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A Sections 1 – 4: Context and summary

1 Statutory role of the Independent Monitoring Board

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 Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) 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 they have 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 resident and every part of the prison and also to the prison’s records.

2 Executive summary

Main judgements

One sentence assessment

Despite some entrenched problems, particularly around levels of violence and self-harm, there is a lot of evidence of emerging improvements, with a cleaner environment and better education arrangements, and these factors, together with a strong new management team, give optimism for the future.

How safe is the prison?

Violence remains unacceptably high with the prison being in the worst 25% of local prisons for both assaults on staff and the use of force to restrain residents. Levels of self-harm are amongst those of the top three jails in the country. A new violence reduction strategy has only recently been brought in and the system for analysing data around violent incidents is not effectively used.

However, there have also been positive achievements. The prison has introduced a number of security initiatives, which have been successful in reducing the supply of drugs. The number of positive random drug tests has been reduced significantly. There have also been improvements in the reception area and the process is generally well-managed.

How fairly and humanely are residents treated?

There have been significant improvements in the cleanliness and general conditions within the jail. Whilst there is still evidence of cockroaches, the rat problem seems to have been brought under control. The provision and exchange of clothing and bedding is much better.

Physical conditions in the segregation unit have improved since last year, but the plumbing is still unreliable, and the it remains a bleak, windowless environment.
The management of residents’ property has continued to improve, resulting in fewer complaints and a 90% reduction in compensation payments. The key worker scheme was slow to be implemented but is now beginning to work well.

However, there are consistent failings in the fairness of some of the prison’s processes and the importance of equality is not yet embedded. In addition, the process for transferring residents has, at times, bordered on the inhumane.

**How good is the care for the health and well-being of residents?**

Mainstream healthcare provides a reasonable standard of care that is comparable to that available in the general community. There are clear signs of improvement in the mental health provision, although there are significant problems still to be resolved.

There is good support for reducing the demand for drugs and for building recovery. The gym remains one of the mostly highly valued activities in the prison. Creative courses and workshops are beginning to play a bigger role in the life of the jail.

**How well are residents prepared for their release?**

This is a mixed picture. On the positive side, there have been clear improvements in education, with better attendance rates, a wider range of courses on offer and a more skilled and motivated workforce. Some impressive offender behaviour programmes are in place. The library has been moved (again) and in its new location it is more likely to be used.

However, there are also a number of areas where the prison is not doing so well. The visits hall is large and not particularly customer friendly and the enhanced family visits have not had a large take up. For most of the year, the decorating, cleaning and F-wing workshops were closed, and the laundry qualification is no longer available. Until recently there has been very little in the way of useful work or training.

The important pre-release board, which is intended to be a one-stop-shop for a smooth transition from prison to the community, has struggled to be effective because of poor attendance (and the timing being changed from one to two-weekly). Successful rehabilitation is also being hampered by a lack of options for accommodation on release and it is not uncommon for residents to leave without suitable accommodation having been arranged.

**Main areas for development**

**To the Minister**

i) There has been a reduction in the number of both local authority and hostel beds and it is now not uncommon for residents to be released with no accommodation which, not surprisingly, has resulted in a very speedy return to prison. This is a national problem and needs a clear funded strategy to address it (12.8-12.9).

**To the Prison Service**

i) The prison does not benefit from a body scanner, which is essential in detecting drugs, phones and other illegal substances entering the prison (5.23).

ii) There is no appeals system as part of the discrimination incident reporting form (DIRF) process (6.6-6.7).
iii) There does not appear to be any effective protocol for communications between prisons regarding lost property, or for recording and reporting performance in that regard (6.18-6.19).

iv) We think it would be appropriate for Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to ensure that residents who have learning disabilities, or have been placed on the autistic spectrum, are clearly recognised as having disabilities and that the appropriate detection, monitoring and support mechanisms are put in place (6.8-6.9).

To the Governor

i) The prison has few specific facilities and arrangements to reflect its additional young offender institution (YOI) status (3.12).

ii) There are chronic levels of sickness amongst staff with, at times, nearly a quarter of officers off sick (4.5).

iii) Levels of violence at HMP and YOI Bedford are consistently amongst the worst for local prisons and challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs) are not being used effectively (5.2-5.6).

iv) The number of self-harm incidents has shown a steady upward trend and the establishment is amongst the worst local prisons in the country for self-harm (5.10-5.12).

v) It would be helpful if further support were given to the drug reduction and recovery team through properly appointed rooms and an effective room booking system (5.25).

vi) The visits hall is not particularly user friendly and the air conditioning has been unreliable (5.31).

vii) There is still some way to go before the importance of equality is recognised by all prison staff (6.1).

viii) Better use could be made of the space outside the cells in the segregation unit (7.4).

ix) There have been significant failings in the application of procedural justice, particularly regarding complaints (8.12-8.14).

x) The process for the transfer of residents at times borders on the inhumane (8.15-8.16).

xi) Levels of attendance by the mental health team at segregation reviews is still inadequate (9.12).

xii) Fewer than 20% of referrals to the mental health team are accepted, which means that considerable amounts of valuable staff time are spent processing inappropriate referrals. We suggest that the referral process should be reviewed (9.16).

Improvements

i) The senior leadership has been refreshed and strengthened and new managers are in charge of the important areas of education, mental health and drug rehabilitation (4.1).

ii) Conditions in reception have been improved and redecorated to provide a more welcoming environment for new residents (5.8).
iii) The prison has introduced a number of measures to reduce the number of illicit substances coming in and positive mandatory drug tests show a significant reduction (5.20-5.23).

iv) The introduction of the key worker scheme has been effective, if a little slow (5.29-5.31).

v) The trend for complaints, in terms of numbers, is downward (6.17).

vi) Physical conditions in the support and separation unit (SSU) have improved since last year. Cockroaches are still present, but in fewer numbers, and the rats seem largely to have disappeared (7.1).

vii) The prison is much cleaner, and the wings seem better organised (8.2).

viii) There continued to be an improvement in the management of residents’ property resulting in a significant reduction in the amount of property-related compensation being paid (8.17-8.24).

ix) Waiting times for healthcare have come down and now compare reasonably with what might be expected in the community (9.2).

x) There are clear signs of improvement in the performance of the mental health team (9.11).

xi) The education service has improved over the last 12 months, with increased attendance rates and a wider range of courses (10.1).

xii) Over the spring bank holiday periods, the gym organised football tournaments, which were highly valued by the residents (10.23).

3 Description of the prison

Accommodation and facilities

3.1 HMP and YOI Bedford is a category B prison with an operational capacity of 487 (and certified normal accommodation of 310). As a busy local (and now resettlement) prison, HMP and YOI Bedford takes both sentenced and remanded residents, 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 residents (all in double cells built for one, with the exception of 34 cells furnished as single cells for high risk residents).
- B wing holds up to 76 residents, in double cells. Floors B2–B4 are above ground, whilst B1 is the SSU with six furnished and two unfurnished cells, a separate exercise yard, a shower and an 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 (residents who give up time to listen to the concerns of others) and a dedicated cell for a disabled resident. C4 remains part of normal location. Underground, C1 has three overflow cells for the SSU, a further five two-man cells currently used for vulnerable residents and, until recently, the library.
- E wing, with 41 beds, is the first night centre where new residents 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 resident unit.
- D wing was built in 1992 and houses a 95-resident 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, the visits hall, and the reception suite.
- In addition, the facilities include a visits centre, large multi-faith room and chaplaincy offices, a gymnasium, education suite, laundry, kitchens, teaching workshops, a maintenance area and an administration suite.

