



Annual report
of the
Independent Monitoring Board
at

HMP/YOI Stoke Heath

for the reporting year
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Monitoring fairness and respect for people in custody

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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 prisoner and every part of the prison and to the prison's records.

2 Executive summary

Main judgements

Are prisoners treated fairly and humanely?

Yes.

Are prisoners prepared well for their release?

The reduction in vocational qualifications significantly impacts upon the range, depth and quality of the rehabilitation provision.

Main areas for development

To the Minister

The Minister is aware of the Board's view of the vital role the achievement of vocational qualifications has in helping prisoners turn their lives around.

The Board took the extreme step of writing directly to him with their concerns about the unwelcome reduction in vocational qualifications at Stoke Heath. Whilst he gave us assurances around activity, the Board believes that vocational qualifications are a positive, effective way to increase prisoners' employability back in the community.

To the Prison Service

The Board continues to have major concerns about the lack of accountability for prisoners' property when it is being transferred between establishments.

The Board has repeatedly raised issues about aspects of the maintenance contract and is deeply disappointed that long-standing issues are not being resolved.

To the Governor

The Board wishes to acknowledge the Governor and his team for an encouraging unannounced inspection carried out by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons on 12–22 November 2018.

The Board is very supportive of the positive and clear communication that is in place regarding the use of body-worn cameras. However, in order for them to be effective the number in use needs to be increased.

The Governor should continue to work to reduce the concerns around prisoners' property on arrival and within the establishment.

To the provider maintenance

Healthcare: The Board feels that, overall, it welcomes the new integrated healthcare service and looks forward to improved staff satisfaction, staff retention and service development.

Maintenance: The Board continues to be extremely concerned about aspects of the maintenance service provided. (Section 7.)

3. Description of establishment

HMP/YOI Stoke Heath, located near Market Drayton, Shropshire, is a closed category C male establishment holding on eight wings both sentenced young adults (aged 18 to 21) and adults aged 21 and over and those on remand from both categories. There is also a small category D house outside the gates (the old prison officers' mess). All wings are now smoke free, and some wings have changed function: all of F wing is for drug rehabilitation and G wing is split between induction and a seniors' quiet wing. The prison's main role is the resettlement of prisoners from the Midlands, and the establishment currently houses 766 category C and young adult prisoners and 16 category D prisoners. The prison population is mainly from the Midlands (66%). Prisoners are also from the North West (14%), Wales (6%), Yorkshire (3%), London (3%) and other areas (8%).

4. Safety

Reception

Most prisoners who arrive at Stoke Heath are transferred from other prisons, so they are familiar with prison routines; but if remanded they are asked if this is the first time in custody and treated accordingly.

On arrival, prisoners are seen in private by healthcare staff, who assess their mental and physical health together with any substance misuse issues. Prisoners are searched thoroughly, and their religious and cultural needs considered.

Reception orderlies are part of the induction process, supporting prisoners and passing on important information, which helps speed up the process.

During the last reporting year, the number of mobile phones detected by 'the pole' equipment in reception is 49, a drop from 65 in the previous year. This is still of concern and, as mentioned in previous reports, the sending prisons have not followed search procedures. This can increase the risk of escape whilst being transferred. Prisoners with mobile phones are moved to the segregation unit and downgraded to the basic level of the incentives scheme.

Prisoners are allowed a free phone call on arrival. The phone has recently been moved to a position where it is possible to have a less public conversation. Reception and waiting areas are clean. The aim is for prisoners to spend as little time as possible in reception and this is usually the case.

Safety

There were no deaths in custody during the reporting period.

Self-harm and suicide prevention: The number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents for prisoners at risk of suicide or self-harm opened was 427, while 413 were closed (June 2018 – May 2019). A weekly meeting considers prisoners on an ACCT or challenge support and intervention plan (CSIP - a violence reduction tool). Appropriate risk assessment tools are used.

There is a good quality assurance system in place to make sure levels of self-harm are not as a result of poor case management. 99% of operational staff have now been trained in the new ACCT processes, as have 94% of non-operational employees and 75% of band 2 staff.

