



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Styal

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

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

HMP/YOI Styal is the only women's prison in the northwest of England and has an operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) of 454¹ prisoners, aged 18 years and over, who may be on remand (held in prison until the time of their trial or subsequent sentence hearing), immigration detention or serving sentences ranging from five days to life. As a local prison, it receives prisoners directly from court and has a large catchment area covering the northwest of England and north Wales.

The prison population is a complex mix of prisoners, encompassing individuals serving short sentences of less than 12 months, as well as long-term prisoners, including those serving life sentences. As the reporting period drew to a close, the data revealed that Styal held approximately one third of individuals who were on remand, with the remaining number being sentenced prisoners. Following legislation change regarding 14 day fixed term recalls, the prison also held a substantially increased number of recalled prisoners, including some prisoners who had been recalled several times. A significant proportion of these prisoners grapple with issues related to substance misuse and mental health.

The prison consists of 17 standalone houses, 15 of which accommodate approximately 20 prisoners, including a community house (Bollinwood), situated outside the fence, for up to 25 prisoners categorised as suitable to live in open conditions and an incentivised drug free living house, which was the first in the women's estate. The prison also has a Young Adult Hub based on one of the houses and a standalone mother and baby unit (MBU), which accommodates up to nine prisoners and 10 babies.

The prison also has a cell block (Waite wing), used for remand, detoxing and prisoners with discipline issues. New prisoners are now located in the induction centre (IC) on Waite wing. There is a ten-bed care and separation unit (CSU), used to segregate some prisoners with poor behaviour, as well as those in temporary cellular confinement, and occasionally for their own protection. The Valentina unit (a time-out, short-stay facility) accommodates up to ten prisoners in single rooms.

Spectrum Community Health (Spectrum), a community interest company, continues to have the contract for primary healthcare, drug and alcohol recovery services (DARS) and social care. Mental health care is provided by the Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust (GMMH). Spectrum also provides substance misuse treatment.

The prison education framework provider is Novus. GeoAmey holds the contract for works within the prison and for escort services.

Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers are Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance (who work with Ingeus accommodation), Lancashire Women and Person Shaped Support (PSS) Turnaround who work across Merseyside, Cheshire and Wales.

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.

Since April 2022, the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) has held the family services contract and Action for Children has run the mother and baby unit.

The establishment has a number of workshops and opportunities on site for training and rehabilitation into a working life in the community. These include laundry, hair and beauty, decorating, catering, prison radio and gardens. Outside agencies operate Recycling Lives, Remade with Hope and The Clink restaurant, all of which have provided work opportunities for prisoners during their sentence and job opportunities on release.

The current governor has been in post since January 2024 and, along with the longer serving deputy Governor, has provided some much needed stability and continuity to the leadership of the prison.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- The Board has once again observed a committed, multidisciplinary and thoughtful approach to safety. However, the Board has again recognised that the prison's approach to safety has been compromised throughout the year by the increased numbers of very complex prisoners (39 in total), with significant mental health or behavioural issues admitted to the prison. During this year eight prisoners have been sectioned on release, and the Board has also noted the increased use of the care and separation unit (CSU) for such prisoners when appropriate mental health facilities in the community are not available.
- The continuing high rates of self-harm and the increased number of deaths in custody remain a cause of concern for the Board. The majority of self-harm incidents are carried out by a very small number of individuals, almost always with a history of frequent self-harm before entry. Board analysis of Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) and inquest reports show that the prison has implemented almost all the appropriate recommendations for improvement.
- The Board recognises the growing effectiveness of the work of the women's estate psychology services (WEPS) team in the development of trauma informed practice in the prison, supporting both staff and prisoners to maintain a high level of care and compassion. The adoption of these practices has led to an increased understanding of the reasons behind poor behaviour, and improved de-escalation techniques, which in turn have significantly reduced the Use of Force (UoF).
- The Board remains concerned about the growth in the ingress of drugs into the prison, evidenced by the increase in finds through incoming mail.

Fair and humane treatment

- Accommodation, particularly in the houses, remains a key concern. The Board has observed longstanding maintenance and repair delays, including a lack of a proactive programme of repairs to leaking roofs and gutters, poorly fitting windows and broken paving stones.
- The limited number of toilets and bathrooms continues to impact on decency standards. The restrictions and huge costs of repairing Victorian buildings limits progress. However, the Board's thematic monitoring of accommodation showed that furniture and furnishings in the houses, including sofas, dining chairs and curtains, which are within the control of the prison, are not consistently provided to a decent standard.
- Fire safety in the houses at Styal remains a concern, with two fire enforcement notices issued over the reporting year.
- The Board is concerned about the lack of supervision on the houses both during the day and at night. Most of the houses require prisoners to share rooms as well as communal facilities and they do not always have sufficient access to a dedicated house officer with whom to share their worries or problems.

- There has been a number of changes over the year to the incentives scheme (a system of privileges used for incentivising prisoners to abide by the rules) and the Board has not been able to identify a sufficiently robust and fair process which drives, and is felt to appropriately reward, good behaviour within the establishment.
- The Board has noted a decline in opportunities for the voice of the prisoners to be heard. The community council meetings have not always been well advertised to the prisoners, are subject to frequent cancellations and are not well attended by prisoner representatives or by the relevant staff. Other opportunities for prisoner voice, including incentives scheme forums, have not taken place.
- The Board has seen little evidence of effective monitoring of equality and diversity with meetings being cancelled at short notice and very few of the protected characteristics meetings taking place.
- The Board has witnessed many positive encounters between staff and prisoners and numerous instances of kindness and compassion being shown to vulnerable women, sometimes in very challenging circumstances.