**Capacity during the report period**

3.5 In September 2018, one resident caused damage to the skylight and roof on C wing, which cost a six-figure sum to repair. As a result, C wing was closed for several months, and the operational capacity was reduced by 99.

3.6 The damage was repaired, and the wing suitable for reopening by February 2019. However, the prison took the decision that, following the report of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) and the issuing of an urgent notification, a focused training programme for staff needed to be carried out. In order to provide time to do this, the prison was not reopened fully following the completion of the repairs to C wing. Instead, C wing was opened, and B wing closed.

3.7 At the time of writing this report, B wing is still not in operation. The current operational capacity is 411.

**Residents and length of stay**

3.8 As a local prison, HMP Bedford serves the courts of Luton and St Albans. On occasion, residents are also brought from London courts. What this means is that HMP Bedford accommodates, predominantly, short-stay residents. 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% of residents stay for less than six months and the average stay is under 30 days. This has an impact on the opportunities to carry out effective interventions.

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

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

**Young offender institution**

3.11 The official title of the prison is HMP and YOI Bedford. This means that the prison takes people aged between 18 and 21, in addition to the adult over-21 population. Indeed, around a quarter of residents fall within that category. And younger people bring particular needs – for example, levels of violence are disproportionately high in the 18–21 group.

3.12 However, the prison does not have any specific facilities or arrangements to reflect its YOI status. There is, for example, no young adults’ strategy, nor is there an officer specifically responsible for this group of residents. It feels like the title of YOI has just been tagged on, with little associated resources or focus.
4 Other relevant background

Staffing and management

4.1 In January 2019, a new governor, PJ Butler, took over at the prison. He has brought vision, drive and a clarity of expectations. The senior leadership team has been refreshed and strengthened. In addition, there are new managers in charge of the important areas of education, mental health and drug rehabilitation.

4.2 We are starting to see a much more efficient organisation with things being done when promised. Unfortunately, this had previously not been the hallmark of HMP and YOI Bedford. There is a focus on active citizenship, which encourages residents to be an effective part of their community and to take responsibility for their actions.

4.3 Whilst the new leadership and focus bode well for the prison in the longer term, there are difficult staffing issues to work through. There is still a great deal of inexperience amongst officers, with over half having been in post for less than two years. A lot of effort is being put into training and increasing supervision by more experienced staff. ‘Jailcraft’ is something that is mostly learnt on the job and takes time.

4.4 A prison is a challenging environment in which to work and there have to be sufficient numbers to do the job. There also has to be consistency as, essentially, prisons are run on the relationships between officers and residents. Our impression is that most officers are extremely good, and we have great respect for their work. They are the key to a well-functioning prison.

4.5 However, there are chronic levels of sickness, with at times nearly a quarter of officers off sick. If this is added to training and leave it may be that half of officers are unavailable at any one time. To cover these shortages the prison often brings in staff from other prisons (known as detached duty staff). However, this militates against establishing positive relationships and delivering a consistent approach.

Terminology

4.6 During this report we use the term ‘resident’ rather than prisoner. This is consistent with the terminology used in the prison. Although the people in the establishment clearly are prisoners, they are also part of a community and their cell is their home for as long as they are there.

4.7 The term ‘resident’ is part of a culture that is trying to instil respect for the physical surroundings and reinforce the concept of ‘active citizenship’ that the governor has introduced. We support this approach.

Board membership

4.8 The IMB has benefited during the year from a diverse membership in terms of gender, age, nationality and race. In addition, no members have left, which means that we have gained experience and stability.

4.9 In the spring we had a successful recruitment campaign, with the result that three new members joined the board. This is very encouraging, and we can look forward to a strong IMB that will continue to effectively monitor the prison.

B Sections 5 – 12: Evidence sections

5 Safety
Violence

5.1 Levels of violence have been variable over the last six months and, although there have been some better months, it is unclear what the trend is.

![Number of assaults on staff per month](image)

5.2 From a national perspective HMP and YOI Bedford has consistently been in the worst 25% of the 30 local prisons for violence and on some occasions in the top three. It is clear that levels of violence remain unacceptably high.

5.3 The national programme for addressing and reducing violence is the CSIP system. While CSIPs are being used in the prison, their impact has been limited and their full potential is not being delivered. For example, one of the key elements of the plan is to collect and analyse the data around violent incidents so as to understand the causes and the likely perpetrators and victims. This is not being done consistently, so the opportunity to make effective interventions is being lost.

5.4 A new violence reduction strategy has only recently been adopted and it is too early to assess the impact. Its goals are to reduce the severity and frequency of violence, together with reduced fear and perception. Consulting residents is a key element – this is now a standard agenda item at the monthly residents’ forum.

5.5 The number of incidents where officers use force on residents has not decreased over the last six months and, indeed at 77 incidents, June was the worst month of the year. As with assaults on staff, the prison is amongst the worst male local prisons.

5.6 The IMB has attended the weekly meetings that review incidents where force has been used. These are looked at in detail using, where available, CCTV body-worn camera recordings. In our view, these reviews are carried out rigorously and fairly, although at times they are hampered by the reporting forms, which are meant to describe the reasons behind each incident, not having been completed at the time. This has been a persistent problem.

5.7 The reviews show that officers at Bedford often lack the experience as well as the confidence to deal effectively with a confrontational situation with residents. They may lack the ability to defuse a situation as well as to use language that is likely to incite or upset the resident further. This is less a criticism of officers and more a recognition of the time it takes to learn how to manage these challenging situations.

Reception

5.8 In recent months, the previously cramped conditions in reception have been refreshed to provide a more welcoming environment for new residents. It is clean and tidy with the provision of an additional waiting area with armchairs and plants. Residents are treated with care and humanity.

5.9 They are processed through the different interview rooms in a timely and efficient manner. All are provided with a hot meal and showers. In most cases residents are now located in the first night centre (E wing). However, we are still concerned that residents with addiction issues are not located on the appropriate D wing or in the healthcare
centre on their first night. Statistics show that while 67% were located appropriately in January 2019, this had dropped to 40% in June. Whilst all were moved to D wing or the healthcare centre within a few days, it is critical that these residents receive the treatment and observation they require from the first night.

**Self-harm**

5.10 The number of self-harm incidents shown an upward trend for the reporting year. Indeed, for figure for June 2019 is over three times that for July 2018.

5.11 In addition, levels of self-harm in HMP and YOI Bedford are amongst the worst in the country for category B local prisons, as shown in the graph below:

5.12 The main mechanism intended to support the prison in reducing acts of self-harm and suicide is the assessment care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) procedure. But, as we have seen, as it is currently applied in HMP and YOI Bedford, it is failing to reduce levels of self-harm. We believe that this is partly due to systemic weaknesses and partly because of failures of local implementation. We recognise that other factors are involved, but, nevertheless, the ACCT process is the only targeted tool available to the prison.

