



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Whitemoor

**For reporting year
1 June 2024 to 31 May 2025**

Published October 2025



Contents

Introductory sections 1 – 3	Page
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the establishment	4
3. Key points	5
 Evidence sections 4 – 7	
4. Safety	7
5. Fair and humane treatment	10
6. Health and wellbeing	15
7. Progression and resettlement	17
 The work of the IMB	
Board statistics	21
Applications to the IMB	22
 Annex A	
Service providers	23
 Annex B	
Kitchen and servery issues	24

All IMB annual reports are published on www.imb.org.uk

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

His Majesty's Prison (HMP) Whitemoor lies outside the Cambridgeshire town of March. Opened in 1991, it is one of five high security prisons in England within the long term and high security estate (LTHSE).

At the end of the reporting year the prison was at capacity with 458¹ prisoners, 151 of whom were category A, and 11 High Risk Category A. The remaining 296 were Category B. 16 men were held under indeterminate imprisonment for public protection (IPP).

Whitemoor was one of five high security dispersal prisons and was nominally a category B training prison. Although nearly two-thirds of Whitemoor's population were category B, they were held in category A conditions; and they needed special consideration before they could progress to be with their nominal peers in pure category B jails.

All Whitemoor prisoners were accommodated in single cells with in-cell telephone and integral sanitation, but used separate, shared external showers.

The prison comprised the following units:

- three main residential wings, two with a capacity of 126 and one with 114;
- the Fens Unit, accommodating up to 70 prisoners undergoing psychological treatment for personality disorder, delivered in partnership with the National Health Service (NHS);
- a close supervision centre (CSC) holding up to 10 prisoners, managed nationally to provide a secure location for the most disruptive, challenging and dangerous prisoners in the prison system;
- a psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE) unit designed to enable prisoners to maintain and build on developments they had previously achieved in prison, with a capacity for 30;
- the Bridge unit, opened in April 2019, designed to support prisoners progressing out of segregated conditions, with a capacity of 12;
- a care and separation unit (CSU, for segregating prisoners) of 18 cells, two of which could be used to hold prisoners from the close supervision centre. The CSU is generally referred to as the Segregation Unit;
- a Healthcare unit that held up to 9, though not as part of the prison's formal capacity.

Annex A lists external service providers.

On 31 May 2025, Whitemoor had 448 operational staff (68% men, 32% women) and 85 non-operational staff (72% women, 28% men).

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

General

- After a difficult start with low staff morale following multiple incidents, the atmosphere in the prison became more settled as inexperienced officers found their feet. Following a change of leadership, the Board was pleased to note improvements in cleanliness and regime from November 2024, though reduced staffing negatively impacted both towards the end of the reporting year.

Safety

- There were five serious incidents of violence against officers, as well as four committed by prisoners against other prisoners, one of which was an apparent homicide. Violence against staff showed a decreasing trend from July to November 2024, but incidents increased in subsequent months
- There were 11 drone sightings and three confirmed drops, two of which were intercepted containing mainly phones and drugs

Fair and humane treatment

- The Board was concerned about food quality and quantity, portion sizes, hygiene in serveries and the poor state of the main kitchen.
- There remain some showers on each wing in very poor condition.
- Segregation staff found it difficult to deal humanely with some seriously mentally ill prisoners who attacked officers whenever their cell was opened.
- Keywork sessions improved in frequency, but the quality of discussions varied widely
- Important functions such as visits administration and general applications processing suffered from staff absence, highlighting a failure to address the lack of resilience in the staffing of some activities
- The administration of social and legal video visits was chaotic, leading to long waits and frequent short notice cancellations

Health and wellbeing

- There was significant improvement to time out of cell from November 2024, but staff shortages from April 2025 increased closures. Residential wings were less affected than small units, workshops and Education.
- The Board was pleased to note improvements in the cleanliness and facilities in the residential Healthcare unit, and the increase in the number of Physical Education instructors
- 21% of health appointments were missed, 12% as prisoners declined to attend and 9% (over 1000 appointments) due to officers not escorting prisoners to the unit.

Progression and resettlement

- The number of progressive moves and downgrades improved significantly from the previous year
- Staff shortages late in the reporting year reversed the trend of improved opening for Education and workshops.

- Vocational work continued to be low quality, with no replacement for previously lost contracts. Unemployment was almost double the target. Anticipated major cuts in the education budget will worsen the situation.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Will the Minister require formal standards for time spent on purposeful activities, along with verifiable criteria to test that such activities are truly purposeful?
- Will the Minister ensure that priority is given to funding to enable aging infrastructure to be replaced?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Will the Prison Service establish a property management system that is fit for purpose?
- Will the Prison Service increase the quality and quantity of training to new officers on how to manage prisoner relationships, given the importance to stability of cooperation between officers and prisoners?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Will the Governor ensure that prisoners have timely access to video-based legal and social visits?
- Will the Governor take action to prevent interruptions to key functions such as visits management due to lack of resilience in staffing?

