



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Woodhill

**For reporting year
1 June 2024 to 31 May 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 Woodhill is a category B men's high-security training prison, first opened in 1992. All cells are single occupancy and have in-cell phones. It is situated on a large site in a densely populated area in Milton Keynes.

Accommodation consists of four house units, each with two wings housing 60 cells (120 cells per house unit), one house unit of 60 cells, a two-wing healthcare unit holding 12 cells each, a 12-cell care and separation unit (colloquially and hereafter referred to as segregation) and a specialist unit that consists of a close supervision centre, a separation centre and a discrete unit.

At the beginning of the reporting year, two house units were closed due to the implementation of the 2023 Urgent Notification action plan (a structured response process, triggered by the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons when a prison's performance raises significant, urgent concerns about prisoner treatment or conditions). By the end of the reporting year, all house units were open. The separation centre was closed throughout most of the reporting year, but it re-opened in April 2025.

The prison's operational capacity was 337 at the start of the reporting year and 551 at the end of the reporting year¹.

In July 2024, HMIP undertook an Independent Review of Progress against the Urgent Notification action plan of 2023. The report, published on 16 September 2024, found a prison fully staffed, with reduced levels of violence overall and reasonable progress in most areas with respect to safety. Notable good practice was recorded in two areas: the prison's peace promoters' (peer workers trained to carry out mediation) work and the pharmacy team's processes to help minimise risk and ensure compliance with prescribing medicines. The associated Ofsted review reported reasonable progress in raising levels of access to education and skills in English and Maths, but insufficient progress in provision of a sufficiently challenging curriculum and support towards prisoners' future. The assessment of progress in the offender management unit (OMU) identified good progress in supporting prisoners and improved levels of contact.

The two closed house units were incrementally re-opened between August and November, increasing the operational capacity to 543 by December 2024.

Throughout this period, staffing levels continued to be supported by officers detached from other establishments. Newly appointed officers have been trained and are in post.

The prison has identified its top priorities: 'keep the peace'; 'get education going'; and 'value our people'.

In February 2025, the Governor identified to the Prison Group Director and Executive Director the complexity of the population. Many of the men re-canted into the prison arrived unwell, with significant mental health issues, or on a CSIP (a challenge, support and intervention plan used to manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence), which impacted the stability and progress of the prison. It resulted in six additional posts in the safety team.

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

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- The Board has repeatedly reported on the lack of scrutiny and imposition of incentive scheme penalties for prisoners who block the observation panels in their cell doors. This was further identified to the prison in an action plan from PPO (Prisons and Probation Ombudsman) report, following a previous death in custody.
- Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults have remained among the highest in the long-term high security estate (LTHSE), with debt and gangs cited by prisoners as the main reasons. From the Board's observations, the safer custody team is proactive in supporting self-isolators and men who identify as being at risk of self-harm.
- Staff assaults are rated as third highest in the LTHSE, with a lack of regime and staff relationships cited as the main reasons.
- From the Board's observations, increased officer numbers and a reduction in the number of cross-deployed officers has improved the regime, but many officers are inexperienced. At the beginning of the reporting year, 45% had less than one year's service and 57% had less than two years' service. A critical gap in staffing throughout the year was the shortage of custodial managers and supervising officers. In the latter part of the reporting year, a high number of prison officers left Woodhill in their first two years of service. Local initiatives were put in place in an attempt to address this.
- Chaplaincy services are highly regarded by prisoners and officers.
- The Independent Review of Progress, conducted in July 2024, highlighted the prison's peace promoters' work as notable good practice.
- The number of ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) plans, used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide, remains high. The focus on improving the use of the ACCT process, with increased training and quality assurance checks, seems not to have had the anticipated improvement.
- Approximately 20 men are on CSIPs at any one time, which raises the question of whether the process is fit for purpose.
- Not all prisoners have a named key worker and target numbers for contact are not achieved. The Board has witnessed key working to be at its most effective in the segregation unit.
- A number of the prisoners transferred to Woodhill are found on arrival, to have concealed illicit items. This raises concerns about the exit searches in the prisons they transferred from.
- Gang culture impacts the location of prisoners in the prison.
- The trade of unlawful substances creates high levels of debt, particularly the use of vulnerable prisoners to 'test' substances and pay off their debts by committing assaults.

Fair and humane treatment

- A revised core day (the designated period when prisoners on main residential wings are let out of their cells to participate in activities such as work, education and association, as well as for meals and personal hygiene) was introduced at the end of April 2025, bringing Woodhill into line with other establishments in the LTHSE. A new key work policy and progress project was linked to the

implementation, defining two key work sessions per month as a standard, with an increase to three per month for specialist groups of men.

- There continued to be long delays in men with identified complex and severe mental health needs being moved to a secure hospital place. The Board maintains that segregation is not the right place for these men.
- A significant number of complaints about property relate to property going missing during transfer from another prison.
- In the Board's view, the continued failure of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to adequately maintain the infrastructure and fabric of the buildings has deprived prisoners and staff of a decent environment in which to live and work. The Board again reports that the showers in the majority of house units are of an unacceptable standard.
- Cleanliness and decency were a defined focus, with standards set and objectives defined. These included the cleaning priorities and schedules that should be in place on the wings. Identification of faults and repairs should be streamlined, and prisoners wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) for wing duties should be enforced. From the Board's observations, implementation of these points was variable.
- From the Board's observations, the segregation unit appeared to provide a fair and safe regime. However, a small number of men spent a very long time in the unit; and those with complex and severe mental health needs experienced very slow progress in moving them to more appropriate specialist settings.
- When men in segregation are identified as being suitable and ready for re-integration, an effective process of liaison with the custody managers of other wings prepares them.
- There continued to be over-representation of prisoners with mental health issues and/or neurodiversity in adjudication panels (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules). Segregation had the most adjudications for neurodivergent prisoners, reinforcing the observation that segregation is the wrong place for these men.