5.13 The way the system works is that if a resident demonstrates any likelihood of suicide or self-harm, he is ‘placed on an ACCT’. This results in staff meeting with the resident and collecting unique information concerning him in the form of a CAREMAP, which is based on identifying a number of individual self-harm risks. It should include actions to reduce that risk. Monitoring continues until both staff and prisoner agree that the risk of self-harm and suicide has been reduced to an acceptable level – the ACCT is then closed. It should be a very individualised process that develops an in-depth knowledge about what a person is thinking through careful interviewing. Some officers are very good at this; others are not.
5.14 However, from what we have seen, the current documentation does not make the recording of these personal stories easy. There is space for triggers and plans but nowhere is the assessor encouraged to put this information together in such a way that it tells a narrative about the individual. This means that the resulting CAREMAPs are not sufficiently individualised and do not contain clear reference to the residents’ existing personal coping strategies.

5.15 There are two basic reasons for self-harm. The first is extreme psychological distress, where self-harm is an expression of distress arising from loneliness, despair and isolation. The other is where an underlying need is not being met. These are very different scenarios and require very different responses. The first requires a clinical response; the second requires a more managerial response. However, in either case the prison is obliged to open an ACCT. Our observations are that the failure to distinguish between these two categories of incident means that attention is deflected away from clinical incidents by those that are essentially managerial in nature. We think it should be possible to distinguish between these two different pathways early on in the ACCT process and therefore to act more appropriately.

5.16 Whilst there has been training for officers in recognising the likelihood of self-harm (and potentially suicide) its impact appears, from the increasing numbers, to have been limited. Training sessions delivered jointly with the mental health team might be useful in facilitating a more individualised, ‘narrative’ approach. Perhaps residents themselves who have engaged in repeated acts of self-harm could be directly involved in the training of officers. The evidence from mainstream mental health services is that individuals with direct experience can make a unique contribution to the training of staff (and other sufferers), providing that the process is carefully managed. Having said all this, we have witnessed many excellent officers working really well with residents.

5.17 In summary, we are concerned about the high, and rising, levels of self-harm in the prison and have questions about whether the current support systems are adequate and effective, both in design and implementation. Clearly something is not working and there will need to change if this worrying trend is to be brought under control.

Drug supply, use and treatment

5.18 The prison has introduced a number of measures to reduce the amount of illicit substances coming in. These include:

- An on-going joint operation with Bedfordshire police.
- The introduction of a Rapiscan machine, which is able to detect almost any drugs that might come in by post or in clothing.
- The use of a specialised dedicated search team to find substances within the jail.
- Better use of intelligence, particularly around visits.

5.19 In addition, 30 new secure windows (to stop lines being thrown out) have been installed and another 70 are in the programme. However, this has been a slow process, given that the need has been recognised for well over two years now.

5.20 The result of this work has brought dividends, with a fall in the number of positive random mandatory drug testing (MDT) rates as shown in the graph below:
This is a considerable achievement and, if it can be sustained, Bedford will no longer rank among prisons with the highest level of drug usage in the country.

5.21 However, the prison does not benefit from a body scanner. This is the normal and expected level of security at airports and public buildings and it seems remarkable that it is not standard equipment in a prison. One common route in for drugs and other illicit items is through new residents – this can be particularly difficult to detect if the drugs are hidden internally. Anecdotally, there is evidence that individuals deliberately break their licence in order to get re-arrested and bring items in. A body scanner would go a long way to dealing with this problem.

5.22 The drug most commonly detected is cannabis, with new psychoactive substances (NPSs) being second. There is no doubt that NPSs have a significant impact on the jail – they are known as the ‘bird killer’ because they make time disappear. They can be brought in through a range of methods, including in soaked tealeaves and sprayed on paper and clothing. They attract high levels of profits for suppliers. This means that there is a market and so there will always be attempts to supply.

5.23 There has also been progress in work to reduce demand and build recovery. At any time around 70 to 80 residents are on a programme of opiate substitutes, of which around a third are on a reducing dosage.

5.24 This is strongly supported by the embedded staff of the Westminster Drug Project (WDP) who see residents on an individual basis to assess their need and see how they can be helped to reduce or stop drug use. They run targeted workshops and groups to encourage self-awareness and a change in lifestyle.

5.25 The demand for drugs tends to lead to debt, and that can turn to violence. We have illustrated earlier in the report that there are still high levels of violence in the prison. The work to reduce demand, and break that cycle, is therefore really important. However, there are still things that are getting in the way:

- The available rooms are poorly appointed and there is no proper booking or management system (at one stage groups were stopped for three weeks because residents were getting bitten by fleas in the furniture).
- Residents can be reluctant to attend NPS groups because it may be seen as an admission of usage and result in greater security attention.

5.26 In summary, the actions to disrupt supply do seem be having some success. Reducing demand and building recovery are the other key areas of the drug strategy. In this respect, it is important that the prison facilitates the work of the WDP and integrates the work of education, activities and the gym to provide useful and interesting alternatives that reduce the need to ‘kill time’.
Key workers

5.27 A national programme of key workers, also known as offender management in custody (OMiC), was introduced on 1 April 2019. The intention is that each resident has 45 minutes per week of dedicated one-to-one time with their key worker. This should enable some of the more complex issues, such as missing property, to be resolved (wing officers do not have the time to chase problems across various departments within the organisation).

5.28 The prison made a slow start to the introduction of the OMiC scheme, but the process has accelerated and, at the time of writing, 70% of residents have access to a key worker. We understand that one of the problems is that the schedule (known as the profile) has not been changed to provide the time for key worker activity. Reprofiling is due in the next few months and, hopefully, will resolve this issue.

5.29 Nonetheless, from what we have seen, the OMiC scheme has been effective, if somewhat limited. Officers seem well trained and able to listen to and understand residents’ concerns. In addition, there has been some reduction in the number of applications to the IMB, which may well be, at least in part, a result of the key worker scheme.

Deaths in custody

5.30 There were no deaths in custody during the 12 months covered by this report. An elderly resident, who had been unwell for some time, did unfortunately die in hospital, but this was of natural causes although, at the time of writing, the prison was awaiting the normal clinical review.

Visits

5.31 The visits hall is large and not particularly customer friendly. The air conditioning has been unreliable during the recent hot weather. The entrance corridor is cramped, and recent enhanced security allows only five visitor units through at a time, which sometimes leads to unacceptable delays. This also depends on the availability of enough staff to do the searching.

5.32 The fixed table and four chair arrangement is not ideal and the board would like to see a more relaxed layout, similar to what we saw during a visit to Norwich prison. Efforts are being made to make the whole area more accessible and less threatening by the removal of instructional posters. There is an attractive play area at one end, staffed by the Ormiston Trust. The café provides a selection of fast food snacks and drinks and gives residents the opportunity to be trained as baristas (if they stay long enough).

5.33 Visitors can experience confusion with bringing in property, as the rules do not appear to be clear. It must be so frustrating for visitors who bring in property for residents in good faith but are then denied permission to hand it in, causing frustration for the resident as well.

