



# **Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Rochester**

**For reporting year  
1 April 2024 to 31 March 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 agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

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

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

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

## 2. Description of the establishment

HMP Rochester is a category C resettlement prison for both adults and young adult men; it has an operational capacity of 766<sup>1</sup>. From March 2025, the prison also holds Prisoners Convicted of Sexual Offences (PCoSOs). Prisoners are held in nine residential units. Until March one was a dedicated drug rehabilitation unit, but this now houses PCoSOs. Gradually, the top-site of the prison will exclusively hold PCoSOs. For the reporting year, the remaining wings were assigned to general accommodation. One previously catered for prisoners with enhanced incentive scheme status including those on the incentivised substance-free living unit. During the year, prisoners who are classed as neurodivergent have resided on this wing. There is also rapid deployment single cell accommodation for 60 prisoners on a street-based design (known as pods). This has improved facilities for selected incentivised prisoners. There is a separate care and separation unit (CSU). One wing was allocated for first-night accommodation for all incoming prisoners.

The prison has four Edwardian-built wings, which are challenging to maintain. The four newer wings have continual ventilation and heating problems. Maintenance is provided by Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL). The majority of cells are double occupancy. The grounds are spacious with each wing being a separate stand-alone location. The open location of the prison gives plenty of opportunity for fresh air and outdoor activity.

As a resettlement prison, the regime is intended to give prisoners training through a structured sentence plan, in order to prepare them for release and ensure resettlement back into the community. Rochester actively engages with prisoners to address their offending behaviour and offers opportunities to engage in behavioural programmes, training, education and work, linked to employment where possible. Increasing the links to real employment vacancies is a continuing aim.

Substance recovery at the prison is operated by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, through Change, Grow, Live. Healthcare support for prisoners is provided by the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust healthcare team, for both primary and mental healthcare. Psychological and psychiatric services are also provided, with the psychologists undertaking individual assessments, as well as running various groups. The physical wellbeing of prisoners is catered for through well-run gymnasiums, offering competitive and recreational activities. The chaplaincy provides assistance across all faiths. The family services provider, the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), is involved with visiting arrangements, and more generally there is community support from various external organisations.

Following the re-rolling of HMP Cookham Wood in August 2024, there are plans for the two prisons to merge. These are under development and HMP Rochester has been working to take this change forward in association with Cookham Wood. Both prisons now sit under the one Governor.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

The prison was inspected by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) in the summer of 2024. The inspectorate highlighted long-standing issues at the prison, which had not been addressed. Consequently, an Urgent Notification was issued. An HMIP independent review of progress (IRP) is scheduled for June 2025.

### 3. Key points

#### Main findings

This has been an exceptionally challenging year for HMP Rochester. Consequently, this report needs to be considered within the context of the four key issues outlined below, which turn have caused disruption and created considerable logistical issues.

- For almost the whole of this reporting year the prison was without a permanent Governing Governor. The unexpected departure of the Governor in the spring, was followed by the appointment of an Interim Governor. In the Autumn, the Deputy Governor was appointed as Acting Governor in the absence (due to the ill health) of the Interim Governor. In December, the Governing Governor from Maidstone Prison was appointed to HMP Rochester to replace the Acting Governor (who reverted to Deputy Governor) until the Interim Governor was able to return (which she did under a phased return to work.) Finally in March the Interim Governor was appointed as Governing Governor, which at last gave some stability of leadership. In addition, there were several changes of departmental senior leaders during the year. The absence of clear and consistent leadership created a lack of structure for all those working at the prison, and how it addressed the issues outlined in the paragraphs below. Consequently, the IMB wrote a letter of concern to the Prisons Minister deploring the impact this disruptive leadership had on all staff working at the prison and, in turn, the welfare of prisoners
- The HMIP inspection in August 2024 resulted in the issuing of an Urgent Notification (UN) for Rochester. It received the lowest healthy prison assessments in three of the four tests: respect, purposeful activity and preparation for release. It also noted that recommendations from the 2021 inspection were still to be addressed. The Board supported the general thrust of the HMIP report. This resulted in an Urgent Notification Action Plan to deal with issues raised. While progress has been slow (in part due to the lack of consistency at senior leadership level), some improvements have been made, but it will take time for all the issues flagged up in the UN to be addressed.
- In the summer it was announced that HMP Cookham Wood would be re-rolled as a male Category C prison and aligned to HMP Rochester. It only became clear to the Board in April 2025 with the appointment of a single Governor for the two sites how the two prisons are to work together. Prisoners categorised as 'enhanced' were transferred to Cookham very speedily and efficiently. However, both the IMB boards at Rochester and Cookham have been concerned about the lack of activity available for these prisoners. In addition, the staffing position was difficult and has taken longer to resolve than anticipated. The Board's view is that there was insufficient planning to enable this move to take place, while appreciating that it was required because of pressure on the national prison estate. The two IMB boards remain in close contact, with the aim of working together as a unified board once the working arrangements for Rochester and Cookham have been established.
- In early February 2025 the Board was informed there would be a partial cohort change at Rochester with the top site holding prisoners convicted of

sexual offences (PCoSOs) By late February and early March, PCoSOs were being housed at Rochester with the aim of having all wings on the top site housing PCoSOs by June 2025. Once again, there was very little time to prepare for this change before it was implemented. The requirement to keep the two cohorts of prisoners separate requires considerable change to all working practices across the prison. This is being taken forward with commendable flexibility by all working at the prison but still has some way to go before it settles down. The change of cohort was introduced as the Prison Service's experience is that PCoSOs are not usually associated with violence or part of a drug culture, which unfortunately has been a dominant factor at Rochester. Initial observations by the Board have shown this is the case. But in turn it presents a challenge to prison officers and other staff as they become familiar with dealing with a new prisoner cohort.

## **Safety**

- The UN Action Plan on Safety requires improvements to reduce self harm, tackle violence and up-skill staff to address risk and vulnerability with the prisoner population. In the Board's view good progress has been made on all of these issues.
- Incidents of self-harm decreased during the year, even noting that some individuals self-harm frequently. The Board has observed that appropriate care is being taken by prison officers with those identified as being at risk of suicide.
- There was a significant downward trend in the level of violence from October onwards, and before the introduction of PCoSOs in March 2025. Much of the violence is caused by drug-related debt and intimidation, and increasingly is associated with prisoners forming group associations.
- The Board had noted that the introduction of PCoSOs into Rochester has, so far, led to less violence, drug debt and intimidation on the top site. However, this reallocation is a cause for concern over how the remaining prisoner cohort can be managed safely within the limited options for redeployment available on the lower site.
- While concerned about the impact of changes at the prison, the Board maintains the view that from its observations during weekly monitoring visits, Rochester continues to be a safe environment for prisoners.
- The large open footprint of the prison makes it easy for illicit items to be thrown over its fences, and the use of drones has grown. The Board has noted the efforts the prison's security department has made to deter this, and the use of search dogs has once again been particularly successful.

## **Fair and humane treatment**

- The Board has noted many positive conversations between prisoners and staff, and believes prisoners are being treated fairly and humanely. However, many officers are newly appointed, and experience levels are low, which in turn leads to some situations becoming more difficult than is necessary.
- Most wings at the prison have a failing infrastructure and are meeting a minimal level of acceptable accommodation. While the pest control measures introduced during the reporting period (together with improved cleanliness on

wings) has improved the vermin situation, in the Board's view it is still a significant problem, and will remain so, until the prison is redeveloped.