Health and wellbeing

- The Board frequently reported the appalling condition of showers on the wings, with one wing having had only six of 12 shower cubicles available for use by 53 men. There has been very slow progress in repair and maintenance of cells out of action, with the main residence prioritised over the segregation unit: during two weeks in April, 50% of the cells in the segregation unit were out of action.
- Lack of basic furniture provision, delays in repairs and lack of basic cleaning materials have been observed by the Board to have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of prisoners. The poor state of cells - mostly due to prisoners' actions - and delays in repairs mean that many cells are out of action. One specialist wing had a longstanding (three-month) problem with provision of hot water.
- The care of prisoners with physical illnesses alongside those with serious mental health needs is not appropriate. On the healthcare unit in January 2025, four of the 12 cells were out of action, which increased the already long waiting list for men to transfer there from segregation.
- Mental health services appeared to be valued and trusted by prisoners, but they struggled to cope with demand. Prisoners with severe mental health needs waited too long for formal assessment of their secure hospital suitability and transfer.

- Together with healthcare professionals, the social visits team organised several Saturday afternoon ‘neurodiversity’ sessions, designed to help prisoners and their families, including children, understand about neurodiversity and how to adjust to it.

Progression and resettlement

- Men in the segregation unit wanting education were told they must go on a waiting list. In-cell education is only available for men on the segregation unit, special units and healthcare units. There is no in-cell education for men self-isolating on the wings.
- In the Board’s view, the contract workshops need more interesting and purposeful work contracts.
- Access to education, library services and workshops increased from 24% to 48% of the prison population in the reporting year.
- The recent appointment of a new head of education, skills and work led to an overhaul of the curriculum and a new focus on men achieving skills that are transferable into a modern workplace.
- A shortage of approved premises (residential facilities that provide a controlled and supervised environment for those released from prison deemed to have a high risk of re-offending) impacted men whose parole board hearings identified them as being suitable for home detention curfew; their ongoing detention in a LTHSE prison has an impact on prisoner numbers across the overall estate.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Will the Minister work with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to proactively monitor the progress of the new Mental Health Bill through Parliament and lobby for appropriate funding?
- Will the Minister work with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to provide education and training material to address the needs of neurodiverse prisoners?
- What steps will the Minister take to ensure the fabric and infrastructure can be raised to a decent standard and maintained thereafter?
- How does the Minister intend to work with Government departments to facilitate and provide appropriate training and resettlement for prisoners?
- Will the Minister work with colleagues to provide more approved accommodation in order to support the parole boards’ recommendations for prisoners to be reintegrated into society?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- What action is underway to secure quality work contracts so that prisoners are provided with a sense of achievement alongside fulfilling employment and training?
- When will the Prison Service radically overhaul the property system? Also, when will the Prison Service provide a digital service to replace handwritten property records, which will help reduce the current frustrating processes?
- Will the Prison Service work with partners to provide better contract workshops in the prison?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- Will the Governor ensure robust measures are in place so that prisoners do not enter the office in House Units and have access to confidential papers?
- Will the Governor take action to ensure that general supplies, deliveries and property are not held up in RIDS (the prison facility for receiving and processing items) by facilitating available transport between RIDS and the prison?
- Will the Governor respond to the PPO report and impose a more stringent incentives scheme policy for prisoners who repeatedly block their cell door observation panels?
- How will the Governor address the high level of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults?
- How will the Governor address the conflict of prisoner debt and gang culture?
- Will the Governor embed and extend the existing education, vocational training and work into the regime, in order to minimise the number of sessions that are cancelled due to officer shortages?
- Will the Governor support the implementation of strategies for prisoners with complex needs, integrating the neurodiversity clinical lead to work collaboratively with the neurodiversity support manager, both to raise awareness and focus on training?

3.3 Response to the last report

The responses below from the Minister and the Prison Service were provided in a letter from Lord Timpson, Minister of State for Justice, dated 6 February 2025.

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
To the Minister		
To work with colleagues across Government departments to develop an improved plan for the recruitment and retention of prison staff.	In July 2024, the Independent review of progress since the Urgent Notification found the prison to be fully staffed, supported by an increase in detached staff throughout the reporting year. Introduction of weekly staff supervision and colleague mentors for new staff.	None.
Will the Minister work with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to consider how to address the mental health needs of prisoners, many of whom require specialist care alongside their punishment and rehabilitation?	A Mental Health Bill was introduced to Parliament on 6 November 2024. It includes a range of reforms to support people suffering severe mental illness in the criminal justice system and aims to speed up access to specialist in-	None as yet.

	patient care in the most appropriate setting. Operational changes will be necessary to fulfil the commitment to commence the legislative reform in 18-24 months following Royal Assent.	
Will the Minister work with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to address the needs of neurodiverse prisoners?	Neurodivergent people are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and neurodiversity support managers (NSMs) have been introduced in prisons. They are working with prison health and social care teams to address the needs and provide training and guidance to prison staff. The NSM at HMP Woodhill is integrated into the safety strategy. Current screening tools are being improved in partnership with the Prison Education Service (PES) to procure a new digital, web-based screening tool, which will identify additional learning needs for prisoners and improve accessibility. This will be implemented as part of the new PES education contracts in spring 2025.	
Will the Minister work with Government departments to facilitate and provide appropriate training and resettlement for prisoners?	In-reach settlement provision is delivered by a pre-release team to ensure prisoners receive support from 12 weeks pre-release.	Limited provision.
To the Prison Service		

