



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

**HMP Ashfield**

for reporting Year  
1 July 2018 – 30 June 2019

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*Monitoring fairness and respect for people in custody*

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### 1 STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

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The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent Board, appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison or centre is situated.

The Board is specifically charged to:

- (1) satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison, and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- (2) inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom he has delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- (3) report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison, and also to the prison's records.

## 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report presents the findings of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) at HMP Ashfield for the period 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019. Visits have been made to the prison by the members of the Board on a regular basis (at least two visits each week), in order that they might monitor the accommodation and facilities, observe the full range of activities, talk informally to prisoners and staff, attend meetings, review relevant documentation, examine relevant data and both investigate and respond to prisoners' concerns and complaints. As this report is designed to be a short summary only, there is no requirement to mention in detail all aspects of the prison's work, and the focus is on those areas where standards are particularly high or where significant issues have arisen.

### **Main judgements**

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It is the judgement of the Board that HMP Ashfield continues to be a well-run prison, despite a more challenging population than in the previous 12 months. Since last year's report, the number of incidences of aggression has increased and evidence of illegal substances has been found, but the establishment has continued to maintain high standards for the prisoners' wellbeing and safety. However, the increasing numbers released directly from Ashfield continue to pose a challenge for an establishment that is a specialist training prison not currently contracted to provide any formal resettlement services.

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

Overall, prisoners at Ashfield are treated fairly. Concerns over the fairness of the application of the incentives and earned privileges (IEP) system reported in the previous report have, with the continuing monitoring, been addressed.

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

Prisoners at Ashfield are treated very humanely and with respect. This is evidenced by regular monitoring and engagement with prisoners.

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

With a consistently large proportion of prisoners engaged in education or purposeful activity and high numbers achieving qualifications, this aspect of release preparation is good. However, particular challenges for Ashfield (which are outside of the prison's control) that compromise the overall release preparation include:

- the number of prisoners not able to enrol on programmes (see paragraph 11.1)
- difficulties in securing accommodation on release (see paragraph 11.4)
- the number of prisoners achieving category D status who are unable to transfer to open conditions (see paragraph 11.5).

## **Main areas for development**

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### **TO THE MINISTER**

The continuing lack of category D spaces for men convicted of sexual offences in the south and south-west of England, once again, is a major concern, causing significant 'waiting lists' (see paragraph 11.4) and, combined with the limited number of designated resettlement prisons to which men convicted of sexual offences can be transferred, is a major contributor to the number of prisoners released directly from Ashfield. The Board welcomes the announcement that HMP Haverigg will be recategorised to a category D prison and will be taking men convicted of sexual offences, but this does not address the lack of open prisons in the south and south-west. Is any consideration being given to increasing the number of places in the south and south-west?

Are there any plans to expand the number of approved premises spaces? During the past 12 months, the number of cases where an approved premises space was not confirmed until 24-48 hours before release has continued to increase (see paragraph 11.4).

### **TO THE PRISON SERVICE**

A number of prisoners transferred to Ashfield are suitable for the offending behaviour programmes offered there, but are maintaining their innocence. As the programmes currently restrict those maintaining innocence to two per course, this results in only six to eight prisoners per year being able to enrol on a programme. Are there any plans to address this and provide greater access to programmes for men maintaining their innocence (see paragraph 11.1)?

As an establishment for men convicted of sexual offences, it is of the utmost importance that contact arrangements are rigorously vetted. Ashfield re-vets contact arrangements for all new arrivals, checking with police, social services and probation services, which is a time-consuming and resource-intensive activity. As a consequence, a number of prisoners are found to have been granted inappropriate contact arrangements at their previous establishments which Ashfield then has to change (see paragraph 11.10). What can be done to ensure that other prisons conduct accurate and robust assessments of contact arrangements?

In the light of the number of prisoners being released from Ashfield, and recent Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMCIP) criticism of Ashfield's provision for rehabilitation and resettlement, are there any plans to revise the contract with Serco, to enable them to fund and offer a more extensive and comprehensive release preparation programme?

