



**Annual Report**  
of the  
**Independent Monitoring Board**  
at

**HMP Ashfield**

for reporting Year  
July 2016 - June 2017

Published  
October 2017



*Monitoring fairness and respect for people in custody*

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

---

### **Introductory Sections**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Statutory Role</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Description of Establishment</b>	<b>6</b>

### **Evidence Sections**

<b>4</b>	<b>Safety</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Equality and Fairness</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Segregation/Care and Separation Unit</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Accommodation (including communication)</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Healthcare (including mental health and social care)</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Education and Other Activities</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Work, Vocational Training and Employment</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Resettlement Preparation</b>	<b>14</b>

	<b>The Work of the IMB</b>	<b>16</b>
	<b>Applications to the IMB</b>	<b>18</b>

## A 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 or centre is situated.

The Board is specifically charged to:

- (1) 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.
- (2) inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom he has delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has.
- (3) **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.

## 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

This Report presents the findings of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Ashfield for the period 1 July 2016 - 30 June 2017. Board members have made regular (at least twice weekly) visits into the prison to talk informally to prisoners and staff, inspect the facilities, observe the full range of activities, attend meetings, examine relevant documentation, study data and investigate and answer prisoners' concerns and complaints. As it is designed to be a short summary only, there is no requirement to mention in detail all aspects of the prison's work, and the focus is on those areas where standards are either particularly high or where significant issues have arisen.

### **Main judgements**

---

***Over all, the Board judges HMP Ashfield to be a very well run prison, which is led dynamically and uses its greater autonomy afforded by its contracted-out status to develop creative and imaginative solutions to issues. It takes its responsibilities very seriously both to the general public and to the prisoners in its care.***

---

### **Are prisoners treated fairly?**

The Board is impressed by the prison's high profile Equalities agenda and the emphasis management places on consulting prisoners and openly seeking their views and suggestions through a variety of forums covering the main "protected characteristics" (para. 5.2) and other discussion groups including the Prisoner Advice and Consultation (PIAC) system. A good example of this was the meticulous way in which planning was undertaken for the successful introduction of Smoking Cessation (para. 7.5). The Board believes, however, that overall effectiveness is sometimes compromised by poorer quality communication on an individual basis in response to Applications and Complaints (para. 7.6), and by what prisoners sometimes regard as an occasionally petty interpretation of rules resulting in what they perceive to be inconsistent and unfair application of the IEP warning system (para. 5.5).

### **Are prisoners treated humanely?**

This is a safe and secure prison in which prisoners are treated decently and humanely. The Board judges many aspects of provision in this area to be excellent, not least the overall quality of healthcare (paras. 8.1 to 8.4), residential accommodation (paras. 7.1, 7.2 and 7.4) and the high standard of catering (para. 7.7). Levels of self-harm are very low and prisoners identified by personal officers or by the Safer Custody team as in need of extra psychological support are helped by a variety of other medical and pastoral services that they can access. A handful of issues to do with aspects of residential services have, however, been persistent subjects of oral complaints or written Applications to the IMB (para. 7.3).

### **Are prisoners prepared well for their release?**

Having expressed reservations in previous years, the Board now judges provision in this area to be good and improving. OMU case supervisors work hard at encouraging prisoners to engage in addressing their offending behaviour. Relatively few prisoners are released directly from Ashfield, the majority transferring to specialist resettlement prisons or to Cat. D open conditions prior to release (para. 11.2). Resettlement therefore focuses on education, training and developing a work ethic (paras. 9.1 and 10.1), and on encouraging prisoners to take on a greater level of personal and social responsibility through promotion to an extensive range of orderly posts. Those prisoners who are eligible are also actively encouraged to participate in offending behaviour treatment

programmes. Fortunately, the impact of the sudden announcement of the national cancellation of TSP, SOTP and Extended SOTP was less damaging than potentially it could have been and the Board believes the prison managed the situation well and has planned effectively for the introduction of Horizon and Kaizen (para. 11.5.).

## **Main Areas for Development**

---

### **TO THE MINISTER**

1. Given the limited opportunities afforded to sex offenders to progress to open (Cat. D) conditions owing to the shortage of available places which they can access in the south and south west of England, is there any plan to increase the number of places available?
2. Is there any plan to address the issue of an increasingly elderly, infirm and consequently resource-intensive population, especially in the specialist sex offender prisons such as HMP Ashfield, in terms of providing additional resources and specialist staff training for their (non-medical) daily management? Alternatively, is there any plan to create one or more specialist secure facilities to which they could be transferred and their particular needs more effectively addressed?
3. What progress is being made in the national review of the high number of IPP prisoners who are significantly "over tariff"?

