



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Garth

**For reporting year
1 December 2023 to 30 November 2024**

Published July 2025



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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 (NMF) 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 a right of access to every prisoner, every part of the prison and 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 Board is part of the United Kingdom's NPM.

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Garth is a category B training prison, a secure prison that houses long-term prisoners who pose serious risks but are not in the highest risk category. It opened in 1988 and holds long-term and life sentenced prisoners. It has a maximum operating capacity of 845¹.

The prison has seven residential wings and a care and separation unit (CSU), where prisoners are segregated.

Prisoners are usually housed in single cells on the wings, with a few cells specifically adapted for physically disabled men who have mobility needs. There is an increasing number of the population in the prison who are over retirement age. Due to the continuing increasing prison population nationally, Garth has had to change some single cells to be used as doubles to accommodate additional prisoners over and above the maximum operating capacity.

There are several specialist units, including the:

- Beacon unit: treats those with personality disorders.
- Building Hope Unit: for those with additional needs, which can be disruptive.
- Residential Support Unit: for vulnerable prisoners who have not been convicted of sexual offences.
- Drug Recovery Unit.

The prison is set in a rural location with no direct connections to mainline train services. The local bus services from Preston, Leyland and Chorley, which are the nearest towns, is infrequent and poor. There is ample parking for visitors who travel by car and there are reliable taxi services in the area. The prison is adjacent to HMP Wymott and close to a site which is deemed suitable for a third prison to be built next to Garth.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- The additional investment required to improve safety and security measures during 2022-20233 was agreed and actioned during 2024. However, measures taken have not been able to fully address the ever-increasing drone activity delivering drugs and illicit items, frequently arriving directly to prisoners at their cell windows.
- There are major concerns that access to drugs is too easy. This is confirmed by random drug tests, where one-third of these tests prove positive.
- Alarming, there has been an approximate 45% increase in violence, with many more serious assaults.
- There have been regular changes to the regime, with prisoners having to be locked up unexpectedly due to staff sickness and absence of officers because of injuries. Sudden changes in regime on the day cause unrest and discontent when it happens, heightening risk to everyone in the prison.

Fair and humane treatment

- The CSU frequently houses prisoners who have severe mental health issues and/or severe personality disorders. These individuals are generally being held there for unacceptably longer periods than they should be. Many segregated prisoners are not able to be moved to alternative suitable accommodation, either in this prison or to specialist units or hospitals elsewhere.
- Key work is not being applied consistently across the prison, mainly due to officers being re-deployed elsewhere from their own work to cover for staff who are not available, due to sickness or other causes.
- The daily planned regime has never been consistent for any period of time, having to constantly change due to staff shortage, and again officers being taken away from their normal work to cover for absent staff.
- It is unhealthy and unhelpful for prisoners to be confined in their cells for excessive periods of time. This requires urgent attention by maintaining an effective regime with sufficient good-quality work and employment for prisoners, as well as domestic time out of cell.
- Major problems continue regarding the progression of property from sending prisons and then from the gate and the dedicated search team (DST) to reception. This frequently means that a prisoner is required to wait three weeks or more for his property, or perhaps months for catalogue purchases. Causes include the unwillingness of transporting companies to carry all prisoners' property, compounding staffing problems within the prison.

Health and wellbeing

- The healthcare needs of prisoners are generally well met although there have been wasted appointments, many of which have been because of limited staff availability to escort the prisoner to his appointment.

- The mental health team is frequently overburdened. The workload is such that it has been difficult for healthcare staff to have the time to attend essential segregation reviews.
- The numbers of prisoners requiring medication is increasing and managing that demand was problematic during the year, resulting in a significant increase in the Board receiving healthcare applications (written representations to the IMB from prisoners).

Progression and resettlement

- Progression to move prisoners from Garth to a Category C prison was almost at a standstill during winter and spring, due mainly to the national overcrowding problem.
- Garth is not resourced as a resettlement prison and consistently holds more Cat C prisoners than it should because of move-on problems within the system.
- Due to continuing staff shortages library, workshops and education have been forced to reduce hours.
- During this year, 85 prisoners were released from Garth under normal processes, plus 13 under the standards determinate sentence review (SDS40). Garth is not funded as a resettlement prison although it has set up its own Resettlement Board to help with this process.