- The Board's judgement is that adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner has broken prison rules) are being conducted correctly, the conclusions reasonable and the outcomes just and fair. Good order or discipline (GOoD) reviews (where the prison determines if a prisoner should be segregated) are undertaken within required timescales.
- The Board continues to receive a large number of applications relating to property loss on transfer, which additionally increased following the transfer of PCoSO prisoners, many of whom have had property lost or delayed in transit.

### **Health and wellbeing**

- Improvements required by the HMIP report and the UN are gradually taking place. The Board continues to receive many applications from prisoners expressing dissatisfaction with the service provided by primary healthcare, mainly relating to the wait to see the GP. The Board's view is that mental healthcare support arrangements are satisfactory and drug recovery systems are good.
- There is good provision for exercise. The Board were pleased to see The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme took place again last year.
- The Chaplaincy is fully staffed, and all faiths can be accommodated. The chaplaincy deals considerably with all prisoners – irrespective of their faith background.
- The introduction of an Incentivised Substance Free Living (ISFL) area within H wing proved very successful for most of the year. However, it was compromised by changes in the prisoner cohort on H Wing, and the Board is pleased to note that ISFL will continue onto another wing.
- The focus on neurodiversity has been positive, especial the additional understanding it has given to staff about prisoners' behaviour.

### **Progression and resettlement**

- The HMIP report required additional resources to be provided to Offender Management work. This has been achieved, and, with a fully staffed probation team, is now working well. Its workload increased with the early release schemes and changes in sentence calculation but was managed successfully.
- The Board is again drawing attention to the lack of trainers and tutors in Education and Skills training. This was of concern to the HMIP and Ofsted Inspectors.
- The Board notes that behavioural programme provision needs to be expanded, and this is planned wef September 2025. The Board notes that since their arrival at Rochester there has been no provision for behavioural courses for the PCoSOs. This means some of this prisoner cohort will leave prison without completing their required sentence plan. In the Board's view, this is unacceptable.
- The Board's view is that more activity for prisoners is required, and it supports the prison in its aim to provide more meaningful occupation.

## **3.2 Main areas for development**

### **TO THE MINISTER**



- The Board believes the speed of change that happened at Rochester prison in the past 12 months has impacted its ability to deliver on the many issues highlighted in the HMIP Report and the resulting Urgent Notification (UN). The Board requests the Minister to provide the resources Rochester needs to enable the necessary improvements to take place. Additionally, to give the prison a period of stability to enable the outcomes from the UN to be achieved.
- The Board draws the Minister's attention to the statistic in paragraph 7.5.4 as to how few prisoners remain in employment after six weeks from release. Are there plans to address this issue? In addition, while there has been an improvement, more hostel accommodation in the South East for released prisoners is still required.

### **TO THE PRISON SERVICE**

- The Board is again noting that volumetric control of property is not happening. Being a prison from which prisoners are released, Rochester regularly receives property in excess of the volumetric control number. This, in turn, has to be sorted and stored, and is a time-wasting exercise for all concerned. The Board believes it should be implemented more rigorously, or another scheme should be devised and implemented, as indicated in the latest HMPPS response to our previous report.
- The Board understands and supports the reasoning for the re-rolling of the top site at Rochester as a prison for PCoSos, but it was rushed through and creates significant logistical issues for the prison, which will take time to bed down. The Board believes a period of stability is required, without further changes to leadership and functions.
- While the UN requires improvements to maintenance and repair of accommodation, the view of the Board is that the dilapidated buildings at Rochester continue to deteriorate and are barely meeting acceptable standards of accommodation. It retains the view that Rochester should be completely redeveloped.

### **TO THE GOVERNOR**

- Many of the themes and concerns in the UN relate to leadership, staff capability and culture. The Board supports the work undertaken so far, and how much has already been achieved, and would like to receive more updates on further plans in this area.
- While there has been some improvement in cell-checks when a prisoner is moved to the CSU, during the reporting year this was still a problem. Can there be a proactive drive to ensure belongings are not lost or taken or misappropriated in these situations?

### **3.3 Response to the last report**

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
<b>To the Minister</b>		

Lack of suitable accommodation for prisoners on release, who are left to become homeless.	Additional accommodation provided by Community Accommodation Service Tier 2.	Improvement of spaces noted, but still insufficient accommodation provided.
Lack of probation officers – impacted by early release schemes	Recruitment of Probation Officers taken place and vacancies in the main filled.	Vacancies at Rochester Offender Management Unit are filled and working well.
<b>To the Prison Service</b>		
Request for information re complete redevelopment of Rochester as intended several years ago.	Problem acknowledged, and reply outlined various upgrade work being undertaken. No plans for specific structural change at Rochester.	Current accommodation is still deteriorating and only just at an acceptable standard
Property on transfer – no volumetric control is being taken forward	Issue acknowledged and recognised as a problem from many other IMB reports. Options being considered by HMPSS Head of Operations.	No progress – property exceeding the quoted controls still arriving with prisoners
<b>To the Governor</b>		
Cell checks not being completed on moves into CSU.	Chair discussed with all three Governing Governors during the reporting year.	Property is still being lost following an in-prison move, as items left insecure.
Requirement for Escorts for all moves.	Chair discussed this with HMIP inspectors.	Improvement shown now that mass movement to attend activities etc has been restored.

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

#### **4.1 Reception and induction**

4.1.1 The Board is satisfied that both functions are working well, with appropriate healthcare checks being undertaken. Ridley wing has been a dedicated entry wing, providing informative induction briefings and a good first-night process. However, this arrangement is changing given the change of prisoner cohort entering the prison.

#### **4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody**

4.2.1 There was one death at the prison in the reporting period. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) have investigated and their report is awaited. There was a Coroner's Inquest for a death at the prison in the previous year. In addition, there was PPO investigation into the death of a prisoner who was on home detention curfew (HDC) release. As far as the Board is aware, recommendations from the reports have been implemented.

4.2.2 It is good to report that the number of incidents of self-harm decreased during the reporting period. It reached a high point of 50 in October, but was down to 17 in March, with 2 individuals accounting for 29% of the March incidents. It has been noted that in March 60 new arrivals came with a self-harm history, compared with 35 in December 2024. During conversations with the safer custody team, the Board has noted a key trigger for self-harm is a feeling of hopelessness, along with more manipulative motivations such as requesting vapes and wing/cell moves.

4.2.3 Assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) reporting (used for prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) was regularly examined by the Board, and a sample of reviews attended. ACCT numbers remain unchanged, at roughly 20 per month. A successful training day was held relating to changes in ACCT and challenge support and intervention plans (CSIPs).

4.2.4 The Board has noted recent safer custody data shows that monitoring and checking of ACCT documents by supervisors needs to be completed on time and become more meaningful. While there is no common trend, the Board notes that worry about debt continues to be a motivator for prisoners who are having suicidal thoughts. The Board recognises that commendable swift action by prison officers has on many occasions prevented attempted suicide by prisoners.

4.2.5 The integrated approach to safeguarding continues with complex case reviews, which are completed alongside the Safety Intervention Meeting.