To review the daily spend for prisoners in the light of the rise in the cost of living.	No response.	No progress.
To review how capital budgets can more effectively be used to maintain the fabric of the prison estate.	No response.	A project is underway to refurbish shower facilities. It is at the stage of tender evaluation, with a projected on-site start date of May 2026.
To radically overhaul the property system within the Prison Service.	No response.	The Prisoners' Property Policy Framework appears to have improved internal processes but not the transfer of property between establishments.
To the Governor		
To ensure practical plans are in place to increase access to meaningful activity for all prisoners within the current resources.	Revised core day planned for January 2025.	Revised core day was implemented 27 April 2025.
To work with partners to improve access to suitable programmes for long-term prisoners.	No response.	No progress.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

A visit from the national clean and decent lead at the beginning of the reporting year highlighted the induction unit as an example of 'best practice'. Good progress was also identified by the Governor regarding induction, and a new induction booklet was issued. This was reinforced by the development of a stronger managerial link between reception and the induction unit to develop and maintain best practice.

All prisoners arriving at Woodhill undergo body scanning and searches. However, items such as drugs and phones are still frequently discovered, raising ongoing concerns regarding the thoroughness of searches conducted at prior establishments.

Observations by the Board confirmed that all relevant checks, processes and assessments were appropriately implemented and documented during reception. Staff demonstrated a high level of professionalism and care, particularly in identifying and supporting individuals who appeared suicidal or struggled with adjustment. New arrivals are promptly seen by both the healthcare and the chaplaincy teams.

Where feasible, the induction house unit retains a core team of officers to ensure continuity and familiarity. Support is further reinforced by Insiders. These are experienced prisoners trained to assist and mentor new or vulnerable prisoners by providing guidance on establishment procedures and daily routines, as well as addressing queries or concerns. This peer-support initiative generally produces beneficial outcomes for both recipients and Insiders.

On completion of the induction process, prisoners are transferred to other house units. Some prisoners expressed reluctance to leave the induction house unit, as they liked it. The Board finds that the plan of the induction unit and its organisational environment are conducive to creating a safe and secure environment and commends the officers for this achievement.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

In this reporting year, there were two deaths in custody. At the end of the reporting year, the reports from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), an independent organisation that investigates deaths in prison, had not been published.

Weekly safety intervention meetings (SIMs) review active ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) and CSIP (challenge, support and intervention plan) cases. Prisoners with complex needs and self-isolators - those who self-isolate for more than 72 hours - are discussed individually.

Around 15% of the prisoners were considered at risk of self-harm or suicide at any one time during the reporting period, as shown by open ACCT plans.

Board members reviewed ACCT documentation during monitoring visits and found that most care plans and records were up-to-date and informative. However, some observation logs had missing or incomplete entries, were unsigned, or recorded at predictable times. This raised concerns, given the preventive purpose and importance of such observations. Cell cards identifying the occupant, with additional information if appropriate, were frequently not displayed outside the cell doors on the wings; evidence

from monitoring visits suggests that there had been improvement on some wings, but the lack of consistency is a risk in the case of emergency, particularly for inexperienced or detached duty staff. The Board reported that it was rare for PEEP (personal escape and evacuation plans for prisoners who are identified as requiring assistance to exit the prison in an emergency) documentation to be readily available in wing offices.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

To maintain safe staffing levels and a reasonable regime for the prisoners, redeployed staff from other prisons continued to be necessary. However, as the reporting year progressed and the number of Woodhill recruited staff increased, the number of redeployed staff decreased. But house unit 6 requires specialist trained staff and, consequently, a significant number of redeployed staff were still needed.

Inevitably, redeployed staff do not have the same level of detailed knowledge of the men or the prison procedures, and their lack of knowledge can lead to prisoners' frustration and resulting incidents.

From April 2024 to March 2025, there were 129 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, 12 of which were classified as serious. Approximately 40% of prisoner assaults were committed by those in the 18-21 year old age group. There were 209 assaults on staff, 17 of which were serious. Despite the reduction in prisoner numbers until December 2024 and the later increase in numbers, the rate of assaults stayed almost unchanged, remained very high and was among the highest in LTHSE prisons.

While there can be no excuse for violence, reasons frequently given for assaults on staff include frustration at delays in processing complaints, property transfers, canteen orders (which are prisoners' purchases of snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials) and general applications, etc. Staff shortages, both of officers and administrative staff, contributed to these delays and led some prisoners to lose their tempers and become violent. Prisoner-on-prisoner violence was often described by the perpetrators as being caused by contraband supply arguments, debt enforcement and gang rivalries.

The CSIP process aims to provide a framework to deal with violence by perpetrators and on victims. There was an average of 16 plans open at any one time during the reporting year.

For yet another year, the Board saw frequent occasions when prisoners were allowed in wing offices and had opportunities to read confidential documents. This is a serious security risk. One such incident nearly led to a prisoner being assaulted, due to information he had provided to staff being read by a prisoner who was in the wing office.

Occasionally, prisoners choose to isolate in their cells from other prisoners, refusing to come out for meals, exercise or showers. This may be due to being in debt, under threat or wanting to resist temptation to take drugs or otherwise misbehave. There was an average of 13 men self-isolating at any one time during the year. Significant efforts are made to encourage these men to leave their cells, including regular visits by the safer custody team, resolving their problems and considering a transfer to another prison. Nevertheless, for some men, a habit of self-isolation is very difficult to overcome.