Staff recruitment and retention

- This is a major issue that affects all aspects of prison life and is addressed further in the report.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The whole policy and process of staff recruitment needs to be reviewed and revised as a matter of urgency, because many of the operational problems within the prison derive from the inadequacies of the current process.
- The ongoing scandal of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) needs to be finally resolved. This continues to be a problem with numerous IPP prisoners who have either never been released or who have been recalled. At the end of November 2024, there were 39 IPP prisoners in Garth, including eight recalls. The problems created by the sentence and the release process are understood, but the very injustice of this sentence continues to be ignored by the Government.
- It is requested that the recommendations made in the recent HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) inspection be fully funded in order that they may be implemented.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- A recent unannounced inspection by HMIP reported that this prison was “of real concern” and “unsafe”, with a 45% increase in violence. What measures are being taken to provide additional investment and support to address the problems of safety, violence, staff capability and other identified areas that require attention?

- Statistics suggest that staff turnover has been too high, particularly with uniformed staff leaving. The whole process of recruitment and retention needs to be addressed with the Governor and senior management being included in the process and able to determine suitability of individual applicants for this prison.

TO THE GOVERNOR

- It is recognised that 2023/4 has been a difficult year for Garth. Regime problems have caused unrest amongst the prisoner population, and it is significant that the level of violence, prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff has increased significantly.
- Applications containing complaints about staff have increased by 47%. Work is required by the prison to establish the cause of this rise and put in place any necessary remedial steps.

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister		
How and when does the Minister propose to tackle the urgent issue of uniformed staff recruitment and retention? Specifically, it is strongly recommended that applicants who are interest in joining the staff at Garth should visit the prison before interview and should be interviewed face-to-face by a panel that includes senior staff of the prison. It is essential that applicants fully understand what they are coming into and that management are as sure as possible that they have the right attributes.	It was confirmed that the current centralised model for recruitment would continue. Prisons are encouraged locally to engage with applicants and to facilitate on site visits to the prison during the selection process.	No progress to a change in the recruitment and appointment process.
Staffing shortages have meant that the Key Worker system cannot work effectively. The Board believes the Key Worker system is essential for good management and support of prisoners. Staffing levels, and therefore regime problems, need to enable this system to work regularly and effectively. The Key Worker should be the prisoner's first support and guide.	Minister accepted that daily staff shortages and sickness absences had impacted on the Key Worker scheme. He expects the 2023 recruitment to improve the staffing issues.	There have been no real improvements in the situation.
It is recommended the Minister properly addresses the ongoing scandal of the IPP. This injustice needs to be resolved immediately. This prison currently holds around 40	Some changes to work with IPP prisoners in custody and to licence requirements.	No real progress made regarding this issue.

IPP prisoners many of whom have been seriously damaged by the sentence. Tinkering with the licence and improving support and treatment during custody does not address the injustice of this sentence.		
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To the Prison Service		
It is recognised that funds have finally been made available to resolve the problem of leaking flat roofs. This work needs to be carried out as speedily as possible. At the time of writing there continues to be a risk of injury caused by wet floors, particularly on the main secure corridor.	Work is due to start late 2024 to repair the roofs of the prison at an expected cost of £400K. Contractors visited in September to provide quotes for the work.	Progress is being made with work having begun at the end of this reporting year.
The heating and ventilation systems on the wings continue in a poor state of repair and major funding is required to restore them. These problems cause serious distress to many prisoners who frequently complain about them.	This may be a long-term project to complete the work required. Permission was given for the prisoners to purchase fans to assist with the overheating and negligible ventilation in the cells.	This is still not resolved.
For many years, complaints have been registered about the very inadequate waiting area in the healthcare unit. This needs to be addressed urgently.	More clinics are held on residential units to address this issue, as there is no room to expand the waiting area.	It is suggested that this issue still needs to be resolved.
Major concerns continue about the transport of property from sending prisons. Resolving this problem would benefit prisoners greatly and would also save much staff time and reduce compensation payments. Again, it is suggested that the transporting companies should acquire secure trailers to ensure that prisoners are accompanied by all of their property. The recent statement that prisoners would be allowed to bring and extra	Although we are told that a digitally recorded prisoner escort record has been introduced, there seems to be no real improvement in transporting property between prisons. Regarding the limited amount of property a prisoner can take on	The Board remains very concerned about this area.

half bag with them does not begin to resolve the problem.	the transport, it was pleasing to see the increase of an extra 7.5kg allowance.	
As above – to the Minister - staff recruitment and interview procedures need to be substantively changed to improve the process.	No direct response to this comment.	This remains a matter of concern.

