recorded incidents of being able to smell cannabis on the wings.

All prisoners found to be under the influence (UTI) are seen by the inclusion team. Two incidents of a prisoner being found to be UTI within a seven-day period trigger a referral to the safeguarding meeting.

The Board has observed that pressure on space within the induction wing has resulted in the five-day induction programme being shortened, with some prisoners who are detoxing being moved to the main wings earlier than planned. This has affected healthcare's ability to maintain prisoners on detox programmes for the intended period.

The Board has noted that incidents of prisoners being under the influence (UTI) are often associated with use of force incidents.

The prison operates an independent substance-free living (ISFL) programme, with a dedicated wing spur for prisoners seeking to remain free from substance misuse. The spur offers additional facilities, including table football, pool, enhanced kitchen facilities and exercise opportunities. Additional activities include compact-based drug testing, through which prisoners may volunteer to be tested and receive recognition for remaining drug free.

The inclusion unit holds regular Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings. In January 2026, 157 men attended such peer-support meetings.

The ISFL garden is now established, well maintained and attractive, providing a positive outlet for prisoners in the ISFL unit.

Drug strategy forums have been established, where prisoners can discuss triggers for substance abuse, debt issues and the support that is available.

6.7 Soft skills

Wellbeing resources are signposted on wing noticeboards and peer support is available through the Listener scheme (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide peer support), talking therapies and social care buddies.

The prison operates an externally funded Here to Help scheme (H2H) ,operated by prisoners. The Board has observed the H2H representatives interacting well with other prisoners through induction meetings and work on the wings. The H2H workers represent prisoners at the prisoner forum.

7. Progression and resettlement

The Board has observed that time out of cell has an impact prisoners being able to access training and education and these observations were also noted in the two points of key concern relating to progression and release raised by HMIP and Ofsted in their 2025 inspection report.

These were: (i) that time unlocked was too limited and too few prisoners had anything meaningful to occupy them; and (ii) that the education and training curriculum did not sufficiently meet the career goals of prisoners or the needs of the large proportion who were unsentenced or serving short stays.

Several of their key concerns also related to insufficient provision for education and training and to support for prisoners in recording and evidencing the skills they had developed in prison to help them when seeking employment in the community after release.

Their report noted: *'Ofsted graded the overall effectiveness of education, skills and work as inadequate. Attendance was low, and the curriculum did not meet the needs of the population, particularly the large number of unsentenced and short-stay prisoners. Too many were unemployed, and those who did work often failed to develop meaningful skills or gain qualifications. Support for reading was patchy, and not enough was being done to motivate prisoners or raise expectations about what they could achieve*.'

As in previous years, the Board received very few applications from prisoners relating to education, employment and training. However, we did receive applications about aspects of sentence progression overseen by the offender management unit (OMU).

7.1 Education, library

The environment in the areas where most formal education takes place is generally bright and welcoming. Prisoners report feeling safe while attending activities in these areas and in the workshops

Board members have observed positive interactions between teachers and learners, although participation levels remained low for much of the year. Managers recognise the challenges affecting both the allocation of prisoners to education and training and attendance at activities, and have taken steps to address these issues.

As of late June 2026, allocations to education or work were around 90%, meaning that around 90% of the available places were filled. However, even if all the available places were allocated, around half of the prisoner population would still not be engaged in education or employment, as there were approximately twice as many prisoners as there were places available. Those not in education or employment included prisoners who were unwell or otherwise unable to work, as well as those who were not required to do so, including prisoners on remand and those above retirement age.

An action plan is now in place to increase the number of spaces available, subject to additional funding being secured. Other elements of the plan involve reallocating existing resources so that education and training provision is less affected by long-

term staff absence, vacancies and turnover among education and training staff employed by external contractors.

Plans are also underway to provide enhanced support for prisoners to consolidate and improve their literacy and reading skills. A new reading strategy was introduced in September 2025, and a number of areas for development have been identified. Implementation is ongoing (although see below regarding increased use and accessibility of library services).

The Board has observed a number of areas in which there has been improvement or success across the reporting year. Managers were successful in bidding for national funding and used this to bring in drama practitioners, whose workshops were helpful in assisting men in their personal development, and gave them confidence to progress to other areas of education and training.

They have also been able to bring in external providers to develop skills such as cooking and financial management, and to engage prisoners in activities relating to art and music, each of which also provides a platform for progression in other areas. A total of 68% of prisoners who participated in personal development courses in drama, art and cookery were unemployed before taking those courses; afterwards, 67% of participants progressed into education or work.

As of the end of June, managers had also brought in a former prisoner who had started working with young offenders in the gym, rather than in the education block. The prison hopes this will be more attractive to younger offenders and will help more of them to progress into education or work.