5.34 The enhanced and family visits have not had a big take-up as many residents have been denied them by security. This is disappointing for both residents and the staff of the Ormiston Trust who provide an excellent and caring service.

6 Equality and fairness

Diversity and equality within the prison

6.1 We reported last year that there was still some way to go before the importance of equality was embedded within all prison staff. Unfortunately, despite some progress, the situation has not changed significantly.
6.2 The equality action team meets once a month, but over the last 12 months it has been chaired by a number of different people. It has lacked continuity, consistency and commitment from many of those involved – this is reflected in problems with attendance whereby, on one occasion just two or three people had arrived, and the chair was forced to ring around to request attendance from staff from the missing functions.

6.3 As a result, some actions have been left outstanding for months. In some cases, new personnel taking over do not realise that they have inherited an action (which they may or may not understand) and on other occasions, the reasons for an action have been lost over time.

6.4 We do recognise that the Governor has made a concerted effort to try and raise the profile and emphasise the importance of equality and more recently attendance has improved. Of particular benefit has been the inclusion of wing equality representatives (residents), a move we very much applaud.

6.5 A more systematic approach to managing equality has been introduced. For example, recommendations from the Lammy Review into the treatment of minorities in the criminal justice system have been placed into an electronic action plan, with staff expected to update the action plan on a monthly basis. We wait to see what impact this will have.

6.6 If a resident feels that he has been discriminated against, he can submit a discrimination incident report form (DIRF). However, the process at Bedford has not been well-managed. There are a number of outstanding DIRFs dating back several months despite being chased. There are constant reminders to staff about their responsibilities, with the Governor making it clear that failure to complete is ‘wholly unacceptable’.

6.7 The IMB has been asked to quality assess a random number of DIRF replies and so far, it appears that the responses have in general been fair and balanced, albeit tardy. One of the responses did give cause for concern in terms of its quality and clarity. We were surprised to learn that, unlike a normal complaint, there was no facility for an appeal. This is a basic failing, which appears to stem from the national DIRF system.

6.8 Disabilities within the prison are usually seen in terms of sensory or motor problems; those arising from mental health problems (including learning disabilities and people who are on the autistic spectrum) receive scant attention. These problems go largely unnoticed and unaddressed (even though the effects may contribute significantly to management issues).

6.9 This is a national, not just a local, problem and requires HMPPS to revise its guidance on screening new entrants and to ensure that education staff and mental health teams are properly resourced with the relevant expertise to assist staff in the management of people with these kinds of disabilities. We hope to see this happening in the future.

Equality and faith

6.10 The largest faith group at the prison is Roman Catholic at around 23%, with 20% declaring themselves and 12% other Christians. The number have not religious affiliation is 23%.

6.11 At present, HMP and YOI Bedford does not have a Buddhist chaplain. In addition, it appears that the Roman Catholic diocese is not able to provide a priest to take Catholic mass over the weekend, so instead it takes place on a Monday at 2pm, which is during the normal association time. This means that residents have to choose between worship and activities such as calling home or washing clothes. As a result, attendance at Roman Catholic services is low – recently only one resident attended.

6.12 Muslim worship takes place at 1.30pm on a Friday, which avoids this conflict. The IMB understands that if the prison could arrange for Roman Catholic services to be brought forward by 30 minutes, the problem would largely be resolved. We would urge the
prison to try and accommodate this in its reprofiling exercise, which will review the allocation of activities, staff and time through each working day.

**Equality, adjudication and segregation**

6.13 Judging from the prison’s information, the likelihood of a resident being subject to an adjudication (essentially, an assessment of an allegation of breaking prison rules) has a strong correlation with the age of the resident. The table below illustrates for the period January to March 2019:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>% of adjudications</th>
<th>% of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.14 In terms of religion and ethnicity, the number of adjudications broadly follows the profile of the prison population, although there is a disproportionate number of black British Caribbeans (21%) with this group being just 5% of the prison population.

6.15 The number of residents who are segregated is also broadly in line with the profile of residents – 65% were white British (compared with 56% of the prison population), which is the largest group by far. The percentage of black residents segregated was 15% of all segregations compared with 12% of the prison population.

6.16 Overall, our general observations are that the adjudications are conducted fairly. However, the prison should investigate why there is a disproportionately high number of black British Caribbean residents involved.

**Complaints**

6.17 The trend for the number of complaints over the last six months is downwards, as shown on the graph below. Taken at face value, this is a positive sign that the management of the establishment is improving. It may also be a reflection of the impact of the key worker scheme.

![Number of complaints January – June 2019](image)

6.18 One of the problems that bedevils the system is poor communication between prisons. When a resident is moved to another prison, there can be residual issues, particularly around property, which he then has to raise with the officers at his new location. They will contact the previous prison, but it is not uncommon for there simply to be no response, even after chasing.

6.19 There does not appear any effective inter-prison communication protocol in place regarding lost property. Nor is there any recording or reporting of performance (for example, the time taken to reply property enquiries). This is another example of where a perceived lack of procedural justice can lead to frustration and, potentially, violence.

7 **Segregation and separation unit**
7.1 Physical conditions in the SSU have improved since last year. Cockroaches are still present, but in fewer numbers, and the rats seem largely to have disappeared. Nevertheless, the plumbing is unreliable, and it remains a bleak, windowless environment. We understand that plans are being made to relocate it, but so far nothing has happened. Staff remain some of the best in the prison and we congratulate them for their patience, skill and hard work.

7.2 We visit the SSU almost every week to speak to each resident about their current conditions and the way in which they perceive they are being treated. Most are reasonably satisfied, although, as indicated above, there are still fairly frequent complaints about the poor state of the physical environment.

7.3 Residents also often complain about property that has not caught up with them following movement from the main wings, lack of PIN numbers for phones, and lack of access to religious services. They also often spontaneously praise the officers for their patience and concern.

7.4 We remain concerned about the amount of time residents spend alone in their cells with little to do (usually 23 hours a day). Most experts recognise that this kind of social isolation and inactivity can be damaging to a resident’s mental health and make them more difficult to manage rather than making them more amenable. More thought should therefore be given as to how the residents in the SSU can access meaningful activities (gym, books, education and religious services) while they are there. For example, could the space outside the cells be made a study area, with books and reading material? Could the librarian make a regular visit and talk to prisoners about their reading interests?

7.5 We have attended most of the GOOD (Good Order or Discipline) and ‘own interest’ reviews and found that generally they have been well conducted by the chairing governor. However, because that person can change from week to week, there has been a lack of consistency, which affects the efficient implementation of decisions. It is not uncommon for weeks to pass with the same issues being discussed and the same actions identified, but without any follow-up. Given the plight of these residents, we do not think this is acceptable and it is an area we would like to see improved.

7.6 Attendance by healthcare staff has been good, but members of the mental health team have attended less than 50% of reviews. They also often appear ill-prepared and cannot contribute much to the discussion. However, we recognise that the engagement of the mental health team has improved over the years.

7.7 In summary, despite the common complaints, we think that most residents feel they are reasonably well treated in the SSU. We see few examples where the resident seems to have been actively harmed by their time in segregation and we have seen several examples where positive solutions have been found to their management within the prison. However, we are still concerned that some of the residents’ mental health issues are not clearly identified and they are not offered an appropriate range of treatments.