### **TO THE PRISON SERVICE**

What more can be done to ensure that prisoners transferring into HMP Ashfield from other prisons consistently arrive with an up-to-date and constructive sentence plan?

### **TO THE DIRECTOR**

1. Can the Director provide assurance that active monitoring of the operation and management of the IEP (Incentives and Earned Privileges) system, and particularly the issuing of IEP warnings, will continue in 2017-2018 to ensure fairness and to identify and address any anomalies?
2. Can the Director provide assurance that the outdated computers currently used by prisoners in Education and elsewhere will be upgraded or replaced in the next 12 months as a result of the review currently being undertaken?

## **Improvements**

---

1. The Board is pleased to report that work has begun to improve the condition of wing showers: some flooring has been replaced (though some showers are still awaiting this), ventilation grills cleaned and plans drawn up to regulate the water temperature more effectively and resolve the problem of peeling ceiling paint. The Visits bungalow has been refurbished, the Food Technology room was finally upgraded into a working Bakery at the very end of the reporting year and plans have been drawn up to improve ventilation in the wing laundries.
2. The problems with the Dentistry service identified by the Board over the last two years have been largely resolved, with waiting times for appointments significantly reduced.
3. Changes to provision in the Education department now give cause for optimism with the introduction of new courses and higher levels of qualifications. Library provision is improving.

### 3 DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

---

3.1 HMP Ashfield is a contracted-out prison run by SERCO Ltd. located in the village of Pucklechurch in South Gloucestershire, around 10 miles from each of Bristol and Bath. It is a specialist Category C adult male establishment exclusively for convicted prisoners serving sentences for sexual offences.

3.2 The prison has a baseline Certificate of Normal Accommodation (CNA) of 416, and an Operational Capacity (Op. Cap.) of 400 though, at the request of NOMS, it briefly expanded in Spring 2017 to 412. Throughout the other months covered by this Annual Report, the prison operated with a monthly average of around 395 prisoners in residence.

3.3 Residential accommodation consists of 2 main house blocks, Avon and Severn, each with 4 wings accommodating between 40 and 60 men, and Brunel which is a smaller 16 cell unit which acts as a First Night and Induction Centre. There are 252 single cells and 78 double cells, all with integral sanitation, and there are 8 shower cubicles on each of the main wings. 7 of the single cells are ground floor cells purpose-built for prisoners with disabilities and there are 2 gated cells for prisoners requiring constant observation. There is no separate Care and Separation Unit.

3.4 BME prisoners typically make up around 17%, Foreign National prisoners approximately 5%, and former servicemen 12% of the population. Approximately 42% are aged over 50 at any one time and around 21% over 60. Around 38% of prisoners have a disability.

3.5 Services run by organisations other than SERCO:

*Healthcare* is commissioned by NHS England: the contract in April 2016 was awarded to "Inspire Better Health", a collaboration between Bristol Community Health (nursing services), Hanham Healthcare (GP services) and AWP (Avon and Wiltshire Partnership Mental Health Trust.) Other providers: IBH (dispensing medication) and "Time for Teeth" (dentistry.)

*Offender Management Unit*: sub-contracted to Catch 22

*Sex offender treatment programmes*: sub-contracted to Turning Point.

*Adult social care*: South Gloucestershire Local Authority Social Services.

3.6 As a contracted-out prison, HMP Ashfield has a Director and a NOMS/HMPPS Controller. At the start of the IMB reporting period the duties of Director were being carried out on a temporary basis by Gary Willding before the new Director, Vicky Pails, took up post towards the end of August 2016.

## B Evidence sections 4 – 11

---

### 4 SAFETY

---

4.1 It is the view of the IMB that HMP Ashfield provides a particularly safe, orderly, stable and supportive environment and that it is to be commended on this. This is one of the prison's strengths.

4.2 Prisoners frequently comment to the IMB on the decent and respectful manner in which they are welcomed on arrival in Reception and that they are made to feel safe. The Brunel Unit acts as a First Night and Induction Centre. It is small, self-contained and with a relaxed atmosphere, so that new prisoners can adjust for around a week (or occasionally longer if there is not undue pressure on accommodation) before being allocated accommodation on the main wings. Prisoners have consistently commented to the IMB on how valuable this settling-in period is. There is a comprehensive Induction run by an experienced orderly, but to the regret of the IMB, the room on Brunel intended for Induction sessions has not been put to maximum use for much of this reporting period owing to the obsolete computer which has not been replaced.