3.3 Response to last report

The Minister provided assurance that deaths in custody and recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) are taken seriously.

Regarding the treatment of category B prisoners in Whitemoor, he advised that at the point of allocation into a Long Term and High Security Estate (LTHSE) prison, the risk presented by each category B prisoner is assessed, with only those prisoners found to require dispersal conditions being sent to dispersal prisons. He said that whilst there, category B prisoners are not subject to the same level of security as category A prisoners and do not suffer any detriment to their regime, which is like that of a category B training prison. However, the Board perceives no difference in regime between category A and category B prisoners, though it acknowledges some differences in approval of visitors and escort arrangements.

The Board had asked that the Prison Service set formal standards to ensure that time in long-term jails is used constructively, and that activities labelled as purposeful truly are. HMPPS responded that they are committed to rehabilitation and taking the right approach, for the right person at the right time. Core expectations have been developed for regime delivery and reviewed targets under the new purposeful activity measures and core expectations will be monitored during quarterly performance assurance report meetings. The Board felt that this was a weak response and have elevated the question to the Minister.

The Board asked the Governor to ensure that prisoners have fair and dependable access to all visits, including legal ones, whether virtual or in-person. While physical visit arrangements proved generally good, virtual visits arrangements were poorly handled, and long waits remained for legal visits.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 General stability

The reporting year began at a very difficult time in the prison. Five serious assaults on staff had taken place before the end of May 2024. In June two young officers sadly died outside the prison. The cumulative effect of these events took its toll on staff, with morale at a low and the prison's care team working overtime.

As the year progressed, new staff began to settle in and despite some short periods of disruption, mainly incidents at height and minor altercations on different wings, the Board observed that the prison was generally calm. Several serious assaults towards the end of the reporting period unsettled staff, many of whom felt that the risks to their safety had increased. However, overall violence and levels of self-harm had reduced by year end and stability improved in general.

4.2 Reception and induction

The prison has remained full throughout the year, with movement into the prison much reduced from the previous year which saw wings being recanted following rewiring work. Reception and induction of arriving prisoners continued to be planned and managed well.

4.3 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

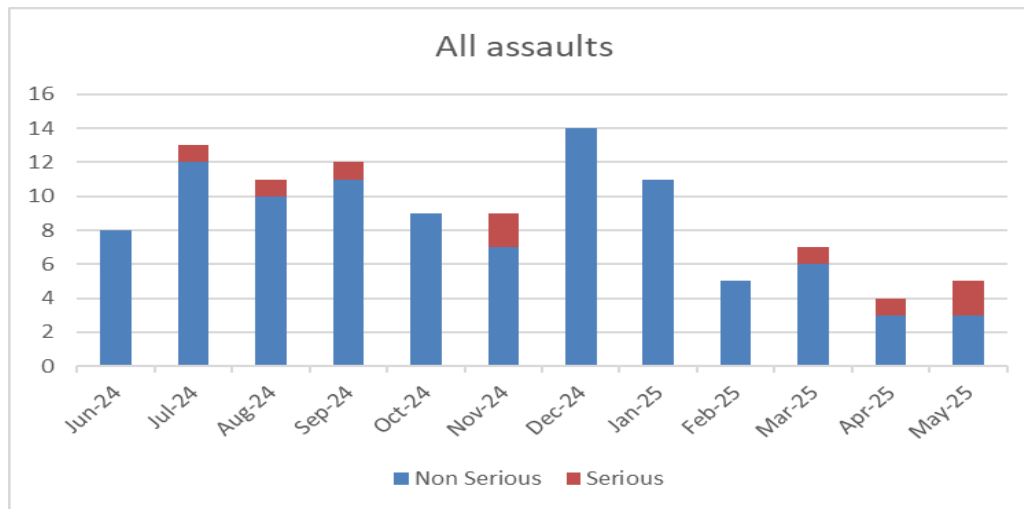
There were two deaths in custody – one prisoner on prisoner apparent homicide and one apparently from natural causes. Staff dealt sensitively and compassionately with end-of-life care for a terminally ill prisoner.

The ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) process is in place to help support those men at risk of self-harm or suicide. 101 ACCT documents were opened during the reporting year, a reduction from last year's 136. 14 of these were for men in the care and separation unit. Attendance at ACCT reviews continued to be inconsistent, sometimes with just two officers rather than a multi-disciplinary team.

The number of self-harm incidents reduced to 285 from a high of 409 the previous year. The reduction was partially due to the transfer of a small number of prisoners who self-harmed frequently - there was a peak of 81 incidents in August 2024 due to multiple acts by a single prisoner who has since been since transferred. A total of 40 prisoners self-harmed during the year. Cutting was once more the most frequent cause, though there were a large number of incidents of swallowing a dangerous substance again due to repeated behaviour by a single prisoner.

