



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Pentonville

**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/YOI Pentonville, on Caledonian Road in the London Borough of Islington, is a category B local prison, primarily serving the Magistrates' and Crown Courts in north and east London. The four cell blocks remain much as they were when the prison was opened in 1842.

Pentonville holds category B and C adult and young adult (YA) men aged 18 to 25. Ordinarily, about a third of the adults held are on remand but, as has been the case over the past few years, the proportion in the reporting year was much higher, remaining static at approximately 65%.

The certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being overcrowded) is 909 prisoners¹. The operational capacity, which is the maximum number of prisoners it can hold without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime, is 1,205. At the end of the reporting year, there were approximately 1180 prisoners and, on some days, every cell was occupied.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- First-night cells were often lacking basic equipment, such as pillows and kettles, and prisoners were not always given a welfare call on their first night in the prison (4.1)
- Although the safer custody team was understaffed at times during the reporting year, the Board noted that there were improvements in the management of safety and also welcomed the increased focus on violence reduction. (4.2, 4.3)
- Accurate completion of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents (used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm or suicide) remains an issue, as reported last year, and the Board maintains its view that the documentation is over-complicated and illogically set out and that it should be revised. (4.2)
- There was an insufficient number of Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide confidential emotional support to fellow prisoners) in the prison over most of the reporting year. This was largely down to the fact that, at times during the year, Listeners could not be put on hold and kept at Pentonville due to capacity pressures in the prison estate nationally. (4.2)
- The Board welcomed the long-awaited move of vulnerable prisoners to their own dedicated wing and the potential increased opportunities available to this cohort. However, it was very disappointing that, by the end of the reporting year, prisoners arriving on the wing were still not getting a satisfactory induction. (4.2)
- The monthly meetings for IPP, or imprisonment for public protection, prisoners (an indeterminate sentence introduced in 2005 and abolished in 2012, designed for prisoners judged to be a significant public risk but not warranting a life sentence) and lifers were a very valuable support for these vulnerable men and should, in the Board's view, be reinstated. (4.3)
- The average monthly percentage of use of force incidents for which body worn video camera (BWVC) footage was available increased from 57% to 67%. However, the Board's view is that, although this was a positive trajectory, the figure was low, given that all staff are supposed to wear BWVCs and operate them during an incident. (4.4)
- The Board was concerned by an increase in the availability and use of new psychotic substances (NPS), often resulting in medical emergencies. (4.5)

Fair and humane treatment

- The crumbling fabric of the prison and poor conditions remain a serious concern to the Board. The building is susceptible to continual infestations of rats, mice, cockroaches and flies, and cells being taken out of use increases overcrowding. In addition to the potential health hazard of living with vermin, two men share cramped and sometimes damp cells built for single occupancy. These conditions are not decent or humane. Repairs are slow and often only provide a temporary fix. (5.1)

- The Board was particularly concerned about the condition of the cells in the care and separation unit, or CSU, where men are segregated, some of which have damp walls and frequently blocked drains. (5.2)
- The prisoner platform meetings continued to be a valuable and collaborative forum for prisoners to bring their concerns to management and were especially useful during the period of the kitchen closure. (5.3)
- Only minimal levels of key work took place, with no proper system for allocating key workers or for monitoring the number of sessions. (5.3)
- Pentonville remains a completely unsuitable environment for prisoners with mobility issues. (5.4)
- The Board welcomed the long overdue repair of the mosque roof. However, it was very disappointing that, due to damage to the flooring because of an undetected leak, the mosque remained out of use. (5.5)
- The system for transfer of prisoner property between prisons remained unfit for purpose, with prisoners often having to wait weeks or months for their belongings to arrive, and property sometimes being lost altogether. (5.8)
- A drive to increase attendance at activities sessions was welcome, but with structured wing activity (SWA) happening only once a day, some prisoners were still locked up for 22 hours a day or more. (6.5)

Health and wellbeing

- It was a positive development that, in response to prisoner frustration at a lack of responses from the healthcare department to complaints and applications, some new arrangements were put in place to address the issue. (6.1)
- A lack of beds in the secure mental hospitals meant that some very unwell prisoners remained in Pentonville awaiting a place, either on the in-patient unit, or sometimes on the wings or in the CSU. However, Pentonville had the shortest transfer waiting times of the London prisons and the highest number of transfers to secure units. (6.3)
- The wellbeing centre continued to be an underused resource. This is regrettable, as Board members were frequently told by prisoners who attended the centre how beneficial they felt it was for their wellbeing. (6.3)

Progression and resettlement

- The drive to increase attendance at activities sessions was a welcome development, increasing opportunities for education and training. (6.5)
- Government-imposed measures to reduce prison overcrowding continued to have an impact on the offender management unit's (OMU) ability to fulfil its remit. The additional work involved in these initiatives reduced the time available for the team to complete its day-to-day work, causing much anxiety and frustration for prisoners. (7.3)
- Immediate releases from court, due to long periods spent on remand, as well as transfers occurring during the last 12 weeks of sentence due to national population pressures, meant that some prisoners missed out on important pre-release support. (7.5)

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- The crumbling state of Pentonville remains a serious concern to the Board. The conditions in which prisoners must live are inhumane and contribute to mental health issues, self-harm and violence. Will the Minister commit to providing additional financial resources to HMPPS to enable urgent improvements to the fabric of the prison, and if so, when?
- When will the Minister provide adequate financial resources to HMPPS to enable offender management units to cope with the extra work involved in implementing initiatives aimed at reducing the prison population, as well as fulfil their day-to-day responsibilities?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- How will HMPPS ensure that, following the end of the maintenance contract with GFSL, robust contract arrangements will be put in place to ensure that repairs are done in a timely manner and that there are penalties for poor performance?
- The transfer of property between prisons remains chaotic and the 2022 Prisoners' Property Policy Framework has made no noticeable difference. When will this dysfunctional system be overhauled?
- The ACCT documentation (revised in 2022) remains overly complicated and cumbersome. When will HMPPS revise this essential documentation, given its potentially life-saving importance?
- What will HMPPS do to create more spaces in the estate for prisoners convicted of sexual offences so that they can move on from unsuitable prisons such as Pentonville and start offending-behaviour courses?
- What will HMPPS do to support the Governor to stem the flow of drugs, especially NPS, into Pentonville, which could include, for example, increased perimeter security and anti-drone systems?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- What additional measures will you take to ensure that all officers wear their body worn video cameras and use them in the event of an incident, in particular where force is used?
- What will you do to ensure that a robust system is put in place to ensure that every prisoner arriving at Pentonville has a clean, fully equipped cell, a welfare call and a meaningful induction?
- How will you implement a system for ensuring that, at a minimum, those prisoners deemed most in need of one will be allocated a key worker, and that the amount and quality of key work is monitored?
- What will you do to increase utilisation of the wellbeing centre, which has such a beneficial impact on many of the prisoners who attend it?
- How will you ensure that maintenance issues are recorded and fixed in a timely manner?