### **TO THE DIRECTOR/SERCO**

Ashfield has a good record of site improvements for the benefit of the prisoners but the process for the approval of projects is protracted and cumbersome, leading to long delays. Can anything be done to improve the current processes (see paragraph 7.4)?

Basins in wing laundries were identified as a necessary addition for health and hygiene reasons in last year's report. Despite being raised as an issue a number of times in the current reporting year, no progress has been made. Could this requirement please be reviewed once more, with a view to progressing the necessary work (see paragraph 7.3)?

## **Improvements**

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The provision of extra washing machines to act as spares is welcomed as it ensures that there is minimal disruption in the event of a mechanical failure. Wing laundries provide a vital and heavily utilised service.

### 3 DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

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

3.2 The prison has a baseline certified normal accommodation (CNA) of 416 and an operational capacity of 400, although, at the request of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), in late October 2017 through to October 2018 this expanded to 412.

3.3 Residential accommodation consists of two main house units, Avon and Severn, each with four wings accommodating between 40 and 60 men, and the early days centre (EDC), which is a smaller, 16-cell unit which acts as a first-night and induction centre. There are 260 single cells and 78 double cells, all with integral sanitation, and eight shower cubicles on each of the main wings. Seven of the single cells are ground floor cells purpose-built for prisoners with disabilities, and there are two gated cells for prisoners requiring constant supervision. There is no separate care and separation unit.

3.4 Black and minority ethnic prisoners typically make up around 14% of the population, foreign national prisoners 5%, and those aged over 50 42% at any one time.

3.4 Services run by organisations other than Serco:

- *Healthcare* is commissioned by NHS England: the contract in April 2016 was awarded to InspireBetterHealth, a collaboration between Bristol Community Health (nursing services), Hanham Healthcare (GP services) and Avon and Wiltshire Partnership (AWP) Mental Health Trust (mental health services). InspireBetterHealth is responsible for dispensing medication. Time for Teeth operates the contract for dentistry. In addition, prisoners can access a variety of specialist clinics
- *Offender management unit*: subcontracted to Catch 22
- *Adult social care*: South Gloucestershire Social Services
- *Coaching*: Coaching Inside and Out
- *Voluntary services*: Shannon Trust, Peace Education Programme (from The Prem Rawat Foundation), faith volunteers, Mothers' Union, prison visitors, Changing Tunes, Citizens Advice

3.13 As a contracted-out prison, Ashfield has a director and an HMPPS controller. During the reporting year, Vicky Pails was director, until 4 October 2018; Martin Jones then assumed the role of acting director, until the appointment of Martin Booth, who has been in post since April 2019.

3.14 HMCIP carried out an inspection of Ashfield in March to April 2019, and judged it as meeting the highest level of assessment ('outcomes for prisoners were good') for all areas except rehabilitation and release planning, where the judgement was 'outcomes for prisoners were not sufficiently good'. Ofsted carried out an inspection at the same time as HMCIP and assessed Ashfield as 'good' in all aspects of education, work and skills activities.

3.15 Ashfield is currently assessed under HMPPS measures as a level 4 prison.

## B Evidence sections 4 – 11

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### 4 SAFETY

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4.1 It is the view of the Board that HMP Ashfield has continued to provide a safe and supportive environment, in spite of the influx of a number of more challenging prisoners and the presence of drugs (albeit very minor in comparison with other prisons). This view was endorsed in the report from the HMCIP inspection in March to April 2019.

4.2 Throughout the reporting period, Board members have routinely asked new arrivals about their experiences of reception and induction. Consistently, prisoners have reported very positively about their initial experiences and the supportive environment they have found. This is borne out by the HMCIP report and the fact that there have been no complaints or applications to the Board about reception for the whole 12 months.

4.3 Visiting the house units on a weekly basis IMB members have found generally a relaxed and calm atmosphere. The relationship between officers and prisoners on the whole is very good, with mutual respect. However, the IMB have this year received some complaints about behaviour of staff, including bullying, but the numbers are very low, with only 10 related IMB applications received this reporting period of which six were withdrawn.