#### **4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation**

4.3.1 There has been a gradual decline in violence over the past seven months, from a high of 29 recorded incidents in August down to 12 in March. While this may tie in with the introduction of PCoSOs into the prison in March, the Board notes this downward trend was in place from October onwards. Analysis by prison management is showing that the majority of assaults on staff occur after prisoners are challenged about their behaviour. Drug-related debt and the subsequent bullying and intimidation have unfortunately remained significant elements of life at

Rochester but are decreasing at the top site housing PCoSOs. The Board also notes that data is showing gang issues are becoming an increasing trigger for violence, especially as more prisoners with gang associations are located at Rochester.

4.3.2 A total of 131 weapons were found during the year, compared with 99 the previous year. (NB: This may not mean there are more weapons at the prison but could indicate the Security team are getting better at locating them.) Currently, the most common weapons being found are heavy items inside a sock, sharpened plastic cutlery and metal objects which appear to have been obtained by prisoners damaging the fabric of their cell. There is good analysis of the statistics being gathered, and subsequent action taken forward. The Board has noted that challenge, support and intervention plans are effective. For example, the identification of ring leaders, who are then transferred out or relocated to another wing. This action is partly responsible for the fall in violent incidents.

4.3.3 In spite of the statistics given above, the Board retains the view formed through its observations that Rochester remains a safe environment for the prisoners living there. When visiting wings, the Board continues to note the atmosphere is unthreatening, with groups of men chatting amiably with each other and with staff.

4.3.4 The Board visits the relatively few prisoners who are self-isolating and checks that arrangements to support those who are doing so are appropriate. While access to exercise for isolating prisoners is offered, they do not always take this up.

#### **4.4 Use of Force**

4.4.1 Use of Force (UoF) data shows an increase from the previous year: A total of 503 incidents took place. Of these, 448 were classed as spontaneous incidents (compared to 342 last year) and 55 planned (compared to 107 last year) – a considerable difference from last year. The increase in spontaneous incidents and decrease in planned interventions implies the prison officers reacted more speedily to incidents than in the previous year, and not necessarily that there were more incidents. Equally, it could also be that inexperienced officers lack the interactive and de-escalating skills required in these situations. PAVA (a synthetic incapacitant spray) was drawn on five occasions but only used once in February 2025. Batons were drawn on three occasions but used just once. Special Accommodation in the care and separation unit was used just once in February 2025. The Board always attends an incident once it is notified, irrespective of whether it occurs when the Board is on duty or called in from home. Its view remains that UoF during incidents is commensurate with the incident, and the individual involved is given full warning before it takes place. The Board anticipates that UOF numbers will decline over the next year, due to the introduction of PCoSOs.

4.4.2 UoF monitoring and evaluation sessions take place weekly, and the IMB observe these reviews regularly. The review session is well managed, and there is 100% completion of follow up actions. The use of body worn cameras has improved, however coverage from CCTV cameras on the wings (useful for spontaneous incident monitoring) remains erratic.

4.4.3 The National Tactical Response Group (NTRG) were called to the prison three times during the reporting year, compared to four last year, and five the previous year. The Board attended all incidents and observed that appropriate action was taken by the NTRG.

## **4.5 Preventing illicit items**

4.5.1 The openness of the Rochester site presents the greatest challenge for the security team in its effort to stop illicit substances and mobile phones coming into the prison. This year there was, once again, an increase in throwovers to 103 (compared to 52 last year). However, this may indicate the team are improving their ability to disrupt the items coming over the walls. The security team identified a pattern to the throwovers, which were occurring towards the end of each week. This enabled local police to conduct further work to disrupt this activity and has recently resulted in a day of action which was reported on Kent Online. Arrests were made. Once again drones are becoming more frequent deliverers of contraband with 15 sightings. All incidents of throwovers and drone activity are referred to the police.

4.5.2 The amount of drug-laced paper being sent into the prison has reduced. The deterrent appears to be the successful use of Rapiscan equipment. Just six items showed up as positive, compared with 30 last year. All items are scanned, including Rule 39 solicitors' letters and items of property such as labels within socks, underwear etc. The Board has monitored this function, and pleased to see it is working well. The barcode system on Rule 39 letters does appear to have had a positive impact, but there are attempts to circumvent the system by re-using old barcodes which have already been scanned on false Rule 39 letters.

4.5.3 There is a zero-tolerance policy toward visitors who are indicated by the search dog to have illicit items. They are denied entry and issued with a warning letter. During the reporting period there were 42 occasions when the search dogs made an indication. In addition there were two incidents when a visitor attempted to convey an illicit item during their actual visit. The Board regularly monitors the searching of visitors and maintains the view it is done fairly and considerately.

4.5.4 Intelligence-led searches continued to be a successful way to find contraband, particularly with the use of search dogs. Fermenting liquid (known as 'hooch') remains a concern, with an average of ten finds per month. Each find can consist of several litres of liquid. The resulting drunkenness accounts for many of the assaults made on staff. Mobile phone finds have increased, averaging at around 14 per month (compared to 11 per month last year). The trend for having smart phones rather than smaller micro-phones continues, and Wi-Fi-enabled devices are being found. This was a new development last year, and suggests prisoners are using their phones to link up to devices which enables access to the internet.

4.5.5 It is generally believed by prison managers that the continuing trend for increases of illicit substances and mobile phones coming into the prison is directly related to an increase in prisoners associated with serious crime. It was anticipated that with the introduction of PCoSOs to Rochester, the demand for illicit drugs, phones, and the associated violence, would lessen. Reporting from April – June and seen by the Board indicates this has indeed been the case.

4.5.6 Mandatory drug testing: Computer generated random tests are carried out on 10% of the prison population each month (about 38 prisoners). If a prisoner refuses, this is deemed a 'positive' test and they are charged. The Board has monitored adjudications where this has been the case and is reassured these situations are handled appropriately (see also paragraph 6.5.1 for a new initiative of suspended awards if engaging in drug recovery). The tests are used to assess the prevalence of substances in the prison population. Prisoners found to be diverting their prescribed

medication are immediately taken off their medication which is reviewed as soon as possible by healthcare.

## 5. Fair and humane treatment

### 5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1. The Urgent Notification action plan required improvement in standards of cleanliness, maintenance, and improvement in decency standards. The Board's view is that while prison staff have worked towards achieving the improvements required, there is still some way to go in all three areas.

5.1.2. All the wings (except for Invicta wing) require constant physical maintenance relating to plumbing, heating, ventilation, structural dilapidation, CCTV coverage and flooring. The Minister's recent update letter notes the maintenance refurbishment repair work being undertaken on some wings, plus replacing boilers on A and D wings. However, in the main it is mainly painting walls etc and wholly insufficient. **The Board's view remains that all wing buildings have an infrastructure which is failing and meets a minimal standard of acceptable accommodation. It recommends again that HMP Rochester is considered for complete redevelopment, as was planned several years ago.**

5.1.3 The A wing mould issue in several cells (referred to in last year's report) continues to be of concern. It is caused by damp within the infrastructure of an old building – only remedied by pulling it down. After a thorough professional investigation, the best way to manage the mould is to paint over it as soon as it appears. Repair work on the roofs of A wing, the library and education highlighted in last year's report has been undertaken.

5.1.4 There has been some progress to address the issue identified by the last HMIP inspection (and the one before that) about privacy for toilets located in cells, with privacy curtains provided in some of the cells on the older site.

