



Annual Report
of the
Independent Monitoring Board
at

HMP Bedford

1st July 2017 – 30 June 2018

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Monitoring fairness and respect for people in custody

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A Sections 1 – 4: Context and Summary

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

Main judgements

One sentence assessment

Considerable efforts have been made to improve the prison, but the rate of progress has been too slow and, although staff numbers have returned to benchmark levels, there remain problems around increasing violence, poor living conditions, perceived unresponsiveness to prisoners' concerns, low levels of engagement in education and constructive preparation for release.

Are prisoners treated fairly?

The treatment of prisoners regarding fairness and equity is mixed. An independent survey conducted in January found that 61 per cent of prisoners said that most staff talked to them in a respectful manner but only 28 per cent felt that the regime was fair.

Whilst the prison has made improvements to the property management, complaints and applications systems, the responses are often still too slow and unclear. Drug treatment services are valued by prisoners, but there are still too many drugs getting into the prison.

The trend of violence is upwards with prisoner on officer assaults being more than twice the national average. The mental health service is inadequate in terms of its resources and coverage.

Are prisoners treated humanely?

Prisoners are not treated humanely in HMP Bedford. Regular shortages of basic items remain, there is often far too long between kit changes, pigeons fly round inside the jail and there are infestations of cockroaches and, more recently rats, in most areas. The struggle to keep the prison clean is being lost and at times the amount of litter and rubbish lying around is disgusting. These are not appropriate conditions in which to detain prisoners in the 21st century.

Despite numerous attempts at refurbishment, the environment of the segregation unit is simply appalling. It is a dungeon. The toilets frequently block, there has been a consistent infestation of cockroaches and, during the summer, there has been a plague of rats. We feel forced to recommend its urgent closure and relocation to another part of the prison.

Are prisoners prepared well for their release?

Again, the picture here is mixed. Whilst we still have areas of concern, there have been areas of improvement. Overall attendance levels at some education classes have got much better and a number of excellent new teaching initiatives have been run. However, for basic skills, the position is not good, with many prisoners refusing to attend.

The painting workshop has been reopened and the construction safety qualification is very successful. The core workshop activities remain stultifyingly mundane and only 18 per cent believed that enough effort was being made to stop them offending on release, while 71 per cent believed that they were 'doing time', rather than 'using time'.

The pre-release board works extremely hard to try to ensure that prisoners leave with accommodation, support and where possible, employment. However, it is not well-integrated into mainstream prison operations and communication between pre-release staff and operational staff is often poor. National constraints mean that inadequate preparation has been made for the payment of Universal Credit.

Main Areas for Development

TO THE MINISTER

- i) The Universal Credit system, as currently proposed, will result in prisoners only being able to make an application on release and then having to wait a further eight weeks for payment. This is scandalous and completely inefficient. We cannot see a reason why prisoners cannot be permitted to make the initial applications whilst inside (12.8 and 12.9).
- ii) In our view the Minister should undertake a fundamental review of the role of local prisons. They are clearly the most disturbed and unruly establishments in the system and it is important to understand why this is the case and what can be done to address the problems that they generate (3.5 -3.7).

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- i) The national process means that test refusals are not treated as positive tests but replaced by another, which means that the statistical randomness of the sample is skewed (5.17);
- ii) Investment in new window grilles would have a significant impact in reducing the number of drugs getting into the prison (5.18);
- iii) HMP Bedford is being allocated more vulnerable prisoners than its capacity. (5.24);
- iv) The national search team did not wear clear identification or record its actions on body cameras (5.37);
- v) The standardised test approach to education does not help provide the sort of teaching that motivates prisoners (10.2)
- vi) There is a lack of a national focus on prisoners' property with no related performance indicators (8.22);

- vii) The three-bag transfer policy frequently leads to property being delayed or lost (8.25); and
- viii) It is disappointing that so little information exists about how prisoners get on when they leave jail (12.7).

TO THE GOVERNOR

- i) There has been a failure to produce detailed descriptions of incidents, which makes it difficult to understand the causes (5.7);
- ii) New officers would benefit from specific training to deal with specific high-risk situations (for example, putting prisoners back in to cells) (5.8);
- iii) There has been little attempt to involve prisoners themselves in the prevention and management of violence (5.9);
- iv) We would welcome renewed attempts to improve the content of the CAREMAPs (5.14);
- v) Sniffer dogs are not consistently available for use at the Visits Hall (5.19);
- vi) E-wing is no longer being used as a First-Night Centre (5.24);
- vii) The access ramp to the Visits Centre has been unsafe for use by buggies and wheelchairs due to slippery surfaces and foliage (5.27);
- viii) The segregation unit can no longer be considered a decent and humane place to hold prisoners - it should be closed and relocated (7.1);
- ix) The mental health team rarely attend segregation or ACCT reviews (7.5 and 9.6);
- x) The wiring does not have the capacity to enable fans in each cell and the showers are inconsistent in providing hot water (8.2 and 8.3);
- xi) Observation panels are being repaired at around 30 per week with associated costs and risks (8.5);
- xii) The level of dirt, litter and general detritus around the prison is too often unacceptably high (8.7);
- xiii) It would be helpful if a leaflet was produced, in the main languages, that explained to foreign nationals the system and contact points (8.29);
- xiv) There are long delays in seeing the mental health team, there is no system for auditing progress and there is no check on the quality of assessments in reception (9.9);
- xv) there are limited opportunities for prisoners to explore or to develop their creative awareness (10.2);
- xvi) Core workshop activities can hardly be said to be purposeful and remain boring and mundane (11.1); and
- xvii) The work of the pre-release board is not well integrated with the prison and there is a lack of reporting on key outcomes or operational metrics (12.3).

Improvements

- i) Officer levels are back up to the benchmark level of 110, which show the recruitment drive has been a success (5.31);
- ii) The average for meeting the complaint response target was 71 per cent (6.8);
- iii) Segregation reviews are now systematically recorded, and the notes brought to the next meeting (7.3);

- iv) The prison has introduced a more succinct and focussed application system that is a lot easier to use (8.16);
- v) The introduction of a smoke free prison on 29th January was a very well-managed project (8.18);
- vi) Much more efficient property management systems have been introduced (8.23 and 8.24);
- vii) The prison has put in place a number of initiatives to strengthen and vary education, learning and development opportunities (10.11); and
- viii) The painting and decorating training facility was reopened in June (11.3).

3 DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

Accommodation and facilities

3.1 HMP Bedford is a Category B Prison with an Operational Capacity of 487 (310 being the Certified Normal Accommodation). The capacity has been reduced from the previous level of 508 because that included double counting of the cells of healthcare and the segregation unit. As a busy 'local' (now Resettlement) prison, HMP Bedford takes both sentenced and remanded prisoners, mainly from courts in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

3.2 It is important to recognise that the prison, in its current guise, was designed for a capacity of 310 – anything above that represents overcrowding. The prison is therefore overcrowded and has been for many years.

3.3 Wings A, B and C radiate from a central hub and were built in 1845:

- A wing holds up to 146 prisoners (all in double cells built for one man, with the exception of 34 cells furnished as single cells for high risk prisoners);
- B wing holds up to 76 prisoners, in double cells. Floors B2 – B4 are above ground, whilst B1 is the Support and Separation Unit (SSU) with six furnished and two unfurnished cells, a separate exercise yard, shower and adjudication room;
- C Wing has 99 places. Above ground, C2 and C3 consist, predominantly, of two-man cells, but include also two four-man cells. There is a dedicated cell on C2 for 'listeners' (prisoners who give up time to listen to the concerns of others) and a dedicated cell for a disabled prisoner. C4 remains as a normal location. Underground, C1 accommodates the library, three over-flow cells for the segregation unit (SSU) and a further five two-man cell, currently used for vulnerable prisoners.
- E wing, with 41 beds, is the first night centre where new prisoners are located.

