



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

**For reporting year  
1 May 2024 to 30 April 2025**

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## **Introductory sections 1 – 3**

### **1. Statutory role of the IMB**

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

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

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

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

## 2. Description of the establishment

HMP/YOI Downview is a women's closed prison (HMP) and young offender institution (YOI) in Surrey, for sentenced prisoners aged 18 and over, which does not serve the courts. (A closed prison is a secure facility, characterised by high security measures, including perimeter fences and controlled access, to prevent escape.) The prison had an operational capacity of 356<sup>1</sup> (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) for the reporting period, including a capacity of 16 on one wing dedicated to transgender prisoners.

### Background/overview

- Our previous report highlighted the significant impact that population pressure had on all operations of the prison. This year, the prison did not have the peaks in population as in the previous year, and retained more headroom in capacity throughout the period. There was, however, a similar churn of prisoners<sup>2</sup> to last year, which can have a destabilising effect on operations. As the population increased throughout early (spring) 2025, we also saw a trend of increased violence, self-harm incidents and (latterly) use of force.
- Staffing levels in the prison remained healthy throughout the year, much of the time at full target or above target. The number of officers with less than one year's service was 18% by the end of our reporting period<sup>3</sup>.
- Prisoners are able to submit applications (written representations) to the Independent Monitoring Board to raise issues within the prison that have not been resolved by prison staff. Applications from prisoners to the Board totalled **200** in 2022-23, **331** in 2023-24 and, in this reporting period, **481**. This is an increase of 140% over two years<sup>4</sup>. The Board noted with concern that applications to the Board were often submitted to resolve basic operational issues, which could have been dealt with by wing staff or referred to other departments by wing staff. We were made aware that staff, prisoners and others operating in the prison (such as third sector organisations) routinely advised prisoners to submit an application to the Board as the most effective way to get their issues resolved. Whilst it is reassuring that prisoners and others appear to have confidence in the Board's ability to resolve their problems<sup>5</sup>, it could be viewed as symptomatic of a wider issue in the prison.
- In prison, the ability to resolve issues is often totally reliant on prison staff<sup>6</sup>. Prisoners are restricted by not being able to move easily around the prison to access staff and also by the lack of access to technology. Prisoners should be able to have faith in their landing officers, key workers and the prison's own complaints system to follow up on everyday issues. Prisoners should not have to

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

<sup>2</sup> Average population 319 in this period, compared to 316 in the last period.

<sup>3</sup> Decreased from 25%, as in our previous annual report.

<sup>4</sup> HMP Send is most often used as a comparator prison by Downview, although with a smaller population of 255. By way of comparison, applications to the HMP Send Board for their last reporting period were 270 in total, with a similar number of visits by members of the Board.

<sup>5</sup> One prisoner told us: *"With you [the Board] on our side, things get done."*

<sup>6</sup> [https://hmiprisons.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmipris\\_reports/easier-said-than-done-resolving-prisoner-requests/](https://hmiprisons.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmipris_reports/easier-said-than-done-resolving-prisoner-requests/)

resort routinely to an external scrutiny mechanism such as the IMB for resolution of their requests<sup>7</sup>. We monitored significant delays in the resolution of basic issues (such as, for example, clean bedding, access to property, induction processes, activity allocations). We often saw a build-up of frustration from prisoners, which in some cases led to challenging behaviour and self-harm. Prisoners often reported to us that certain staff focused on the prisoners who shouted the loudest.

- We saw a **580%** rise in applications relating to prisoners' finances, at a time when prisoners faced significant difficulties in getting answers to their queries from the prison's business hub<sup>8</sup>. This was acknowledged as having a knock-on effect on security in the prison, as some prisoners got into debt as a result of lack of funds.
- Some staff appeared to lack basic knowledge or experience in dealing with prisoners' queries and complaints. We monitored one scenario where a prisoner had asked staff whether a threatened sanction had materialised on their record, with no response. We were told by an officer that the prisoner was required to submit a subject access request to the prison to get the information - a lengthy and unnecessary procedure and one which most prisoners wouldn't understand how to process<sup>9 10</sup>.
- We regularly monitored many examples of effective officers, but this was inconsistent across the prison. We also saw evidence of positive and trusting relationships developed with conscientious officers, who took the time to respond to and engage with prisoners. We queried whether enough staff have had training of procedural justice methodology, which HMPPS states leads to more positive outcomes for prisoners in resolving complaints<sup>11</sup>.
- By way of an example of unresolved operational issues, we had various prisoners repeatedly contacting the Board regarding the lack of clean bedding on a particular wing. Prisoners told us that they had constantly asked various wing officers, but with no resolution or apparent commitment to resolve the issue. We were told to raise the issue with a particular officer who, in the eyes of prisoners, was trustworthy and responsive. The officer promptly responded, saying there was a shortage of clean bedding and proactively grasped the wider issue of the problem in the supply chain for the clean bedding. This was a clear example, amongst many, of certain officers having the reputation of "getting things done" and being trusted, as a result, by prisoners. This reputation, however, inevitably increased the effective officers' workloads and allowed less responsive officers to avoid accountability. Prisoners reported to us that they quickly learnt which officers to approach to get their issues resolved, which echoed the Board's own experience. Some prisoners have consciously taken steps to try to manage their expectations about resolution from officers: one talked about how she tried to stay calm when basic requirements didn't go to plan (for example, menu selection when located in the care and separation unit, where prisoners are

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<sup>7</sup> PSI 75/2011 Residential Services: "Effective application procedures must be in place, be easy to access, easy to use and provide a timely response".

<sup>8</sup> Which is responsible for processing prisoner's monies, amongst a wide variety of other administrative issues.

<sup>9</sup> We contacted a more senior officer on the wing and were able to get the information on the prisoner's behalf.

<sup>10</sup> We also saw the formal subject access request process being requested by the Security department when a prisoner had queries about why they were not entitled to a family visit.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prisoner-and-staff-perceptions-of-procedural-justice-in-english-and-welsh-prisons>

segregated) saying, *“If I was going to complain about each thing, I would be constantly writing complaints and then it would all build up and become too much...”*.

- One of the prison’s five key priorities for 2024-2025 was cited as to *“develop a more positive culture”*. Despite positive staffing numbers throughout the reporting period, we often saw basic operational processes not being followed by staff<sup>12</sup>, many of which impacted on outcomes for prisoners. In July 2024, the prison was selected for additional support as the first “early adopter prison” for the Enable Programme. This included significant support and investment for the prison, with seven existing staff allocated to it. The objective was to support *“the delivery of new initiatives to improve the capability and confidence of [the] workforce...”* *“... at the forefront of future workforce transformation”* and also to promote staff wellbeing. There was a regular prison lockdown for one day each month from January 2025 to train staff in various elements of jail craft and operational processes. We look forward to monitoring outcomes from the Enable Programme and its impact on the operation of the prison. More experienced staff voiced their concerns to the Board regarding the elementary nature of staff training sessions generally: one general staff training session (following a death in custody) focused on how staff should unlock prisoners in the mornings with the use of a greeting and an emphasis on checks that the prisoners were still alive.
- It is the view of the Board that meeting management across various functions continued to be an issue, despite ongoing efforts of the Deputy Governor to instill some rigour and process. There were many examples of poor attendance<sup>13</sup> and a lack of meaningful action planning and follow-up (including significantly delayed minutes<sup>14</sup>), which hampered positive outcomes for prisoners.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, inter alia, individual examples that the Board has monitored: a member of security staff forgetting to report suspected serious criminal activity in the prison to the police (which we were told was reported some months later but we have not been provided with evidence of that); a roll reconciliation in January 2025, where staff had given a roll of four prisoners – the correct roll was seven prisoners – a standfast roll took two hours, with three separate counts, to process the correct number; basic operational information being incorrect or routinely not distributed; health and safety guidance not followed; roll checks being carried out incorrectly; welfare checks not carried out; incorrect timing records provided by staff for an emergency visit by the Fire Service; limited access to clean bedding (not enough sets available); prisoners being unlocked incorrectly; a lack of available forms as required by prisoners on wings; prisoners not being located correctly and lack of awareness of PEEPs on the landing; parcels for prisoners going missing when sent in; first aid kits being incomplete; a missing risk assessment for a volatile prisoner to work in hairdressing with sharp implements; closed visits facility not in working order for visits; transgender boards delayed for lack of the required information or not scheduled as required; a delay of two months for a prisoner to have a telephone number approved; prisoners being routinely brought late to video social visits, resulting in reduced visit time; failure to adequately stock the prison shop.

<sup>13</sup> For example, 5 out of the 13 required participants attended a quality improvement group meeting for education, work and skills in March 2025. 13 out of 26 expected participants attended the SHRDMM meeting in April 2025, with a significant number of actions remaining open.

<sup>14</sup> The only meeting we monitored that produced minutes regularly on time was the safety intervention meeting.

### **3. Key points**

#### **3.1 Main findings**

##### **Fair and humane treatment**

- We continued to observe numerous acutely mentally unwell prisoners segregated in the care and separation unit (CSU), some of whom were awaiting to be transferred to a psychiatric facility (5.2). The prison has no choice but to locate such prisoners in the CSU, for their own and others' safety, but it is not an appropriate location. CSU staff exhibit extraordinary patience, professionalism and compassion, but they are not trained to support such unwell prisoners.
- As in previous years, we have seen a significant number of applications relating to property being lost or delayed when prisoners are transferred to Downview from other prisons (5.6).
- Often, prisoners' basic requirements are not dealt with in a timely and proactive way by staff (see above).
- Population pressure cited across the prison estate continues to impact on prisoners' outcomes. For example, safety in the prison, timely healthcare appointments and efficient daily medication distribution, the availability of purposeful activity, release on temporary licence (ROTL) and access to family support networks (see references throughout).

##### **Health and wellbeing**

- Acutely mentally unwell prisoners are still waiting far too long for transfer to secure psychiatric units following assessment and referral (6.1).
- A number of prisoners were transferred to Downview from other prisons who were not in a safe or stable condition for transfer (6.1).
- Limited dementia care is provided at Downview, but there remain challenges in accessing memory assessments for those who need a dementia diagnosis in order to facilitate them receiving relevant treatment and support (6.1).

##### **Progression and resettlement**

- The number of prisoners working on release on temporary licence (ROTL) from the prison has, again, remained alarmingly low. The lack of clarity regarding ROTL opportunities at the prison, which we reported on last year, has continued. Most prisoners eligible for open conditions are now transferred to HMP/YOI East Sutton Park. This has had an impact on outcomes for transferred and remaining prisoners at Downview and also on the sustainability of industry partners in the prison who provide ROTL opportunities (7.2, 7.3).
- We saw effective work from the prison's reducing reoffending team in securing post-release employment for prisoners (7.2).
- The impact on the workload of the offender management unit (OMU) in sentence recalculations for the SDS40 (standard determinate sentences) early release scheme (which allows eligible prisoners to be released after serving 40% of their sentence, rather than the usual 50%) and revised home detention curfew (HDC) scheme was significant. We will continue to monitor this impact for future early release schemes (7.3).
- There has been an ongoing focus on recording and increasing attendance at education and activities, but attendance remains variable (7.1).

