



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Five Wells

**For reporting year
1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Five Wells is a newly designed and built category C prison in Wellingborough, in Northamptonshire, for adult men. Opened in February 2022, it is managed by the private security company G4S and was originally contracted to house 1,680 prisoners¹, providing rehabilitation and resettlement for those with up to two years left of their sentence. By March 2024, the capacity had increased to 1,715 and the population had increased further, to 1,735, by March 2025. Accommodation comprises seven houseblocks, each with four floors, plus a care and separation unit (CSU). There are other significant buildings that provide facilities such as 24 workshops, one of which has had to be converted into a gymnasium, education, visits, resettlement and healthcare, although there is no provision for in-patient healthcare.

Most prisoners have a single-cell, with an in-cell shower. There is in-cell telephony, plus an electronic kiosk (a self-service computer terminal that allows prisoners to manage their daily affairs) on each wing, and prisoners are provided with electronic tablets.

By the end of the reporting year, approximately two-thirds of the men were prisoners convicted of a sexual offence (PCoSO), who are fully integrated with others for both residence and activities.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Although some improvements were made under the leadership of the director appointed in 2023, in June 2024 a new director was appointed and the changes being made are having an extremely positive effect on the prison. From the Board's observations, there has been increased staff support, improved communication at all levels and inter-departmental cooperation.

The imposition of a 'red-amber regime' signified a reduced but sustainable delivery of activities and services. However, the return to a 'green regime', which refers to the full operational delivery of all activities and services for prisoners, in October 2024, has had a positive impact on purposeful activities.

A review of the peer-led initiatives (PLIs) has led to a refining of roles, limiting numbers and ensuring they are well managed. From the Board's observations, this is beginning to have a positive impact on prisoners and the prison itself.

The prison council also meets on a monthly basis, attended by representatives from each houseblock and senior managers, and is a valuable forum for prisoners' representatives to raise concerns directly with directors and managers.

Although positive steps have been made to improve staffing, education/vocational work and staff recruitment and retention, there are still outstanding issues to be addressed, in the Board's view. A new education provider, Novus, appointed in July 2024, and a new head of learning and skills, appointed in September, appear to be having a positive impact. At the end of the reporting year, the prison has indicated that it will be fully staffed by the end of April 2025.

The pressure on the prison estate continues to be a challenge in accepting higher numbers, as well as a large number of PCoSO.

Safety

- As was the case in last year's IMB report, illicit substances are still prevalent in the prison, alongside a high rate of positive random drug tests.
- The frequency of self-harm incidents has increased during the reporting year and the management of the assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) process, for prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide, requires improvement, in the Board's view.
- Use of force incidents continued to be poorly managed, putting staff and prisoners at risk.
- The frequency of violent behaviour has not increased notwithstanding that the prison population has grown significantly to reach its capacity.

Fair and humane treatment

- As noted in our previous report, the standard of accommodation remains good overall. The majority of prisoners continue to have single cells with showers. A total of 12 cells have been 'doubled up' to cope with the increased prison population. The Board is still concerned about two prisoners sharing cells designed for one.
- The building design issues highlighted in our previous report remain. There is no airflow to the houseblock hub and common areas, creating significant discomfort in the warmer months.

- The Board continues to receive a high number of complaints about property loss. As noted in our previous report, we consider that the national use of a paper-based system, rather than a digital one, is inefficient, and we continue to maintain that a digital system could enable quicker responses.
- The Board is pleased to note a substantial improvement in the operation and oversight of serveries on wings.

Health and wellbeing

- The health needs of prisoners seem to be generally met.
- Prisoners can submit paper-based communication to the healthcare unit, using complaints boxes on each houseblock. However, the Board is concerned that the boxes may be inaccessible to those who rarely leave their wing. Electronic communication between prisoners and the healthcare unit has yet to be introduced.
- Many prisoners have told the Board that they do not understand the reasons for changes to their medication or delays in receiving medication on arriving at the prison. The healthcare unit recognises this is an issue and is attempting to improve understanding.
- Approximately 66% of prisoners receive in-possession medication.
- A newly appointed neurodiversity support manager (NSM) has raised awareness of how prison environments and communication can be adapted to be more accessible to prisoners' needs.
- Continuity of care for prison leavers receiving drug and alcohol support appears to be good: approximately 90% are referred to a community treatment provider, and the probation service is notified.

Progression and resettlement

- The education department has continued to struggle this year, due mainly to issues surrounding staffing. It is noted that it can take a considerable time for the appointment process to be completed.
- Novus replaced Weston College in July 2024 as the education provider, and immediately commenced a staff training programme. There have been noticeable improvements, in the Board's view, but they need to be consolidated. The introduction of movements' officers and searching on entering industries workshops and the education unit, noted in last year's report, continues to improve attendance and staff safety.
- From the Board's observations, the overall resettlement activities are good, but outcomes, such as employment and accommodation, are influenced by factors over which the prison has minimal influence.
- The progression of prisoners is still well managed, but it is influenced by increased national prison population pressures.
- No prisoners have been released on temporary licence (ROTL) for any outside employment purposes since October 2024. Support for families, particularly for men with children, has remained good. Reducing reoffending meetings have been more frequent and focused, but a reducing reoffending strategy is still awaited, pending an anticipated assessment to reflect the needs of the changed population.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- During the year, the IMB has noticed an increasing number of recalled prisoners. What is being done nationally to improve the monitoring and support for newly released prisoners, to reduce the likelihood that they are recalled for minor indiscretions?
- What improvements are planned to remedy faults in the design of new prisons, such as poor ventilation, lack of facilities, poor physical security, which have been identified in IMB reports?
- What steps will the Minister take to improve the poor recruitment record for IMB members?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- The original designation of Five Wells was as a resettlement prison for men in their last two years in custody. As the composition of the prison population has changed to accommodate a significant number of men who are not in their last two years of custody and on current projected availability of programme delivery capability, is there any plan to change the designation of Five Wells as a resettlement prison?
- What steps are the prison service undertaking to improve the system for recording and transferring prisoner property?

