Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Whitemoor

For reporting year
1 June 2025 to 31 May 2026

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records. The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) 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 NPM.

2. Description of the establishment

His Majesty's Prison (HMP) Whitemoor lies on the edge of the Cambridgeshire town of March. Opened in 1991, it is one of five high security prisons in England within the long term and high security estate (LTHSE).

At the end of the reporting year the prison was near capacity with 454 prisoners, 155 of whom were category A, 11 high risk category A and 288 category B.[1] 10 men were held under imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentences.

Whitemoor is one of five high security dispersal prisons accommodating category A and category B prisoners. Whilst 63% of Whitemoor's population were category B, they were held in category A conditions; and they needed special consideration before they could progress to be with their nominal peers in pure category B jails.

All Whitemoor prisoners were accommodated in single cells with in-cell telephone and integral sanitation, but used separate, shared external showers.

The prison comprised the following units:

- three main residential wings, two with a capacity of 126 and one with 114 including the psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE) unit referenced below;
- the Fens Unit, accommodating up to 70 prisoners undergoing psychological treatment to reduce risk and increase wellbeing via treatment of developmental trauma, delivered in partnership with the National Health Service (NHS);
- a close supervision centre (CSC) holding up to 10 prisoners, managed nationally to provide a secure location for the most disruptive, challenging and dangerous prisoners in the prison system;
- a PIPE unit designed to enable prisoners to maintain and build on developments they had previously achieved in prison, with a capacity for 30;
- the Bridge unit, designed to support prisoners progressing out of segregated conditions, with a capacity of 12;
- a care and separation unit of 17 cells, two of which could be used to hold prisoners from the close supervision centre. This is referred to as the segregation unit or "Seg" throughout this report.
- a healthcare unit that held up to nine, though not as part of the prison's formal capacity.

Annex A lists external service providers.

[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

General

The past year has been particularly challenging, principally due to insufficient staff and resources to provide a full regime and purposeful activities. The regime was inconsistent, unpredictable and subject to short notice change. This was the primary driver of frustration and challenges from prisoners, including incidents of concerted indiscipline. It also led to management and staff frustration due to limited ability to avoid the consequences. The lack of resources is likely to be the root cause of many of the other issues raised in the report.

On 31 May 2026, Whitemoor had 493 staff. This represents a 14% shortfall over the full complement and includes a 24% shortfall in the number of operational prison officers. Staff levels were further impacted by periods with high sickness absence and officers on restricted duties. By the end of the reporting period there had been an improvement in staff retention but difficulties in recruitment meant that the shortfall was not measurably reduced.

19% of officers had less than one year's experience and a further 36% had four years or less. Just 26% have 10 or more years' experience.

Safety

- Overall violence reduced from last year, but there were eight serious assaults on staff – an increase from last year's five - and four serious prisoner on prisoner assaults
- There were three incidents of concerted indiscipline
- Incidents of self-harm reduced by 38%, from 285 to 177; the number of ACCTs opened (a process to support those men at risk of self-harm or suicide) increased from 101 to 121
- Seven drone sightings were reported during the year, though none were intercepted and there were no identified successful drops

Fair and humane treatment

- Boiler replacement is welcome, but the fabric of the prison is deteriorating and items such as kitchen freezers remain in need of replacement (though the Board understand replacement is planned)
- Cleanliness and hygiene need major improvement
- While limited improvements were under way, un-refurbished showers were in very poor condition
- Property problems continue to dominate prisoner complaints, with many examples where both sending and receiving prison deny responsibility for losses

Health and wellbeing

- Continued staff shortages caused time out of cell to be frequently restricted. Smaller units were impacted even more than main residential wings

- Waiting times for most health appointments were reasonable, but there were long waits for dental treatment and routine optician appointments

Progression and resettlement

- The number of progressive transfers improved for the second year running.
- Staff shortages in the correspondence team resulted in long delays to processing applications for telephone contacts, including phone access to legal services.
- Staffing shortages meant activities were closed for up to 60% of the time
- A new upcycling workshop provided limited improvement to the quality and availability of activities. Activity spaces were 22% fewer than eligible prisoners.
- Whilst nationally there has been no reduction in the education budget, the proportion for local spend has been reduced by 26%, leading to more limited availability of education opportunities. This includes a 19% reduction in delivery hours through the annual delivery plan (ADP) process.
- The separate dynamic purchasing system (DPS) element reduced from £117k to £17k, mostly already allocated, which appeared to leave little room for Governor flexibility.
- Shannon trust delivered measurable improvements in literacy (funded by the above DPS).