Health and wellbeing

- The Board has observed improvements in the safe and timely administration of medicines since the last report. Prisoners' ability to access health services has also improved but can still be adversely affected by staff shortages and the lack of escorts to move prisoners to and from the medical provision.
- Regular monitoring has indicated that pregnant prisoners, and mothers and babies, are very well cared for by the well-staffed peri-natal team. The Board has seen evidence of very good safeguarding procedures in the MBU, and of excellent support provided by staff to new mothers and their babies.
- A large number of prisoners enter the prison with existing health needs and complex and enduring mental health conditions, which has led to an increased demand for healthcare services. During the year 29 prisoners have been transferred to secure mental health hospital placements; 75% of the cohort identify mental health issues and 50% are receiving treatment for substance misuse.
- The Board has noted the lack of confidential spaces for staff dealing with individuals who have mental health or substance misuse issues, and has also recognised that these same prisoners are more likely to identify as feeling unsafe.
- Preparatory work for the new healthcare building has started and the planned temporary pharmacy building will not now happen.
- Inadequate prison staffing has impacted on the presence of officers in the IRIS building, and on the provision of escorts to internal appointments.

Progression and resettlement

- The Board has observed that, since the library provider changed to Novus, provision, access and attendance at the library has improved over the year with all prisoners timetabled to attend at least once a week, and the majority accessing the minimum weekly 30 minute allocation.

- The prison has not provided sufficient activity spaces to enable every eligible prisoner to have the opportunity to attend work and/or education full-time.
- There has been significant recent pressure in relation to finding accommodation on release for the prisoners despite the positive working observed between the prison pre-release team and CRS providers. Local and published figures show a reduction from last year in accommodation on the first night of release, demonstrating this increased pressure. The situation has been exacerbated by the large number of short-term recall prisoners who have placed additional strain on already stretched resources.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

1. Too many vulnerable and very mentally unwell prisoners have been sent to prison due to a lack of suitable services in the community. What progress has been made to increase the number of secure mental health placements in the region and improve timely access?
2. What additional support can be provided in terms of technology and enhanced security measures to help prevent the ingress of drugs?
3. What progress has been made to enable community provision for prisoners, as an alternative to prison?
4. The Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reports on deaths in custody always compare provision in the prison to that in the community – does this accurately reflect the local provision in terms of deprivation, access to mental health support and community support networks?
5. Given the restrictions and huge costs of repairing Victorian buildings and refurbishing them to meet decency and fire safety standards, is any consideration being given to the total replacement of the existing prison buildings, and their replacement with accommodation and facilities more suited to the 21st century?

TO HMPPS

1. Are there any plans to expand the reach of the New Futures Network in order to enable more employment opportunities?
2. What additional resource is planned to reflect the unique physical nature of the prison, the complexity of the current cohort needs, and the additional health requirements of prisoners?
3. There is an increasing demand for prisoners to attend hospital appointments, and for emergency intakes, which places greater demands for escorts. Are there any plans to increase the staffing contingent for this purpose?
4. Are there any plans to decrease the amount of paperwork required for assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) assessments and observations through digitalisation and possibly the use of hand-held technology, which may reduce potential duplication or human errors?
5. What additional resource will be made available to mitigate the serious fire safety concerns highlighted by the Board?

TO THE GOVERNOR

1. What additional supervision is being provided at weekends and at night times to ensure safety and security, including Bollinwood House, which is outside the prison perimeter?
2. What plans are in place to allow the current limited supervision of the houses to be extended, to enable staff to respond to prisoner requests and listen to their concerns?
3. How does the prison intend to provide more access to confidential spaces for discussions with prisoners on the wing?
4. What progress has been made with the incentives scheme process and how is its impact being monitored?
5. How does the prison intend to improve opportunities for prisoner voice to be regularly heard and acted upon?
6. The regime on Valentina is often the first to be disrupted when there are staff shortages, and this can impact on exercise and time outdoors – how does the prison monitor and mitigate the effects of this for some of the most vulnerable prisoners?
7. What progress is being made to ensure adequate and secure ‘in-possession meds’ lockers in the houses and on the wing?
8. The monitoring of equalities and protected characteristics has been sporadic, meaning that trends and indications of potential discrimination may have been missed – how does the prison intend to remedy this?

3.3 Response to the last report

To the Minister:

Question	Response	Progress
Accommodation regarding safety and decency issues	Large refurbishment project for all the houses scheduled for November 2025. Mini fire safety project out to tender for delivery in 2025; new boilers for Size, Davis, Nightingale and the video link unit. 5 year painting programme with AMEY and the CRED team.	No mention of refurbishment details yet. Basic furnishings and internal fittings (e.g. curtains), doors on showers are not being replaced/maintained in a timely way. Two fire safety orders recently issued.
Timely access to specialist mental health facilities	Women’s Justice Board January 2025, and Partnership Delivery Group (PDG) attended by the Department for Health and Social Care.	WJB met in January 2025; specialist external stakeholders recruited to PDG with first meeting on March 2025.
Additional resource to support the vulnerable and mentally ill in prison	New Mental Health bill to improve access to care for those in the criminal justice system.	Bill currently in the Lords – aims to end use of police cells and prisons as places of safety.

	Additional recruitment and retention by Spectrum.	Statutory time limit for transfer from prison to mental health facility of 28 days. There have been significant improvements in the service provided by Greater Manchester Mental Health. The additional forensic psychologists are making a positive impact.
Categorisation review	Ongoing with revised policy expected in 2025	Post reporting period: Recent (May 25) short term measures regarding recalls and home detention curfew (HDC) extensions for up to 12 months (June 25) will cease to apply when new sentencing. Recommendations recently publicised come into effect in 2026.
Impact on female prisoners of recall system	Lancashire Prisoners pilot funding to appoint a recalls officer to provide intensive support.	We have observed the detrimental impact of so many prisoners on short-term recall to the regime and to wider prison life, behaviour and discipline (including access to drugs) within the prison. The pilot run by Lancashire Women regarding frequent recalls -current data shows that from 71 referrals into the project, there is a 72% success rate from their second time into the project (meaning no further recall) and an 84% success rate from those who have had involvement with the project on three occasions.