4.4 Despite the highly challenging nature of the population, the number of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults during the reporting year has been low (four), which is testament to sound safeguarding processes; however, worryingly, there was an assault on a member of staff (no assaults on staff have been recorded for at least three of the previous years). The new challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) initiative was introduced in May 2019, but in this reporting period no prisoners have been placed on it.

4.5 The challenging nature of the population is reflected in the rise in the number of adjudications (217 adjudications this year compared with 118 in the last reporting period) and in the number of incidents of use of force (19 this year, of which four involved control and restraint, compared with two in the last reporting period). It should be noted, however, that force has been deployed at times to prevent self-harm. Board members have attended adjudications on a random basis and, of those observed, have found the hearings to be fair, and outcomes proportionate. Officers are quick to challenge unacceptable behaviour, and this has helped maintain high standards of safety and security. The Board has been concerned, however, that for some of this reporting period, it has not routinely been provided with advance warning of adjudications, to facilitate members' attendance. This has now been addressed.

4.6 The number of intelligence-led cell searches and drug tests has increased in response to the changing environment. In the reporting period, there were 11 positive drug tests, including four for unprescribed codeine plus four refusals to be tested. Finds from cell searches include traces of synthetic cannabinoids, a phone charger and explicit images. Perimeter searches have increased, and finds have included wheel nuts with SIM cards, adding to the evidence of a changing environment. Concerns about drug-impregnated mail led to numerous items being scanned using HMP Eastwood Park's Rapi-Scan machine, but the increasing evidence of illegal substances at Ashfield has resulted in the establishment purchasing its own machine, which was installed in June 2019. The detection of drugs is very ably supported by an on-site drugs dog, as well as intelligence gathering. In terms of providing a safe environment for the men held at Ashfield, the increased activity to root out drugs is welcomed by the Board.



4.7 In the reporting period, there have been 80 Assessment in Care Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) documents opened, with usually only one or two open at one time. The most recorded on a single day has been six, which is unusual. Members of the Board, on rota visits, review the ACCT documentation and, where possible, talk to the prisoner involved. These prisoners generally report being well managed and receiving the appropriate support. ACCT documentation is of a good standard, and quality assurance processes are conducted by custodial operations managers once a day, safer custody staff three times a week and the duty director once a week, and are effective. Additionally, safer custody staff quality assure 100% of closed ACCTs. Since May 2019, safer custody staff have also been providing greater scrutiny of triggers and observations, to ensure that the correct levels of observations have been set relative to these. Randomly, Board members attend ACCT reviews and generally report that these are well run, with appropriate representation from other departments.

4.8 For prisoners experiencing difficulties, the 'Here to Hear' scheme is available, with an average of eight to nine peer Listeners available 24 hours a day. The service is accessed, on average, about nine times a month. Since the last report, an additional safer custody room has been set up on Avon house unit, to allow prisoners to have quiet time. The chaplaincy also runs a 'Living with Loss' course every six weeks to support individuals coping with bereavement, with up to 10 attendees. A number of support organisations, such as the Samaritans, are also available on the in-cell telephony.

4.8 There were no deaths in custody between July 2018 and June 2019. There was one prisoner diagnosed with a terminal illness, who was not given long to live. The care and compassion shown to the individual was exemplary and all staff involved are to be commended for their actions in expediting his transfer to a prison with a palliative care unit, and making his time in Ashfield, prior to transfer, as comfortable as possible.

## **5 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS**

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5.1 Ashfield remains a stable prison, with minimal levels of prejudice or discrimination of any sort. Men of different ages, different sexual orientations, and from different ethnic and religious backgrounds live alongside one another in an atmosphere of mutual toleration. Illustrative of this is the fact that, over the past year, the prison has housed up to three transgender prisoners at any one time, who have experienced very few problems in integrating with the rest of the community; their particular needs have been well catered for, with a comprehensive local policy translated into effective practice.