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- In the absence of any discernible response from HMPPS regarding improvements to property management, will the Minister take action to facilitate replacement of the costly, outdated and unreliable manual process?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Will HMPPS consider additional means of recruiting, training and retaining staff at a geographically isolated location such as Whitemoor, including reviewing financial remuneration, to supplement and support local recruitment efforts?
- Will the LTHSE consider how to avoid transfers of prisoners for whom it is known that it would be unsafe to locate on residential wings?
- Prison service order (PSO)1700 which sets out segregation processes is out of date and its replacement has been under development for years. Will HMPPS accelerate its implementation?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Following planned residential wing management changes, will the Governor continue action to improve the overall cleanliness and hygiene across the prison and ensure consistency across these wings?
- Will the Governor consider ways to improve the regime for self-isolators and those segregated on residential wings?

3.3 Response to the previous report

The Minister expressed his concern regarding the level of serious violence and provided assurance regarding deaths in custody that recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman will be considered and acted upon.

The Board had expressed concerns regarding purposeful activity (PA), and the Minister acknowledged that this was problematic. He advised that HMP Whitemoor would be looking at ways to address this, and that HMPPS was planning a PA audit. The Board has not seen any evidence of the latter. Local efforts to address the issues have included establishment of a new upcycling workshop, but there remains a shortfall of work places and of good quality work.

The Minister advised that funding was being provided for infrastructure improvements, including replacement of boilers and security enhancements. While these are essential and welcome, the fabric of the prison continues to age and more is needed.

The Board had asked that HMPPS establish a fit for purpose property management system, which is a long-standing problem across the prison estate. No response was received and this remains a major opportunity. There was there no response to the Board's comments on improving officer training.

Locally, the Governor took action to improve the management of social and legal video visits, but improvements have been hampered by staff shortages. Staffing problems continued to cause interruptions to consistent delivery of some functions.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 General Stability

While the prison was largely settled for much of the year there were three concerted indiscipline incidents during February. Frequent lockdowns reduced the time out of cell for all prisoners and frustration at this was expressed through indiscipline and incidents of violence.

There was some conflict based on religion (conversion or leaving or rejecting a religion they previously followed) leading to real or perceived threats to individuals that resulted, in one instance, to the victim being segregated for their own protection while the perpetrators would, after appropriate sanction, be returned to their wings. In addition, there was a regular and consistent number of self-isolators most of whom felt at risk. These situations created a perceived inequity in treatment between victim and offender.

4.2 Reception and induction

The prison has been at or near full capacity through the year, with movement into and out of the prison averaging 15 per month including 12 prisoners moved out during the year to secure hospitals. Reception and induction of arriving prisoners continued to be planned and managed well. Due principally to directed moves, a proportion of the transfers were Seg to Seg with the incoming prisoners unable or unwilling to locate on the main residential wings due to real or perceived threats from non-associates.

Despite staffing challenges, Reception staff have focused on effective management of outgoing property transfers and reduced the backlog of processing incoming property to around one week. A substantial number of parcels continued to be received without the necessary authorisation, which placed additional pressure on resources. Prisoners were reminded of the requirement to ensure parcels are authorised before being sent.

4.3 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

The number of self-harm incidents reduced substantially for the second year running, to 178 from 285 in the previous year, partially due to the transfer of some frequent self-harmers. A total of 43 prisoners self-harmed during the year with eight of these accounting for 56% of the total incidents. The Board was pleased to note that there were no deaths in custody during the reporting year.

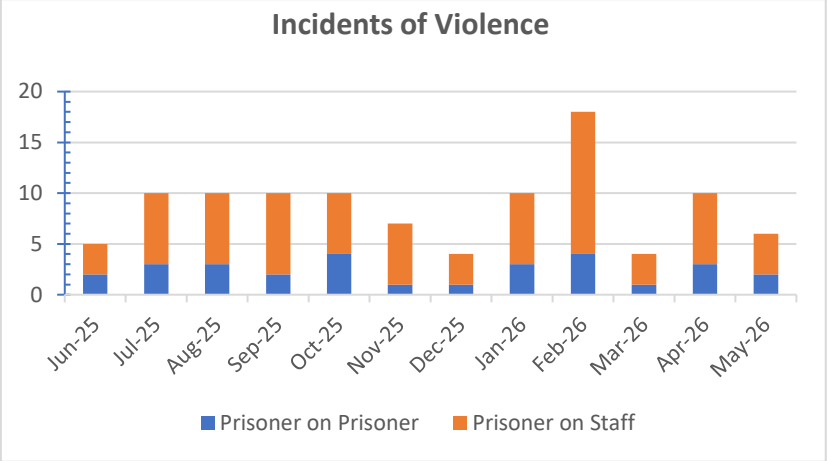
The ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) process is in place to help support those men at risk of self-harm or suicide. At the end of the reporting year there were 21 prisoners on open ACCTs (approximately 5% of the total prison population). 121 ACCTs were opened during the reporting year compared to 101 the previous year. Of these, 22 were for segregated men.