5.1.5 While the amount of vermin being seen at the prison has decreased (particularly since the HMIP report) it continues to be an ongoing challenge at Rochester, with prisoners making barriers across their cell door thresholds in an effort to keep mice out. A prisoner recently reported he saw a mouse actually giving birth in his cell. Some wings have reported no mice, just rats. The Board has observed a correlation between how pro-active the wing Custody Manager (CM) is about standards of cleanliness and the prevalence of vermin. The Board has seen improvements when assertive action about hygiene is taken, especially as prisoners regularly leave out food, such as crumbs around toasters. Unfortunately, mice are inside the infrastructure on some older wings, and it can be seen where vermin have eaten through deterrent fillers in the brickwork etc.

5.1.6 The accommodation provided in the pod system for prisoners of Enhanced Status (the highest level on the behaviour incentive scheme for prisoners) on Invicta wing is very good. It is run well, exceptionally clean and vermin free, with prisoners incentivised to maintain high levels of tidiness and cleanliness in their pod and the association areas. It is an example of how prison accommodation could be compared with the failing Edwardian wings on the top site.

5.1.7 Catering: the kitchen continues to provide good quality meals, and all dietary requirements are being met. The Board notes that meeting these dietary requirements creates a considerable impact on the allocated food budget, but this is managed well. This is evidenced by the Board receiving just three applications

(prisoners written representations to the IMB) about food during the reporting period. Appropriate protection has been put in place to avoid adulteration of meals being delivered to the PCoSO wings.

5.1.8 Canteen: Delivery of items works well. Applications to the Board relate to refunds occurring when a prisoner transfers between prisons and items are lost or not delivered. The Board notes that prices for canteen goods have risen, but wages appear unchanged. For those prisoners without private means, it makes prison life more difficult. There remains an identified link between canteen delivery day and self-harm/violence with debts being settled and pressure to give up items.

## **5.2 Segregation**

5.2.1 The Care and Separation Unit (CSU) at Rochester is an old building, austere and unattractive. Both the heating and the showers can fail. In spite of this, some prisoners are still committing an offence to gain access to the CSU to escape from the drug and debt culture prevalent at the prison. The cells are often subject to damage by disruptive prisoners, but repairs are managed well. The Board notes that unfortunately some prisoners have remained in the CSU for long periods because they have become difficult to transfer (paragraph 5.2.3 refers). On the plus side, there were fewer dirty protests than last year.

5.2.2 The Board attends, with few exceptions, all good order and discipline (GOoD) reviews (where the prison determines if a prisoner is to be or remain segregated.) It is good to report that Mental Healthcare are now following the requirements of the prison service instructions and attending all GOoD reviews and ACCTs taking place at Segregation.

5.2.3 The Board is raising again that on several occasions in the reporting year, the 42-day time limit for segregation was exceeded, with some there in excess of 84 days. The Board recognises this is, in part, due to population pressures across the entire prison estate. However, the wait for transfers caused by a change in a prisoner's category status, (for example from C to B due to an escape attempt), or where it is confirmed that a prisoner's safety is at risk within the prison, are still taking too long to arrange. **This is unacceptable.** It is unfair on a prisoner who remains in segregated conditions, when transfer has been identified and approved, and who, in turn, may cause difficulties for the CSU staff.

5.2.4 Having an experienced cadre of officers working in the CSU enables a skilled approach when dealing with prisoners who are often difficult to manage. While there have been some changes to staff, the CSU team continue to perform their difficult task well. The Board commends past and present segregation officers for their professionalism and patience.

## **5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers**

5.3.1 While on paper Rochester has a full establishment of officers, due to temporary promotions, high levels of sickness and other absences there are often shortages of staff. Consequently, this leads to a restricted regime, which limits prisoners' time out of cell, an issue of concern in the HMIP report. In addition, many prison officers are inexperienced; a considerable number have less than two years experience. Ideally, the Board would like to see the allocated number of officers at



Rochester increased, enabling greater resilience to cover the frequent absences which occur.

5.3.2 An impact of the introduction of PCoSOs is that the existing prisoner population (many associated with drug culture and violence at the prison), have moved onto the lower site. The staff wing allocation has not changed, which means those officers used to dealing with top site difficult prisoners are now working on PCoSO wings. Those on the lower site are learning new skills of communication and prisoner handling, having previously dealt with more compliant prisoners. In particular, Headcorn Wing, the only wing on the lower site with single cell accommodation, is being used to house some challenging and difficult prisoners and has seen a complete change of culture from the long-term 'enhanced' status - prisoners it housed previously.

5.3.3 The Board welcomed the return of mass movement of prisoners, who leave at dedicated times to go for education, work and activities, which replaced all moves being escorted. After some initial troubles, the system has worked well and lessened the pressure on escorted moves. This change has contributed to the smooth running of the prison, with prisoners arriving on time for appointments and other activities.

5.3.4 Key-working: Revised key-working arrangements were introduced last year. However, the Board has seen little evidence that key-working is taking place or delivering anything of value. Our understanding is that key working is resuming along previous lines, and the Board will be monitoring how this benefits prisoners. When initially introduced several years ago, key-working was a successful initiative at Rochester – the Board hopes it will be again.

5.3.5 In spite of the adverse findings of the HMIP report, from its day-to-day monitoring, the Board's finds the general atmosphere at Rochester is still positive and unthreatening. The Board has observed good interactions between staff and prisoners. The Board were pleased to note a letter written by a Rochester prisoner to Inside Time (the national newspaper for prisoners), in response to the criticisms in the HMIP report. In this letter he praises the assistance he has been given from a group of 'amazing, caring and supportive people' and lists the opportunities and advantages he has received during his time at Rochester. While this is public praise from just one prisoner, it is praise the Board has often heard from other prisoners over the years.

## 5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 The chart below based on January 2025 figures, outlines the ethnicity and mix of adults and young adults (YOs) at the prison. Information about the ethnicity split between adults and YOs was not available. These statistics are provided as indicative figures for comparison with last year's report.

	No. of residents	% of residents	White British	All other ethnic groups combined	% White British	% All other ethnic groups combined
Total population	644	100.00%	431	213	66.9%	33.07%

Adults	546	84,7%				
YOs	98	15.2%				

5.4.2 Analysis of the above, shows there was no significant change in the ethnic mix at the prison even though the prison population numbers for January had decreased. Later figures were not available at the time of writing. However, the Board is expecting to see a drop in the number of YOs following the transfer of PCoSOs into the prison, (which started in March 2025) and also the ethnic and age mix, due to the number of older white men in this cohort.

5.4.3 A diversity and inclusion manager was eventually appointed in the new year and will be picking up on many issues highlighted in the UN, which have not been progressed. She is in the process of re-establishing forums based on protected characteristics and is changing the system of reporting.

5.4.4 The Board received 13 applications relating to diversity issues, an increase from last year. The overwhelming majority of these related to race, although there was an application from a prisoner who classified himself as 'non-binary' and the NOMIS prison system was unable to record him in this way.

5.4.5 The Board has been monitoring the discrimination reporting system; the number of reports being received is averaging at 4 per month. The Board has encouraged prisoners who have raised issues around race and religion to take these forwards with the diversity team via a Discrimination Incident Report form (DIRF), but a general reluctance to do so continues. The perception amongst prisoners remains that it is not worth submitting a discrimination report. The Board hopes this perception will change with the appointment of the new diversity lead. DIRFs are being sent out to a regional manager for evaluation, until an independent person is appointed.