Professionals' case reviews: This is a meeting with multiple agencies in attendance to ensure that on release vulnerable prisoners have everything in place (housing, benefits and medication) to enable them to cope on their release. There have been four this reporting year.

A key worker scheme has been rolled out. Each prisoner has a key worker, whose role it is to spend quality time and have more in-depth conversations with the six prisoners allotted to them, to guide, encourage, coach and support them. Details are then entered on P-Nomis. This scheme is in its infancy and, going forward, the IMB will report on its effectiveness.

Bullying: The prison has an active tackling bullying behaviour strategy – perpetrators are moved from wing to wing or cell to cell and searched frequently in order to disrupt their

behaviour. Other sanctions such as reduced canteen are available. Victims of bullying are supported – they are monitored for at least eight weeks.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) observed in the report of the inspection in November 2018:

'Use of force, however, had increased and was high. Supervision of use of force had improved but we still believed more needed to be done to ensure that there was comprehensive governance and accountability in place.'

The Board has noted these comments and work has commenced to examine more thoroughly category J (staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying) applications and any other complaints received. The Board recognises the emphasis that is placed on staff training, including refreshers, and welcomes the opportunity to observe recent training sessions.

Body-worn cameras: The increasing requirement by the Governor for staff to draw, wear and use body-worn cameras is appropriate. The system is up and running and familiarisation talks are ongoing with staff. Posters and signs are around the prison to inform prisoners that body-worn cameras are being used. A compliance visit on 16 March 2019 found that they were being used appropriately. An average of 33 cameras are deployed daily. When they are docked, the information is automatically downloaded and they are recharged; the information is available for 91 days unless put onto a memory stick.

Training starts in July on the use of PAVA spray (an incapacitant). The IMB is to be informed when this goes operational.

There are currently six Listeners (prisoners who support fellow prisoners) at Stoke Heath; recruitment and training is ongoing for eight new identified Listeners. The Listeners are available on a 24-hour rota and prisoners can ask to see a Listener in private. Listeners are trained by the Samaritans – there are also Samaritan phones available.

Security

Improved staffing levels now allow security staff to carry out more searching and other operations.

The Rapiscan body-scanner has been re-deployed to HMP Nottingham, which is one of the previous Prisons Minister's 10 priority prisons; however, there is a request for this to be returned. The prison continues to copy all mail, excluding R39 (legal documents), as this is an effective way of reducing paper items impregnated with NPS. R39s are monitored for any abuse and national guidelines are followed. If there is any doubt, the solicitor's firm is contacted.

We recommend that the Email a Prisoner scheme, which is in place at Stoke Heath and other prisons, be expanded to reduce the availability of paper NPS.

The security department has a good working relationship with the police and other agencies and appropriate risk-based strategies are regularly reviewed.

5. Equality and fairness

All discrimination incident reporting forms, complaints and security incident reports are logged for potential investigation. Compared to this point in 2018, the prison has seen a 2.5% decrease in reports. This figure is an encouraging one.

Due to prisoner turn-around, the prison is currently struggling to replace prisoner representatives who have recently departed and is investigating the suggestion that there is a change in format of the wing representatives.

6. Segregation/care and separation unit

The Board is told of newly arrived prisoners and advised of review dates. IMB members can speak freely with all prisoners in the unit at any time.

The staffing levels are adequate; on adjudication days extra staff are brought in.

A safety algorithm is completed and, if not deemed suitable for segregation, the prisoner is returned to a more suitable location. Two safety algorithms were reported as not suitable this year.

Rule 45 (good order or discipline) reviews have been held within the specified time limit and are attended by a governor, healthcare staff, an IMB member and others as appropriate. The nurse is always asked if there are any medical concerns relating to the prisoner.

Prisoners generally attend their review, although a small number refuse to do so. If they do not attend, they are advised of the outcome. The prisoner is always introduced to those present, asked if he knows the reason for his location in the segregation unit and the purpose of the review. He is given an opportunity to speak and a reintegration plan is discussed if he is returning to the wing.

The conditions in the segregation unit are decent and clean sheets and clothing are issued; exercise and showers are offered daily and a small library is available. The duty governor visits all prisoners daily. Healthcare staff visit daily, plus prisoners can ask to see the doctor. Chaplaincy staff also visit daily; religious observances are catered for and respected. Prisoners are often returned to the normal location within the day.