The Prison Safety Policy Framework states that an ACCT case review must take place within 24 hours of a prisoner being placed in segregation conditions. The Board was concerned that such ACCT reviews did not always take place or were not always

thorough if they did. But consistency did improve towards the end of the reporting year.

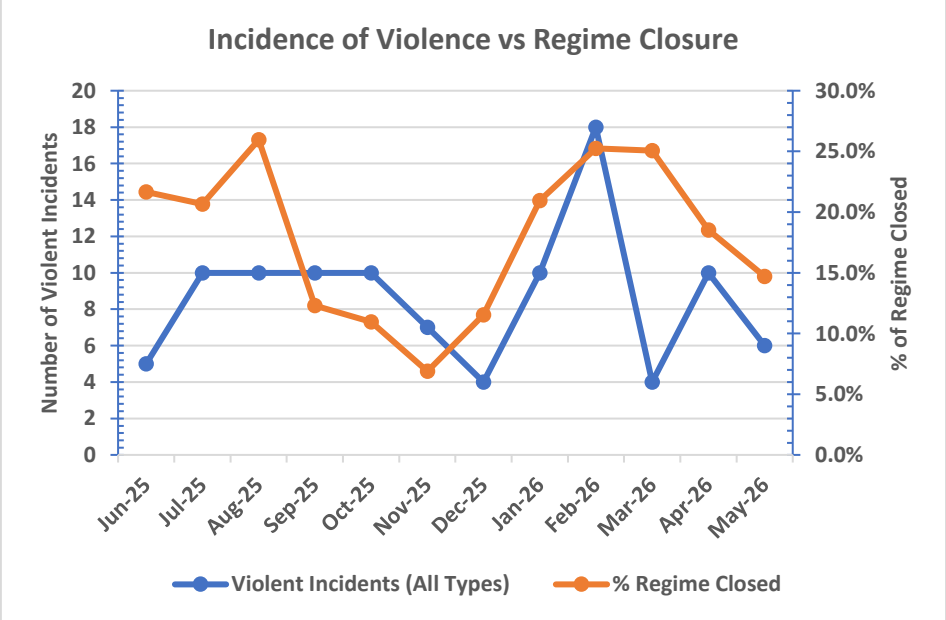
“Listeners” are prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide peer support to other prisoners. Listener requests are dynamically assessed to consider violence risks, particularly if the request is at night, and some are refused to maintain safety. The Board was concerned to note that such refusal could put prisoners in distress at risk.

4.4 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation



During the reporting year the number of assaults on staff by prisoners dropped again for the second year in succession to 75 (83 in the previous year and 95 the year before). However, the number of serious assaults increased from five to eight.
prisoner on prisoner assaults also reduced from the previous year with four that were serious, unchanged from last year.

The five high security prisons face similar challenges in managing violence and self-harm. It is to HMP Whitemoor’s credit that prisoner on prisoner assaults were the lowest in the group. However, despite the consistent reduction in staff assaults, Whitemoor had the second highest rate in the group.



These are encouraging figures for assaults, but they should be considered against the

significantly limited regime permitted by the staff pressures Whitemoor faces. Less time out of cell reduces the opportunities for such incidents. A review of the incidents of violence against the regime closure does indicate some correlation.

Self-isolation is a concern to the Board. With the number of segregated prisoners frequently exceeding the segregation unit's capacity several prisoners have sought to self-isolate in their cells on the residential wings. The reasons for this include feeling unsafe due to potential threats from other prisoners, mental health, offence vulnerabilities and faith views. A number of prisoners claimed pressure from some Muslim groups to convert to Islam.

Prisons usually have a choice as to whether to accept a new prisoner. Directed moves are where executive management order a prison to accept a prisoner regardless of their status. The Board has been advised that there is a growing problem nationally caused by directed moves. Whitemoor has had to accept a number of prisoners who would be at risk from other prisoners within Whitemoor. This has led to prisoners self-isolating on residential wings, and to incoming prisoners going straight to the segregation unit. One prisoner self-isolated for over nine months before a transfer could be arranged and with regime closures this meant he often did not get any time out of cell for showering or exercise.