During the reporting year the number of Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide support to other prisoners) reduced from 16 to eight due mainly to transfers. By the end of the reporting year plans were in place to recruit and train a further eight. Samaritans were complimentary about Listener services.

4.4 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation



For the reporting year Whitemoor's overall annual assault rate was 236 per 1000 prisoners; for the period January to May 2025 the annualised rate had reduced to 168/1000. For comparison, in 2024 the average rate per 1000 prisoners for the five dispersal prisons was 273.

There were 83 assaults on staff during the reporting year, five of which were serious, a reduction from 95/8 the previous year. Prisoner on prisoner assaults reduced significantly from 44 to 25, though of those, four were serious, including one apparent homicide. There were two months with zero prisoner on prisoner assaults.

Violence against staff had been on a decreasing trend from July to November 2024, though this trend was interrupted by higher figures for December 2024 and January, March and May 2025.

Officers expressed concern to Board members about the perception of instability and the risk of violence. There was one incident where officers on one wing refused to unlock prisoners due to these concerns. This was well handled by Governors, and a normal unlock eventually went ahead. Staff concern was reinforced by two serious assaults in May, one on an officer and one on a non-operational instructor, with both victims requiring specialist hospital treatment.

4.5 Use of force

The Board was pleased to note the thoroughness with which use of force events were rigorously reviewed and analysed, and feedback provided to officers involved where appropriate. The planned events observed by Board members were handled with care and as much sensitivity as was practical.

Monthly occurrences ranged from nine to a high of 39 in May 2025. 23 of the latter related to one prisoner with severe mental health problems who attacked staff at every opportunity. Of the annual total of 264, 20% involved the 21-25 age range which made up 13% of the prison's population. The division by ethnicity varied widely from month to month as a small number of individuals were involved in multiple events.

4.6 Preventing illicit items

During the reporting year there were 11 drone sightings, of which three were confirmed drops. Two of the three parcels were intercepted. Among the contents were iPhones (one parcel included 16), chargers, SIM cards, cannabis, tobacco, an X box and other electronic items. A further drone and package was seized by police around two miles from the prison, with similar content, most likely destined for Whitemoor. It is acknowledged that there may have been further undetected successful drops.

Robust action by prison management, including installation of external bars at ground level windows to limit opening and prevent the easy retrieval of drone drops, has reduced, but not eliminated the ability to successfully deliver contraband through this route.

Cell searches were conducted both routinely and based on intelligence. Figures for the reporting year were unavailable, but for a seven-month period from January 2025 finds included 64 mobile phones (of which 61 were iPhones), 52 chargers, 18 weapons, 11 drugs and around 100 other illicit items.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The general appearance of many areas of the prison was improved during the year by fresh painting of walls and bars. This had the benefit of proving useful employment for some prisoners.

Cleanliness varied by wing, with the Fens unit consistently observed as the cleanest and tidiest. For much of the year there was a strong focus on cleanliness, though the age of the prison and general wear and tear made it difficult to achieve a high standard.

Flooring in some areas was very poor, with ingrained dirt and cracked and broken floor coverings. There remain several showers in need of refurbishment, with visible mould on ceilings and blocked ventilation grills. Some work commenced locally but is hampered by resources and funding.

Towards the end of the reporting year, regime restrictions reduced the amount of time that wing cleaners were out of cell, leading to a reduction in cleanliness noted by Board members, prisoners and staff.

Problems with rodents continued, though they appear to have reduced towards the end of the reporting year. Traps provided by Rentokil catch only one rodent before having to be emptied and reset, so cannot cope with major infestations.

The kitchen remains largely unchanged since its original installation over 30 years ago. The Board had major concerns about problems with the main prison kitchen, which affect the hygiene and smooth running of the unit and the provision and serving of meals in wing serveries. These are set out in Annex B.

The process for preparing Ramadan meals was changed to reduce work for kitchen staff, with Ramadan boxes no longer being prepared in the main kitchen. This caused problems with serving fresh and/or hot food in the segregation unit and a high number of discrimination complaints on the main wings.

There were 154 complaints about food, fewer than the previous year. Anecdotal evidence from multiple prisoners who spoke to the IMB indicates a broad level of dissatisfaction by prisoners. Many prisoners cook their own food in wing kitchens, though a review of kitchens by HMPPS started during the reporting year may impact this in future.

The daily budget per prisoner of £3.01 makes the provision of good quality, balanced and nutritional meals very challenging. Kosher meals for the small number of Jewish prisoners are externally sourced and cost from £10-£15 per day. The Athena food management system is yet to be made operational, over four years after its acquisition. Given the anticipated benefits in cost and efficiency, this appears to be a serious failure.