To HMPPS:

Question	Response	Progress
What further support can be provided so that the important activity of	New regime and business planning process introduced for 2024/25, designed to drive regime standards, safety, and	Meaningful key work is still not taking place. It is planned and monitored

key work is delivered consistently and to a high standard for all prisoners?	delivery into business as usual. The plans will include key work. Core expectations are that prisons must utilise all their allocated resource for this task, and that it must be profiled. Every eligible prisoner must receive one key work session every four weeks as a minimum.	through the morning meeting minutes.
Reconnect Services - When will the RECONNECT service (care after custody service) be available for prisoners leaving Styal?	The RECONNECT service will ensure that prisoners who leave the area on release are referred on to and supported to access the RECONNECT in their home area, who will continue to support on-going needs. Referrals can be up to 12 weeks in advance of expected release dates and support will be offered during this 12-week period and for up to six months post release (or when needs are met).	Reconnect have 18 active cases in Styal. There have been 44 referrals in the last three months but prisoners are not yet able to make self-referrals electronically. Pre-release boards engage Reconnect links with community.
Cost of living increase: The cost-of-living crisis has disproportionately impacted prisoners. What plans are in place to consider an increase in budget available for prisoner wages to offset this increase?	HMPPS is aware of the impact of the cost of living on the purchasing power of offenders, and looking at ways to respond within the confines of budget allocation. HMP/YOI Styal is reviewing prisoners pay and with the intention to support prisoners who gain and enhance skills and qualifications to support attaining employment, training or further education upon release, with the eventual aim of reducing reoffending.	Prisoners are seriously impacted by their reducing purchasing power. The cost of magazines for example is prohibitive to them and toiletries have significantly increased in price. The new pay policy in Styal has been introduced for some prisoners with focus being given to lower paid workers – due to budget limitations and this has caused some unrest in relation to perceived fairness by the prisoners.
New healthcare building: Funding for a new healthcare building has been agreed for Styal, but we understand building work has been	The business case for a new healthcare centre was approved for funding in March 2024, programme dates are currently being confirmed with the constructor.	The latest Governor update confirmed: The new healthcare centre build project is underway, and is at RIBA stage 4. The programme is on schedule with site work commencing in October.

<p>delayed until 2025. What guarantees are there to ensure that this happens?</p>		
<p>Workplace and employment opportunities: What further HMPPS support and assistance can be provided to increase the number of workshop places and employment opportunities for the prisoners?</p>	<p>New Futures Network (NFN) opened a call centre, provided by 'Kickstart Futures', at HMP/YOI Styal in July 2024, which can employ up to 16 prisoners. A further multi skills/construction boot camp will commence at the end of September 2024 for up to 10 prisoners per course, with the prison planning to run four courses per year. NFN will continue to explore opportunities to help the prison fill their workshop spaces.</p>	<p>There have been setbacks to several workplace and employment opportunities; the call centre has been closed since March 2024. Recycling Lives has been closed for several months since the supervisor moved on but is due to re-open in May 2025. New short-term qualifications available in waste management, cleaning and recycling – useful for shorter term sentenced prisoners. A reliance on outside providers to supply supervision can be a limitation in terms of contract negotiation/funding. The construction course (Procure Plus) is very well received by the prisoners, with good job prospects on release with further construction opportunities being sought. The gardens do not currently offer accredited training qualification and is undersubscribed. Challenges in obtaining sufficient number of open categorised prisoners to fulfil numbers in The Clink restaurant. Prisoners prefer release on temporary licence (ROTL) opportunities in the wider community with improved post release employment options.</p>

Laptop content and word processing facility When will new content, including a word processing facility be made available for prisoners to access?	Strategies for generating national content include the creation of content (in conjunction with communications specialists, staff at launchpad sites and prisoners), and the acquisition of content that is approved by HMPPS subject matter experts and the Launchpad editorial board. The digital manager at HMP/YOI Styal will continue to play a crucial role in the creation and acquisition of content that meets the local needs of the prison. A regular survey will be distributed to ensure the user voice is heard and content adapted accordingly.	Some new content update on laptops. To our knowledge there has been no update on the Word processing facility.
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To the Governor:

Question	Response	Progress
Accommodation: What action can be taken to address the ongoing problems with accommodation standards to ensure decency and humane treatment at Styal?	Facilities on all houses have recently been reviewed and the establishment is purchasing new furniture for the dining rooms on the houses. We continue with a painting programme on the houses, although the increased capacity makes painting the bedrooms problematic as we are unable to re-locate women on different houses. We will introduce a log on all houses where small repairs can be logged and monitored.	The thematic accommodation monitoring review we carried out in January 2023 has still not been fully progressed. Items to provide decency are missing in several houses. The shower doors on X side took what the IMB believe to be an unreasonable time to replace. This concern remains.
Key work: What more is planned to ensure that timely and high-quality key work sessions are delivered to	The current resourcing position makes the facilitation of regular keywork inconsistent. We have introduced a new	The IMB appreciates the pressure of the regime and the challenge of managing severely unwell prisoners. Whilst keywork

every eligible prisoner, in line with national targets?	process to ensure all new receptions to Styal receive a keywork session within five days. We continue to monitor the delivery of keywork through the daily operational meeting.	is routinely scheduled, the prisoners report to us it often lacks depth/meaning. This concern remains.
Library access: How does the prison intend to ensure that all prisoners have access to the library for at least 30 minutes per week?	We continue to focus on regime delivery but recognise the inconsistent provision due to staffing shortages.	Although improved, there remain inconsistencies in relation to escorting prisoners to allocated library sessions to enable minimum weekly access of 30 minutes.
Spectrum contract renewal: How and when will the Spectrum contract be reviewed to support the changing healthcare needs of prisoners?	A business case has been supported by Commissioners and Spectrum are currently undertaking a recruitment exercise to these posts.	Following our escalation to the CQC and their unannounced inspection during April/May 2024 the IMB has observed significant improvements in Spectrum's healthcare provision. The contract has been reviewed and significant additional staffing agreed, some of whom are already in post, and there has been significant improvement in the timely distribution of medications.
Scheduling to avoid non-attendance: What progress is being made in reducing non-attendance at healthcare, education and activities, caused by scheduling conflicts?	A weekly taskforce meeting continues to focus on duplicate scheduling with improved attendance to activities.	Efforts have been made to address the clashes between healthcare appointments and education/activities. The 'whole prison' approach and regular cross functional attendance meetings has resulted in improved attendance at both education (by 16% in last six months) and activities (by 6% to 81% in last six months)