## 3.2 Main areas for development

### TO THE MINISTER

- Acutely mentally unwell prisoners continue to arrive at the prison. They often face long delays in transfer to secure psychiatric units, following assessment and referral (6.1). *How confident is the Minister that the statutory 28-day time limit for transfer from prison to hospital, envisaged by the Mental Health Bill, will be achievable, given the low number of suitable beds for female prisoners?*
- Despite acknowledgement by the Ministry of Justice that prisoners who have experienced ROTL have better outcomes, the prison has only a very small number of prisoners accessing ROTL. This was described by HMPPS in the response to our previous annual report as a “*significant reduction... due to capacity pressures*”. This seems to be a waste of the excellent employment links at the prison and an example of cited population pressure providing obstacles to progression (7.3). *The Minister’s view on this is welcomed.*
- Last year, the Minister provided reassurance to the Board in the response to our previous annual report that allocation decisions for transgender prisoners would be made “*in the quickest time possible to reduce the anxiety and uncertainty experienced whilst they await the outcome*”. However, we have, again, seen a significant delay in a prisoner’s allocation by the Lord Chancellor (7.3). *Does the Minister agree that this delay, regarding the location of a transgender prisoner, was unfair and inhumane?* It appears to the Board that the prisoner is being caught in the crossfire of a politically sensitive issue.
- We have, again, seen that population pressure impacts significantly on prisoners’ outcomes. These include increased self-harm and violence, healthcare pressures, a decrease in working ROTL opportunities and prisoners being transferred in a seemingly random fashion across the estate, away from families and other support networks. *The Board is hopeful of the outcomes from the Sentencing Review and the Women’s Justice Board in better managing the population in the female estate. The Minister’s view on this is welcomed.*

### TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- There is no mention of ROTL in the Women’s Group Deliverables for 2025-2026<sup>15</sup>. There were only three prisoners accessing working ROTL from the prison as of the end of our reporting period. This seems to be a waste of the excellent work by the prison employment lead, industries and community engagement manager, and the Employment Advisory Board in securing training partners and employment links at the prison (7.3). *We understand that HMP/YOI East Sutton Park may need to be filled up, but this should not necessarily mean that working ROTL opportunities cannot also develop further at Downview, with its opportunities and local transport links.*
- The HMPPS Prisoners’ Property Policy Framework<sup>16</sup> states: “*How HMPPS looks after prisoners’ possessions may be symbolic of how we look after the people in our care*”. We continue to see extremely high levels of property loss for prisoners when transferring in from other prisons (5.6). The much-heralded Prisoners’ Property Policy Framework appears to have had no impact in managing the issue. The process remains labour-intensive and paper-based, and there is no system at Downview for recording how property loss and delay is followed up

<sup>15</sup> HM Prison and Probation Service Women’s Group Delivery Plan 2025-26.

<sup>16</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/682aeb6d02662c6f8ec243de/prisoner-property-pf.pdf>



with other prisons. Much of the operational performance of a prison is audited and managed by various metrics and key performance indicators, yet there is no attempt to hold prisons accountable for property management. It is unconscionable that, in 2025, HMPPS has not been able to create or manage a system that takes the transfer of prisoners' belongings seriously. *How does HMPPS intend to improve this dire situation? It is a disgrace.*

- We have, again, seen examples of prisoners who were transferred to Downview from prisons across the country, often with just a few weeks to serve and with apparently no consideration of family networks (4.1, 7.4). We were informed by HMPPS in the response to our previous annual report that such transfers were a necessary response to cited population pressure (*"every bed matters"*). These transfers are, however, entirely at odds with HMPPS' own research<sup>17</sup> regarding the importance of family ties as a significant factor in rehabilitation. *Given that population pressure appears likely to continue in the women's estate for the foreseeable future, how can prisoner moves be managed in a more compassionate and rehabilitative way?*

## **TO THE GOVERNOR**

- Can the Governor please comment on the issues raised earlier in this report regarding the effectiveness of certain staff in resolving prisoners' basic issues, and on operational oversight in the prison generally?
- The Board is hopeful that the latest recent positive refresh of the prisoner induction process receives the staff support it needs for ongoing implementation (4.1).
- How is it expected that the ongoing mixed messages regarding the future viability of working ROTL at the prison will be resolved? (7.3)
- The Board hopes that the successful HMPPS audit carried out in the reporting year may be a catalyst for more ambition and creativity with family engagement at Downview. How does the prison intend to sustain the focus on families and significant others (7.4)?
- Which measures recently utilised to encourage and record attendance at purposeful activity are seen as effective and will be retained going forward (7.3)?
- Gladragz (the prison shop) is a valuable resource for prisoners. It would be a positive development if it could be adequately stocked and managed (5.1).
- Management of, and attendance at, some meetings by staff at times remains poor. Will the significant investment and support from the Enable Programme also provide encouragement to staff in this area?
- Can the Governor comment on the lack of enhanced gate security in the prison (4.5)?

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-review-places-family-ties-at-the-heart-of-prison-reform>

## Evidence sections 4 – 7

### 4. Safety

- A new safety strategy was issued in October 2024. Despite repeated requests by the Board to Downview's head of safer prisons for an update on overall implementation, this information was not forthcoming. We are, therefore, not aware if any progress has been made against the prison's action plan for the strategy.
- The relatively new<sup>18</sup> safety, security, drug and harm reduction meeting is under review. Although this meeting combines all aspects of security and safety, it appears difficult to get the necessary staff together. This is presumably because of shift patterns, leave, sickness absence and other prison requirements. As a result, decisions and actions are not guaranteed to be carried out. While these difficulties are understood, this multidisciplinary discussion has been seen by the Board as a useful monitoring tool, despite its inconsistencies.
- A poorly performing<sup>19</sup> incident reporting systems audit in summer 2024 highlighted certain inconsistencies with safety metrics. This area remained under focus, with upskilling delivered later in the year. The audit was repeated in April 2025 and received a 'Substantial/Green' rating. The process of collating accurate data from the safer custody team for this annual report was confusing. We have been made aware that the raw data we obtain from safer custody does not present the final iteration of safer custody data. Processes of review and correction by the prison occur throughout this period (a process referred to as "data cleansing"). It also appears that data supplied to the Board for the purposes of this report varied, depending on which individual source it came from within the prison. The safety figures presented in this report are provided from the HMPPS Safety Diagnostic Tool.
- A high number of intimate relationships between prisoners were recorded. These can provide flashpoints for challenging behaviour and violence in the event of breakdown<sup>20</sup>. We observed confusion by staff regarding implementation of the guidance in relation to such relationships<sup>21</sup>. The weekly safety intervention meeting included relationships of note on its agenda<sup>22</sup>, but it was acknowledged that the meeting mostly ran out of time to discuss them due to the high number of prisoners<sup>23</sup>.

#### 4.1 Reception and induction

- By the start of 2025, the induction timetable for new arrivals was described as "disjointed"<sup>24</sup> from its previous refresh in 2023. Prisoners and certain staff didn't seem to know what was in place and, in the words of a prisoner "*things seemed*

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<sup>18</sup> As of early 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Amber/red rating.

<sup>20</sup> "*Relationships are identified as a key driver behind recent violence*": SHDHRMM meeting, November 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Healthy Relationships Policy, July 2025

<sup>22</sup> As of the end of the reporting period, 16 couples.

<sup>23</sup> "*Relationships are not being discussed as much in SIM meetings because the list has become unmanageable*": SHDHRMM meeting November 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Quality Improvement Group (QIG) minutes December 2024: "*Currently disjointed approach to induction*".

*to happen regardless of the timetable, we have no explanation of when”*<sup>25</sup>. At the end of the reporting period, another refresh of the timetable and the passport system (whereby prisoners were encouraged to sign off induction activity) took place, with two staff members moved off detail to manage it. The wing underwent a painting refresh in April 2025, with warmer colours used. The initial weeks at a new establishment are important for prisoners. The Board hopes that this latest iteration of the induction process will be properly embedded and that designated staff will remain accountable for ensuring it is functional.

- Whilst largely outside the control of the prison, in the first part of 2025, almost a quarter of prisoners were transferred to Downview on a Friday afternoon (the vast majority from HMP Bronzefield). Reception is not operational later on a Friday afternoon, which means that prisoners arriving then receive skeleton induction support until Monday morning.
- Again, prisoners regularly commented on the impact of transfers to different prisons on various aspects of their lives. We received a high number of applications from prisoners on the induction wing. These related to, for example, delays with accessing phone PIN (personal identification number) credit or phone number approval (for calling family and friends), access to social visits, access to monies and allocation of purposeful activity. One prisoner said: *“You work your butt off to be enhanced [at a previous prison] and then you’re like a newbie again when you change prisons.”*
- Despite the significant impact of being transferred, we continued to see more prisoners arriving at the prison often far from their home area and with just a few weeks left to serve. Many transfers we saw appeared to make little sense for resettlement needs. We also saw prisoners who were transferred in a manner that, on face value, appeared to be lacking in compassion, often far away from family. One prisoner was transferred a significant distance from her elderly parents, who were unable to travel for visits. Another prisoner was transferred over 100 miles from her child, who has severe special needs. A prisoner was moved from another prison to Downview, with minimal time left on her sentence. Her family lived near her initial prison and had visited her there weekly. One prisoner at another prison attended the funeral of a parent and was told the following day that she was being moved to Downview. She reported to us that she found this incredibly difficult, as that was her *“day to start grieving”*.
- The prison’s Business Hub appeared to the Board to be inadequately staffed for much of the period. As from late 2024, it appeared incapable of functioning and was repeatedly closed for responses to staff and prisoner queries. During the reporting period, we saw a rise of **581%** in applications to the Board concerning prisoners’ finances. Some prisoners waited for over three weeks after arriving for their monies to be transferred from the sending prison. The early days in a new prison can be extremely stressful for prisoners, which can be heightened without their funds. It was also articulated as an issue by the security department, as some prisoners ended up getting into debt in this period whilst awaiting funds<sup>26</sup>. In early 2025, after repeated reporting of the issue by the Board over some time, we saw a highly effective staff member being put in charge of the transfer of funds process and the Board started to see an improvement in outcomes for prisoners.

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<sup>25</sup> *“Induction timetable is not being followed by some departments. Some of this is due to areas not realising when their time slot was on the timetable”*: QIG minutes, January 2025.

<sup>26</sup> *“A significant issue related to debt is believed to stem from the induction process, where delays in accessing funds and starting activities can occur”*: SDHRMM minutes, February 2025.