A portable phone-detecting pole is available.

Several prisoners have been kept in the segregation unit for more than a month; this is because they have refused to go back to the normal location despite the efforts of staff and governors to persuade them to return. This is usually because of debt issues and fear of reprisals or intimidation against them or their family. Under these exceptional circumstances, a transfer may be arranged, although it is not normal policy to transfer from segregation. Additionally, there are some prisoners with mental health problems or personality disorders who may be kept in the segregation unit until transfer to the appropriate hospital bed.

There was no use of the special cell or restraints. There has been a small number of dirty protests and prison officers have been trained to deal with bio-hazard.

7. Accommodation (including communication)

Further improvements to reception and visits have been implemented during the year. The former laundry has been converted to provide additional tailoring workplaces. The transfer of the drug and substance rehabilitation unit to the larger wing, reported last year, has proved beneficial. One of the two large gymnasiums is currently being refurbished. The general observation of the Board has been that the fabric of the prison is reasonably maintained. There are specific areas that need attention, such as the floor in the main kitchen; however, a major temporary relocation to effect repair is in the planning stage, now funding has been secured. Nevertheless, as we delve beneath the surface, concerns expressed in previous reports regarding contractual arrangements persist.

In the residential buildings, wings and kitchen, 15 maintenance requests remain outstanding from 2018 and before – nine of them go as far back as July 2016. These include: damage to a fuse box, flooring on a large wing, water softening to remove the need to descale toilets, provision of cells suitable for disabled occupants and refurbishment of staff areas.

The descaling of toilets is worthy of further explanation. This is a basic decency issue and significantly influenced by the water supply. The contractor Amey has declined to take on the work of descaling, despite it being covered by the contract, as they do not have the resources available. The residential governor is having to resort to releasing staff from normal duties to undertake the labour-intensive task. There are over 600 toilets in the prison. The provision of water softening equipment for the incoming supply may seem a low priority, but the benefits in terms of long-term cost reduction and basic decency are clear.

A further contractual matter concerns two of the six industrial dual gas and electric ovens in the main kitchen. They were reported as faulty in November 2018. A repair to isolate the electric heating on one oven, so leaving it usable on gas, resulted in a gas leak, which necessitated complete isolation. The ovens are under warranty; however, an impasse has been reached between Amey and the supplier as to responsibility. To date the ovens are still out of use.

The relationship with Amey extends beyond works and maintenance – it provides the stores service. General stores work well; however, the management of laundry, bedding and towels is via Amey, with HMP Stafford undertaking the work. Regular complaints are received from prisoners and staff that insufficient towels and sheets are available: again a basic decency matter. A wing may send, say, 50 towels to the laundry, but only receive 30 in return or there may be damage or a poor standard of washing. The issue seems to be with the stores' management process at Stoke Heath but, unfortunately, repeated representations have yielded no significant change.

These contractual matters distract the governors and staff from the task of rehabilitation and are beyond their direct control, having to work through a contract manager. No doubt greater persistence could yield some movement, but it is clear to the Board that the root of the problem is a poor contract with insufficient leverage available to the local team. Giving governors greater autonomy is a good sound bite, but failing to provide the means to exercise that freedom is contradictory and verging on the disingenuous. This is a matter that needs to be addressed further by the prison governor and perhaps by the Prison Service nationally.

Property

The trend in applications received by the Board about property issues arising at or on transfer from other establishments has continued, whilst overall applications have increased marginally. Property complaints now form 24% of the applications dealt with by the Board, up from 20% last year. Property complaints about Stoke Heath have also risen and there is some evidence that the property received is not processed as smoothly as it could be. This has been raised with the Governor. At a recent prisoner consultation meeting, the matter was raised by wing representatives. Our report last year stated:

'The evidence the Board has seen indicates that the management of property by prisons sending men to Stoke Heath is patchy at best and in some cases almost non-existent. Cell clearance procedures do not seem to be used, men claim they are rushed into signing off property cards on the pretext of waiting transport, property does not follow on when promised and when complaints are sent, they often need several iterations to yield a result. The Board unashamedly advises men who feel aggrieved to claim financial compensation and if necessary, take their case to the Ombudsman. The financial cost of such poor procedural compliance should be of concern, not to mention the moral responsibility to safeguard the property in the care of the system. If the prison service gives an example of indifference to property what message does that send to those whom they are trying to rehabilitate?'

