



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP The Mount

**For reporting year
1 March 2024 to 28 February 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 IMB Board at HMP The Mount (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 as well as 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 The Mount ('The Mount') is a category C¹ men's prison, built on one side of a disused airfield adjacent to the village of Bovington in Hertfordshire. It is at the edge of a residential area, just over a mile from a mainline railway station, and is well served by bus routes. This makes it a very open and accessible site for walkers, as well as for anyone who wants to throw packages over the fence. It is also vulnerable to drones.

The prison's residential accommodation is sometimes viewed in two 'halves':

- The 'bottom half' opened in 1987 as a young offenders institution (YOI) and comprises five wings, of which four (Brister, Fowler, Ellis & Lakes/Wellbeing) are configured in a four-spur design on two landings, making it difficult to observe prisoner behaviour. The fifth (the Annexe) has no toilets in its cells and is used to accommodate 'super-enhanced' prisoners (the top level of the prison's incentives scheme), who are unlocked and thus able at all times to access shower and toilet facilities, as well as a lounge and kitchen.
- The 'top half' was opened after the prison was recategorised as an adult prison in 1989. Two wings built in the 1990s, Howard and Dixon, have a two-landing galleried design that allows for better observation of prisoners. Narey opened in 2007 and has larger cells with their own showers. It is used to house older prisoners (over 50 years of age). Nash was opened in 2015, with a mix of purpose-built double cells and single cells spread over two wings (Nash A and B), again with a galleried design.

The prison's character has changed in recent years through the combined effects of a growing prison population and continued delays in the criminal justice system. In particular, as the category B² local prisons filled up with prisoners on remand awaiting trial, prisoners serving very short sentences have been sent to The Mount. Space has been created by doubling up single cells and sending prisoners who previously might not have been deemed suitable for open conditions to category D prisons. Having so many short-term prisoners has strained the prison's resources in a number of areas, some of which are covered below.

The resettlement service offered by The Mount is intended for prisoners from Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. But, in practice, prisoners are also released from The Mount to other areas, especially London.

-
1. *Category C prisons are for those who cannot be trusted in open prison but who have been recognised as being unlikely to make any attempt at escape. They are training and resettlement prisons; most prisoners are located in a category C. They provide prisoners with the opportunity to develop their own skills so they can find work and resettlement back into the community on release.*
 2. *Category B prisons are either local or training prisons. Local prisons house prisoners who are taken directly from court in the local area (sentenced or on remand), and training prisons hold long-term and high-security prisoners.*

2.1 Accommodation as of 28 February 2025³

Operational capacity	Cells out of action	Spaces available	Roll
1,039 ⁴	1	1,038	1,022

2.2 Prisoners by length of sentence

Length of original sentence	Number of prisoners			
	28 Feb 22	28 Feb 23	29 Feb 24	28 Feb 25
Less than 12 months	22	42	26	38
12 months to 2 years	41	64	55	53
2-3 years	105	107	82	105
3-4 years	116	120	87	112
4-10 years	386	367	398	322
More than 10 years	190	182	237	235
Prisoners serving life sentences	106	101	102	112
IPP (imprisoned for public protection) prisoners	32	29	33	27
Sentence expired	13	8	2	2
Total	1,011	1,020	1,022	1,006⁵

The breakdown by length of original sentence is considered to be important by the Board because prisoners with different sentences – and at different points in those sentences – require different degrees and types of support, so a material change in either of these would require a response from the prison and/or HM Prison and Probation Service (“**HMPPS**”).

- 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 maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime
- It has not been possible to reconcile the difference between the roll of 1,022 shown in §2.1 above and the sum of the Prisoners shown by length of Sentence in §2.2 (1,006). The issue of data quality and reliability, mentioned in last year’s report, is reprised at the end of this report

3. Key findings

3.1 Progress since the last report

For the Minister	Comment on Progress
1. IPP prisoners	We welcome the changes announced by the Lord Chancellor in September 2024 but believe that this is only scratching the surface of the problem and consider that much more radical action is needed.
2. Effect of overcrowding	The changes introduced under SDS40 ⁶ were clearly necessary but only a temporary measure. The issues need to be addressed at a more strategic level, alongside the implementation of the recommendations in the recent Gauke review into sentencing.
3. Drugs	The introduction of new tamperproof (at least in theory) vapes is welcomed and we hope this will lead to a reduction in the number of 'code blues' (the emergency code for when a prisoner is not breathing). But demand (and supply) remain.
For HMPPS	Comment on Progress
1. Support of IPP Prisoners.	No change apparent.
2. Defence against drones, etc.	An ongoing issue. A lot of effort is being made to address this, with some success. But the poor state of many of the buildings makes it all too easy for prisoners to accept deliveries.
3. Prisoners' property.	No improvement – arguably worse (at least as it relates to property of prisoners transferring in).
4. Improve use of data.	No change.
For the Governor	Comment on Progress
1. Carry on with good work.	Broadly achieved.

6. The standard determinate sentence 40 scheme, or SDS40, is a policy that allows certain prisoners serving certain sentences to be released after serving 40% of their sentence, rather than the previous 50%

3.2 Main findings

3.2.1 Summary

It is fair to say that little has changed at The Mount during the period covered by this report. It ‘feels’ the same, and there have not been any significant changes – positive or negative – in many of the aspects of prison life that we report on below.

However, this does not reflect the continuing, varied and, in many cases, increasing challenges that The Mount (in common with many other prisons) faces. It is testament to the hard work and dedication of the former Governor (who retired in March 2025), his senior management team and the officers and staff that they have managed to overcome – or at least resist – many of the tests, trials and tribulations that they have faced, including the continuing issues of drugs, the effects of prison overcrowding and the early release schemes designed to alleviate some of it.

3.2.2 Safety

Drugs in prison threaten inmates through addiction, debt and crime, and benefit organised crime. From the Board’s observations, the management of vulnerable prisoners has improved, through weekly multi-disciplinary safety intervention meetings that assess and address their needs. However, the continued attraction for organised criminal gangs to supply drugs to prisoners, and the ability of drones to supply them in significant quantities, as well as mobile phones, almost to order, is a continuing concern. Notwithstanding the improved co-operation with local police, it is the opinion of the Board that this will not reduce materially as an issue in the year(s) ahead – not least because the ability of the gangs to invest in the latest technology far exceeds the capacity of HMPPS to respond.

3.2.3 Fair and humane treatment

The prison is fully staffed, and the benefits clear, as prisoners spend more time out of their cells, although the opportunities for work or education are limited and the turnover of prisoners further limits the chances of men to study for a prolonged period. Staff appear more confident in their interactions with prisoners, which has contributed to improved relationships between them. The prison is generally clean and well-maintained, although some showers need refurbishment. The kitchen operates on a modest budget, providing meals at less than the allowance for a single free school meal per prisoner. It is also worth noting that the increases in the costs of ‘staple’ additions, such as coffee and vapes, far exceed the rises in prison pay.

The Board continues to be concerned by the doubling up of single cells (see §5.1).

The continued detention of IPP⁷ prisoners beyond their sentences remains an issue. The prison is unable to provide sufficient programmes, courses or support to help

7. *The indeterminate sentence of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) was introduced in England and Wales in 2005. It was intended for people considered ‘dangerous’ but whose offence did not merit a life sentence. In common with the life sentence it contains three elements: (a) a minimum term (the ‘tariff’) that a person must spend in prison, judged by the court to be appropriate for the crime committed, (b) detention in prison for a potentially unlimited period until*

these prisoners progress towards release, effectively resulting in their prolonged detention. Even when they are put forward for release, in the view of the Board the process remains too risk averse and the support available in the community is patchy and/or insufficient.

3.2.4 Health and wellbeing

As a rule, prisoners' physical healthcare is comparable with services in the community, with fewer hospital appointment cancellations due to better escort availability. Mental healthcare is generally good, and fewer mental health referrals are needed, as prisoners spend more time out of their cells. Dental waiting times have fallen by two-thirds.

3.2.5 Progression and resettlement

The prison provides various educational courses, vocational training and offender behaviour programmes, but there are not enough places for every prisoner to participate in activities full-time and this does not seem likely to improve in the short term for the following reasons:

- the closure of many of the workshops for up to six months for renovation is necessary but unfortunate. We welcome the new Governor's decision to review the activities to ensure that the right opportunities are being provided, rather than simply grandfathering the previous ones; and
- we await the results of the tendering process for the provision of education going forward, although we are very concerned at the suggestions that this will result in a substantial reduction in the hours provided in a service that the Board believes is already insufficient for the needs of the prisoners in The Mount.

Prison offender managers (POMs) develop sentence plans and guide prisoners in completing them, although their capacity is challenged by an increase in prisoners serving short sentences.

Prisoners nearing the end of their terms receive assistance with reintegration into society, where the new dedicated wing for the creating future opportunities (CFO) programme (see §7.5) is a welcome initiative. The assistance includes help with opening bank accounts, obtaining identity documents, contacting Jobcentre Plus, and finding housing, although the housing crisis means that about half of the prisoners are homeless on release, with many experiencing rough sleeping.

3.3 Main areas for development

3.3.1 For the Minister

- When will the Minister adopt the recommendation of the House of Commons Justice Committee, in February 2023, that IPP prisoners be re-sentenced? If not, why not?

the person can prove that they are no longer a threat to the public, and (c) release back into the community on licence, with the potential of being returned to custody.

- Does the Minister believe that prisons that hold IPP prisoners, who represent such a small proportion of the roll (about 3% at The Mount, marginally higher than for the prison population as a whole) are structured and resourced to be able to provide the specialist help and support that they need, both while they are in prison and while they are preparing for the parole board and (hopefully) a life in the community?
- Do the members of the parole board receive additional training to allow them fully to understand what being an IPP prisoner is like and how much of a challenge it can be for an IPP prisoner to appear before them?
- Is the Probation Service in the community structured and resourced to be able to provide the specialist help and support that IPP prisoners will need as they return to life after a long period in prison?