- The transfer of monies process appears particularly inefficient for transfers from HMPs Bronzefield and Peterborough (private prisons). Their financial systems are not compatible with Downview, which means that cheques need to be sent, rather than an automated bank transfer taking place. We monitored one situation where a prisoner was transferred from HMP Eastwood Park to Downview, with a night in HMP Bronzefield on the way. This then necessitated a cheque being sent from HMP Eastwood Park to HMP Bronzefield, with another cheque raised there for onward transmission to Downview. The process took almost a month for the prisoner's monies to be credited, despite the best efforts of a Downview staff member to expedite the situation.

## **4.2 Self-harm, deaths in custody**

- The number of self-harm incidents for the reporting period was significantly reduced to 728, from last year's total of 1,171.
- The total number of prisoners involved in self-harming incidents during this reporting period was 103. Cutting was the most common method, with razor blades and metallic objects also being used. For certain prisoners, we observed that their day-to-day frustrations (for example, responses to basic queries, lack of access to purposeful activity or lack of contact with their children) affected their ability to cope.
- The significant statistic is the number of self-harm incidents attributable to a very small number of prisoners who engaged in prolific self-harm. In July 2024, four prisoners were responsible for 27 of 42 self-harm incidents. In February 2025, one prisoner who engaged in prolific self-harm, was responsible for 28 of 66 incidents; in March 2025, three prisoners who engaged in prolific self-harm were responsible for 99 out of 123 incidents; in April 2025, five prisoners were responsible for 156 of 185 incidents. Five prisoners accounted for 60% of all self-harm incidents at the prison from July to September 2024. One prisoner self-harmed so repeatedly, often using paper staples, that she contracted MRSA - it was not clear how she was able to get repeated access to staples. The determined actions of this small number of prisoners has a huge impact on the self-harm data. Attempted strangulation, with items of clothing placed around the neck, is the chosen method for a number of prisoners, who may repeat this action multiple times during the day. One prisoner tied 14 ligatures in one day and 16 on another day. Three separate prisoners (over a total of 36 days, from November 2024 to the end of April 2025) were placed under constant watch supervision. This was with a member of the healthcare team or prison staff supervising a prisoner for their own safety on a 24/7 basis when in their cell or engaged in activities, with the prisoner ideally located in a specially designated cell for clearer vision. Concerns have been expressed by staff that prisoners who require constant watch have not always been located in the designated cell; resolution of this issue by the Governor is ongoing.
- *We are aware that a good deal of work is done with prisoners in an attempt to understand the reasons for these repeated actions and to put in place supportive plans, with a view to reducing them. We are also aware, however, that operational prison staff have neither the qualifications in, nor specialist training for, managing such acutely mentally unwell prisoners who clearly should not be held in prison.*

- The number of prisoners on an ACCT<sup>27</sup> remained broadly the same during the reporting year, ending the period at 5.6% of the population. We received reports that healthcare staff were asked to attend ACCT reviews on very short notice, which was sometimes not manageable. An estate-wide initiative mandated regular scrutiny of a sample of CCTV footage to provide quality assurance that the observations recorded in ACCT documents are, in fact, carried out. This was initiated in early 2025 for Downview, we were told at a planned rate of ten checks per month.
- There were two deaths in custody in the reporting year:
  - A prisoner died apparently of natural causes in an outside hospital in June 2024. She and her family were sensitively supported by one of the prison's family liaison officers (who received a Butler Trust Award in recognition of her work generally in this period).
  - A prisoner died overnight in the prison. The effect on the prison population was marked. Training regarding roll and welfare checks was arranged with all staff members over a number of sessions, as well as written training guidance provided<sup>28</sup>.
- The Listeners scheme (where prisoners are trained by the Samaritans to offer confidential emotional support to other prisoners) again experienced significant issues over the reporting period. This arose both internally (because of retention and recruitment) and also externally (with interrupted support from the Samaritans). 24-hour Listener support remained lacking as of the end of the reporting period.

### 4.3 Violence

- There were 30 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (compared with 26 in the previous year).
- There were 36 prisoner-on-staff assaults (compared with 48 in the previous period, with a higher population). There were ten assaults in April 2025.

### 4.4 Use of force

- There were 119 use of force incidents (a significant reduction compared with 310 in the previous year).
- There were a high number of use of force incidents at the beginning of the period (12 in May 2024) and from January 2025 (12 each month), rising to 23 in April 2025, which appeared to coincide with the rising population level. Many of these incidents related to the breaking up of arguments or fights between prisoners. Others were interventions to prevent prisoners self-harming. The remainder were caused by refusals to comply with an order, often resulting in removal to the care and separation unit (segregated conditions). One prisoner, in particular, was the reason for a number of such interventions, requiring a number of staff to control the situation (on several occasions, in full control and restraint equipment, for their protection).

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<sup>27</sup> Assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) is the care planning process for prisoners identified as being at risk of suicide or self-harm.

<sup>28</sup> "Numerous briefings have been conducted on the importance of roll checks, ensuring prisoners are alive, obtaining a verbal response, and emphasizing that ACCT checks must never be falsified. CCTV checks are now being carried out to ensure this is being done" - SDHRMM minutes April 2025.

- A member of the Board views the body-worn video camera (BWVC) footage for the majority of the use of force meetings and reports that the discussion following the footage is generally analytical, perceptive and fair, with a view to finding learning points for the staff. Unfortunately, the follow-through for learning or actions is not always reported, or the delay for it is such that the value is questionable. As highlighted above, the shift system/other absences often prevent the relevant people from being in the room at the subsequent meeting. It is also the case that some staff are more proactive than others at following through.
- Concerns have been expressed by the prison that BWVCs were not turned on as much as required. In April 2025, for example, they were activated for only 44% of relevant incidents.

#### **4.5 Preventing illicit items**

- The rising number of illicit drugs brought into the prison in the reporting period was of concern to the security department, with the first appearance of synthetic opioids amongst them in early 2025. There was a reported rise also in early 2025 in 'street drugs' (e.g. spice, heroin and cannabis) in the prison, with an impact on debt and violence<sup>29</sup>.
- There is no routine enhanced security on the gate for visitors or staff. It is notable that most of the Board's members (many of whom have been on the Board at Downview in excess of seven years and who all visit the prison regularly) have not been searched on entering the prison.
- People attending for social visits often commented on the relaxed searching process<sup>30</sup> for visitors, compared with other prisons they had visited (at the same time as the prison reiterated their concerns about drugs coming in via family visits).

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<sup>29</sup> SHDRMM minutes – February 2025: *"There has been a rise in 'street drugs' (e.g. spice, heroin and cannabis) in the prison, possibly driving recent debt and violence."*

<sup>30</sup> Although we often monitored high levels of staffing in the visits hall observing visitors; for example, seven staff for nine visitors in April 2025.

## 5. Fair and humane treatment

### 5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food, post

- The resettlement wing is the only accommodation block made of wood. A non-standard fire survey was completed in February 2023 in which a number of fire-stopping issues were identified for the wing. A visit from a team from the Ministry of Justice took place in September 2024 to assess if required works could be carried out by the in-house facilities management provider, given challenges with funding otherwise. Some works have taken place, but the remainder have been paused, pending additional funding.
- The prisoners' forum stopped operating in early 2025<sup>31</sup> and was replaced by six specialist prisoner peers. Each of these peers represents a wing and also works closely with one of the prison departments to improve understanding, raise awareness of issues, and support initiatives within the prison. The Board is hopeful that the peers will resolve some of the low-level queries from prisoners which the Board receives.
- The prison has a shop in the reception area (Gladragz). It provides donated clothes, at no charge, for prisoners, purchased items for sale at modest prices and cosmetic items not available on the canteen system. Again, in this period, access to stock has proved problematic for various reasons. Routine procurement has been interrupted by staff changes and the purchasing method is clumsy and barely fit for purpose<sup>32</sup> in the Board's view. Prisoners find it difficult to access the shop, with waiting times for an appointment reaching four weeks. Supplies of makeup have been especially erratic. This resource is important to prisoners and when it functions poorly it affects their wellbeing.
- Overall, the standard of food remains very good, although we had some comments from prisoners about smaller portion size in the latter part of the reporting period. This likely relates to poor portion control training and supervision at the servery.
- Eight of the 21 applications received by the Board about the kitchen related to special diets. As of the end of the reporting period, there were 21 prisoners with individual dietary requirements arising from health issues and five receiving special food due to mental health recommendations. The Board observed that it was frequently challenging for the kitchen to manage prisoners' dietary expectations within budget, despite their best efforts.
- The environmental health officer made recommendations some time ago that services running down the middle of the kitchen should be boxed in as they were difficult to clean. This work caused considerable upheaval but was completed during the year. The kitchen has retained its five-star rating. (There has been an ongoing situation with the large walk-in freezer requiring repair due to health and safety issues; however, a solution appeared imminent as of the end of the reporting period).

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<sup>31</sup> At the last forum meeting, there were three prisoners and five staff. Over the reporting period, attendance by prisoners and senior staff was poor. As a result, actions arising from the meetings were minimal and many issues raised were not resolved.

<sup>32</sup> An order purchased from Asda included aerosol shaving foam and face cream in glass jars; both of which are not permitted in the prison and had to be returned. Slippers were also purchased at £12 each, outside of prisoners' spending power compared with the previous ones sourced for £4, and also not fire-retardant. A large amount of clothing purchased was oversized men's tops and deemed unsuitable.

- Last year, we reported our concerns regarding rule 39<sup>33</sup> breaches in the prison. There was a rule 39 breach late in 2024. Failings in the process were acknowledged, and we were assured by the head of operations that there would be guidance and support provided to staff in the mail room.
- The Board understands the important role of the security department in the prison and that intelligence decision-making often cannot be shared with prisoners. However, we continue to have ongoing concerns regarding a perceived failure by relevant staff to appropriately communicate with prisoners when managing certain individual outcomes arising from security intelligence. We monitored various situations, ranging from prisoners being removed from an enhanced wing to a prisoner remaining in the CSU without charge for a month. The practice we saw of staff not providing appropriate information to prisoners appears to contradict the HMPPS emphasis on procedural justice methodology<sup>34</sup>. This can lead to difficult situations for staff to manage on an ongoing basis and poorer outcomes for prisoners.