4.5 Use of force

The number of use of force incidents reduced from last year's 264 to 199. There was a peak of 39 events in February 2026, due primarily to concerted indiscipline. PAVA (synthetic pepper spray) use was similarly high in February, with 12 cans being drawn and used. The lowest month saw eight uses of force with other months ranging from 12 to February's high. As last year, Board members observed that use of force meetings were analytical and thorough, with care taken to identify lessons learned. While these are positive figures, the Board's opinion is that techniques such as five-minute intervention could be used to a greater extent to help manage relationships with prisoners.

4.6 Preventing illicit items

Verbal feedback from prisoners suggests that drugs – particularly cannabis and spice (a synthetic drug similar to cannabis but often much stronger and more harmful) – are readily available in the prison. There were multiple examples of prisoners apparently being under the influence of substances – one individual fell resulting in some serious injuries; others were found unresponsive and some were given medication to counteract the effects of drugs. However, finds of drugs in routine and intelligence led searches reduced from last year. Finds of phones also reduced (14 iPhones found) while the prevalence of SD cards and readers increased (SD cards are small removable memory storage devices used to store files, while SD card readers allow those files to be accessed or transferred to a computer or other device). 48 improvised weapons were located, also an increase over past year. Fermented liquid ("hooch") was a more frequent find during periods such as Christmas.

Drone activity tends to be linked to specific prisoners, the availability of pilots and financing. Improvements to the security of windows continued to limit the probability of successful drone drops. While no successful drops were identified, there were seven sightings reported during the reporting year.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

With the exception of D-wing (Fens Unit) and F wing (CSC) there was an initial decline in general cleanliness and tidiness on all wings, In addition, shortage of staff reduced the time for which wing cleaners were unlocked, and association appeared to take priority over cleanliness. In the second half of the reporting year the Governor initiated a drive to improve the cleanliness of the prison that had, with a few exceptions, a positive impact. However, there was a deterioration in cleanliness in certain areas towards the end of the reporting year. In one wing's servery there were visible mouse droppings, uneaten food left out overnight, and filthy protective clothing on which rodent droppings were visible. While this improved slightly towards reporting year end, this servery remained in serious need of a deep clean.

The Board noted that limited progress has been made to refurbish unimproved showers. Those not yet upgraded are in very poor condition, with evidence of potentially hazardous mould in some areas.

The Kitchen remains a concern as reported last year. There is a lack of funds available for replacement of old and unreliable equipment whilst large sums are spent on renting of equipment when existing units fail e.g. external freezer storage. The Board was advised that freezer replacement is planned.

A continuing issue remains with both the lack of provision and, when provided, the non-use by prisoners and officers of appropriate protective clothing at the serveries.

It is encouraging to note that the budget for food per prisoner was increased during the reporting year by 5.4% to £3.29 per day per prisoner. The daily budget has risen by 19% since 2023, while food inflation has been 15%. However, it is extremely challenging to provide balanced and attractive meals that meet the latest nutritional standards and cater for all dietary needs. The cost of kosher meals is around three times the daily allowance, which distorts the actual average cost per prisoner.

5.2 Segregation

Throughout the reporting year the segregation unit was at and often over capacity (17 cells) with segregated prisoners kept in cells in the Bridge Unit, healthcare unit and on residential wings. At the end of the reporting year there were 19 prisoners held in segregation, plus one segregated on a wing. Of the 20 segregated prisoners six were on open ACCTs. Time in segregation ranged from five to 841 days. The average was 117 days with six men over 90 days and 12 over 42 days.

There was an increasing incidence of prisoners being 'trapped' in segregation with no opportunity to locate within the LTHSE due to non-association tags and threats as well as those deselected from specialist programmes such as the Fens unit.

Of the 19 in segregation at the end of the year, exit plans were not assured. 13 of the prisoners were looking at transfers (Seg to Seg), two awaiting transfer to secure hospital, only two had the possibility of returning to main residential location within the prison and for one there was no clear progression route identified.

As has been reported in previous years, prisoners who were mentally ill put huge pressure on segregation staff with assessments and eventual moves to secure hospital accommodation taking many months. Their continued presence in segregation added to the mental health pressures on the prisoners.