TO THE DIRECTOR

Safety

- What steps will the prison take to reduce the frequency of self-harm incidents?
- How will the prison engage with staff and prisoners to reduce instances of violence and use of force?
- What additional security measures will be taken to limit the number of illicit items found on the premises?

Fair and humane treatment

- What steps will be taken to improve the airflow in houseblocks?
- What plans are there to make cells which have been 'doubled up' more appropriate for use by two prisoners.
- When will the policy be enforced on the use of vapes for both staff and prisoners?

Health and wellbeing

- What steps are being taken to introduce electronic communication between the healthcare unit and prisoners?
- How is contacting the prisoners via their tablets improving communication?
- How can the healthcare unit improve prisoner understanding of changes to their medication?
- How are the new lockable lockers having an impact on the dispensing of medication?
- How are all parties ensuring the safety of pharmacists and men at the dispensary hatches?

Progression and resettlement

- Will there be an increase in the delivery capability of the building choices programme in the future?
- What steps are being taken to ensure that prisoners do not remain unallocated for long periods before being assigned to meaningful activity?
- What is being planned to ensure all men are in meaningful employment for at least 28 hours a week?
- Accepting the factors constraining ROTL for outside employment, is it envisaged that any prisoners will be granted ROTL in the next or subsequent years?

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised with the Minister	Response given	Progress
Are there plans to address the Board's concerns that progress towards making the IMB Secretariat a separate entity to the Ministry of Justice has not been given Parliamentary time, and that the current public appointment system does not serve the best interests of recruiting new members? The Five Wells Board has a complement of 16 members. However, at the end of the reporting year, only six members were in place, trying to monitor a complex prison with over 1,700 prisoners.	'I understand your concerns regarding the difficulties in recruiting new Board members, especially as you have faced particular challenges monitoring a large and complex prison with only six members in place at the end of the reporting year. I was pleased to hear that, since March 2024, there have been further appointments to the Five Wells Board; that you now have a team of 10; and that you have recently been part of a further recruitment campaign, obtaining two more applicants. Other initiatives to attract new applicants are in place, such as using local radio stations so that members can share their invaluable experience about the role more widely. I am aware that the process of appointing new Board members can sometimes be a lengthy one, and that this can cause frustration. The	In the reporting year, IMB Five Wells had four trained members and two new members in training. Recent national recruitment initiatives have identified very few able candidates to join the IMB. As of the end of the reporting year, we had a complement of four trained members.

	<p>IMB Staff Group (formerly the 'Secretariat') continues to seek improvements to its recruitment processes, including exploring ways to fill vacancies more quickly. There are no plans to make the IMB Staff Group a completely separate entity to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). I appreciate this may be disappointing to you. However, IMB staff will continue to operate with full independence from the MoJ under the overall leadership of the IMB National Chair. The vital and important role that IMB members play in scrutinising places of detention is formally distinguished from other 'volunteer' roles by their status as Ministerially made Public Appointments. It is of the utmost importance that these appointments are made using the appropriate selection processes, to ensure that the most suitable candidates are placed in these roles and the high standards of qualitative monitoring and integrity can be maintained. I would, again, like to extend my gratitude to you and all the HMP Five Wells Board members for your continued exemplary work.'</p>	

Issue raised with the Prison Service	Response given	Progress
<p>The Board remains concerned that little progress has been made in introducing a system that reduces the problems of loss of property during transfer from another establishment.</p>	<p>'HMPPS notes the Board's continuing concerns about the handling of prisoners' property and is aware that the Board raised this as an issue in last year's annual report. This is an area to which HMPPS is currently giving further attention. Careful consideration will be given to the findings in the recently received IMB national thematic report on how property loss impacts prisoners, as well as those due to be received from Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations, following a thematic review of the property complaints they have received in the last five years. As the Board identifies, a common area for problems is when excess prisoner property is forwarded on when a prisoner transfers. It is, therefore, key that prisoners comply with volumetric control limits, since anything within those limits will transfer with them. HMPPS is focusing on what more can be done to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Framework. HMPPS also notes the Board's concerns about the lack of digital improvements</p>	<p>There are continuing problems with property forwarded from other prisons to Five Wells. There has been no significant improvement to the position in the reporting year.</p>

	<p>on property handling. While it is recognised this will be disappointing, other pressures around digital changes mean it is not anticipated that an electronic property card will be in place in the immediate future. At HMP Five Wells specifically, the complaints about property handling largely emanate from prisoners transferring into the prison. During the last 12 months, there has been one complaint received regarding loss of property when a prisoner was transferring out of HMP Five Wells, which was attributed to the escort contractor. This indicates that HMP Five Wells is complying with the transfer control limits when prisoners are moved.'</p>	
<p>The Board remains concerned about the ingress of illicit items into the prison. Can more robust methods of detection be authorised?</p>	<p>'The Managing Conveyance of Unauthorised and Illicit Items Policy Framework, published in July 2024, provides instructions and guidance for prisons. The policy is structured on five key areas of conveyance, which includes the gate, reception, visits, correspondence and perimeter. Governors must assess the risk of conveyance in these areas using an evidence-informed risk</p>	<p>Additional CCTV has been installed' but there has been no progress regarding drone-detection systems. Levels of ingress remain high.</p>