3.4 The following facilities are accommodated in separate buildings on the congested site, within a perimeter wall that is compromised by the proximity of commercial and residential buildings on the outside:

- F wing was built in 1812 and houses a 30-place Vulnerable Prisoner Unit;
- D wing was built in 1992 and houses a 95-prisoner Drug Treatment wing;
- The Healthcare Centre, built in 1992, houses an Inpatient Unit on the first floor comprising nine normal cells and a gated cell. Consulting rooms, treatment rooms and a pharmacy are on the ground floor;

- The gatehouse, built in 1992, houses some offices, a Visits Centre and Hall, and the Reception suite; and
- In addition, the facilities include a large multi-faith room and chaplaincy offices, gymnasium, education suite, laundry, kitchens, teaching workshops, maintenance area and an administration suite.

Prisoners and length of stay

3.5 As a local prison, HMP Bedford services the courts of Luton, and St Albans. On occasions, prisoners are also brought from London courts. What this means is that HMP Bedford accommodates, predominantly, short stay prisoners. This is either because their sentence is short (less than 12 months), or they are moved on to a more appropriate facility. Typically, around 80 per cent of prisoners stay for less than six months and the average stay is under 30 days, or thereabouts. This impacts on the opportunities to carry out effective interventions.

3.6 It is also worth noting that around a third of prisoners are on remand and subject to a slightly different set of rules (for example, they do not have to attend education or workshops).

3.7 The short length of stay means that there is a high turnover – during the year of the report over 3,000 inmates went through the prison (some on more than one occasion).

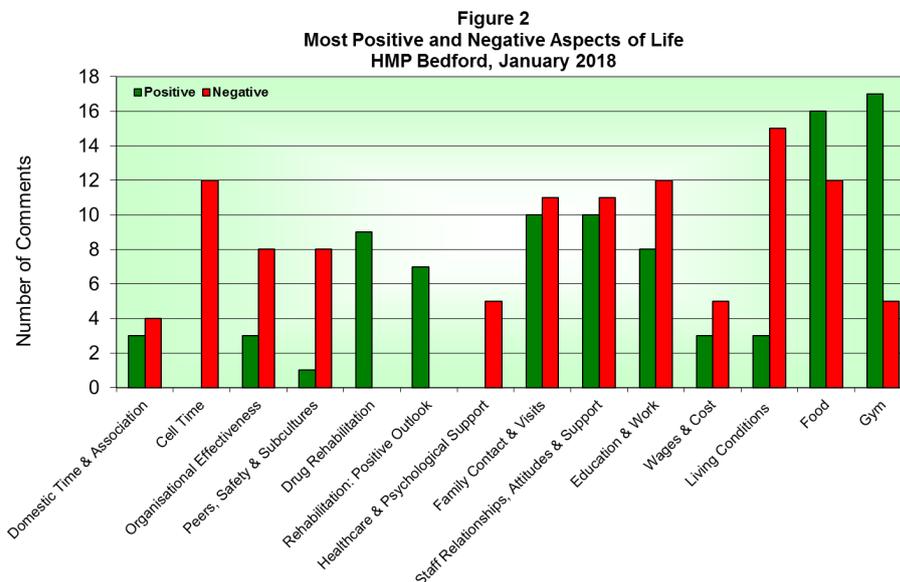
4 NOTES ABOUT READING THE REPORT

Riot of November 2016

4.1 The riot of November 2016 was 17 months ago, but it has cast a long shadow. After the riot, A and B wings were unfit for use and the capacity of the prison was reduced to around 250. B-wing reopened in July 2017 and A-wing in September. It was not until December that the prison was operating at full capacity. We have therefore concentrated on data and impressions from December 2017 to June 2018.

Quality of life survey

4.2 Between 15th and 18th January the National Prison and Probation Service carried out a survey of prisoners' views in HMP Bedford – it is called Measuring the Quality of Prisoners' Lives (MQPL). The survey asked 130 questions to 119 prisoners. During the report we will refer to this survey and use the findings to illustrate particular points. A summary of the findings is shown in the graph below



HMIP Urgent Notification

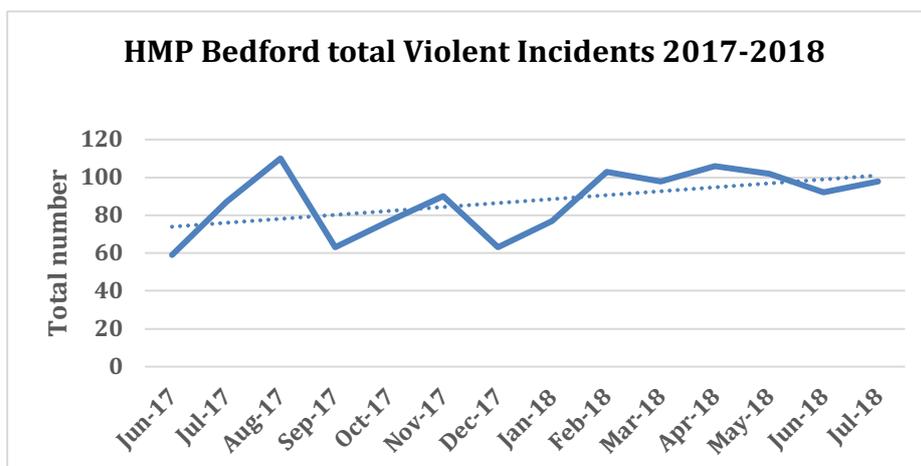
- 4.3 This report covers the year from July 2017 to the end of June 2018. The subsequent collation, writing and review period means, inevitably, that the report is published a few months later. Normally this gap between the end of the reporting period and publication does not have any impact.
- 4.4 However, since the end of the reporting period the prison, in many ways, seems to have gone backwards. Our rota reports have more often expressed concern about a febrile atmosphere and a shortage of visible officers. On occasions it has not been clear if officers are in full control. In addition, the litter and vermin problem has got worse and there have been further shortages of basic materials. Members of another IMB who visited the prison in August were shocked at what they saw.
- 4.5 Levels of violence continue to be worrying and in September an incident led to four officers being taken to hospital. The causes of these issues are not fully clear, but the shortages of basic kit, inexperience of staff, coupled with summer leave and the uncomfortableness of the prison in the hot weather were certainly contributory factors.
- 4.6 It was not surprising to us that the HMIP inspection in September led to an Urgent Notification to the Justice Secretary being issued. We hope that this will address the problems noted in this report. There have been improvements in a number of areas and we have seen a determination to build a rehabilitative culture. But this has been continually undermined by instability in the regime, inexperienced staff and a failure to provide a consistently decent environment. With some reluctance, the Board would therefore have to concur with the issuing of the Urgent Notification.