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

The Board has observed a multi-disciplinary and responsive approach to safety. This has been demonstrated through strong leadership, effective analysis of data, extensive knowledge of prisoner needs and a high level of care and compassion. The development of a trauma-informed environment and the increased focus on psychological support for prisoners has helped to promote positive early interventions and provide staff with more appropriate de-escalation techniques. The Board has observed greater provision of training to help officers understand behaviours of prisoners in their care and the availability of supervision sessions aimed to promote confidence and competence within this staff group.

4.1 Reception and induction

The Board has noted the continuing improvement in the reception area, which now provides a secure and welcoming environment for newly arrived prisoners. The presence of peer mentors into the evening and on Saturday ensures a much-improved transition into prison life, as does the follow-up induction sessions with the same orderlies. The presence of healthcare staff and skilled officers ensures that the relevant checks, processes and assessments are in place, and that appropriate and timely referrals to mental health and DARS are made. Professional interpreters attend the prison to help patients who do not speak English to engage in and understand mental health assessments.

Extra support is given to new arrivals by the safety team who meet them during their first day in prison and again a week later. Recall prisoners are given a 'Fast Track' induction, if they are back within three months of their release and this includes appropriate checks on health and referrals when necessary.

However, the Board has again noted that the prison has continued to receive prisoners late in the evening, and having been in police custody and on prison transport for several hours before their transfer to the prison. This is especially problematic for those first time prisoners, and those with substance dependencies.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

The continuing high rates of self-harm (the second highest in the women's estate), and the high number of deaths in custody this year remain a cause of concern for the Board.

The majority of self-harm incidents are carried out by a very small number of prolific self-harmers, almost always with a history of frequent self-harm before entry. The main types of self-harm are strangulation, followed by cutting and the primary triggers identified by the prison are drug and vape debt, family issues, concerns over release, moves within the prison, and access to medications. In December 2024 there were 523 incidents of self-harm by 31 individuals, with 13 prolific self-harmers responsible for 493 of the incidents (94%).

The Board has recognised a growing proportion of self-harm incidents emanating from the 18-24 age group. Of the 426 incidents in January 2025, 279 were attributed to young adults, five of whom were prolific self-harmers. In April 2025, 48% (248) of

all self-harm incidents were attributed to one young adult. The prison has responded to the growing number of incidents by this cohort by the creation of the Young Adult Hub that provides additional support to those identified as more at risk of self-harm, through a range of different activities and therapies.

On average, the prison admitted between six and seven prisoners with severe mental health conditions and behavioural issues every month over the reporting year. The Board has observed that these prisoners have frequently required special accommodation, constant watches and repeated visits from healthcare staff as a result of prolific self-harm, refusal to take medications and non-compliance. One prisoner was responsible for 400 incidents over a three month period before being removed to a secure mental health placement. Another has had 1269 incidents of self-harm; has been involved in 66 use of force interventions; been on constant watch for large portions of her sentence; and has carried out numerous assaults on staff. The impact on resources, staff and other prisoners has been hugely disproportionate, and has drained attention and time from others in need of care.

The Board has monitored those prisoners who are mentally unwell or are a significant risk to themselves, to the point of likely needing a secure mental health placement to address their support needs. The Board has noted the increased use of the care and separation unit (CSU) for such prisoners when appropriate mental health facilities in the community are not available. It has been incredibly difficult securing the appropriate placements needed for these individuals and, despite its best efforts, the prison is not resourced to provide the required level of support. This was highlighted by the fact that eight prisoners this year were sectioned on release at the gate.

The number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans opened to support prisoners at risk of self-harm or suicide has remained relatively stable, although they have increased over the reporting year from a daily average of 29 in May 2024 to a high of 43 in December 2024 and 36 in April 2025. The Board has seen a number of interventions over the year to improve the quality and consistency of ACCTs, particularly with regard to reviews, and the monitoring of care plans and observations. However, the board has also noted that the amount of paperwork for the ACCT process is excessive, and there is a lot of duplication, which can lead to mistakes being made. The paperwork also occupies a great deal of officer time that could be better spent on positive interactions with the prisoners.

There has been positive peer support through the Listeners scheme (prisoners trained by the Samaritans) for all prisoners, and the Early Days programme identifies and provides additional support for those most vulnerable to self-harm on entry to the prison. The Stepping Stones programme also continues to provide therapeutic support for other vulnerable prisoners, with a range of art, music, meditation and reflection programmes.

The Board has recorded the actions of a committed and professional team of staff in the CSU, and in the Valentina unit, which offers short-term respite care for vulnerable prisoners. Staff in both of these areas understand the complex needs of the prisoners and consistently respond with patience, good humour and understanding. However, the Board is concerned that staff shortages frequently impact the regime on Valentina, leading to prisoners being locked behind their doors

for extended periods. The lack of a consistent exercise regime and the poor state of the outside environment is also detrimental to the mental health of this cohort.

The Board notes with sadness that there were six deaths in custody during the reporting year, five of which were apparently self-inflicted, two which occurred after release from prison, and one in hospital from illness. Two of the apparent self-inflicted deaths took place within days of the prisoners being recalled to prison. The prison is now designated as a 'cluster site' as a result. A Board analysis of PPO and inquest reports show that the prison has implemented almost all of the appropriate recommendations for improvement.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The data available to the Board revealed that prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased over the reporting year. These assaults peaked in December 2024, had fallen by April 2025, but remain the highest in the female estate. Key triggers were linked to drug and vape debt, stealing and arguments, and in some cases insufficient supervision on the houses as a result of staffing shortages.