8 Accommodation

General conditions

8.1 The Board remains concerned about the challenges of a Victorian prison with a failing infrastructure. HMIP noted that conditions were very poor, often overcrowded and vermin infested. Indeed, conditions were particularly unpleasant during the hot summer months of 2018. Wooden planters in the F wing exercise yard had to be removed to get rid of the rats. Residents regularly complain about cockroaches in the older parts of the prison. We are pleased that pest control workers are now visiting on a more regular basis and this does seem to be having an effect – rats are now rarely evident.
8.2 The new governor has made cleanliness a priority over the last six months and we can certainly see improvements, partially as a result of daily decency checks by senior leaders. The place is clearly cleaner, and the wings feel better organised. We hope that the recent establishment of a 'clean and decent' group will embed this approach. However, unless staff are committed to a clean and tidy environment and set a standard, the prison will continue to struggle to maintain the status quo. There is an underlying culture of not taking responsibility on the larger wings.

8.3 We are also pleased to note that curtains have been installed in C wing cells as have privacy screens for the toilet area on all wings.

8.4 Despite these improvements, there are still issues to be resolved. Bedford has an ongoing pigeon problem still requiring some areas to be netted. The area at the back of B and C wings is still particularly unpleasant, and the visitors' centre access via a ramp has been unsafe for use by buggies and wheelchairs due to slippery surfaces and foliage. The IMB still receives some reports of cockroaches.

8.5 The operation of the showers has been unpredictable throughout the period on all wings. This item comes up regularly at the residents’ forum meetings with reports of water being either too hot or too cold and a lack of reliable temperature control. Likewise, the cleanliness of showers is an issue dependent on the resident cleaner and cockroaches have been reported on E wing. We are, however, pleased to note that the showers on B and D wings have been refurbished.

8.6 The Board is also pleased to note that the monthly residents’ forums (on F wing and the other main wings) have developed under the new governor and are now attended by senior members of staff as well as residents representing each wing. This is an opportunity for residents to raise problems concerning accommodation and the regime. These are discussed and minuted and feedback is given on each action. Residents are encouraged to be active citizens and contribute towards the ongoing maintenance and running of the wings for the mutual benefit of all.

**Housekeeping and food**

8.7 Basic housekeeping is not always routine and recently there was another shortage of toilet rolls and basic cleaning materials. The stores do not hold sufficient stock.

8.8 Washing machines and driers have been out of action on some wings for several months and there was a delay in both maintenance and ordering replacements. There have been problems with both kit exchange and the issue of clean towels, sheets and blankets.

8.9 Laundry (other than personal laundry) is no longer done at Bedford but outsourced to, initially, HMP Aylesbury and now HMP Bullyingdon. It is disappointing that the laundry qualification provided by the laundry manager is no longer available.

8.10 There have been ongoing issues in the kitchen with a number of changes in the responsible senior manager throughout the reporting period, which has resulted in a lack of consistency in approach. Meals are so important in the prison that it is imperative that issues are resolved, new staff vetted and cleared promptly and that potential kitchen helpers are speedily identified and cleared.

8.11 Generally, meals are of a good standard and plentiful, and special diets are well catered for. Special menus were introduced to celebrate the Chinese New Year and Diwali. Maybe the serving of the teatime baguettes could be more imaginative with a range of fillings on offer for residents to make their own choices (as we saw at a visit to HMP Norwich). There have been reports of F wing meals being tampered with, food being stolen from serveries and pre-ordered meals being unavailable. 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.

**Procedural justice**
8.12 Procedural justice is a term that encompasses the fairness and reliability of the systems and processes that support the resident within the prison system. Our impression is that the complaints system does not work well and, as a result, there is a perceived lack of procedural justice on the part of many residents. This is reflected in the number of applications to the IMB for unresolved complaints. For example, there have been several occasions when a resident’s phone PIN, which should be available in the first few days so that he can ring home, has not been provided for over two weeks.

8.13 Administrative support in the form of residents’ pay, canteen orders, phone numbers and catalogue orders seems unacceptably stretched at times. The whole operation is cumbersome and depends on officers and administration working together.

8.14 It is hard to over-stress how important this is and how frustrating and dispiriting it is when it goes wrong. One resident said: ‘We have to obey the prison rules, but they don’t follow their own rules. That’s not fair’. That sense of injustice can really fester when there is little else to do and can end up with a resident doing something stupid, like going on the netting, in order to get attention. It can be a factor in both self-harm and serious incidents. Good, clear and consistent procedural justice would go a long way to having a calm and ordered establishment. This has not yet been achieved.

**Transfers**

8.15 Whilst we understand the importance of security issues, the transfer process at times borders on the inhumane. Residents are generally given no notice and so are unable to prepare themselves and their family or properly gather their belongings.

8.16 The IMB witnessed an example of this when, during a residents’ forum, an officer came in to tell a wing representative that he was going to be transferred and had to get his property immediately. The resident had no prior knowledge and indeed had family visiting in the afternoon. They would turn up, having spent time and money to get there, only to find the person they had come to see had been moved to another jail. Although that particular incident was resolved by the Governor, this approach to transfers is really not a fair or reasonable way to treat people.

**Property**

8.17 Although residents’ property is incredibly important to individuals, the systems surrounding it are complex and confusing. Most issues fall into the following categories:

- Property not transferred from a previous prison.
- Property brought or sent in by relatives but not received.
- Property missing from the cell.

8.18 In its autumn report, HMIP concluded that ‘the management and storage of residents’ property had recently been poor but was starting to improve’. This concurred with our findings last year, which showed progress in an area that was in real need of improvement.

8.19 This gradual improvement was largely due to the hard work and determination of the custodial manager appointed to oversee the workings of reception, which included property management. In addition to the general physical improvements to reception, for example re-painting and a new waiting area, a welcome booklet for new residents has been introduced. The following specific improvements mean that residents’ property is more effectively managed:

- Unclaimed clothing is being washed and stored as spare kit available to residents on leaving.
- All stored property is now contained within numbered volumetric boxes. This has resulted in a much tidier and more orderly property store and an easier retrieval system. Box numbers are recorded on respective property cards.

- The cabinets containing property cards, previously standing in reception, have now been moved, out of sight, to a locked secure area nearby.

8.20 Cell clearance forms are now in regular use, which together with improvements in property management, has resulted in compensation claims falling from £1840 in November 2018 to £140 in June 2019. This is a significant achievement, which not only saves the prison money, but also means that residents do not spend so much time trying to find their missing property.

8.21 The prison transport contractor SERCO continues with its ‘three bags per resident’ policy. This often results in missing items and can lead to long delays for those waiting to be reunited with their missing property. There are occasions when property eventually arrives at the original destination when the resident, by then, has been moved on to another prison.

8.22 There was a prolonged period of delay in the transfer of some property earlier in the year, due to a misunderstanding over the payment of an invoice to the carriers TNT. This resulted in considerable delays in property transfers, much frustration and stockpiling of parcels. It was eventually resolved, and normal service was resumed. Steps have been taken by the accounts department to ensure that this does not happen again.