## 5.2 Segregation

- A total of 20 of the prisoners located in the care and separation unit (CSU) were on ACCTs during their stay (compared with 18 last year).
- Five prisoners were held for more than 42 days in the CSU (the limit allowed without external HMPPS authorisation) during the reporting period (compared with seven in the previous reporting period). One prisoner with a lengthy stay in the CSU was in custody for a pattern of persistent shoplifting, for which she was convicted of burglary in *“a new approach being taken to prosecute prolific shoplifters”* (in the words of her local police force). She spent a total of 79 days in the CSU from the start of 2025 until the end of April.
- Whilst in the CSU, the majority of prisoners are kept in their cells for 23 hours each day (although a few are allowed to access parts of the regime outside of the CSU). The standard protocol for unlocking prisoners in the unit is a minimum of two officers.
- As in previous years, we saw many prisoners arriving at the prison who were acutely mentally unwell. The prison has little choice but to house many of such prisoners in the CSU, for their own safety and for that of other prisoners and staff. It is more difficult to access mental healthcare support and other interventions whilst in the CSU, due to the safety requirements of multiple-officer unlock and sometimes requiring staff to use full personal protective equipment<sup>35</sup>. Our observation is that the mental health of many prisoners appears to deteriorate as a result of their stay in segregation.
- We also monitored the significant impact on prisoners who were not acutely mentally unwell who were housed in the unit and faced with the often 24/7 noise and demands of the other unwell prisoners. One prisoner, who was successfully managing her own mental health prior to her stay in the CSU, described the experience as *“triggering”* and clearly declined as a result<sup>36</sup>.
- We can cite many distressing examples from our monitoring of prisoners in the CSU. For example, as one of very many, here is an extract from the prison’s

<sup>33</sup> Rule 39 of the Prison Rules 1999 states that any correspondence between a prisoner and their legal adviser or a court may not be opened, read or stopped.

<sup>34</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c3f11a9e5274a6e40f38f83/prisoner-staff-perceptions-procedural-justice-research.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Including shields, helmets and other protective equipment.

<sup>36</sup> After a few days, staff kindly moved her on to a quieter spot of the CSU.



daily operational record: *“At 03:20 Miss X was not visible for her check. [various officers] entered the cell. Miss X was naked and informed us she had ‘thrown piss in her own face and eyes’. She was extremely distressed and hysterically crying - she was spoken to for some time when she became more coherent but quickly changed to presenting as confused and very agitated. She was offered some soap to clean in the sink with.”* We also monitored a situation of an acutely mentally unwell prisoner being regularly located from normal location to the CSU for her own safety, because her behaviour was so distressing to fellow prisoners, some of whom reacted aggressively towards her<sup>37</sup>.

*CSU staff are not trained to treat or support severe psychiatric cases. Our observation firmly remains that the CSU staff display extraordinary resilience, patience, professionalism and compassion for the prisoners in their care, whilst working in extraordinarily challenging conditions.*

### 5.3 Key workers, staffing

- The delivery of the key worker scheme has, again, been below target and the quality of entries has also been a focus for staff development. The average of sessions delivered for this reporting period was 39.99% (an increase, however, from 33.18% in the previous period). At times, we saw less than half the day’s target completed<sup>38</sup>. Our monitoring demonstrated that when relationships with key workers are effective and meetings are regular, they are viewed extremely positively by prisoners.
- Staffing levels have remained broadly at, or above, the target strength figure. A total of 25 new officers joined between September 2024 and January 2025. As of the end of the reporting period, 18% of staff were in the 0-1 year service group and, therefore, less experienced (although this figure was lower than the previous year)<sup>39</sup>. Staff absence, due to sickness, was higher than comparator prisons in certain periods, but finished the reporting period at 10.59 average working days lost, against an HMPPS Women’s Estate average of 11.12. The main sickness absence reasons were cited as musculoskeletal and mental-health related. Resignations for officer bands 3-5 finished the period at 1.98%, from a high of 8.38% at the start of the period. Possible reasons for this decrease cited by staff were the impact of the Enable Programme in rewarding and recognising staff and also external factors such as a slowing economy for other job opportunities and recent staff pay awards. Senior operational staff are permitted to work from home on an HMPPS-hybrid model basis by local Governor discretion; it is reported to us that this flexibility is welcomed by relevant staff.

### 5.4 Equality and diversity

- *Equality and diversity governance.* There is a monthly diversity and inclusion meeting, overseen by a member of the senior leadership team and attended by various prisoner representatives and some staff. The area was cited as one of

<sup>37</sup> *“For her own protection and a period of respite, she was locked in and given her regime in the CSU this morning”*: daily operational report 6.5.25.

<sup>38</sup> For example, in November 2024, 13 sessions completed of 30 scheduled in a day; 15 out of 37, in January 2025; 11 out of 31 completed in March 2025; 16 out of 40 completed and 3 out of 44 completed, March 2025.

<sup>39</sup> 25%.

the prison's top five priorities<sup>40</sup>. We saw more evidence of demographic data analysis being produced by the equality and diversity lead and the monthly meeting<sup>41</sup> now regularly scheduled from its previous seemingly ad hoc basis. Attendance, however, remained poor at times. The Board's perception remains that equality and diversity work has a low priority with staff outside of the function<sup>42</sup>. Despite their best efforts, the equality and diversity lead faced barriers to: (a) obtaining the required data from functions to enable analysis for disproportionality across the prison population<sup>43</sup>; and (b) attendance at the various protected characteristic forums from designated senior staff leads. A "fresh start" for the latter was announced at the beginning of 2025. The prison re-engaged with the Zahid Mubarek Trust (ZMT) in reviewing DIRF<sup>44</sup> responses for a short period from February 2025 which was a positive development<sup>45</sup>. By the end of the reporting period, however, the equality and diversity lead had left the role, the prison was undergoing a recruitment process and we were told that DIRFs would no longer be sent to ZMT for external scrutiny<sup>46</sup>.

- There is a dedicated wing for transgender prisoners (E wing)<sup>47</sup>. A member of the Board attends the monthly wing management update meeting. Throughout much of the reporting period, the wing contained a higher number of residents than in previous years, with a maximum of nine for much of the period and ending the reporting year at seven. The wing has a capacity of 16. The wing is not large and had one association sitting room for most of the year, with another one opened at the end of the reporting period on the other side of the wing<sup>48</sup>. For various reasons (such as, for example, choice or as a form of protest about being on the wing, lack of suitable education or work, retirement, remand status), many of the residents stayed on the wing for much of the time, often in the association room watching day-time television. Previously, there has been a requirement for constant sight and sound supervision of E wing prisoners by a dedicated prison officer on a 1:1 basis whilst in activities, education, faith services and social visits alongside prisoners in the general population. This was changed earlier in our reporting period (subject, we were told by the Governor, to local risk assessments, although we have not been provided with evidence of those in our monitoring). The previous 1:1 supervision arrangement was replaced by activities, education and other staff having general oversight of the E wing residents off the wing, as they do for all other prisoners.

There were limited wing activities and unexplained delays with accessing some off-wing activities<sup>49</sup>. At various times, the atmosphere on the wing was challenging for various prisoners - with frequent conflict, bullying, exclusion and flashpoints in prisoner relationships. It was often described by prisoners and staff

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<sup>40</sup> "Encourage and celebrate equality, diversity and inclusion".

<sup>41</sup> The Board was added to meeting invitations as of November 2024.

<sup>42</sup> There has been no training to embed an inclusive culture carried out for the majority of operational staff.

<sup>43</sup> Activities and Security, as key departments, for example, were cited as not submitting the required data.

<sup>44</sup> Discrimination Incident Reporting Form.

<sup>45</sup> The prison had stopped this external scrutiny in November 2023.

<sup>46</sup> It is not clear whether DIRFs have the formal quality control sign off required by HMPPS guidance: PSI 32/2011.

<sup>47</sup> Such prisoners are directed there by the HMPPS Complex Case Board process.

<sup>48</sup> And welcomed by one prisoner who had not regularly left their room prior to then, stating that she preferred it to "*the drama on the other side*".

<sup>49</sup> One prisoner waited a number of months for promised access to music activities.

as “toxic”<sup>50</sup> and “full of drama”. Some prisoners said that they had resorted to self-harm as a result of the dynamics on the wing. Various prisoners told us that they often stayed in their rooms to avoid the conflict on the wing.

Prior to the UK Supreme Court’s equality ruling in April 2025, we had been led to believe by senior Downview staff that there had been proposals by HMPPS to transfer more transgender prisoners to the wing, potentially to the maximum limit of 16. It is difficult to envisage how an increased population on such a small, contained wing with limited facilities will develop positively. The position regarding the ongoing location of transgender prisoners on E wing has not been formally clarified following the UK Supreme Court’s equality ruling. A communication to prison staff was sent out by HMPPS regarding the ruling shortly after it<sup>51</sup>. It is unfortunate that no communication from HMPPS to affected prisoners in Downview had been sent as of the end of our reporting period.

- *Foreign national prisoners:* as of the end of the reporting period, there were 49 foreign nationals in the prison, 15% of the population. We regularly monitored new arrivals who did not speak any English. They struggled with the limited translation support from HMPPS and instead relied on other prisoners and staff on an informal basis. One case involved a Brazilian prisoner who arrived at the prison without a word of English. She was transferred in quick succession from HMP Bronzefield to Downview and onwards to HMP Peterborough. By chance, a connection was made with a Portuguese speaker in the offender management team whilst at Downview, who helpfully translated the information regarding her onward move to HMP Peterborough. This was the first time someone had communicated with her in her own language. We were informed that most staff did not understand how to use the HMPPS mandated translation service<sup>52</sup> and only senior staff had the passwords to use it. As of the end of the reporting period, the prison had recruited a foreign national prisoner specialist on an interim basis to act as liaison between foreign national prisoners and the Home Office.

## 5.5 Incentives schemes

A revised incentive scheme was introduced in summer 2024, which was designed to be applied alongside a revised violence reduction policy. This was more streamlined than the previous system, which had become overly complicated. Prisoners and staff have remarked that there is still some lack of transparency, and that it can be a struggle to complete routine incentives reviews in a timely fashion. At any one time, around 60% of the population are on the enhanced (top) level of the incentive scheme, with usually fewer than ten prisoners on basic level (bottom) and the remainder on standard status (middle).

## 5.6 Complaints

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<sup>50</sup> A member of the Board observed the scheduled LCMPMs (local planning meeting for transgender prisoners) for three separate E wing prisoners, who all stated that they wanted more activities, as it was better off the wing than being in the wing atmosphere, which they described as “toxic”.

<sup>51</sup> An email was sent from HMPPS to staff two weeks after the ruling, stating: “HMPPS is reviewing its policies in light of the judgement alongside the Government’s wider approach”.

<sup>52</sup> <https://moj.thebigword.com/useful-info.html>

- For the last two years, complaints from prisoners to the prison have increased year on year. This latest reporting period, however, shows a reduction of 8% (1,432 against 1,555 last year). The recent initiative, from January 2025, to use specialist peers to provide liaison between prisoners and departments may also help to reduce complaints.
- Whenever overdue complaints increase, pressure is applied by governors, which often succeeds in reducing them. As a result, there has been a modest increase in the number of complaints answered within the recommended time frame: 67% compared with 64% last year. The worst offenders for overdue complaints remain other prisons, where the overdue period can exceed 100 days.
- Complaint categories that have increased notably over the period are: letters and censors (51%), education (43.5%) and canteen (24%).
- Quality assurance checks are carried out on 10% of the complaint responses each month by the heads of function. Heads of function responses may be checked by the Deputy Governor (against procedural justice criteria), but often with a simple yes or no. Some heads of function provide useful comments to help improve performance, but this is not the majority.
- The prison introduced a phone-based applications process for prisoners in late 2024. Each function/department now has a number that prisoners can access. Certain departments, such as reception (for property queries), had a high number of calls. Their answering service was usually full and prisoners were unable to leave a message. There is no way of a prisoner keeping a record of when a phone application has been made. Whilst the rationale for the new process may be inclusivity (with less emphasis on written applications for foreign national prisoners and those with low literacy levels or learning difficulties), the new system has been unpopular with prisoners.