Keeping the Peace is a process designed to reduce the causes of violence by providing mediation by trained prisoners and staff. The Safer Custody team manage the process, and it is credited with resolving disagreements that otherwise might well have descended into violence.

4.4 Use of force

There were 913 incidents of force (UoF) being used in the year to March 2025. UoF figures fell slightly from the previous reporting year. Force was used primarily in spontaneous incidents, frequently due to a prisoner's refusal to obey a lawful order or when a prisoner refused to relocate back to his cell. Pre-planned interventions are carried out according to a procedure involving staff in personal protective equipment (PPE), with the process recorded. In most instances of UoF an explanation is given to the prisoner why it was deemed to be necessary.

Records of UoF should be completed within 72 hours, this is 85-90% compliance each month with management monitoring and reminders to chase up the outstanding reports. UoF incidents are reviewed to monitor adherence to the policy and procedures, give follow-up guidance to staff and learn lessons.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

As in all prisons, preventing illicit items from entering the prison is a very challenging task and significant resource are devoted to it. The dedicated search team carries out random and intelligence-led searches. Visitors are monitored, including by trained dogs, and may be searched. The visits hall is monitored to help prevent illicit items being passed to prisoners. New arrivals are scanned and searched for illicit items contained either inside or outside their bodies. Staff are searched when they arrive for work.

Nevertheless, it appears relatively easy for prisoners to obtain drugs. Spice (a synthetic cannabinoid) is the drug of choice. In addition to being smuggled in as a liquid, it can be impregnated in almost any material, including paper and cloth. Fermentation of alcohol is achieved using bread and/or fruit and sugar. Storage can be in a variety of vessels, although all empty containers should be rendered unusable.

There is anecdotal evidence that the smuggling of mobile phones is falling, possibly due to prisoners being increasingly able to use legitimate prison phones to contact relatives and the effectiveness of the mobile phone blockers preventing mobile phone use across the establishment.

The use of drones to drop illicit items in prisons is an increasing problem, although one that, so far, appears to be less prevalent at Woodhill than many other prisons. The prison reported nine sightings of drones over or near the prison in the reporting year. Detection of illicit items thrown over the prison walls was similarly rare, with the prison detecting only two instances in the year.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Throughout the reporting year, the Board has observed and recorded that, due to underspending and lack of investment, maintenance has not kept pace with requirements. The need to upgrade and replace floors, the poor condition of showers, main serving counters, laundries, staff offices and welfare facilities are all noted frequently in monitoring reports. Flooring and showers have been replaced in some areas, but progress remains slow in getting all areas to a decent living standard.

The standard of cleanliness and tidiness differs from wing to wing. Depending on the wing staff and prisoners employed as wing cleaners, it ranges from good to very poor. It has not been uncommon to see rubbish piled up in bags, unemptied bins, dirty floors and packaging left around the wings and in the shower areas, with clothing hung over landing rails. Fire exits on the access to wing staircases are often partially blocked with broken furniture, paint tins, rubbish and crates of prisoner canteen. This is dangerous and poor practice.

The Board frequently observed that officers on the wing could not locate the cleaning schedules or demonstrate that they were operational.

Staff welfare facilities and office space are often in a poor condition, with many broken items of furniture and chair still in use. The Board continues to be dismayed by the poor working conditions for staff on some wings and its impact on morale. It is disappointing that the planned major improvements to cleanliness and tidiness in staff areas have not materialised.

The main association areas in each wing contain seating and pool tables, many of which need repair.

There is frequently a shortage of basic furniture, bedding and equipment designated for each cell. This has been observed to be a source of frustration for men when they are moved into a cell which is missing basic items. Men on basic regime (the bottom level of the prison's incentive scheme) and those with missing or lost property have to wear prison-issued clothing, which is often in short supply. There are washing machines and dryers on each wing, operated by wing workers who wash the personal clothing of the men on the standard (middle) level of the incentives scheme, or the enhanced (top) regime. The main prison laundry manages bedding and prison-issued clothing. Vulnerable men continued to complain about the perceived lack of equality in the distribution and allocation of laundry, clothing, bedlinen and food.

As a category B training prison in the long-term high-security estate (LTHSE), each wing should have access to cooking facilities in a proper kitchen. At HMP Woodhill, the wings have had rooms converted to allow cooking. The cost of installing extraction fans means there is only access to limited cooking facilities. Men can order a range of food items from the external canteen, including a limited range of refrigerated items for use in the cooking areas.

The men are provided with three meals per day: a breakfast pack; a cold sandwich/snack; and one hot meal. The budget of £3.12 per prisoner, per day, dictates the use of budget ingredients instead of fresh. During the year, the market gardens (a popular workplace for prisoners) began to supply the kitchen with vegetables and salads.

Meals are cooked in the main kitchen and are sent to the wings in hot trolleys, where they are served from a static servery. The servery workers should wear prison-issued 'whites', complete and record the temperature checks on all food and update this in the kitchen diary. The Board frequently reported that there is no evidence any of these checks are completed or recorded, posing food hygiene and safety risks.

The Board continued to be made aware of the number of men who requested sealed meals (portioned and securely sealed in the kitchen for delivery to the wings) or special (e.g. kosher) meals, which are very expensive. This put financial pressure on the catering budget.

5.2 Segregation

The segregation unit is a 12-bed unit, plus a special accommodation cell (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety) and two exercise yards. An adjacent annex contains 12 cells, one of which is a constant watch cell; this unit should be closed but was being used as an overflow segregation unit. The number of men held in it gradually increased as the year progressed because the main unit was already full.

The constant need for this space, alongside the frequent presence of several men on four- or even six-staff unlock in PPE added huge pressure to managing the regime.