4.3 IMB members observe that prisoners at HMP Ashfield generally behave in an orderly manner and are polite, respectful and understand the boundaries, so that staff-prisoner relations can be relatively informal with everyone on first name terms. Invariably when Board members visit there is a pleasant and relaxed mood and positive prisoner-staff interaction. Prisoners comment to the IMB that the personal officer scheme generally works well and that they are confident about talking to other members of staff if their own personal officer is not on duty. Nevertheless, it is important to guard against complacency: in the course of the reporting year a shift in the age profile was detected with an increasing number of younger, rather more challenging and confrontational prisoners arriving whose conduct at their previous prisons had given serious cause for concern but who were nevertheless eligible for Cat. C conditions and needed to transfer to complete specialist behaviour modification programmes in accordance with their Sentence Plans.

4.4 In comparison with most prisons, however, the IMB can report that levels of prisoner-on-prisoner violence at HMP Ashfield are very low. In the course of the year a new Violence Reduction Strategy was developed and implemented. Verbal abuse or physical assaults are rare and in the Board's judgment these have been dealt with effectively through the Adjudications process.

4.5 It is the Board's view that all areas of the site provide an overwhelmingly safe environment for both prisoners and staff. Health & Safety are taken seriously. There is a well publicised Anti-Bullying Strategy: bullying is infrequent and, when detected, addressed appropriately. There is no evidence of smuggling in, or bullying for mobile phones or drugs. The prison is effective in keeping any illicit trade in prescription medication, home-brewed alcohol ("hooch") or inappropriate DVDs in check with effective use of intelligence gathering, the availability of an on-site drugs dog and targeted cell searches. There is now a complete ban on personal DVDs, but an increased number of security-approved DVDs can be borrowed from the Library. Additional security measures were put in place towards the end of the reporting year, including staggered timing for main movement to minimise the potential for passing items. The prison is also mindful of the potential for older prisoners to "groom" younger ones based on their offending history.

4.6 Self-harm is at a very low level and well-managed. There are rarely more than 3 or 4

open ACCTs at any one time and often none at all. It is the Board's view that the Safer Custody team, assisted by the Healthcare providers, Chaplaincy, Samaritans help-line and HMP Ashfield's own prisoner "Here to Hear" scheme, provide a high degree of care and support. ACCT documentation inspected by the Board on a regular basis is thorough and indicates that considerable thought has gone in to developing and delivering care plans. A new quality assurance system has also recently been introduced to add an extra layer of auditing. Multi-disciplinary reviews attended by the Board have been both comprehensive and compassionate.

4.7 There were three Deaths in Custody between July 2016 and June 2017, two of which, of men with long-standing complex medical conditions, were confirmed as resulting from natural causes and the third is still currently under investigation. In all three cases the prison provided appropriate and extensive support to the families concerned and assistance with and funding for funeral arrangements. Prisoners commented to the IMB on how well they felt the prison had handled matters and, in particular, how sympathetically the news had been broken to prisoners, with clear advice on support services available for those most affected.

## **5 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS**

---

5.1 It is the Board's judgment that HMP Ashfield strives hard to ensure fairness for all "protected characteristics" and that it broadly succeeds very well in this. Complaints about a degree of institutional racialism, especially in connection with re-categorisation, voiced in 2015 to HMIP inspectors have noticeably subsided, having proven to be largely groundless.

5.2 The promotion and celebration of Diversity are a high-profile aspect of the prison. The department is run effectively and enthusiastically by one SERCO manager supported by a handful of orderlies and each "protected characteristic" has its own Forum, along with a VIPA group (Veterans in Prison Association.). Elected representatives on each Forum raise any issues of concern, which are remarkably few, with their "lead" (usually a SERCO manager though, to the IMB's disappointment, some of them attend less consistently than others). The main issues raised which are still outstanding are a request to provide ramps to those exercise yards currently without them and the provision of painted edges on steps to assist those with visual impairment. The Forums are also active and imaginative in organising regular (often monthly) events which incorporate fundraising for relevant charities with some form of celebration (e.g. Black History Month, Chinese New Year) or a useful information and advice session. As a consequence, in excess of £1600 has been raised for charities in the course of this reporting period. A new venture in 2017 was the prison's first ever World Faith Day which was well attended and received.

5.3 The Board very rarely encounters evidence of tension between prisoners on racial, religious, age or sexual orientation grounds. The number of DIRFS submitted (31 in comparison with 49 in 2015-16) is very low, given the size of the population. A survey conducted by the Age Forum to ascertain whether 55+ prisoners would prefer to have their own dedicated wing produced a resounding majority in favour of continuing mixed age wings. Complaints voiced to the IMB by older prisoners on one wing around Christmas of bullying by younger prisoners appeared to be a short-lived and isolated event. The Equalities officer has produced a Transgender Policy, though the prison was already well advanced in its plans and enlightened provision before the national PSI was published. Of the 77 Applications received by the IMB, 15 were from the BME and/or Foreign National population (broadly in line with the percentage in the prison), and of these only 1 was specifically an allegation of racial discrimination by staff. The remaining

14 were about general matters that the non-BME population were also raising. Some concerns were raised with the Kitchen by prisoners unhappy with special food provision in the first few days of Ramadan in 2017 but this matter was swiftly resolved.