To the Governor		
Whilst it is recognised that progress is being made, the Board receives complaints about staff culture which largely reflects the inexperience of many members of staff. This suggests that increased work is needed to promote and maintain a healthy staff culture in the prison. The Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) process works well, although the incidence of self-harm is a cause for concern.	The Governor is acutely aware of these issues and is addressing them with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).	This continues to highlight problems with the recruitment process.
The population of the CSU continues to highlight the high number of prisoners with serious mental health needs. Concerns regarding mental health support in the prison and the timely move-on to more appropriate prisons or hospitals need to be urgently addressed.	This is severely affected by national problems.	The Board has ongoing concerns.
Constant regime changes, which are frequently caused by staff absences and shortages, unsettle the prisoner population.	This is affected by recruitment inadequacies.	The Board has ongoing concerns.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and Induction

Board members regularly visit the reception area of the prison. It was noted in last year's report that the space at reception is cramped and uninviting with bags of prisoners' property frequently stacked in piles on the floor and corridor areas waiting to be processed. This continued until near the end of this reporting year when bags were clearly labelled and placed in a more orderly way reducing the trip hazards. Ongoing staffing problems suggest that this problem is not yet fully resolved.

Movements into and from the prison increased during the year. As the national prison population has increased substantially, Garth has modified some single cells to accommodate two prisoners. Garth is a category B prison that is currently holding a substantial number of category C prisoners, many of whom are unable to move on because of overcrowding problems. This compounds the workload.

Although the reception area appears to be inadequate for the activities that take place there, good work is done by the staff to welcome new prisoners on arrival. Prison officers explain what will happen during the first few days and security at the prison is explained. New arrivals, together with their belongings, are thoroughly searched. All property is documented on the prisoner's property card and the card is agreed with the prisoner (see section 5.8). An initial medical health check is conducted to ensure that any ongoing medications are available. If a prisoner is coming from another prison, there should be a handover of the prisoner's records to ensure they receive appropriate continuity of care.

Prisoners invariably say to the Board they were treated well in reception and that they were treated with respect during the process.

Following initial reception, the prisoner will be placed in the reception wing until moved to a permanent residential wing. During the first two weeks a key worker and prison offender manager (POM) will be allocated.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Self-harm incidents have increased during the year, with 386 new assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents being opened, compared to the previous year where 588 were opened. An ACCT document sets out the care for a prisoner at risk of suicide or self-harm, and an officer will be responsible to check on him at frequent intervals throughout the day. The frequency of checks is determined according to the needs of the prisoner and may include him being placed on constant watch. Officers are specially trained to undertake these observations.

It is with sadness that the Board reports five deaths in prison custody during the reporting period. Two were, apparently, expected deaths in hospital. Two were apparently self-inflicted and the fifth is yet to be determined. Each death in custody is investigated by the Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) who contacts the Board as part of their investigation and in due course a report is prepared for the coroner, together with recommendations for the prison. In each case a family liaison officer (FLO) is appointed who is the personal contact for the family of the deceased. That person will assist the family from initially informing them of their loss until a

Coroner's inquest has taken place. This contact, if the family wishes, can be for several years due to the time it takes for the inquest to be listed in the Coroners Court.

Self-harm incidents recorded during the year reached 612, an increase from 587 during the previous year.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The number of violent incidents has increased during the reporting year. It is noted that there are real concerns that the levels of violence, particularly towards prison officers are becoming more frequent and extreme, including injuries that require urgent hospital care.