The number of men held in the segregation unit in the reporting year was very high, with the lowest number being 10 and the highest being 17 at any one time. Many of the men remained on the unit for extended periods, because of a lack of space in other prisons to allow a move to a more suitable location or, alternatively, a secure hospital. After 42 days, continued segregation must be authorised by a Deputy Director of Custody on behalf of the Secretary of State. A snapshot showed that, in September 2024, one man had been in segregation for 526 days and seven others for more than 91 days; the average length of stay was 18 days. In March 2025, one man had been in segregation for 196 days and 15 men for more than 28 days; the average length of stay was 21 days.

The continued high number of men on the unit causes significant problems for staff in delivering a full regime, particularly exercise.

From the Board's observations, the staff remain positive while working in what can quickly become a stressful environment. This environment is not conducive to the management of neurodiverse men, whose behavioural responses are often inadvertently triggered by unconsidered staff actions and verbal responses.

The unit often suffers from extensive damage caused by prisoners. This damage is slow to be repaired, and cells remained out of action for extended periods.

The showers on the wing need improvement to bring them up to a decent standard.

During the colder months, the Board received complaints of inadequate heating in cells.

Reviews of the men held in segregation are completed in line with the legal requirements. GOoD (good order or discipline) boards are held weekly, with the IMB in attendance at most of them (for monitoring of process and procedure). They are always attended by a member of the healthcare team and, frequently, from the psychology, chaplaincy and addictions teams.

During the reporting year, the special accommodation cell was used five times.

Men on Rule 45 (exclusion from association for the maintenance of good order or discipline or in the prisoner's own interests) were also held on the healthcare's clinical assessment unit, when deemed necessary.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

The established Listener scheme (whereby prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide peer support) works effectively and the peace promoters successfully reduce low-level incidents. However, assaults on staff were the third highest in the LTHSE. Self-harm incidents were the highest in the LTHSE, although noted to be by a small number of prisoners who prolifically self-harm.

The Board remains concerned about the number of blocked cell door observation panels and the lack of cell cards.

Weekly wing forums were scheduled to take place, chaired by a supervisory officer or custodial manager. Comments are fed into the monthly prison council meetings, chaired by the Governor or Deputy. The senior leadership team considers the prison council meetings to be effective.

The Board has been reassured to see that men continue to provide recognition, feedback and comment on the Launchpad app (an in-cell technology platform that provides prisoners with secure laptops to access various services) to recognise staff who have helped them; this is shared with staff in the weekly newsletter.

The key working system is known to be inconsistent; some men have no key worker allocated and, frequently, discussion sessions are not held at proper frequencies.

The target contact for key workers is two sessions per month; high risk prisoners (those on ACCTs/CSIPs/young offenders/isolators/men known to have been in care) should have three sessions per month. These sessions vary between brief catch-ups and longer, in-depth meetings. In March 2025, the prison reported that 67% of the meeting targets were met.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Adjudication standards' meetings were held monthly. There were 3,063 adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules) during the reporting year. The average in the first half of the year being 219 per month, increasing to an average of 296 per month when the prison was fully occupied again.

The 26-34 year old age range was the highest population group in Woodhill and was the highest range to receive adjudications. White ethnicity was consistently the highest ethnicity range to receive adjudications. Muslims and Roman Catholics were represented equally as the highest religious groups receiving adjudications.

Segregation had the highest number of adjudications for neurodiverse prisoners, reinforcing the observation that segregation is the wrong place for these men.

A number of men refuse to attend their adjudications (some of which involved those who were isolating), offering no valid reason, and also declining to sign the refusal-to-attend paperwork.

There was a widespread belief among prisoners that their complaints and discriminating incident reporting forms (DIRFs) get lost deliberately in the system. The Board could not substantiate these claims but observe that it undermines prisoners' confidence in the system. The Board was informed by staff that, at one point during the year, the backlog

of DIRFs was considered insurmountable; the prison discarded them to start with a clean slate, asking prisoners to resubmit their forms if they would still like them to be considered. The Board is not satisfied this was an acceptable or unavoidable course of action.

Two applications (prisoners' written representations to the IMB) regarding equality were received by the Board during the year.

Equality and diversity staffing continued to be unstable, including officers moved to other departments and the responsible Governor being seconded to a role outside the establishment.

The diversity and equality action team (DIAT) meetings continue to take place monthly. The team now looks at a range of statistics in comparison with the overall prison population, rather than in isolation, which is an improvement in analysis.

The number of complaints (not DIRFs) across race/ethnicity and religion/belief usually appear roughly representative of the prison population. However, the 25-29 year old and the 40-49 year old age groups are often over-represented in the number of complaints.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The chaplaincy department consists of one full-time managing chaplain (Free Church), one full-time Christian chaplain (post vacant), one full-time Roman Catholic chaplain, two full-time Muslim Imams and one part-time Imam. There are also Sikh, Hindu, Pagan, Rastafarian, Anglican, Buddhist, Mormon and Jehovah's Witnesses, who visit the prison.

All groups meet once a week, except Pagans, who meet once a fortnight. The chaplains have organised a number of successful feasts/festivals and family days and have been involved in numerous mediations. They also have 50 people on their additional pastoral support group and are in the process of training more volunteers.

The chaplaincy has been creating more content through Launchpad onto prisoners' laptops and are looking at running a bereavement course and an Alpha course, as well as increasing their volunteer base.