5.2 Each protected characteristic has continued to have its own forum of volunteer prisoner representatives. These meet monthly to discuss emerging issues and to organise worthwhile inclusive, educational and well-attended social events which bring the different communities together. Their efforts, however, have occasionally been hampered by competition for a limited number of bookable slots in the chapel, and complex processes for securing permission to proceed. Occasionally, some of the forums have not helped themselves by being dilatory in choosing their Charity of the Year for whom to raise funds, or in recommending books and DVDs for the library in response to the offer of a dedicated sum of money for their purchase.

5.3 The Board has received only one application alleging discrimination with regard to protected characteristics, and, as a general rule, staff and prisoners buy into the concepts of diversity, respect and fairness. The number of discrimination incident report forms submitted has continued to remain very low indeed (33 for the 12 months), although the Board has picked up hints from some prisoners that they do not have much confidence in the investigation process, as it has led to hardly any adjudications or action against alleged bullies

(a perception not endorsed by HMCIP, who concluded that the investigation process was thorough).

5.4 The prison catering department goes to considerable trouble to reflect major cultural and religious festivals in the menu that it provides, and the chaplaincy team also reflects the diversity of faiths in the prison.

5.5 It is acknowledged that the prison has continued to take diversity and equality matters seriously on a day-to-day basis. However, whereas the 2017–18 IMB Annual Report identified the management and promotion of these as a particular strength, and a model of good practice, over the last 12 months oversight of diversity and equality has become less dynamic, and the previous impetus, drive and innovation have waned. It was unfortunate that, during the year, a decision was taken not to continue to have a dedicated full-time manager for this aspect of the prison, which meant that far less time could be devoted to it; however, this decision was reversed at the very end of this reporting period (see below).

5.6 The lack of strategic oversight, and of any vision for further development, has become increasingly evident throughout the past year. The frequency of diversity and equality action team (DEAT) meetings has been reduced to quarterly, and on at least two occasions meetings have been postponed at short notice. Minutes of meetings have suggested that, although limited statistical data have been presented, there has been little or no discussion of them. Moreover, since part-way through the reporting period, the DEAT has no longer been chaired by the director or deputy director, and this has inevitably sent out signals about its status. This was coupled with reduced staff training on diversity issues in the first part of this year and with little evidence of any action to implement an announcement at the DEAT in January that each forum was going to be asked to audit different areas of the prison, to see how well they meet the needs of those with different protected characteristics, to identify what is going well and suggest where additional work is needed.

5.7 Particularly noticeable has been the ongoing failure (reported on in two previous IMB Annual Reports) until February 2019 to resolve the long-standing problem of the very variable levels of attendance at forum meetings by senior managers (an issue also flagged up by HMCIP).

5.8 By mid-way through this reporting period, it was evident that all of this was generating a serious degree of frustration and disillusionment among prisoners actively trying to promote equality and diversity. As the minutes of the forum meetings set out very clearly, these prisoners had increasingly expressed disappointment and annoyance at the apparent lack of senior management interest. To the prison's credit, it was acknowledged in February 2019 that this issue needed to be tackled. It was decided that each forum lead would be expected thereafter to attend at least quarterly or, in his or her absence, send another manager who had 'the authority at that meeting to make a calculated decision' on their behalf. In addition, each forum was assigned a prison custody officer to act as their 'champion', to promote their equality and diversity activities within the prison and to attend the forum meetings whenever possible. The Board has continued to monitor senior management team, manager and 'champion' attendance at forum meetings throughout reporting year and, while there have been a few indications of improvement, it is impossible to predict at this stage whether this will be sustained or not.

5.9 Encouragingly, however, following the HMCIP inspection report and at the very end of the Board's reporting year, the decision was taken to restore the post of full-time manager of equality and diversity matters, and assign strategic oversight to a member of the senior management team. Another encouraging sign is that, in response to concerns raised by prisoners about the lack of use by staff of the Big Word simultaneous interpretation service

and of the absence of printed translations into common foreign languages of key prison policy documents, the latter is now being addressed by Serco centrally. There is genuine cause for optimism, therefore, that there may be a welcome reinvigoration of the promotion of equality and diversity in Ashfield in the coming year.