The Board are also concerned that with the high number of inexperienced officers on site, many incidents may arise due to a lack of staff confidence to challenge or intervene in situations. More staff resources are needed to ensure full staff teams are available to effectively supervise each wing of this high security prison.

Prisoners who are self-isolating must be checked regularly to ensure they are safe but if wings do not have the required staff levels this process may be compromised.

4.4 Use of force

Board members are usually notified when a planned removal is to take place although it should be recognised that Board members are not always in the prison when these events take place. This is usually a removal of a prisoner from his cell to another or to the CSU. It could be that his cell must be searched for illicit items such as hidden weapons, mobile phones or drugs. Alternatively, he may refuse to be relocated to another cell or wing. The Board is always impressed by the professional way these moves are made and believe that the trained staff take pride in doing a professional job.

There will also be occasions when, while walking through the prison, Board members observe incidents occurring and these are generally resolved well.

Body worn video cameras record removals and in addition, where possible, Board members monitor the process from inception until the prisoner is placed in the new location. From observations, it is noted that considerable care is taken to ensure no injuries are caused to a prisoner. The prisoner is warned and given an explanation of what is happening and asked to co-operate. There have been 304 occasions when force has been used during the year.

Trained officers carry PAVA (a synthetic pepper spray) which has been used on eight occasions, and batons have been drawn on two occasions but never used.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Significant changes were made to security and search procedures during 2023 but this has not stopped the ingress of illicit items. There is a total ban of paper being brought into the prison by people entering on foot. Mail coming into the prison for prisoners is searched, opened and checked by dedicated officers and search dogs. This may also include legal mail because instances of forging legal labels have been identified. Mail is then photocopied and the copy given to the prisoner with originals placed into their personal property for receipt on release. This minimises

impregnated paper entering the prison and since the change there has been a significant reduction of drugs through this route.

The number of drones coming to the prison bringing various items continues to grow as a route for delivering mobile phones, drugs and weapons. Initially drones could carry very little, however much more sophisticated ones have been developed that can carry significant payloads. Drones typically fly directly to a cell in which a prisoner has caused damage to the window, often by burning a hole with an electric element removed from a kettle. There is a need to prevent this by installing netting or other preventive measures to windows.

Staff regularly patrol the walls inside the prison and cameras monitor outside. Lancashire Constabulary has a dedicated officer working in the prison.

The prison has had unannounced searches conducted by the national HMPPS search team. Board Members have been present when these searches have taken place.

Search dogs are regularly working at the prison.

The manufacture of “hooch” appears to be lower than in recent years but remains a problem.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Many areas of the prison have been deteriorating badly with little or no remedial work being done. For six or seven years, flat roofs of the prison have developed leaks, particularly above the main secure corridor. Buckets are deployed to catch rainwater but with limited success. After many applications to HMPPS in the summer of 2024 funds have been made available for roof repairs and this work can now be expedited.

Applications were received from prisoners complaining about the poor ventilation which is a particular problem in the summer if they are locked in cells for up to 23 hours a day. This was happening regularly through the summer due to regime changes which were directly due to staff shortages.

Earlier in the year all the showers were assessed and found to be in poor condition and therefore in need of upgrading, but funding is unavailable, and the Governor had to find more creative means to gradually improve the situation (the quote from Amey, who run the works department, was deemed excessively high).

Due to vandalism many of the cell windows require replacing and there is an ongoing program of repair in place.

The catering department receives a budget of £3.01 per day per prisoner to provide three meals: breakfast, a hot lunchtime meal, and a cold evening snack meal. This department has experienced frequent equipment failures, such as refrigerators and ovens requiring repair or replacement. Replacements can take many months as the prison is not allowed to make local arrangements, but this is vital equipment, used daily to prepare meals for up to 840 prisoners.

During the year the Board received just four applications from prisoners regarding food and generally feedback is positive.

5.2 Segregation

Prisoners are placed in the CSU for various reasons including their own protection, the protections of others, not following the rules or orders, or being involved in violent incidents. There are 22 cells in the CSU, plus two special cells, and these are usually full and quite frequently prisoners are also segregated on the residential wings. Many prisoners are violent and a risk assessment determines how many officers must be present to unlock a prisoner, to protect staff safety. Body worn video cameras are carried and there is CCTV monitoring continually in operation, although not in all cells.