The Board regularly attended weekly segregation reviews during the reporting year taking the view that these prisoners represented some of the most vulnerable in the population. The effective management of the reviews varied considerably, and prison management implemented a more consistent approach which showed benefits in the latter part of the reporting year. A consistent frustration for all at the reviews was limited or missing security reports that the review Board required to make decisions on relocating prisoners to the main residential locations.

Additional issues were seen in the segregation unit when prisoners on D wing (Fens unit) were deselected. This happens if they are unable to safely and appropriately manage them on the unit on red spur or in the crisis suite. Prisoners who are opted out of therapy ideally remain on the unit, pending transfer, subject to risk and behaviour. Where this is not suitable, they are located in the segregation unit. These prisoners are not usually able to locate within the main residential wings. This location, pending transfer, often impacts their mental health detrimentally; difficulties in finding alternative prison locations frequently result in unacceptably long periods in the segregation unit.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Board members frequently observed officers congregated in wing centre offices rather than being on spurs (sections of a residential wing containing rows of cells), engaging with prisoners or carrying out other duties. This was acknowledged by senior management and remained a work in progress to address.

The stability of the prison depends on effective working relationships between officers and prisoners. Recognising that it is challenging to get the balance right, Board members observed varying levels of competence by officers of all ages and levels of experience. The Board questioned the level of training in these skills with HMPPS in last year's report but received no response.

The Governor emphasised the value of respect towards prisoners, including addressing them as "Mr" rather than simply by surname. Board members regularly observed occasions when this was ignored, both verbally and in writing.

Each prisoner should receive at least one keywork session per month, more for those on intervention plans or nearing a parole hearing. Staff shortages impacted the ability to deliver sufficient sessions. During the reporting year 4,737 keywork sessions were entered on prisoner records, an average of around 10 sessions per prisoner. For those men who were resident for the full year, the number of annual sessions recorded ranged from two to 26. Taking the final two months of the reporting year as an example, 371 individuals out of over 450 prisoners had a session recorded, implying that around 80 prisoners had no keywork session over that two-month period. Quality of entries continued to vary widely.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The prison population was very mixed in terms of age, nationality, ethnicity and religion. 27% of prisoners were aged 29 or younger, many with very long sentences. A governor led a forum to focus on support of the youngest cohort, aged 21-25, who often find it difficult to adjust calmly to prison conditions.

The predominant religion was Muslim, representing 46% of prisoners, followed by Christians of various denominations at 35%. 45% of prisoners were white, 30% black and 13% Asian. 80% of prisoners were British, with the remainder representing 45 different nationalities.

A discrimination incident reporting form (DIRF) is submitted by prisoners who consider themselves to be discriminated against because of one of the nine protected characteristics. During the reporting year, 168 DIRFs were investigated (122 in the previous year), although the reporting year's figure was skewed by a large number (39) submitted in September due to a one-off problem with providing showers prior to Muslim prayers. Of the total, 23.8% were upheld.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The Board welcomed the recruitment of a Roman Catholic chaplain following a long period of inadequate support for the 12% of Catholic prisoners. The chaplaincy continued to arrange celebratory events for key religious festivals. It was disappointing that Easter services were cancelled due to only 28 out of a required 72 staff being at work. The chaplaincy arranged for delayed Easter celebrations.

There was perceived inconsistency in the provision of Kosher meals to prisoners who identified as Jewish.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The incentives policy framework (IPF) is an administrative system to encourage positive behaviour. There are three levels – basic, standard and enhanced -each providing prisoners with different privileges. As last year, a downgrade to basic IPF in addition to a penalty such as cellular confinement for breaking rules was perceived by some as a double punishment.

73% of prisoners were enhanced, 25% standard and 2% basic shortly after the end of the reporting year. 68% of Muslims and 74% of those of a Christian denomination were enhanced; 81% of the remainder were enhanced. There were notable differences between age groups, with higher levels of enhanced status among older prisoners. Just 44% of those aged 21-25 were enhanced, versus 87% of those aged 45 or over. All 30 men aged 60 or over were enhanced.

5.7 Complaints

The prison complaints system has three types of complaints – a Comp 1 is an initial complaint; a Comp 1A provides a way to appeal a response to a Comp 1; and a Comp2 is a confidential complaint to the Governor or the Prison Group Director.

The prison recorded 5164 complaints from prisoners during the reporting year, of which 277 were confidential. Of the remainder, the highest number (894) related to property, with residential issues, complaints about staff and problems regarding correspondence each exceeding 400. 29% of the total came from just nine frequent complainers (2% of the population), each of whom submitted over 100 complaints with some exceeding 200.