The analysis of prisoners by religion, as of 31 March 2025:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| • Muslim | 205 (37%) |
| • Roman Catholic | 55 (24% combined RC, Christian and CofE) |
| • Church of England | 44 |
| • Other | 54 (11%) |
| • None listed | 65 (12%) |
| • Christian | 33 |

The average number of prisoners attending religious services was

- | | |
|---------------------|-----|
| • Muslim | 110 |
| • Roman Catholic | 45 |
| • Church of England | 40 |
| • Rastafarian | 8 |
| • Jewish | 6 |
| • Pagan | 3 |
| • Sikh | 2 |
| • Hindu | 2 |

5.6 Incentives schemes

The average percentage of prisoners on each level of the incentives scheme remained largely unchanged, year-on-year. The number on the basic level decreased from 8% to 6%; on the standard level, it fell from 46% to 44%; and on the enhanced level, it increased from 46% to 47%.

5.7 Complaints

HMP Woodhill received 3,323 complaints in the reporting year, which represents a 12.1% fall from the previous year. Nevertheless, the key performance targets for responses were not met. On average, 64% of responses were generated within the set time period, which was an improvement on the previous year. Complaints relating to prisoners' property remained the highest number of complaints received, followed by confidential access ones and those about staff attitude and conduct.

5.8 Property

In the reporting year, there were 873 complaints about property, of which 284 were referred to other prisons. The Board received 17 applications concerning property at Woodhill and 29 relating to property transferred in or out of Woodhill. There were 48 approved claims for loss of property, totalling £4,393. This is a pro-rata reduction on the previous reporting year and is mainly due to the appointment of a proactive custodial manager to oversee reception and change the culture of work. Since that appointment in November 2024, there were only two claims, and none since February 2025. However, reception regularly continued to be depleted of staff, who were deployed to other areas due to shortages.

The Board has noted some specific problems:

- Property is getting stuck within RIDS who, apparently, have insufficient HGV drivers to bring it into the prison.
- The X-ray machine in reception is over 30 years old and broke down six times during the reporting year. Mending it takes weeks and costs around £4,000 each time.
- Some prisoners arrive at Woodhill with up to 20 bags of property, some of which contain a mixture of clothing and perishable goods. Without a scanner, each bag has to be manually examined. Owing to the length of time it could take these bags to reach reception, they have been known to be maggot-ridden and fly-blown, rendering it impossible for staff to search them manually.
- Prisoners used to be able to give bags of property to visitors to take away. Owing to staff shortages, this facility is no longer available. They can still send it by courier, but at their own expense, so they are unwilling to do this.
- The national storage facility at Branston is reported to be full. Property that would usually be sent there for onward distribution is, therefore, stuck at whichever establishment a prisoner is leaving.
- Property is being lost in transit between prisons.

There remains a need for a radical overhaul of the system across the whole prison estate.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Healthcare is provided, under contract, by the Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, which sub-contracts to the Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL) for the delivery of the service in the prison.

The Governor and the head of healthcare meet regularly to review operations and progress.

A review in October 2024 by the Care Quality Commission (the independent regulator of health and adult social care services) noted that effective measures had been implemented to address the issues identified in their previous inspection, when a requirement notice had been issued. They found that learning had been shared from safety incidents and implemented successfully to improve patient care. This led to the healthcare unit no longer being in breach of the regulations.

Medical emergencies are a frequent out-of-hours occurrence, the majority of which relate to self-harm, drug use and assaults.

The Board received 18 applications concerning healthcare. These involved delays in accessing healthcare, complaints about access to secondary healthcare and prescription changes.

Occupational therapy is provided by the mental health team. Physiotherapy is sub-contracted, and an out-patient service is provided twice a month. The dental service is also contracted out.

The healthcare team aims to facilitate forums with prisoners on a regular basis, both via drop-in sessions in the gym and on the wings themselves. They are considered a successful and productive way to engage with the men but cannot always take place, either due to operational challenges within the establishment or to some healthcare staff being unwilling to facilitate them on the wings because of safety concerns. Over the reporting year, wing forums took place monthly until October 2024, then, again, monthly from February 2025.

The progress of prisoners out of the clinical assessment unit (CAU) and Compass unit is very slow. There was usually a waiting list of men needing a place. There were occasions when cells in the CAU and Compass unit, which provide specialist programmes for men who find it difficult to cope on the main wings, were put out of action by the occupants. This resulted in considerable operational difficulties and further admission delays.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Waiting time for GP appointments varied across house units. Prisoners complain to the Board about this but, overall, the waiting times are comparable with the community. Non-attendance at appointments was a significant issue: there were 318 missed hospital appointments during the reporting year, 39% of which were due to 'prison issues', which the Board considers unacceptably high. A total of 38% of missed appointments were due to prisoners' 'refusal to attend'. The Board spoke to prisoners who were concerned about being asked to sign refusal paperwork, even when there was an operational issue that prevented them being able to attend.

A total of 40% of GP/ nurse/optician/dental/physio/ultrasound/podiatry appointments were not attended. Of those, 11% were due to lack of access and 89% were marked as 'did not attend' (DNA). The anomaly was dental appointments, with lack of access accounted for 32% of non-attendance. This suggests that dental appointments were not given equal priority by the prison when facilitating attendance at healthcare appointments. A total of 11 dental clinics were cancelled, along with 12 GP clinics and nine nurse clinics.

Prisoners moving establishment frequently disrupted access to secondary care. Transfer requires referral to a new secondary care provider, often causing significant delays.

As was the case in the previous reporting year, 'illicit/banned items (including substances)' was, by far, the highest cause of patient safety incidents, accounting for 33%. This was followed by 'self-harm (including medication refusal)', at 19%.

6.3 Mental health

The service has two teams: psychosocial and nursing. Urgent referrals are assessed on the same day as referral, although the requirement is 48 hours for urgent referrals and five working days for those that are non-urgent.