3.3.2 For HMPPS

- **IPP prisoners:** when will the Prison Service take more action to support these men, both leading up to and following release into the community (see above)?
- **Property:** when will the Prison Service adopt the recommendations contained in the recent learning lessons bulletin from the Prisons & Probation Ombudsman, supplemented by a (limited) number of sanctions for failure to comply (see §5.10)?
- **Short-term transfers:** will the Prison Service consider prohibiting the transfer of a prisoner from one establishment to another within, say, three months of their release date unless there is a particular reason for doing so, such as to be nearer to their family (and thus closer to their likely domicile post-release)?

3.3.3 For the Governor

- **Family visits for enhanced prisoners:** will the Governor introduce a trial to increase the number of such visits (see §7.7) to see if it is welcomed by prisoners and has the potential benefits in terms of their behaviour?
- **Workshops post-renovation:** we welcome the new Governor's intention fully to evaluate each of the existing workshops to decide if they should continue, be altered, or replaced by an alternative that can offer more, whether in terms of employment opportunities post-release or for which it is simply easier to recruit trainers.
- **Redemption Roasters:** will the Governor ensure that any arrangements going forward result in the employment of a higher number of prisoners (both in The Mount and post-release), and fully compensate The Mount for the costs of operating the roastery in the workshop?

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 Workload

The number of receptions has continued to increase during the year. Shortage of cell spaces throughout the country has led to prisoners being moved more frequently to make use of available accommodation. The SDS40 Early Release Scheme⁸, saw days when The Mount released 35 (Tranche 1 on 10 September) and 42 prisoners (Tranche 2 on 6 October), a mammoth task given that the daily average is less than 4 (with a total of 960 releases during the reporting year). However, these releases seemed to be extremely well organised by the prison management and staff. The Board commends all those who were involved in the planning and execution.

4.1.2 Inadequacy of reception space

In the view of the Board the reception area space is wholly inadequate for the numbers that pass through in normal circumstances. But is acknowledged that to increase this would call for a major financial outlay, which is unlikely to be available at this time. The property store is also insufficient to house the stored property, which has accumulated over many years, especially given the paper-based documentation, which can make locating specific items extraordinarily difficult. With the increased numbers and frequency of movements, the turn round of property is shortened, resulting in men arriving and moving on within only 48 hours in some cases.

From our observations, staff are welcoming and follow the required process, including scanning incoming prisoners to prohibit the influx of any illicit items (see §4.5.1).

4.1.3 Induction

Prisoners move on to Brister wing, which has a dedicated induction unit occupying two of its four spurs and where individual interviews are carried out. The timing of arrivals does cause some problems here when they arrive after lock-up, but all prisoners are regularly checked on the first night in case of any concerns.

There follows a three-day induction programme, led by prisoner representatives, to inform new arrivals about the regime, etc. However, some of the information on the

8. *The ECSL scheme, introduced in October 2023, allowed lower-risk prisoners to be released up to 70 days before their automatic release date. The incoming Labour Government introduced SDS40, allowing certain prisoners serving a 'standard determinate sentence' to be released after serving 40% of their sentence rather than halfway through. SDS40 has been in operation since 10 September 2024, when the first 'Tranche 1' releases (those serving less than five years) happening, followed by the first 'Tranche 2' releases (those serving sentences of five years or more) on 22 October 2024. The announcements are often made with little or no warning. Those not eligible include people convicted of sexual or terrorism-related offences, category A prisoners, and those serving a recall.*

digital presentation needs updating, whilst sessions can be cancelled at short notice due to other demands on staff.

4.1.4 Releases

We have also become aware of an increasing number of prisoners being transferred to The Mount with a very short amount of time remaining on their sentence – sometimes as little as two weeks – with little or no time to adjust to their new circumstances or to prepare for their release and often missing documentation or property they need. It is all too often the case that necessary documentation is not provided by the sending prison.

For example, a prisoner arrived from another prison recently, with less than three weeks remaining on his sentence and expecting to be released into the area of the previous prison, where he has family connections. He was upset to find he was being moved to The Mount, at one stage refusing to board the transport. It was determined at The Mount on his arrival that his demeanour was such that an assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plan (used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) was opened.

The explanation given to the Board was that it shouldn't have happened, but that the pressure on the system is so great that HMPPS was just focused on transferring any convicted prisoner to wherever they could find a place, without looking into the specifics of any given case to analyse whether – at its core - it made sense.

The Board finds it difficult to understand why any prisoner would be transferred so close to their release date, other than to be closer to family. But the upheaval for those prisoners is disturbing, added to which the cost and logistics involved when budgets are tight is (in our view) ridiculous and the work being done to prepare the prisoner for impending release is interrupted, undermined and/or set back.

4.2 Suicide, self-harm, and deaths in custody

Incidents of self-harm average 28.6 per month over the year, which is a slight increase from the last reporting period, when it stood at an average of 27.5 per month. However, the number of individuals self-harming remains consistent, ranging between 12 and 17, although there was an increase in November to 22 and December to 21 (though some of these were repeat incidents concerning the same individual(s)).

A rise in incidents in July and August was mainly attributable to men with complex cases being transferred in from other establishments. The seriousness of the recorded incidents is not accounted for in the figures but range from very superficial cuts to more serious harm that needed medical assistance.

Staff being in a position to identify risks and triggers of the individual prisoners under their care has been hampered somewhat by the increased movement of prisoners, due to overcrowding in the prison system as a whole. Furthermore, ACCT records from prisoners transferring in from other establishments are not always available, which can hinder staff in identifying and supporting prisoners who may be at risk of suicide or self-harm.

There is a dedicated safer custody team, which identifies and supports prisoners who have a variety of issues. This team co-ordinates with other areas in the prison, such as, for example, probation, mental health, drug treatment, chaplaincy and healthcare. Weekly safety intervention meetings (SIMs) are held to monitor the progress of prisoners who have been identified as needing support.

Positive action has been taken to improve completion and monitoring of ACCT procedures by the introduction of new documentation. The ACCT process requires that certain actions are taken to ensure that the risk of suicide and self-harm is reduced. Use of constant supervision has been required for some prisoners to assure their safety but, from the Board's observations, this has been very infrequently and only for a very short period.

During the reporting period, there have been two deaths in custody, which is a significant reduction from last year's figure of six.

- One death was post-release⁹.
- The other was in the establishment.

As of the end of the reporting year reports on both from the Prisons & Probation Ombudsman (PPO) are outstanding.

Although any death is one too many, in the Board's view, the work that has been done to help staff be more able to identify individuals' issues and triggers has been crucial in the reduction. The introduction of a more settled staff for each wing is proving very beneficial in monitoring prisoners.

The death-in-custody action plan has been reviewed and an analysis of key risk factors and actions to improve outcomes in these areas is being used.

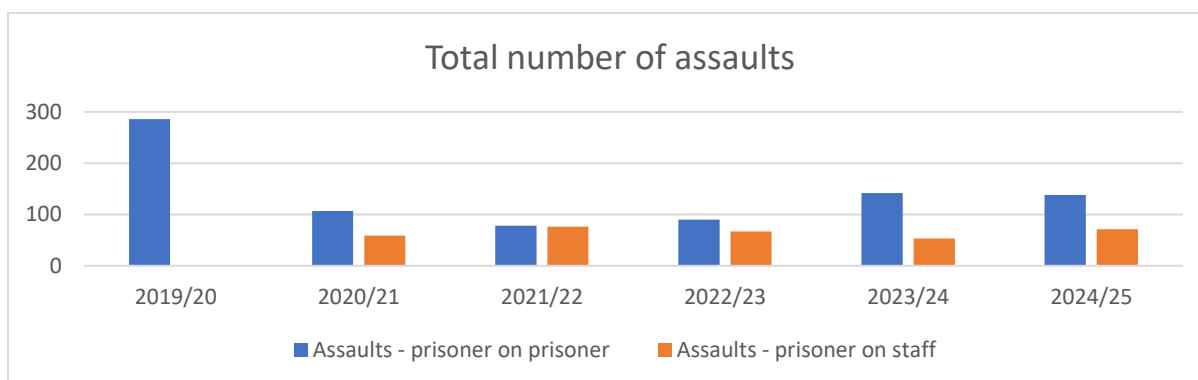
4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 Assaults

There were 71 prisoner-on-staff assaults during the reporting year (compared with 53 last year and 67 in 2022-23), of which eight (compared with two last year and 10 in 2022-23) were classed as serious. The number of assaults varied from month to month, with a peak of 10 (none of which were serious) and a low of three (none serious). There is no apparent pattern or trend to the month-to-month variation.

There were 138 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in the year (compared with 142 last year and 90 in 2022-23), of which 24 (compared with 24 last year and 10 in 2022-23) were classed as serious. The number varied from month to month, with a peak of 17 (three serious) in February 2025 and a low of eight (one serious) in March 2024. Again, there is no obvious pattern or trend to the variation, although in the Board's view, many of these assaults arise from the high incidence of drug use, with the attendant debt.

9. *Since 6 September 2021, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) has been investigating post-release deaths that occur within 14 days of release.*



4.3.2 Support for vulnerable prisoners and safeguarding

The prison opened 325 ACCTs this year, averaging 27 per month. The number varied monthly, with peaks and troughs but no clear pattern.

Board members review most open ACCT documents and interact with prisoners receiving care. Generally, the standard of care is good, with documents showing that prisoners' issues are understood, with support provided, the involvement of healthcare where appropriate, and proper case management.

From the Board's observations, the safer custody team is well led and staffed by dedicated individuals. When Board members raise concerns about prisoners, the team is usually already aware and is managing them.

4.3.3 Self-isolating

At any given time, The Mount may have up to a dozen prisoners who are not covered by the ACCT protocol but who have chosen to isolate themselves from the general prison population. These self-isolating individuals are monitored and managed by the prison's safer custody team and periodically visited by Board members. Prisoners often opt for self-isolation to force a transfer to another facility, due to reasons such as being in debt, facing threats, fearing rival gang members within the prison, or desiring proximity to their families.

The safer custody team supervises these prisoners, striving to ensure they receive at least a basic regime and attempting to resolve their issues through relocation to different wings. However, some situations prove challenging to address, and arranging transfers can be difficult, especially as The Mount operates so close to capacity.