The Board noted that there was often a long delay between interim responses being provided and a final response, effectively bypassing the requirement to respond within the required timeframe. Management action was taken late in the reporting period to address this and a time limit introduced between interim and final response. At the end of the reporting year, there were 31 overdue responses for which interims had been sent, of which 13 were more than 30 days overdue; the oldest was 87 days overdue. A further eight were overdue with no interim.

For those complaints reviewed by the Board where prisoners submitted applications to the IMB, we formed the impression that the default approach by prison staff to complaints was often that the prisoner was wrong, rather than an objective view being taken.

5.8 Property

The management of prisoner property, particularly around movement between prisons has and continues to be a major issue, generating 18% of complaints to the prison (the most frequent topic) and 13% of IMB Applications.

Despite assurances in the past, is the Board was disappointed to see no progress in improving the system. The frequent losses of property increase prisoner stress and frustrations and place additional financial pressure on the prison service budget where there are successful compensation claims.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

- During the reporting year there were 4,551 appointments scheduled with healthcare professionals both within the prison and with outside secondary care providers (excluding routine nurse and health care assistants). Of these, there were 1,140 non-attendances (25%) due to the prisoner not making themselves available or there being insufficient staff to provide the necessary escorts and time out of cell to attend.
- Dentistry experienced an average waiting time of nine weeks for urgent treatment, 18 weeks for planned treatment and 22 weeks for routine and follow up treatment. These waiting times had reduced following an increase in the number of sessions provided from one to two per week during the reporting year, though Board members observed occasions when the dentistry team were idle due to prisoners not being brought to their appointments. The dental services provider commented that the condition of prisoners' teeth was particularly poor and multiple appointments were often needed to provide appropriate treatment.

6.2 Physical healthcare

The prison healthcare provider offers a full range of treatments with staff present to manage urgent requests as well as scheduled therapies. Waiting times for routine treatment are shown in the table below. The Board considered that waiting times for routine optician appointments were excessive.

Waiting times for appointments

	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25	Nov-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	Feb-26	Mar-26	Apr-26	May -26	Ave.
GP	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Optician	63	42	56	49	28	56	28	56	56	49	42	70	50
Physiotherapy	42	21	21	28	28	21	21	21	21	28	63	21	28
Podiatry	42	63	63	63	56	56	91	42	56	56	70	63	60

6.3 Mental health

Mental health, psychology and psychiatry provision was consistent throughout the year. An average of 27 prisoners were under the mental health team each month with all urgent referrals seen within 24 hours and the average wait for non-urgent support being five days.

There was a monthly average of 57 appointments for psychology support and 18 for psychiatry.

What remained unclear to the Board were the criteria for referral to, and engagement by, the mental health team. There were numerous occasions when a prisoner's presentation, including incidents of self-harm and episodes of erratic or unusual behaviour, did not automatically prompt the team's involvement, with formal referrals being required before any engagement took place. Even where referrals were made, the prisoner's willingness to engage appeared to be a determining factor, despite circumstances in which an

objective observer might reasonably have concluded that the prisoner lacked the capacity to respond rationally or engage meaningfully with the process.

The Board was also concerned about the amount of time required to make decisions regarding referrals to secure hospitals. In some cases this led to many months of vacillation resulting in prisoner frustration and worsening behaviour.

6.4 Social care

The prison and Cambridgeshire County Council social services continued to support those prisoners with specific needs, providing some special equipment and making reasonable adjustments where necessary. In some cases, budgetary constraints delayed provision of equipment.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

Due to continued staff shortages, time out of cell was restricted throughout the year. Of the three residential wings, each had only three months when they were closed for less than 10% of the time, with closures some months exceeding 20%. The Fens unit fared better, with only one month where closures exceeded 10% and one month with no closures. There was a slight improvement towards the end of the year, though at the continuing expense of education and workshops.

Smaller units such as the Bridge suffered more – only two months showed the Bridge closed for fewer than 10% of sessions, while in other months closures ranged from 10% to 27%. This was exacerbated by the proximity to the CSU necessitating frequent short duration lockdowns. The impact of F Wing closure rate of up to 22% was made worse by frequent reduction of the number of officers in the unit, and the number of separate regimes.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Phoenix Futures provided a small recovery and wellbeing team, offering support to prisoners with substance abuse dependencies and general wellbeing concerns. Of their 112 active clients, 63% were for substance abuse. The main illicit substance was cannabis, with smaller instances of synthetic cannabinoids (spice), fermented liquids illicitly brewed in the prison (hooch), and occasional opioids. Staff shortages impacted the team’s ability to deliver wellbeing and group sessions.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

As indicated elsewhere the lack of staff resource has severely curtailed the amount of time out of cell in workshops and educational activities. In addition, there was a substantial (26%) reduction in the prison's budget for education.