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Four different Governors headed the early days in custody (EDIC) wing during the reporting year, so some fresh approaches were short-lived.

Reception processed over 22,000 movements in and out of the prison. Reception staff were observed to treat new arrivals with respect, compassion and efficiency. When asked by Board members, prisoners generally said they were treated with respect.

New arrivals were interviewed by a trained officer, but a lack of privacy may have inhibited frankness, which contributes to risk assessment. Men were also interviewed by a nurse and referred, if necessary, to the GP who was on duty each evening. Prison orderlies (trusted prisoners who take on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison) were a cheerful presence and gave the new arrivals kit and an induction booklet and served a hot meal.

Prisoners arriving on transfer often brought several bags of property and had to choose one, which was searched by prison officers, emptying it on to the floor, before the prisoner could take it to his cell. There was a body scanner in reception but still no scanner for property, which the Board believes could make the process more respectful and quicker.

Despite the emphasis on decency by the Governor, the standard of first-night cells slipped. Random checks by the Board (or a Governor) sometimes found essentials missing, such as a pillow, blanket or kettle and, occasionally, a cell was filthy. Housekeeping checks should be systematic and rigorous, with all new arrivals being entitled to expect a fully equipped cell. The Board repeatedly raised this issue with management. Prisoners were not always given a welfare call on their first night. This was sometimes the result of staff shortages, but it was also due to an apparent lack of staff knowledge about the correct protocols, which increased prisoner anxiety and was a serious safety concern to the Board. Staff on the wing had to fit these calls in on subsequent days. A manageable and more compassionate approach to welfare calls would be welcome. Due to public protection controls and restrictions, prisoners on MAPPA (multi-agency public protection arrangements, which manage violent prisoners and those convicted of a sexual offence) often had to wait longer than other prisoners to make calls. The prison did not have an effective process to make the necessary checks and facilitate calls.

Induction sessions, led by Insiders (trusted prisoners who explain procedures and life in the prison to new arrivals) supervised by an officer, covered a daunting amount of information. They were generally observed by the Board to be clearly delivered, but we felt that there was inadequate consideration given to the needs of non-English speakers. The induction booklet was, however, available in a range of languages and there was information on the Pentonville TV channel. A basic skills test (BSA), usually completed on day two in the prison, is essential for getting a job or attending education. To improve the take-up rate, Pentonville introduced a payment of £25. However, still only around 65% completed the test, perhaps

because most prisoners were on remand and did not have to work. The payment stopped at the end of the reporting year.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

The safer custody team had a shortage of staff over most of the reporting year, for various reasons, including frequent attendance at Coroners' Court inquests, which rendered it unable to meet its remit. New leadership was put in place, along with increased staffing levels, later in the reporting year. It was too early for the Board to assess the effectiveness of these developments.

A more concise weekly safety overview, with clearer, user-friendly graphics that identified trends and issues of concern, and a much-improved weekly safety intervention meeting, ensured that all vulnerable prisoners and those of concern were reviewed within a multi-disciplinary setting. There was good attendance by agencies and staff involved in their care. However, re-deployment of staff remained an issue.

There were 565 discrete recorded incidents of self-harm, a 7% decrease on the previous reporting year. Monthly levels varied, depending on how many prolific self-harmers were in the prison. Identification of the reasons behind self-harm improved, with mental health, family and debt frequently cited.

The number of ACCT documents (used to support a prisoner who is at risk of suicide or self-harm) opened during the reporting year increased slightly, to 769, up from 723 in the previous reporting year. Most were opened in reception and the early days in custody (EDIC) wing.

ACCT reviews (which monitor the prisoner's progress and adjust the care plan as needed) were rarely overdue, but there was an occasional backlog of seven-day post-closure reviews. However, the Board continues to believe that the current ACCT documentation is not fit for purpose, being overly complicated and illogically set out. When spot-checked, it was often found not to have been completed correctly, sometimes with important details omitted.

Around 46 calls were made from in-cell phones to the Samaritans each day. Listeners (trained by the Samaritans) gave an average of 73 Listens per month. This was a fall from 115 per month in the previous reporting year, due to a shortage of Listeners who, at times during the year, could not be put on hold and kept at Pentonville because of capacity issues in the prison estate. Additionally, vetting and training up new Listeners takes time. In February, there were only four Listeners in the prison. This increased to 19 in March although, for a prison the size of Pentonville, there should be 25.

Sadly, eight prisoners died in the reporting year, compared with two in the previous year. There were five inquests during the reporting year, with seven outstanding. The one Prevention of Future Deaths report received during the reporting year recommended that all staff receive sickle cell disorder training, which management received and was planned for later this year for operational staff.

Due to a software problem, statistics for the response times to cell bells have not been available for this reporting year. This is of concern to the Board due to the importance of the prison being able to monitor response times.

Vulnerable prisoners unit (VPU) The number of vulnerable prisoners (VPs) continued to surge this year, reaching over 150, with around 100 housed on the EDIC wing due to a lack of space on the dedicated VPU. Despite the space and safety constraints, the wing manager on the EDIC wing improved the VPs' regime, with activities such as in-cell work, for which they could be paid, and more time on association (when prisoners are allowed out of their cells to socialise with other prisoners and participate in activities). However, opportunities were still very limited. Barista training to include some VPs came to nothing when the national training contract was cancelled.

A decision was made in August to relocate all VPs to a single wing. The identification of a suitable location was a challenge in a Victorian, radial-design prison (which features a central hub with multiple wings or corridors extending outwards). The move took place in mid-January, involved over 300 prisoners and was meticulously planned and executed. Forums had been held with the prisoners who were being displaced, and although some were unhappy, they were mainly resigned to the move and there was very little trouble on the day. To prevent equipment going missing, prisoners took everything with them (including TVs). All cells were thoroughly cleaned and checked for furniture and repairs were done before the new occupants arrived. Moving the VPs was a project that had been discussed for several years, and the Board viewed its successful completion as a welcome and positive outcome.

Compliance with additional safety requirements for VPs took a little while to embed on the new wing. For example, VPs had to pass through another wing to collect medication and, on one occasion, a prisoner who should not have been out of his cell assaulted a VP. Wing managers underlined safety requirements to staff and held focus groups with the VPs to hear their concerns and ideas.

New arrival VPs went straight to the VPU rather than spending early days on the EDIC wing. The Board did not receive complaints about first-night provision for VPs. However, planning for induction sessions to be held on the wing was very slow and some VPs went almost two months without induction or the opportunity for the incentive payment for BSA completion. As of the end of the reporting year, regular weekly induction for VPs was still not happening. Given the particular vulnerability of new arrivals, the Board felt that this was not acceptable.

More positively, VPs had some increased job opportunities as a result of the move. An education pod was installed on the wing. However, it was unstable, potentially unsafe and lacked sufficient seating, so was removed.