B Evidence sections 5 – 13

5 SAFETY

Violence

- 5.1 Increasing violence in prisons is a national problem. In HMP Bedford the number of incidents between June 2017 and May 2018 almost doubled (59 to 102). In comparison, the national increase was 13 per cent. The figures in the first half of 2018 show some flattening out of the upward trend, stabilising at around 50 per cent higher than the corresponding months of 2017. This is shown on the graph below:



- 5.2 If we look at specific types of incidents, 'prisoner-on-prisoner' assaults show a steady increase from June 2017 to February 2018, with a flattening off from February to May

2018 and a slight decrease in more recent months (20 incidents per month down to 15 by July 2018).

- 5.3 For 'prisoner-on-staff' assaults the pattern is different. There was a marked increase from January to February 2018, with a more than doubling of the monthly figures (9 to 21). There was then a flattening out at this higher figure through May to July. The percentage increase over the whole year was again around 50 per cent, compared with the national figure of less than 25 per cent. The average number of incidents was about 2.5 times the national figure.
- 5.4 In order to address these problems, there is a current Violence Reduction Strategy (published in November 2017) but the figures cited above suggest that it has not been effective. Attempts to understand and reduce violent incidents have also been repeatedly discussed in the 'Safer Custody' and 'Use of Force' meetings. Again, these seem to have had little impact on outcomes.
- 5.5 The prison has put most of its faith in reducing violence in the deployment of various general training packages for staff, for example the 'Suicide and Self Harm' (SASH) and 'Five Minute Intervention' (FMI) programmes. Although these have been well-attended and appear to be well-constructed and delivered, there is little evidence that they have had any effect.
- 5.6 This may be because these training packages are too general and not focused enough on understanding each incident and the common factors contributing to it (known as a 'conflict-centred' approach). We understand that the prison managers intend to adopt this approach in the future and we would welcome such a development.
- 5.7 Managers have also been hampered in the analysis of violent incidents by the consistent failure of individual officers to produce detailed descriptions of incidents as part of their routine recording.
- 5.8 From the data presented above (and the analysis undertaken in the Safer Custody meetings) it also seems that there may be some specific training needs for new officers in relation to specific high-risk situations (for example, getting prisoners behind their doors). They will then need appropriate mentoring to embed this learning and to gradually increase their confidence and skills. The dearth of experienced officers on the wings has undoubtedly made this more difficult.
- 5.9 Finally, there has been little attempt to involve prisoners themselves in the prevention and management of violence. This seems odd given their wealth of experience and desire to invest in a safe environment. They would also seem to have as great a vested interest as anyone in making the prison a safer place.

Reception

- 5.10 We have followed prisoners through the reception process and our observation is that it is effective, caring and well-managed. Whilst recent refurbishment has provided greater privacy for prisoners, it is still an uncomfortable and cramped space. The installation of air conditioning units has done little to lower the temperature. Given the limitations of the building, small improvements like a few fans and a working water cooler would go some way towards making the environment more congenial.
- 5.11 Unfortunately, the First Night Centre (E-wing) is not operating as it should, with the result that prisoners often go directly on to the main wings. This means that they do not get the benefit of focused induction services. The impact of this is shown by the MQPL results:
- 49 per cent felt worried and confused when they first came into prison;
 - Only 20 per cent felt the induction process was effective; and

- Only 12 per cent felt that staff took a personal interest in them in their first few days.

5.12 We also have concerns about the transport arrangements for prisoners coming into the prison, as summarised by this rota report extract: *Inspected the Serco truck and had a chat with the driver. These trucks are really cramped and claustrophobic. If a prisoner needs restraining it seems nearly impossible in these cramped quarters (imagine a plane toilet and you get the idea). There is no appropriate storage space for property, there is one tiny cupboard with a door width that makes cramming anything in impossible and a small netted area near the stairs. I was told that the driver is operating solo with potentially dangerous people in the transport, but that was ok, because the only thing they can do is verbally abuse the driver.*

Self-harm (ACCT)

5.13 The main mechanism that is intended to reduce acts of self-harm and suicide is the application of the ‘Assessment Care in Custody and Treatment’ (ACCT) procedure. Last year we were critical of the operation of the ACCT; it is seen as essentially a ‘form-filling’ exercise, rather than a procedure aimed at making distressed prisoners feel safer and less likely to self-harm. We believe that this criticism remains valid for most prisoners.

5.14 An examination of ten randomly selected CAREMAPs found that the content of CAREMAPS was very limited and the outcome was usually restricted to simply adjusting the fixed intervals for observation. They rarely contained information about personal coping strategies or how these could be supported and integrated into an individualised plan for reducing risk.

5.15 We would therefore welcome renewed attempts to improve the content of CAREMAPs so that they reflected, more accurately, the experiences and coping strategies of individual prisoners. This means identifying specific actions to address the issues identified during the ACCT assessment. Greater involvement of the mental health team in the assessment and review of ACCT documents would undoubtedly help in this process.

5.16 In terms of the general application of the ACCT and of training, we would make the following observations:

- The Suicide and Self Harm (SASH) training focusses on an ‘actuarial’ model of risk assessment (that is, identifying whether a prisoner belongs to a particular ‘at risk’ group), which does not help in the judgement as to whether this individual prisoner is ‘at risk’ at a particular time;
- Any evaluation of the ACCT should therefore include seeking the prisoner’s views; and
- Prisoners themselves could contribute to the training of officers regarding application of the ACCT, perhaps through joint workshops with staff.

Drug supply, use and treatment

5.17 Despite considerable efforts to reduce the supply, drug availability and usage remains a significant problem in the jail. Between January and April 2018, the prison carried out 90 random drug tests (MDTs) of which a quarter were positive. However, the national testing guidance means that this is likely to underestimate the position – test refusals are not treated as positive tests but replaced by another, which means that the statistical randomness of the sample is skewed. The prison simply does not know, with any accuracy, how many prisoners are taking drugs at any one time, but it is certainly likely to be well over a third and probably nearly a half.

5.18 The majority of drugs (and phones) come in over the wall, which is remarkably easy in a town centre prison. Whilst the prison has put a strong focus on addressing this, and has

a detailed action plan in place, it is difficult to say how effective it has been. A capital investment in new window grilles would have a significant impact, but despite requests by the prison, and in our report last year, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has not provided the necessary finance.

- 5.19 Another point of entry for contraband is through the Visits Hall – it is almost impossible for officers to monitor all interactions in enough detail to be sure to stop anything being passed over. Dogs are used to monitor visitors, but they are not always available – for instance, in May 2018 sniffer dogs were only available on one occasion.
- 5.20 Spice and other psychoactive substances (PS) have a high national profile and certainly create real issues. However, the MDT tests only show 7 per cent of results at HMP Bedford as being positive for PS. There has been some evidence that marijuana is becoming more popular and that tobacco, which was banned in January, is vying with other substances for the illicit market.
- 5.21 Drug treatment is carried out by healthcare (for prescriptions) and SORTT (supporting offenders in recovery and treatment team) who try to deal with psychological impacts. It is a difficult job carried out by dedicated individuals, but success is very difficult to measure. It is often about releasing prisoners with a better understanding of the impacts and using fewer drugs more safely. For prisoners who do want to get off drugs, the services provide a real opportunity.

Deaths in custody

- 5.22 There was one death in custody in the year ending 31st July 2018. Of course, one death is too many, but it is a significant reduction on the four deaths between July 2016 and June 2017.
- 5.23 We have expressed concerns about the circumstances of the death, particularly in the communication between the mental health team and the officer staff. However, the coroner found that the mental health given to the prisoner was appropriate.