	<p>assessment. Any risks highlighted via the evidence-informed assessment must be mitigated against with local procedures and outlined in the prison's Local Security Strategy. The Director and senior leadership team at HMP Five Wells are exploring additional methods to better prevent and detect the ingress of illicit items that will be supported by additional CCTV, which is due to be installed on the perimeter of the prison. Methods of reducing ingress by employing drone detection systems are also being considered.'</p>	
<p>What improvements can be made to ensure all men arrive at Five Wells with a robust and up-to-date sentence plan?</p>	<p>'Since opening in 2022' HMP Five Wells has had a high number of new receptions and for this cohort of prisoners it is not possible or expected that a sentence plan is in place on their arrival. For the majority of prisoners who are serving a determinate sentence of over ten months, the Prisoner Offender Manager (POM) should complete an initial OASys assessment (incorporating the sentence plan) within ten weeks of being sentenced. There is a strategy in place to maximise compliance to this timeframe, but due to continued churn it is recognised that there</p>	<p>The number arriving without a sentence plan has varied, but as of the end of March 2025 there were 36. However, there has been ongoing improvement in completions throughout the year.</p>

	<p>remains an ongoing but reducing backlog; the number for the end of September 2024 was 71. The vast majority (95%) of the population have now had a start of custody OASys completed. Initiatives that have been introduced, such as having dedicated POMs focusing on OASys completions, are helping to keep the backlog low. As identified by the Board, the backlog has reduced and is being managed by appropriately giving priority to OASys completion for those men closest to release.'</p>	
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Issue raised with Director	Progress
<p>Safety How will the prison measure and monitor the effectiveness of actions being taken to improve the management of use of force incidents?</p>	<p>Detailed analysis of both violent and use of force incidents have resulted in frequent individual and group communications about incident management and the use of body worn video cameras. Further work is needed to embed best practice and consistently meet current standards for control and restraint.</p>
<p>How will the prison improve its management of ACCT cases to reduce the frequency of self-harm incidents?</p>	<p>Improving the management of ACCT cases has remained a key issue for the prison throughout the reporting year. A quality assurance process has now been introduced to identify remaining weaknesses and improve staff awareness and documentation standards. Frequent self-harming prisoners and those with complex needs are the subject of a weekly review by a multi-disciplinary group, and this process has improved during the year.</p>
<p>What additional security measures will be taken to limit the number of illicit items found in the prison?</p>	<p>Although there have been notable finds of illicit items during the year, the positive rate for mandatory drugs tests remains high and suggests that significant quantities of illicit items are still available in the prison. Efforts to reduce demand, such as the drug rehabilitation unit (DRU), appear to have had only a modest impact. The prison's approach to security</p>

	measures has not changed significantly during the year.
Fair and humane treatment When will the low mobility cells be made safe and brought into full use?	Partially completed.
What steps will be taken to improve the airflow in houseblocks?	There have been no changes made during the year to improve airflow.
What plans are there to make cells that have been 'doubled up' more appropriate for use by two prisoners.	This situation has not been addressed since the previous IMB annual report. Concerns continue to be raised about privacy and storage.
When will a consistent policy be enforced regarding the use of vapes for both staff and prisoners?	Policy is clear but enforcement is not always consistent across the prison.
What steps are being taken to ensure greater efficiency in the timing and attendance at GOoD (good order or discipline) reviews?	The situation has improved considerably since the previous IMB annual report.
Health and wellbeing What steps are being taken to introduce electronic communication between Practice Plus Group (PPG) and prisoners?	The healthcare department is due to move to electronic communication by 31 July 2025 and is setting up the system log-ins for all staff.
How can the healthcare department improve prisoner understanding of changes to their medication?	The healthcare department is holding medication forums, and the head of healthcare is communicating the process for medication changes. This is also discussed in the prison council.
Progression and resettlement What steps will be taken to ensure, where possible, that all men will be able to take an accredited course that could help them access employment on release?	Vocational training is currently providing 16 accredited courses. Whilst the Building Choices programme may indirectly assist securing employment, it is estimated that it will only be able to be provided to 100 prisoners next year.

What steps are being taken to ensure that prisoners do not remain unallocated for long periods before being assigned to meaningful activity?	Concerns continue to be raised about the time taken for men to be allocated.
What is being planned to ensure all men are in meaningful employment for at least 25 hours a week?	The position has improved and meaningful employment now exceeds 25 hours a week.
What will be done differently in 2024-2025 to enable the achievement of the planned 35 prisoners to be granted ROTL for outside employment?	The changed population negatively impacted the possibility for granting ROTL in 2024-2025, with the result that only a total of five prisoners were employed for a short period and none since October.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

The prison population has been static, at around 1,700 during the reporting year. High natural turnover was increased by accelerated releases under the national early release programmes. The prisoner mix has changed significantly during the year, with an increase in the number of PCoSOs, who made up the vast majority of new arrivals and now represent more than 60% of the population. The prison is now fully integrated, with no separation of PCoSOs from other prisoners.