Wing gardens were cleaned and tidied after being littered and unkempt earlier in the year. While the gardens for the Fens unit, PIPE and Healthcare were used for prisoner therapeutic purposes, gardens on other residential wings were not opened to prisoners due to lack of resources and staff concerns, which appeared to the Board to be a missed opportunity.

5.2 Segregation

Of the 19 prisoners segregated at the end of the 2023-24 reporting period, six had been transferred to other prisons, three transferred to secure hospitals, two had moved to the

Bridge unit and five had moved to residential wings in Whitemoor. The remaining three are still segregated (though one of these has returned to segregation after a period on a wing). This represents considerable success in progressing some men with complex behavioural challenges, one of whom had been continuously segregated for almost five years.

The approach to structuring prisoners' 14 day reviews at segregation review Boards was altered to try to alternate groups of long-term segregated prisoners one week, and shorter term the following week, with a limited number of Governors assigned to chairing. This approach has yet to show benefits and has proved difficult to maintain. However, the reviews were well managed, and attendance (apart from security) was consistent.

At the end of the current reporting period 23 prisoners were segregated, of whom 18 were in the care and separation unit (CSU), four on the adjacent Bridge unit and one in Healthcare. Seven of these prisoners were segregated for their own protection. As last year the latter received the same regime as those segregated for behavioural reasons. Although there were two prisoners who had been segregated for over a year, there was evidence of a near term pathway for release into the main prison for both. Of the remaining prisoners, five had been segregated for three-seven months, five for up to two months and the remainder for less than a month.

However, the longer-term pathway was unclear for those at risk segregated prisoners who had progressed or were about to do so. Further progression may prove difficult or impossible given their inability to move to normal residential location due to them being at risk in all dispersal prisons. Such men can only be held safely when denied even minimal association with other prisoners.

There were several occasions when men were segregated on a residential wing due to lack of space in the main unit. These men were rarely given their required daily visits from a Governor, chaplaincy and doctor. Wing staff found it difficult to deliver an appropriate regime to segregated men without negative impact on regime for others, and showers and exercise were often missed. Board members made at least weekly visits to these prisoners.

There were occasions during the year when segregation staff struggled to deal humanely with men who were severely mentally ill. For example, one prisoner was left in his cell over a weekend in urine-soaked clothing and his food was left on the contaminated cell floor. This was due to his behaviour in attacking officers when they opened his door, with staff lacking an effective approach to ensure he was kept clean and given meals.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Prisoners should have at least one keywork session a month; two monthly sessions for those on a CSIP (challenge, support and intervention plan for prisoners who are displaying violent behaviour) and those close to a parole hearing. Numbers delivered continued to improve, though at the end of the reporting year 13 prisoners had not had a keywork session in 2025 and 105 had not had a session in the preceding month.

Quality remained a challenge, with a lack of substance in some keywork session reports. Some reports simply said the prisoner didn't want a session, rather than showing an attempt to explore issues more deeply.

37% of Band 3 officers had less than two years' experience, and 10% had under a year while 44% had over five years. There were examples of excellence in the way that inexperienced staff deal with prisoners, such as effective forums for young prisoners led by a young officer. Equally, there were some who seemed to find prisoner relationships challenging, lacking the skills to deal effectively with challenges from prisoners. The Board questions whether sufficient training in developing and maintaining prisoner relationships is provided to new recruits, given that cooperation between staff and prisoners is critical to stability.

The administration of general applications (which cover a wide range of requests from prisoners) was assigned to an individual staff member, having previously been handled by staff in the business hub. The total number of general applications received during the reporting year was not available, but from January to May 2025 over 4000 were logged. Assessing how many were completed is difficult, as some officers did not follow the correct process. There were also an unknown number of applications which were not logged, again due to failure to follow the correct process.

5.4 Equality and diversity

At the end of the reporting year over half of the prison population was non-white. 44% were Muslim, many of whom regularly practiced their faith. Fewer of the 36% Christian prisoners attended services. The largest cohort of prisoners, at 37%, were aged 26 to 35. 13% were under 26 and 10% were 56 or older. 20% of prisoners were foreign nationals from over 40 countries.

116 prisoners were recorded as having some form of disability in May 2025. Learning difficulties and mental illness were the most prevalent. 14 prisoners had a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) as they had mobility problems or other relevant issues.

There were 122 cases using discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs), a reduction from last year's 156. Of these, 12 (10%) were supported after investigation. While the monthly average was 10, a peak of 31 in March 2025 was due to concerted action by around 20 prisoners who submitted identical DIRFs regarding provision of Ramadan meals.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

By the end of the reporting period, the chaplaincy was fully staffed except for a full-time Roman Catholic position. Difficulty in recruiting to this role reflects a more general shortage of Roman Catholic priests. A priest visited on Monday mornings, but this was less than adequate given that the demand is for a full-time role. Chaplaincy staffing was depleted for much of the year, and programmes were limited to Bible studies and Quran studies. Plans are in place to extend the range of programmes, but the Board was disappointed to note the national cancellation of the restorative justice Sycamore Tree course.