Adjudications are held daily to deal with offences that have taken place in the prison. Throughout the year the number of adjudications has far exceeded the time available and there is a continuous backlog of cases to be heard. Most months there has been an excess of 500 outstanding cases. Delays occur when the Crown Prosecution Service has not decided if prosecution will take place, or it may be to give prisoners time to seek legal advice, or frequently it is because there is not enough staff to bring the prisoner from a wing to the room where the adjudications take place. Those adjudications that Board members have observed, proceeded following the correct procedures. The prisoner is given time to explain guilt or innocence before penalties

are determined. Various Board members have monitored 187 adjudications during the year.

When in the CSU, a prisoner has regular reviews – the first after 72 hours, then at intervals up to a maximum of every two weeks. Board members have monitored 93 segregation reviews during the year. These take place before a governor together with healthcare representatives, a mental health team member and officers, and if available a prisoner's key worker and they follow a standard procedure. The reviews consider the progress made towards the prisoner either returning to a residential wing, or to one of the special units at Garth, or to a special unit or hospital out of the prison.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

In the main, there appears to be a good deal of mutual respect between prisoners and the staff or volunteers at Garth. However staffing levels are frequently low with the result that regime changes take place at short notice resulting in frequent lockdowns. This builds tension for both prisoners and the staff, thus increasing the workload for staff who are required to cover for absences. The fluctuating number of staff available makes it difficult for managers to ensure consistency.

Staff being redeployed cover other roles due to too few officers on duty, then return to their main job to find they cannot meet their targets. As a result, local key work targets have been impossible to achieve.

Many new staff being recruited have been observed as not having good interpersonal and communication skills. Some have not realised from the interview and selection process and information they are given, what the work actually entails. Although offered a tour of the prison they may not fully understand what is expected. This Board strongly advises that the whole system of recruitment be assessed and revised as a matter of the utmost urgency. It should not be assumed that an applicant is suitable to work in any prison and therefore each applicant should be required to visit the prison where they may be placed. This would allow the applicant better to understand what is required of them and to consider whether they are able to undertake the work. The interview should be carried out "face to face" with senior management of the prison being a part of the process with a right to determine whether the applicant is suitable for appointment. If this process is followed effectively there should be more likelihood of making the right appointments and staff remaining in post and becoming effective.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Applications to the Board regarding equality and diversity issues were just nine for the year (four in the previous year).

Garth received 76 discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRF) during this period, of which 41 were dealt with through the prison's formal complaint procedure and of the remaining 35, two complaints were upheld in favour of the prisoner.

Early in 2024, the prison was able to recruit and appoint a neurodiversity support manager to improve staff understanding of those prisoners identified, or suspected, to have different needs. Many prisoners have been acknowledged as being on the autistic spectrum. Early assessments suggest that up to 30% of prisoners are neurodivergent.

There should be regular meetings to discuss the needs of the diverse prison community. The Board is happy that meetings are arranged to discuss equality issues. However, notices of the meetings are not always easily accessible to the Board and, as a result, it can be difficult for members to monitor these meetings. Minutes of the meetings that have taken place are available for members to read.

There has been no improvement to the prison to ensure that those with mobility issues can move about independently. There are just two lifts at Garth, one is in the stores department and the other is in one wing. Some years ago, there was a plan to install stair lifts in some of the stair wells. This did not happen because of problems associated with Brexit and availability of the lifts which would have been imported from the EU. It is recommended that this plan be re-established.

Emergency evacuation plans are in place on all wings.

Garth, as a Training Prison, does have some workshops that can offer work to those with disabilities but, realistically, only if they can be made more accessible.

The healthcare department will offer peripatetic services if a prisoner cannot access their services independently.

There are numerous support groups and forums and areas of special interest including for prisoners over 55, foreign nationals, black, Asian, Gypsy and Roma prisoners, armed services veterans and Pride (LGBTQ+).

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The Chaplaincy provision is an integral part of prison life providing constant support 365 days a year. It includes a multi-faith team covering all faiths and none. The team is very ably led by an imam with ordained and lay ministers representing all faiths with a mix of full-time, part-time and volunteer staff who work effectively across the entire establishment.