The comments are equally valid this year.

8. Healthcare (including mental health and social care)

A new integrated healthcare contract became active on 1 April 2019 and, whereas previously services were provided under three single contractors, the prime provider model means that all services will be delivered by one provider or through a sub-contracted/partnership arrangement, accountable to the prime provider. Primary, secondary and substance misuse staff are now one team and accommodated together.

Health and well-being champions (HAWCs – prisoners recruited and trained by Healthcare) are progressing exceptionally well with their integration into many elements of both prison and healthcare services. Currently, there are 11 active HAWCs and a patient/service user forum has commenced with the HAWCs co-ordinator and primary care nursing sister leading it.

Weekly multidisciplinary meetings are held every Thursday and HAWCs are allocated time within the meeting to discuss patients/concerns with the team. The team is made up of primary and secondary mental health staff, including a consultant psychiatrist, psychological and clinical substance misuse workers (services being provided for 100 patients), a learning disabilities nurse and the HAWC co-ordinator. Feedback from all parties is very positive.

A dedicated green/amber/red care plan function has been activated, together with dry blood spot testing and vaccination at first contact.

A new dental contract, extra sessions and the introduction of a dental hygienist have assisted in the reduction of dental waiting times and dental emergencies are dealt with within 48 hours.

The doctor previously employed by Stoke Heath has left and currently locum GPs are utilised. This has proved to be a very positive experience; however, from 1 September 2019, a new GP practice from North Staffordshire has been contracted to provide resilient quality services. Additionally, a new psychiatrist is due to start at the end of August 2019.

Escort services and bed watches continue to create a cost pressure – in an attempt to alleviate this, Airdale NHS Trust has been approached to cost a telemedicine service.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) visited the prison last November and one of the issues raised was the need to address and improve safeguarding awareness and reporting. Healthcare staff and HMP Stoke Heath are working together in partnership with Shropshire local authorities to address these issues. In addition, the CQC recommended that the number of emergency bags be increased throughout the prison. Whereas there was one full bag throughout the whole establishment previously, there are now 10, including one in the segregation unit. They were funded by NHS England.

Complaints are resolved well with no noticeable themes, other than complaints regarding the pain management pathway and tradeable medications.

Difficulties are still being experienced with the recruitment of band 5 nurses in primary care, but the healthcare department is actively engaging with the nurse associate training programme and offering two existing healthcare assistants the two-year training programme – this should lead both to improved staff satisfaction, staff retention and service development.

Overall, the new integrated healthcare service is growing and provides safe, decent quality care. Significant progress is underway and HAWCs are influencing the service provision and its delivery across the establishment.

9. Education and other purposeful activity

NOVUS has managed Stoke Heath's education department since April 2011, delivering a wide range of educational services for the prison population. It was successful in tendering for the new contract, which started on 1 April 2019. This was welcomed by the Board as it allowed for continuity of service. Stoke Heath has an excellent reputation for training and educating prisoners. However, in March 2019, £600,000 – a third of the existing budget for vocational education – was withdrawn under the new national distribution formula.

Stoke Heath is classed as a training prison, but its ability to train prisoners effectively to ensure they have the skills and qualifications needed for employment (bricklaying, painting and decorating and motor vehicle and rail track maintenance etc.) to reduce reoffending is in serious doubt.

The Board felt so strongly about this that an exchange of letters took place with the Minister of State for Justice.

10. Work, vocational training and employment

Inspectors identified that a major weakness of the prison was the number of prisoners who were inactive and locked up during the working day. They further commented that the range and variety of work on offer were reasonable and, in education, English and mathematics were correctly prioritised. For those who attended education and vocational training, good coaching and teaching were available and, in general, quality improvement measures undertaken by the prison and providers were effective.