5.4 With regard to the IEP scheme, a minority of prisoners in denial of their offences who refuse to engage with their sentence plans complain that they are unable to access Enhanced level (though the prison is merely acting in accordance with national policy on this).

5.5 In addition, there remains a lingering perception amongst a minority of prisoners that the IEP warning system is inconsistently and unfairly applied. Of the Applications received by the Board, 13% were about this matter alone and represented the biggest single issue presented (and the second largest category of issues raised by prisoners with PALS, the Prisoner Advice Line Service.) The official prison Complaints system also received 98 complaints (representing 11% of the total and the second largest category of issues.) It is to the Prison's credit that, following concerns raised by the IMB, a decision was taken in to begin monitoring the issuing of IEP warnings to determine whether there was any particular pattern in terms of some staff or wings being more ready to issue them than others. Data generated for the period November 2016 to June 2017 indicates that, although the matter is far less serious than some prisoners allege, their concerns are not entirely without foundation. The IMB believes it is essential for such monitoring by the prison to continue in order to obtain robust data.

5.6 Adjudications attended by the Board on a random basis or at the specific request of individual prisoners have been conducted professionally and fairly, though, in a prison with, overall, high standards of behaviour, the length of periods of Cellular Confinement awarded for some misdemeanors is surprising. Nevertheless, at any one time there are few men on Cellular Confinement or GOOD (see below under Segregation/Care and Separation Unit).

5.7 The other aspect of perceived unfairness brought to the Board's attention has concerned the level of access to families and, specifically, children, allowed by the PPU (Public Protection Unit), with a significant number of prisoners alleging that they have been permitted a much more restricted level of access than had been allowed at their previous prison(s). This represented the third highest group, numerically, of Applications received by the Board. The PPU staff at HMP Ashfield are thorough in conducting their own checks to verify that all the necessary approvals have been sought from Social Services, Probation and Police (in the course of which investigations it has often come to light that other prisons have been less thorough and have allowed an inappropriately higher level of access). As the decision to keep some prisoners on the most basic level pending the completion of these enquiries did, however, cause genuine distress to prisoners' families in some cases, the prison's decision to be more flexible part way through the year was welcomed by the IMB, and the number of Applications received has since declined.

## **6 SEGREGATION/CARE AND SEPARATION UNIT**

---

6.1 In comparison with most prisons, there are very few prisoners indeed on GOOD or Cellular Confinement at any one time. There are rarely more than two or three, and some weeks there are none at all.

6.2 From 2013 HMP Ashfield allocated eight cells on one wing exclusively for housing prisoners on GOOD or Cellular Confinement. The Board is pleased to report that in 2016-17 this system has been largely discontinued and, in the course of this reporting year, the

prison decided to implement the HMIP recommendation that prisoners should generally be confined in their own cell on normal location.

6.3 The Board has endeavoured to check on the wellbeing of each such prisoner on a weekly basis and is able to report that they receive all their entitlements (and in some cases those on GOOD are offered a relaxed regime) and feel they are being well cared for. There does seem, however, only a limited attempt to use the potential created by Cellular Confinement to encourage them to engage in some form of in-cell "purposeful activity" rather than merely pass their time, especially for those awarded longer periods of confinement.

6.4 GOOD reviews randomly observed by Board members have been fair and well run, though IMB attendance at these remains problematic in the absence of routine notification by the prison as to when they are scheduled.

## **7 ACCOMMODATION (including communication)**

---

7.1 It is the Board's view that the overall standard of accommodation at HMP Ashfield is very good indeed, and well above that experienced by many prisoners elsewhere.

7.2 Wings are light, spacious, well ventilated and heated and immaculately clean, and prisoners can eat and socialise in the central communal areas. In summer, the exercise yards remain accessible for much of the day so that prisoners can wander freely in and out on their rest days. Furniture and equipment are generally in a good state of repair and there is an effective programme of painting, decorating and general refurbishment (over Christmas and New Year, for example, the temporary closure of Brunel enabled cells to be redecorated.) The prison benefits from having its own in-house Works department with a well-managed system of routine maintenance and repairs. It is to the credit of this department that they worked over a weekend to minimise the flooding damage caused by a burst hot water boiler in June 2017. At the end of the reporting year it emerged however, that the prison's access to mains electricity had been disrupted by a faulty switch and the prison was relying for an indefinite period on the use of emergency diesel generators.