Services are organised throughout the year for various faiths including weekly prayer, annual celebrations and feast and fasting days.

One to one support is available for every prisoner who may have suffered a recent bereavement. Services can be arranged to remember those lost and funeral services can be streamed live into the chapel.

The rooms available in the chaplaincy can be used for meetings, formal services and quiet contemplation.

Board members have observed on many occasions the work of those giving their time to support prisoners at HMP Garth.

Every year a service of remembrance is celebrated on or about 11 November and this is valued by both staff and prisoners.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The incentives scheme seems to generally work well.

5.7 Complaints

The prison complaints department received 2,521 complaints during 2024 compared to 3,119 in 2023. There is no clear explanation for this reduction although it is recognised that quite often a small number of prisoners may inflate the figures by submitting large numbers of complaints. These complaint figures do not include any for healthcare as these are subject to a separate procedure.

Each month the Board monitors a sample of the complaints made to the prison through the established complaints process. This includes the COMP1, which is the initial complaint and COMP 1A appeals to the response if a prisoner does not accept the response given.

In general complaints are expedited within the required response time. Correct procedures are followed and responses usually appropriate. There are few occasions when the responses may not be explained clearly, however the complaints process is generally well managed by the team in the business management unit.

Prisoners have laptop technology and can send their applications (prisoners' written representations) directly to a department, or they can send a written complaint directly to the complaints clerk, who will log it and take any action required.

5.8 Property

Issues relating to property when a prisoner arrives at Garth arise constantly. Ideally, all the prisoner's property should accompany the prisoner, but this rarely happens. For many years, the transporting companies seem to have allowed only two bags per prisoner. The Board frequently received applications about property issues in the reporting period December 2023 to November 2024. In January 2024, property limits were updated to allow for an additional half bag. The information took time to filter down to prisoners and staff. This additional amount is far from satisfactory and has not alleviated the problem. When property is left at a sending prison, it should follow in a timely manner, but this does not happen and can take weeks, even months, resulting in unnecessary claims for compensation. The Board, again, suggests that all of a prisoner's property should be transported with him.

One important aspect of this problem is that prisoners report that legal documents and papers go missing when their property is transferred, and these documents could interfere with upcoming court appearances.

All property on arrival must be inspected by the DST and cleared to go to a prisoner, but due to redeployments from their main role to cover for absentee staff this does not always happen in a timely manner, resulting in items to be searched accumulating and causing delays. Some property may never be found resulting in compensation claims against the prison. As with many problems within the prison this one is largely caused by staffing problems which, in turn, are mainly caused by the failed recruitment process.

During the autumn a senior manager was given the task of reviewing the property management and handling procedures and making recommendations for improvement. The Board expect that changes will be implemented during 2025.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The Governor and Head of Healthcare meet every month to discuss any areas of concern that need particular attention. The Board has not monitored any of these meetings. Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust are the lead provider of healthcare services to the prison.

6.2 Physical healthcare

For many years the Board has raised the issue of the very poor waiting facilities for prisoners in the healthcare department of the prison. It is a railed and gated area with poor quality seating and there is no toilet available. If a prisoner needs the toilet, he has to attract the attention of a staff member to request that he is taken to use a facility. The Board recommends that this situation is addressed as a priority. It is understood that improving this waiting area would require substantial funding and work but, after so many years of complaints, it is time that the problem is resolved.

There is a GP available daily and dentistry and optical care are provided on site. Bookings can be made by prisoners directly using their laptop. The Board has received few applications, 39 during the year which is less than during 2023 when there were 48. It is noted here that prior to Covid-19 there were generally very few complaints about healthcare and the last two years have been exceptional.

Some applications have been from prisoners claiming that they have been unable to get appointments, but there is little evidence that this is the case. Most prisoners can see a GP within two weeks of the request being made. For those needing to be seen urgently, a triage visit on their wing will take place and any further action will be arranged. If necessary, an ambulance will be called to take a prisoner to an outside hospital.

Garth does not have any inpatient beds so, if necessary, prisoners are transferred to the inpatient unit at HMP Preston or to an outside hospital.