8.23 It has long been the practice that all valuables, handed over for safekeeping by new arrivals, are transferred within 24 hours to the cashier, who locks them away in the safe. Only recently a small number of problems have arisen when valuables, duly signed out for legitimate reasons, have failed to be signed back in again with the cashier. ‘Missing’ items have all subsequently turned up, but the cashier has taken steps to ensure that all established procedures are now followed by all.

8.24 In our report last year, we reported a reduction in property applications needing IMB intervention. While property still represents the largest single category of complaints to the IMB, there has been a further reduction in numbers – from last year’s total of 40 applications to 25 this year. We hope that this downward trend may continue. It suggests that the measures taken to improve property management over the past year are now having a greater impact and that earlier intervention by wing staff is now being more consistently and effectively practised.

9 Healthcare and mental health

Healthcare

9.1 The healthcare services at HMP and YOI Bedford are currently provided by Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHFT) and are comprised of a substance misuse service, including psychosocial services subcontracted to WDP, mental health provision, pharmacy services, in conjunction with Lloyds Pharmacy, and primary care provision, including an inpatient unit. Overall, the service provides a good standard of care comparable to that available in the general community.

9.2 Waiting times have mostly been better than in the previous reporting year and compare favourably with what might be expected in the community. Whilst the waiting time for mental health assessment at eight days does not meet the target of five days, it is down from the 10-day wait in May 2019.

9.3 Missed appointments for the doctor are on average 14% from September 2018 to June 2019 and, for the dentist, 15%. The most common reason for missed appointments is that the resident declined – 21% in the case of medical and 14% in the case of dental appointments.
9.4 Residents with substance misuse issues should be located on D wing (which is connected to the healthcare unit) on their first night. The wing provides the specialist services required by residents with substance misuse issues. Access to these services and supervision by staff trained to deal with their particular needs is crucial from the first night. However, in the past year, success in achieving this has not improved. In four of the six months between January and June 2019, only 40% to 44% were appropriately located. This can lead to distress and self-harm.

9.5 NHFT is registered with iWantGreatCare, a platform for patient ratings and reviews, to monitor its patient satisfaction surveys. Resident responses, on average 20 per month, are sent to iWantGreatCare to collate data. Out of a possible score of five, HMP and YOI Bedford scored an average of 4.63 between September 2018 and June 2019. This is on a par with the scores for the last reporting year and represents a good level of satisfaction.

9.6 The healthcare unit is in a more modern part of the jail, built in 1992. The physical conditions of the unit are adequate for their purpose.

**Gabapentin and pregabalin withdrawal programme**

9.7 Since the classification of gabapentin and pregabalin as controlled drugs in April 2019, a considerable amount of planning has been involved in setting up the assisted withdrawal programme to get residents off these drugs. Staff and residents have been fully involved in the setting up of the programme.

9.8 An excellent information postcard has been produced, involving the education department with graphics by residents. There are also posters in various locations with further information. Letters have been sent to the doctors of residents on these drugs requesting that they do not issue repeat prescriptions to relatives (there had been occasions where they were sold to other residents). On release, letters are sent to the doctor informing them of a reduction or withdrawal.

9.9 There are 12 residents on pregabalin and nine on gabapentin. The programme started in June 2019. Plans are drawn up on a case-by-case basis. There have been some instances of aggression as result of withdrawal, but so far, they have been manageable. This programme has been well thought out and involves all stakeholders.

9.10 This change of designation for some quite commonly used drugs had the potential to be difficult and disruptive. We feel that the transition was well-managed by the healthcare team.

**Mental health**

9.11 There are clear signs of improvement in the performance of the mental health team. Significant problems remain to be resolved regarding waiting times and prioritisation of attendance at SSU reviews, but it is now almost fully staffed and seems to be going in the right direction.

9.12 The frequency of attendance at segregation reviews has doubled from last year, although at less than 50% it is still, in our view, inadequate. As we understand it, the reason for this is a combination of a shortage of resources and a reluctance to prioritise attendance over other activities. We believe that this is mistaken and urge the mental health team to discuss with the governor where they might most profitably concentrate their time.

9.13 The team has a good record of attendance at ACCT reviews (more than 90%) and its contribution has been commended by the regional review team. This is excellent news. Staff also now attend the safer custody meetings on a regular basis.

9.14 We commented in our last report on the lack of group-based activities for mental health support in the prison. This year the team has been running a regular ‘emotion management’ group, set up specifically to address the needs of residents at HMP and YOI.
Bedford. It is short (six weeks) and looks at ways to manage anxiety, low mood and frustration (anger). It also includes advice on activity scheduling, managing self-harm, and finding positive ways of coping on the wings. The team has also been running a group with WDP (the drug rehabilitation support team) on mental health and substance misuse. These are very welcome developments and we believe that groups of a similar nature should be a permanent feature of the mental health service in the future.

9.15 There is also now a systematic process for monitoring outcomes, which did not exist before. The target time from referral to being seen is five days, but the data indicate this is seldom achieved (usually around eight to 12 days). Residents often report long delays in being seen.

9.16 A contributing factor may well be the volume of referrals coming from reception, often between 100 and 150 in a week. Each referral takes over an hour to process but usually less than 20% are accepted by the mental health team. Given the pressures on staff time, it seems that streamlining the process would deliver a number of benefits.

9.17 There is no routine audit of resident satisfaction with the service provided by the mental health team (as is routinely undertaken in healthcare). Although there is some use of the iWantGreatCare paperwork, this is not systematic. In our view, a better way of seeking consumer satisfaction should be established. In addition, there is still no involvement of residents, who have their own experience of mental health issues, in teaching and supporting other residents and staff. This kind of process has become increasingly important in mainstream mental health services, for example, there are now numerous ‘recovery colleges,’ which offer jointly developed and delivered short courses on living with different kinds of mental health problems. There is the potential for the prison to become a leader in this new field.

9.18 There is still little direct training of officers on mental health issues by the team. Sessions have been offered but take-up has been poor. This is a lost opportunity and contributes to the relatively low profile of the mental health team and the lack of integration within the establishment.

9.19 There have been no deaths in custody this year, which is welcome. The mental health team feels that it has made a contribution to this outcome. On the other hand, the overall number of self-harm incidents has increased and remains stubbornly high.

9.20 Subjectively, our impression is that negative comments about the work of the mental health team still predominate over positive ones. The lack of systematic satisfaction data means that it is difficult to obtain a more accurate picture of how the contribution of the team is regarded by residents and staff within the prison.

10 Education and other activities

Education

10.1 The education service in the prison has improved over the last 12 months. These are the key facts:

- Attendance rates have increased from 49% in April 2018 to 69% in June 2019.
- The number of residents accessing education has increased from 79 in September 2018 to 118 in July 2019 (and this is with a reduced prison population).
- There are a wider range of courses on offer and a more skilled and motivated workforce.

10.2 However, the year did not start well. In its inspection report of September 2018, HMIP judged all aspects of education provision, including achievement, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development and leadership to be inadequate.
Progress since the last inspection in 2016 had been inadequate. The report concluded with 10 recommendations, which reflected many of the concerns the IMB had reported last year, with poor attendance being a major and recurring anxiety.