The Board welcomed the removal of a restriction on numbers in a single location, enabling Muslim prayers to be a single event rather than being split over two locations.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The incentives policy framework (IPF) is intended to motivate prisoners to obey rules and participate appropriately in prison activities. There are three levels – basic, standard and enhanced – each providing prisoners with different privileges. The scheme is not intended to be used as a punishment. However, negative behaviour by prisoners often

results in a reduction in incentives scheme level, which is perceived by them as punishment. This can be in addition to formal punishment such as cellular confinement.

The proportion of men on basic, standard and enhanced incentive levels was consistent throughout the year, with 5% basic (an increase from 3% the previous year), 23% standard and 72% enhanced (an increase from the previous year). Only 17% of segregated prisoners were enhanced. As in previous years, older men were more likely to retain enhanced status – in May 2025 56% of those aged to 25 were enhanced, while 78% of those over 45 were enhanced.

The tables below show that there was only a marginal difference in the proportion of prisoners on different incentives scheme levels between different religions, though comparing ethnicities a higher proportion of Asian prisoners retain enhanced level.

	Basic	Standard	Enhanced
Asian	3%	21%	76%
Black	5%	26%	69%
White	5%	25%	70%
Mixed & Other	5%	24%	71%

	Basic	Standard	Enhanced
Muslim	5%	28%	67%
Christian	5%	25%	70%
Other	5%	25%	70%

The backlog of adjudications, which peaked at over 500, reduced significantly during the year, with 200-300 outstanding in May 2025. Many were awaiting response from the police, as certain behaviour (e.g. assaults) is automatically referred for potential police investigation. A new process was implemented to locally filter out referrals that would result in no action.

5.7 Complaints

20% of the 4668 complaints recorded during the reporting year came from just five prisoners, 1% of the prison population. There were 298 complaints about staff (68 were appealed). 891 complaints (20%) were regarding property, a reduction from 36% the previous year (though number the previous year was skewed by a high number of transfers into the prison). Of the remainder, the highest numbers were on residential issues (445/10%), correspondence and phones (364/8%) and visits (236/5%).

A continuous focus on highlighting overdue complaints at daily staff briefings prevented late responses in most cases. At the end of the reporting year there were eight overdue complaints for which no interim response had been sent, and a further 21 for which interim replies had been submitted.

5.8 Property

HMPPS's manual system to manage property, using hand-written property cards, is fraught with problems. The Board is disappointed to see that despite the well-known issues, nothing has been done to improve the system.

Property continued to be the topic of the highest number of complaints, and the highest number of applications to the IMB. Annual clothing parcels for enhanced prisoners were cancelled as they were inconsistent with policy. Confusion around timing of birthday parcels and enhanced parcels (before they were phased out) was a frequent complaint. The transport of property into Whitemoor from other prisons often led to losses and damage. Around 80 of the property complaints related to transport of property from Whitemoor for prisoners transferred out.

A reduction in the amount of property accepted by the central Branston storage facility led to pressure on local storage, with the main reception full and an external storage unit also full.

By the end of the reporting period, property for incoming prisoners was routinely being processed quickly and there was only a very small backlog in reception.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The Board was pleased to note significant improvements in cleanliness and facilities in the residential healthcare unit, including regular care of the garden in the exercise area.

At the end of the reporting year, Healthcare was fully staffed save for three vacancies, all of which had successful candidates awaiting security clearance.

79% of the 11692 appointments booked were completed. Prisoners refused to attend 12% of booked appointments, and failure to provide officers to escort prisoners to the Healthcare clinic accounted for the other 9%. Complaints were generally handled on time, and there was no backlog at the end of the reporting year.

The Board was pleased to see an increase in the number of PE instructors. The Board observed no problems with delivery of daily medication to prisoners.

6.2 Physical healthcare

The Board found physical healthcare services available to prisoners adequate. There were long waits for dentistry. Optical services were readily available for prisoners on residential wings, but there were longer waits for segregated prisoners.

6.3 Mental health

At the end of May 2025 eight prisoners were at various stages of assessment for secure mental hospitals. One prisoner had been accepted in September 2024 but was still awaiting a place. Another had multiple assessments for high and medium security hospitals for a period of over a year, with no agreement as to where he would be accepted. As previously noted, segregation officers lack the training to effectively manage severely mentally ill prisoners.

Mental health staff routinely attended and contributed to segregation review boards and managed a challenging caseload effectively. The team were persistent in pressing for the transfer of mentally ill prisoners to more appropriate settings, though not always successfully. However, particularly urgent cases were dealt with expeditiously.