4.4 Use of force

Whilst every effort is made to avoid using force, inevitably there are occasions when it is necessary - either planned or unplanned. These use of force (UoF) incidents are recorded on the body worn video cameras (BWVCs) on the officers involved, and the footage is used to monitor the activity in weekly meetings. Whilst every effort is made for these meetings to take place regularly, sometimes they have to be cancelled due to the shortage of control and restraint (C&R) instructors available for monitoring.

There were approximately 59 incidents a month during the reporting period. All prisoners involved are seen by the healthcare unit and debriefed, with a post-incident review completed with the prisoner by a member of staff who was not involved in the

incident. Some prisoners refuse but it gives those who take part an opportunity to reflect on the incident and how it could have been handled differently.

In early 2025, an analysis was carried out to establish the age group most likely to be involved in UoF incidents, resulting in prisoners in the 21-30 age group being offered a session with Belong¹⁰ to try to find alternative ways of dealing with situations.

A total of 213 officers have been issued with Pava incapacitant spray, which was deployed on two occasions during the period. There was one incident when a baton was drawn.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

As highlighted in our previous two annual reports, the number of illicit items reaching the prisoners in The Mount remains a problem. These include mobile phones, cannabis, tobacco, SIM cards, USB sticks and Spice (a psychoactive drug¹¹). All have a heightened value in prisons, and their availability creates a very lucrative market for organised criminal gangs, which often leads to prisoners running up debt.

4.5.1 Reception

All staff and visitors enter via a strict security area. There are two airport-style body scanners and conveyor belt X-ray machines for bags and other items. Body searches are carried out, which also involves the use of specially trained dogs. Visitors must leave all items in lockers in the visitors centre before being escorted to the main building, where they undergo these searches and scans.

A body scanner is also in use in reception to check incoming prisoners, which has identified a substantial number of men bringing illicit items with them. Although on a small scale compared with the amount a drone can transport, it assists in reducing the quantity of drugs and number of mobile phones being used in the establishment.

4.5.2 Mobile phones

These are used from inside the prison to direct the drones and, despite significant finds, it is proving impossible to stop the influx of illicit items entering the estate. The replacement of windows with a more secure design is still awaiting finance approval from the Ministry of Justice (as referenced in our 2023-2024 annual report). Meanwhile, despite the regular inspection of cells, the window grills continue to be loosened by prisoners to allow items to be caught and brought in. This is possible because of the poor state of the external walls and the fixings used.

10. *Belong is a charity providing restorative justice interventions in response to crime and anti-social behaviour committed in the community and in response to incidents and violence that occur in custodial settings. This enables people who have committed offences to develop empathy, learn about the impact of their offending on others and find ways of making amends or restoring relationships. Source: <https://belongmakingjusticehappen.co.uk/>*

11. *Spice is a synthetic drug which originally came onto the recreational drugs market to mimic the effects of cannabis. But unlike cannabis, spice is far more dangerous due to its potency and the way it exerts its effects on the brain and body. It has even been nicknamed the “zombie drug” because of the debilitating effects it can have – causing psychosis, loss of movement, vomiting or diarrhoea and even sometimes seizures.*

From the Board's observations, the security department continues to work hard to ensure all staff are aware of the signs of participation in bringing items in, with searches of wings and cells being carried out to the required frequency.

The brewing of fermenting liquid, often known as 'hooch' has decreased. This seems to have been helped by the removal of items from the canteen lists that are used in making the alcohol, but demand for this hooch may also be affected by the widespread availability of drugs such as Spice, which can be easier to hide than the 2l, 5l or even 10l containers used for brewing.

4.5.3 Drone activity

This is a major concern, as commercially available drones are very sophisticated and capable of bringing significant quantities of drugs and mobile phones into the prison (one seizure weighed 15-20kg), including at night, albeit with technological advances the anti-drone capabilities have also improved. The number of 'code blues' (where prisoners having collapsed due to drug use) has remained at a high level.

Staff are continually on alert for drones flying over and there has been some success in spotting their approach. Working together with Hertfordshire Police, there have been some arrests and more collaboration is ongoing: activity has fallen considerably since December 2024 with the arrest of a drone pilot linked to The Mount.

The Mount is not alone in this escalating problem, but is close to housing, which puts some restrictions on the possibility of blocking signals. It is also in a rural area, which allows people to be unobserved when launching and controlling the drones.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Inside, the prison is generally well-maintained and clean and tidy – the gardens team does an excellent job of keeping the prison's outside areas tidy, which has been commented on by external visitors. It has spacious grounds, with flower beds and lawns, as well as a farms and gardens area, where vegetables and herbs are grown.

Outside the prison perimeter, there has often been a lot of litter, due to the lack of bins and the fact that no prisoners are authorised to clean outside. A local family cleaned up the car park and surrounding areas because it was so unkempt. A system needs to be put in place to address this, in the Board's view.

There is a continuing programme of repainting cells and common areas in the wings, carried out by trained prisoners from the Clean Rehabilitative Enabling Decent (CRED) team. By contrast, the common areas in the administrative blocks, where prisoners cannot work, are looking shabby.

The Board continues to be concerned by the doubling up of single cells. Prisoners in these cells share a forced intimacy without adequate privacy; there is often not even enough space for prisoners to put away their personal possessions. It is not uncommon for Board members to see double cells, even those that are purpose-built, where prisoners have used bedding to create makeshift screens around in-cell toilets (although the prison does re-order and issue proper curtains from time to time). As always, showers on some wings need refurbishment. There is an on-going programme, but it does not keep pace with regular wear and tear.

5.1.1 Crowding on Narey

The doubling-up is a particular issue on Narey, the wing used to house some, but not all, over-50s, often with medium-to-severe health problems, and with limited mobility. Many are on long sentences and have built up significant amounts of property.

On more than one occasion during the year, Board members have been approached by officers on the wing who wanted the IMB to see how little space there was in the single cells that had been converted into doubles.

In our opinion, the use of bunk beds with small ladders to climb up and very limited space in the cell for moving around and no space for a table to eat, write or study at, make them wholly unsuitable for this particular cohort.

Post-year-end update: we are pleased to report that the single cells on Narey that were converted to doubles are in the process of reverting to single prisoner occupancy. The only remaining double cells on Narey were designed for dual occupancy. There are, however, still more than 80 prisoners at The Mount occupying single cells that have been converted to dual occupancy.

5.1.2 The kitchen

In the Board's view, the manager and their team perform miracles to feed prisoners on a very modest budget (£3.14 per prisoner per day, up by 9% - just enough to meet

the previous year's overspend). The budget is supplemented by food grown in the prison's kitchen garden. Prisoners say the portion sizes and food are good.

5.2 On-wing laundries

During the reporting period, there have been numerous incidents of one or more of the washing machines on the wings being out of commission for long periods. In the most extreme example, *both* washing machines on one wing were out of commission for an extended period (reportedly three months). During this time, the clothing of a wing containing 120 prisoners was being done in a domestic machine, with less than one-third of the capacity of the two installed machines.

Whilst there is no way of definitively attributing causality, it is worth recording that a number of prisoners on this wing were diagnosed as suffering from scabies at the time that the two commercial machines were out of action.

In subsequent discussions with Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL)¹² and the residential Governor, it became clear (and there was general agreement) that the system is flawed, with the existing contract meaning that (i) the machines not being maintained properly, (ii) the responsibility for dealing with problems is unclear, and (iii) a prison can be asked to find significant sums at short notice from within already stretched budgets when a machine becomes unusable and needs to be replaced.

Post-year-end update: we can report that a full review of washing machines and dryers on the wings was carried out by the residential Governor to understand how old they were, how many times they had been fixed and the cost of replacement.

After a detailed analysis, it was decided to recommend the move to a 'Total Care' contract with JLA, the market leaders in the provision, rental and servicing of commercial laundry equipment, which covers all The Mount's current requirements, allows additional machines to be added if required, and maintenance to happen 7 days a week. If a machine cannot be repaired, it is replaced. This is covered by a fixed monthly fee.

This should not only ensure that the time(s) when machines are out of action reduces significantly but also allow a much greater degree of certainty in financial planning, without the need periodically to purchase new machinery.

We understand that this has been approved by the Prison Group Director and the Board welcomes the change which we believe will improve the lot of the prisoners.

5.3 Segregation

The care and separation unit (CSU) houses prisoners who have been given cellular confinement (CC) following an adjudication (a disciplinary hearing when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules) for their own protection (Rule 45), because they

12. Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL) provides facility maintenance services to prisons across the South of England, is part of the Ministry of Justice and was created in response to the Carillion collapse in 2018. At that time Carillion was responsible for services in 52 prisons

are vulnerable or a threat to staff or other prisoners (GOoD/good order or discipline – Rule 43) or pending an adjudication (Rule 53).

Increasingly, the CSU was being used to house men for other reasons, such as for prisoners awaiting transfer out of the prison; for those with mental health problems; and for those wanting or needing to detox from heavy drug use or alcohol away from the ‘temptations’ on the wings. Except in the most limited of circumstances, the CSU is not deemed a suitable environment for these categories of prisoner.

The CSU works actively with the rest of the prison services (mainly the safer custody team but also the mental health and addiction teams) to either prevent prisoners coming to the unit in the first place or to arrange for them to return to the normal location as soon as possible - frequently on different wings from their previous ones.

Prisoners are also offered two new support initiatives:

- They can sign up for frequent drug testing following adjudications or failed MDT (mandatory drug testing) to help them monitor their own drug use.
- For low level offences, the community payback scheme allows a prisoner to do unpaid work for up to eight hours in the prison. This system can also be used to help a prisoner pay back any money due to the prison for damage they have done to prison property.

These initiatives have reduced the turnover in the CSU.

The number of reviews (which the monitoring IMB member observes) for those staying in the CSU fell from 149 last year to 85 for the reporting period. Only three prisoners were held in the CSU for over 42 days (the limit allowed without external authorisation); six were held in special accommodation (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety); and 18 on dirty protest, where a prisoner has chosen to defecate or urinate in a cell without using the facilities provided.