Other successful initiatives included the decision to change the timetabling of a business skills course so that it was delivered over one week, rather than four weeks, thus improving both uptake and the number of prisoners who completed the course.

Library use has increased during the reporting year, apparently at least in part due to prisoners being able to communicate directly and more quickly with library staff through in-cell technology and wing kiosks (self-service computer terminals that allows prisoners to manage their daily affairs).

The main library is a bright and welcoming space, and staff have worked hard to ensure that it offers a service and environment comparable to those found in community libraries, helping prisoners to feel more confident using similar facilities after release. Prisoners can now apply for an Oxfordshire library card while still in custody and receive it on release. This provides access to a range of library services, including book borrowing, internet access and Citizens Advice outreach services delivered through libraries.

Smaller libraries or library trollies have been established on the wings and in workshops so that men may borrow books from those locations, as well as from the main library.

The library also supports prisoners in maintaining links with their families. The Story Book Dads service allows prisoners to make recordings of themselves reading stories for their children. Its move from audio recording to video recording has increased its popularity; around 200 videos have been recorded and sent to families in the last 18 months.

During the reporting year, the library partnered with Oxford University libraries and museums to offer craft workshops using museum artefacts. It has hosted a visit by a stand-up comedian who delivered a one-day confidence-building workshop.

Prisoner responses to our survey question about their experience of being able to get to activities such as education, training and work were very similar to answers given last year. A total of 45% of respondents said that it was quite difficult or very difficult to get to activities like education, training and work, the same as last year. A total of 29% of respondents said that it was quite easy or very easy to get to activities such as education, training and work (a small increase on the 27% of prisoners who gave this answer last year).



7.2 Vocational training, work

Work available on the wings and in workshops, such as recycling, can sometimes be unskilled and repetitive, offering limited opportunities to develop transferable skills. However, opportunities are available to develop employment-related skills in areas such as the kitchen, coffee shop and laundry, as well as in workshops, including art, drama, textiles/sewing and bicycle maintenance.

It can take some time for prisoners to be allocated to these activities, and the constant churn of the prison population, with prisoners regularly moving into and out of the prison, means that some men who begin courses leading to certification that might help with employment on release are transferred to other prisons before they can complete the qualification. For example, the Level 2 Certificate in Bicycle Maintenance takes eight weeks to complete.

The Board understands that discussions are underway about how to create more spaces for training in areas related to construction and horticulture, as there are employment opportunities in the local community in both these sectors.

Plans appear to have been made to increase the role of the decency team, which consists of prisoners who work under supervision to respond to maintenance issues in the prison (see also section 5.1). This work helps to improve living conditions in the prison (such as, for example, by replacing broken toilet seats and repairing

furniture in cells), as well as enabling prisoners to develop skills that may help them find work when they are released. These roles are often valued by prisoners and can provide a pathway into other areas of education, training or employment.

The Board has often observed positive interactions between prisoners, and between prisoners and staff, in workshop settings. However, relatively few prisoners leave the prison, whether on release or transfer, with a record of the skills or work experience they have gained that could support future employment or training opportunities.

See section 7.1 above regarding prisoners' views on the ease or difficulty of accessing activities such as education, training and work. Responses this year were very similar to those received in the previous year.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The offender management unit (OMU) is responsible for sentence calculation and other matters that affect the progression of a prisoner's sentence. The unit was the subject of significant criticism in the HMIP report. Among its findings, HMIP noted that: *'Many prisoners had little contact with their offender managers, and sentence planning was often delayed or superficial. Public protection arrangements were weak, with gaps in risk identification and monitoring. Too many prisoners were released homeless, and while some promising initiatives had been introduced - such as the resettlement accommodation advisory board and the departure lounge - these were not yet delivering consistent outcomes.'*

In the Board's view, staff face a number of challenges that can affect their ability to support prisoners in progressing through their sentences. These include additional work arising from government initiatives, the size of the regular OMU caseload, and overcrowding across the prison estate, which can make transfers difficult to arrange and may result in transfers being cancelled at short notice because of capacity pressures elsewhere. The Board also understands that managing paper-based prisoner records, which can comprise large numbers of files and pages, can be particularly time-consuming.

Such challenges can have a negative impact on prisoners' ability to progress while in custody. For example, they may affect the timely transfer of prisoners to establishments offering courses they are required to complete, or otherwise hinder preparation for release.

A significant proportion of the applications the Board receives relate to sentence management. There have been occasions when OMU staff were unable to locate paperwork relating to prisoners who had contacted the Board, so they were not able to show that they were responding appropriately or in a timely way to applications from prisoners. Prisoners often complain to us that they do not know who is their prison offender manager (POM), a person with responsibility for their progression during their sentence, and that they do not receive timely responses from applications or queries that they make to the OMU.