5.10 The other principal feature of 'fairness' monitored by the Board has been that of the operation of the IEP scheme, and of adjudications (see paragraph 4.5). Throughout the year, there have been exceptionally few prisoners on the basic level of the scheme (the highest number at any one time being five, and more usually there will be one or two), almost all being on the standard or enhanced levels (87% enhanced as reported in the HMIP inspection report). While the Board has received seven applications from aggrieved prisoners who have received IEP warnings or reviews which they perceive to have been unwarranted, there has been little or no evidence to support their claims when investigated. It is noteworthy that, compared with previous years, the number of IEP warnings issued has reduced (in the reporting period, it was an average of 18 per month compared with an average of 31.4 per month in the 2016/17 reporting year). It is to the prison's credit that the system of monitoring and quality assurance established in 2017, to determine whether or not there is validity in allegations of inconsistency among officers in managing the IEP scheme, has continued. The prison has been open in sharing the collected data with the Board, and we are now satisfied that there is no evidence of any systemic problem. Complaints about IEPs through the prison system (23) have been thoroughly investigated, resulting in five warnings being withdrawn and two statuses being revised.

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

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6.1 Ashfield has continued to have very low numbers of prisoners on good order or discipline (GOOD) or cellular confinement (CC) compared with many prisons (a total of 11 CC and five GOOD in the course of this reporting period). In most weeks there are none at all, and at the most there have been two in a week. As there is no separate care and separation unit, when confinement is necessary prisoners, where feasible, are kept in their own cell or else temporarily housed in the EDC.

6.2 The Board has consistently been notified within 24 hours of prisoners being confined, and a member will check on any prisoners on GOOD or CC. Generally, prisoners are accepting of their situation and the reasons behind it. Where possible, Board members have attended GOOD reviews and, of those monitored, there has been full attendance by relevant departments and they have been both well managed and fair. From the Board's scrutiny, the duration of confinement has consistently been appropriate.

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

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7.1 Accommodation standards once again have been generally very high, and the state of cleanliness always attracts favourable comments from prisoners, staff and particularly official visitors. There was a short period during the reporting year when the Board felt that standards were slipping but this was soon rectified.

7.2 The floral displays throughout the grounds this year have been very impressive. Credit should be given to the horticulture department for such a notable transformation, which has significantly brightened up the prison.

7.2 Issues with the supply or temperature of the water have from time to time plagued different areas of the establishment. In July 2018, water was reported as running warm rather than hot. In the following month, the water pressure was reported as dipping. In April 2019, a

hot water boiler supplying a wing on Avon house unit failed, and later in the month an external water leak affected the establishment, resulting in low water pressure. In May 2019, there was a leak affecting two wings, which had an impact on both hot and cold water, and within a fortnight there was a more serious issue with the water supply which affected both of the main house units. A faulty valve was identified as the cause, and Bristol Water provided a temporary solution to restore the supply. Major disruptions have been short lived (no more than 24 hours). Whenever the water supply has been seriously affected, Ashfield has quickly supplied prisoners with bottled water. Work to replace boilers and water tanks has continued over the last 12 months, which should address some of the issues.

7.3 In the previous annual report, the Board reported, for the second year running, the lack of hand-washing facilities in the wing laundries. This would allow the prisoners in the laundries to wash their hands after handling both detergents and dirty clothes. This issue has been raised a number of times with senior management but there has been no action to address it. It is disappointing for the Board to be reporting this yet again. However, the Board is pleased to report that a spare washing machine has been procured, so that in the event of catastrophic failure (minor faults can be repaired in the electrics workshop), it can be swapped in with minimal disruption.