The Board therefore finds the work of the Shannon Trust especially positive in an otherwise poor situation. Despite the removal of much of their funding and only supported by the Governor's allocation of funds unused in other areas the Shannon Trust's lead in Whitemoor has delivered impressive results as demonstrated by the number of prisoners undertaking the reading and numeracy scheme. At the end of the reporting year, the Trust had 32 reading learners supported by 27 active mentors. This peer supported process has delivered major improvement in the literacy of the prisoners taking part.

The Children's Book Project is where a child receives the same book at home as their parent in prison. The parent and child can then share the book together over phone calls thus helping to maintain those vital links between parents in prison and their children. The project is funded and organised by the education, skills and work function and supported by the Shannon Trust coordinator.

With one of the purposes of rehabilitation being to assist the prisoner in learning to read, write and be numerate this work should be seen as a priority. It is sad to see such a vital piece of core work be under consistent threat due to funding reductions.

7.2 Vocational training, work

The Board was disappointed to note that the unemployment level had increased from last year. At the reporting year end, 24.9% (18.8% last year) of eligible men were unemployed – 80 individuals - versus a target of 10%. There were 334 eligible prisoners, but just 262 activities spaces.
It was equally concerning that one of the main workshops was closed for more than 30% of the time in seven out of the twelve months. In four out of the last five months of the reporting year it was closed more than 50% of the time.
The quality of work available continued to be limited. A new carpentry and upcycling workshop was closed for much of the year, and introduction of another new workshop was delayed. The Board considers that major improvements continue to be necessary, particularly recognising that prisoners will find other, potentially negative, avenues to use their energy if they cannot find suitable employment.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The Board was encouraged to note that the number of transfers to category B prisons continued to show an upward trend, increasing from 17 in 2023-2024 to 46 in 2024-2025 and 80 during the reporting year. A total of 21 category B prisoners were downgraded and moved to category C prisons, unchanged from the previous reporting year. Of the 145 category A prisoners considered for a downgrade, seven recategorisations were recommended to the national review team, five of which were approved.
It should be noted that the prison offender managers (POMs), alongside their community and psychology partners, have worked tirelessly to address the barriers to progression

faced by IPP prisoners. Despite the complexities associated with this cohort, the number of IPP prisoners has reduced significantly to just 10, reflecting the sustained efforts made to support progression and risk reduction.
The Board also noted that eight men with release dates in 2027 remained at Whitemoor rather than in a prison providing resettlement services. However, it is acknowledged that the majority of these men are category A prisoners and are therefore required to remain within the LTSHE.

7.4 Specialist units

Whitemoor had four special units:

- The Fens Unit (also known as D Wing), holding up to 70 men
- A Close Supervision Centre (CSC), with a maximum capacity of 10
- The Bridge Unit, holding up to 12 prisoners
- A Psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE), located on one spur within a main residential wing, accommodating up to 30 prisoners

The smaller units tended to suffer more from regime restrictions than main residential units, on the basis that fewer prisoners were impacted. For example, in nine out of twelve months the Bridge was closed much more than A wing, and in eight out of 12 months the CSC was closed more often than A wing. While the logic is understandable, it does mean that some prisoners are treated inequitably. The disparity improved in the last two months of the reporting year.

The Fens unit was run in partnership with the local NHS trust and had a capacity for 48 prisoners undergoing psychological treatment for developmental trauma and a further 22 in transition to or from treatment. It also housed a varying number of “lodgers” (prisoners who display an appropriate level of good behaviour but did not participate in treatment).

The CSC was one of five national units that held some of the most dangerous men in the prison system. Following the closure of the wing kitchen and gym in 2025, it was confirmed that the kitchen would not reopen. However, the gym did reopen for solo exercise.

Frequent lockdowns of the unit, coupled with even more frequent staff level reductions, had a greater impact than closure of a residential wing. This was because all prisoners cannot be on association together. Some are on single unlock, while others associate in limited membership groups. Only one individual or one group can be out at a time. This meant that if, as occurred frequently, the unit was open for only half a day, there was insufficient time to deliver an acceptable regime – showers, exercise, association – for all prisoners.