Many of the VPs are men convicted of sexual offences, who should move on to more suitable establishments. HMPPS has clamped down on prisons' ability to refuse transfers, but it has no national strategy on creating spaces. Local efforts lie with the offender management unit (OMU), which worked hard to obtain spaces. At the end of the reporting year, there was already little spare capacity on the dedicated wing.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

There was an increased focus on violence reduction this reporting year, with an increase of seven members of staff. Mental health problems and a prison running at near capacity in a building that is falling apart were major factors driving violence towards staff (which averaged 20 incidents per month) and prisoner-on-prisoner

assaults (37 per month), both of which increased slightly on the previous reporting year.

A new manager was appointed to increase the effectiveness of all aspects of reducing violence such as challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs), Time4Change and key work, as well as to integrate the work of contract agencies such as Catch22 and St Giles. A violence reduction day was held in March, with workshops and walkarounds, to educate staff about CSIPs and other violence reduction tools in order to prevent escalating behaviour from erupting into violence, and to increase CSIP referrals.

Two outside agencies, Catch22 and St Giles, worked with young adults (YAs) who were gang-affiliated and presenting with challenging and violent behaviour. They provided one-to-one support, mediation and conflict resolution. Prisoner violence reduction representatives were appointed on some wings and, although it was early days, staff told Board members that they felt there had been a marked decrease in gang violence because of these interventions.

Two disruption moves to break-up particularly violent periods took place during the reporting year, which did interrupt the cycle for a time. However, due to the churn (turnover) and transfer of prisoners, violence hotspots moved around the prison. Reasons cited for violence were non-compliance and threats to staff, so a key focus was on improving communication between staff and prisoners. Overall, monthly violence levels remained roughly stable throughout the reporting year.

Manual razors were withdrawn and replaced with electric razors, which has led to the men reverting to old-school methods of violence, using cut-off broom and mop handles as weapons. The appearance of flick knives was alarming. Two of these, which have longer, sharper blades, were found but a third one, used in an attack, was not. Two other knives were found in February. Focus groups were started to find out why the men carry weapons and what the prison could do to make them feel safer so that carrying weapons would be unnecessary. These findings were to be included in the violence reduction strategy moving forward.

The safer custody hotline ensured that family and friends could contact the prison if they were worried about a loved one. There was an average of 20 monthly calls, mostly concerning prisoners on the induction wing.

IPPs Due to the efforts of one custodial manager, monthly meetings were organised for IPP prisoners, whose sentences do not have a fixed release date and who were spread around the prison with little or no understanding or support from staff or agencies. These meetings were held in the library, where the men were able to talk freely about their anxieties and concerns. They were attended by staff from probation, the offender management unit and the healthcare department, as well as by the IMB, for observational purposes. The group was expanded to include those serving life sentences and prisoners sentenced to more than 15 years. In the Board's view, it provided an essential and innovative support group for these very vulnerable prisoners. However, these meetings stopped towards the end of the reporting year, and the Board believes it is crucial that this innovative support group for such a vulnerable group of men should be resumed.

4.4 Use of force

There were 1128 reported instances of use of force (UoF) this year (compared with 895 last year). Of these, 773 involved the use of full control and restraint. The most common reasons for using force were prisoner non-compliance and violence, during searches of prisoners, and to stop assaults on members of staff. Batons are carried by officers for use in the most serious incidents. Of the 19 incidents at which they were drawn, they were used on eight occasions. There were 77 planned interventions (54 more than in the previous reporting year). A total of 41% of the prisoners restrained by officers during a UoF incident were identified as having 'personal care needs' (defined by the prison to include learning difficulties/disabilities or neurodiversity).

The average monthly proportion of UoF incidents for which there was body worn video camera (BWVC) footage increased to 67% (from 57% last year). Although this was positive, the Board believes this figure should be higher, as all officers are required to carry BWVCs and are expected to use them. At adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules), and in internal scrutiny meetings, BWVC footage, along with CCTV footage if available, was regularly examined.

PAVA incapacitant spray was introduced at Pentonville in July 2023. In the reporting year, it was drawn four times and used three times. All incidents were investigated. Due to a lack of communication at one of the incidents, appropriate after-care didn't happen. There was an extensive investigation and actions were taken. Pava was not used at all in the previous reporting year.

The format of meetings for scrutinising, learning from and performance managing UoF incidents improved this year, with a renewed focus on accountability. The Board was invited to all meetings and observed robust discussions of good and poor performance.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

There was increased gate security, rub-down searches and X-ray scanning of staff and visitor bags. However, there were not always enough members of trained staff to operate the airport-style X-ray machine, which meant it was not always used. There were also enhanced proactive wing searches, for which additional resources were supplied.

A whole staff search took place in the chapel, with 100% rub down identifying several members of staff with banned items. Over the reporting period, five members of staff were suspended, with several dismissals.

Illicit items' data are collated daily and there were 273 drug finds, 442 mobile phone finds and 248 weapon finds over the reporting year. This is higher than the previous reporting year due to improved drone technology and inadequate window security allowing more items in. Two intelligence reports on firearms in the establishment were submitted in March 2025, but nothing was found.

The searching of staff, visitors and the prison by specially trained sniffer dogs increased over the reporting year.

The disruption of one route for contraband, such as, for example, the enhanced gate security, sometimes led to spikes in other channels, such as drones and throwovers (where people from outside the prison throw parcels containing illicit items over the walls, which are then picked up by prisoners). Drone technology had improved to such an extent that contraband could be delivered to an exact cell on a specified landing. The installation of the new windows was halted, as they seemed too easily dismantled to allow drone deliveries.

Reception body scanner finds spiked in April 2024 but, in most months, around 5.5% of scans resulted in finds.

Mandatory drug testing (MDT) increased but varied from month to month, depending on staff levels, and showed a decrease in positive results. Cannabis was the drug of choice. Of serious concern to the Board was the increase in men collapsing under the influence of new psychoactive substances (NPS), primarily Spice, with many needing paramedic attention or hospitalisation. One man had five 'code blues' (breathing difficulties) in two days. In February alone, there were 47 code blues, of which 29 were caused by NPS, with one hospitalisation.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, food

Accommodation

Pentonville was built in 1842 to accommodate 540 prisoners in single cells. By the end of March 2025, the unlock figure was 1180, with two men living in cells originally built for a single prisoner. These 12 x 8ft cells had a bunk bed, a table and a chair, although there was not always adequate furniture for both occupants of a shared cell. Cells had a toilet, but not all had effective screening. Furthermore, the crumbling fabric of the building was susceptible to continual infestations of mice, cockroaches, flies and rats. This was evidenced in the shutting down of the kitchens in April 2024 for 14 weeks due to a rat infestation. Blitzes by a pest-control company provided only temporary respite with rats frequently being found behind boxed-in pipework in the cells.

Although in-cell TVs and phones alleviated boredom and allowed contact with the outside world, the potential health hazard of living with vermin, together with the lack of privacy and cramped conditions, are not decent or humane.