Prisoner-on-staff assaults decreased from April 2024, peaking in December 2024 but by April 2025 remained the second highest in the female estate. As with self-harm, the Board noted that the majority of assaults on staff were carried out by a very small number of repeat perpetrators; in April 2025, 41% of assaults on staff were committed by three young adults.

The prison has initiated regular forums on units that are identified as hot spots for violence and has implemented behaviour management plans for those prisoners responsible for high numbers of staff assaults, violence and UoF incidents. A safety officer presence on the wing during serverly times has been observed as this has been identified as a time that incidents often happen. The prison has also expanded provision for staff reflective sessions with the psychology team, which the Board believes has had a positive impact on helping staff cope with the traumatic incidents they deal with on a daily basis.

4.4 Use of force

Figures available to the Board showed that Styal had the highest level of use of force (UoF) in the women's estate in April 2024, with 99 recorded incidents. As with self-harm, the majority of incidents involved a small number of prisoners who had to be repeatedly restrained as a result of their behaviour and non-compliance. There has however been a steady reduction in the UoF to 68 incidents in April 2025.

Leaders work with the WEPS team to identify incidents where good de-escalation techniques had avoided the need to use physical force. They share this learning with staff and there had been a reduction in the amount of times force was used.

The minutes from the weekly UoF meetings are analysed and monitored by the Board and it is noted that there are many more examples of good practice being shared at these meetings. The prison has recently introduced the use of rigid handcuffs that appear to be more effective in restraining prisoners, although it is too early yet to demonstrate any significant impact.

In February 2025, the National Tactical Response Team deployed to use of PAVA spray (an incapacitant) to resolve a serious barricade incident. The Board was

satisfied that the two prisoners involved were offered appropriate medical attention and no subsequent ill effects were reported.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

Despite the enhanced security measures introduced for scanning all prisoners, staff, visitors and mail, there remained ongoing issues with illicit substances in the prison. The main ingress noted by the Board appeared to be through mail (including legal letters), recall prisoners and social visits. There is now a much more regular involvement of dogs, particularly during visits which has increased the number of finds from visitors.

There was an increase in mandatory drug testing, although targets have still not been completely met. The security team were effective in raising awareness about the drugs entering the prison, and all staff were vigilant around the financial activities of 'prominent nominals' (those suspected of criminal activity in the prison and under surveillance) and organised crime group (OCG) prisoners. However, the use of x-ray machines and scanners would be of significant value in preventing drugs ingress.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The long-standing maintenance and repair delays to the accommodation continue. There is still a significant fire risk, as indicated in our report for 2021-2022, to prisoners who reside in the 15 houses which have not yet been refurbished at Styal. Despite some work to improve fire safety, the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate (CPFSI) has issued enforcement notices after identifying areas of concern, particularly with regard to asbestos in boiler rooms, and compartmentalisation of the houses, leaving no natural fire breaks.

Many areas of Styal remain in a poor state of repair and are costly to maintain. In order to keep these buildings safe, decent and habitable there are still major expensive structural and maintenance issues to be addressed. Many of the buildings housing prisoners were constructed in 1896; consequently, due to their age and design they are in a poor state of repair, with many having extensive problems that need to be addressed in order for them to provide decent and secure facilities.

Other concerns the Board raised during a thematic monitoring exercise in 2023 have still not fully been addressed; most notably relating to furnishings and fittings that support decency (14 of the original 79 issues were still outstanding at the end of April 2025).

The improvements made to the communal areas in the cellular block (Waite wing) continue to have a beneficial effect. The less austere environment encourages prisoners to eat outside their cells when the regime allows. Both sides of Waite wing have a small laundry room and there has been investment to provide more reliable washers and dryers. However, prisoners are still expected to wash their underwear in the small cell-based hand basin, and dry on radiators. The outside areas of Waite wing are frequently observed by the Board, as being littered with debris, including food thrown from cell windows.

Waite wing only has seven ground floor cells that are fully accessible, and the recently refurbished communal showers have a high step. Repairs to the ground floor shower doors took weeks.

The development of a Young Adults' Hub in one house provides a stimulating physical environment and the Board has observed positive interactions and engagement from some young and vulnerable prisoners.

Despite recent attempts at improving both the interior and the garden areas, the care and separation unit (CSU) remains an unwelcoming place, and does not serve the needs of those mentally unwell prisoners who are sometimes of necessity located there. The prison wings have been redecorated and are generally clean and well maintained. The Valentina unit has an outside area that is in serious need of improvement. This has been scheduled for some time.

External donations for suitable outdoor clothes, nightwear and underwear continue and are gratefully received, but the board feels this lack of clothing choice should be addressed by the prison service.

The board have received 20 applications about food during the reporting year, with prisoners generally commenting that it is satisfactory. On occasion prisoners have reported to the Board that the shopping budget for those on self-catering is challenging, especially when prisoners move accommodation as the budget doesn't follow the prisoners immediately.

5.2 Segregation

The CSU has continued to be monitored as a core area by the Board on a weekly basis. The Board notes that the unit has accommodated a number of complex individuals throughout the year, including some awaiting transfer to alternative accommodation outside of the prison.

The Board has observed positive interactions between staff and prisoners, often under challenging circumstances. Staffing levels on the unit, particularly over weekends, remain a concern, as several individuals require unlocking by multiple officers, which can impact the overall regime.

The Board notes that during the reporting period, accommodation on the CSU was used on 186 occasions. Of these, 75 instances (40%) were directly reported to the Board at the time, with the remainder identified through the monitoring of daily orderly officer logs. Seven individuals remained on the unit for more than 42 consecutive days. The average stay across all individuals was 10 days, with the longest recorded stay being 75 days.