The reasons for those in special accommodation were as follows:

- on five occasions due to continuous damage to prison property; and
- on one occasion due to violent behaviour towards staff.

During the reporting period, the remand adjudications fell considerably and stood at 84 at the end of the year in review. The police referrals are also reducing.

All prisoners in the CSU are visited by a Board member so they have an opportunity to make a complaint or otherwise. It is unusual for the Board to receive complaints from men in the CSU. All prisoners are visited by a Governor every day, as well as by a member of the healthcare and the chaplaincy teams. In the Board’s view, the staff in the CSU are admirable in the manner in which they deal with the prisoners in their care. They take great care to ensure that men have access to showers, exercise, a phone and meals, as well as sorting out prisoners’ concerns, usually regarding family and property left in their cells. Many prisoners in the CSU explicitly praise the work of the CSU staff in their conversations with Board members.

5.4 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

During the year the IMB has noticed a considerable increase in staff and prisoner interactions, with our monitoring reports noting that staff are seen to be available on the wings engaging freely with prisoners.

Key working has been affected by staffing levels and staff being redeployed from key working at short notice, which has impacted the effective delivery of key working. However, the prison is committed to improving staffing levels so that the programme can be expanded throughout the establishment.

Key work sessions are scheduled daily. The more vulnerable prisoners are prioritised, such as those under 25 and men who are isolating or disengaged from the regime. It also includes prisoners being managed under processes such as an ACCT plan or a challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP), for prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence, and those segregated in the CSU under GOoD (see §5.3).

The prison is running and implementing the choices and changes programme for prisoners under 25 who score with low maturity, as there has been a notable increase in violence and non-compliance from young adults.

There has been a positive increase in the number of documented key worker sessions on P-NOMIS¹³ (the prison's internal computer system). Six officers have volunteered to take on the role of key work champions. These band 3 officers have consistently demonstrated a high standard of recorded key working, and their involvement as champions should not only enhance the support available to their peers but also help foster a collaborative environment where all staff feel equally supported.

5.5 Equality and diversity

In the year to 28 February 2025, 144 discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) were submitted. Of these, 69 did not meet the criteria for discrimination and were, therefore, redirected to the complaints department for further investigation. The remaining 75 DIRFs were processed in line with the appropriate procedures.

Throughout the reporting period, the prison ran a proactive and wide-ranging programme of events to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. These included:

- A sexual orientation forum.
- A wellbeing clinic (Bash's wellbeing clinic) in recognition of wellbeing month in January.
- A neurodiversity forum in recognition of Neurodiversity Celebration Week.
- Diversity & Inclusion representative training.

13. P-NOMIS is the operational database used in prisons for the management of offenders. It contains offenders' personal details, type of offence(s), type of custody, sentence length, prisoner movement data and involvement in breaches of prison discipline. It also includes full details of the prisoners' visits history, activities (both paid/unpaid work and offender rehabilitation programmes) and details of the prisoners' financial records whilst in prison.

- DIRF investigator training for bands 5 and 6 staff.
- A staff ovarian cancer awareness cake sale in support of ovarian cancer.
- A Mother's Day card-making workshop for prisoners, held in advance to ensure timely posting.

The equality and diversity wing representatives, whose training is ongoing, meet on a monthly basis and are active participants in scheduled forums. Upcoming forums over the next quarter include those focused on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities, religion and belief, autism, and gender.

However, the Board continues to be concerned about accessibility. Facilities for disabled prisoners are limited, with poor wheelchair access across the estate (see §6.5). The long distances between key services such as healthcare, education, the visits hall and workshops - often exposed to the elements - present ongoing challenges for prisoners with mobility needs. In one (extreme) case a prisoner in a wheelchair had to be carried upstairs by two fellow prisoners to receive his prescribed medication, because no one from the healthcare unit was willing to take it down to him or to make alternative arrangements. In the Board's opinion this experience would have been demeaning and humiliating for the prisoner concerned, as well as totally unnecessary.

5.6 Faith and pastoral support

A new chaplaincy manager was appointed in May 2024. The chaplaincy exists to support both prisoners and staff in their belief and with pastoral care. The vision is to support prisoners to flourish in their rehabilitation during their sentence and set them up for success on release.

The chaplaincy team conducts statutory duties in the prison such as inductions, CSU rounds, visiting those on ACCTs, attending ACCT reviews, and discharges (connecting prison leavers with community chaplaincies and faith groups). It also runs courses, visits isolating prisoners and those on CSIPs, attends multidisciplinary meetings, makes pastoral visits and organises services and classes, such as Islamic studies and Bible courses.

The chaplaincy team is pioneering the first accredited theology course in prisons, along with Westminster Theological Centre (WTC).

The chaplaincy is supported by volunteers from prison fellowship, who run the Sycamore Tree course, and volunteers, who run the 'Living with loss' bereavement course, and official prison visitors.

The managing chaplain is a Free Church pastor. There are chaplains for: Roman Catholics, Free Church, Muslims, Pagans, Sikhs, Buddhists, Greek Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Rastafarians and those of the Jewish faith, plus volunteer chaplains from the Church of England, Free Church and Christian Science. Approximately 80% of prisoners report having a faith, with Christianity being the largest group and Islam the second largest.

5.7 Incentive schemes

The IMB receives very few complaints about the incentives scheme, so we can only assume that it is accepted and administered fairly across the prison. There can be problems when a prisoner is reduced to the basic, or bottom level, of the incentives scheme and has his television removed, which often causes a disturbance, but this is usually short term. There have been a few complaints from those on basic and these are mostly unjustified. There is good feedback from prisoner forums because a few incentives have been added for those on enhanced.

5.8 Complaints

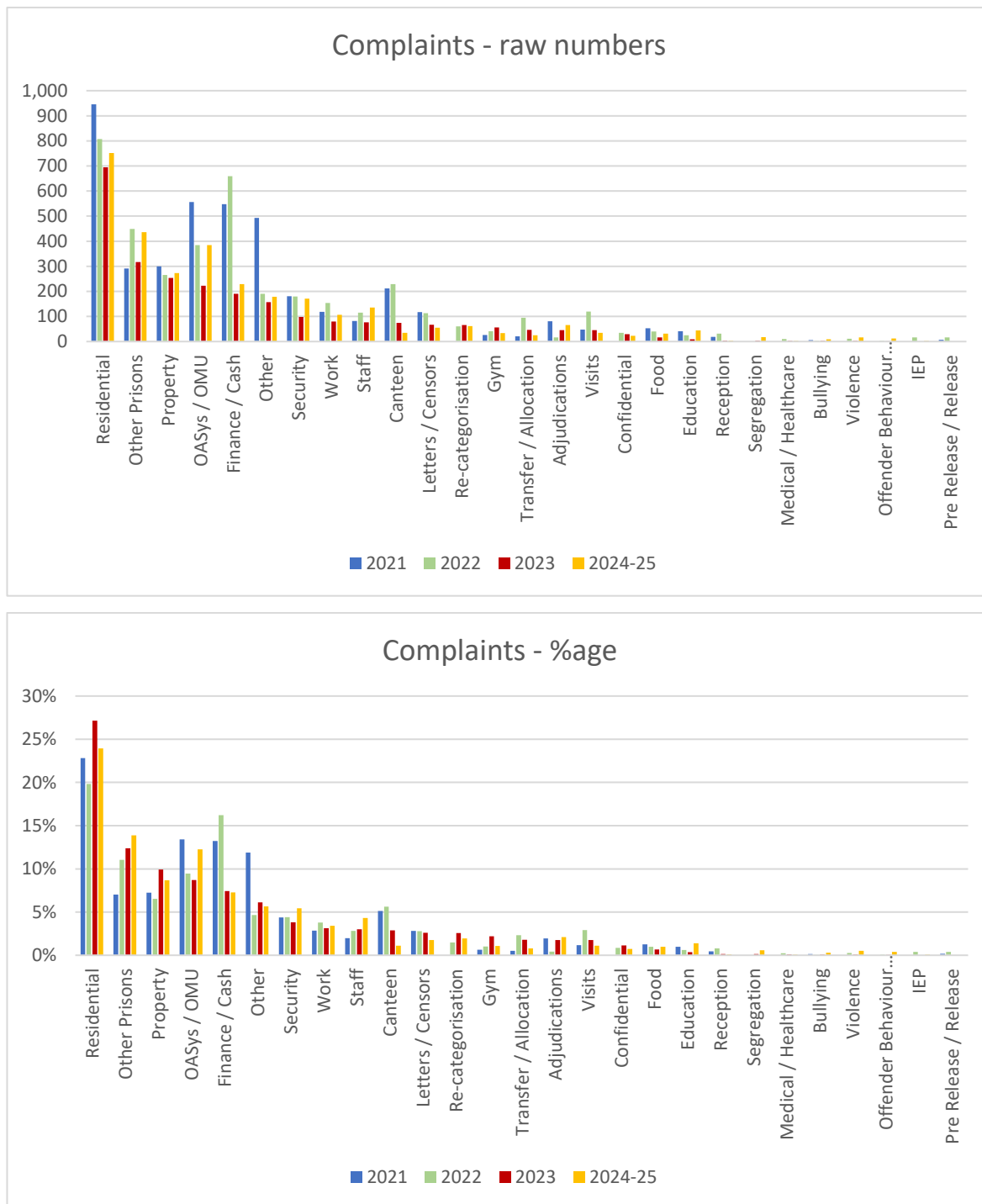
5.8.1 Procedures

If a prisoner has an issue, he should first consult a key worker or prison officer before submitting a formal complaint. Complaint forms (COMP1s) are (or should be) available across all wings and are collected on weekdays. Responses are expected within five working days by qualified personnel; however, if the prisoner is not satisfied, the complaint may be escalated within the prison. If still unresolved, prisoners can approach the IMB (see §8.2) or refer their case to the Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations (IPCI) team, which is part of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO).