## 5.7 Property

- It is difficult to over-emphasise the importance of property to prisoners. Losing favourite clothes can affect their self-confidence, while losing items of sentimental value can be devastating. An inter-prison move is when a prisoner is most likely to lose property and the more moves they make, the more property can be lost. Transferring prisons is already a difficult time for most prisoners (see induction 4.1), without losing their property en route.
- Property applications in the category H1 (property within Downview) have decreased slightly to 29, from last year's 31. Concerns in this category can range from delays in the receipt of parcels sent in to matters relating to what items are allowed in possession. Staff endeavour to handle prisoners' property accurately and with care, although some mistakes do occur in the record-keeping processes.
- There were 50 applications (prisoners' written representations to the Board) regarding property lost or damaged during transfer from another prison (H2), compared with 47 last year and 19 in the previous year. There have been many instances of prisoners arriving with none or very little of their property. It is often not possible to judge whether the transferring prison simply failed to send the property or if the transfer subcontractor failed or refused to take it. But the outcome is a considerable amount of additional work for staff and distress for the prisoners.
- Property applications together (within Downview and upon transfer to Downview) account for 16% of applications to the Board.

- Property loss and delay is an issue we have highlighted regularly in recent reports. However, it has not improved in any way following the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, issued in 2022 (PPPF). Downview staff seem to be largely unaware of the content of the framework. There is still no staff single point of contact for co-ordinating property issues<sup>53</sup>, nor a maintained centralised log or database for the tracking and recording of property issues, both of which could significantly help staff in their efforts to retrieve prisoners' property. Staff appeared not to be aware of the PPPF requirement that excess follow-on property should be transferred by the sending prison within four weeks of the prisoner transfer. Our observation is that follow-up by staff in chasing missing property is made in an uncoordinated fashion (although certain reception officers are consistently helpful in resolving issues). We are told that HMP Bronzefield staff rarely respond to chasing emails sent from Downview. However, the lack of any tracking database or log for Downview staff means that this is impossible to monitor. There appears to be a lack of proactive collaboration amongst prisons to resolve the issue. The Board's observation is that HMPPS staff view the issue as being systemic across the entire prison estate and that there is little apparent incentive to resolve it.
- On any given monitoring visit to the induction wing, members of the Board are approached by various newly arrived prisoners explaining that some or all of their property has not been transferred with them on the van. One prisoner wrote to the Board saying: *"I don't like the way [that] because I'm a prisoner, no-one is taking me serious[ly] about my clothes."* A Board member met a newly arrived prisoner in early 2025, who said she had been without any shoes in the three days she had been at the prison. One prisoner arrived at Downview from HMP Bronzefield with some clothes and her house keys missing. They were listed on her property card<sup>54</sup> at HMP Bronzefield when she left that prison, but were not in her property by the time she was transferred to Downview. We have monitored several occasions when the transferring prison has not dealt with prisoners' valuables (e.g. mobile phones, house keys, credit cards, etc) correctly. They have been stored with regular property, not listed separately or held securely. We closely monitored the situation of a prisoner whose ring containing her daughter's ashes was lost in transfer.
- Owing to the regular cross-deployment of reception staff, the waiting list for prisoners wanting to access their stored property, especially for seasonal changes, remains long. In late 2024, for example, there were as many as 60 prisoners on the waiting list to exchange property (and 49 to access Gladragz, the prison shop). The voicemail system for prisoners' applications referred to above appears to have been unhelpful in this situation.

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<sup>53</sup> This is a recommendation in the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, so that a member of staff is nominated in each prison to take responsibility for property.

<sup>54</sup> The record of a prisoner's belongings updated by prison staff, which detail which items arrive or leave a prison.

## 6. Health and wellbeing

### 6.1 Healthcare general

- Overall, communication between the healthcare department and the prison (as reported last year) remains greatly improved. A list is now circulated from healthcare, via the safety intervention meeting, of prisoners who are non-compliant with taking their medication (particularly anti-psychotic medication).
- There were ongoing issues throughout the reporting period of prisoners being transferred from HMP Bronzefield to Downview who were not in a safe or stable state for transfer. We were informed by senior healthcare staff that these included, for example: prisoners without fully updated health records; those in a drug detoxification process; prisoners who should not have been transferred for medical reasons (involving one in the “red zone”, relating to her mental health); and prisoners on open or post-closure ACCTs<sup>55</sup>. One prisoner arrived at the prison and was not considered suitable for transfer by various parties, including the Forward Trust and local healthcare staff<sup>56</sup>. As discussions continued, the prison van waited for over two hours in the yard, engines running in the cold weather with the prisoner inside, until she was returned to HMP Bronzefield. Another prisoner was deemed suitable for transfer from HMP Bronzefield by their healthcare staff and arrived without her medication. She required ten different forms of medication, which took two days for Downview healthcare staff to acquire. One prisoner was transferred to Downview from HMP Eastwood Park with just six days left on her sentence. She had significant mental health needs, and there was no forward planning from the transferring prison. The prisoner had to be released to accident and emergency in a local hospital, with no release accommodation provided. We were informed by the prison that such systemic issues have been escalated to NHS Commissioner level.
- Prescription medication remains the major source of illicit drug-taking in the prison. As of the end of our reporting period, there were over 90 prisoners receiving medication every morning on one wing alone and we were told that 99% of the women in the prison were on some form of prescription medication. Communication to, and training of, officers regarding medication distribution appears to still be a work in progress and there were frequent late rolls due to delays in medication distribution<sup>57</sup>. Some officers do not appear to have the confidence to check prisoners’ mouths or challenge prisoners when receiving medication, which may be a training issue. Medication queues are busy, noisy and often chaotic, despite attempts to manage trading with one prisoner at the hatch and taking their medication at the time. Using body worn video cameras (BWVCs) at all times by officers on medication hatch duty is being discussed but, as of the end of the reporting period, we were informed that it was not supported by the staff union. Fewer in-possession prescriptions (where prisoners are allowed to keep medication in their own rooms for dispensing) are being made available as a result of trading concerns, which exacerbates the dispensing situation.

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<sup>55</sup> SDHRMM minutes October 2024.

<sup>56</sup> Which delivers substance misuse services (psychosocial and clinical) in the prison.

<sup>57</sup> SHRDMM meeting minutes - April 2025.

- There has been a steady improvement in DNAs<sup>58</sup> for medical appointments<sup>59</sup>. All healthcare appointments are now listed on the new digital prison services (DPS) system and added onto movements lists, which has supported attendance.
- GP2GP<sup>60</sup> went live this reporting year, meaning that all prisoners will have the prison registered as their GP (with their consent). On release, their full, updated medical records will automatically be transferred to their new GP.

## 6.2 Mental healthcare

- *Delays in the management of acutely mentally unwell women.* Again, we monitored an increase in acutely mentally unwell women being sent to the prison, who required assessment and transfer to a psychiatric setting. A total of 17 women had been referred for transfer to hospital under section 47<sup>61</sup> of the Mental Health Act (MHA) in the reporting period<sup>62</sup>. Despite the very best efforts of the mental health team, only one of the 17 women met the 28-day timeframe for transfer, as set by the National Good Practice Guidelines<sup>63</sup>. Some exceeded the timeframe significantly, by a number of months. One prisoner had been placed in a psychiatric setting under Section 2 of the MHA<sup>64</sup> at the gate as they were being released from prison. By way of an illustration of the extent of the issue, as of April 2025, there were four women in the prison referred for a Section 47 transfer. One had been accepted for a bed at the end of February but was still waiting for availability, and the mental health team were waiting for outcomes for three prisoners, with the possibility of a further two referrals being made.
- *We, again, reiterate the significant impact on the prisoners affected and on staff and also other prisoners, as such acutely mentally unwell prisoners are often held in segregated conditions pending their transfer. Despite the considerable efforts of staff to mitigate the prevailing conditions in the CSU, the unit is categorically not the appropriate place to hold acutely mentally unwell prisoners.*
- At the end of the reporting period, there was, on average, a three-week waiting time for psychiatry appointments, although more urgent cases can be seen within a week. The ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) list remained stable, as of March 2025: 31 for the assessment clinic and 12 on the ADHD screening list.
- There has been an increase in eating disorder presentations during the reporting year and Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL), as the healthcare provider, is developing an eating disorder pathway.
- Despite the best efforts of the mental health team to offer training regarding mental health awareness, there has been low take-up from operational prison staff<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> When a prisoner misses their appointment, it is referred to as a 'Did Not Attend' (DNA).

<sup>59</sup> We reported last year that there remained some confusion operationally with prisoners being able to attend medical appointments.

<sup>60</sup> Which allows for the transfer of patients' electronic health records securely between their old and new practices.

<sup>61</sup> Section 47 of the UK's Mental Health Act 1983 allows a person serving a prison sentence to be transferred to a hospital for treatment if they have a mental disorder that requires hospital treatment.

<sup>62</sup> From 15 transferred in our last reporting period.

<sup>63</sup> <https://cloud-platform-e218f50a4812967ba1215eaecede923f.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/sites/19/2024/02/The-long-wait-web-2024.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Allowing a person to be detained in a psychiatric hospital for assessment and treatment.

<sup>65</sup> Ten operational staff in attendance in 2024.

- The mental health team continues to provide practitioner cover on most weekends and bank holidays.