From the Board's observations, the reception and induction process has continued to work well, facilitated by staff and prisoner-led initiative (PLI) prisoners. The process signposts new arrivals to all opportunities the prison offers and is well received. Most issues arising relate to property following on from other prisons, or to periodic shortages of basic kit. This latter problem has been exacerbated by poor prison management of items such as kettles and televisions.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

The number of self-harm incidents has continued on an upward trend, reaching 2,326 for the year, an increase of 59%, and with a monthly peak of 271 in March 2025. The number of these incidents which were serious totalled 49 during the year. The number of prisoners self-harming has increased more slowly, demonstrating the frequent self-harming behaviour of a small number of men. The prison's efforts to understand the reasons behind these increases are still at an early stage, although changes to the safety team seem to have provided fresh impetus to this work.

Open assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans are generally in place for between 2-3% of the prison population at any time. The rate of open ACCTs as a percentage of population has not changed significantly during the year. ACCTs most commonly remain open for less than one month. The prison has endeavoured to reduce the number of ACCTs, including through more consistent case management and increased use of challenge, support and intervention (CSIP) plans (used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence). But, by the end of the reporting year, this had limited success. Concerns have been raised over the quality of both types of document, such as, for example, regarding the use of generic rather than individualised targets, the quality of records describing prisoner interaction, and the knowledge of staff about associated processes and responsibilities.

There were three deaths in custody at Five Wells in the reporting year, which have not yet been the subject of completed fatal incident reports.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

There has been a 12% increase in the total number of violent incidents, to 589, during the year, although the number of incidents involving staff has gradually reduced, while there have been more instances of prisoner-on-prisoner violence. The prison has identified and managed specific risks that have led to incidents, including improving the safety of prisoner movement and managing the population to avoid concentrations of prisoners likely to be involved in violent incidents.

CSIP documents have been used more frequently but the Board remains concerned about the quality of these documents, the use of generic rather than specific individual targets, and a general lack of staff understanding about their operation and purpose.

During the year, there has often been a small number of prisoners self-isolating, usually due to the individual having personal safety concerns. The vast majority of these prisoners have ceased self-isolating after a short period of time.

4.4 Use of force

There has been a gradual increase in the incidences of use of force (UoF) during the year, most notably in the second half of the period under review, when the average number exceeded 100 per month. Prison reviews of individual incidents have continued to show poor incident management, lack of leadership and communication, failure to follow good practice such as the use of body worn video cameras, and an ongoing need for refresher training for staff. Although management has taken actions to improve UoF practice - and there have been many instances of good practice - the IMB does not consider that the management of UoF incidents, as a whole, has improved during the year.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

As mentioned in the previous annual report, the IMB continues to be concerned about the number and range of illicit items found in the prison. Drugs continue to be routinely available and the positive random drug test rate remains stubbornly high, at around 25%. Efforts to reduce demand, such as the establishment of the drug rehabilitation unit (DRU), appear to have had little impact. The DRU's capacity has been reduced during the year and now has space for around 60 men. In some cases, men remain in the DRU for an extended period of time, rather than being progressed to a general landing.

This disappointing situation persists, despite a variety of measures to address the ingress of illicit items and prevent their circulation. These include better control of prisoner movements, extended prisoner searching and successful prosecutions of staff for inappropriate activity. The IMB continues to note that searching staff and other individuals working in the prison remains sporadic.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing and food

Accommodation

Following Ministry of Justice (MoJ) requests to house additional prisoners, 56 cells that were designed as singles have been converted to doubles. This has caused issues for some older prisoners, who now have to climb up to an upper bunk bed. In addition, there is now a shortage of space for in-cell property storage.

The low-mobility cells' design flaw, whereby the showers could not be safely used due to the proximity of power points, has been mainly resolved. However, issues concerning shower curtains still remain, preventing proper use of the showers in these cells. A temporary fix is being applied, but the Board would like to see a more permanent solution.

5.2 Segregation

Overall, from the Board's observations, there has been consistent and effective management of the CSU during the year. We expressed concerns that a small number of prisoners remained in the CSU for 42 days or over (the limit allowed without external authorisation). In most cases, these men were awaiting transfer to another establishment, and the process for managing these cases has been inefficient.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Key workers have been appointed to all prisoners but the frequency of key work sessions depends on priority. Key working continues to improve, but is focused on target groups of prisoners.

There are still some areas for staff to be consistently acting with confidence when challenging prisoners who are not observing the regime. Improvements have been made to prisoner movement, including the introduction of movements' officers and rub-down searches when entering and leaving areas.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Improvements have been made following the appointment of a new neurodiversity support manager (NSM).

5.5 Chaplaincy

Following the appointment of Jewish, Rastafari and Pagan chaplains, there is now a full complement. There has been an increase in attendance at Christian services, with numbers reaching over 100 at times. Muslim attendance at Friday Prayers remains high. Festivals for Seikh and Hindu prisoners have been observed by the Board.

5.6 Incentives schemes

From the Board's observations, the application of the incentives scheme remains inconsistent and appears to be used primarily to punish negative behaviours rather than reward positive behaviours.

5.7 Complaints

From the Board's review of the complaints system, response times to complaints have greatly improved during the year. However, only 53% of discrimination incident reporting

forms (DIRFs) were responded to on time. It is hoped that, with the prison similarly focusing in this area, the response times will improve.

5.8 Property

Issues with missing property still occur when prisoners are moved to the CSU or other wings and their property sometimes goes missing. The Board, however, continues to receive more applications about property that has not been forwarded from other prisons. The ability of the prison to follow up requests to other prisons is very limited, with no proper procedure in place nationally.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The NHS-commissioned Practice Plus group (PPG) continues to deliver the healthcare provision in the prison. A new head of healthcare was appointed in December 2024.