5.8.2 Performance

During the reporting period, 3,141 complaints were recorded, a 23% increase on the previous year. Major variances included canteen-related issues (down 53%), finance/cash problems (up 21%), work-related complaints (up 34%), and those relating to the offender management unit, or OMU (up 73%). Although the increases are unwelcome, they need to be seen in context: total complaints are down by more than 20% from the levels seen in 2021 and 2022.

Of the logged complaints, 83% received responses within the prescribed time, although this includes outstanding complaints with other prisons, where the proportion of on-time replies is significantly lower than for The Mount. Common issues included residential matters (24%), property-related concerns with other establishments (14%) and within The Mount (9%), as well as those related to offender management, which (see above) now account for 12%. There was an increase in the number complaints about violence and bullying, totalling 25, up from a historically low level of four in the previous reporting year. Looked at graphically:



Complaints about healthcare are treated separately.

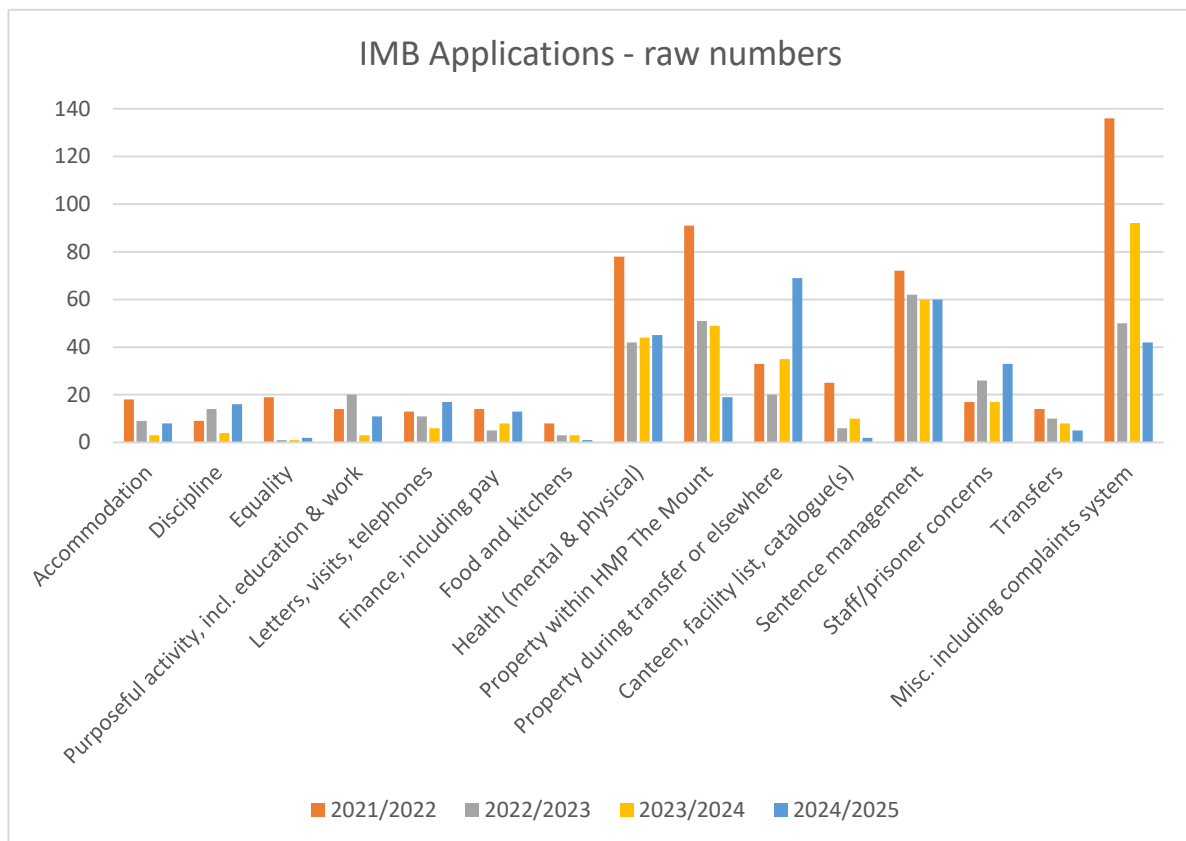
5.9 Applications to the IMB

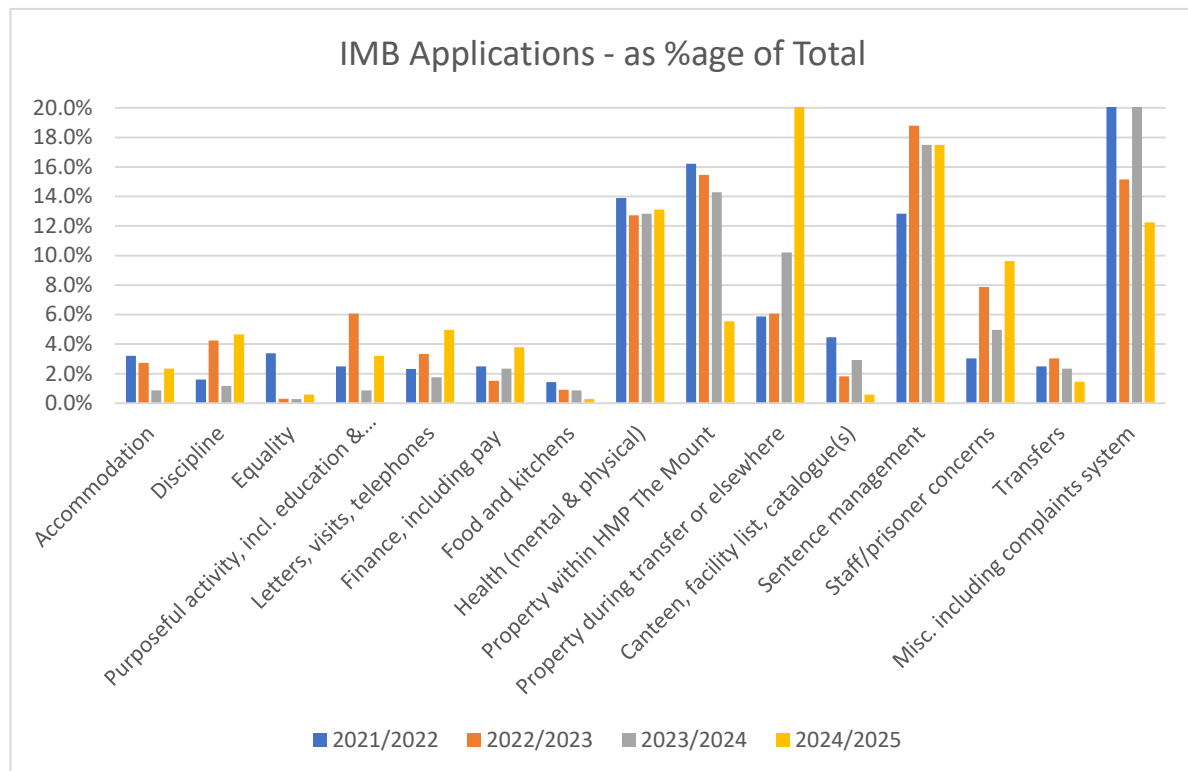
As the graphs show, the fall in the number of complaints over recent years is, as would be expected, also reflected in the number of issues considered by the IMB at The Mount and signifies the generally improvement in atmosphere and relationships referred to elsewhere in this report. The apparent disconnect in the 2024-25 reporting year between the number of COMP1s (up 23%) and the number of IMB applications received (up by 3 - <1%) is accounted for by an increase in the number of satisfactory responses received by prisoners following the submission of a COMP1.

The reduction in the number of applications (prisoners' written submissions or in-person approaches to the IMB) since 2021-22 is nearly 40% (down from 561 to 346 – see §8.2) and includes a fall of:

- 21% relating to purposeful work and activity.
- 88% relating to food and the kitchens.
- 92% relating to canteen.
- 42% relating to physical and mental health.
- 79% relating to property (within The Mount).

The only major categories where there has been a rise (see §5.10), are in relation to the items of prisoners' property that are mislaid, or fail to be transferred, during the transfer process, and staff/prisoner concerns, which are up by 94%, but only to 33 applications, and which is not reflected in our experience on the wings.





5.10 Property

Property continues to be a problem with inadequate storage and monitoring, as well as a frequent lack of commitment to ensuring that property is forwarded on to the prisoner. Property issues form the largest category of applications received by the IMB, with 19 relating to 'in-house' property concerns, mostly occurring due to cell clearance (when a prisoner is removed forcibly) and 69 relating to those on transfer. The failure to address the core issues with the transfer of property, highlighted in our last report, is reflected in the fact that the number of applications seeking our help doubled - from 35 to the 69 referred to above. Conversely, the number of (internal) property applications continues to fall - it totalled 49 in the last reporting year.

Most of the property problems occur during prisoners' transfer between prisons, when they are lucky if their property catches up with them if it cannot be accommodated in their transfer vehicle. It is the experience of the Board that a number of other prisons, particularly the private ones, are 'cavalier' in their attitude to forwarding property. On occasion, however, we consider the attitude of other prisons has gone beyond merely 'cavalier' into being downright obstructive or even arguably dishonest:

- On two occasions, other prisons stated, in response to a prisoner now at The Mount submitting a COMP1, that they no longer held any property, only for them to perform a volte face when the local IMB went to reception to go through the former prisoner's records and established that the property was still there.
- One prison that was still holding a parcel of important personal items simply stopped responding to chasing emails from the complaints and correspondence team, then claiming that the emails hadn't been received, even when it could be

seen that they had been both received and read. Fortunately, following diligent enquiry by the local IMB Chair, these items were located and forwarded.

- Two other prisons responded to a prisoner from The Mount submitting a COMP1, acknowledging that they had the items and would send them on 'as soon as possible', only to do nothing for months on end. In one example, and purely by chance, a local IMB member who had investigated an issue for us happened to be in their reception when they found that a van was coming to The Mount and ensured that the (once missing but now found) bag of property was put on the van – more than six months after the COMP1 was submitted.