5.4.6 Adjudications are monitored to support the equality strategy and Lammy recommendations. Provisional indicative figures based on the data for January 2025 appears to show more black and minority ethnic prisoners had adjudications than white prisoners. This has not been the case for previous years, which has been in line with the ethnic mix at the prison. The Board will look into this carefully, to check if this is a temporary increase or something which has become more sustained.

5.4.7 Until March there were very few prisoners over the age of 65 at Rochester. This number has grown with the PCoSOs, but the Board has noted that issues affecting elderly prisoners or those with impaired mobility are considered appropriately. The number of prisoners who are self-declaring a disability remains steady at around 33%. (NB: ,any prisoners declare more than one disability.) The Board has monitored those prisoners who need special accommodation due to a disability and is satisfied that work is underway to address these needs (see paragraph 6.2.4)

5.4.8 Care experienced prisoners: as with last year, around 10% of prisoners have declared they have been looked after or cared by a local authority. As noted on last year's report, the Board has not seen any progress on initiatives to work specifically with care-experienced prisoners, although it has been taken forward within the scope of the neurodiversity support manager.

5.4.9 Foreign national prisoners: as of January 2025, there were 38 foreign national prisoners – roughly the same as last year. The Board has observed that foreign national prisoners are treated fairly and given appropriate assistance where necessary.

## **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

The Chaplaincy is fully staffed, and all faiths are catered for. The Board notes the one-to-one care provided by the chaplaincy team is of a high standard and commends their work and the care they show in dealing with some troublesome and troubled individuals. Unfortunately, the Sycamore Restorative Justice courses are no longer available at the prison. With the introduction of PCoSOs, the Chaplaincy has made arrangements for separate services, where this is deemed necessary. However, for Muslim faith Friday prayers, the attendance is from both cohorts.

## **5.6 Incentives schemes**

The Board notes that current system continues to work well, and it is understood by prisoners and staff. The Board has sample-checked some of the incentives scheme warnings and negative entries, and these were managed correctly.

## **5.7 Complaints**

5.7.1 The complaints team have logged 1446 complaints during 2024, a decrease of 213 on the previous year. Of these 1134 were directly related to Rochester, 122 for DHL (the provider of purchased items to prisoners) and 190 for other prisons. Of the 1134 Rochester complaints 52% were rejected, 31% upheld and 17% partially upheld. Comparative data is showing that complaints are in line with the ethnic population mix at the prison. The numbers do not include DIRFs (complaints related to diversity or equality issues) or healthcare complaints, which are handled separately. The slight decrease in the number of complaints matches the small decrease in applications to the Board (654 compared to 660 last year).

5.7.2 The highest number of complaints related to residential matters and also property. The Board is pleased to note that complaints about offender management have decreased. For complaints relating to Rochester, 88% were completed within the target time. Those related to DHL and other prisons, the target time was only achieved on 67% of complaints, which is disappointing. The Board retains the view that the complaints team work effectively and efficiently, and during its regular dealings with the team, they are always helpful.

## **5.8 Property**

5.8.1 Property continues to be a major issue for the Board to deal with. The Board received 117 property related applications this year, a significant decrease on 162 last year, but it still creates a significant workload for its members. As in previous years, many applications relate to property which has gone missing during transfer. The Board always encourages prisoners to follow the complaints process rather than take it forward to the Board. The property office team are always helpful to the Board. The Board also notes that prisoners have been observed to be treated with consideration and understanding by the property office staff when asking about missing items.

5.8.2 The amount of property prisoners can have in possession, despite the storage allowance of three bags, continues to cause problems. Rochester, being a prison where the majority of incoming prisoners have already acquired many items, has to manage these excessive amounts. The shelves in the property office are often full and there is always a backlog of property waiting to be sorted. Items not taken home by prisoners on release are donated to charity.

5.8.3 Delivery of Mail: The Board has drawn to the Governor's attention the continuing issues it has seen about the delivery of mail within the prison. Given the prison is still paper-based, letters, notifications, application replies, etc are collected in mail boxes by the wing staff from the Post Room or picked up from a 'dip system' – with each area of the prison having an allocated open post box into which to place mail etc. The post room staff work very efficiently, but there is an unacceptable laxity from the wings about picking up the boxes and clearing 'the dips'. In addition, newspapers and magazines which are purchased by prisoners for weekend reading are not being delivered until later in the week. There is suspicion by prisoners these are being held back and read by officers and other staff. The Board has not seen supporting evidence of this, but if it is happening, once again, this is unacceptable practice and the Board has drawn it to the Governor's attention.

5.8.4 The Board is again flagging up the following:

- Too many transferring prisoners arrive without their possessions, including family photographs (the loss of which is detrimental to their wellbeing). The minister's recent reply acknowledges this remains an issue, which is being considered again. The Board retains its view that it is a needless source of frustration for both prisoners and hard-pressed wing staff who are left to deal with the consequences. An example of this is a prisoner who transferred from a northern prison, stopping off at two other prisons overnight on his way to Rochester. Four bags were loaded onto the van, but only three arrived at Rochester. The missing bag contained family photographs and addresses etc. This bag eventually arrived at Rochester a couple of months later, but with several items missing, although fortunately the photographs were still there. The Board's view is that there is no improvement being achieved in the inefficient property transfer system, and a more effective solution to this continuing problem is required.
- Property loss in the prison usually arises from lack of a cell-check following a disciplinary incident. A prisoner's possessions unfortunately become available to others unless the cell is locked down immediately. The Board has not seen the anticipated improvement in this area and, on several occasions, prisoners transferring from the CSU to another prison have left without their property. While the Board recognises there are many issues on wings which officers need to deal with, it is disappointing to note this lack of care around securing personal items remains a continuing problem. While the CSU staff chase up on missing property, it is frustrating to report the loss of items in these circumstances still continues.

## 6. Health and wellbeing

### 6.1 Healthcare general

6.1.1 Healthcare services are provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. Following the Inspection, the Urgent Notification Action Plan had three areas for improvement in healthcare provision:

- Appoint an operational health lead to drive forward partnership working ... supporting the Healthcare provider to deliver actions with the Care Quality Commission action plan. **Outcome:** This appointment has taken place and the prison's Healthcare Lead is working closely with Healthcare Managers to drive forward the changes required.
- Review all non-attendance at clinics and medical appointment on a daily basis and challenge where appropriate. **Outcome:** The introduction of mass movement has generally assisted this. Trusted prisoners are now allowed to give out appointment slips directly to prisoners. Attendance levels for appointments have generally improved across all Healthcare areas. The Board notes that prisoners refuse to attend both internal appointments and outside hospital appointments for a variety of reasons (they feel better, it clashes with activities or visits etc) or in the case of emergency outside appointments, they have self-harmed and resist treatment. It is pleasing to note that with improved escort availability those prisoners who have routine outside hospital appointments and who want to go, are able to attend.
- Review of supply, process and governance of medicines administration. Additionally, to conduct a review of the healthcare outcomes highlighted at the inspections. **Outcome:** It is not clear to the Board if the requested review has taken place. However, delivery of medication has improved, and plans are in place for two dispensaries to be placed on wings, in addition to the two separate dispensaries already operating on each site.

6.1.2 The Board endeavours to attend all Healthcare Board meetings as an observer. Healthcare forum meetings (which include prisoner representatives) have resumed after a break earlier in the year. As noted above, the introduction of mass movement enabled better attendance at healthcare appointments and enables more provision of escorts for hospital appointments.