The Board therefore found it particularly distressing and perplexing to discover that on 1 April 2019 the new educational funding regime impacted so significantly on the good work identified by HMIP. The vocational courses being cut out entirely are woodworking, car maintenance, bricklaying, rail track maintenance, painting and decorating and professional cookery. Qualifications no longer being offered in the following work activities: kitchen, horticulture, manufacturing industries.

The prison management has in place a strong action plan to try to minimise the impact of the funding issues. However, the Board has strong concerns regarding the effect on prisoners' well-being and reoffending rates due to the lack of vocational qualifications on offer.

The Board will continue to monitor the situation.

11. Resettlement preparation

Around 90 prisoners a month are released from Stoke Heath. Some have very short stays at the prison (less than three months to serve) and it has been challenging for resettlement workers to process all the release arrangements. The offender management unit (OMU) has high caseloads, about 70 prisoners each. Prisoners often complain that they have had to wait a long time to see their OMU officer.

The prison delivers two accredited offending behaviour programmes: the thinking skills programme (TSP), addressing prisoners' thinking and behaviour, and Resolve, an intervention for violent offenders. An additional programme New Me Strengths (NMS), suitable for prisoners with learning difficulties and challenges, started in January 2019. The combined annual target for programme completions was 34 prisoners. In January 2019, over 100 prisoners were on waiting lists for Resolve, TSP and NMS.

More prisoners are spending a large part of their day in cells rather than doing any kind of purposeful activity. HMIP inspectors found that 33% of prisoners were locked behind doors, compared to 7% in 2015. The recommendation is that prisoners should have 10 hours a day out of their cells.

In November 2018, 75% of prisoners had the full-time equivalent of purposeful activity, including education, training and employment. Workshop facilities were adequate, catering for a range of vocational skills. There were high achievement rates for most of the education and vocational qualifications. One immediate effect of the funding cuts is that unemployment within the prison has increased by 9%, so that 35% of prisoners do not have purposeful activity and will spend longer behind locked doors, contrary to recommendations from HMIP inspectors.

Whilst many vocational classes are being discontinued, places for basic education in maths and English are at a premium. Most potential employers require level 2, but 50% of prisoners arriving at Stoke Heath are assessed as below national vocational qualification level 1. They include prisoners coming to Stoke Heath towards the end of their sentence and taking up valuable places because other establishments have failed to provide sufficient education. There is a risk that fewer prisoners will find meaningful employment upon release.

Along with other category C prisons, employment outcomes for prisoners upon release are very low. The baseline figure (target) for the prison is 12% employment for 2018 – 2019, rising to 17% for 2019 – 2020. The Board is pleased that ACORN will start a careers service for prisoners for 2019 – 2020.

St Giles Trust has responsibility for the delivery of resettlement services. This includes a housing specialist working with prisoners to resolve accommodation issues. Eighty-eight prisoners (9% of those released) had no fixed abode (NFA) in 2018 – 2019, twice that in the previous year. From January to March 2019, there has been a worrying trend of much higher numbers released with NFA. Some local authorities like Stoke-on-Trent are particularly challenging, as accommodation is in very short supply. The new home detention curfew (HDC) policy and the continued strain on resources in local authorities have not helped. There is an urgent need for more supported accommodation in some areas of the Midlands.

Prison unemployment has increased to a third of the population, meaning longer hours in cells, less time in purposeful activity and less chance of earning a wage to supplement goods within the prison.

12 Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	17
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	12
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11
Total number of visits to the establishment	408
Total number of segregation reviews attended	127

13 Applications to the Independent Monitoring Board

Code	Subject	Current reporting year	Previous reporting year
A	Accommodation including laundry, clothing, ablutions	13	7
B	Discipline including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	8	10
C	Equality	7	5
D	Purposeful activity including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	4	13
E 1	Letters, visits, phones, public protection restrictions	14	15
E 2	Finance including pay, private monies, spends	22	14
F	Food and kitchens	4	5
G	Health including physical, mental, social care	64	58
H 1	Property within this establishment	27	17
H 2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	102	80
H 3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	3	24
I	Sentence management including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	47	36
J	Staff/prisoner concerns including bullying	57	56
K	Transfers	22	28
L	Miscellaneous	27	42
	Total number of IMB applications	421	410