7.4 An area of continuing frustration for many staff and the Board is the seemingly inefficient and protracted process for establishing, approving and progressing projects. The prime example of this has been the opening of a visits hall café, the requirement for which has been noted now for two years. This has progressed this year (having been approved) to Serco headquarters, but the process for submission and approval of projects has now changed and it has had to be resubmitted. The new waste management unit has similarly been subject to delays. There appears to be a lack of transparency over the process, how and if priorities are assigned, and where responsibilities lie.

7.5 The majority of prisoners' property issues at Ashfield continue to involve property that does not always follow the prisoner on transfer into Ashfield from another prison. Ashfield has the advantage of a dedicated resource working in the property store, which ensures a consistency of approach and processes. Many complaints are not resolved, so have to be referred to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. Property complaints, once again, form the third highest category of formal complaints (57 in the reporting year), after residential and confidential complaints.

7.6 Generally, the catering at Ashfield is considered by the majority of prisoners to be good, and better than at many previous establishments. However, there have been a number of occasions where standards have been affected adversely by the quality of the products from the supplier and/or the calibre of the prisoner kitchen staff. The latter issue has arisen where prisoners have been allocated to the kitchen without the officers responsible for that area having the opportunity to interview them. The role in the kitchen is a critical one as it potentially affects every prisoner, and a disinterested, disaffected prisoner can be a liability. A number of prisoners have allergies, so failure to adhere scrupulously to instructions could have serious repercussions. Fortunately, to date, errors for this group have been picked up; for example, butter was used for a lactose-intolerant prisoner, but he spotted it in time. For the most part, this lack of attention to detail has been manifested in inadequate or inconsistent fillings in sandwiches and baguettes, and incorrect loading up of portions on trollies. The Board is pleased to report, however, that at the end of the reporting period it was agreed that kitchen managers would have the opportunity to interview and select their cohort, which should address concerns about the calibre of the kitchen workers.

7.7 There has, however, been a minority of prisoners with particular dietary needs who have felt that the catering department does not accommodate them sufficiently, resulting in

complaints both to the prison and to the Board. The group with the most complaints has been vegans, who have had concerns, for example, about the level of protein in the food provided and the lack of variety. Credit should be given to the constructive and pragmatic response of the catering department and the deputy director, with the latter convening a meeting with vegan prisoners to discuss their issues (which the Board attended), and appointing a prisoner in the kitchen to oversee non-standard diets. Hopefully, this will go a long way to address the concerns expressed to date.

7.8 The canteen (shop) has continued to be popular and well managed, although, as with external retail outlets, it is subject to the variances of product availability. In August 2018, the national shortage of carbon dioxide made it difficult to source carbonated drinks. At the same time, there was a shortage of squash. In addition, the limited range of halal products has, at times, caused some dissatisfaction, and the Board remains concerned about the lack of products suitable for type 2 diabetics to purchase.

7.9 In October 2018, the 'health bar' was opened; this offers small amounts of over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, such as sticking plasters and paracetamol, for purchase. Orders need to be placed on the same day as for general shop orders, and will be delivered on the same day as these items. As this facility is provided and overseen by healthcare staff, they are responsible for answering any complaints or queries. This service has been well received by the prisoners.

7.10 Communication with prisoners is generally good. A lot of communication takes place via the touchscreen information kiosks, which for the majority of issues are more than adequate. Duty director surgeries continue to be available at weekends, and the monthly prisoner information and consultation (PIAC) meeting is well attended by senior managers and representatives from the wings. The implementation of the key worker initiative has ensured that prisoners can easily, in their regular sessions, discuss any concerns or issues. Started in May 2018, by Christmas of that year every prisoner had a key worker. Questionnaires sent out in the early days of the initiative, both to prisoners and staff, came back very positively, except for the complaint both from key workers and prisoners that for some who had long sentences, the currently held weekly sessions were excessive. In response to this, Ashfield altered the scheme in January 2019 to be fortnightly (unless the prisoner requested weekly meetings); however, following direction from HMPPS it reverted to weekly in May 2019. The percentage of sessions conducted on a weekly basis is usually between 80% and 85%.