First night arrangements and vulnerable prisoners

- 5.24 In July 2016 E-wing was converted to be a First Night Centre - we supported this in our last report. However, the prison has had to accommodate more vulnerable prisoners than it has room for in the 30 bed F-wing. The result has been that 10 prisoners have been placed on the second floor of E-wing which means:
- The capacity for new prisoners has been reduced by half;
 - Officers have to take vulnerable prisoners across to F-wing each day (and need to avoid meeting other prisoners who may be out); and
 - There have been problems around interactions with the kitchen staff who serve food on E-wing.
- 5.25 Overall the situation is unsatisfactory and needs to be addressed.

Visits

- 5.26 For many prisoners maintaining contact with their families is one of their most important priorities; the MQPL results in January suggested that only a quarter of prisoners felt that staff achieved this. The Visits Hall is large and suitable for purpose, although the air-conditioning installed last summer has been unreliable - it was not working for much of June and July and conditions became virtually intolerable. The new table arrangements have received mixed reviews from both prisoners and staff. They offer possibilities for intimacy which is not appropriate in a public place.
- 5.27 The access ramp to the Visits Centre has been unsafe for use by buggies and wheelchairs due to slippery surfaces and foliage and despite our reports, little attempt has been made at improvement.

- 5.28 The cafe is an important facility for the visits hall that also provides training for prisoners in service and barista skills. However, the prison has had difficulty in providing enough prisoners for this useful and interesting work opportunity – it is unclear why this is.
- 5.29 The Board will be monitoring the outcome of the Farmer Report (The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending) and how family contact can be encouraged. Four planned family days (10.00 – 15.00) did not happen because of a shortage in staff, which is most disappointing. The Ormiston Trust are all ready to go with enhanced children’s visits, especially during school holidays and half-term, but always seem to be held up due to indecision or inconsistency applying the rules.
- 5.30 Funding has been received for the Breaking Barrier project, which supports families within the community whose fathers are in prison. There have been a large number of referrals and there is currently a waiting list.

Staffing levels and prisoner relationships

- 5.31 The recruitment drive for new officers has been a success and we congratulate the prison on this achievement. Officer numbers are back up to the benchmark level (as defined by HMPPS) of 110. Most of these recruits are new to the prison service and from what we have seen often bring enthusiasm and a fresh approach.
- 5.32 However, there is an experience gap, which is sometimes evident in day-to-day operations and in handling difficult incidents. We believe there is the opportunity to build a strong cadre of effective and committed officers, but it will need a clear and well-planned approach, with a crucial role for more experienced staff as mentors.
- 5.33 It should also be noted that the senior management team, although very capably led by the Governor Helen Clayton-Hoar, is also relatively inexperienced. This is always likely to exacerbate the very significant challenges inherent in managing a prison.
- 5.34 Despite sometimes challenging conditions, staff and prisoner relationships are, generally, positive, which was recognised by residents in the MQPL survey: 71 per cent said they got on well with wing staff; 61 per cent that staff treated them respectfully; 51 per cent that they had been helped by a member of staff on a particular issue. We would also like to put on record our recognition and respect for the work officers do.

Full cell search

- 5.35 On 9th and 10th April a ‘full cell’ search was carried out in HMP Bedford by approximately 100 external officers, dressed in full protective gear. Most cells were thoroughly searched at least once – sometimes twice – and many prisoners were subject to a full body search. The purpose was to locate illicit objects (phones, drugs, weapons) and thus to assist in the creation of a more stable operating environment.
- 5.36 When we visited the prison after the search we immediately started to hear numerous complaints from prisoners, independently and in different wings. They related to allegations of excessive use of force, naked strip searching (rather than ‘half-and-half’ as in guidance), damage to property and the fact that officers’ identification was not visible. We advised prisoners to use the formal complaint process and we understand that 12 did.
- 5.37 The prison acknowledged that the officers’ identification was covered by protective clothing. Otherwise, its investigations into these complaints did not find any evidence to support these claims. This was not surprising as body cameras were not worn and so most of the key events could therefore not be observed. Records were made of the searches of individual cells and these were summarised into a record of what was found. However, no overall report of the operation stating, for example, its purpose, authority, timing, number of staff employed, issues encountered and outcomes was produced. We find this surprising.

5.38 The IMB understands, and indeed supports, the principle of cell searches. In this case however we are left with concerns about the openness and accountability in the way that this was undertaken.

6 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS

Diversity and equality within the prison

6.1 In the 12 months since the last report there has been very positive progress with the Equalities agenda, driven largely by the Governor - the Equalities Action Team meets monthly.

6.2 Forums for older, younger, foreign national and disabled prisoners are successfully taking place, with positive feedback from both prisoners and staff. Issues arising from these forums are being documented and followed up where possible; for example, prisoners at the disability forum raised issues with access for those with reduced mobility to the library, which is below ground This is now being investigated to see whether access can be improved, or if a library trolley service could be started.

6.3 Each month a member of the senior management team takes responsibility for promoting awareness of issues such as faith awareness, LGBT, literacy and dyslexia and anti-bullying.

6.4 Data is now being collected to record and track/monitor trends in a coherent and accessible way highlighting areas of concern. Examples of this are:

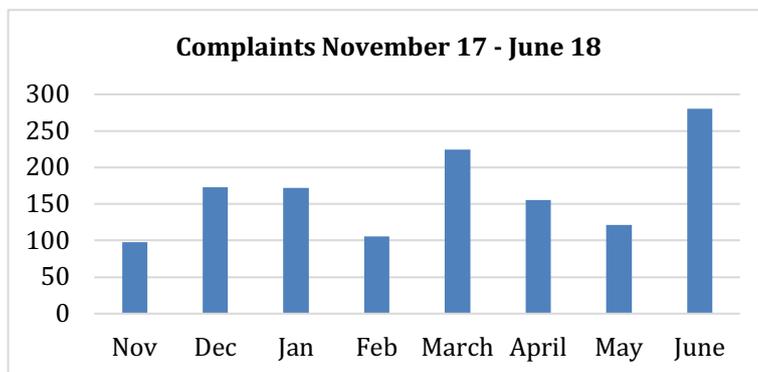
- IEP (the incentives and earned privileges system) levels being monitored to highlight patterns/fairness against population;
- A higher number of adjudications with BME (black and minority ethnic) prisoners initiated an investigation that found no areas of concern with the process;
- Data collection on age/race of those most commonly involved in use of force incidents (young - white) - the results of this fed back to the young prisoner forum and discussed for their opinions; and
- DIRFs (discrimination incident report forms) - whilst low in number, have been taking too long to resolve and this is now being chased.

6.5 The IMB has received a number of complaints from prisoners with regard to access to religious services, particularly for those in segregation. Whilst it would appear that efforts are made, where possible, to enable attendance, it is often restricted by staff availability or security issues. We feel that the prison could do more to ensure that all prisoners were aware of the procedure for requesting attendance and that the application forms are routinely available.

6.6 Whilst the Governor is very committed to the Equalities agenda, meetings are not always well attended with the results that people are often chased up on the day. In addition, information which has been promised is not always delivered in a timely fashion so that issues do not come to light as soon as they should. This all suggests that there is still some way to go before the importance of equalities is embedded amongst all prison staff.

Complaints

6.7 Although the picture is not consistent, the general trend of complaints is upward, as shown on the graph below. In addition, the level of complaints in March and June was higher than the 209 on October 2016, just before the riot in November.