As these examples illustrate, sometimes an intervention between the respective IMB Chairs can help locate missing property and lead to it being forwarded. But, frequently transferring property remains in other establishments, leading to claims for losses and distress for the prisoner. It is also worth noting that IMB Chairs at the prisons with the worst records in relation to property transfers are understandably reluctant to get involved, as they would risk being overwhelmed with such queries.

Our report for the last two years has stated the following and this still applies:

'The Board hopes that a new national policy regarding the management of transfers of prisoners' property is being developed and would welcome a system where all prisoners' property travels with them when transferred. This would also benefit from a greater degree of tracking, tracing and handing over responsibility for prisoners' property.'

We have seen no sign that such a scheme is being considered, never mind implemented. In the opinion of the Board the time saved and the reduction in compensation that HMPPS would no longer have to pay out for justified claims would be considerable. It is the Board's view that such a system would:

- ensure that staff at the sending prisons are held responsible for the prisoners' property that is being handed on;
- require that any property held at the sending prison after a prisoner is transferred is sent to the prisoner within a reasonable time, e.g. a month;
- contractually require the prison transport companies to transport all the property that prisoners are entitled to have in their possession;
- include monitoring to overcome the situation whereby problems originating in the sending prison become apparent only in the receiving prison; and
- introduce sanctions for those (whether other prisons or the transport companies) that failed to meet their targets and/or deadlines.

All these problems are fixable without new systems, but as we have said previously it is the view of the Board that HMPPS should 'develop much better systems and procedures for the transfer of prisoners' property'. The sending prisons should take much more care when clearing cells and forwarding property, while a track-and-trace

system, using hardware and software, rather than the paper and card, should be introduced without further delay.

Post-year-end update: the learning lessons bulletin from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, dated March 2025 (https://ppo.gov.uk/learning_research/learning-lessons-bulletin-issue-11-property-complaints/) and entitled 'Property Complaints' summarised the learnings from the Independent Prisoner Complaints Investigations (IPCI) examinations and rulings into property complaints from prisoners. It contains a lot of useful data and analysis, although it needs to be acknowledged that the claims received by the IPCI will be the 'tip of the iceberg', as it only reflects the cases referred to them and thus excludes those that are resolved via the complaints process or by the local IMB.

That said, in general, we share the Ombudsman's analysis and agree with the recommendations contained in the 'Summary of lessons to be learned', set out on page 14 of the bulletin.

We would, however, go further than the Ombudsman and recommend that a series of penalties and/or sanctions be applied in circumstances where a prison (or one of the prison escort and custody services) fails to comply with the (revised) Prisoners' Property Policy Framework – which in our experience is too all often the case.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare - General

General healthcare services are still provided by Practice Plus Group (PPG). They have their own complaints system, but prisoners can and do complain to the IMB. However, relatively few complaints are received, and these are mostly concerned with a lack of information regarding agreed treatments, delays to hospital appointments, consequent treatment and changes in medication.

Most of the 'code reds' (occasions when blood is visible) are caused by a small number of regular self-harmers. There has been a considerable increase from 45 in 2022-2023, to 99 in 2023-2024, to 115 in 2024-2025.

There was also an increase in 'code blues', from 128 in 2022-2023, to 288 in 2023-2024, to 512 in 2024-2025.

It is difficult to attribute the rise in codes caused, although it is the view of the board that many are related to drug use and the easy availability of Spice.

6.2 Hospital appointments

Out-patient appointments have gone ahead as much as possible, as per the following chart, but there have been regular cancellations due to lack of escort staff.

	1 March 2024 to 29 February 2024		1 March 2024 to 28 February 2025	
Out-patient appointments scheduled	1,148		1,265	
Attended	615	53.6%	666	52.6%
Cancelled by hospital	185	16.1%	228	18.0%
Cancelled by prison	69	6.0%	61	4.8%
Cancelled by prisoner	117	10.2%	129	10.2%
Clinically reprioritised	162	14.1%	181	14.3%

6.3 Physical healthcare

Further services available for prisoners, according to need and application, are:

Triage (nurse-led, with prisoners assessed before being referred to a GP, if necessary)			
GP	Sexual health	NHS health checks	Psychology
Long-term conditions	Optician	Medications	Psychiatry
Ultrasound	Physiotherapy	Mental health	Dentistry

Dentistry is commissioned to Community Dental Services, but the healthcare unit works with them. The longest wait for a dental appointment is eight weeks, which is a reduction from the previous year (12 weeks) and dramatically lower than the year before, when it was as high as 42 weeks.

6.4 Mental health

The service has continued to improve over the year, with more permanent staff in post, and is available seven days a week, to good effect. Face-to-face consultations take place, and the use of in-cell phones allows for continuing welfare checks on non-urgent referrals and reviews.

Mental health staff keep in touch with clients using the in-cell phones, which also allow contact with the Samaritans.

The number of referrals increased from 985 in 2023-2024 to 1,016 in 2024-2025, an increase of 3.2%. Prisoners with a wide range of mental health issues are cared for. Often these issues lead to self-harm and drug use. Overall, the Board's view is that with a more open prison, allowing prisoners to spend more time out of their cells, in work or education and interacting with their fellow prisoners, prisoners' mental health would generally be expected to improve.

6.5 Social care

The prison has few facilities for disabled prisoners. Wheelchair access to the older wings is not catered for at all, including there being no access to showers. All the medication hatches are on the first floor, which makes life difficult for prisoners with mobility issues.

Narey wing has showers in each cell, but no adaptations for wheelchair users. There are two adapted cells on Nash wing. The prison consults with the local authority's social services team if a prisoner needs an assessment. Some aids can be provided to assist a prisoner, but wheelchair access across the estate is very poor and there are long distances between some residential wings and facilities such as healthcare, education, the visits hall and workshops.

There is no specialist support or special unit within the prison and no overnight medical care. Palliative care is very limited within healthcare and any end-of-life care needs to be provided outside the prison.

6.6 Time out of cell, regime

Prisoners get substantial time out of their cells every day for association and domestics (time for personal hygiene, calling family or socialising, etc) or to attend activities. The prison has been operating a proper category C regime¹⁴ for some time, after the regime was first restricted in 2017 to cope with staff shortages before even more draconian restrictions were imposed because of the pandemic.

14. *Meaning that prisoners should be able to engage in resettlement activities such as preparing for work, gaining qualifications, studying, gaining work experience and getting themselves ready for release or to prove themselves ahead of recategorisation/transfer to a category D (open) prison.*

The gym is working well. There are six physical education instructors, with good morale amongst the team. Prisoners are working on a reward scheme and both full- and part-time workers get regular gym time.

All prisoners have TVs in their cells (unless they are on the incentives scheme's basic regime or in the CSU), in-cell phones for approved numbers and internal calls. They also have access to social video calls and have basic personal laptops, which allow them to make applications to healthcare, receive responses to applications and access education courses and recreational content

All residential units have their own small outdoor exercise areas, some with outdoor gym equipment, whilst rugby is played against local teams in an RFU league.

6.7 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The incentivised substance-free living unit (ISFL) wing, which was established during the previous reporting period, has continued to work with prisoners under the guidance of the drug strategy lead. Approval/rejection for this unit is a multidisciplinary decision with the charity, Forward Trust, and the wing custodial manager (CM). Prisoners must fulfil certain criteria, including having a history of drug or alcohol abuse and are now motivated to live drug/alcohol free. Failure to comply with any of the expected goals and rules of the unit will result in removal. There is both voluntary and mandatory drug testing and compulsory engagement with the substance misuse provider, Forward Trust. All residents must have at least five months left of their sentence.

As reported in the previous annual report, Forward Trust had faced a long period of staffing shortages, limiting the structured interventions delivered to patients. However, the remaining staff vacancies have now been filled, and practitioners were awaiting start dates, so it is hoped that the 12-step programme, which has had good results in the past, can be a reintroduced on a regular basis.

The number of prisoners under the influence (UTI) continues to give great cause for concern. The ready availability of the drug, Spice, results in very few days when 'code blues' are not called (this is where prisoners are found unresponsive).

The Mount does not have full-time health provision, but nursing staff are available throughout the week: 7.45am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday; and 8.30am to 6pm at the weekend. Outside these hours, 111 and 999 (emergency services) are used. Thirty-four prison officers are trained to deliver nasal naloxone (to reverse the effects of opiate overdose) to prisoners found UTI when health staff were not on site.

When a prisoner is found UTI the first time, an interview with the wing Supervising Officer (SO)¹⁵ is conducted to discuss the different types of support available.

Prisoners continue to use vapes to process Spice. However, the new, single-use vape should limit the ability to adapt them for this purpose.

15. Supervising officers coordinate all aspects of prison life within a residential unit and will be included in prison-wide rotas for weekend and night duties

Within the three months prior to release, prisoners who have been working with the drug rehabilitation providers are given training on delivery of naloxone and community contact information.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) attends the prison on a regular basis, with speakers giving talks on their experiences and sharing support.

6.8 Soft skills

The Mount has continued to work with charities and outside organisations. During the year:

- There has been a seminar for prisoners on self-development, debating sessions with the University of Hertfordshire and engagement with the Writing with Walls mentoring programme.
- The prison started a partnership with the Hardman Trust to support prisoners who are serving sentences of 10+ years. It is a charitable organisation offering mentoring and some grants.
- Collaboration with Care and Combat for Veterans, a lived experience event, 'Cuffs to Cufflinks'. An ex-prisoner related his journey since leaving custody.
- A chess club pilot is in the process of being set up with 'Chess in Schools'.
- Connections with resettlement mentoring charities have started so men have a list on release.
- Waste management is upcycling second-hand furniture for Emmaus¹⁶.
- Inside Academy is running e-commerce training courses.
- Staff have had a wellbeing day and the chaplaincy arranged a coffee morning for volunteers. There has also been a talent show for prisoners and a gospel choir. At Christmas, carols were sung on each wing.
- Wing reps have monthly meetings with a Governor, and a newsletter is produced for the prisoners. Listeners (prisoner trained to offer confidential emotional support to their peers) continue to work with the Samaritans and there is a peer mentor who acts as an advocate for prisoners. All wings have access to HAWCs (health and wellbeing champions), and therapy dogs have visited during the year.