Two cells in the care and separation unit (CSU) hold CSC prisoners who cannot be in the main unit. One prisoner, who had been held there for approaching two years with limited regime, finally moved to the CSC unit.
The PIPE is a therapeutic unit for men to consolidate what they have previously learned in preparation for further progression. The Board was pleased to note that the frequency of specially trained PIPE officers being unavailable reduced from the previous year.

The Bridge, located adjacent to the CSU, aims to help the progression of men who have been segregated for long periods. Unoccupied Bridge cells were frequently used as overflow from the care and separation unit during the year.

Seven men achieved progressive moves during the year, an increase of one from last year – three to the Fens unit, three to category B prisons (including one man who achieved a downgrade from category A) and one to a category C prison following a downgrade from category B. As noted last year, these are all complex men so this is again a successful outcome. Unfortunately, there were also five deselections due to violence or negative behaviours, most of whom were relocated to the segregation unit.

7.5 Family contact

There is a complex process for approving visitors for category A prisoners, including a police check on proposed visitors. During much of the year there was a large backlog of applications awaiting processing. The Board understands that this is now up to date. However, some prisoners still face a long wait as it can take many weeks or even months for some police forces outside London to respond to requests to check visitors.

Prisoners are restricted to telephoning authorised correspondents only. They have to apply to have people added to the system, including legal advisors. This is only done after security checks are completed. During the reporting year, staff shortages in the correspondence section led to very long delays in adding people to the system. At one point, no applications were being processed as priority was being given to monitoring telephone calls. This led to long waits for family members and legal advisors being authorised. While prisoners can write to their solicitor, this is no substitute for a conversation.

The Board was pleased to note that the maximum daily telephone time was increased from 60 to 90 minutes.

Visitors to prisoners were generally complimentary about the visits process. Board members observed that security checks on visitors, including dog checks for drugs, were handled sensitively and with good humour. It was positive to see an increase in family visit days, and efforts to coincide these with school holidays, It was, however, disappointing to see a number of visit days cancelled at short notice due to staff shortages. We also observed that there was sometimes a long wait for visitors before the prisoner arrived. Prison management acknowledged this issue and are aiming to address it.

The administration of video visits improved during the year, but staff shortages caused a number of short notice cancellations. The Board considered that clearer guidance for the conduct of video visits would be helpful. For example, a visit was curtailed due to conversation in a foreign language. As telephone calls can be in foreign languages, and face to face visits can include foreign language conversations, this seemed to the Board inequitable.

8. The work of the IMB

8.1 Board statistics

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Recommended complement of Board members	14	14	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	6	7	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7	7	4
Total number of visits to the establishment	268	261	201

The Board lost its two youngest members to IMBs at other prisons during the year, and one who resigned for family reasons. Recruitment has been challenging, with three applicants reduced to just one appointment due to join in the new reporting year. There was a 24% increase in applications from prisoners. As there were only four active members for most of the reporting year, this curtailed the proportion of time spent on more general monitoring.

8.2 Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	% of '25/'26 Total
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	6	9	6	2%
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	18	21	29	10%
C	Equality	3	3	4	1%
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	19	13	21	7%
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	30	33	59	20%
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	7	7	12	4%
F	Food and kitchens	8	14	20	7%
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	16	20	31	11%
H1	Property within the establishment	19	48	27	9%
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	12	10	13	4%
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	4	7	2	1%
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	16	16	21	7%
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	31	20	17	6%
K	Transfers	1	3	2	1%
L	Miscellaneous	17	13	30	10%
	Total number of applications	**207**	**237**	294	

The most notable increase was on category E1, mainly due to delays in processing telephone applications and short notice visit cancellations.

8.3 Serious Incidents

Board members attended 10 of the 17 times the command suite was opened for serious incidents (a reduction from 23 serious incidents the previous year). Most were incidents at height, many of which were quickly resolved, though a few were extended. There were three incidents of concerted indiscipline – the IMB were not notified of the most major so did not attend.

During one of the incidents at height and as a result of this occurring when the spur was unlocked and therefore more than 30 prisoners out on the spur, the time to resolve the issue was protracted. In the Board's opinion this was contributed to by the lack of experience of some officers, the failure to relay and implement instructions from the Governor in charge (silver) and the prison service's caution during a period of well publicised incidents of violence in prisons.

Annex A

Service providers

- Healthcare services were provided by Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, dentistry by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust Prison Centred Dental Care and optical services by Forensic Eye Care
- Psychological services in the Fens unit were provided by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust.
- Education and library services were initially delivered by Milton Keynes College but changed to People Plus during the year.
- Maintenance was undertaken by Government Facility Services Ltd.
- Cambridgeshire County Council provided adult social care services.



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