6.8 The prison has put a great deal of effort into the improvement of complaint management and it does seem to be bearing fruit. Previously, performance information was not even collected. The average performance November – June was 71 per cent and, although we do not have previous information for comparison, our experience suggests that this is much better. However, there is still room for improvement.

6.9 Despite this improvement in response times, we still find issues around the quality of response, which is not always clear, written in plain English or address the issue. Prisoners find the system bureaucratic and difficult to access. Most of the applications to the IMB are the result of the prisoner feeling that the response to a complaint is unsatisfactory.

Board membership

6.10 The IMB has benefited during the year from a diverse membership in terms of gender, age, nationality and race. There have been 11 members of which three are from an ethnic minority background, seven were female and four were under 40 years old.

6.11 Unfortunately, we have also lost members during the year – we started with seven, went up to 11 and are now down to eight. At one stage we had only four active members. With such a small number, it has been difficult to provide mentors for new starters and to manage circumstances where individual members have had to take time off.

7 SEGREGATION AND SEPARATION UNIT (SSU)

Physical conditions and closure

7.1 Despite numerous attempts at refurbishment, the environment of the SSU remains simply appalling. It is underground with limited light getting into the cells, the toilets frequently block, there has been a consistent infestation of cockroaches and during the summer there has been a plague of rats. Each year we have commented on the deplorable conditions in the segregation unit. We now believe that it can no longer be considered a decent and humane place to hold prisoners and recommend that it should be closed and relocated

Operation

7.2 Given the dreadful environment, the SSU actually works remarkably well. The staff are highly professional, well-motivated and consistently patient and helpful. From our weekly visits, it is rare that prisoners are not getting exercise, or a shower and efforts are made by staff to provide something for them to do, even if it is only the 'distraction packs'. There are sometimes problems with accessing prison phones and with missing property, but we would say that this has improved since last year. There are more complaints about the quality and quantity of food compared with last year and problems with prisoners not being given the forms to apply to attend religious services.

7.3 We attend nearly all the weekly prisoner reviews. A major innovation this year is the introduction of a member of the administration staff to record the content of these reviews and bring these notes to the next meeting. This has been very helpful.

- 7.4 In general, the reviews are well conducted. Prisoners are treated fairly and with respect and their collaboration is routinely sought. However, the practice of having a different Governor attend each week disrupts continuity. Would it be possible for Governors to be nominated to attend the segregation reviews for, say, a month at a time?
- 7.5 Members of the Healthcare team assiduously attend most reviews even though the need for physical health advice is rare. In our experience the majority of prisoners in SSU have mental health issues and, regrettably, the mental health team rarely attend. It was hoped by concentrating the reviews on one afternoon per week their routine attendance would be facilitated. This has not happened, and we remain concerned.
- 7.6 . The segregation reviews are the place where you are most likely to encounter the most severely, mentally disturbed prisoners and it therefore follows that those staff with the greatest knowledge of mental health issues should always be present. We therefore urge the Governor to agree with the health commissioners that this should be a part of the mental health contract.

8 ACCOMMODATION (including communication)

General conditions

- 8.1 The Board remains concerned about the challenges of a Victorian prison with its failing infrastructure. Plans to replace the windows and upgrade the heating, which have been promised for years, now appear to have been abandoned. This means that sections of the prison will always suffer in very hot and very cold weather. Ill-fitting and broken windows are the norm.
- 8.2 Portable heaters and fans are available for certain cells, but this creates a sense of inequality amongst prisoners as they have no understanding of why some prisoners get fans or heaters and some do not. The problem is that the electric wiring does not have the capacity to support these facilities in each cell. This reflects the lack of investment in providing a decent environment.
- 8.3 The hot water system is barely sufficient for its needs and prisoners often complain of not enough hot water for showers, or, conversely, that the showers are producing only hot water. The boiler is likely to break down at any time.
- 8.4 The MQPL survey indicated that the majority of prisoners had concerns about the living conditions – 53 per cent reported that *'the quality of my living conditions is poor'*. Following this report, the Board devised a 'Back to Basics' survey which is regularly completed during rota visits to the wings, giving us an opportunity to engage with prisoners about their concerns regarding cleanliness, clothing, laundry, bedding, food, showers and safety. Key areas of concern were around the frequency of kit change, not enough blankets, small food portions and cockroaches.
- 8.5 Observation panels in the cell doors are continually being broken – we understand around 30 per week are repaired. They represent danger to staff as prisoners can spit and squirt liquid through them and the small pieces of glass around the edges are a danger to prisoners. The cost in time, money and risk is significant. We feel that there must be a better solution.
- 8.6 The collapse of Carillion made life very uncertain for the employees and the future of their contract with the Prison Service. The staff are excellent, but the procedure for processing the requests for work to be done is more complicated.

Cleanliness and hygiene

- 8.7 The struggle to keep the prison clean is being lost. Whilst at times the prison appears to be getting on top of it, at other times it is really quite dreadful and depressing, with litter strewn all around the outside areas. Time after time a new initiative is put in place, with

some success, but the prison very soon reverts to its previous state. Unless this can be addressed permanently (and we do acknowledge that it is difficult) it is going to be very hard to engender pride and respect within the prisoner - and staff - community.

- 8.8 Graffiti has started to appear in cells that have been recently redecorated and refurbished. This is not acceptable in places which are, to all intents and purposes, the prisoner's temporary home.
- 8.9 Some recent progress has been made with the redecoration of Healthcare, SSU and D-wing. The resident painter (a prisoner whose work is to be highly commended) will not be at Bedford for much longer and there needs to be some other process in place. The jet cleaning initiated by a previous governor has not been continued.
- 8.10 Bedford has an ongoing pigeon problem requiring some areas to be netted to prevent the birds flying in, nesting and excreting everywhere. The area at the back of B wing and the library is particularly unpleasant.
- 8.11 The IMB also receives regular reports of cockroaches and other vermin. Rats have been a particular problem in F wing where the wooden planters in the exercise yard have been demolished and prisoners report hearing the rodents moving around during the night. Rats and flies were also reported in the basement of the Visits Centre in a storeroom containing dress uniforms and other kit.

Housekeeping, kitchen and laundry

- 8.12 Basic housekeeping is not always routine. The stores do not hold sufficient stock and the ordering system is prone to periods of failure. Recently there was another shortage of toilet rolls and basic cleaning materials, which was rectified by an officer going out and purchasing directly from a local supermarket.
- 8.13 Washing machines and driers were out of action on some wings for several months and there was a delay in both maintenance and ordering replacements. This has now been rectified. There have been problems with replacement clothes and the issue of clean sheets and blankets.
- 8.14 There have been some difficulties in the kitchen leading to the resignation of the Manager after 22 years. Meals are so important in the prison that it is imperative that issues are resolved, and new staff vetted and cleared promptly. Potential kitchen helpers (prisoners) need to be speedily identified and cleared. Generally, meals are of a good standard, although recently there have been complaints about undercooked chicken.
- 8.15 The Board receives few applications about food, although the issue of the main meal being served later in the day is expressed from time to time. A questionnaire was circulated to prisoners in June. The results indicated a preference for an evening hot meal rather than the lunchtime hot meal which is currently being served. Special religious diets are well catered for.