7.3 Nevertheless, whilst overall accommodation is of high quality, residential matters accounted for 24% of prisoner Complaints and 23% of Applications submitted to the IMB (an increase from just 1 in 2015-16 to 18 in 2016-17) as well as numerous oral complaints. Four issues figured prominently in submissions to the IMB:

- The poor state of the showers on most wings which continued to suffer in varying degrees from poor ventilation, condensation, peeling ceiling paint, faulty drainage and lifting linoleum as well as inadequate water temperature regulation. It is to the prison's credit that it has now responded to the IMB's requests that these matters be addressed and, since the Autumn of 2016, there has been a rolling programme to replace flooring and the prison is currently looking to improve ventilation and temperature control and to source an alternative paint for the ceilings.
- Ongoing prisoner dissatisfaction voiced to the IMB about the arrangements put in place shortly before the start of the reporting year for personal laundry to be processed in a newly opened laundry on each accommodation block rather than in the main Laundry (now operating just three days a week and reserved exclusively for prison-issue clothing and bedding.) The domestic-grade machines purchased were insufficiently robust and orderlies were finding it difficult to process (and in particular to tumble-dry) the sheer volume of clothing in accordance with wing timetables. The rooms concerned had no extra ventilation or hand washing facilities and were hot and

stuff for orderlies to work in, and the IMB had to field a series of complaints from prisoners that clothes were returned to them damp and smelly. At the end of the reporting year the prison is now planning to improve ventilation, but the IMB will continue to monitor these arrangements, which it still believes to be unsatisfactory, in the course of 2017-18.

- A lack of clarity over what prisoners could legitimately expect the prison to provide in the form of clothing and whether their decision to elect to wear their own clothing did or did not absolve the prison from a national requirement to provide essential items on grounds of decency. In the absence of a published prison policy, prisoners were repeatedly referred to the IEP facilities list which merely listed items of personal clothing which could be worn as a result of earning Standard or Enhanced status under the IEP scheme but made no mention of basic clothing entitlements. The Board is pleased to report that the new clothing policy issued by the prison in Spring 2017 was developed in consultation with prisoners and has included greater clarity and flexibility in terms of enabling prisoners to possess both prison-issue and their own clothing on Standard and Enhanced levels.
- In a prison where demand for single cells exceeds their availability, the IMB had to field a number of complaints from prisoners frustrated over what was perceived to be an opaque system for allocating these to Enhanced prisoners who joined a waiting list for them, especially given the apparent ability of some newer arrivals to be prioritised. The prison, in response, has now helpfully published a brief policy statement explaining why waiting lists have to be managed flexibly and why some new arrivals have to be prioritised for security or medical reasons.

7.4 In all of these cases the Prison's positive response to IMB concerns is to be applauded and reflects its general willingness to listen to prisoners' complaints and to consult with them on key matters. The Prison has continued to run an effective PIAC (Prisoner Information and Consultation) system that enables wing representatives to raise matters of concern or suggest improvements and has responded sympathetically to many of their suggestions for additional facilities on wings. PALS also fielded a large number of queries (exactly 600 in the 12 months concerned) and resolved many issues which might otherwise have escalated to Complaints or IMB Applications.

7.5 A good example of effective consultation and communication with prisoners which impressed the Board was the prison's invitation to prisoners to be actively involved in the preparations for the introduction of Smoking Cessation from 9 January 2017. The planning for this was meticulous and prisoners were regularly consulted on proposals and given ample advance notice of what would be happening. Effective support was put in place with Smoking Cessation clinics and nicotine patches, provision for the purchase of e-cigarettes, careful monitoring of tobacco purchases via the prison shop to identify potential hoarding, and a one month "amnesty" to allow for a smooth transition to the new smoke-free environment. As a consequence the transition proved to be relatively trouble free and was generally welcomed by prisoners. The IMB received no complaints of any sort about it.

7.6 Where there is still some room for improvement, however, is in the quality of some responses prisoners receive to applications sent via the ATMs and via the official Complaints process. The standard of these remains variable, and whilst the majority of responses indicate careful thought and consideration, others shown to the IMB by prisoners are terse, negative, vague or do not directly address the matters raised and, far from resolving matters, often tend to be counterproductive in that they can lead disgruntled prisoners to escalate them to the next level.