10.3 A huge amount of effort has been put in to address the problems identified by the inspection, including obtaining support from education specialists, visiting other establishments, getting better student feedback, providing weekly in-service training sessions and improving diagnostic tools.

10.4 Both the governor and deputy have worked very hard with all relevant staff to move the resulting action plans forward at pace and to bring about the change in culture needed to achieve the improvements. They have continually made it clear to all managers and staff that they are determined to drive up standards and to improve poor attendance levels. In meeting after meeting, they have maintained their sense of urgency and determination to succeed.

10.5 Additionally, there has been a regular programme of lesson observations and helpful feedback over the past months conducted by external visiting educationalists. Health checks by independent inspectors were carried out in March and June 2019. A new head of education is in place and the service has been rebranded HMP Bedford College. This latter point may seem trivial, but it is all part of the message that learning in the prison is not the same as school, which, for a lot of residents, was not a happy experience.

10.6 The external health checks identified a range of improvements in systems, quality assurance processes, self-assessment, data analysis and the planning of lessons. They found lessons to be more inspiring. These are important building blocks in providing a good quality service.

10.7 There is also much better integration with the first night wing. The purpose of the college and programmes of study are promoted as part of the learning and skills induction for newly arrived residents. Led by the governor, the prison, working in tandem with the learning and skills team, is now actively promoting positive citizenship. In addition, an independent careers guidance provider has now started to offer impartial careers guidance to residents as part of the induction programme.

10.8 Education and activity events have twice been organised during June and July. Teaching staff and external providers of advice and services have been on hand with brochures and handouts to help residents from all wings to understand the wide range of courses and avenues of assistance that are available to them. As a result of the June event, 70 residents registered expressions of interest in education courses, as well as 30 for the industrial cleaning course and a further 15 for the recycling course. These events have, for the first time, provided marketing, promotion and information about all the options that are available.

10.9 We have made the point in previous reports that there should be a greater emphasis on creative arts, and so it is very pleasing to report that a full-time art specialist has recently been appointed. It is too early to see any outcome from this, but we understand that there will be a new course in art and design, providing a creative outlet for those residents who remain disenchanted with the core curriculum as a result of their earlier experiences of school. Art offers great scope for cross-curricular links with mathematics, English, history and geography, IT and multi-cultural themes. More than many other subjects, it can lead to a sense of awe and wonder as part of the learning experience, a rare and precious commodity in the prison community.

10.10 The identification of new prisoners with learning disabilities or those on the autistic spectrum is poor. Similarly, training for education staff and officers regarding how best to manage such individuals is lacking. We hope to see these issues addressed in the future.
Other activities

10.11 Following the success of last year’s short visit by the Synergy Group, the company was booked for a three-week stay earlier this year. Its workshops – developing creative writing and performance skills – attracted nearly 20 residents. They proved very popular and were a very welcome exploration of creative and imaginative skills for those participating. We hope that it becomes a regular and valuable feature of the college’s emerging creative curriculum.

10.12 For the first time, the prison organised a victim awareness programme exploring the principles of restorative justice. This was a six-week programme led by the Sycamore Tree Project; 10 residents participated. Learners explored the effects of crime on victims, offenders and the community and discussed what it would mean to take responsibility for their actions. One of the most powerful sessions was when a victim of crime gave personal testimony of how the murder of her son had had an impact on her life and that of her family. At the final session, learners presented artefacts, which expressed their remorse in the form of drawings, poetry or letters to their victims. The outcomes for this group were impressive and we would hope that this would become a regular course offered to residents.

Library

10.13 This year has been particularly difficult for the library. For most of the time it was in a poor location that was separate from the main wings, which added to the practical difficulties of escorting residents. When C wing was closed in November 2018, for some six months, the main access route was closed, and most residents were unable to use the library. As a result, library staff were forced to provide a wing-based service with bags of books, which was unsatisfactory for all concerned.

10.14 The library has now returned to its former location in the education department. It has moved twice in the last three years, only to get back to where it started. Whilst the Board is delighted to see the library back in its original home, it deplores the cost, inconvenience and sheer physical effort involved in all the moves.

10.15 However, the staff are to be congratulated on their positivity, stamina and forbearance. A highlight of the year was a visit by Carl Portman (author) who came in and talked about ‘chess behind bars’. The library manager is determined to make a success of the new location and increase footfall, ensuring accessibility for all. An outreach service is provided as an alternative in some circumstances. Since the library reopened in its new location on 11 June, 159 residents have signed up.

10.16 We hope there will now be a period of stability and this excellent facility, which has been so underused, will be able to deliver to its full potential.

Faith

10.17 The closure of C wing for six months meant that the multi-faith room was inaccessible, so temporary arrangements were made for services and Muslim prayers to be held in the gym. It is to the credit of the staff that all services took place as normal. The Board continues to be impressed by the dedication of the chaplaincy team (both paid staff and volunteers) which embraces many faiths and works together to provide spiritual direction and support for the residents.

10.18 Outside funding has been sought to support counselling provided by 10 counsellors working with 42 residents, who are referred by the safer custody and mental health teams. In addition, The Place (a local theatre) provided 10 workshops for young offenders. The chaplain (an imam) is anxious to involve the community in the life of Bedford prison, as well as taking the prison out into the community – for example, there is currently an exhibition at the Bunyan Museum entitled Gaol; banged up in Bedford, which describes prison life from Bunyan up to the 21st century.
Currently, seven prison visitors visit those who do not have close friends or family in the Bedford area. They are particularly thanked for befriending an elderly resident prior to his death from natural causes.

Gym

Attendance at the gym remains one of the most highly valued activities within the prison. Gym staff are always friendly and welcoming and invariably have an interesting perspective on morale in the prison (officers and residents). They provide a unique setting, which seems to be valued not simply because of the nature of the activities, but also because of the attitudes of staff.

Residents consistently comment that in the gym they feel treated much more like ordinary human beings rather than simply residents. We believe that this unique atmosphere could be better studied and understood to see if any of the key ingredients could be transplanted to other settings.

Over the last year, sessions for enhanced residents have been offered over the weekend. They have been well attended and we would very much welcome further extensions (for other groups, or at other times). This might have resource implications, but current evidence would suggest that it could play a significant part in reducing overall levels of tension within the prison.

Over the summer bank holiday periods, the gym organised football tournaments, which were highly valued by the residents. This is the first time, certainly in recent years, that this has happened, and they contributed to the bank holidays being trouble-free. (This is often a time of tension because the normal diversions, such as education, are not available.)

The impact on residents’ quality of life is evident from casual conversations with them. They clearly highly value gym sessions and, if circumstances restrict gym time for any reason, they are quick to complain.

11 Work, vocational training and employment

It has been a mixed year for these activities, which are supposed to run from Monday to Thursday each week delivering a range of modular courses. Allocated residents from two of the main wings should attend morning classes, whilst those from the other two wings attend in the afternoon. F wing has its own dedicated workshop catering for people convicted of sexual offences and vulnerable residents. However, many of the potential activity areas were closed for much of the year.

A long-standing facility, the British Institute for Cleaning (BIC) workshop, was closed for several months last year due to staffing health difficulties. During this long break, the prison’s member of BIC lapsed. This was eventually reinstated and staffing issues were resolved. The course began again in March 2019. It remains a popular and successful course and can accommodate six residents for each half-day session.