Healthcare management continues to have monthly meetings, attended by senior healthcare and prison staff and the local NHS Commissioner. The local authority, which has responsibility for social care in the prison, is invited and attendance has improved over the year.

At the end of the reporting year, there were still 10 staff vacancies, including for a permanent part-time psychiatrist, a psychologist and administrators.

Three healthcare assistants have been appointed, as well as two advanced clinical practitioners, but they are waiting for clearance. Any gaps are filled by bank staff, which include a pharmacy technician, a pharmacist and a registered general nurse.

The Board received 114 written healthcare applications, compared with 100 in the previous year. The majority of applications were about the management of medicines, wait times and medication collections from the hatches.

Men are frequently frustrated with the apparent lack of communication and appointments are often missed, as the men have not been notified in a timely manner.

Boxes for healthcare applications and complaints are on every houseblock and are emptied daily. When a concern looks like it can be dealt with quickly, the patient engagement lead goes on to the wing to deal with it, face to face, rather than with a written response.

PPG has been working with G4S to be able to provide access for the men via the tablet system so that a prisoner can have an immediate acknowledgement. This should be available at the beginning of the next reporting year.

The prisoner-led HASLine (Healthcare Advisory Service) continues to support the healthcare unit and is a valuable asset. They work to reduce non-attendance at appointments.

Approximately 66% of prisoners receive in-possession medication. Secure cabinets have been purchased and should be on the houseblocks early into the next reporting year.

There has still been a major concern raised by PPG about distributing medicines at the medication hatches, where the men have not always been monitored. PPG has been working with G4S to rectify this and to ensure there is always a prison officer at the hatches during the distribution of medicines.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Complaints about waiting times for appointments are still received.

However, waiting times are:

- Doctor: 4 weeks
- Dentist: 15 weeks
- Optician: 14 weeks
- Podiatry: 3 weeks

A nurse carries out an initial assessment on arrival at the prison. A second screening should be carried out in 24 hours.

A nurse is in attendance when prisoners are released, alongside a member of the substance misuse team, who can ensure they leave with their medication, including naloxone (an emergency antidote for overdoses caused by heroin and other opiates or opioids), where deemed appropriate.

Screening programmes are comprehensive and vaccinations are in line with those offered in the community.

A nurse and health care assistant provide night cover. The process for release from hospital is more organised.

6.3 Mental health

Urgent mental health referrals are seen within 24 hours, or immediately if a code red (a medical emergency code for major blood loss or trauma). Routine cases are usually seen within three days.

The new head of safety and their team have been training staff in the ACCT process. It is improving, but still needs further work to ensure anyone on an ACCT is dealt with appropriately.

PPG and the prison have worked together to ensure there is a member of the mental health team at an ACCT review (where a prisoner's risks, triggers and the effectiveness of the support strategies are discussed). By the end of the reporting period, attendance stood at 90%.

The neurodiversity support team works closely with the head of education and the PPG team and offers training for PCOs and PLI leads.

The main mental health issue is that Five Wells does not have a psychologist. The provision and support from the mental health team seems to have improved.

There are approximately 50 men on the caseload, who are frequently monitored; 160, who are stable but on antipsychotic monitoring; and those who are on ACCTs requiring short-term crisis intervention.

There were four patients under review for sectioning under the Mental Health Act at the end of the year. Where a prisoner is acutely unwell, they can be referred for an assessment and transferred to hospital for treatment under the Mental Health Act (where the criteria for detention is met).

6.4 Social care

The number of patients requiring social care has increased from 10 to 16; this number is on the increase, due to the ageing population of the prison. There is also quite a large number who require 'drop ins', e.g. for incontinence care, etc. The social care buddies (trained or informal prisoners who provide non-personal, peer-based social care support to other prisoners who require help with daily tasks due to age, illness or disability) are extremely helpful and supportive. There are five men with dementia, one of whom also has additional social care support. Wheelchairs are provided by PPG. The remaining equipment is supplied by G4S.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

The 'red-amber' regime (where there is a reduced but sustainable delivery of prison activities and services) was in place until October 2024. Under the 'green' regime, men are out of their cells for three hours and 15 minutes of work/education in the morning and the same in the afternoon, plus 45 minutes for the collection and eating of meals. They are all offered adequate exercise and are encouraged to do this. Men who are unallocated or refuse work or education are locked in their cells and only let out for exercise, meals, appointments and social visits. Many of the men who are of retirement age prefer to go out to work. If not at work, then they have to remain in cells, but the doors are not locked and they can access the kiosk, etc, with permission of a PCO.

There is very little activity on offer for the retired community. New initiatives are being investigated to include coffee mornings, games and suitable activities. An over-65s forum has been set up.

An under-25s forum has been established and activities are being developed, such as circuit training, football training, matches, rounders, etc.

The outside gym facilities are also an asset to the very small unsuitable gym.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The substance misuse team (SMS) screens prisoners on arrival at the prison. SMS had a caseload of 173 at the end of the year and 88 on opiate substitutes (buprenorphine and methadone).

Other treatments include:

- Psychosocial treatments: mutual aid, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Chaplaincy Higher Power, etc.
- Other support is received from courses run by PPG, online support (Breaking Free) and outreach work from the PLIs and key work sessions.

There were 60 men in the drug rehabilitation unit (DRU) at the end of the year, but the unit's effectiveness is under review, as it has not delivered expected positive outcomes. There were over 250 existing PCOs trained in using Naloxone and they now all receive training as part of the induction training course.