7.7 The Board's view is that the quality of catering remains very high indeed. Prisoners have an excellent choice of meals over a three-week cycle, with the Kitchen going to considerable trouble to keep the menus under review and to cater for special diets and food allergies, as well as providing for the dietary needs of different religious faiths. Prisoners routinely comment to IMB members that the food is the best they have encountered in comparison with other prisons. This is reinforced by the fact that the Complaints Department received only 10 complaints (just 1% of all complaints received) in the course of the year and both PALS and the IMB only one each. The Kitchen received 447 applications from prisoners, many of which were complimentary and/or made suggestions for new dishes. Aside from occasional complaints about the supply of soya yoghurts and milk for those on special diets and about wing serveries serving small portions, the only persistent source of complaints (67 applications or about 15% of the total) was the electronic menu choice ordering system, though in most cases prisoners had been allocated the "default" menu because they had failed to submit their orders within the deadline. A number of prisoners requested to go on vegan diets and the IMB is concerned that vegans and diabetics have a much narrower range of items that they can purchase from the shop. Given the high percentage of diabetics in the prison, the IMB would repeat its request that this matter be explored further.

7.8 The Board expressed some doubts about the efficiency of waste disposal arrangements as waste accumulated at various times in the large commercial bins awaiting collection, but it is pleased to report that the contract with the external service provider has now been terminated and a new contractor engaged in June 2017.

## **8 HEALTHCARE (including mental health and social care)**

---

8.1 The Board is pleased to report that the problems with Dentistry which persisted over the last couple of years are now largely resolved with the provision of a second session day each week of dental care. Waiting lists are now at acceptable levels.

8.2 Prisoners interviewed at random generally report a very high level of satisfaction with the overall quality of medical care they receive, many commenting that it is significantly better than at their previous establishments. Prisoners are able to obtain GP appointments promptly and can access a wide range of specialist clinics. The only issue the Board has identified in the last 12 months has been an occasional shortage of nursing staff arising primarily from unfilled staff vacancies, but this does not seem to have impinged unduly on the level of service provided.

8.3 The Board received only one Application from a prisoner about the quality of healthcare and 7 others about other aspects of provision. The prison's Complaints system received only 1. Given that the prison typically houses around 395 prisoners at any one time, this is a remarkably low number of complaints in total.

8.4 Prisoners with mental health problems or at risk of relapse into drug or alcohol misuse have continued to receive a professional level of service from AWP (Avon and Wiltshire Partnership) and the Board is pleased to report that some of the occupational therapy sessions have continued. AWP has also taken the initiative to develop a course preparing men for Cat. D open conditions.

8.5 Around 42% of prisoners at HMP Ashfield are over 50 and many have chronic medical conditions. A recent case highlighted the complex problems associated with managing the care and behaviour and meeting the needs of a prisoner with dementia, despite the best endeavours of staff. Given the age profile of prisoners at HMP Ashfield, the Board is concerned at the lack of specialist training for prison staff and the likelihood of other prisoners at HMP Ashfield developing this condition in the future with little or no

opportunity for them to transfer to a specialist facility where their needs could be better met.

8.6 In addition, there is currently no palliative care and end-of-life suite at HMP Ashfield.

## **9 EDUCATION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

---

9.1 The IMB, formerly critical of provision in this area, is now of the view that good progress is being made. The review of education and training stimulated by the 2015 HMIP inspection led to a student needs analysis and a revised curriculum from May 2016 with a greater number of Level 2 qualifications on offer. This new provision was delivered throughout the 12 month IMB reporting period.

9.2 With a core of English, Mathematics, ICT and Lifeskills, supplemented by Business Skills and ESOL, classes are well subscribed. Inevitably the prison's insistence that those below Level 1 undertake compulsory Mathematics and English classes generates some mutterings but, given that the goal must be to maximise employability on release, this is an entirely reasonable requirement. In lessons visited by IMB members there has been, with just very few exceptions, a positive atmosphere and prisoners have been complimentary about the quality of teaching. It is to the Department's credit that it has recently launched a Level 4 course in Business Skills which it is believed is unique of its kind in custody.

9.3 Classroom facilities are broadly good, but the Department is hampered by an outdated networked computer system with regular complaints by both prisoners and staff that computers are breaking down and incapable of repair. The IMB has been led to understand that prison managers are currently investigating this issue, but would welcome a speedy solution to this problem.

9.4 It is to the Department's credit that it facilitates the studies of those undertaking Level 3 and 4 courses with the Open University or other educational providers, with dedicated computer access and appropriate support from the Library. In the course of this reporting year, 83 students have undertaken courses at this level, reflecting the higher percentage of prisoners capable of studying at this level at HMP Ashfield than would be normal in the prison estate.

9.5 Proof of overall prisoner satisfaction is the fact that PALS fielded only 3 queries about Education in the course of this reporting year, the IMB only 1 and Complaints typically only around 2 to 4 each month.