6.1.3 The Board received 110 applications about healthcare issues this year, compared with 103 last year. However, it should be noted that applications decreased as the year progressed – i.e. 16 in May 2024, down to five for March 2025. Applications usually relate to the time it is taking to see the GP, the medication being prescribed and general lack of care. The Board always follows up on healthcare applications and the healthcare staff in both primary and mental health are helpful. The Board has witnessed healthcare staff deal with some anxious and at times very rude and abusive prisoners, with patience and politeness. However, it has been raised by prisoners (and witnessed occasionally by Board members) that some healthcare staff can at times be offhand and abrupt in dealing with prisoners.

6.1.4 As with other departments at the prison, the arrival of PCoSOs means Healthcare is adjusting to delivering to two separate populations who are to be kept

apart. However, the red band trustees (who provide support to new prisoners and general peer support) are required to sign a compact agreeing to go to both sites.

## **6.2 Physical healthcare**

6.2.1 Requests to see the GP are triaged by a healthcare nurse and brought forward depending on the nature of the condition. Frustratingly, the GP can also arrive late, which in turn means appointments are missed and a very grumpy and frustrated prisoner is returned to his wing. Anxiety about the waiting times is a common complaint. The GPs are now running clinics on both top and bottom sites.

6.2.2 There is a regular dental surgery, and it can accommodate urgent appointments more speedily if necessary. Unfortunately for the optician it can be a long wait, especially for prisoners who are transferred to Rochester, having missed an optician's appointment due to the transfer. Although it can be a long wait for the optician, this does not appear to feature on any applications received by the IMB. The Board has frequently heard prisoners praise both the optician and the dentist for the care they have shown. There are clinics for podiatry, sexual health, physiotherapy, smoking cessation and other various long-term conditions. While there can be long waits for these, the system does seem to be working appropriately.

6.2.3 Urgent care: the on-call system for medical emergencies works well. The Board notes that, as in previous years, about half the ambulances which are called to the prison are stood down. This is due to the care being by a paramedic or the individual refusing to attend hospital. In the latter circumstances, the Board is aware a disclaimer form is signed.

6.2.4 Some of the PCoSO prisoners coming into the prison have major physical disabilities which presents a new challenge for the prison healthcare team. A key problem is the need for more walking aids, wheelchairs and shower stools etc. In addition, social care packages are needed – the current estimate is that 15 are required, and the prison is liaising with Medway Council about this. The Board will monitor how this progresses during the year.

## **6.3 Mental health**

6.3.1 The mental health service is provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust in-reach team. If necessary, prisoners are referred to the inpatient service at HMP Elmley. Until recently the team were fully staffed. A permanent consultant psychiatrist has been appointed and is attending the prison for several days a week. He is fully trained and very good in this role. Especially important is the interaction the mental health team has with those prisoners being placed in Segregation and being assessed to remain in solitary confinement. The Board has witnessed good interventions by the team and feels the relationship between the mental health staff team and the prison officers working in CSU has improved.

6.3.2 The Board notes prisoners present with the full range of mental health conditions, some of which are very complex. There is an increasing number diagnosed with ADHD, in part due to the number of prisoners transferring into Rochester with an ADHD diagnosis in place.

6.3.3 The Board notes that in the January, the equalities and diversity report said 216 prisoners' self identified as having a disability, but did not have specific data related to mental illness. Last year, 134 prisoners had self-identified as having a mental illness

6.3.4 There is a psychological therapy team, working alongside the mental health team, which provides a range of interventions and counselling services. This includes workshops and one-to-one sessions.

#### **6.4 Time out of cell, regime**

6.4.1 There have been several changes to the regime during the reporting year. Time out of cell for association is impacted by the number of staff available, as high levels of officers' absence limits how this can be managed safely (see also paragraph 5.3.1). A survey in August 2024 indicated that prisoners at Rochester spent less time out of their cell than others in category C training prisons. Additionally, this was an issue highlighted in the HMIP report. During the year there has been positive action from prison managers to get men into work or attending education, training and other activities. At present things are still unsettled due to the changes caused by the introduction of PCoSOs.

6.4.2 There are regular gym sessions, and outdoor gym equipment on each wing yard. Football matches are held regularly and are popular with the prisoners. The gymnasiums are fully equipped and there is the facility for indoor sports such as badminton and indoor tennis. Attendance to the gym has been impacted by regime disruption, but recent changes in how allocations work appear to have improved this. Staffing levels at the gym have improved this year, and instructors remain enthusiastic and committed to their roles.

#### **6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

6.5.1 The UN requirement was to develop and implement an effective drug strategy which has a whole-prison approach. This has been achieved with the appointment of a specific Governor for Drug Prevention, with three aims: a) restrict supply, b) reduce demand and c) enable recovery. The Board is aware of the initiatives coming from this proactive refocusing, but as mentioned several times in this report, it is difficult to prevent drugs entering the prison and circulating within it. For example, the drug 'spice' (a chemical compound that mimics the affects of cannabis) can be made by using hand sanitiser, consequently it has been removed from wings and cupboards etc. More positively, rehabilitation adjudication awards can be given (i.e. a suspended punishment for being under the influence) if the prisoner engages with drug rehabilitation.

6.5.2 The provider for drug rehabilitation is Change Grow Live (CGL), The Board has observed (and is pleased to note) that CGL is providing an effective drug rehabilitation service. Until January 2025, there was a dedicated drug recovery wing, and the residents on the wing were generally kept apart from other prisoners. They worked exclusively producing the Ministry of Defence netting. Unfortunately, the wing was no longer effective in reducing substance abuse and prevention for its residents. Consequently, with the arrival of PCoSOs, those on the wing were either transferred out or brought into the mainstream of the prison.

6.5.3 As of March 2025, CGL had 201 prisoners on structured treatment (with care plan objectives, one-to-one and group sessions, and clinical treatment); of these, 46 were on clinical treatment. These are lower figures than the normal caseload, which was due to the partial cohort change leading to a temporarily lower roll. The initiative for working with the Connecting Communities team referred to last year has continued. This helps those on CGL's books who are leaving the prison within three months, preparing them for life outside prison given their addiction. Out of 201 prisoners on structured treatment, 42 of them are currently collaborating with Connecting Communities.

6.5.4 Most prisoners are referred to CGL during induction, or through self-referral via their wing. In addition, the team chase up prisoners who were found to be 'under the influence'. Some of these in turn may be part of the 'rehabilitation award' adjudication process referred to in paragraph 6.5.1, and begin working with CGL on the CGL workbook to address their addiction.

6.5.5 Incentivised Substance Free Living (ISFL): this has been a successful innovation, whereby part of Headcorn wing was designated for those prisoners agreeing to be substance-free, and incentivised with special activities, such as the opportunities to cook their own food, wider TV choices, and longer time out of cell. There was a relaxed atmosphere on the wing and good engagement with prisoners who had bought into the concept. Unfortunately, changes required on the other side of Headcorn wing impacted on the success of ISFL, and it was being compromised. The plan is for Ridley wing to become the ISFL wing, as it has its own exercise yard and is away from other prisoners. Positively, CGL have been successful in gaining funding for a specific ISFL recovery worker. Consequently they will be an integral part of ISFL, including selection of residents, and providing on-going 1-1 and group support.

6.5.6 The Board regarded this as a very successful innovation, and was disappointed the initiative could not be sustained. It is hopeful the high standard of compliance to the scheme will resume on Ridley wing and will be monitoring this change closely.