Applications, communication and phones

- 8.16 To obtain almost anything in prison – from a job, a place in education, a healthcare visit to additional clothing or a blanket - prisoners must complete an Application. In our last report, we were critical of the myriad of unclear and confusing forms. We are pleased to note that the prison carried out a full review and introduced a much more succinct and focussed system that is a lot easier to use. However, prisoners still complain about Applications, being lost or extreme delays in reply.
- 8.17 Staffing in the Business Hub has changed, including the retirement of the Governor's well-respected secretary after more than 30 years. This has left some functions neglected for several months, leading, for example, to long delays in the provision of goods ordered through the catalogue system.

- 8.18 The prison went smoke free on 29th January. It is to the great credit of the team of 'smoke free' champions that it went so well. It was achieved without any great drama and serves as a good example of how a difficult project should be delivered.
- 8.19 The Board is pleased to note that the monthly prisoner forums (F wing and main wings) have continued. This is an opportunity for prisoners to air problems concerned with accommodation and the regime. These are minuted and attended by senior members of staff. Our observation is that they are working well.
- 8.20 Prisoners report that staff do not have time to just listen to their concerns and then act upon them. In the MQPL survey 82 per cent of prisoners said, '*to get something done you have to ask and ask*'. The prison has started to introduce the key worker scheme (now called Offender Management in Custody or OMiC) which is specifically designed to provide a structure for these meaningful interactions. We applaud the work of the team that has organised the training and implementation of the pilot and look forward to it being rolled out across the prison. We believe that it could make a real difference.

Property

- 8.21 Although prisoners' property is incredibly important to individuals, the systems surrounding it are complex and confusing. It remains the cause of the largest number of applications to the IMB. Most issues fall into the following categories:
- Property not transferred from a previous prison;
 - Property brought or sent in by relatives but not received; and
 - Property missing from cell.
- 8.22 The problems with property are not helped by the lack of a national focus on outcomes - none of the prison performance indicators assesses success and efficiency in managing prisoners' property. It can take weeks for property to catch up with a transferred prisoner, by which time he may have moved. In one case the IMB was chasing property from six prisons ago!
- 8.23 We are pleased that the Governor recognised the ineffectiveness of their practices regarding prisoner property management and the amount of time spent by staff trying to locate and recover missing items of clothing and property, from other institutions, on prisoners' behalf. The steady stream of compensation claims was also a motivating factor to improve procedures and practices. As a result, the prison carried out a full review of the management of property.
- 8.24 The final report, both thorough and revealing, was submitted in February 2018. Implementation initially was slow but recently we have seen significant progress including:
- The Property Room in Reception has been re-organised and is now operating more effectively - for example, the many black bags of prisoner property, which once covered much of the floor, have been sorted and allocated to the alphabetically arranged shelving system;
 - Volumetric boxes have replaced the insecure and ungainly black plastic bag system;
 - A new form has been introduced for tracking property once it has left Bedford; and
 - As a further system check for ensuring accountability, transparency and entitlement of property, cell clearance forms have been reinstated.
- 8.25 SERCO, the company responsible for prisoner transfers, is currently operating a three bag per prisoner policy during transportation. This frequently leads to surplus baggage being left behind for dispatch at some, unspecified, future date. This can then result in a

prisoner's sense of deprivation and frustration, waiting for many weeks or months even for his missing property to arrive. This is not satisfactory, and we would ask that HMPPS explores a better solution.

Transfers, foreign nationals and HDCs

- 8.26 It is the practice of the prison service, we are told for reasons of security, to transfer prisoners to other prisons with no notice. This means that prisoners cannot inform their families, express any preference or prepare effectively for transfer. This hardly seems decent and it is not unusual for prisoners to refuse to transfer, which can result in a physical altercation with staff.
- 8.27 We are pleased to note that at the time of writing this report, the prison has changed its policy so that some notice is being given to prisoners being transferred to a category C prison. This is a step forward.
- 8.28 The Board has received a number of applications from Category D prisoners who have been in HMP Bedford (a category B prison) for an unreasonable length of time. In one case, a Category D prisoner was there for three months, primarily because transport could not be arranged. Whilst we understand the complexities of prisoner allocation, it is not helpful for anyone for prisoners to be held in the wrong category jail.
- 8.29 An increasing number of applications to the IMB from foreign national prisoners has emerged as a recent trend. In general prisoners serve half their sentence (considering any remand time) and are then released on licence. The situation is more complicated for foreign nationals – they can be deported after a quarter of their sentence or kept in prison after the normal half sentence has been completed, if the Home Office has registered an interest in them. Prisoners struggle to understand the system and how to engage with it, particular if their grasp of English is limited. We think it would be helpful if a leaflet was produced, in the main languages, that explained to foreign nationals the system and contact points.
- 8.30 The new HMPPS guidelines have led to a big increase in the number of HDCs (home detention curfews, otherwise known as tagging) being issued. It is a more streamlined process. By May 2018 HMP Bedford had issued 25 HDCs, which is about double that for the whole of the previous year. In general, we welcome the use of these kinds of non-custodial alternatives, providing that the safety of the public and security is not compromised.

9 HEALTHCARE (including mental health)

Healthcare

- 9.1 The Healthcare services at HMP Bedford are currently provided by Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (NHFT) and comprise of a substance misuse service (IDTS), including psychosocial services subcontracted to Westminster Drug Project (WDP), mental health services, pharmacy services, in conjunction with Lloyds, and primary care services, including an In-Patient Unit (IPU).
- 9.2 Waiting times compare favourably with those expected in the community with, on average, a ten day wait to see a doctor and five weeks to see the dentist. More concerning is the number of DNAs (did not attend). Over the first 6 months of 2018 an average of 21 per cent of doctor's appointments were missed and 33 per cent of dental appointments. These figures would be considered unacceptably high in the community setting. The majority of missed appointments were because the prisoner declined.
- 9.3 The NHFT has scored well in user feedback. It is registered with 'iWantGreatCare' to monitor its patient satisfaction surveys. Prisoner responses, on average 20 per month, are sent to 'iWantGreatCare' to collate the data. Out of a possible maximum score of 5.00

HMP Bedford scored 4.68 in June 2018, an increase on the average 4.55 in the previous 6 months.

9.4 However, in the MQPL survey only 25 per cent of respondents agreed that 'wing staff take an interest in helping to sort out' their healthcare needs. There needs to be a greater understanding of why an (ostensibly) good service has such high rates of missed appointments and is not well valued by prisoners,

9.5 Prisoners with substance misuse issues coming into reception should ideally spend their first night on the dedicated D Wing which provides IDTS services. Here they can be observed at regular intervals by nursing staff. It is disappointing that this does not always happen because of lack of space.

Mental Health (MH)

9.6 In our view, the profile and level of provision of mental health services is inadequate. In last year's report we were critical of the mental health team's failure to attend ACCT and segregation reviews on a regular basis. This situation has not improved. In our view this remains a significant failure that needs to be addressed.

9.7 Apart from the value of their specific expertise in these reviews, we believe that a higher profile would help raise the general awareness of mental health issues within the prison. At present, few custody staff consider mental health issues when trying to understand prisoners' behaviour. Whilst not all staff can be expected to have the expertise of the mental health team members, an increased awareness of possible psychological and psychiatric explanations would help. This is particularly important at a time when the mental health team are not engaged in any in-house training on mental health for custody staff.

9.8 There has been one example of a therapeutic group initiative being delivered (on mood/anger control), which was led by the Clinical Psychologist and an Assistant Psychologist. This is very much to be welcomed and we believe that more groupwork would be an effective and efficient way of addressing some of the demand problems, particularly in relation to those with common mental health disorders. It also represents an opportunity to involve prisoners directly in the design and delivery of therapeutic interventions.