9.6 The IMB had previously expressed concern about the relevance of some of the Library stock which had not benefited from refreshment since the prison had re-rolled in 2013. It is now pleased to report that there is now a dedicated Library budget, titles specifically targeted at teenage readers have now been removed, suggestions for new titles have been actively invited from prisoners and a wider range of journals and newspapers are also now being stocked, with just occasional interruptions in delivery from the Gatehouse. The new movement times introduced in May 2016 led, however, to a reduced number of visits to the Library as prisoners were no longer able to pass by on freeflow but had to book sessions of an hour and a half's duration, much longer than needed to choose books and DVDs or to browse through the newspapers. The Library has endeavoured to respond to this difficulty by introducing a delivery service to wings and by running activities such as a Scrabble club to entice more men to visit, but attendance levels still remain lower than before.

9.7 The Gym has continued to offer a full and varied programme of activities throughout the year, with a special emphasis on the Rio Olympics and Paralympics, including games such as blind cricket, wheelchair basketball and bowls.

## **10 WORK, VOCATIONAL TRAINING and EMPLOYMENT**

---

10.1 The Board can report that this is an area of the prison which is operating very well indeed and provides effective work experience for prisoners whilst also enabling them to acquire vocational qualifications, increasingly at Level 2 or above. Staffing levels have ensured that a full regime has operated throughout the year. The prison has been able to maintain full employment for most of this period (except for a brief period of expansion to 412 prisoners on site in Spring 2017) with few "unemployed" except for those required to refine their choices of activities when there have not been vacancies or where security risk assessments have determined that their choices are unsuitable or would contravene the terms of their SOPO.

10.2 The number of places available in light industries has expanded, with other plans for commercial expansion announced in June 2017. Design and Print continues to offer an internal printing service and takes external orders. The Bistro and Kitchen between them provide a range of qualifications from basic Food Hygiene up to NVQ Level 2. The Bakery which operates on a commercial scale to cater for a predominantly internal market had to persevere with outdated facilities in the Food Technology Room until almost the end of the reporting year but, in June 2017, was completely refurbished and re-equipped. Other workshops such as Carpentry and Painting & Decorating have provided useful qualifications and employment and the Electrical workshop has expanded its activities, which already included PAT testing, to providing a repair facility for small appliances. The Horticulture department (which also cares for small animals) has continued to go from strength to strength and offers prisoners the opportunity to use their own initiative to develop communal areas previously just left to grass.

10.3 The nature of the offences committed by prisoners at HMP Ashfield, however, means that even those categorised as suitable for open conditions and awaiting transfer to Cat. D prisons do not qualify for ROTL (Release on Temporary Licence) so cannot obtain work experience outside the gates.

## **11 RESETTLEMENT PREPARATION**

---

11.1 A detailed Needs Analysis was completed in summer 2016 with the aim of informing resettlement provision. Whilst this produced a number of helpful statistics about prisoners, the IMB has yet to detect any noticeable changes in policy, practice or provision resulting from this.

11.2 Relatively few prisoners, however, are released directly from HMP Ashfield (though these are offered appropriate information and support in advance by a trained orderly supervised and managed by Catch 22). Most prisoners either transfer to a specialist resettlement prison or qualify for places at one of the open prisons as and when vacancies there arise. It remains a matter of major concern to the IMB that, at any one time, around 40 prisoners are unable to move to an open prison within the south of England from where most of them originate. As a result, "bed-blocking" limits the ability of HMP Ashfield to accept others who might potentially be eligible for its offending behaviour treatment programmes.

11.3 Resettlement preparation at HMP Ashfield is primarily designed to provide a suitable foundation for transfers elsewhere, though the quality of sentence plans with which prisoners arrive at HMP Ashfield is very variable, ranging from the specific to

others containing unhelpfully vague suggestions about general compliance with the regime. OMU case workers are in systematic contact with their allocated prisoners to discuss with them how they can move forward and the Board can report that, broadly, there seems to be an effective working relationship. There are, however, occasional complaints voiced to the Board that a minority of prisoners feel unduly pressurised to engage with their sentence plans when they are still maintaining their innocence or are otherwise in denial of their offences. When such allegations have been made the Board has investigated thoroughly and there rarely seem to be any substantial grounds for their complaints.

11.4 Paperwork for Parole Boards and re-categorisation reviews is usually produced on time, and many prisoners are successful in being re-categorised to Cat. D. Invariably those who are unsuccessful complain to the Board or to Complaints. However, given the high percentage of prisoners who persist in various forms of denial of their offence or who are deemed to be at high risk of reoffending on release, it is inevitable many will not meet the required criteria for parole or re-categorisation. Consequently many IPP prisoners also remain "over tariff".

11.5 Turning Point was able to deliver treatment programmes on target until the sudden announcement in March by NOMS that TSP (Thinking Skills Programme), SOTP (Sex Offender Treatment Programme) and Extended SOTP were to cease with immediate effect. Fortunately, groups had just completed and prisoners were not left stranded mid-course at HMP Ashfield. The prison is to be congratulated on how it handled the situation with all prisoners due to start these courses seen individually and reassured that their needs would be addressed. The prison is now offering Horizon (with Kaizen due to commence in August 2017) and, following Turning Point's announced withdrawal from the contract, plans are well under way for SERCO to take responsibility for delivery from the end of September 2017.