16. Emmaus Hertfordshire is a homelessness charity, offering 'not just a bed for the night; but a home for as long as it's needed, meaningful work in one of [their] social enterprises, and a sense of belonging in the community': <https://emmaus.org.uk/hertfordshire/>

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

Very little has changed since last year. The contract provider for education is still People Plus and the education department consists of a main block, a small, additional skills centre and various workshops. There are approximately 341 prisoner attending education and in excess of 100 prisoners in activities, attending in the morning and afternoon, representing about 43% of the roll.

Courses consist of English, Maths, IT, art and music, as well as a range of other subjects. Most courses are accredited and certificated.

Education scored badly in the Ofsted section of the report of the inspection carried out by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in November 2024 and is being monitored carefully.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 Summary

Vocational courses in bricklaying, plastering, and carpentry have been delivered throughout the year, with no significant gaps in instructors (although motor vehicles has a vacancy), as has happened in previous years.

There was the addition of plumbing, which has been very successful. Planned delivery of Level 2 courses was slow to implement and all accredited courses are delivered at Level 1, which is insufficient for employment needs.

Attendance in education was considerably higher by 20% through the reporting period since last year. Prisoners are challenged more regularly for non-attendance, both on the wings and in classes, and the general prison culture moves towards being more employment oriented. There was a marked improvement in punctuality and getting to work and education on time.

7.2.2 Education

The achievement of targets for English, of 60%, and 59% for Maths, both an increase on last year, and achievement in vocational courses, of 70%, are welcome. However, many prisoners stay on courses beyond the planned expected end dates.

All prisoners are assessed as part of their induction process and those below entry level 3¹⁷ in Maths and English are offered places on education. The non-readers should be supported by Shannon Trust prison mentors. But even though mentors have been sourced, they are unable to operate either through lack of access to learners or through lack of co-ordination. Unfortunately, there is no facilitator or co-ordinator. This has been due to the lack of admin support in Education, Skills & Workshop and the cuts in the Dynamic Purchasing System budget, which would have enabled more mentors to be facilitated to support more prisoners.

17. Entry Level 3 is equivalent to a GCSE English grade below 1 (G). It's a stepping-stone qualification to achieve GCSE level for adults who learn better with practical, real-life examples.

The neurodiversity support manager (NSM) has been very effective since being appointed last September, assisting prisoners with educational and other needs across the prison. However, there was a reduction in the support from education with the removal of the Inclusive Support Co-ordinator within the industries team.

People Plus no longer runs the Open University course and now the learning and skills manager for HMPPS coordinates this area, having been full time since January 2025. A total of 24 prisoners are enrolled for Open University courses and are studying 33 modules. The prison allows prisoners to access the courses to OU to bridge the gap of Level 3. Prisoners are able to have Open University as a workplace or to be released from other workplaces in order to study. They use the computers in the library, as their laptops are incompatible.

7.2.3 Library

The library holds around 11,000 books and subscribes to a number of magazines, with a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction publications available. It is open all day from Monday to Thursday, plus Friday mornings, with evening sessions on Tuesday and Thursdays. The library is well used and has introduced puzzles, which are proving to be very popular with the prisoners. Since last November, the library is providing more information via the prisoners' laptops. Content is constantly being added, such as recommending books, book of the month and encouraging prisoners' reviews. Magazines and books are now far more accessible than before.

Storybook Dads runs very successfully from the library. These are videoed with various backdrops so prisoners can read stories to their children, which is proving to be very popular.

The fine cell embroidery workshop is gaining popularity and is based in the library. Some of the work is outstanding and items have been provided to Royal Households.

A reading strategy has been relaunched to encourage reading not only for functional purposes but also for pleasure. It links with the Shannon Trust to create a better understanding of the need to improve literacy levels and how reading plays a vital role in rehabilitation. Shannon Trust is embraced on the reading strategy, should be a whole-prison approach and is to be encouraged by all staff.

7.2.4 Workshops

The vocational courses on offer in the workshop complex are:

Coffee Shop	Bike Repairs	DHL
Carpentry (Levels 1 & 2)	Plastering	Bricklaying (Levels 1 & 2)
Motor Mechanics	Plumbing (Levels 1 & 2)	Barbering

The workshops are now undergoing major repair works to the roof, so these courses have been relocated until the works are finished (hopefully, the beginning of 2026). They should resume when the workshops return to their workshop area. Individually:

- The motor mechanics and forklift driving courses are temporarily not available, as instructors are required.
- The double-glazing workshop only operates periodically and its future must be in doubt, as it never operated efficiently, in the Board's view.
- DHL continues to employ workers to complete canteen packs for The Mount and other prisons, and it seems to be a popular and pleasant workplace that incentivises prisoners.
- The Sue Rider bike shop has moved to smaller premises, allowing for recycling of photocopiers by DSA (a nationwide IT Asset Disposal company that provides a service to businesses and government organisations who need to dispose of IT hardware and other electronic devices safely and securely), giving many more opportunities for the prisoners to learn a trade.
- National Rail (formerly Railtrack) is now a major part of the prison, allowing for many prisoners to learn the theory around laying rail tracks. The main issue that needs to be considered is the actual fitting of the rail track within the prison. The rail track has been donated, but to fit it could cost up to £20,000. If this is carried out, prisoners will all mostly be guaranteed jobs on release, as they would have covered both the theory and practical aspects.

7.2.5 Vocational courses

These are very popular with the prisoners, as they give them a genuine trade and, hopefully, a job once they are released. It is imperative that the workshops continue, as they are an asset to the Prison Service as a way of educating and providing a trade when the prisoners are released. Workshops come at a price, depending on size, but gas, water, electricity and other services must be taken into consideration so that external companies must not profit from the prison.

There is a new project called the Prison Mentoring Initiative Group, which mentors prisoners who are soon to be released. It is formed of successful businesspeople from different sectors who are in a position to offer good, sound advice to prisoners, covering a wide range of topics, on a voluntary basis. Since its inception, it has proved to be very successful, and there is waiting list for prisoners to attend the four meetings each year.

7.2.6 Redemption Roasters

The arrangements with Redemption Roasters were a focus of our report last year. At one stage, there was a real possibility that they would not continue at The Mount, as it was proving impossible to agree a mutually acceptable variation to the contract.

The new Governor is making strenuous efforts to retain Redemption Roasters in The Mount and is, rightly in our opinion, prioritising the needs of the prisoners. He is aiming to ensure that there are sufficient training opportunities within the prison and that Redemption Roasters guarantees that prisoners will get placed within their outlets. However, this should only be done on the basis of a commercially balanced contract -

Redemption Roasters should not be subsidised, at an operational level, by The Mount - and with clear commitments for employment post-release.

7.3 Offender management, progression

In our previous annual report, we noted that staff shortages and excessive workloads hindered the ability of the Offender management unit (OMU) to help prisoners progress toward rehabilitation and release.

Staff shortages have largely been resolved in terms of numbers, but workloads remain excessive. Delays in criminal trials have caused category B local prisons to overflow with remand prisoners, resulting in category C prisons, such as The Mount, accommodating those who would usually serve their sentence in local prisons. This significantly increases the workload, as processing short-term sentences requires nearly as much effort as long-term ones. This churn has increased as a result of the SDS40 Early Release Scheme, the policy that allows certain prisoners serving certain sentences to be released after serving 40% of their sentence, rather than the previous 50% with staff at The Mount reporting that they have to manage both arrivals and imminent discharges simultaneously. Though prisoner offender managers (POMs) are more visible, some prisoners struggle to arrange meetings due to workload constraints.

Nevertheless, the OMU team consistently meets deadlines for recategorisation reviews and parole board hearings. It's also notable that some prisoners commend the support from their POMs when speaking to members of the Board.

As noted in the section on complaints (see 5.8.2), there has been a significant increase in COMP1s relation to offender management. We believe that this is almost entirely due to the significant additional workload imposed on the team as a result of the increased churn of prisoners in general and the high volumes of receptions and releases as a result of the SDS40 Early Release Scheme in particular, with insufficient time (or resource) to manage these changes and prisoners arriving unprepared or without the necessary documentation.

7.4 ROTL (release on temporary licence)

The Mount aims to release men on temporary licence for community work. The reducing reoffending team has raised the profile of the ROTL scheme, both inside and outside the prison. Local employers offer opportunities, which would help prisoners integrate into society before their release and lift the prison's overall mood.

ROTL is moving forward, but due to the demand on the OMU, with its high workloads, the ROTL applications do take time. Prisoners and employers have been identified, and applications have been put forward. We have seen that here is undoubtedly the demand from a range of employers.

The number of ROTL opportunities should be much higher in a category C training prison such as The Mount. We accept that these have been limited by the number of hurdles that need to be overcome and by the high churn of prisoners but hope that the

new Governor's recent experience in a category D prison will lead to many more prisoners being on ROTL.

7.5 Creating future opportunities (CFO) programme

7.5.1 Background

The programme is voluntary and intended to support prisoners, particularly those with complex needs, as they approach the end of their sentence and/or to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. The programme delivers personalised support designed to equip prisoners with the skills, confidence and resilience needed to access mainstream services, including education, training and employment. It encourages positive engagement with the wider community, ultimately supporting a successful reintegration into society. It commenced at The Mount in October 2024.

7.5.2 CFO Evolution at HMP The Mount

The Mount has decided to support a targeted group of prisoners, specifically those serving life sentences, IPP (imprisonment for public protection) prisoners, and those who have been recalled and who are over tariff or within three years of their release date.

It aims to provide a structured, supportive community to help prisoners develop the skills and confidence needed to complete their sentence and prepare for life in the community.

- Phase 1/Foundational Development: an eight-week, full-time, classroom-based programme, delivered by CFO wing facilitators, covering essential topics such as independent living skills, money management, mental health and wellbeing, communication and relationships, goal setting and future planning

It is also hoped that the programme will be extended to deliver workshops that help men understand the parole process, what to expect, and how to engage with confidence and clarity.