6.4 Time out of cell, regime

Residential units should ideally be unlocked for three sessions per day – morning, afternoon and evening. For almost half of the year, due to staff shortages, most prisoners on a wing could be locked in their cells for part or all of a day, known as ‘red regime’. The table below shows by month the percentage of sessions which were closed - i.e. prisoners locked up – in each unit. It illustrates that time out of cell on main residential wings improved significantly following the removal of ‘red regime’ in November 2024.

Area	% of sessions closed											
	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25
A wing	17	19	18	22	21	4	7	0	0	4	9	8
PIPE	36	26	18	18	23	23	48	39	47	36	30	35
B wing	20	15	15	18	19	4	7	0	3	5	9	9
C wing	20	18	19	19	23	4	8	0	3	4	7	7
Fens Unit (D wing)	11	9	8	6	0	3	5	0	1	4	8	8
CSC Unit (F wing)	17	20	27	17	10	5	11	1	4	6	22	7
Segregation Unit	25	28	24	39	28	23	19	18	19	18	17	22
Bridge	27	21	23	34	25	4	13	3	3	10	9	9
Healthcare	27	18	26	29	23	8	5	0	7	12	11	5

However, frequent redeployment of specialist PIPE officers continued – indeed became worse - hampering the unit’s ability to manage group therapeutic sessions.

While F wing closures appear lower, time out of cell was severely impacted by frequently reduced numbers of officers as shown below:

CSC Unit (F Wing)													
Nov-24		Dec-24		Jan-25		Feb-25		Mar-25		Apr-25		May-25	
Closed	Reduced	Closed	Reduced	Closed	Reduced	Closed	Reduced	Closed	Reduced	Closed	Reduced	Closed	Reduced
4	21	8		1	36	3	31	5	19	17	25	5	26

A shortage of around 40 officers led to increased regime restrictions towards the end of the reporting year. Recruitment and retention of staff remains challenging,

6.5 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

Phoenix Futures operated the four-member recovery and wellbeing team. They had 104 active clients in May 2025, 30% of whom were for wellbeing support and the remainder for substance abuse. The most prevalent substances were cannabis, synthetic cannabinoids ('spice') and fermented liquids illicitly brewed in the prison ('hooch'). Group sessions held in a workshop were often cancelled due to officer shortages.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

As with most other areas of the prison, Education opening improved from November 2024, as shown below. But officer shortages from April started to impinge on opening frequency.

Area	% of sessions closed											
	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25
Education	28	15	5	5	21	0	12	0	0	0	11	11

The full-time Shannon Trust coordinator made significant progress in improving prisoner literacy, along with the TRT (That Reading Thing) programme. At the end of the reporting year, there were 30 Shannon Trust prisoner mentors and 31 learners, from all areas of the prison. A further six learners had completed the programme. An AQA accreditation was established for mentors, 10 of whom had received the award.

The Board was concerned at reported potential significant cuts to education funding from October 2025, which will put at risk programmes such as Shannon Trust and potentially increase the gap between available work and education places and the number of prisoners.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Opening of workshops improved considerably from the previous reporting year, particularly following the removal of 'red regime' in November. The table below compares closure rates for the two reporting years. Staff shortages from April badly affected workshops, with priority being given to keeping residential wings open.

Area		% of sessions closed											
		Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Coppermills (WS1)	2023-24	34	55	35	31	53	32	36	23	29	50	50	41
	2024-25	23	19	16	5	19	0	21	0	0	3	46	38
Laundry (WS4)	2023-24	37	53	28	28	45	30	30	18	32	44	50	44
	2024-25	32	28	26	24	17	0	18	0	0	0	41	41

The Board was disappointed at the failure to improve the quality - variety and skill level - of vocational work despite this being a priority. The number of employment and education places fell short of the number of prisoners by around 40. At the end of the reporting year 18.8% of men were unemployed versus a target of 10%. Supply of computers for refurbishment and onward shipping to Africa increased due to a contract to deal with 7,500 machines from HMPPS which were being replaced. The Board was advised that a new 'upcycling' workshop will provide 15 additional employment places in the new reporting year. However, in the Board's view these measures will not deliver the major improvements required.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The Board was pleased to note significant improvement in prisoner progression versus the previous year. There was limited evidence of preparation for release of the small

number of men with short remaining sentences, and no hard evidence that prisoner offender managers (POMs) had improved contact with prisoners.

46 prisoners transferred to real category B establishments (17 last year) and 21 to category Cs (four last year). 135 men were considered by the local board for downgrade from category A, of which 16 were recommended to the national team; six of these were approved.

At the end of the reporting year, there were seven men with less than two years left to serve; of these, two had less than seven months to serve. While the Board could find no evidence of preparation for release, it was advised that they would be in the handover period to the community teams at least 10 months before their parole dates, to allow appropriate time for the community offender manager and support services to prepare them. Special arrangements are in place for those prisoners who remain as category A, as they cannot be moved to a local prison prior to release.