Prisoners are often frustrated when they are not approved for home detention curfew (HDC), even where they may be eligible for consideration towards the end of their sentence. Eligibility does not guarantee release on HDC, but the Board understands that, in some cases, applications are not progressed within the required timescales because the necessary paperwork, including liaison with external agencies, has not

been completed. This may be unrelated to any assessment of risk posed by the individual prisoner. In one case, a prisoner was unable to spend Christmas with his family on HDC because the required processes were not completed in time.

The Board noted that, in November 2025, the OMU was managing around 50 transfers or releases each week, placing considerable pressure on the staff responsible for this work.

7.4 Family contact

The prison's main provision for supporting prisoners' contact with families (including their children) and the outside world is through opportunities for social visits in the bright and airy visits hall, which includes a well-equipped play area for children. More than 300 visiting slots are available over six afternoons each week.

Visitors are able to use a visitor centre, which is adjacent to the prison and managed and staffed by the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) charity. It now offers an outside garden with a play area for children.

The prison arranged a number of family days during the year, when prisoners were able to spend more time with their children and other family members than is possible during routine social visits, and to participate in supervised activities. Family members and prisoners alike have expressed appreciation to Board members for these events, and the Board has observed the efforts made by prison staff to provide a welcoming atmosphere and a varied range of activities for those attending.

The prison also hosted a number of 'celebration of achievement' events for prisoners completing educational courses and programmes, which family members were able to attend.

Prisoners who did not receive visits were also supported. The chaplaincy team arranged official prison visitors for some individuals, and quarterly 'community days' provided opportunities to socialise in the visits hall, with a range of external support organisations in attendance.

7.5 Resettlement planning

All prisoners are allocated a pre-release officer on their arrival at Bullingdon, who should remain responsible for that prisoner throughout their time in the prison. A shortage of staff in the pre-release team means that they have needed to work flexibly and to make choices about prioritising some prisoners over others. In the Board's view, this can result in patchy reparation for resettlement, especially as prisoners approach the end of their sentences. Cohorts who have been prioritised for support during the reporting year include prisoners serving sentences of less than ten months, those subject to fixed-term recall (individuals who have been recalled to custody for a set period following a breach of their licence conditions after release), and prisoners within the final 12 weeks of their sentence.

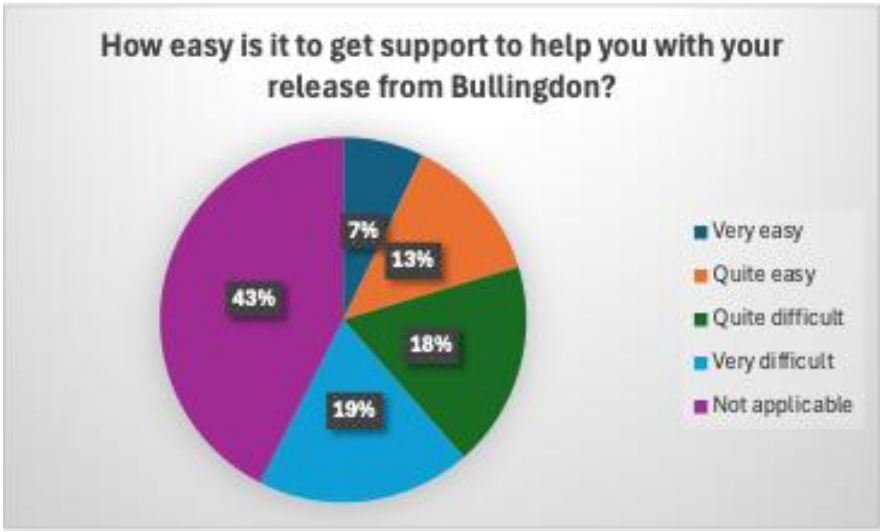
For many prisoners, this means that support with resettlement planning is not available until relatively late in their sentence. Prisoners on fixed-term recall can face particular challenges, as their period in custody is often shorter than the 12-week pre-release programme, limiting their opportunity to access the full range of support available.

A recently established resettlement and accommodation advisory board (RAAB) brings together a range of partners to facilitate multi-agency discussions about prisoners approaching release, with the aim of addressing accommodation and wider resettlement needs. Despite these efforts, many prisoners continue to be released with no fixed abode or without employment. Between January and May 2026, 76% of prisoners had accommodation for their first night after release. Over the same period, 34% of prisoners were in employment six months after release.

The Board is aware of a case during the reporting year in which a prisoner was released without receiving their discharge grant because the necessary arrangements had not been completed prior to release.

The ‘departure lounge’, located in the visitor centre just outside the prison gate, provides practical support to many prisoners on the day of their release. It offers basic mobile phones, as well as clothing, footwear, towels and toiletries for those who need them. Prisoners using the departure lounge can also charge their phones, check travel arrangements and contact professionals such as community probation teams. The Board has observed that this facility is well run and valued by those who use it. However, it is not open during all prisoner release periods.