Major problems with the fabric and infrastructure of the prison were evidenced in the regular applications from prisoners to the Board relating to the antiquated heating and plumbing systems. Problems with plumbing, drainage, heating and hot water occurred regularly, affecting personal hygiene. Some of the higher landings experienced intolerable temperatures in the summer, made worse by new windows that did not allow air flow. Several showers had been renovated to a good standard, but others were observed to have uneven and potentially hazardous flooring and smelly and blocked drains. The Board noted that there were too often delays in reporting by staff of problems, and that remedial repairs often took a long time to be completed and offered only a temporary fix to systems urgently in need of complete renovation. As reported by the Board in previous years, there appeared to be little accountability for the slow or inadequate performance of its duties by the maintenance contractor Gov Facility Services Limited. While some of the outside areas of the prison were bleak and dirty, with evidence of both food debris and litter, others were tidy and bright, with the recent addition of colourful murals.

Vermin including rats, mice and cockroaches were also a problem for staff, affecting work and rest areas.



Dilapidated showers were frequently infested with flies

Food The rat infestation in the main kitchen was a major issue for the first three months of the reporting year. Following the prison's failure to listen to repeated warnings by the Board as early as November the previous year, we reported the situation to the environmental health officer at Islington Council. The following day (10 April), the prison closed the kitchen and when the environmental health officer inspected the next day, he fully supported the decision to do so. Temporary kitchens were installed and a works and vermin extermination plan implemented. The kitchen was successfully reopened on 19 July. There has been no significant vermin issue in the kitchen since. During the closure, the Board felt that the prison and the kitchen managed the feeding of the prisoners well in difficult circumstances.

The number of complaints to the prison about food was generally low, at an average of three per month. However, food-related issues were frequently raised at prisoner platform meetings. These were mostly about food quality, portion size and special diets, as well as menu choices not being handed out correctly on the wing. There was an increase in complaints between October 2024 and January 2025, when a new computerised menu system was introduced. The rise was due to problems with the reading of menus because of a technical fault, which was subsequently rectified. The new system provided prisoners with calorie information to assist in informing their menu choices and to allow the prison to record exactly how many calories were being offered to each individual prisoner. Many men compensated for insufficient portions by purchasing food from canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials using their allocated funds). However, this was not available to those lacking funds. The food budget per prisoner, per day, was increased to £3.01 for 2024-2025, up from £2.70 in the previous reporting year.

The Board remained concerned that the breakfast and lunch packs provided to prisoners were insufficient in quantity and nutritional quality. Eating a healthy diet is important for managing and preventing conditions such as diabetes, as well as for supporting the health of prisoners who have previously been homeless or substance

misusers. In January, noodles and couscous, items that bulk out meals for many prisoners and are made edible by the addition of boiling water only, were removed from the canteen list in error. By the end of the reporting year, neither item had been added back on the list, despite repeated requests by prisoners at prisoner platform meetings, which are attended by Governors.

A dietician was employed by Practice Plus Group (PPG) during the reporting year to work at Pentonville and some other London prisons. But, at the end of the reporting year, they had not yet been able to start any clinics for prisoners who would benefit from their advice.

Kitchen worker numbers were sometimes insufficient due to stringent security checks, transfers or releases. From routine sampling of the food by Board members, the quality was considered to be satisfactory.



Brightly coloured murals around the prison were a cheerful addition

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit (CSU), where men are segregated from the rest of the prison population, had 11 cells. However, there was usually at least one cell out of commission due to dirty protests (where a prisoner has chosen to defecate or urinate in a cell without using the facilities provided), vandalism, the presence of rodents, cockroaches and fly infestations or simply because of the crumbling fabric of the building. Antiquated drainage caused regularly blocked and overflowing drains, leading to extremely unpleasant conditions for all those in the cells and the officers who worked there. The toilets and sinks were stained and the walls were damp. Over the reporting year, the Board has been particularly concerned about the cells in the CSU and considers them to be both indecent and inhumane.

There were 672 segregations over the reporting year, equating to a total of 3613 days in the CSU. The Board noted that the number of days spent in the CSU increased from 903 at the end of the first quarter of the reporting year to 1087 by the end of the third quarter. The average length of stay was five days. There was only one 42-day review (the limit allowed without external authorisation). Special accommodation cells (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety) were used five times. Occasionally, very unwell men had to be kept in the CSU due to a lack of space in the healthcare unit.

Segregated prisoners were visited daily by the duty Governor, healthcare staff and a member of the chaplaincy team. Members of the Board visited the CSU several times each week. Prisoners were offered radios (availability dependent), activity packs and books. All segregated prisoners were offered daily exercise and showers, although sometimes staffing levels meant this was impossible due to prisoners requiring multi-officer unlock.

The CSU regularly held prisoners with challenging and volatile behaviour. The Board observed that the staff demonstrated high levels of patience, compassion and care towards those in their charge.

Good order and discipline (GOAD) reviews (where it was determined if a prisoner who had been segregated due to disruptive behaviour should remain segregated) were regularly monitored by the Board. These reviews were observed to be fair, detailed and thoughtfully managed, with the Board agreeing with all decisions made.

Separation, monitoring and review group (SMARG) meetings were held quarterly to ensure that the prison service order on segregation was implemented and adhered to. These meetings were observed by the Board.

Adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules) were held most days for offences committed by prisoners. There were an average of 17 per day. This was a 50% increase on the previous year, driven exclusively by finds of unauthorised articles. The Board observed that adjudications were often dropped due to issues such as a lack of CCTV footage or inadequate statements by the reporting officer. More serious offences were passed to the independent adjudicator (IA), who conducted several sessions each month, with each session handling around 20 cases. There was no backlog of cases to be heard by the IA at the end of the reporting year.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Prisoner platform meetings provided a useful and productive forum for prisoners' views and complaints to be discussed between senior staff and prison representatives. It was also a positive and effective way to communicate issues to prison representatives for dissemination to prisoners.

From its observations, the Board felt that the meetings proved an essential forum for the prison to manage communication about the emergency kitchen closure in April 2024 until its reopening in July. Heads of function were transparent about the consequences of the situation and the prison representatives, in turn, were open to understanding the challenges. Communication around the government's early release schemes, implemented in 2024, and the move of all VPs to a single wing were, in the Board's view, managed well through the prisoner platform. However, it was more difficult to resolve frequently raised and more intractable problems involving property and the fabric of the building.

Meetings were generally well attended by relevant senior staff. Prison representatives appeared engaged and constructive. Dialogue was free but respectful and, although meetings were mostly good natured, they were also an outlet for frustrations with perceived Pentonville failures.

The Board observed positive and engaged relationships between prisoners and staff, with staff often working hard to provide appropriate support where needed. This was

also evidenced in ACCT reviews. However, the Board also observed several less-than-ideal interactions and received some complaints about staff conduct and bullying. On the wings, there were reports of cursory and unengaged treatment by less experienced officers, which was also sometimes observed by Board members. The introduction of the new Pentonville Academy (the first cohort of which started in January 2025), with training focused on fostering positive relations with prisoners and the first of its kind, was a welcome initiative. The Board will monitor its impact going forward as it becomes embedded. It was also clear that when there were fewer staff on the wings, they had less time to respond to requests for advice and help, leaving prisoners frustrated.