Support on release:

- Multiple groups provide information to men about support available in their area. For those who are receiving substance misuse treatment, appointments are arranged in the community.
- Just before prisoners are released, the healthcare unit issues them with injectable naloxone and trains them in its use.

6.7 Soft skills

There are more activities for older residents, and new initiatives are being investigated to include coffee mornings, games and suitable other activities. Age-appropriate seating has been provided on the wings. More age-appropriate seating has been requested for visitors.

All men are encouraged, through various outlets, to exercise at the appropriate levels and abilities, including walking groups. However, it is recognised that more could be done for those retired and with dementia.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, Library

Education

In the Board's view, the education department has worked hard to raise standards and address all the issues raised in the Ofsted report from earlier in 2024. New providers were sought and Novus took over on 1 July 2024.

Staffing remained an issue. A substantive head teacher was appointed in May 2024, then changed role on 1 January 2025 to lead the special educational needs provision. The current deputy head then took over as interim head teacher.

The education department worked closely with G4S to improve the safety of staff, which included improved searches of those entering education facilities and also G4S staff patrolling the area.

There have been a number of improvements in the quality of courses on offer since Novus took over. Staff have received intensive training and this has been reflected in improvements in planning and teaching. Staffing remains an issue, and no substantive head had been appointed following the changes in reorganisation.

Class closures, allocation issues and staff absences have had a negative effect on attendance and although men should be issued with a negative incentives scheme note, this is not consistent. In the Board's view, Novus and G4S have worked hard to address these issues and, up to the end of the year, attendance in education had improved from 36.29% in April 2024 to 69.77% at the end of March 2025. However, this is still not at the expected level. The introduction of education prisoner-led initiatives (PLIs) is being utilised to work with 'refusers' to not only encourage them to attend classes but to gather data about the reasons for non-attendance.

The percentage of men completing their basic English and Maths levels and achieving the appropriate level has increased from 67% in English to 100%, and 52% in Maths to 71%.

Initial screening has improved, but there are still courses on individual sentence plans that are not on offer at Five Wells.

Through the reporting year, there were many other external courses on offer, including from the Open University and the University of Leicester, etc, which were attended by 121 men. They have access to a room and IT during working time, but numbers are restricted, as there is limited funding to support the men.

There are some excellent courses, such as, for example, a business programme that helps men write their CVs on their release and teaches them how to set up a business and use SAGE accounting software. Success rates on these courses are high.

Other positive courses run by Novus and G4S have included art, computerised accounting, mentoring, warehousing and storage, and plumbing, etc. The success rate is 100% in the vast majority of these courses.

The reading charity, the Shannon Trust, now has 10 men in a support role.

The teaching of British values is being incorporated into the life of the prison.

Library

There have been some improvements in the library, although the actual space inhibits many activities, and attendance has improved during the year.

Staffing has also been problematic. The librarian left and the deputy was appointed in their place. However, they were still waiting for a new deputy to be appointed.

Rearranging the shelves, etc, has made it a more usable space, but it is still too small to be able to introduce other activities.

Systems are in place for taking out and returning books, which has reduced the number of books lost. New books were purchased and requests for visitors, etc, to donate books has had a positive impact.

Reading champions have been appointed and a scheme is being trialled to encourage reading on the houseblocks. Books have been ordered for this scheme. There are book cases on the landings, although they appear to be a low priority and books do not appear to be changed regularly. Book club initiatives are on offer and those attending are enjoying the experience.

Chess clubs, writing/poetry competitions with a reward are popular, but the percentage of men accessing them is small. Limited resources still tend to impede these activities.

7.2 Industries, vocational training

A new head of learning and skills was appointed at the end of September 2024 and appears to have had a positive impact on the development and improvement in both education and skills.

Improvements in attendance throughout the year have given this area a more positive experience.

There are 16 accredited courses, with three further courses at the staff recruitment stage. Sign and design and print continue to take on work from outside, as well as from the prison itself, and it is run in a professional manner. Other areas working with outside providers include: Salvation Army (upcycling); Recycling Cycles; Textiles; and Carpentry, etc.

The success of the gardening programme is evident in the prison grounds.

Warehousing and forklift training is running well, although space is an issue.

Kitchen fitting and other multi-skills areas, including bricklaying, are developing.

Linde Fork lift repairs is well organised and run and is highly acclaimed by Linde.

Other courses include: plumbing and heating, art, fitness academy, Fluidmaster and cleaning. Radio and media present regular videos from the Director and senior management, as well as videoing special events.

A variety of sporting activities have been introduced over the year, with competitions taking place.

Movements' officers and strict timetabling have improved attendance and men are regularly searched on entry and exit to industries.

The 'red-amber' regime changed to 'green' in October 2024 so now men are attending work/education on a full-time basis. Three of the workshops offer an evening session, with

their meal being taken in Woody's cafe. There have been some positive reports from men about the experience but concerns about how effective it is in increasing productive hours.

Prisoner attendance targets have been achieved, but there are still 12 improvement notifications from the HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) inspection to finalise.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 Offender management

A combination of staffing shortfall for part of the year and the unexpected increase in workload, due to initiatives such as early custody supervised licence (ECSL) and standard determinate sentence (SDS40, which allows prisoners to be released after 40% of their sentence, instead of the usual 50%, to alleviate prison overcrowding), has resulted in the caseload of both prison and probation offender managers being approximately 50% higher than would usually be expected. To illustrate the level of extra work, there were 174 ECSL releases to plan for in the period April to September and over 300 additional hours to prepare for SDS40. The consequential response to this was to prioritise other, more routine work such as imminent parole hearings and release. As of the time of this report, the staffing situation has improved but is expected to remain lower than desirable to provide optimum delivery capability.