Prisoners’ responses to the survey question on accessing support relating to release were very similar to those reported last year. A total of 37% of respondents said that it was quite difficult or very difficult to obtain such support, which was almost unchanged from the previous year. Meanwhile, 20% said that it was quite easy or very easy to access support relating to release, a slight decrease from 22% the previous year.



8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	152

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	34	9
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	2	0
C	Equality	6	5
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	15	4
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	52	39
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	10	1
F	Food and kitchens	24	3
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	92	62
H1	Property within the establishment	63	34
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	13	20
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	10	16
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorization	31	35
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	38	33
K	Transfers	6	2
L	Miscellaneous	97	27
	Total number of applications	**493**	**290**

Annex A

Service providers

- Aramak provides catering services.
- DHL provides canteen (shop) services.
- Government Facilities Services Limited (GFSL) is responsible for maintenance.
- Milton Keynes College provides education and training.
- Oxfordshire County Council provides library services; OCC also work the Practice Plus Group to provide social care.
- Practice Plus Group provides physical healthcare services; some items are subcontracted by them.
- Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust provide mental health services.
- Serco provide prison transport services.

Annex B

Photos of the establishment



Wing shower unit with fungal growth clearly visible



Typical in-cell sanitary facilities



Gym facilities for use by prisoners



Workshop space with equipment for training prisoners in bicycle maintenance and repairs

Annex C

Independent Monitoring Boards

A Survey about Your Stay in Bullingdon Prison

The IMB would like to understand more about your stay in HMP Bullingdon. This survey is an opportunity for you to tell us how you feel about a number of specific topics – it's a chance for us to hear your voice. You do not have to do this survey, but if you do, it will give us a better picture of what is happening in Bullingdon Prison.

The **IMB is a team of independent volunteers.** We regularly visit Bullingdon prison to monitor your day-to day living conditions and treatment while in prison – monitoring for fairness and respect. You may have seen or spoken to us, but we may not have had the chance to speak to each one of you. This is why we want to know more about your life in Bullingdon.

PLEASE PUT THIS SURVEY IN THE IMB BOX ON YOUR WING

Any information you give is anonymous and will be stored securely.

Mark the box (with a circle, a tick, or a cross) that is closest to your view to give your answer to each question.

Q1. How safe do you feel in Bullingdon prison?				
Very safe	Quite safe	Neither safe nor unsafe	Quite unsafe	Very unsafe
Q2. What is the overall condition of your cell (for example bed, toilet, furniture)?				
Very good	Quite good	Neither good nor bad	Quite bad	Very bad
Q3. What is the condition of the shared areas of your spur / wing?				
Very good	Quite good	Neither good nor bad	Quite bad	Very bad
Q4. What do you think of the food?				
Very good	Quite good	Neither good nor bad	Quite bad	Very bad
Q5. How often do you have the chance to speak to a staff member about how you are doing in the prison?				
More than enough	Enough	Not enough	Not nearly enough	Don't know
Q6. How easy or difficult it is to speak to someone in healthcare when you need to?				
Very easy	Quite easy	Neither easy, nor difficult	Quite difficult	Very difficult
Q7. How often have you been able to have contact with friends or family (through letters, parcels, phone, visits)?				
Very often	Sometimes	Once in a while	Rarely	Never
Q8. How do you feel about the way your complaint forms are dealt with?				

Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied	Quite dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Q9. How easy or difficult it is to get to activities like education, vocational training, prison work?				
Very easy	Quite easy	Neither easy, nor difficult	Quite difficult	Very difficult

Q10. How easy is it to get support for mental health and wellbeing?				
Very easy	Quite easy	Neither easy, nor difficult	Quite difficult	Very difficult
Q11. How easy is it to get support to help you with your release from Bullingdon prison?				
Very easy	Quite easy	Quite difficult	Very difficult	Not applicable
Q12. Had you heard of the IMB (Independent Monitoring Board) team of volunteers before this survey?				
Yes		No		
Q13. Please tell us the 3 most important things that could make your life better in prison.				

1. **2.** **3.**					
Choosing any of the questions above, is there any more information you want to give us?					
Q14. What is your current age?					
20 years old or under	21-29 years old	30-59 years old	60 or over	Don't want to say	
Q15. What is your ethnic group?					
White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Other	Don't want to say
Q16. Do you think that you have a health condition or disability that affects your day-to-day activity?					

Yes				No			
Q17. Are you on Remand?							
Yes				No			
Q18. Which wing / residential unit are you in?							
B	C	D	E	F	SSCU	Healthcare	Don't want to say

Thank you very much for completing this survey



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