Prisoners spoke positively about the support they received from the mental health nurses once they were seen, but there was often frustration at the waiting time after being referred.

Non-attendance rates at mental health/psychology/psychiatry appointments were much lower - 24% overall - than physical healthcare appointments. However, the proportion of these attributed to lack of access was much higher: 41% for mental health; 48% for psychology; and 19% for psychiatry. The Board considers this to be unacceptable, particularly as the education, skills and work needs analysis, carried out in October 2024, showed 'mental illness' was, by far, the highest category of disability among the prison population. Fourteen mental health clinics were cancelled during the reporting year.

Demand for the specialist care provided by both the CAU and the Compass Unit was higher than could be met. The segregation unit was required to keep men who would have benefitted from the support of CAU or the Compass Unit but who could not be housed there. They were not able to access group work, which might have been beneficial to them. Individual work was done with men on the Compass unit, but prisoners could not always be moved on as quickly as necessary, which blocked places in the unit.

As in previous years, transfers of men to secure mental institutions generally took far too long, often resulting in lengthy periods in the segregation unit and further deterioration in their mental health.

Medication for neurodivergent conditions is the responsibility of the mental health team, but overall neurodiversity support and advice is provided by the education, skills and work team. In October 2024, 40% of the prison population had either declared that they were neurodivergent or were screened for neurodiversity, and they identified to the Board the need for greater support. In particular, the Board feels that it would be beneficial for all involved if there was more training for staff on how to communicate effectively and manage the behaviour of prisoners who are more severely affected by neurodivergent conditions.

6.4 Social care

Social care assessments for specialist equipment for prisoners with disabilities were carried out by Milton Keynes City Council's occupational therapy service. The Board heard from several prisoners who felt their social care needs were not being adequately met. The prison's decision to make the buddy support worker role unpaid makes it difficult to find volunteers willing to participate in the peer-support initiative.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

A revised core day was introduced on 27 April 2025, so that on normal residential units it was extended by one hour from Monday to Thursday. This gave prisoners extended time out of cells at the end of their working day. It enabled access to showers and evening activities (video visits/library/chapel) and extra gym or astro-turf football sessions before lock-up.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The addictions team have an average of 150 men registered with it at any one time. Its service comprises psychosocial and clinical teams. All prisoners on the induction wing are seen on the first day and given an induction pack. Prisoners can participate in either an individual plan or group work. On completion of the programme, there is a graduation ceremony. Men who lapse or request more intervention must wait six months for a further session.

Prisoners on high levels of prescription drugs are a priority, but misuse of these prescription drugs is common; men whose prescriptions have been reduced will seek ways to obtain them from other prisoners. The service recognises that not all drug users in the prison are interested in or motivated to change their behaviour. The success rate for complete detoxification is almost negligible. There is high use of vaping across the prison, with no indication that prisoners want help to stop. Prisoners identified lack of funds and debt as their difficulty in accessing vapes; this became a trigger for disorder.

6.7 Soft skills

Wellbeing resources are signposted on noticeboards. Wings have appointed Listeners who work with the Samaritans and Insiders to provide support to their peers. The system is well regarded and works effectively, in the Board's view. However, Listeners told the Board that sometimes they were not unlocked to support men in need, which they found very frustrating.

A 'peace promotor' system works well to stop low-level incidents and appears to be well regarded by management.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

Education is provided by Milton Keynes College. At the time of the Independent Review in July 2024, the Ofsted report recorded insufficient progress against the provision of a curriculum suitably ambitious or challenging for the needs of the prison population. Education, work and skills experiences are vital to the prison, and all prisoners should have access to develop their career in custody and prepare for release. A total of 97% of the prison's population is aged under 60, while 32% are aged under 29. Therefore, preparation for meaningful employment on release should be a strong focus of the education, work and skills team.

All prisoners now have an induction appointment with careers guidance but not necessarily an assessment if they have had one at a previous prison. The Board was aware that repeat education assessments were frustrating prisoners when they arrived at Woodhill.

At the end of the reporting year, there were 465 education, skills and work opportunities for prisoners. A total of 138 prisoners were unemployed (25% of the prison population), which included self-isolators, men deemed unfit to work and those waiting to be allocated to work or education.

A partnership with the Prison Education Service (PES), to procure a new digital, web-based screening tool to help identify additional learning needs for prisoners and improve accessibility, was scheduled to be implemented as part of the new PES education contracts in spring 2025.

The appointment of a new head of education, skills and work led to the education curriculum being overhauled. This included Level 2 work experiences, which are transferable into workplace environments, and a programme of competitions that support creativity and develop new knowledge and skills. Prisoners designed Christmas cards, which were sold in aid of the Angel Tree charity.

Submissions to Koestler Arts awards were of exceptional quality and volume, leading to HMP Woodhill becoming a Koestler 'Platinum' site. Approximately 15 men are studying with the Open University through the Prisoners' Education Trust.

Rates of pay for prisoners were adjusted to align with other prisons in the long-term, high-security estate.

Prisoners with special educational needs and neurodiversity who do not attend education, skills and work (ESW) activities are reviewed by the neurodiversity support manager. Too few prisoners with low reading skills engage consistently with peer-led provision or commissioned reading support.

Attendance rates at classes were low throughout the reporting year, with a contributing factor being clashes with activities within chaplaincy, the gym, the offender management unit (OMU), equality and diversity meetings, social visits and healthcare appointments. This problem was, to some extent, addressed within the revised regime implemented in April 2025. By the end of the reporting year, non-attendance fell from 15% to 8.5%. Within education, attendance increased from 26% of capacity to 48%.