Cleanliness of the unit has been a recurring concern for the Board, with numerous occasions noted where there has been no cleaning orderly, and bags of soiled clothing and bedding from 'dirty protests' (when a person deliberately urinates or defecates without the use of the proper facilities supplied, as an act of non-compliance or protest) have been left in the corridor awaiting collection. This was formally raised with the Governor during the September board meeting.

As with the previous year, IMB attendance at good order or discipline (GOoD) reviews and adjudications has been sporadic. However, the Board feels that those reviews that have been observed have been conducted in a fair and humane way.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key work

The Board has observed that for the majority of prisoners and staff, relationships were mutually respectful and appropriately friendly. We have noted staff being caring as well as helping in practical ways. Prisoners living on the houses have told us they would feel more safe if they had more consistent access to an officer on each house; due to staffing challenges there is usually a number of officers per group of houses rather than dedicated to each house. This means some prisoners feel they have to wait to get their issues addressed.

House representatives are not always aware of meetings and some prisoners do not know the identity of their house representative, or how to raise issues with them. The Board has received only two applications relating to staff concerns during the reporting year.

Key work has been routinely scheduled but can often be cancelled due to staffing shortages or regime requirements. The Board has been told that the sessions are often cursory rather than meaningful and many get cancelled.

The Board has observed a decline in formal opportunities for prisoners' voices to be heard. The meetings at which their views are sought (community council, protected characteristic meetings and the incentives scheme forum as examples) have been sporadic or frequently cancelled. Several prisoners have told us they are not aware of how to participate.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The Board has found it difficult to access equalities data, and meetings have been sporadic and/or cancelled. Protected characteristic meetings are also patchy. The leads for the areas have changed several times, making it hard to determine the long-term issues and progress against them. No equalities needs analysis has been shared with the Board, making it difficult to identify improvements or targeted actions.

However, we have observed sensitive support provided to vulnerable prisoners, most notably young adults, who have dedicated provision, and transgender prisoners, who have reported feeling supported and respected. Provision and support for older and disabled prisoners seems less defined. Foreign nationals make up 7.5% of the population and are well supported by a dedicated officer. To the Board's knowledge there is no group or formal way of having any shared concerns addressed.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Generally positive relationships between prisoners and the chaplaincy have been observed. The Board has seen the chaplains interacting with prisoners within the CSU with understanding and empathy. Efforts to meet religious and cultural needs are met through services and marking of festivals, as well as through the provision of special diets from the kitchens.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The Board carried out some thematic monitoring focused on incentives scheme during October 2024. All prisoners spoken to as part of this survey were aware of the entitlement scheme and how it worked. There was widespread agreement from those consulted that the incentives scheme was not always effective in motivating or sanctioning, although the prisoners suggested some excellent ideas for improvement. The prison has been reviewing the process for some time.

5.7 Complaints

The Board continues to monitor a sample of complaints every month as does the deputy Governor. During this reporting year a total of 1086 formal complaints were submitted, an average of 90 per month, with some prisoners submitting multiple complaints. Only a small number of complaints, usually in single figures were submitted by prisoners from minority ethnic groups (who make up around 11% of the population at Styal).

The responses to complaints seen by the Board have generally been appropriate, have addressed the issue in question and appeared to use the principles of procedural justice. However, it has been a concern of the Board that access to

complaints form, along with IMB application forms has not always been in place, and prisoners have had to ask officers for copies of forms.

5.4 Property

The Board has received 13 applications about property. Generally, there are few complaints about property and the Board believes that where they exist, they are resolved in a timely manner.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The Board has noted that, over the year the turnover of healthcare managers has impacted leadership. However effective steps have been taken to reduce the reliance on bank and agency staff and to improve staff retention. Significant work was also carried out on processes and procedures, to ensure consistency of practice. Training was improved, and regular audits have taken place to ensure that the changes are fully embedded. In April 2025 the healthcare contract was reviewed, resulting in agreement that staffing should be increased at all levels, and recruitment began immediately.

In May 2024 the ability of prisoners to submit applications to healthcare, including for appointments, was removed from laptops as healthcare staff were struggling with the administrative burden and the system reverted to the old paper-based one. Paper-based applications are less satisfactory for prisoners, in that they take longer to be delivered and there is no automatic record of their submission. The Board is concerned that this change was said to be temporary but there is, as at the end of the reporting year, no news on when it will end, although healthcare staff are trying out various options to ensure quicker acknowledgement of applications.

6.2 Physical healthcare

An unannounced inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in April/May 2024 led to the issue of three warning notices, including one on medicines administration, about which the Board had previously raised concerns. Spectrum rapidly addressed the issues raised by the CQC, who were satisfied with the action taken to deal with them, while noting that further work was needed in some areas.

The Board has noted a reduction in applications relating to healthcare of almost 84%. We have also observed that medicines administration is generally more timely although some concerns about prescribing decisions, and about the time when individual prisoners receive medication remain. This is reflected in Spectrum's data which show that the highest number of incidents in the last quarter of the reporting year (10) related to medication, and seven out of eight healthcare complaints received by Spectrum in April 2025 were about medication issues.

At the end of April 2025 there was a GP in the prison five days a week, an increase of two days a week.

The Board has significant concerns about the security of lockers on the wing used for the storage of in-possession medication. As a result, prisoners on the wing may only have very low risk medication such as antibiotics in their possession. While prisoners on the houses can have their medication in their possession, subject to a risk assessment, lockers for their storage are also unsatisfactory; many are broken and keys have been lost. Their siting in shared space on the houses reduces confidentiality. It is unclear what, if any, steps are being taken by the prison to improve lockers so that in-possession medications can be permitted with the lowest possible risk, thus reducing the workload for pharmacy staff.