6.3 Mental health

The Mental Health Team is fully staffed, having employed temporary staff on short-term contracts. The demand for mental healthcare continues to increase with a great deal of time dedicated to those in the CSU, or on open ACCTs. These people receive a daily visit, usually during the morning. An assessment is undertaken as a person is placed in the CSU and arrangements made for them to have continuing intervention and support if required.

Many men at Garth are serving significantly long sentences, much of which must be served in a Category B prison, with many adversely affected by the sentence in terms of their mental health. This is particularly true in the case of IPP prisoners. See Section 7.3.

6.4 Social care

Since the prison population is increasing dramatically, and sentences are getting longer there is a corresponding aging of the prison population which results in a greater demand upon healthcare resources and the need to provide good social care and assistance. As far as resources permit, individuals in need receive daily visits

from healthcare workers and are also supported by approved prisoners employed as carers. Efforts are made to make them as comfortable and safe as possible, although it is recognised that for many the prison is not the most appropriate place for them. This problem will only increase requiring proportionately more resources to cope adequately.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

This has been a contentious issue throughout the year. The Governor, deputy or other senior representative attends part of every monthly Board meeting and is invariably open and clear about the problems of the prison and the endeavours to resolve them.

The Governor is most anxious to restore a full and ongoing regime but is severely hampered by the staffing problems described throughout this report. He is fully aware of the problems caused by the all too frequent lockdowns which cause great frustration amongst many prisoners and puts staff at risk. This in turn is exacerbated by the high number of inexperienced staff. It should be stated, however, that many staff members are engaging well with the prisoners, indicating that the situation is not beyond repair.

Regime changes have been made weekly, or even daily. For most prisoners, only part-time work and education have been available and this also affects their pay. Access to the library and gyms has also been affected and the cumulative effect of these factors causes unrest within the prisoner population, as prisoners are encouraged to exercise either in the exercise yards attached to their wing or in one of the two gyms, to keep fit.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Delphi works with prisoners, individually and in group activities, providing active support for prisoners to deal with certain addictions.

6.7 Soft skills

Board members go onto each wing on a weekly basis. Observations are made about the general state of the wings, notice boards and availability of necessary forms and information. This includes information about access to peer support, Listeners, the Samaritans, the chaplaincy and, of course, the Board.

Prisoners have phones in their cells as well as laptops to enable them to get appropriate information and to contact internal services.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

The library at Garth is supported by the Lancashire County library service and prisoners should have access to their full range of resources. Unfortunately, the current regime has had no time to allow prisoners physically to go to the library. They do not now get the opportunity to browse the shelves and ask advice from the library staff on duty.

There is a book request service, from which prisoners can locate and order books on their laptops and the books are delivered and collected from the wings. There is also usually a trolley available on the wings with an assorted collection of books.

The Board recommends that library visits are included in future regime plans.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Prisoners are expected to be engaged in either education or work, with refusal to attend resulting in financial penalties. Many prisoners arrive at the prison with few or no qualifications and some are unable to read or write. All are encouraged to achieve at least basic levels of Maths and English and courses are available include English at entry level (part-time) and levels 1 and 2 full-time. Some prisoners do wish to progress further with a number undertaking Open University courses. Those wishing to do so are encouraged and supported by the education department staff.

There are various types of industrial workshops which include:

- **Plastics:** injection moulding machines produce essential plastic items for distribution across the prison estate including toothbrushes and cutlery as well as plastic boxes for charities.
- **Textiles:** manufacture of prison clothing for prison estate.
- **DHL retail:** Warehouse workshop servicing the canteen (prisoner shop) process for Garth and other prisons in the North West region.
- **Community workshop:** Repair and refurbishment of wheelchairs for distribution to charities/repair of other items – such as reupholstering furniture.
- **Contract services:** production of LED lighting provided across the prison estate, wiring assembly and testing of specialist units.
- **Industrial cleaning:** which provides a vocational qualification.
- **Woodwork:** production of wood and carpentry items.
- **Catering services:** daily provision of meals for HMP Garth.
- **Farms and gardens:** maintenance of the grounds within the prison and the production of free-range eggs.