9.9 There has been no progress in the following areas, that we raised in last year's report:

- Prisoners reporting long delays in being seen by the mental health team members (and sometimes not being seen at all);
- No system for auditing the progress and outcomes of new referrals; and
- No check on the quality of assessments in reception, which are undertaken entirely by general healthcare staff.

9.10 The mental health team is not formally involved in the process of Induction on E-Wing. Given the known vulnerability of prisoners to serious self-harm incidents early in their sentence, we believe that these arrangements should be reviewed

9.11 We would also welcome a routine audit of prisoner satisfaction with the mental health service provided, as is currently carried out by the mainstream healthcare service. It is easy to forget that prisoners themselves are a great source of expertise when it comes to coping with some of the common problems of living in a custodial environment (for example, sleep difficulties, coping with thoughts of self-harm and resisting drug use).

9.12 The most important, and most numerous, resource within the prison to deal with mental health issues for prisoners are the officers. We have seen many good examples of officers interacting with prisoners in ways that are clear, honest, sympathetic and empathic. These interactions facilitate the formation of positive relationships and are

likely to be the most psychologically helpful. Indeed, they are the bedrock of a well-run prison.

10 EDUCATION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Courses and attendance

- 10.1 Recent surveys suggest that just under half of those entering the prison system have literacy skills no higher than those expected of an 11-year-old child. For many prisoners, education is associated with a sense of failure, rather than as a means of self-improvement, of increasing a sense of personal worth and of accessing rewarding employment opportunities. For these people, education holds no promise, no attraction and no enjoyment.
- 10.2 It is important, therefore, that the type of education offered helps to change that perception. However, the national contract with education suppliers focusses on standardised tests, which does not help provide the type of teaching that motivates prisoners.
- 10.3 The provision and range of short and medium-term opportunities regarding the creative arts and other more intrinsically appealing options remains unsatisfactory. With the exception of the computer-generated music course and the brief excursion into scriptwriting with a visiting theatre group, there are no other opportunities for prisoners to explore or to develop their creative awareness or to increase their sense of achievement through the exploration of the sensory skills.
- 10.4 Only around 15 per cent of prisoners choose to engage in education and book themselves on courses. Even then attendance rates, at an average of 70 per cent, are disappointing. But we do recognise that this is an improvement on the 50 per cent of a year ago.
- 10.5 F-wing education however, bucks this trend. The vulnerable prisoner wing has significantly higher levels of basic education, higher levels of engagement and much better attendance rates. It is also very conveniently located within the wing.

Basic skills

- 10.6 The basic skills test is a key initial assessment so that the prison can determine a prisoner's level of learning and the appropriate level of subsequent courses needed. Passing the test is an essential requirement before moving to employment in the prison or to appropriate education classes. However, attendance rates for these classes continue to be very poor. Many prisoners refuse to attend, and their names are then returned to the back of a waiting list, only to refuse to attend for a second and third time when their name once more appears. All the while, the waiting list grows in number with each new intake of prisoners.
- 10.7 The education department has frequently arranged additional classes in basic skills in order to combat the long waiting list, but the problems remain. In our view, this situation has arisen primarily because of breakdown of appropriate incentives (and, where necessary, sanctions) at wing level to ensure that those required to attend, do indeed arrive at their classes.
- 10.8 In June 2018, as a means of breaking the deadlock, the Governor suspended the once mandatory basic testing for all on entry, so that more prisoners might be employed and spend less time in their cells. Whilst we understand the reasons for this, we are concerned that prisoners are removing themselves from the possibility of any of the benefits that can be gained through targeted learning experiences and from achieving any of the educational advantages that result. It is a difficult balance to strike.

In-cell teaching

- 10.9 Outreach and support work in English and mathematics needs a fresh focus and more consistency. We understand that delivering this programme is linked to staff availability, which can be variable. There have been occasions, throughout the year, when behavior on the wings has been judged too unpredictable for outreach work to take place.
- 10.10 There is also a classroom in the healthcare wing, which offers a personal and social development course. This is especially needed with such vulnerable prisoners. It is well-attended, and we have been impressed by the quality of teaching.

Education initiatives

- 10.11 Despite the difficulties, the prison has put in place a number of initiatives to strengthen and vary education, learning and development opportunities. These are much to be welcomed. For example, the personal and social development course, with its modules on applying for a job, the qualities and qualifications needed in various employments and its introduction to counselling, is a successful course that has shown further improvements in achievements this year.
- 10.12 Similarly, the 'Introduction to Counselling', is a new course, begun in July 2017, that focusses on listening, speaking and education skills. This is relevant and purposeful learning and can accommodate six learners over four sessions. At present, numbers are low, although in double figures, but staff consider achievement to be high.
- 10.13 The education department also provides appropriate courses for non, or limited, English speakers who arrive at the prison and experience communication difficulties. Understandably, the numbers requiring this programme fluctuate throughout the year. When numbers quickly rise, there are often waiting lists for the course as its delivery is not something that can be supported effectively as part of the in-cell learning facility. In other aspects of in-cell learning support, the mentors organised by the Shannon Trust have been helpful
- 10.14 The Synergy Theatre Group visited in June to deliver a scriptwriting course. This went well, although numbers involved were low.
- 10.15 Reactiv8 is a good example of innovative and effective working. It is a 'course' run by a social enterprise company, which has been operating for the last three months in the prison and 49 prisoners have taken part. The theme is around motivation – to help prisoners have a different view of themselves and to develop confidence. The feedback from prisoners has been very positive, with noticeable changes in attitude.
- 10.16 In November 2017, a team of education specialists, including an Ofsted inspector, carried out a detailed health check on the education department. Their conclusion was that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good, but that leadership and management required improvement. This confirms our view that the team has the potential to deliver good education services.

Library

- 10.17 The Library is a valuable resource and an attractive learning environment. Whilst prisoners from the wings can and do visit the library on a rota basis to borrow books, education classes have been unable to make use of this well-maintained provision since it was moved from its original base, within the education department, to a more distant and less accessible location. This is regrettable, and, in our view, its location should be reviewed again in the light of this experience.
- 10.18 In recent months, education and library staff have tried to establish a part session each week so that education classes will be able to attend the library as part of a structured session rather than a 'free for all'. They have reached agreement on the times and days and are now waiting for a risk assessment to be completed that would accommodate the movement of learners in session. This is a welcome development.

Chaplaincy

- 10.19 We recognise how important the chaplaincy team is to the running of the prison. Not only do they attend to spiritual and religious needs, they are also a uniquely respected and trusted group. They give advice, guidance and comfort and are highly respected as an independent voice.
- 10.20 In addition, the chaplaincy team plays a strong role in supporting the equalities agenda, particularly in faith-based matters. The fact that the lead clergy is an Imam sets a hugely positive example. We warmly congratulate the team for their role in contributing to a positive atmosphere in both religious and secular matters.

Gym

- 10.21 The gymnasium continues to be a very popular facility. We see quite a different atmosphere here to the rest of the prison – there is a respectful and adult relationship between officers and prisoners and this is much to be welcomed. Unfortunately, whilst we said in our last report that opening hours had been extended to include the evenings and weekends, this is now no longer the case.
- 10.22 The staff are keen and willing to make the gym as widely available as possible and we would very much support them in this. In many ways, staff-prisoner interactions within the gym provide a model for good relationships that might be aimed for throughout the prison.
- 10.23 The Board would like to see greater use of the AstroTurf football pitch, which now appears abandoned, even as an alternative exercise yard.