Pressures on the offender management unit (OMU) have also continued to rise with the increase in the number of high-risk men arriving at the prison, most of whom are PCoSOs. Although there is no readily available data to show the reasons for recall, there has been an increase during the year in the number of prisoners who have been recalled. A welcome initiative has been the introduction of monthly OMU surgeries on each landing, providing easier opportunities for prisoners to raise their concerns directly.

During the year, the number of prisoners arriving without a sentence plan has varied: in March 2025, there were 36. At the end of the reporting year, there were 116 prisoners who had no offender assessment system (OASyS, which assesses the risks and needs of prisoners) completions. However, improvements are illustrated by a reduction from typically 150-180 outstanding completions each month to 70-85 at the time of this report.

Categorisation reviews resulted in 277 prisoners recategorised to category D (similar to last year) and, therefore, eligible for transfer to an open prison. However, 21 prisoners were recategorised from C to B, which is a significant increase on the 13 who were recategorised last year, and is potentially indicative of the changing nature of the population.

The average number of indeterminate sentenced prisoners during the year was 50, of which, at the end of the year, 15 were imprisoned for public protection (IPP), an increase from five last year.

A total of 287 prisoners were released on home detention curfew (HDC), which is significantly more than 189 last year.

There were 188 parole board hearings, resulting in 73 releases. In 47 cases, the board required a psychology referral but, as there is no resident psychologist, this required external provision.

At the beginning of the year, it was hoped that up to 35 prisoners might be approved to be released on temporary licence (ROTL), but there were only five, and none since October. With the significantly increased number of high-risk prisoners, mostly PCoSOs, and pressures on the OMU, this was not subsequently possible to provide.

7.3.2 Programme delivery

Staff resourcing issues at the beginning of the year were successfully resolved, enabling the target delivery of 14 courses of the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) to be achieved, with 120 of the 140 prisoners who started it successfully completing the programme. However, it was noted that there was an apparently less motivated population to engage with the course than last year, which impacted on the successful completion rate. The TSP course will be discontinued in the coming year, after completion of the final two courses, and replaced by Building Choices.

The Choices and Changes one-to-one programme, for young offenders, was provided according to need and successfully completed for the eight out of 10 men who started the course.

Planning and training for the Building Choices programme was ongoing for several months to enable the first course, for medium-risk prisoners, to begin in April 2025. The planned delivery outcomes of seven courses for medium-risk and three courses for high-risk prisoners will be monitored throughout the year. Noting that an estimated 85% of Five Wells prisoners would benefit from the programme, there is currently only a delivery capability for a total of 100 course completions during the year. The prisoners selected for the programme will be prioritised for those due for home detention curfew (HDC), and parole or release, but exclude consideration for transfer to a category D establishment.

Delivery is dependent on a planned upgrade of treatment rooms and psychology input, which is expected to be provided by an external resource.

Delivery to more prisoners would require both more staff and availability of additional treatment rooms.

7.4 Family contact

Support for families has remained good, with provision for visitors in a welcoming visits hall. During the year, an average of 58 social visiting sessions were provided, each with opportunities for up to 37 prisoners to have visitors, with a resulting average of 1,940 visitors per month. However, the number of adult visitors has had a downward trend, from a maximum of 2,281 in April 2024 to 1,876 in March 2025. The same downward trend has been seen in the number of visiting children, from 686 in April 2024 to 260 in March 2025. The reason for the decline in number of visitors is considered to be attributed to the significant proportion of prisoners convicted of sexual offences, some of whom have restrictions on contact with children.

The provision of social video calls has increased, and consideration is being given to increase it further to meet rising demand.

The dedicated family unit for 60 men was discontinued, due to the significantly fewer men meeting the criteria, but provision of support for men with families has remained good, with some examples as follows:

- Family days (which bring together men and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings) have been held, typically two per month, but those for adult visitors have been found to be increasingly popular.
- Family lounge visits have increased (372 during the year).
- Support for other visits has continued, including those for social services, court, first visit with a new baby and farewell visits for a child going into care.

- A variety of family interventions have been good, including an awareness event for professionals dealing with children, to learn the impact of parental imprisonment on their children;
- Free legal advice at a family law clinic for prisoners;
- Support for parents and carers to encourage involvement of fathers in early building of a bond with babies and very young children;
- Arranging and maintaining parental relationship with their children's school and an opportunity to meet teachers; and
- 'Bricks beyond bars', using LEGO as a therapeutic tool.

In order to gain feedback and enhance the social visits experience, surveys and forums have been held with some examples:

- A visitor survey gave a very positive indication of the social visits experience, with responses indicating they were treated well.
- A visitor forum gave a sample of visitors the opportunity to meet and discuss a range of issues with relevant visits and families staff.
- A forum provided the opportunity for prisoners to raise questions and address concerns and make suggestions. The visits arrangements have been changed to address some previously expressed concerns.

Refreshment facilities for visitors have continuously improved and visitors can now pre-order from the visits centre.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Resettlement activity is good, but outcomes such as employment and accommodation are affected by factors over which the prison has minimal influence, including the remaining length of individual sentences.

Reducing reoffending meetings have been held more frequently and appear to be more focused than in the previous year. Although a reducing reoffending policy remains in place, a strategy has not been produced, pending an assessment to reflect the needs of the changed population.

A pre-release team, which was managed by a senior probation officer who had responsibility for several prisons, is now managed by a senior probation officer in the OMU. It is anticipated that this will assist the integration and co-ordination of the resettlement activity with the work of the OMU.