Many of these provide vocational training to enable prisoners to achieve National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) at varying levels depending on their aspirations.

Because of staffing and regime problems most of these activities have only been available to prisoners on a part-time basis throughout the year.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The offender management unit (OMU) is ably managed by a Governor and two senior probation officers. There should be 13.5 probation officers, with 11 being in post, and three and a half (full time equivalent) band four officers, of which there are three. On the administration side there are three vacancies.

At the end of the reporting year, the department was up to date with re-categorisations, OASyS assessments and resettlement boards.

Increased pressure has been caused by the requirement to check records to determine whether prisoners should be granted early release under the SDS40 rule and new home detention curfew regulations. All sentencing warrants have to be checked carefully as it has been found that courts frequently do not record sentences accurately.

This Board continues to be concerned that the Community Offender Manager (COM) is not usually allocated to a prisoner until within nine months of release and that restrictions frequently prevent them from visiting the prisoner. This then becomes a contributory factor in breaches of licence because working relationships have not developed between the prisoner and the COM.

Good work is done with IPP prisoners to help them to work towards release but it has long been recognised that this sentence is unjust, that a prisoner should not be forced to serve what is effectively a life sentence for an offence which the sentencing judge believe was worth a few months or a couple of years, as is indicated by the length of tariff imposed. The IPP sentence was cancelled from 2012 without retrospective application. There remain around 3,000 IPP prisoners in prisons who have either never been released or who have been recalled and many of these have served 18 years or more. Recent changes to licence conditions have helped to resolve the problem partially. Work being done in prison with these prisoners is also designed to help them to be released but this does little to resolve the injustice of the sentence.

This Board would agree that no-one would want to see any further victims being harmed by a released IPP prisoner. However, the rights of these prisoners should be respected, and it is recommended that legislation be introduced to release them forthwith. Many of these people have been seriously damaged by their sentences and should be given appropriate support and treatment upon release.

7.4 Family contact

Contact with families is actively encouraged at Garth and visits for family members are available five days a week. The Visits Hall has recently had some refurbishment to make it more welcoming. Security measures have been increased to ensure illicit items are not brought into the prison.

Social video calls can be booked to enable families to have a video call.

Prisoners have telephones in their cells and can contact family and friends once they have provided the prison with contact details and a risk assessment has been completed.

Family days are arranged which are appreciated. A prisoner and his family can spend up to four hours together with catering available and some staff at the prison

give time to facilitate entertainment for children during the day. These visits make use of outdoor space, weather permitting, which provides a much more relaxed atmosphere than would be available in the visits hall.

The Storybook Dad's initiative has been much appreciated for some years.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Garth is not set up to be a resettlement prison. The number of prisoners released directly has traditionally been low, but this is increasing due to the difficulties of moving prisoners on to lower category prisons. The policy of a recent Secretary of State for Justice to restrict the number of prisoners transferring to category D prisons created a major slow-down in transfers resulting in Garth having a backlog of Cat C prisoners waiting to move on.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	460

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	14	17
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	8	4
C	Equality	4	9
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	10	6
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	12	21
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	4	25
F	Food and kitchens	5	4
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	48	39
H1	Property within the establishment	46	65
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	21	33
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	15	15
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	23	27
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	58	123
K	Transfers	1	1
	Total number of applications	269	389

Annex A

Service providers

Various services are provided in the prison. Some are contracted local or regionally whilst others are provided directly by national contracts negotiated by HMPPS including the following:

- Primary healthcare: Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust (GMMH)
- GP healthcare: locum GPs from various agencies
- Dental services: Smart Dental Services
- Mental Healthcare: Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Substance misuse services: Delphi Rehabilitation Services.
- Adult social care: Lancashire County Council
- Pharmacy provision: Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Optical services: optometrist privately employed by GMMH
- Education and training: Offender Learning and Skills Services/Milton Keynes College
- Shared learning: University of Central Lancashire
- Prisoners' canteen: DHL
- Main food supplier: Bidfood
- Library services: Lancashire County Council
- Listeners and online support: Samaritans
- Prisoner transport: GeoAmey (main contractor)
- Facilities maintenance and management: Amey



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