The library provider is West Northamptonshire Library Service. During the reporting year, the library recorded 375 registered borrowers, although actual attendances at library sessions remained very low. Potentially, 80 men could attend allocated library

session each week, but actual attendances often involved only 2-4 men per session. The new regime was intended to give men more opportunities to attend sessions. The Board heard that men were frustrated by missing dinner if they attended a late session. Men who are self-isolating and those on the segregation unit and in the healthcare unit were able to submit requests for library books. Library staff also visit the segregation and separation unit.

The library area in the segregation unit held a small number of books, which are in great demand. At the end of the reporting year, the number of available books was noted to have increased.

A number of books and podcasts were made accessible through Launchpad onto prisoners' laptops.

The library is on an improvement plan, as it has not sufficiently met the needs of prisoners with low reading skills or sufficiently promoted a culture of reading for pleasure, purpose and rehabilitation. The reading corners set up on the wings appear to be under-used and neglected.

7.2 Vocational training, work

The contract workshop has a capacity of 28 part-time jobs; the Board observed this work to be dull and repetitive. More contract opportunities would be beneficial.

The multi-skills training facility trained up to 37 men in painting and decorating, plastering, plumbing and tiling and catering. These courses have a high attendance requirement: 160 hours over five weeks for painting and decorating; and 250 hours over 11 weeks for construction. Success can lead to a Level 2 Diploma in Maintenance Operations.

The emphasis on Level 2 qualifications will enable men who achieve this to work under supervision with Gov Facilities Services Ltd (GFSL) workers in the prison in construction, painting and decorating.

At the end of the reporting year, a newly appointed creative arts tutor began to develop a facility to expand the arts beyond the classroom in several ways, such as, for example, the development of instruction videos in liaison with commercial businesses.

The expansion of the market gardens contributes produce to the kitchens, liaising with them to plan menus around available produce. Kitchen workers identified that they would like to be able to make more food on site.

Some trees are grown under contract for the prison estate. The staff are developing an in-house composting certificate.

7.3 Offender management, progression

At the end of the reporting year, six prisoners had not been provided with an OASys/sentence plan in the agreed timeframe, i.e. within 10 weeks of sentence (or 16 weeks for those serving life sentence).

Prison offender managers (POMs) are expected to have three meetings within 12 weeks of a prisoner being allocated to them (this includes the initial OMU induction appointment). There should be a further three meetings in the last three months of their handover date to the community offender manager (COM). However, the actual level of contact is variable, according to the POM's judgement; prisoners approaching parole or

release have more planning needs and, therefore, more contact than prisoners serving very long sentences.

Men frequently report a lack of contact with their POMs and key workers.

Access to offending behaviour programmes for sentence progression remains very limited at Woodhill: key programmes include Kaizen, Thinking Skills and Sycamore Tree. Men identified as needing access to other rehabilitation programmes must wait to be transferred to establishments offering those programmes.

7.4 Family contact

Family contact through social visits and social video calls has been effective, especially at weekends. The revised core day led to weekday sessions being offered Monday to Thursday, with additional social video calls on those days, although the use of 45-minute video calls has seldom reached full booking capacity. The Board frequently hears from men who have been transferred from, for example, the north west of England, whose families are no longer able to visit due to the distance. The social visits booking team regularly reviews uptake for potential adjustments to the programme. On occasion, some visit sessions started late but prisoners were allowed their full allocated time, leading to fewer complaints.

Prisoners request social visits using paper forms, as the Launchpad system cannot be used. They provide appropriate details that allow visitors to book appointments, the first of which must be made by phone so that the rules and procedures can be explained. Subsequent social visits can be booked using an online system.

The visits clerks assist family members to access visits and comply with the rules and procedures, which helps avoid refusals on the day,

During the reporting year, regular father-child sessions and two-family sessions in the visits hall allowed prisoners better interaction with their children, enabling them to play games and access refreshments. One annual social visit took place in the market garden for prisoners working there, to enable visitors to see where food used in prison meals is grown. A Saturday afternoon session, in liaison with healthcare professionals, focused on neurodiversity and how to help men and their families use appropriate interactions.

In-cell phones have continued to make it easier for prisoners to contact family: use is restricted during certain hours for sleep and work duties. Delays in authorising phone numbers have decreased since prisoners began using their laptops to submit requests directly. The need for the consent of call recipients causes delay. Laptops also allow prisoners to request phone credit top-ups. Foreign national prisoners can contact their families abroad using their laptop, with assistance from key workers helping to streamline the process.

7.5 Resettlement planning

As a primarily category B training prison, relatively low numbers of prisoners - 99 men - were released directly into the community, although this was an increase on the previous year.

HMP Woodhill has a resettlement provision, delivered by a pre-release team managed by the local probation delivery unit. The pre-release probation services officer works with the offender management unit to ensure prisoners receive support from 12 weeks pre-release: they assess resettlement needs and take action to address them before

release. This pre-release work is key to preparing prisoners for reintegration into the community. The prison seeks to ensure all prisoners being released have access to core services such as ID and banking. Department of Work and Pensions coaches and prison employment leads provide pre-release careers support. However, the education, skills and work self-assessment identified that the careers guidance provided is poor. The 'next steps' programme has not developed skills for the men in custody or progress them towards employment on release. The support given is insufficient to prepare them for employment.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	18
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	282

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing and ablutions	9	11
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	9	4
C	Equality	0	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	7	10
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	11	2
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	3	2
F	Food and kitchens	4	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	14	18
H1	Property within the Establishment	14	17
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	18	29
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	0	2
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, re-categorisation	5	3
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	33	27
K	Transfers	1	2
L	Miscellaneous	13	11
	Total	141	142



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