11.6 Given that Family is of the Seven Pathways to Reducing Reoffending, the Board has welcomed the expansion of the Chaplaincy team to create a full-time post of which 40% of time allocated is to act as a Family Links coordinator.

## C Section – Work of Board

---

The Board is very grateful to the prison management and staff and other providers of services for their cooperation and assistance in enabling members to carry out their duties and the positive way in which they have addressed concerns raised by the Board and have accepted praise and criticism in equal measure.

Members of the Board have typically been on site around 20 times each month (including attendance at the monthly Board meeting).

The weekly Rota visit has routinely included visiting all accommodation blocks, the Kitchen/Bistro, and the Healthcare department. In addition to this, prison functions, services and departments are divided for practical monitoring purposes into seven themed areas (Safer Custody/pastoral care; Sentence Management and Resettlement; Prisoner Employment and Vocational Training; Prisoner Education; Prisoner Services and Facilities; Dynamic Security; Central Services) to ensure that each theme is monitored in depth approximately 8 times each year (and at regular intervals between if there are pressing or emerging issues that would benefit from further scrutiny.)

In addition to the weekly Rota visit, one member a week attends to collect and respond to all Applications from prisoners. Wherever possible a Rota or Applications visit is combined with attendance at a prison meeting (such as the Interdepartmental Risk Management meeting or a Safer Prisons meeting), an Adjudication, a GOOD review or an ACCT review, but the scheduling of these often necessitates a separate visit. A night-state visit took place in the Autumn of 2016.

A national recruitment campaign in Spring 2016 resulted in the appointment of 6 new members from July 2016, but unfortunately 3 of these soon withdrew on personal grounds as other demands impinged on their time or other career opportunities presented themselves. As 3 of the Board's remaining 7 members were on probation, this effectively meant that the main burden of work, especially in the first half of the reporting year, had to be shouldered by the 4 experienced Board members. It is, however, to the credit of the 3 remaining new members that they embraced their induction and training enthusiastically and with a high degree of professionalism and, as a consequence, increasingly took on their share of Rota visits and Applications. They are now proving to be valued and indispensable members of the team.

The Board is now seeking to expand its numbers again with a further recruitment campaign in order to facilitate greater in-depth monitoring of some aspects of the prison and to observe a greater number of prisoner consultation forums and prison management meetings.

Board members have continued to attend SERCO-run training sessions within the prison, one attended the National Conference and three completed the new members' IMB Foundation Course and also visited HMP Bristol. Occasional training sessions have been provided at monthly Board meetings. The Chair has attended the South West Chairs' meetings as well as being a member of, and attending the meetings of the Sex Offenders' Working Party. She has also chaired the IMB's national Learning and Skills Support Group, leading the team's research into the overall state of prison education, vocational training and prisoner work opportunities, and drafting a report scheduled for publication and national circulation later in 2017.

<b>BOARD STATISTICS</b>	
Recommended Complement of Board Members	13
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the Establishment	247
Total number of segregation reviews attended	7

## D Section - Applications

Code	Subject	Current reporting year	Previous reporting year
A	Accommodation including laundry, clothing, ablutions	18	1
B	Discipline including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	14	17
C	Equality	1	4
D	Purposeful Activity including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	1	1
E 1	Letters, visits, phones, public protection restrictions	15	9
E 2	Finance including pay, private monies, spends	1	0
F	Food and kitchens	1	1
G	Health including physical, mental, social care	8	5
H 1	Property within this establishment	1	}
H 2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	2	} 13
H 3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	0	}
I	Sentence management including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	6	3
J	Staff/prisoner concerns including bullying	8	12
K	Transfers	1	1
	<b>Total number of IMB applications</b>	77 inc. 4 Confidential Apps	83 inc. 10 misc. and 6 Confidential Apps

The very low number of Applications received by the Board is testament to the fact that prisoners, overall, show a high degree of satisfaction with the way they are treated at HMP Ashfield.

The trend in numbers received has been consistently downwards since 2013 (2013-14 = 189; 2014-15 = 125; 2015-16 = 83; 2016-17= 77). This year has seen a major reduction in the number of Applications about property issues equalled by a large rise in the number of Applications about residential matters, especially laundry arrangements, and a slight increase in issues connected with Public Protection restrictions.

Of the total of 77 Applications, 23 (29%) were made by just 6 serial complainants, some of whom had also submitted a number of Applications in the previous reporting year.