The pharmacy building continued to cause concern but plans to erect temporary accommodation were shelved in view of plans for a new healthcare building, which will include a new pharmacy. Preliminary work on this has started; building work is

due to begin in October 2025 with completion in June 2026. Detailed plans for the services to be housed in this building are as yet unclear, and it is not decided how the available accommodation will be allocated once it is in use. This is a particular concern in view of the recently agreed increase in staffing and the lack of suitable rooms for group work in existing buildings.

Pregnant prisoners and mothers and babies continued to be well cared for by the perinatal team. Prisoners reported very positive interventions with the midwife and pregnancy and mother and baby liaison officers (PMBLO), whose work was supported by a perinatal reception orderly appointed in February 2024.

6.3 Mental health

The mental health needs of the population in Styal is significant, with approximately 267 prisoners per month receiving support from the mental health team. This is provided in a variety of ways from mental health assessments, review following episodes of self-harm, psychiatric review and nursing support, and engagement with psychological therapies. The Board recognises that the mental health team works collaboratively with the prison and psychology services to deliver a range of interventions to support the complex needs of the prisoners. The ADAPT service provides support to prisoners with the severe personality disorders. The weekly multidisciplinary team meeting ensures that prisoners are allocated to services based on their needs, allowing prisoners to move easily between mental health and psychology services.

During the reporting year, the initial mental health screening of all prisoners, by a member of the mental health team at reception was changed to a programme of referral by the reception nurse to mental health, based on a screening questionnaire. The Board will continue to monitor the impact of this change to prisoners. In addition to reception screening, referrals to mental health can also be made by officers and prisoners. The team is available seven days a week and each day nurses undertake a range of activities such as screening new referrals, reviewing prisoners in segregation and attending ACCT reviews.

The mental health team is based in the Iris Centre where prisoners attend for appointments. Unlike the healthcare building, an officer is not based in the Iris Centre, which has led to a lack of oversight and support for prisoners waiting before and after appointments. Due to a significant episode of self-harm in the bathroom of the centre, the area has been locked leading to prisoners waiting in the area without access to a bathroom. The Board observed the frustration of prisoners waiting for some time to be escorted back to work or to their accommodation following their appointment. For this reason, in some cases, prisoners were reluctant to attend their appointment.

The Board observed significant delays in the transfer of severely unwell prisoners to inpatient NHS facilities, resulting in prisoners being housed in accommodation, which despite being the safest location with the establishment, was wholly unsuitable for someone with mental health issues. Delays in transfer to inpatient NHS facilities resulted in the most severely unwell prisoners experiencing delayed treatment due to the limited interventions available in prison for those who require inpatient care. This had a significant impact on the regime due to the additional staff resource needed to respond to severely mentally unwell prisoners. Despite the challenging

circumstances, the Board observed mentally unwell prisoners being treated with dignity and respect by staff.

6.4 Social care

At the end of the reporting year the social care specialist was supporting an average of eight prisoners a day. A particular challenge is helping prisoners with mobility issues to use the showers as, throughout the prison, access to these requires the negotiation of a high step. Approval has been given to the appointment of another member of staff for this work and recruitment is under way.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

Staffing pressures, usually caused by the need for unplanned escorts, could occasionally mean that the regime was restricted but generally prisoners had regular time out of cell, including for association, exercise and purposeful activity.

For part of the year the Valentina unit was one of the first areas of the prison to be affected if staffing was low, with prisoners then being confined to their cells. However, prison management recognised that this was particularly unhelpful for this cohort of prisoners and are making efforts to ensure that, where possible, they are not so regularly impacted by staffing pressures. The Board is, however, concerned that opportunities for Valentina residents to benefit from fresh air and exercise are limited. The small area of open space attached to the unit is uninviting and shabby and the only regular opportunity to leave the unit is to attend the regular one weekly timetabled gym session. However, this is not popular and staffing there is not always sufficient to permit attendance by more challenging individuals.

6.6 Drug and alcohol recovery service (DARS)

The Board has recently carried out an in-depth monitoring of this service. The substance misuse service supports about 50% of Styal's population. A prisoner is referred to services, which can happen at any stage but is most usually done when they arrive at Styal. Depending on answers to the healthcare screening questionnaire, they remain on the service's books until they leave, although they may not be actively in receipt of services throughout their stay.

The service's emphasis is on safety, so the main focus is on working with prisoners when they arrive in Styal and then prior to their release. The increase in short-term prisoners, whether sentenced or on recall, has in turn increased this work.

The DARS team work with community service providers to ensure a smooth transfer on release. As the prison takes prisoners from across the north west of England, including Wales, this requires working with 36 different organisations, dependent on location, each of which has its own processes and procedures. In addition, there are regular releases of prisoners to areas outside the northwest. Reported figures on the number of service users who are released from custody, referred to community services for continued treatment and present at their designated community team within the first 21 days of release (three weeks) are higher, in some cases substantially higher, than comparator women's prisons.

Currently, each full-time caseworker has a caseload of around 40 prisoners. NHS commissioners have recognised the high caseload and approved the appointment of two additional clinical staff and four DARS caseworkers, thus bringing Styal's staffing to a similar level to that of comparator prisons in the male estate.

The Board has noted that the DARS team want to do more work with prisoners during their time in the prison. However, as well as staffing considerations, there are significant problems with available accommodation. On the wing, in particular, there is no space where staff can have confidential one-on-one conversations, and it can be a challenge to gain access to prisoners. There are no rooms within healthcare accommodation of an appropriate size for group work, and only two rooms that accommodate a maximum of six people.