Key work Although some effort went into providing key work for those prisoners who would most benefit, there was no administrative system for allocating key workers. There was also a lack of reliable data, as sessions were not accurately recorded.

Key work delivery was affected by staffing levels. It was not clear to the Board what resources would be necessary to follow guidance on key work delivery without compromising some aspects of normal regime on the wings, even with adequate staffing levels.

Prison management felt that the quality of individual key work sessions had improved since November 2024, when the National Standards Coaching Team worked with staff, but there were no solid data available.

As of the end of the reporting year, it was the Board's view that the level and quality of key work was inadequate and, in the absence of any proper system for its delivery, it was likely to remain so. In March 2025, at the end of the reporting year, key work was assigned to the residential group profile with the aim of making it an integral part of regime delivery to prisoners, and it was earmarked as one of the Governor's priorities.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The population in Pentonville is diverse, and many prisoners with protected characteristics (which include, age, race, religion, disability, sex and sexual orientation) could be at risk of discrimination or require additional support. In March 2025, the prison's population was found to have the following characteristics:

- Ethnic origin: 39% white, 28% black, 16% Asian, 7% mixed race, 7% other, 1% Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, 2% no information
- Religion/belief: 44% identified as Christian, 41% as Muslim, 7% other religions, 8% no religion or no information.
- Disability: 31% declared a disability, 58 prisoners had a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) arising from their disability. (A PEEP provides assistance for those who cannot get themselves out of the prison unaided in an emergency.)

Data showed that almost 50% of use of force (UoF) incidents were on young black males (18-25), arising predominantly from prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff assaults. This resulted in a disproportionate number of this cohort being put on the basic regime (which is the bottom level of the prison's incentive scheme). The equality team undertook a survey of all prisoners aged 18-25 to understand the

underlying reasons for the violence and devised an action plan to address these issues, which was due to be implemented in May 2025.

A total of 114 discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) were received over the reporting year, with only one upheld. The principal issues concerned race, religion, disability and age. The equality team received training from an external provider to assist them in understanding the factors behind the complaints and for developing improvements to responses and outcomes.

Given the age and fabric of the building, it was difficult for the needs of disabled prisoners to be met by the prison, which was a particular concern of the Board. With only two disability discrimination Act-approved cells for wheelchair users and a lack of step-free access, a number of prisoners with mobility issues were being held in locations where they were unable to leave their landings. Staff did their best to accommodate the needs of disabled prisoners but this was not enough, and some prisoners with disabilities were taking risks by simply moving around the prison. For example, the Board observed a prisoner with one leg hopping up a flight of stairs. The showers were not adapted for prisoners with limited mobility, and some areas of the prison that offered activities were inaccessible to them. Frequently broken lifts caused delays and complications accessing healthcare appointments, as prisoners had to wait for assistance or take long, circuitous routes to healthcare facilities. Broken lifts also prevented some wheelchair users from attending external hospital appointments. An ageing prison population appeared to exacerbate the problems, as many older prisoners had increasing care needs.

The neurodiversity unit (NDU) housed 50 prisoners and supported the needs of those who found it most difficult to cope on normal location. The prisoners appeared to benefit from a higher staff-to-prisoner ratio and, in the Board's view, the unit continued to be a very necessary initiative given it is estimated that up to half of the national prison population is neurodiverse.

The equality team arranged prisoner forums for those with protected characteristics, held events to raise awareness of diversity and conducted welfare checks on prisoners with complex needs, including transgender prisoners. However, their ability to be proactive was limited, as the officer on the team was regularly redeployed to landing duties.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

A new managing chaplain started in post at the beginning of the reporting year. The chaplaincy team was made up of employed, sessional and volunteer chaplains, supported by a group of about 70 lay volunteers. An additional part-time Imam started in March, providing much-needed support to the one existing employed Imam in delivering three Muslim services each Friday for the over 300 prisoners wishing to attend.

Subject to security checks, all prisoners who wished to attend one of the faith services each week was permitted to do so. There were Roman Catholic, Church of England, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu services, and figures for March showed a total monthly attendance of around 2000. However, there were still reports of prisoners not being unlocked for services, which caused upset and frustration. In addition, prisoners with disabilities could not attend services so had to be seen individually by chaplaincy team members.

The team continued to provide extensive support to prisoners and their families. All new arrivals were visited on their first day in the prison, and there was a rota to ensure that all prisoners requesting visits were seen regularly. A chaplaincy member visited the CSU every day. Support was provided to prisoners and families at times of bereavement and terminal illness, and in the event of a death in custody support was also provided to affected staff.

Members of the team ran groups, including bereavement support and a reflective group called Still Time, and some volunteers assisted with Through the Gate support. This included the provision of housing and accommodation support, with a member being recognised with an HMPPS AED award (which celebrates outstanding contributions of staff members across the prison and probation service) for their efforts in this area.

Following a new initiative, ACCT champions were introduced, with the aim of all prisoners on an ACCT being visited by a member of chaplaincy every week, which was achieved. This was a substantial improvement on the previous figure of 50-60% receiving a weekly visit. There was effective liaison with the kitchen over festivals, including Ramadan, and the Board's view was that these were managed well.

The prison has a chapel, a synagogue (which also serves as a multi-faith room) and a mosque. After several years of being in a state of appalling disrepair, the roof of the mosque was finally fixed in March. For the duration of the works, services were held elsewhere, with two in the sports hall and one in a wing classroom. This was difficult to facilitate and caused disruption to the regime. It had been hoped that, with the roof repaired, the mosque could once again be used. However, the flooring was so badly damaged by an undetected leak in the ablutions area that, as of the end of the reporting year, it remained unusable, and assistance was having to be sought from a charity to provide new flooring. The ablutions area also remained unusable due to disrepair. The Board was pleased that the roof was repaired but very disappointed that the mosque, a designated place of worship for the largest religious group in the prison, remained unfit for use, and we would urge that all additional repairs should be completed as a matter of urgency.



The mosque remained out of use



The mosque showers and toilet facilities were in a very poor state of repair

5.6 Incentives schemes

The Board received few applications (prisoners' written submissions to the IMB) about the incentives scheme. However, prisoners on the enhanced (top) level of the scheme often felt there was insufficient difference between them and other prisoners, and the Board agreed. In addition, as reported by the Board last year, privileges were afforded to prisoners on the drug-free wing that were not offered to enhanced prisoners elsewhere in the prison. This was unfair and demotivating to those not on that wing. At the end of the reporting year, Pentonville was in the process of reviewing the scheme and had asked senior officers and prisoners for ideas on improvements.

The basic status includes removal of the incentive for a prisoner to have a TV in their cell, except in exceptional circumstances, and a 50% reduction in SWA. Exercise and showers are also restricted. As reported by the Board last year, the restriction on showers undermines fundamental standards of decency and should be removed.