## **6.6 Soft skills**

6.6.1 Choir-singing on Friday mornings at the Chapel continues with the involvement of outside agencies. Art classes are proving successful, with basic skills, different techniques and some art history being covered. The art workshop works closely with 'Under the Rainbow Events' which holds exhibitions and displays prisoners' art in public places. Some of the prisoners had their art displayed at Bluewater shopping centre. Additionally, prisoners' art has been used by Redemption Roasters (an initiative which employs those with a criminal record) on their packaging. From May 2025 there will be a joint art tutor with Cookham Wood.

6.6.2 The Shannon Trust has continued with its reading work. There are also guitar lessons in the library.

6.6.3 Beekeeping was a summer hobby activity for the over-50s prisoners. The aim is still to produce some honey from the Rochester Prison bees, although none has materialised so far.



6.6.4 The Duke of Edinburgh's Awards scheme took place in 2024 for both young officers and young prisoners (aged under 25). Several have again achieved the Bronze Award. The prisoners' 'outside activity' includes camping out on the AstroTurf. The Board supports this scheme as it is positive activity, especially as many of the younger prisoners taking part would not have experienced the opportunity undertake such activity given their lives outside prison. Unfortunately with the change of cohort, it is unlikely the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme will continue in 2025, given there are fewer eligible young offenders at the prison.

## **6.7 Neurodiversity**

6.7.1 The neurodiversity support manager, appointed last year, has made a significant impact on raising awareness of neurodiversity across all areas of the prison. Half of Headcorn wing was changed to become a neurodiverse focussed wing under Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) (a programme to reduce re-offending) arrangements. Unfortunately this has not worked out as planned, as too many prisoners with discipline and behavioural challenges were moved onto the wing, which reduced the initial good work that was being achieved there. Following the re-rolling of the top site, the cadre of prisoners on H Wing became even more difficult and not conducive to CFO requirements.

6.7.2 With the move of the ISFL prisoners to R wing, the manager's understanding is that the CFO will move to the other side of H wing, with the former area housing reception prisoners, recalls and lifers. The manager is concerned about how CFO is being taken forward more generally at the prison. She is supporting a number of PCoSOs on the top site; and has indicated that about 70% are neurodiverse. She is preparing a support plan and engaging with peer mentors.

6.7.3 The Board believes good work has been achieved in raising the profile of neurodiversity during the reporting year. It continues to be a worthwhile initiative and supports and commends the work being achieved by the neurodiversity support manager.

## 7. Progression and resettlement

### 7.1 Education, library

**7.1.1 Overview of education and skills training provision:** In the Board's last report we highlighted the lack of tutors and the turnover of staff was impacting on what could be delivered. The HMIP inspection and Ofsted in September gave adverse findings about the lack of purposeful activity, the lack of face-to-face places in education, skills and activities, the lack of guidance and support to enable prisoners to plan their learning, and inadequate resources to develop vital digital skills for support resettlement. Under the Urgent Notification the prison commenced a full review in all these areas to develop an effective strategy to improve and enhance opportunities for prisoner's progression. The Board's view remains that while there is a range of good training facilities at Rochester, it is primarily the lack of trainers and tutors which is holding up progress. Until this improves, progress will be difficult to achieve.

7.1.2 Unfortunately, due to the reasons set out at the beginning of this report, the Board is disappointed to report little progress on the ground has been achieved. The Quality Improvement Group meets monthly to review progress, and some key changes are coming from this. However, there are still vacancies for education staff and trainers, which in turn limits what can be delivered. On the plus side, induction for new arrivals has been redeveloped, but yet to come into place due to the changes to cohort. The 'pathways' scheme into education and skills has been revised, as it was not working. The attendance level for education is working out at an average of 64%. Non-attendance at scheduled activity by prisoners is challenged rigorously and negative incentive scheme awards applied and pay deducted as necessary. Two enrichment officers have been appointed and are based on residential wings to encourage prisoner learning. Work is in progress to provide Wi-Fi access.

7.1.3. There is still much to be achieved, and the logistics following on from the arrival the PCoSOs have made this a more difficult task. Given that Rochester is still classified as a category C training prison, the Board hopes the necessary funding and resources will be allocated in order to achieve the changes required under the UN and improve its function as a 'training' prison.

7.1.4 **Library:** The library at Rochester is thriving. In December 2024, 676 books were borrowed compared with 273 in December 2023. With the arrival of PCoSOs book borrowing has increased even more. Borrowing DVDs has also proved popular. Unfortunately, the computers available for prisoners at the library are very out of date, and require an upgrade. A range of talks and presentations to prisoners at the library was well attended. The library staff are experienced in dealing with the prisoners and provide a very good service in a conducive atmosphere.

7.1.5 A criticism in the UN referred to leaders being too slow to implement a prison-wide reading strategy. The Board notes that a reading strategy is now in place, with the initial focus on enabling officers to understand and assist more beneficially prisoners with literacy issues. A plan for prisoners is about to be launched.

### 7.2 Vocational training and work

7.2.1 There are opportunities for work in the following areas - waste management, industrial cleaning (on wings and with training), orderlies for gym, laundry, segregation, the library, healthcare and food preparation. A new structured framework for Peer Mentors is being developed and will be in place soon. The Ministry of Defence camouflage netting production was previously assigned to just drug recovery prisoners. This was opened up to the general population during the year, but since March is only manned by PCoSOs.

7.2.2 This year saw the successful introduction of the Windows Workshop – with each session accommodating 12 prisoners. They are supplying windows to a range of prisons across the country. The company wants to expand this to two tutors and 30 prisoners. Those working there are encouraged to read during the ‘downtime’. While there is no specific qualification, the tutor is keen to change this. Since March, this activity has been just for PCoSOs.

7.2.3 The Transformation Team, a group of prisoners working under the guidance of GSFL, is undertaking a range of basic maintenance tasks with successful results.

7.2.4 Vocational training is subject to the availability of trainers. At present, there are courses in carpentry and stone masonry. There are facilities for bricklaying, welding, painting and decorating, plumbing and IT digital, all remaining unused at present. During the year there were courses with Railtrack, which offers employment after release. The prison employment lead aims to get the education provider to run more training courses leading to a qualification which, in turn, enables an improved work opportunity for ex-prisoners. There is also positive engagement with the newly established Employment Advisory Board, which will hopefully lead to more opportunities.

7.2.5 The excellent stonemasonry workshop (which is unique to Rochester) continues to provide prisoners, who attend the six-week course, an opportunity to learn a very specific skill from a master stonemason. They completed a range of memorial plaques, etc, associated with the 150-year anniversary of Rochester Prison during the summer of 2024.

### **7.3 Offender management, progression**

7.3.1 The HMIP report and the UN highlighted a requirement to improve identification and management of the risk for Public Protection, and to ensure it is appropriately identified, assessed and mitigated. The Board notes that dedicated resource at a senior level has been given to public protection work, and monthly risk management meeting and public protection meetings have resumed. The Board has observed that while good results have been achieved, there is still some way to go.

7.3.2 Aside from the UN, this has been a very challenging year for the Offender Management team, with an increased workload caused by the various early release schemes. Re-calculating sentences for Home Detention Curfew eligibility has been time consuming. Eligible prisoners, irrespective of whether they are classified as high, medium, or low risk, are being released without some of the pre-release preparation that would normally apply. The Board has concerns that while this does free up prison places, the individuals may not be able to meet the conditions associated with their release.