The prisoner offender manager is key to managing a prisoner's programmes and plays an important part in their progression. An HMIP inspection in 2023 concluded that '*Contact between prison offender managers and prisoners was too limited to provide effective offender management*'. The prison agreed a range of actions, including '*an improved monitoring system of contact between POMs and prisoners*'. The Board was advised of a number of manual checks on POM/prisoner contact but was unable to establish any data on whether contact had improved. Offender unit management advised that contact '*...between the POMs and prisoners appears to have increased over time, although we are affected by regime changes, lock down and the typical staff shortages in the OMU and the prison*'. Anecdotal evidence from prisoners suggests that POM contact continues to be problematic, although Board members do not have access to the relevant entries to prisoner records to verify this.

7.4 The specialist units

Whitemoor had four specialist units.

The Fens unit was run in partnership with the local NHS trust and had a capacity for 48 prisoners undergoing psychological treatment for personality disorder and a further 22 in transition to or from treatment. The total number of prisoners averaged 61 during the year. At the end of the year, 31 prisoners were undertaking the three year treatment programme, and a further nine were in transition. There were eight lodgers (prisoners who displayed an appropriate level of good behaviour but did not participate in treatment), six prisoners who had opted out of the programme, and four who had graduated and were awaiting progression. Five prisoners completed treatment during the year.

14 prisoners – 20% of the unit's capacity - were deselected during the year. Seven of these were removed for security or misconduct reasons, three made a personal decision to leave and the remainder were for other reasons.

The Close Supervision Centre was one of five national units that held some of the most dangerous men in the prison system. Until March 2025, men in the unit were able to associate with at least some other prisoners. A wing kitchen provided cooking facilities for those men who purchased their own food. Serious incidents during April in Whitemoor and elsewhere caused a review of individual risk levels. The kitchen and the gym were closed until further notice and association between prisoners was stopped. By the end of the reporting period, some limited association was restarted.

While percentage closure of the unit reduced from November 2024, frequent reductions in the number of staff assigned meant that regime continued to be restricted. The closure of facilities, regime limitations and introduction of a 'closed door' policy where cell doors were locked while prisoners were on association led to an increase in prisoner dissatisfaction.

Two cells in the care and separation unit (CSU) hold CSC prisoners who cannot be in the main unit. One prisoner has been held there for over a year, and the regime provided was not consistent with that expected for a CSC prisoner in terms of time out of cell, interactions with others and availability of purposeful activity.

The PIPE (psychologically-informed planned environment) is a therapeutic unit for men to consolidate what they have previously learned in preparation for further progression. Prisoners remain for up to 24 months, and at the end of the reporting year 29 of the 30 places were filled; 25 of these were official PIPE residents and four were 'lodgers' – men not on the programme but resident on the unit. While overall closures reduce from November 2024, it was disappointing to note that the frequency of redeployment of specially trained PIPE officers increased, reducing delivery of therapeutic sessions and challenging how the unit could achieve its purpose.

The Bridge, located adjacent to the CSU, held 10 men at the end of the reporting year, two short of its capacity of 12. Unoccupied Bridge cells were frequently used as overflow from the care and separation unit during the year. The Bridge's objective is to help the progression of men who have been segregated for long periods.

Six men successfully progressed during the reporting year – one to the Fens unit, three to a therapeutic community, one to a category B prison and one to a resettlement prison. This is a positive outcome, given the complexity of the prisoners concerned. There were, however, three deselections (prisoners removed from the unit, usually to the CSU) due to behaviour.

During the year the kitchen was refurbished and cooking with the installed air fryers proved a popular and therapeutic group activity. A cooker was acquired but not installed due to budget constraints preventing the installation of the necessary electrical supply; the cooker remains in storage. There was no progress with plans for a meeting room. Frequent lockdowns due to the proximity to the care and separation unit and almost continuous use of the constant observation cell ('gated cell') disrupted movement around the unit and reduced time out of cell. These issues illustrate the unsuitability of a location for the Bridge unit which is effectively an annex of the care and separation unit.

Trained staff levels improved from 10 to 12 officers, though still falling short of the target of 20. Records show that most prisoners had regular keywork sessions, an important element of the unit and an improvement on the previous year.

7.5 Family contact

In-cell telephones have proved generally reliable, though there have been a number of incidents of failures which took some time to resolve. The 60 minute daily allowance (which excludes legal calls) continued to generate prisoner complaints. The Board was pleased to note that the allowance was doubled for Christmas day and Eid, in recognition of the importance of family contact during those periods.

Many prisoners in Whitemoor are far from their family so do not receive visits. For these men, 'purple' visits – the ability to speak to family via video – is their only opportunity to maintain face to face family contact, a key part of rehabilitation. The provision of such visits was limited – unlike other prisons, staff were not profiled to carry out the necessary

management and supervision, and there were frequent short notice cancellations and inconsistency in booking arrangements.