Prisoners who would, in principle attend groups, are reluctant to do so when it potentially means waiting for an hour or two for an escort, in a crowded waiting room with no access to toilets. Furthermore, attendance at such approved appointments is not always paid by employers, meaning that those who do attend, can suffer a financial penalty. Despite these issues many of the prisoners expressed their appreciation for the help and support they received from DARS staff.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

The Board have observed developments in the education offer to the prisoners following the HMIP inspection at the end of 2024. The prison population has changed over the period of this report, with an increase in the number of prisoners on short sentence or recalls, so an amended educational offer has been developed. The 'Skills for Life' course is designed to support those prisoners with entry level English and maths skills who would be better suited to vocational versus classroom activities. Attendance at education activities has improved from 56% to 73% between October 2024 and March 2025, supported by the 'whole prison' cross-functional approach to allow prisoners to obtain medicines, attend education and activities.

Provision, access and attendance at the library which transferred to Novus in February 2024 have all improved, with the library open five days a week, including weekends and evenings. Prisoners were timetabled to attend at least one session a week and the majority did participate but there were reports of inconsistencies in relation to escorts to allow the prisoners to attend.

A new management information system was installed in the library that was well stocked with a good range of books including some 'easy reads'. Reading support from the Shannon Trust was available and outreach to the local community was hoping to engage further reading support and coaching opportunities. Board members heard directly from the prisoners that they appreciate the quiet space available in the library, particularly if they are struggling with the environment in the main prison.

7.2 Vocational training, work

The board has observed that there are limitations on the opportunities for full time work for all those who seek it, and which, in particular carry accredited training. The prison accessed funding to provide a new construction course that has proved very popular and is oversubscribed. Styal is the only prison in the female estate offering a consistent pathway within the construction sector. This workshop is an externally funded skills bootcamp, providing prisoners with their Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card and a Level 2 Diploma in Property Maintenance, with guaranteed job interviews and employment support attached. Further opportunities in this area are being sought due to the potential for employment on release.

The Clink restaurant has employed up to 15 prisoners working in this 'open' employment opportunity. The restaurant offered qualifications in hospitality and catering. The prison has found it challenging to provide the number of workers required in this open setting, with prisoners choosing to work in community based ROTL placements (such as construction) which might lead to employment activities on release alongside taking up family resettlement based ROTL entitlements.

Given the increase of remand and short-term prisoners, the pool of prisoners ready to progress into employment has also decreased, although the Board is aware of a number of further discussions for provision of ROTL based work opportunities.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The Board observed and heard very positive feedback from prisoners involved in the SDS40 early release scheme in 2024 (to tackle the ongoing overcrowding crisis in prisons, certain prisoners serving 'standard determinate sentences' (SDS) became eligible to be released after serving 40% of their sentence instead of 50%) – with prison staff working collaboratively to provide for efficient, well planned and coordinated releases. Further legislation changes in relation to short term recalls have created significant workload. Some of the prisoners on 14 day recalls have reflected to Board members that there is little or no activity for them to undertake during their recall period.

Treatment programmes such as Working with Anger and Thinking Skills programmes were held during the year, which have supported prisoners with challenging and complex issues. The prison has prioritised attendance at these courses for the relevant prisoners to support programme completion.

7.4 Family contact

The Board has observed positive developments by PACT to support family and community links for the prisoners. Family visits and children's visits were temporarily halted due to security reasons but have now been reinstated, in addition to the statutory visit entitlements. These activities reach across all the areas covered by the Styal catchment area and support is provided for Welsh prisoners to help maintain family connections with children via the 'Visiting Mum' – Wales initiative.

The Board has recognised that family video links have on occasion, been frustrating for some prisoners due to technical difficulties or challenges with escorts to the video-link facility. Nevertheless, these issues appear to have reduced in frequency based on informal discussions with prisoners, during rota visits.

7.5 Resettlement planning

The Board noted that for the reporting period the prison met the target of 10% for prisoner employment within six weeks of release. The data provided by the prison shows an increase in employment figures within six weeks and six months of release. In both cases the hospitality sector provides the highest number of employment offers. Styal is currently fourth within the women's estate for employment within six weeks, and third within six months, and consistently has the highest number of job offers. This is largely due to new initiatives and employers, with one such development being a pilot scheme with Starbucks, where nine job offers have been made to Styal leavers.

There has been significant recent pressure in relation to finding accommodation on release for prisoners despite the positive working observed between the prison pre-release team and CRS providers. The Board conducted a follow up to the Thematic Monitoring survey last conducted in 2022 and noted a small but important deterioration to positive housing outcomes since the earlier report. Local and published figures show a reduction of up to 6% in terms of successful accommodation placement on first night of release.

The Board has noted that due to the changes in the prison population over the past 12 months that the number of releases per month has increased from 50-70 individuals each month to around 90 per month. This has led to an increase in the

number of prisoners requiring some form of support and intervention around accommodation.

The 'Departure Lounge' to support prisoners on the day of their release continues to be a positive element of providing prisoners with access to essentials for their departure including clothes and toiletries, access to phones, transport and accommodation and key community links.

The CRS providers have been allocated a shared space within the prison, working alongside the accommodation specialist, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), a recalls officer, domestic violence officers and the pre-release team. This has facilitated effective cross-functional working.

The introduction of pre-release boards for the prisoners has been observed to be very effective in terms of provision of all the necessary elements for the prisoners release to be as successful as possible. Inputs are provided by all relevant parties such as DWP, banking, CRS, DARS, career guidance and healthcare (mental and physical). The process was observed to be reassuring to the prisoners and was done with professionalism and compassionate care for those who were particularly vulnerable.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	12
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	12
Total number of visits to the establishment	427

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year	% change
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	5	12	↑ 140%
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	15	4	↓ 73%
C	Equality	3	1	↓ 67%
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	8	8	→ 0%
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	6	4	↓ 33%
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	10	2	↓ 80%
F	Food and kitchens	4	20	↑ 400%
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	43	7	↓ 84%
H1	Property within the establishment	21	2	↓ 90%
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	3	11	↑ 267%
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	2	5	↑ 150%
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	11	1	↓ 91%
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	15	6	↓ 60%
K	Transfers	4	12	↑ 200%
L	Miscellaneous	8	4	↓ 50%
	Total number of applications	158	99	↓ 47%



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