### 6.3 Primary healthcare

- The waiting list for the optician remained at times high (at 16 weeks<sup>66</sup>) and the waiting list for podiatry appointments was, at one stage, 29 weeks. This was, we are told, escalated to NHS Commissioner level. We started to see an improvement in these lists as the reporting year ended. GP waiting lists have improved; despite the regular GP leaving in August 2024, he was quickly replaced. The dentist still has a long list (50 on the list, with a seven-week wait as of the end of the reporting period). Urgent dental cases can still get dealt with promptly and emergencies are seen immediately.
- After two years of not having a trained practitioner to carry out cervical smear tests (and being reliant on resource from another prison), the prison now has two trained dedicated staff. Many prisoners are reportedly reluctant to attend appointments due to a history of trauma.
- The use of agency nurses has decreased in the reporting year, with only one agency nurse being used on a regular basis.
- Many of the requests and complaints to the healthcare department this year concerned the need for new/additional mattresses to assist with a variety of medical issues. The policy of the prison is that prisoners are not allowed to have two mattresses but are encouraged to purchase mattress toppers, which are permitted on the facilities list.
- A member of the Board monitored a sample of various prisoners' experiences of medical escorts to outside hospital. Points of note were:
  - The delay in leaving the prison due to various prison processes often meant prisoners were late for their appointments;
  - Prisoners understood why they couldn't know about the date and time of the appointment beforehand (for security reasons), but felt that this added to the overall stress of the situation;
  - During the medical consultation, prisoners may be asked about past medical history (including, sometimes, their social history) and current symptoms, all of which can be heard by the escort officer. It was reported that during one examination, the male officer remained in the room, even though the female officer was cuffed to prisoner. The prisoner had to lower her trousers (for a knee examination), but the male officer didn't leave the room. This prisoner was a red band<sup>67</sup> and therefore presumably low risk.
  - Using the toilet while on escort means the prisoner remains on a long chain but has to leave the toilet door open, with the escort officer on the other end of the chain.
  - We were informed by the healthcare department that they are not told who the escort to hospital will be unless it is clearly specified that a female officer is required during the consultation. If an intimate examination is required, prison staff decide amongst themselves which staff member is to escort and remain with the prisoner whilst they are being examined.

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<sup>66</sup> The provider attended once a month and there was a period of sickness absence.

<sup>67</sup> A trusted prisoner.



- We continued to receive various reports about supply issues with medication. These appeared to be related to national supply shortages but also inefficiencies in the ordering process and storage by the healthcare department.
- Medication lockers for in-possession medication have been installed on all wings, except for the resettlement wing.
- There remains limited dementia care provision for prisoners in Downview. Whilst the prison's mental health in-reach team conduct cognitive assessments and provide occupational therapy and other relevant support, there is no provision for the formal memory assessments that are required for a dementia diagnosis. Local services continue to report that they are not commissioned to take dementia referrals from the prison. In the reporting year, this has affected two prisoners. Prisoners over the age of 50 were around 12% of the prison's population in the reporting period. One elderly prisoner was able to access the service following a Section 36 of the Mental Health Act transfer to hospital.

#### **6.4 Time out of cell/gym**

- The absolute maximum allocated time (which is, on average, available to one-third of the prisoners) for purposeful activity is 22 hours per week. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) targets for full-time attendance (nine or more sessions) is 35% and for part-time attendance (five or more sessions) it is 46%. The maximum length of the working day is four-and-a-half hours, which has been highlighted by the Employment Advisory Board as a concern, as it bears no correlation to employment opportunities in the community.
- The previously popular Park Run has faced considerable disruption throughout the year, due to cited prison staffing inconsistencies.
- It is welcomed that a significant amount<sup>68</sup> of new equipment for the gym was acquired in autumn 2024 and was popular with the prisoners and staff who access the gym. Gym attendance figures, however, averaged only around 30% of the population attending one or more gym session each week. We received various reports from prisoners that wing staff sometimes did not unlock them for their regular gym slot as requested. Frustration was expressed via the Employment Advisory Board that there were limited opportunities for prisoners to access the gym outside of the hours of purposeful activity. There appeared to be an element of cross deployment affecting gym provision, and sickness absence was also a factor in staffing. It is very much hoped that with such significant expenditure on new equipment, the gym can be utilised more effectively in the future.
- The therapy dogs' programme lapsed in early 2024, due to an issue with the tendering process, and it was not reinstated, as there was no budget. The programme was extremely popular with prisoners and we had various reports of the positive benefits for mental health. At the end of the reporting period, there were plans for another organisation to provide therapy dogs.

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

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<sup>68</sup> We were told by various senior members of staff that the associated cost of the equipment (on a lease basis) was £90,000. We asked the Governor for clarification of the amount repeatedly, which was not forthcoming.

- For much of the reporting period, the Forward Trust<sup>69</sup> faced significant staffing issues, which impacted heavily on service provision: at its lowest ebb, only five of nine vacancies were filled in December 2024. Group work was placed on hold and releases were prioritised. Towards the end of the reporting period, staffing was stabilising, workshops had been restarted and group programmes (The Bridge and Stepping Stones) were again scheduled.
- There is an incentivised substance free living wing at the prison, which holds 37 prisoners.

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<sup>69</sup> Which delivers substance misuse services (psychosocial and clinical) in the prison.

## 7. Progression and resettlement

In our previous report, we reported on challenges regarding attendance at education and activities and with the accuracy of attendance recording at both. We continued to monitor<sup>70</sup> *“the long running problem of women leaving wings and going to the wrong places, not turning up where they should be, or not leaving the wings because they don’t want to...”*<sup>71 72 73</sup> However, this year, we have seen a concerted focus from the prison (as one of its five new prison priorities) on a range of initiatives aimed at improving capacity, allocation, attendance and reporting (including regular attendance monitoring meetings). But attendance has remained inconsistent<sup>74 75</sup> and we will continue to monitor the prison’s efforts in this area.

To support allocation and attendance monitoring of purposeful activity, the prison was chosen to be a pilot site in the women’s estate for an IT system (based on DPS<sup>76</sup>) to deliver more effective allocation of activities, which was rolled out in March 2025. The view was that the system was simpler and more streamlined for activities staff to use (compared with the previous system, which was considered by staff to not be fit for purpose) and also for operational staff to access. By the end of the reporting period, activities staff reported significant benefits in ease of use and reporting with the new system, regarding capacity, allocation and attendance at education and activities. We will continue to monitor.

We understand that, based on initial screening, 68% of Downview prisoners were in receipt of benefits and 67% were in debt prior to coming into custody. This creates significant challenges to developing aspirations and expectations of leaving the prison to seek employment. Despite such challenges, the team of four staff in the reducing reoffending team<sup>77</sup> consistently received high praise from prisoners for going above and beyond, with feedback such as *“a powerhouse”* and *“they treat us as human, never treat us as less than”*. An interim reducing reoffending Governor in place for much of the year was, in the Board’s view, prisoner-focused and proactive.

**Prisoner feedback.** Workshops were facilitated via the Employment Advisory Board in early 2025<sup>78</sup>, with a theme arising that *“seeing is believing”*. Prisoners said they felt

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<sup>70</sup> The Board has continued to carry out various ad hoc spot checks in the education department to monitor attendance throughout the year. These identified discrepancies in the number of prisoners recorded by the prison as attending education and those actually in lessons. These discrepancies are not as high as those monitored last year but still lead us to believe that the attendance data formally recorded by the prison may not be accurate.

<sup>71</sup> Employment Advisory Board minutes.

<sup>72</sup> We were informed by activities staff that there were at times 100 unaccounted prisoner absences in a day.

<sup>73</sup> The seemingly straightforward resolution of the prisoner going back to activities (rather than their room) after a scheduled healthcare appointment is hampered by healthcare staff not having access to the necessary IT system in healthcare and, therefore, needing to rely on the prisoner to say where they are meant to return to.

<sup>74</sup> For example, as a snapshot, in mid-December 2024, activities data showed 221 attended and 98 didn’t attend (AM) and 191 attended and 104 didn’t attend (PM) (morning meeting 19.12.24). In mid-February 2025, 214 attended out of 285 (AM) and 209 out of 292 (PM).

<sup>75</sup> As of the last week of our reporting period, we monitored absences from activities (e.g. on one day, 33 prisoners absent in the morning and 42 in the afternoon).

<sup>76</sup> Digital Prison Services (DPS), a replacement for the main system that manages prisons, NOMIS.

<sup>77</sup> Prison Employment Lead, Industries and Community Engagement Manager, the ID and Banking Administrator and the Vocational Life Skills Tutor.

<sup>78</sup> Held to explore themes from the prisoner survey data collected late 2024, over three separate sessions.

they needed to see what is possible by way of progression to believe in their own progression (for example, seeing others engaged in working ROTL (release on temporary licence) opportunities and meeting employers).

*Transparency/waiting lists.* We continued to receive reports from prisoners about long waiting lists to be allocated to education and activities (sometimes as long as six weeks). Almost a quarter of prisoners cited long waiting lists as a barrier to engagement in activities at the prison<sup>79</sup>. Understandably, this caused frustration among the prisoners, with an income of only £2.50 per week pending allocation, and a greater risk of falling into debt with other prisoners. Over the reporting period, the allocation process was viewed as “*opaque, unhelpful and very unclear*”<sup>80 81</sup>. However, with the use of the new scheduling pilot from March 2025, we started to see staff expectations of prisoners being allocated an activity before the end of their two-week induction period, and we will continue to monitor the situation. Education staff have regularly highlighted that there was an increase in prisoners with short stays (of 2-4 weeks), but there remains limited provision by way of short courses in response.

The quality improvement group meeting, which reviewed progress for education and activities, was typically poorly attended by other functions outside of the education department.

## 7.1 Education, library

- *Budget decreases/range of provision.* The prison’s Prison Education Framework contract budget was reduced by 5% in April 2025, with a Level 1 hair and beauty course and a performing arts course cut as a result. The Dynamic Purchasing System<sup>82</sup> budget for the prison was reduced by 50%, with a resulting casualty being the participation in the Construction Skills Certification Scheme, a valuable certification for prisoners planning to enter the construction industry. The barista and digital marketing courses were recommissioned. A new upcycling scheme (to refurbish old furniture) was created in a newly purposed workshop and was popular with prisoners. Beauty therapy and upcycling were the most popular courses with prisoners.
- *Attendance.* During 2024, 48% of the population did not enroll in education<sup>83</sup>. Average attendance at education against planned capacity over the reporting year was 63%. This was based on the prison having a planned capacity of 21,548 sessions: 18,333 (85%) of these were allocated to prisoners, who attended 13,657 of the available sessions. Concerns were expressed by the Employment Advisory Board that the contracted education provision is being “*considerably under-utilised, versus opportunity and versus what is paid for*”<sup>84</sup>. In October 2024, for example, the planned capacity was 2,247 sessions, of which 1309 were attended, leaving almost 1000 unused sessions, for which the prison was contracted to pay Milton Keynes College, the education provider<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> 2024-25 ESW Needs Analysis Report.

<sup>80</sup> Prisoner feedback workshop held January 2025.

<sup>81</sup> And not helped by the new phone system for submission of applications.

<sup>82</sup> An online application process for prisons to commission specialist education services.

<sup>83</sup> HMP Downview Progression in Education 2024 document: “*regarding the 48% who didn’t enrol a percentage won’t need education, and a percentage will have more pressing health/substance/mental health issues as higher priorities*”.

<sup>84</sup> EAB Strategy 2024 – review of actions and targets – January 2025.

<sup>85</sup> EAB minutes – November 2024.

Appropriate allocation to education and ensuring attendance in classrooms is the responsibility of the prison, not Milton Keynes College as the contracted provider.