11 WORK, VOCATIONAL TRAINING and EMPLOYMENT

- 11.1 Workshop activities can hardly be said to be purposeful and remain stultifyingly mundane. They usually consist of simple assembly tasks (for example, putting two elements of a badge together). Prisoners feel that this is inadequate with the MQPL survey showing that only 18 per cent believed that enough effort was being made to stop them offending on release, while 71 per cent believed that they were ‘doing time’, rather than ‘using time’.
- 11.2 The location of the main wing workshops means that prisoners have to be brought from each wing separately. This contributes to the very low level of attendance, which is normally less than a handful out of a capacity of 17. However, a good quality of work is produced in the F-wing workshop, which is directly off the wing, and has good numbers attending.
- 11.3 We are pleased to see that the painting and decorating training facility was reopened in June after a long period as a storage facility for riot gear. Whilst numbers are also low, due to the physical limitations of the space available, this is a well organised and oversubscribed course.
- 11.4 The popular and successful BICS (British Institute for Cleaning Services) course has had to be temporarily suspended, due to prolonged staff illness. It is not known when this sought-after course will be back on the curriculum. The Laundry course, which runs in the prison’s well-equipped main Laundry facility, continues as a well organised and managed option, albeit for very low numbers.
- 11.5 The CSCS course (a safety qualification for working on a construction site) is very popular and continues to be oversubscribed. Units of work are delivered in class and via a Mobile Testing Unit bus that parks in the prison on a regular basis. Pass rates are high and the CSCS card, which the course awards, is valid for three years and essential for those hoping to work on a building site on release. There was even an instance of a prisoner delaying his release in order to be able to take the test.

11.6 The other, highly valued, skills training available are:

- barista training is provided in the cafe that is part of the visits area; and
- the kitchen provides the opportunity to obtain food safety certification.

12 RESETTLEMENT PREPARATION

Pre-Release Board

12.1 At HMP Bedford, prisoners coming to the end of their sentence are looked after by the Pre-Release Board (also known as the Discharge Board) which is out-sourced to the St Giles Trust. They also take responsibility for, and complete, Part 2 of the Basic Custody Screening Tool (BCST) for each prisoner.

12.2 The Pre-Release Board takes place every Wednesday afternoon and is a very positive meeting. Prisoners are invited to attend 12 weeks before their release date, giving them time to engage with the process of release and to discuss their needs on leaving custody. The members of the Pre-Release Board work closely together to offer advice and assistance including:

- Accommodation/resettlement - in June, of the 53 prisoners released, 18 were classed as NFA (no fixed abode) although this is misleading as they could be 'sofa surfing' or living with family/friends;
- Employment - as Bedford is a local prison, there are some prisoners who, having served only short sentences, are returning to their former employment and for those who want to work there is help with both writing CVs and applying for jobs;
- Drug and alcohol support - the Pre-Release Board work towards ensuring that these prisoners receive help with both their problems and in securing those benefits that they are entitled to on release; and
- Money, debt advice and opening a bank account.

12.3 Despite this excellent and comprehensive approach, we do have a number of areas of concern. The work of the Board is not well integrated within the prison and there is a lack of reporting on key outcomes or operational metrics. In addition, no one from the core prison service attends the meetings.

12.4 It is important that prisoners attend the Pre-Release Board so that they can be prepared for when they leave. Very often attendance is low – at a recent meeting only three out of 13 attended. This means a wasted opportunity for the prisoner and wasted work for the board members. In our view it is a priority to address this.

12.5 The Board is not able to advise prisoners on travel warrants or monies that they will be paid on the day they leave. Reception hold this information. It would make sense for either a member of the Reception team to attend the Pre-Release Board each week to advise or, if that is not possible, an email to be sent to the Chair each week giving this information for each prisoner.

12.6 Often housing is not confirmed until the day before or even the day of release which, not surprisingly, can cause a great deal of anxiety for a prisoner who is concerned about whether or not they have somewhere to sleep that night on release. Alternatively, a prisoner is released earlier than expected and therefore does not have accommodation in place. There appears to be poor communication between the prison and the Pre-Release Board: for example, its members are not always informed when a prisoner is being released early.

12.7 Once a prisoner leaves custody, it is difficult to follow up whether they engage with the services that they are referred to and what happens to them, particularly if they are from out of area - therefore success rates, with regard to accommodation and employment are hard to track. It is disappointing that so little information exists about how prisoners get on when they leave jail. We recognise that this is a national problem, but it is difficult to understand how Governors are meant to evaluate the effectiveness of their jail when they get no information about how released prisoners leaving fare, once in the community.

Universal Credit (UC)

12.8 The IMB continues to have serious concerns about the processes around the introduction of Universal Credit. Under the current system, the Job Centre Plus staff come into the prison three times a week to arrange, with the prisoner, for an application for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) to be made before he leaves prison. The prisoner will then leave with the pre-release allowance of £46 and is meant to receive JSA within one to two weeks.

12.9 However, where a prisoner is released into a UC area (and Bedford is one), the Job Centre Plus can only make an appointment to see a UC advisor after release. Only then can the application process start, and the released prisoner apply on-line (for which he may have very little experience or skills) – payment of UC may then take a further eight weeks. This is scandalous and completely inefficient. We cannot see a reason why prisoners cannot be permitted to make the initial applications whilst inside.

MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels or Arrangements)

12.10 The purpose of MAPPA is to ensure that more comprehensive risk assessments are completed, thus taking advantage of the coordinated information-sharing across the agencies, and to direct the available resources to best protect the public from sexual or serious harm.

12.11 It is also the process through which the Police, Probation and Prison Service works together with other Agencies to manage the risk posed by violent and sexual offenders living in the community, in order to protect the public. MAPPA is not a statutory body in itself, it is a mechanism through which agencies can better discharge their statutory responsibilities and protect the public in a coordinated manner. The National Probation Service Team at HMP Bedford attend all MAPPA meetings either by telephone participation, or in person for more complex cases. As far as we are aware, MAPPA is working well in the Bedford area.

Sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection [IPPs] Cases.

12.12 Currently the team attends bi-monthly forums for our lifer and IPP Population. The team has regular events scheduled until the end of the year. In terms of IPP management, the Senior Probation Officer and an expert from psychology meet monthly to review our IPP population. They look at ways to support the Offender Supervisor and the individual to progress in their sentence and to establishments where they can work towards Parole recommendations and/or eventual release.

C – Work of Board

BOARD STATISTICS:

Recommended Complement of Board Members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the Establishment	325
Total number of segregation reviews attended	240

APPLICATIONS:

Code	Subject	This year	Last year
A	Accommodation including laundry, clothing, ablutions	9	4
B	Discipline including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	1	2
C	Equality	2	3
D	Purposeful Activity including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	8	2
E 1	Letters, visits, phones, public protection restrictions	11	9
E 2	Finance including pay, private monies, spends	3	5
F	Food and kitchens	5	1
G	Health including physical, mental, social care	11	36
H 1	Property within this establishment	20	17
H 2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	20	26
H 3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	9	3
I	Sentence management including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	19	18
J	Staff/prisoner concerns including bullying	31	15
K	Transfers	13	23
	Miscellaneous	4	10
	Total number of IMB applications	166	174