7.3.3 Too many prisoners still arrive at Rochester without an Offender Assessment System (OASys) assessment. The tracker system identifies those prisoners at a ten week point from their sentencing, by which time OASys and other information should be in place. The Rochester OMU team do their best to reach this target and keep the OASys backlog to a minimum. Release of Temporary Licence (ROTL) is not happening, and in effect has been overtaken by other schemes. The HMIP identified that checks by OMU should be made on prisoners within 14 days of arrival. This is now happening.

7.3.4 The Board is concerned that moving prisoners to the open estate is happening too quickly, following the introduction of Temporary Presumptive Re-categorisation Scheme (TPRS.) TPRS is a scheme intended to utilise the number of vacant places at category D prisons. It means a prisoner gains eligibility to move under revised criteria to a category D prison, but often has insufficient time left on their sentence to complete meaningful work and/or training in open conditions. Additionally, some who become eligible are not ready for the change and are recalled back to Rochester. The Board's view is that the scheme is being driven by pressure on the prison estate, rather than what is in the best interests of both prisoners and society more generally.

7.3.5 The Board received 104 applications relating to sentencing issues. The majority of these came at the beginning of reporting year and related to how transfers were taking place at that time, and shortages of Probation Officers. The Board notes that between December and March this number fell to just 16. Recent applications often related to perceived delays in progressing to open conditions. At time of writing there are just six prisoners awaiting transfer to a category D prison.

7.3.6 An action under the UN was to direct additional resources to support offender management work. This has been achieved, and the staffing level is much improved. The Board's view is that the offender management unit continues to provide a good level of performance, as indicated by the decrease in applications it has received in the second half of the year. The Board would like to acknowledge, with thanks, the patient help it receives from members of the OMU team.

7.3.7 **Probation:** Another action under the UN was for the prison to work with Kent, Surrey and Sussex Probation Service to address probation vacancies at the prison. This was already happening by the time the UN was produced, and it is pleasing to report there are six Probation Officers working at Rochester plus support officers. The Board has seen good evidence about the effectiveness of the probation officers working there as they carry out their difficult duties.

7.3.8 **Offender Behaviour Programmes:** Programmes are continuing, but there is always a backlog of prisoners awaiting to attend, especially as this part of their sentence plan. During the report period, the team at Rochester only provided the Thinking Skills programme. While the Building Better Relationships (BBR) course was due to be provided with support from HMP Elmley, the Board is not aware of this course being run at Rochester with any regularity. The Board is aware that other programmes exist, which may be suitable for Rochester prisoners, and will be exploring with the Governor about expanding the provision. Importantly, the Board is concerned that required programmes for the PCoSOs are not taking place and unlikely to do so until the Autumn or possibly next year. This is unacceptable, given these prisoners were moved from prisons where the relevant courses were available

and attendance at these courses is part of their sentence plan. It means that prisoners from this cohort may be leaving prison without going through the necessary behavioural development sessions that are required. The Board's understanding is that programme provision will improve wef September 2025.

7.3.9 Thinking Skills programmes include group sessions in addition to one-to-one work. The Board has previously noted the 'thank-you' letters received by the team from prisoners, and the positive impact a programme may have on the conduct of individuals back on the wings. The Board's view is that for Rochester, as a resettlement prison, the delivery of all programmes is an important function and more courses are required.

## **7.4 Family contact**

7.4.1 Visits to the prison are run efficiently by the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT). The Board has monitored the searching of visitors, which is done considerately and correctly. Unfortunately, there are occasions when contraband is passed to a prisoner by his visitor, so visits are closely observed by staff. The Family Visit opportunity continues to be a welcome arrangement, whereby fathers are able to meet their children in a less formal setting in one of the gyms. This is always well received by families and is a chance for fathers to relax and play games etc with their children.

7.4.2 Visits for the PCoSOs are being held separately. At first mixed visits were proposed, but there was concern from both other prisoners and their families about the presence of PSoCOs when children may be visiting. The new arrangement appears to be working acceptably but does cut down on the availability of visiting times for both cohorts of prisoners.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

7.5.1 This area of the prison was praised by the HMIP Inspection. All prisoners are contacted 12 weeks prior to release with the offer of assistance with employment, bank accounts, driving licences and identification documents. The service was impacted by implementation of the early release schemes but recovered speedily as things settled down. There are currently ongoing discussions about meeting with PCoSOs and how this should be managed. It is a team which works well, worthy of the praise given in the HMIP report.

7.5.2 CXK, the employment advisors, run courses as part of the induction process to identify skill needs and progression plans.

7.5.3 Opportunities for employment are actively sought, and assistance is given with CVs, banking arrangements and other identification requirements. The Board was pleased to see a range of employment events were held, for example with Gallagher Construction, Greene King Hospitality, Iceland and two DWP funded Traffic Management courses. Additionally, work is taking place with the Employment Advisory Board. The Prison Employment Lead is also looking into providing assistance about self-employment advisory courses, especially as this is likely to be an option for leaving PCoSOs, who have difficulty finding employment after release.

7.5.4 Employment after release from prison is an important issue. The prison employment lead recently informed the Board that in checking up on 105 releases six weeks after departure, just nine were in employment. Importantly, our

understanding is that this is one of highest outcomes in the country. Given that being in employment is a proven way to reduce reoffending, the Board's believes this issue should have a higher profile within HMPPS policy initiatives.

7.5.5 While every effort is made to find suitable accommodation for all those leaving, there are still a number of prisoners, who having completed their full sentence, are released without accommodation, to become homeless and vulnerable. The Board notes the Minister's response to last year's report and that more accommodation is being provided in hostels etc. However, the Board retains the view that more is required to reduce the re-offending associated with homelessness.

## 8. The work of the IMB

For the majority of the reporting year there were nine members on the Board, however of these two were in training, and a further two inexperienced. There was one resignation. Another member, appointed the previous year, attended very briefly, but was unable to take up her appointment due to changed family circumstances. She is omitted from the statistics below but does reflect in visits numbers. The Board had two applicants from the last recruitment campaign, who are proving valuable members of our team. The number of visits increased during the year, due to new members in training.

Given the Board was working with half its establishment number, it continued to work on a reduced rota system. This enabled the Board to discharge its full statutory duties as effectively as it could, given the circumstances. The focus has moved slightly more towards area of special interest reporting, and this has given better understanding of issues arising from the Urgent Notification process.

There was a slight decrease in the number of applications to the Board. Of the total of 654 applications, most came between April to November, with just 129 in the remaining months. The Board notes there was a significant drop in applications related to Property. The increase under heading E reflects issues about PINS access, which has been a constant complaint during the year. Once again, the numbers are impacted by several serial applicants during the reporting year.

The Board continues to enjoy a constructive working relationship with the management team at Rochester prison, and the staff in general. The Board once again expresses its gratitude to the senior management team for their openness and willing support to the Board during the year.

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
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	491

### Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	22	25
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	24	14
C	Equality	10	13

D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	33	39
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	52	68
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	Included above	Included above
F	Food and kitchens	5	3
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	103	110
H1	Property within the establishment	162	117
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	Included in H1 above	Included in H1 above
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	Included in H1 above	Included in H1 above
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	103	104
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	37	42
K	Transfers	17	22
L	Miscellaneous	92	97
	<b>Total number of applications</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>654</b>





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