- **Reasons for non-attendance.** An education survey of almost half of the prison was conducted by trained and specialist peers in February 2025<sup>86</sup>. The main reasons for non-attendance in education were cited as: *“Too much noise” (43%); anxiety/depression/mental distress (43%); bullying and intimidation (32%); and don’t want to/can’t be bothered (35%)*. A total of 35% of surveyed prisoners cited *“not let off the landing”* as a reason for a missed session. A third of prisoners stated that they had been permanently excluded from school at some stage and 45% stated that they had left school before the age of 16, demonstrating a pattern of disrupted education<sup>87</sup>, which presents challenges for engagement.

Lessons are long (over two hours) and without breaks or the opportunity to make a hot drink, due to cited health and safety/security reasons. A six-week trial of a £5 bonus for 100% attendance at English and Maths classes in early 2025 was discontinued as not having enough impact on attendance. We were told that prisoner pay at the prison was amongst the highest in the women’s estate<sup>88</sup>, although a recurring theme from many prisoners was an objection that education is paid more than work<sup>89</sup>.

- **Career pathways.** Towards the end of the reporting period, the prison introduced nine pathways, which will support the sequencing and progression available to all prisoners whilst they are at Downview. The pathways will help provide structured routes that connect education and skill development to real-world employment opportunities and provide a clear plan that connects learning to specific careers. We look forward to monitoring how these will impact on outcomes for prisoners.
- **Hairdressing** (a popular course) was impacted by staff absence, due to a cited security issue for several months, and remained closed as of the end of the reporting period. There was no temporary teaching cover provided for hairdressing during this period, although we are aware that the education contract provides for it.
- **Staffing and facilities.** The education team was fully staffed - for the first time in four years - by the end of 2024<sup>90</sup>. The education block looks rather tired and with an uninspiring layout. An innovative partnership with a local school, facilitated by the chair of the Employment Advisory Board in early 2025, sought to improve the look and feel of the education block, as well as providing support to Downview education staff with teaching delivery. There was an upgrade of all personal computers in the education block in April 2025, allowing security managed WiFi enablement<sup>91</sup> (although there were still significant limitations).
- **Library staffing.** After significant staffing issues in our previous reporting period, a new librarian has been appointed, and library opening times increased,

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<sup>86</sup> The Education team, however, discounted the prisoner feedback, as follows: *“Although prisoner-voice is valuable as an indicative measure, we can only use data that have been collated by professionals, have been through due diligence and that, in which, we can have a high degree of faith that it is accurate. Otherwise, we are unable to confirm this information is accurate and fair. As a result, we are unable to recognise this feedback.”*

<sup>87</sup> ESW Needs Analysis Report August 2024.

<sup>88</sup> But have not been able to verify that independently.

<sup>89</sup> English and maths - £2.50 per session, activities £1.80 to £2.

<sup>90</sup> QIG meeting, November 2024.

<sup>91</sup> Via the Prisoner Education Service digital platform.

together with development of a range of initiatives. There are approximately 1000 books borrowed each month.

## 7.2 Vocational training, work

- *Employment Advisory Board.* The chair of the Employment Advisory Board continues to provide a highly engaged strategic contribution, in the Board's view.
- *Hours of purposeful activity.* The number of total hours of purposeful activity at the prison has declined since 2022, when the provision was 27.5 hours per week<sup>92</sup>. The prison's planned increase of purposeful activity on offer, from 22 to 27 hours each week, was repeatedly delayed, scheduled from October 2024 and onwards. By the end of the reporting period, the prison was in consultation with the staff union and there was no scheduled date for implementation. The number of prisoners attending full-time purposeful activity (nine x 2¼ or 2½ hour sessions a week) ranged from 22% at the end of 2024 to 29% in March 2025 (against an HMPPS target of 35%). Attendance at industries did not meet the year-to-date HMPPS target of 17% of the population engaged in five or more sessions per week, ending the year at 11.8% year to date.
- *Reallocation.* From September 2024, no prisoner was allowed to work more than nine sessions per week, in order to allocate the available activities across the population, due to a shortage. Many prisoners who had been working more than nine sessions (various in the kitchen area, which supported consistent staffing on a seven-day week basis) expressed their frustration regarding this change. The impact on prisoners was that more prisoners were in work, but for fewer hours. From the prison's perspective, it had a positive impact on data, showing more prisoners working more than five sessions per week in the climate of fewer vacancies for activities and education<sup>93</sup>.
- *Employment partners.* The work of the employment lead and the industries and community engagement manager remained particularly effective, with several new employment partners (such as Thames Water, Unispace and Starbucks, for example) engaged at the prison during the reporting period.
- *Training partners.* There were 88 training workshop spaces at the end of the reporting period: London College of Fashion, Max Spielmann, the Clink Kitchen, Gardens, recycling, industrial cleaning and Suez upcycling. London College of Fashion (LCF) had 18 learners registered as of the end of March 2025 (the highest number to date, with a capacity of 24). LCF also had ROTL (release on temporary licence) opportunities available, but there were no prisoners on working ROTL at the college. The Clink kitchen expressed concerns about the low number of prisoners available for their ROTL programme (with a new kitchen opened in south London at the end of 2024)<sup>94</sup>. Max Spielmann had two spaces for working ROTLs in April 2025, with no ROTL prisoners available to take up the roles (and no prisoners on working ROTL since early 2025).
- With the Simpler Recycling guidance in place from April 2025<sup>95</sup>, there was an increase of three prisoners to the prison's recycling team and nine new full-time roles created for wing recycling.

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<sup>92</sup> EAB strategy 2024: review of actions and targets – January 2025.

<sup>93</sup> The reducing reoffending meeting in March 2025 discussed the "number of vacancies available becoming extremely tight and the Education budget cuts which have impacted courses".

<sup>94</sup> 'ROTL numbers are disappointingly low' – reducing reoffending minutes November 2024.

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/simpler-recycling-workplace-recycling-in-england>

- Data and HMPPS targets relating to post-release employment outcomes were suspended in summer 2024 due to the “probation reset”. We were told in April 2025, at the Employment Advisory Board, that there is now an “*absence of meaningful data for outcomes for prison leavers following the “probation reset”*”. In the absence of available data, we were told, via the Employment Advisory Board, that Downview is one of only three prisons to deliver confirmed employment offers every month in the reporting period.
- Barriers to employment outcomes post-release were cited by the Employment Advisory Board as high numbers of short stays (with a significant number spending less than four weeks at the prison) and foreign national prisoners<sup>96</sup>.

### 7.3 Offender management, progression

- *Thematic review.* The Board carried out a thematic survey of resettlement outcomes and surveyed 19 prisoners leaving the prison within the month after mid-February 2025. One concern expressed was difficulty in the offender management team acquiring necessary information from community offender management probation staff, but this was not without repeated effort from the prison’s offender management team. The majority of prisoners had not seen their sentence plans or felt that they had not been adhered to. It was surprising how few prisoners had family support through their release process and how few felt that families (including their own children) would be a protective factor on release. It was repeated to the Board by many prisoners surveyed how stressful this time of their prison sentence was, with release accommodation highly uncertain (often confirmed at the last minute, despite the efforts of the offender management team). We were told repeatedly by prisoners about the extremely effective work by the prison’s banking and ID administrator in securing bank accounts and IDs for those leaving prison – one woman at release proudly showed a member of the Board her first ever piece of identification. It seems that prisoners are not routinely told that they are exempt from prescription fees for at least three weeks after release and not all had been connected with a GP for release. Making Connections<sup>97</sup> received many positive reports from prisoners regarding the quality of their pre- and post-release support.
- *Offender management team staffing.* There has been a significant churn in the receiving and releasing of prisoners this year. By way of a snapshot of new arrivals and releases:

	Oct 24	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar 25
Receptions	34	44	49	52	36	70
Discharges	37	34	35	31	43	48

- The offender management unit was under-staffed at the end of the reporting period, due to vacancies and sickness absence. We monitored some lengthy delays in prisoners accessing support from their prisoner offender manager (POM) due to short staffing. The impact on the unit of the workload of sentence recalculations for the SDS40 and revised HDC (home detention curfew) schemes was significant. We will continue to monitor the impact of forthcoming

<sup>96</sup> Although there appeared to be no data available to support this.

<sup>97</sup> A chaplaincy programme run by volunteers and funded by The Nazareth Way.

- early release schemes on prisoners' outcomes - both on those prisoners being processed in early release schemes and also support for remaining prisoners.
- **Decrease in prisoners on working ROTL.** The HMPPS ROTL Policy Framework<sup>98</sup> states that the *“expectation is that [ROTL] will be widely used with suitable offenders in [...] women’s prisons where the resourcing and infrastructure best enable ROTL to be undertaken”*, citing an expectation that *“the number of releases on temporary licence will rise following implementation of this policy framework [in 2022]”*. The Policy Framework states that *“there is promising evidence from research in several countries that temporary release from prison is associated with better outcomes”*. Prisoners have often mentioned to the Board the benefits of getting into the rhythm and discipline of working whilst in prison. Accessing ROTL is not only important for individual outcomes, but also creates an impact on the desired Downview “seeing is believing” culture with peer role models in the prison.

Despite the HMPPS policy and the broad range of training partners in the prison providing some excellent ROTL opportunities for Downview, there were just three prisoners accessing working ROTL as of the end of our reporting period. Two of these worked only within the environs of the prison.

The instruction continued throughout the reporting period for Downview prisoners under open conditions to be transferred to HMP/YOI East Sutton Park (ESP)<sup>99</sup>. Whilst Downview was not at full, or near, capacity for much of the period, ESP also had a high number of places empty in a time of population pressure elsewhere in the female estate. A number of prisoners have been returned from ESP during the period and they often did not have a positive view of the prison, which potentially fueled a wider reluctance to transfer there. As in our previous report, a number of prisoners told us that they chose not to progress to open conditions because they did not want to transfer to ESP. The number of prisoners on open conditions at Downview was 20-24, on average, in 2023, and 14 in 2024<sup>100</sup>. We were informed that women working under open conditions at the prison’s industry partners (e.g. The Clink, Max Spielmann, London College of Fashion) were ring-fenced from being transferred to ESP. There was a lack of clarity and delay regarding ROTL boards taking place as the reporting period ended, which caused confusion among prisoners and staff.

**There appears to be a significant disconnect, resulting in conflicting messages given to prisoners, staff, and training and employment stakeholders regarding ROTL.** On the one hand, there is excellent work undertaken by the Employment Advisory Board, the prison employment lead and the industries and community engagement manager in securing and optimising a range of working ROTL opportunities<sup>101 102</sup>. At the same time, the HMPPS Women’s Group and the prison’s offender management team have clearly

<sup>98</sup> Re-issued October 2022.

<sup>99</sup> For example, in February 2025, the HMPPS Women’s Team visited Downview with instructions that as many prisoners as possible should be transferred to HMP/YOI East Sutton Park as it had 40 spare beds.

<sup>100</sup> EAB minutes May 2025.

<sup>101</sup> *“The low number of open prisoners/those available for ROTL has put pressure on existing industry partner relationships and the development of new long-term employer partners”* - EAB Strategy 2024 Review of Actions and Targets January 2025.