The painting and decorating course closed last October because of staffing problems. After several attempts, a suitable new appointment was made, and the course recommenced in June this year. It offers training to eight residents each day.

The F wing workshop had to close at Christmas and did not re-open until May. When available, it maintains the highest attendance rates, although activities continue to be mundane and offer little challenge or variety. A new product, assembling components for drinks optics, is shortly to be introduced. When required, flat pack furniture such as desks and lockers, for use in the prison, are also assembled in this workshop.
11.5 The laundry course closed as the laundry is now being run by HMP Aylesbury. It was replaced by a clothing exchange store, which employed around six residents, but that option is no longer being offered.

11.6 The construction skills certification scheme (CSCS) course continues to operate and remains popular and successful. It is an accredited course recognised by the building and construction trade. It is now delivered within the college and accommodates 12 residents each day.

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

- barista training – provided in the café that is part of the visits area and
- the kitchen – which provides residents with the opportunity to obtain food safety certification

11.8 As set out above, there have been problems in the provision over much of the last 12 months. Even when training facilities were available, attendance was poor. However, we have recently seen a new impetus, most facilities are now open, and attendance has improved – in July it was 83%. We are pleased to see that some new courses and ideas have recently been put in place:

- An accredited course in sports and leisure activities began in June, which operates on five days each week and is very attractive to residents.
- The long-heralded course in independent learning skills, offering domestic self-survival skills to those about to be released, commenced in July 2019.
- An employment passport has been introduced into prison workshops so progress can be recognised and recorded.

11.9 We are at last beginning to see some improvement in the provision of training activities, which has been really pretty poor over the last few years. But for this to be sustained, the problems of single person dependency, which has resulted in the closure of a number of facilities, needs to be resolved.

11.10 The importance of providing a good range of meaningful activities cannot be overemphasised in terms of its potential impact on prison life (for example, reducing violence, contributing to reducing demand for drugs, improving self-confidence and self-esteem for residents and giving meaning and purpose to their lives). We therefore particularly welcome these positive changes and would support the governor wholeheartedly in his commitment to create a more varied and engaging regime.

12 Resettlement preparation

Pre-release board

12.1 The pre-release board (PRB) is an essential part of the release process whereby residents should leave prison with appropriate support in place, such as housing, money (including help with debt and court fines), employment, drug and alcohol management, healthcare and help from local mental health teams. It is intended to be a one-stop-shop to try and ensure a smooth transition from prison back to the community.

12.2 The board is run by the community rehabilitation company ‘Through the Gate’ and comprises representatives from a number of organisations, who provide the relevant services, for example: Nacro (housing and finance support), St Giles Trust (basic custody screening tool), the Kings Arms Project (homelessness) and WDP (drugs). The services have not worked well for most of the reporting period.

12.3 The PRB was run weekly but, in order to facilitate additional training for staff, this was changed to once every two weeks. As a result, an increasing number of residents was discussed at each meeting. This meant that there was less time available for each
resident to raise their concerns or worries and to pick up on any matters that had not been addressed or missed.

12.4 But attendance by residents has often been poor, for example:

- 1 August 2018 – due to attend: 13 – attended: two.

12.5 A key reason for this low attendance is that there seems to be little emphasis on the importance of pre-release preparation by the prison. This is reflected by the fact that often officers are not made available by the wings (although they have been notified in advance) to escort residents to the PRB.

12.6 Despite these problems, we would commend the work of staff from St Giles Trust, supported by individuals from Nacro, WDP and the Kings Arms Project for their commitment to providing help to residents to prepare for release. However, it often seems that they are operating in isolation, while other agencies, such as those working on employment, education, health care and mental health, have effectively stopped attending the PRB (or never attended).

12.7 But things now look to be improving. In the last few months there has been a concerted effort, led by the new Governor, to address the problems described above and to increase the profile and importance of good pre-release planning. Weekly PRBs have been reintroduced. In addition, there are plans for a ‘departure lounge’ where residents will be encouraged to access help before being discharged, to ensure that they have money and accommodation for a fresh start.

12.8 Probably the biggest problem facing the prison in terms of pre-release planning is finding suitable accommodation. There has been a reduction in the number of both local authority and hostel beds and it is now not uncommon for residents to be released with no accommodation. Unsurprisingly, this has often resulted in a very speedy return to prison. This is a national problem.

12.9 Without a fixed address, released prisoners cannot begin the often-lengthy business of applying for benefits and cannot register with a GP. It is thus a recipe for disaster and devastating for not only the resident concerned, but also for all those who have had a stake in trying to help them succeed. We believe that this is a key area of national policy that needs to be addressed if prisoners are going to stand a reasonable chance of not re-offending on release.

12.10 We would repeat what we have said in previous reports regarding the need for the whole release process, and agencies providing services, to be much better integrated into the mainstream operation of the prison. This means regular reporting and a recognition of the importance of pre-release planning. That clearly was not the case when the PRB was moved to a two-weekly cycle. In addition, we would hope that joint working with Bedford Borough Council will do something to address the accommodation issues in the future.

Reactiv8

12.11 Reactiv8 provides a workshop-based programme that helps residents understand their potential and set goals for the future. We attended two workshops and found them both motivational and inspirational. An extract from a rap written by an attendee goes a long way to illustrate the impact:

- See, positive thinking is a wonderful thing
- Health and wealth is only a few of the joys it could bring
- I could have no arms and no legs but I could sing
- Surrounding yourself with success is the only way you can win
That's the secret, manifesting your own creations
Too long I've been held up at a negative station
Time to recondition my brain for reactivation
And put pen to pad I'm filling out an application

Let myself believe, grow like its cultivation
Set a goal and think positive for the whole duration
Apply myself to desired occupation
And aim for the stars like an astronomical constellation

**Offender management**

12.12 The offender management team is now fully staffed with five prison offender managers (POMs) and three probation officers. Case allocation is completed daily and every sentenced resident at HMP and YOI Bedford is allocated an offender supervisor. The POMs now conduct weekly surgeries for each wing, which is a great improvement. In addition, where there is an assessed need, residents who are not sentenced are afforded access to offender supervision.

12.13 Targeted training and consistent quality and assurance checking of all administrative processes have improved outcomes particularly in relation to home detention curfew (HDCs) releases.
C The work of the Independent Monitoring Board

Board statistics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommended complement of Board members</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of visits to the establishment</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of segregation reviews attended</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPLICATIONS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>This year</th>
<th>Last year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Accommodation including laundry, clothing, ablutions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Discipline including adjudications, incentives and earned privileges, sanctions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E 1</td>
<td>Letters, visits, phones, public protection restrictions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E 2</td>
<td>Finance, including pay, private monies, spends</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Food and kitchens</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Health, including physical, mental, social care</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H 1</td>
<td>Property within this establishment</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H 2</td>
<td>Property during transfer or in another establishment or location</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H 3</td>
<td>Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Sentence management including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Staff/resident concerns, including bullying</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Transfers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total number of IMB applications</strong></td>
<td><strong>182</strong></td>
<td><strong>166</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, 26 applications were submitted by one resident in the space of three months, primarily about accommodation.