5.7 Complaints

Continuing last year's focus on monitoring performance in responding to complaints on time, some new processes were implemented by the business hub. These included a new functional mailbox for complaints, automatic email reminders to the appropriate individual or department when a response was due, and the dissemination of detailed monthly analysis of complaints to the senior leadership team and managers, with recommendations for actions.

The focus on response times resulted in 100% of responses being on time in several months of the reporting year, with the lowest percentage between June and March being 94.8%. A new quality audit process for complaint responses was introduced in September. This was a welcome initiative but, notwithstanding this process, there was no sustained improvement in the quality of responses by the end of the reporting year and Board members saw some that were inadequate, unhelpful and

badly written. In addition, a new process was introduced in the reporting year, which allowed complaints to be rejected for one of a long list of reasons set out on a nationally approved form, with the complaint and the form being returned to the prisoner. This resulted in many complaints not being responded to, and the Board felt that more guidance for prisoners on how to complete complaints would make the process easier and fairer.

Property remained consistently the highest subject of complaints, along with finance and work-related issues.

5.8 Property

Property is one of the most complained about issues at Pentonville. In the reporting year, the Board received 110 applications about property. Transfer of property between prisons remained a particular problem. Prisoners were often convinced that packages had been lost at Pentonville when, in fact, their property had still not been released from the transferring prison. It was very frustrating for prisoners to have to wait weeks to receive their belongings. Not always knowing where their property was caused them considerable anxiety. Sometimes property was lost altogether.

Although prisoners could apply for compensation for lost property, their belongings were sometimes the only things they owned, so they could also have sentimental value. It was a positive development that the Board received 40% fewer applications about property during the reporting year than in the previous period, when the situation was particularly bad. However, there was a greater decrease in relation to property within Pentonville than property on transfer. The Board maintains, as reported last year, that the revised Prisoners' Property Policy Framework has done little to improve the transfer of prisoners' property between establishments and we believe that the system needs a complete overhaul. Far too much staff time is still taken up with locating property, using a system still largely dependent on paper records.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The 22-bed in-patient healthcare unit served prisoners with complex and challenging health issues, particularly mental health. Board members visited at least once a week and felt that medical staff and prison officers dealt appropriately and sensitively with patients. Generally, men expressed satisfaction with their treatment. The unit was well managed, with a supportive and cohesive team, and earlier staffing problems, due to redeployment of prison officers, improved over the course of the reporting year.

The mental health services were well staffed. Two clinical leads were appointed, although they were not able to start until later in the reporting year. A new matron was making a significant difference to the clinical quality of service and governance. The care lead and paramedic, who are responsible for emergency care, had been on secondment at HMP Thameside since October. This meant that the existing management team were very stretched for six months and had to cover double the amount of work. Whilst recruitment to nursing positions had greatly improved, there was a shortage of pharmacy technicians, which was a national problem.

There was a daily early days in custody (EDIC) referral meeting, which the Board observed, held from Monday to Friday, to discuss new arrivals to the prison and draw up care plans for the early days. Onward referrals were made to the relevant teams. As all disciplines were represented, there was ownership of care decisions, which the Board considered worked well.

The biggest challenges were several serious assaults on healthcare staff, including a hostage incident in the treatment rooms in October. Such events significantly impacted the morale and sense of safety of healthcare staff working in the prison. The healthcare department continued to work with prison colleagues to rebuild trust and implement safer ways of working to restore confidence.

'Call Phill' is a prisoner health information and liaison phone helpline for concerned relatives to contact the healthcare team, providing reassurance to patients and their relatives. It was very well used (from 29 to 72 calls per month) and healthcare received important information from families and friend, which helped to ensure patients were kept safe.

There were 158 applications to the Board relating to health concerns, which is level with the last reporting year. Most were about appointments and were resolved quickly. The healthcare unit had their own system of applications and complaints, but a significant number of responses to these were not reaching prisoners. As a result, some new arrangements were put in place. These included distinguishing between lower-level concerns and more serious complaints and ensuring that responses to more serious complaints were delivered by a staff member rather than by internal mail. Applications were collected from the wings every day and urgent ones prioritised, with response times to lower-level concerns improving to an average of 10 working days between January and the end of the reporting year. In addition, Pentonville was an early adopter of a new Practice Plus Group (PPG) 30-day required response time to more formal complaints, down from 60 days.

There was no Care Quality Commission (the independent regulator of health and social care in England) inspection during the reporting year.

6.2 Physical healthcare

A full-time patient engagement lead worked across the prison to liaise with patients and undertake health promotion work. She produced a monthly newsletter for patients, collected surveys and analysed feedback, held patient forums, and linked up with outside organisations, including NHS England and a prostate cancer charity. Over the reporting year, there were external visitors delivering training and group sessions to staff and prisoners, including about epilepsy and sickle cell disorder.

The Board had no concerns about waiting times for appointments for prisoners to see a GP, optician, dentist, physiotherapist or podiatrist.

Abdominal aortic aneurism (AAA) checks for older prisoners took place every quarter.

Release and transfer staff supported numerous complex patients through the gate and on release from prison, including by accompanying prisoners to appointments on the day of release.

6.3 Mental health

Mental health professionals visited CSU prisoners and attended GOAD (good order and discipline) reviews (which determine if a prisoner who has been segregated due to disruptive behaviour should remain segregated), where they provided mental health advice and support. They also conducted segregation rounds. In addition, they worked closely with CSU staff to put care plans in place for those with mental health needs and ensured that those with severe mental health issues were transferred to the in-patient unit as soon as possible. Mental health staff provided input to the weekly safety intervention meeting and contributed to decision making for individuals in the CSU through this multi-agency forum.

The neurodiversity unit (NDU) which housed 50 men on a self-contained landing with a good officer-to-prisoner ratio, managed neurodivergent prisoners, some of whom found it difficult to cope with life on normal location.

Transfers to secure units required several escorts and the prison ensured these were provided. Pentonville had the shortest waiting time for hospital beds and the highest number of transfers to secure units in London, particularly to Chase Farm Hospital. This was, in part, down to the consultants on site at Pentonville having good links with local hospitals. However, despite this, the 28-day deadline from secure units agreeing to accept a patient to the day they were moved was rarely met, so severely unwell men had to remain in Pentonville awaiting a place, including sometimes on the wings or in the CSU.

There were numerous therapy sessions in the wellbeing centre for those identified as having a need, led by psychologists and occupational health practitioners, who also visited the in-patients unit. The most stable groups of men attending the centre were permitted fresh air in a small grassy outside area with a basketball hoop, and some helped to tend the garden. However, over the course of the reporting year, the Board observed that the centre continued to be an underused resource, due to unreliable unlocking and escorting.