<sup>102</sup> *“We aim to continue to grow ROTL employment opportunities”* – reducing reoffending quarterly strategic review meeting – November 2024.



signalled that all prisoners on open conditions (other than those employed at the training workshops) will be transferred to ESP. This will continue to leave an insufficient pipeline of prisoners to apply for wider working ROTL opportunities at Downview. We will continue to monitor this confusing situation.

- *Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP)*<sup>103</sup>. There were four IPP prisoners as of the end of the reporting period (with a high of five during the period). We monitored one prisoner who struggled for information regarding recent changes to IPP legislation<sup>104</sup>, which a member of the Board was able to provide.
- *Ministerial intervention*. We have noted in previous annual reports what could be perceived as excessive and delayed Ministerial intervention in resettlement decision-making. In this reporting period, a transgender prisoner was recommended by the Complex Case Board<sup>105</sup> and various other senior HMPPS staff<sup>106</sup> for a Ministerial exemption for them to be held in the general women's estate (to cover both prison location and approved premises on release). Despite this clear recommendation, there was a significant delay in the Lord Chancellor providing her view (from early November 2024 to late February 2025<sup>107</sup>). A scheduled Parole Board for the prisoner had to be adjourned for several months, pending the response, which the prisoner stated, "*felt like an extra sentence*". The recommendations for Ministerial exemption were then rejected by the Lord Chancellor. The Board's view is that the delay in reaching a decision was not fair or humane. At the time of writing this report, the prisoner's Parole Board hearing was again delayed, until autumn 2025.
- *SDS40 releases*. We closely monitored the first tranche of SDS40 releases in September 2024. The number released on one day (29) was high compared with many other prisons<sup>108</sup>, at a time when the population of Downview was low (310). Whilst the Board understands that the lower-risk profile of female prisoners from Downview would have influenced the selection, the early release of a large group from a prison with a low population did not appear to target the key issue of overcrowding in the male estate. It also tied up under-resourced prison offender management and community probation and accommodation staff. The prison, co-ordinated by the offender management unit, facilitated the release of the large number of prisoners well, and it was clear that much advance preparation had taken place. There appeared to be no data available relating to the total number who were then recalled from the Downview SDS40 tranches.
- *WECASP / Women's Group support in progression*. We closely monitored a prisoner who 'bounced' from normal location to the care and separation unit (CSU) in rotation for a period of months. The prisoner was allocated to the

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<sup>103</sup> Sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPPs) were created by the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and started to be used in April 2005. They were designed to protect the public from serious offenders whose crimes did not merit a life sentence.

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/end-of-lifetime-licences-for-rehabilitated-ipp-offenders>

<sup>105</sup> A multi-agency body that makes decisions about the placement and management of transgender prisoners in the prison system.

<sup>106</sup> Inter alia, the MOJ Policy Cohort Lead, Area Executive Director for policy area and DG Operations of HMPPS (E wing update minutes 8.11.24).

<sup>107</sup> The initial submission from HMPPS seeking a decision from Ministers was sent to the Lord Chancellor's Private Office on 7 November 2025. From then, additional information was requested about the prisoner's case at different points by the Lord Chancellor's Private Office and a meeting was held between the Lord Chancellor and officials (including some CCB members) in January 2025.

<sup>108</sup> We were told the highest in the female estate and anecdotally significantly higher than some prisons in the male estate.

WECASP<sup>109</sup> caseload from October 2023. The process is described by WECASP as a “*reflective space for those trying to manage [the prisoner] locally*”. The prisoner was in CSU for a total of 161 days during the reporting year<sup>110</sup> and exhibited significant challenging behaviour and committed several assaults on staff in that time. The prisoner’s behaviour escalated as the months went by. The Board monitored the significant impact on staff dealing with the prisoner<sup>111</sup>, as well as on other prisoners. We escalated our concerns to WECASP and the Head of HMPPS Women’s Team about the situation at the end of 2024. We emphasised our concern that the constant cycle of relocating the prisoner in the CSU was not fair and humane treatment and queried whether a transfer could be facilitated to another prison. From our monitoring and direct contact with the Prison Group Director, Women’s Prison Group, it appeared that the HMPPS Women’s Prison Group was unable to provide any meaningful intervention to support senior Downview staff in managing the prisoner or in facilitating a transfer to another prison. We also monitored minimal evidence of intervention and support provided by WECASP, generally, in helping to support Downview with a prisoner with such significant behavioural challenges. In the absence of any suitable offender personality pathway, which could offer an element of progression for the prisoner at Downview, the position remained that the prisoner was caught in a cycle of frequent relocation to the CSU. Each time, their behaviour escalated, culminating in a serious assault on a member of staff in April 2025. The prisoner was eventually transferred to another prison at the end of April 2025, in a segregation-to-segregation transfer facilitated by the Deputy Governor.

#### 7.4 Family contact

*Our continued monitoring experience is that many prisoners undergo crises connected to contact with or support for their family. Prisoners’ relationships with their families are acknowledged by HMPPS to be “utterly indispensable” for rehabilitation<sup>112</sup>. We have previously extensively noted our concerns regarding PACT’s (Prison Advice and Care Trust) contractual performance and the prison’s commitment to its family and significant others strategy in recent reports.*

- The area was previously flagged as one of priority concern by the HMPPS Women’s Estate team in their audit process in early 2024 and it became an area of focus and support from the Women’s Estate team. It was positive to monitor that, following a significant amount of work by an interim reducing reoffending lead, the rating from the HMPPS family and significant others audit in early 2025 increased from a 1 to the maximum of 4<sup>113</sup>.

<sup>109</sup> “The WECASP is a multidisciplinary resource that has been developed to provide advice, guidance and support to prisons and staff for those individuals in the women’s estate who present with additional complex and challenging behaviours and who are not progressing in their sentence plan. The WECASP aims to help achieve better outcomes through supporting stabilisation of behaviour, improving wellbeing and supporting the surrounding staff groups; to help reduce risk accordingly, as well as enabling progression” (Women’s Estate Case Advice and Support Panel (WECASP) Policy Framework – issue date 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021). WECASP do not offer support in facilitating a transfer.

<sup>110</sup> Ranging from three days to 41 days.

<sup>111</sup> A WECASP meeting in early February 2025 heard from Downview staff that “[Downview] staff are done, and new staff are contemplating leaving” because of the challenges faced in the management of the prisoner.

<sup>112</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farmer-review-for-women>.

<sup>113</sup> Women’s Estate Families & Significant Others Performance Measure 2024-2025.

- We saw a period of stability with the same PACT family engagement manager and worker during the period and more positive feedback from prisoners and staff for the support offered by PACT. As of the end of the reporting period, there were, however, two PACT staff vacancies.
- As of the end of the reporting period, there were 45 prisoners on the PACT caseload (from 81 in November 2024<sup>114</sup>).
- PACT commissioned a review in early 2025, comprising a survey of 90 prisoners. A total of 43 of these stated that they were not receiving the support from PACT they would like. 45 prisoners responded saying that they would like further support from the PACT resettlement family engagement officer (who was not in post at the end of the reporting period). We asked for a copy of the review from PACT to understand context further, but it was not forthcoming.
- *Social visits.* We were told that over 200 prisoners do not receive social visits. The exterior of the visitors' centre continues to look uncared for (despite our regular reporting of the issue) and the outside seating has not been replaced. On the various occasions when we monitored, there was no PACT playworker in the play area in the visits' hall (and this was confirmed by staff on a regular basis). However, we, again, saw frequent examples of visitors being welcomed in a warm and professional way by prison staff in the visits' hall.
- The population crisis has particularly impacted the maintenance of family ties in the women's estate, given the wide geographical spread of female prisons (see 4.1). Downview receives prisoners primarily from HMP Bronzefield, but also from HMP Peterborough and HMP Eastwood Park - a wide catchment area for potential new receptions. The prison states that *"where possible, we ask that prisons send us women whose home addresses are as close to Downview as possible, though this is currently proving more challenging because of the lack of space in the women's estate"*<sup>115</sup>.
- The number of prisoners allowed to visit their children on a childcare resettlement licence<sup>116</sup> (available subject to eligibility at any time in their sentence) ranged between one and three during the reporting period.
- There were just nine recordings for the StoryBook Mums programme (a scheme whereby prisoners record bedtime stories for their children) in 2024 and none for 2025, as of the end of our reporting period, following operational issues in the prison for the programme.
- The X (ex-Twitter) account for HMP Downview (in various prisons used as a positive means of communicating with prisoners' families) had five posts for the entire reporting period.
- As of April 2025, the cost of calls to all UK landlines and UK mobile numbers was reduced by 20%. From the same month, prisoners without social visits were allowed to get phone credit per unused visit (a frequent request to date from prisoners without families near and foreign national prisoners).

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<sup>114</sup> This was the figure provided by the PACT manager on site in relation to an information request. However, PACT HQ, as part of the annual report review process, have said that this figure is actually 30 prisoners accessing PACT support. It is, therefore, not clear what the actual number is.

<sup>115</sup> Women's Estate Families & Significant Others Performance Measure, 2024-2025.

<sup>116</sup> A childcare resettlement licence lets a prisoner spend time with their child on day release.

## 8. The work of the IMB

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	347 <sup>117</sup>

### The work of the IMB

There was a 45% increase in applications to the Board from the previous period, and an increase of 140% from the period before (200 applications). The Board had minimal clerk support provided for much of the reporting period, due to staffing issues in the Business Hub – this is now resolved with an effective Clerk.

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year	% increase
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing and ablutions	20	21	5
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme and sanctions	15	20	33
C	Equality	7	19	171
D	Purposeful activity, including education, w training and time out of cell	19	28	47
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection and restrictions	27	40	48
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies and spends	11	75	581
F	Food and kitchens	7	22	214
G	Health, including physical, mental and social care	59	72	22
H1	Property within the establishment	31	29	6
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	47	50	6
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	9	2	-78
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew (HDC), ROTL, parole, re dates and re-categorisation	44	49	12
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	27	33	22
K	Transfers	1	3	200
L	Miscellaneous	7	18	157
	<b>Total number of applications</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>45</b>

<sup>117</sup> Including weekdays, weekends, evenings and one unannounced night visit.

## **Annex A**

### **Service providers**

- Works and maintenance at the prison are carried out by Government Facility Services Limited (GSFL).
- Healthcare services are provided by Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL), with substance misuse support provided by Forward Trust and GP services provided by DrPA.
- Education facilities are provided by Milton Keynes College.
- A number of providers offer services and programmes (on a contracted or third-sector basis) in HMP Downview, including Seetec, the Shannon Trust, the Samaritans (Listener scheme), ID Essence, the Koestler Trust, Hibiscus, London College of Fashion, The Clink Kitchens, Max Spielmann, Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), Fine Cell Work, StoryBook Mums, the Shaw Trust, Making Connections, Women in Prison, and Advance.



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