The Board was pleased to note that physical visits have been given some priority since the visit hall reopened following security upgrades. Booking became easier as on-line facilities were reintroduced and more family day visit sessions have been arranged, with a focus on coinciding with school holidays. Visitors who provided feedback to Board members were positive about their experience.

The Board had complaints from both staff and prisoners about the length of time required to authorise visitors for category A prisoners. At the end of the reporting year, the staff member responsible was on long term sick leave with no replacement. The work had to be carried out by staff members with other full-time jobs, leading to delays. One prisoner had been waiting for five months with no predicted completion time. While it is acknowledged that delays are often due to lack of priority by police to verify potential visitors, the lack of sufficient prison staff to chase requests undoubtedly has an impact leading the Board to question whether visits are always taken seriously.

7.6 Legal visits

Lead times to arrange legal visits varied but were generally very long both for video and face-to-face arrangements, with greater pressure continuing from younger prisoners early in their sentence. The Board considered that the three-month waiting time for a legal visit, either video or face to face, was unacceptable and interfered with prisoners' legal rights. Face-to-face meetings were not popular with legal advisors, who preferred video.

8. The work of the IMB

8.1 Board statistics

	2023-24	2024-25
Recommended complement of Board members	14	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	6	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	268	261

One member was on sabbatical leave for most of the year, one was on long term sick leave and three long-standing experienced members left during 2024. For much of the year the number of experienced active members was low, limiting the Board's ability to monitor comprehensively.

At the end of the reporting year one member was newly appointed, one remained on sabbatical, two were in their induction period, one was in her second year and one had recently returned from sick leave.

8.2 Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	5	6	9
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	14	18	21
C	Equality	4	3	3
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	15	19	13
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	19	30	33
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	2	7	7
F	Food and kitchens	5	8	14
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	14	16	20
H1	Property within the establishment	5	19	48
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	9	12	10
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	3	4	7
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	8	16	16
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	14	31	20
K	Transfers	3	1	3
L	Miscellaneous	16	17	13
	Total number of applications	136	207	237

The total number of applications increased by over 10%. Property almost doubled, accounting for 24% (15% last year). A similar increase in food/kitchens applications concealed a greater underlying proportion of negative verbal comments to the Board.

8.3 Serious incidents

Board members attended 13 of the 23 times the command suite was opened for serious incidents. One was an apparent homicide, and the remainder were incidents at height, many of which were quickly resolved. The incidents observed by Board members appeared to be well-managed.

Annex A

Service providers

- Healthcare services were provided by Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, dentistry by Prison Centred Dental Care and optical services by Forensic Eye Care
- Psychological services in the Fens unit were provided by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust.
- Education and library services were delivered by Milton Keynes College.
- Maintenance was undertaken by Government Facility Services Ltd.
- Cambridgeshire County Council provided adult social care services.

Annex B

Kitchen and servery issues

The main kitchen has been largely unchanged since its original installation. As an important facility that provides daily meals for many of the prisoners (some cater for themselves using small kitchens on residential wings) it is essential that it functions effectively. It also provides employment and training for up to 21 prisoners, 5% of the prison population.

The Board was concerned at the number of problems which affect the hygiene and smooth running of the unit, and the provision of meals to prisoners. These include:

Frequent failure of ageing freezers and fridges: One large walk-in freezer was out of action and awaiting repair or replacement. The food that was stored in this freezer was now being stored in a mobile freezer facility out in the sterile area. Operationally accessing the food from this freezer is not easy due to security and is time-consuming. This leaves one walk-in freezer working. This freezer was not functioning properly; water leaking from internal pipes on the backwall of the freezer freezes as it hits the ground, leaving a large mound of ice forming. It was acknowledged to be in urgent need of repair/replacement. Engineers had expressed surprise that it was still working.

General condition: The floors are very old and in poor condition with cracked tiles and ingrained dirt, making it difficult to maintain an adequate level of cleanliness. Paintwork is old, peeling and looks dirty.

Rodents: Rodent infestation remains a constant challenge, though the position did improve during the reporting year. Traps are deployed and regularly emptied, and lids are available for rodent-proof containers for dry foods, though these were often not in place.

Residential wing serveries: Portion control is difficult to monitor as the prisoners use a variety of food containers of differing sizes. Plates are available, which would make consistent portions easier, but they are not generally used. Prisoners and officers working in serveries frequently fail to wear the appropriate protective clothing.

Prison management acknowledge the problems. Ways of working are being improved; more effort is being put into cleaning; equipment replacement is under consideration; prisoners who work in the kitchen are being encouraged to get more involved in cooking as well as preparation. However, budget constraints will make it challenging to achieve real improvements.



This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at imb@justice.gov.uk