Resettlement activity commences on arrival. A peer-led team, Wellingborough resettlement advice programme (WRAP), has a key role in identifying potential resettlement needs. Their role is especially important in making referrals to the resettlement team in the 12 weeks prior to release. The most significant issue identified has been a concern about accommodation on release.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) work coaches also provide a much-appreciated service, whereby claims for Universal Credit are pre-arranged and advance referrals made to relevant job centres to assist in employment-related interviews and benefits claims, as appropriate.

Another valued peer-led team (the departure lounge) provides support to pre-release activity by interviewing all men in the two weeks prior to release to identify and make relevant referrals for remaining and potentially ongoing issues of concern. This team also

meets the men immediately prior to release in a 'departure lounge', where hot rolls are offered, items of clothing are available and onward travel arrangements confirmed. A common theme identified by this team was the need for ID to be provided on release. Although birth certificates were frequently provided to support evidence of ID, there was still no facility for provision of photographic ID. As noted in our last report, it is, again, hoped that this will be provided in the coming year.

A Foundations of Rehabilitation programme, which aims to positively plan for release to help prevent reoffending, was successfully delivered to 74% of the 150 prisoners who started the programme. Although fewer than the 87% of 305 men who started last year, it remains a popular course, with positive feedback from participants, as indicated by over 60% of recent arrivals expressing an interest.

Careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) also meets all prisoners on arrival to assess and subsequently review possible career aspirations. As of December 2024, CIAG identified that whilst trades such as plumbing and carpentry were the highest priority, business and IT-related areas also featured more highly than previously, which was considered likely to be due to the changed nature of the population.

During the year, there were 11 events where employers met with groups of prisoners and provided details of potential employment opportunities, which were predominantly in the construction sector, as well as hospitality. These resulted in 58 offers of potential employment, which were successfully taken up by 13 prisoners.

Overall, an average of 24% of released prisoners were employed six months after release.

The employment advisory board met on nine occasions during the year but, disappointingly, the number of employers fell from a maximum of six to two by the end of the year. Efforts were underway to try to re-energise the board and to actively seek to identify more employment opportunities to meet the needs of the population.

During the year, there were 1,535 releases, of which an average of 92% were accommodated, although there was a downward trend at the end of the reporting year. This is likely attributed to the change in type of population, which tends to be more difficult to accommodate. Whilst the majority (72%) were released in relatively local regions, it was noted that those released locally had the best accommodation outcomes, while those to London or the south (20%) had relatively less good outcomes.

8. The work of the IMB

The Board at Five Wells has continued, with fewer members than last year, to maintain a strategy of planned monitoring of the prison environment. The findings are reported weekly to the Director, and questions to management form part of the report. The monthly board meeting continues to welcome the Director and Controller, who share updates and highlight issues that are being dealt with. A senior manager is also invited to brief us on departmental issues and plans for the future. It is important to maintain relationships with prison staff, from whom we receive good cooperation.

The Board has regular face-to-face interaction with prisoners at reviews, adjudications, when dealing with applications to the IMB and when monitoring wings. Our annual team performance review provides an opportunity to review our monitoring of all aspects of the prison's management.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board member	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	6
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	4, plus 2 in training
Total number of visits to the establishment	438

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	31	37
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	35	54
C	Equality	0	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	22	41
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	21	37
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	47	39
F	Food and kitchens	22	35
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	100	114
H1	Property within the establishment	51	79
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	52	55
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	36	40
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	48	45
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	38	46
K	Transfers	11	15
L	Miscellaneous*	57	155
	Total number of applications	571	792

*The increase in miscellaneous applications is partly due to larger numbers of applications covering a number of issues, and a small number of prisoners who submitted multiple applications that could not be categorised. The IMB dealt with all applications in the same way, irrespective of categorisation.

Annex A

Service providers

- Aramark: prison food contract
- Change, Grow, Live: health and social care charity, delivering life skills' courses
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP): assistance with financial needs, debt issues and setting up benefit payments ready for release
- Ingeus: Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) accommodation support service
- Interventions Alliances: support in securing accommodation ready for release
- Invisible Walls: visitor centre services
- Nacro: wellbeing services after release
- New Futures Network: provider of employment services
- North Northamptonshire Council: social care provider
- Probation Service
- Practice Plus Group: NHS commissioned healthcare provider
- Voluntary Impact Northants: a local charity providing programmes aimed at improving prisoners' health and wellbeing
- Novus: education and skills provider (replaced Weston College in June 2024)

Annex B

Issues raised with management by the Board

The Board's weekly monitoring report is sent to the Director and senior managers. In the report, key issues from the week are raised and a response requested. The table below gives a breakdown of the number of issues raised for each category in the reporting year.

	Category	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation/Laundry/Clothing	56	76
B	Discipline/Adjudications/Incentives schemes	16	17
C	Equality	2	3
D	Purposeful Activity/Education/Work/ Training/Regime	53	68
E1	Letters/Visits/Phones/PPU	5	4
E2	Finance/Cash	3	1
F	Food/Kitchens	69	27
G	Medical/Healthcare	47	24
H1	Property within Five Wells	18	8
H2	Property during transfer	1	0
H3	Canteen / Facilities	16	1
I	Sentence mgt/ROTL/HDC/Parole/Recat/ Release dates/OMU	11	11
J	Staff - prisoner concerns/bullying/discrimination	8	0
K	Transfers	1	0
O	Other	19	11
S	Safety	28	18
	TOTAL	353	269



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