- Phase 2/Rebuilding Community Connection: prisoners automatically proceed into Phase 2 on completion of Phase 1. This phase focuses on reconnecting individuals with community life, both inside and outside the prison. For many, community is something they've been disconnected from for years, or never truly experienced in a positive way.

At the end of Phase 2, CFO staff will complete a formal document confirming the prisoner's participation and successful completion of the programme, highlighting the individual's progress, and engagement, which supports future release planning.

The CFO wing also works with the resettlement team (see **§Error! Reference source not found.**), offering 'Through the Gate' support to men across the prison who are within 10 weeks of release, regardless of sentence type.

It is clearly too early to make a judgement, but we believe that the initiative is to be welcomed, and we hope that the programmes will assist all the prisoners – but

especially the IPP prisoners (see §7.6) and 'lifers', as they secure their release, whether via the parole process or otherwise.

7.6 IPP prisoners

7.6.1 Background

In our previous report, we highlighted the continued detention of prisoners serving indeterminate sentenced for public protection (IPP) long after they have served the tariffs that represent the punitive part of their sentences, which we viewed as inhumane. We recommended that:

- IPP prisoners receive all the support they need to become ready for release;
- the conditions for such release be clear and objective; and
- the burden of proof be reversed, with release not conditional on their being able to demonstrate that they are highly unlikely to be a danger.

The continued detention of IPP prisoners long after they have served the punitive part of their sentence (their 'tariff') poses serious ethical problems for the criminal justice system, if not society as a whole. Essentially, these prisoners are being confined in prison, not because of the crimes they have committed - they have served the time they were given for these - but in order to prevent them from committing further crimes in future. To get released, they effectively have to prove to the parole board that they pose no future risk.

7.6.2 Update

At first glance, the fact that only 17 of the 32 IPP prisoners who were at The Mount in March 2024 are still there would be viewed as a good thing, but in reality:

- Of the 15 prisoners that left The Mount, 8 were released, though one of these was recalled less than six months later leaving 7 in the community. Of the eight that were transferred out, 1 went to an open prison, only to abscond, and is now at HMP Pentonville, whilst the remaining 7 were transferred to other prisons,
- A total of 14 IPP prisoners have been transferred to The Mount, including two who have been in prison since 2012 and have never been released on licence; three who have been released and recalled on four occasion; two who have been through the same process on five occasions; and one who has been released and recalled eight times since being sentenced to 10 months in 2007.

These examples alone warrant further examination and are considered further below.

Summary

We remain of the view that the treatment of IPP prisoners as a whole is inhumane and that a change to the system is overdue. We can see no reason why the Government should not accept the recommendation of the House of Commons Justice Committee in 2023 that IPP prisoners be re-sentenced.

But this would only be a start, as many of the issues, above, relating to preparation for release and support once in the community would still require attention. It is also

unarguable that the longer the system remains as is, the worse the situation will become, as IPP prisoners become yet more institutionalised, the ties with their friends and family become more strained and the chances of their losing any residual hope grow by the day.

7.7 Family contact

The charity, Prisoner Advice and Care Trust (PACT), provides support to prisoners and their families. It is responsible for organising family days (these bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings). They seek to restore lost family contacts and to support isolated prisoners.

Family days, days for children who have special needs and a day for prisoners whose partners are pregnant or have children under three years old have been organised. Family days are restricted to 15 families, as the smaller number allows the visit to be more informal.

PACT runs Roald Dahl mornings once a month on a Monday between 9:30am and 11am. Any prisoner can attend, provided they have at least one child booked into the visit. Someone reads a Roald Dahl story to the group and the child gets to go home with a copy of the book.

There are nine visit sessions a week: two each on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, and one each on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Twenty-eight prisoners are allowed visits at any time.

Prisoners are allowed three adults over 18 years old and three children. Family days allow two adults and any number of children.

Lifers and IPP prisoners have their own family day. Visits are booked digitally. The phone is open two hours a day; alternatively, visitors can go to the Government website, where they can choose three dates.

Family visits for prisoners on the enhanced (top) level of the incentives scheme last four hours and can make a significant difference to the mental wellbeing of prisoners. They only take place once a month, leading to a long waiting list. We would like to see these visits occurring two or three times a month and believe this would provide a significant incentive for prisoners, who would not wish to put their enhanced status (and the visits) at risk, though we understand that this might require a change in policy, as we are told that it is against policy to make attendance at a Family Day dependent on IEP status.

Storybook Dads takes place in the library every two months. This gives the prisoners the opportunity to record a story onto a CD. Recently, it has been possible to video the reading.

There is a safer custody portal, where families can share concerns about a prisoner online. This is sent to the safer custody team, which will advise the caller of the correct source of information.

Prisoners can contact their family using their in-cell phones. The prison runs a Family Links Course. This aims to break the cycle of offending by focusing on the importance of families and implementing change for the better.

7.8 Resettlement planning

From the Board's observations, the prison offers good support to prisoners within the 12 weeks of release. Prisoners are supported with ID and right to work documents, such as a driving licence, a bank account, birth certificates and national insurance documents. They can then approach the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

There is also a weekly pre-release clinic, which prisoners attend when they are 6-8 weeks from release. The organisations that attend the clinic include:

- Department for Work and Pensions.
- Banking and ID.
- Housing.
- Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).
- Prison Employment Lead (PEL).
- Forward Trust,
- Offender Management Unit.
- Resettlement Housing.

The Forward Trust is there for continuing support with substance abuse whilst Seetec, a commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) provider, offers support regarding accommodation and housing issues. The establishment is now at 92% of prisoners being housed on release.

There are now several new opportunities: Railtrack training, land management, CV writing, mock interviews, employment events and mentoring events. The prison also arranges interviews on Teams, so prisoners have job offers on release and, we are told, has numerous employers conducting face-to-face interviews with prisoners.

The work of the IMB

8. Monitoring involvement

The IMB monitoring visits consist of one member on duty every week, including observing any CSU reviews, and two members dealing with applications weekly. Rule 45 (GOoD – Good Order or Discipline) reviews in the CSU have been observed in person on all but a few occasions.

Two members of the Board resigned.

Recruitment has been patchy, with a common complaint to the IMB Secretariat being that it takes a long time and can be opaque. It can also be frustrating when a new candidate, having successfully passed through the IMB selection process, is then placed in a 'holding pattern', often for many weeks (or, indeed, months) whilst their security clearance is confirmed within the Ministry of Justice.

8.1 Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members ¹⁸	18
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11
Total number of visits to the establishment	417
Total number of segregation reviews monitored	85

18. This number is historic and does not, we believe, reflect the underlying need. In our view the ideal number would be 13, allowing each member to undertake 4 rotas and 8 Applications per annum.

8.2 Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24			2024/25	
		Paper	0800	Paper	0800	Paper	0800	In Person	Paper	In Person
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	8	10	3	6	3	-	-	6	1
B	Discipline, including adjudications, Incentives, warnings and reviews, sanctions	3	6	7	7	3		1	14	2
C	Equality	11	8	1	-	1	-	-	2	-
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library & time out of cell	7	7	10	10	1	1	1	9	2
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	4	9	3	8	6	-	-	17	-
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	1	13	5	0	2	2	4	10	3
F	Food and kitchens	6	2	1	2	2	1	-	1	-
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	32	46	19	23	38	2	4	41	4
H1	Property within this establishment	45	46	39	12	46	1	2	17	2
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	8	25	19	1	32	1	2	63	6
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	4	21	1	5	7	3	-	1	1
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release, re- categorisation	21	51	35	27	50	5	5	45	15
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	5	12	8	18	17	-	-	30	3
K	Transfers	2	12	6	4	3	1	4	5	4
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	109	27	29	21	83	8	1	36	6
Total applications per category		266	295	186	144	294	25	24	297	49
Total number of applications		561		330		343			346	

Notes 1. The 0800 number ceased operation as of 1 July 2023.

2. In-person approaches resulting in an application previously not recorded separately.

The number of applications received by the IMB can vary dramatically but averages at 6.7 per week (compared with 10.7 in 2021-2022), showing the progress being made. There is no apparent pattern or trend to the month-to-month variation.

Data

Little, if anything, has changed during the year, so we simply restate the principal findings from 2023-2024.

- The issues with data collection are not due to any lack of willingness by staff to assist us, but in the way that key information is recorded and stored.
- Much of the information we needed had to be manually extracted from the 12 monthly reports that are prepared by the SMT and added together; each monthly summary was, itself, created by reference to the daily briefing sheets, meaning that 365 separate data points had to be physically drawn out to produce each single outcome.
- It was impossible [for us] to show the operational capacity of The Mount, after allowing for cells that were out of use, and track the number of prisoners on the roll to see how full the prison was over the course of the 12 months under review. This would have required 1,095 manual entries.
- The recording of complaints - on a single spreadsheet - is barely fit for purpose, notwithstanding the generally diligent and professional approach of the team that has to use it. Even the inclusion of simple filtering does not facilitate more than the most basic analysis, and errors and omissions may not get picked up.
- The daily briefing sheet, the key operational document informing senior management of events in the previous 24 hours and alerting them to potential issues in the prison, is created overnight by the night orderly officer. According to one of them, it is *'a bit of a nightmare' and 'just one of many checks and checklists we need to do on nights...[with] new stuff added on a weekly basis.'* It takes *'a good 60 to 90 minutes a night'*, requiring information to be extracted from various systems, none of which appears to be linked in any way.

The creation of such a data platform across HMPPS is necessary and, indeed, vital if prisons such as The Mount are to be able to operate as efficiently and effectively as they should. Properly designed, this platform would, in the Board's opinion:

- ensure that the data is collected, kept and used securely, efficiently and cost-effectively;
- remove many of the mundane tasks of data entry, increasing productivity and reducing inputting errors;
- facilitate the efficient extraction of data, whether for one-off matters or for repeated/longer-term studies; and
- above all, allow the senior management of prisons, including The Mount, and indeed, HMPPS, more generally, to better understand what is going on in the prisons from relevant data and to allow them to make decisions and take actions based on information that is timelier and more accurate and where trends can more easily be identified and understood.



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