6.4 Social care

There were many reception prisoners (particularly older, vulnerable prisoners) who required triage by social care and then referral to the local authority for either occupational therapy and/or Care Act assessments. Generally, this worked quite well, but there were often long delays in seeing occupational therapists or social workers from the local authority to carry out these assessments. Social care assistants supported the prisoners in the interim and arrangements were in place to set up peer supporters or buddies, organised by the equality team.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

SWA was offered only once a day, either in the morning or afternoon, to fit in with regime and activities arrangements on individual wings. The session, lasting approximately one-and-a-half hours, provided time for showers, exercise in the yards, administrative tasks and wing recreation such as pool, table football and ping pong. Activities were held in the other half of the day.

A drive from the Governor to increase activity take up and time out of cell led to an increase in attendance. The monthly percentage of overall purposeful activity undertaken against the maximum capacity was 58.80%. The lowest percentage was 53.15%, straddling June and July, and the highest was 64.21%, in March. This was higher than the national average (England and Wales) for any type of prison, which was 55%. Purposeful activity included work, education, religious services and activities such as gym and wellbeing courses. Men were also out of their cells for social visits and health clinics. As part of this drive, a new core day and staff profile were introduced at the beginning of March. Two dedicated activities officer roles were created to support this process by chasing up attendance and asking prisoners the reason for non-attendance. Staffing issues led to some problems with the new profile during the initial few weeks, but the overall trend for attendance was positive, evidenced by the highest levels being in March.

The most significant challenge to attendance figures was staffing levels, with low staffing levels leading to problems with getting prisoners unlocked and escorted to activities. Additionally, the prison housed a very high number of remand prisoners who could choose not to engage in work or activities. With SWA in place just once a day, there were men who were locked up for more than 22 hours a day. SWA was also vulnerable to staffing levels and there were times when it was reduced or not delivered at all. This situation was the cause of vociferous complaints from men on the wings. The regime offered to prisoners on the drug-free wing and the NDU was less disrupted by variables such as staffing levels.

In March, canteen delivery was moved from Saturday to Friday to provide more time for regime delivery at the weekend.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

New arrivals to the prison were seen by the substance misuse team during induction to ensure those in need of help were identified early.

The team was responsive to heightened Spice use in the prison and related incidents, running wing surgeries and communicating as much information as practical.

Prisoners on Pentonville's drug-free wing, which has 60 places, earn privileges through work, voluntary drug testing and a behaviour compact. Two key recovery programmes ran successfully across the year: one geared to the needs of prisoners on the drug-free wing and the other for the wider population. Both concluded with graduation events in the chapel with family present. Collaboration with the equality team in organising a debate group resulted in an impressive play, which was written and performed by the attendees.

The team remained committed to increasing the number of prisoners who received treatment in the community when released, and supporting prisoners in obtaining accommodation for their first night was a crucial part of their resettlement.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

From the Board's observations, the education programme in Pentonville is a great resource and is appreciated by the prisoners, with the courses and the teachers receiving praise. An internal audit by the provider, Novus, reported in March 2025 that: 'Learners' behaviour and attitudes across the department are exceptional... reflecting high expectations set by leaders and managers.'

Nevertheless, throughout the year, late unlocking by wing staff remained a frustration, as this meant attendance and punctuality were erratic. In December, a payment was introduced for taking the basic skills assessment (BSA), usually on day two in the prison and a requirement for getting a job or participation in education, but this ended on 31 March. This was unfortunate, as it appeared to have a positive effect. In February, when the scheme was fully embedded, induction attendance was 94% and education attendance was 60%. This fell in March, possibly because prisoners knew the incentive was due to be stopped.

A wide variety of courses and activities was delivered, including the following:

Customer service	Fire Safety Awareness	Duke of Edinburgh Bronze and Silver Awards
Food safety	Peer Mentoring	Vocalise with the University of Law
Painting and Decorating	Business Enterprise	Distance Learning with The Open University
Barbering	Maths	Criminology Level 3 with Westminster University
Writing Group	English	Business with Urban Lawyers
Radio Production	ESOL	Public speaking with John Bercow

The library was relocated in January and staff worked hard to facilitate this, although it meant a period of time when there was little or no access. It is a valuable resource but is underused, and, following the move, the Board observed that it was accessed less than before. There is a dedicated reading group for prisoners on the NDU.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Vocational training included textiles, recycling and waste disposal. Skills training included food hygiene, painting and decorating, printing, barbering and the Construction Skills Certification Scheme qualification.

- Liberty Kitchen ran a 10-week certificated course for eight prisoners at a time. This included making food balls, which were sold through a variety of outlets including a farmers' market and the in-house catering at Pentonville. The

training involved developing business and enterprise skills. Liberty Kitchen continued to support prisoners on release.

- XO Bikes, a company based in Lewisham, used donated bikes to teach prisoners repair skills and obtain a bronze certificate. On release, XO Bikes helped prisoners work towards a silver or gold certificate. Eight cohorts (of six prisoners each) were trained.
- There was a very successful trial of a tattooing course for 10 prisoners, with further courses planned for later in 2025.



The XO Bikes workshop taught bike repair skills

Whilst these initiatives were limited by the number of prisoners who could be trained at any one time, they were able to offer prisoners ‘through the gate’ support on release through employment, further training or the provision of support and advice, hopefully reducing the likelihood of reoffending.

Gym There were eight physical education (PE) instructors, four gyms and one sports hall. Prisoners who applied could attend two sessions a week. One session a week was held in the healthcare gym for the prisoners on the wards. Compared with similar prisons, Pentonville had a high number of monthly prisoner gym hours (5382 prisoner hours in December 2024). A total of 123 prisoners obtained a qualification in 2024.

The gym department ran an eight-week, 200 hours of learning, Level 2 gym instructor course, and a first aid course. The Arsenal Twinning Project engaged with around 30 prisoners, each receiving a Level 1 FA football coaching qualification. This meant they had access to the Arsenal Hub on release, could complete an FA First Aid qualification and be advised about work or further learning opportunities.

The gym has always been extremely popular with prisoners, who often expressed to the Board an interest in being able to attend more sessions.

7.3 Offender management, progression

Offender management unit (OMU) In its three previous annual reports, the Board has been critical of the OMU. This reporting year, 14% of all applications to the Board related to OMU services, similar to the previous year. Continuing from last year, there have been a series of different government-imposed measures, which have placed substantially increased demands on the OMU. These were implemented to manage prison overcrowding by releasing some prisoners early. These initiatives are extremely complex and require additional training of already overburdened staff. This inevitably resulted in a lack of time to deal with the routine services provided by the team. In addition, due to the high number of prisoners on remand, there were 20-35 immediate releases each week. These required extensive, rapid and accurate checks and resulted in a backlog of sentence calculations and transfers for other prisoners. All of these are matters of extreme frustration and anxiety for prisoners. By early March, there were between 60 and 70 sentence calculations outstanding. It also meant that there was no resumption of wing-based OMU clinics, which happened for a brief period during the last reporting year and were much appreciated by the prisoners.

The following measures have been introduced to support the OMU:

- since December, there have been two heads of the OMU, one operational and one non-operational. The operational appointment was initially temporary, with a permanent appointment made by the end of the reporting year;
- additional managers in post;
- weekly assurance meetings of senior OMU staff and the Deputy Governor; and
- monthly meetings with the Governor.

However, the Board repeats its concern from last year's annual report that HMPPS should consider the necessary resource implications and staff the OMU accordingly.

Legal visits These continued throughout the year and were held either in the visits hall or via video link. Both arrangements provided limited privacy, particularly for sensitive discussions. Several visits were missed because prisoners were not unlocked or not informed in time. Some legal representatives also experienced difficulty arranging visits due to problems with the booking system. Video link booths were heavily used, but some were outdated or unreliable, and not all were clean or properly maintained. Delays in allocating PINs (personal identification numbers) restricted some prisoners' early access to legal advice.

Young adults At the end of February, there were 253 young adults aged 18-25 in Pentonville, which equated to 21% of the population. This group was supported by Time4Change, a bespoke programme designed specifically for young adults. Societal issues that impact young people were debated and the perceptions of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds challenged to help them improve their chances of living a law-abiding life on release. This impressive initiative worked with approximately 45 prisoners per cohort across three wings delivering three cohorts across the reporting year. Topics covered included brain development, trauma, knife crime, systemic racism, relationships, and forgiveness. The aim was to deliver these sessions in a safe, nurturing and educational space where participants felt comfortable discussing their vulnerabilities. They received support from peers,

psychologists, mentors and staff. Time4Change also introduced a piloted evening activity called TV-not-Time, which enabled young adults to learn about job opportunities within the TV and film industry. It offered them hands-on experience of filming, editing, interviewing and acoustics. Both Time4Change and TV-not-Time are accredited by City & Guilds. The programme is going through the HMPPS National Framework for Interventions' accreditation process.

Young adults also took part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Bronze Award, which was adapted for young people in custody.

Despite these initiatives, with so few dedicated facilities or opportunities, the Board remains concerned that young adults continue to be held in Pentonville.

7.4 Family contact

Prisoners continued to face challenges in retaining family ties. Social visits took place daily, with a charity, the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), running the visitor centre. Prison staff working in the visits hall generally acted professionally, politely and compassionately to prisoners and their visitors. An online booking system, long identified as a necessary improvement to solve long-standing access issues, was implemented during the reporting period. This was a welcome development, with most visitors reporting that it worked satisfactorily. However, visitors still using the phone booking line frequently faced long waits, and emails were not always acknowledged. Inconsistent ID requirements between Pentonville and other prisons led to some visitors, on occasion, being refused entry.

The visits area continued to suffer from regular infestations of mice and other vermin, and problems continued with generally inadequate heating and ventilation and poor building fabric. Although a budget for refurbishment had been approved, progress was limited, and the overall condition of the space remained poor. The children's play area was closed early in the year due to mice infestation and remained out of use for several months. Planning for an enhanced replacement facility had begun, but it was not yet available by the end of the reporting year.

Prisoners on the enhanced (top) level of the incentives scheme who had children had access to regular family days (which bring together prisoners and their families outside of their statutory entitlement to social visits, usually in more informal settings), which appeared to be valued by participants and consistently well managed. These days provided genuinely transformative, rehabilitative contact between prisoners and their families and were one of the few opportunities for more natural and sustained interaction between prisoners and their children. Staff worked constructively to support these events, and preparatory work began late in the reporting year on further improvements to family visits, including enhanced activities and prisoner-led catering.

The Board noted that some prisoners were not able to make a first night welfare call, particularly when arriving late in the day.

7.5 Resettlement planning

The pre-release team was part of the probation service. Their role was to make contact with prisoners on arrival and refer them to appropriate support agencies 12 weeks before release. Most agencies worked with sentenced and remand prisoners.

Twelve weeks before their release date, prisoners were asked by the employment hub to complete an assessment form to identify their needs in terms of housing, employment, identity documents, right to work and banking. Employment hub staff visited prisoners who did not return the form. In the employment hub, prisoners attended CV writing sessions, advice sessions on debt and obtaining ID, and career events and courses. The number of prisoners visiting the employment hub increased throughout the year. A 'Learn to trade' course, provided by the skills exchange project, proved very popular with the prisoners. The hub also hosted an information session run by HMRC, focusing on self-employment. A self-employment session was delivered to prisoners on the vulnerable prisoner unit. Over the reporting year, the number of bank account and ID applications made for prisoners were 49 and 74 respectively. Liaison between the employment hub and employers resulted in 21 provisional job offers for prisoners.

The following is a list of agencies and the resettlement support they provided:

- **JobCentre Plus** prison work coaches engaged with remand and sentenced prisoners to provide benefit and employment advice and guidance. One of their disability employment advisers ran a session in the employment hub to raise awareness of the support available on release to prisoners with a disability.
- **StandOut** ran a three-week pre-release course, including CV writing and mock interviews, during which money management, disclosure and working with the probation service were discussed. This course ran in May, October and January, on three different wings. StandOut continued its support into the community, with employment events and one-to-one coaching.
- **IAG** (information, advice and guidance) gave careers advice and ran sessions on CV writing and maintenance.
- **Catch22** advised prisoners who were in debt on the outside.
- **St Mungo's** contract was changed so they were able to support remand prisoners, as well as sentenced prisoners with housing needs. The Board felt this was a very welcome development.
- **The PACT** team worked closely with prisoners to strengthen their family connections, including providing casework support on a one-to-one basis. They helped prepare prisoners for release and offered signposting to necessary services.

Some prisoners refused help and some were transferred before they had a chance to engage. Due to population pressures, prisoners were sometimes transferred, even during the last 12 weeks of their sentence. Frequent releases from court meant that some prisoners missed out on pre-release support, such as, for example, help with accommodation and employment. Problems also continued with escorting prisoners from the wings to some activities that partner agencies were delivering. This undermined the agencies' efforts and the valuable support on offer.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	14
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	12
Total number of visits to the establishment	550

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	47	55
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	13	9
C	Equality	11	10
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	55	57
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	50	65
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	38	42
F	Food and kitchens	21	25
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	157	158
H1	Property within the establishment	103	60
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	81	50
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	15	22
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	146	123
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	70	76
K	Transfers	25	10
L	Miscellaneous	52	103
	Total number of applications	884	865

Annex A

Service providers

- Optometry: The Prison Opticians Company
- Dental services: Smile Dental
- Podiatry and physiotherapy: Practice Plus Group MSK (a sub-division of PPG)
- Mental health: North London NHS Foundation Trust coordinates the work of Practice Plus primary mental health nurses, with its own secondary mental health, in-patient and day-care services.
- Substance misuse programme: Building Futures
- Gym qualifications: Active IQ
- Visitors' centre: Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)
- Resettlement support:
 - Only Connect
 - Bounce Back
 - StandOut
 - St Mungo's
 - Catch22
 - JobCentre Plus



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