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

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8.1 The healthcare department, resourced and managed through InspireBetterHealth, is very professionally and efficiently run. Prisoners are well cared for and patients in the waiting room are almost universally complimentary of the care they receive. HMCIP's recent inspection in conjunction with the Care Quality Commission found the healthcare department to be good.

8.2 The changes made to the frequency of attendance by medical staff (the most significant being a reduction in attendance by the GP from five to three times a week, offset by the provision of triage nurses) reported last year have not had an adverse impact on either the quality or timeliness of the services provided. The waiting time for routine GP appointments has therefore not increased, and remains at two and a half weeks, which is on a par with community service provision. In the event of an emergency, a doctor can attend at short notice.

8.3 Access to other medical expertise continues to be good, with the dentist visiting three times a week; the physiotherapist once a week; the podiatrist twice a month; and the

audiologist, optometrist, ultrasound technician and psychiatrist once a month. Any of the services can be called in additionally if the need arises. Regular screening is provided for bowel cancer at two-year intervals for prisoners aged 60–69. Additionally, there is screening for abdominal aneurisms and diabetes.

8.4 Hospital visits should be limited to a maximum of three per day. In practice, this is exceeded because of the large proportion of elderly prisoners held. Occasionally, hospitals cancel appointments, which causes distress (one prisoner had his hip replacement surgery cancelled at short notice), but, in general, booked appointments are honoured. Bed watches also present resourcing challenges, and in this reporting period there has been a total of 26, with three being the most at any one time. Ashfield has succeeded in resourcing these demands to date but, to facilitate meeting future demands, part-time staff are being recruited.

8.5 Mental health services are administered in conjunction with AWP. One-to-one treatment is needs assessed. There was some disquiet when AWP changed their approach last year, reducing the number of one-to-one treatments in favour of group therapies, but this has largely dissipated. Courses provided by AWP include alcohol awareness, relapse prevention and Spice awareness.

8.7 In terms of social care, Ashfield provides a very valuable drop-in service which allows prisoners to discuss issues they may have with a social worker, health care worker and occupational therapist.

8.8 In the reporting period, 40 complaints were made to the healthcare department, of which 26 were not upheld. The Board received eight complaints. A frequent complaint is that medication has been stopped or altered; for example, a prisoner who has received medication in his previous prison has had it withdrawn at Ashfield on clinical grounds and is unhappy about that, or the same drug is prescribed here but under a different name. Staff accept that prisoners should be given advance notice of such planned changes. The department has 20 days to respond to a complaint. If a longer period is required, where, for example, the complaint concerns medication, then it has to go to Bristol for consideration. When that happens, a holding letter of explanation is sent to the prisoner. It should be noted, however, that the department has received 88 compliments from prisoners in the same period, a clear endorsement of satisfaction with the services.

8.9 The healthcare provided at Ashfield is of a good standard. The standard of prison healthcare should be comparable with that in the community but in the case of Ashfield it undoubtedly exceeds what is required.

## **9 EDUCATION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

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9.1 In the recent HMCIP inspection, Ofsted commented on the excellent progress made by the education and vocational training departments since the previous inspection. The Board's observations over the past year would concur with this.

9.2 Education classes continue to be well attended; the appointment during the last year of two cover teachers has been effective in reducing the number of cancelled sessions. The atmosphere in classes which the Board observed was generally good. Managers conduct regular observations on teaching quality and, following the recent preliminary Ofsted report, are encouraged also to focus on the progress made by prisoners.

9.3 The prison encourages men who may lack basic functional skills to take classes in appropriate subjects and gain a recognisable qualification; this includes up to GCSE level in

English and mathematics. Distance learning is also encouraged, with over 5% of the population registered with the Open University and other distance learning courses. An in-house initiative to provide a controlled environment in which to familiarise men preparing for release with modern information technology is welcomed.

9.4 The recent HMCIP inspection report identified a lack of specialist educational support for men with learning difficulties and, from applications received, the Board would concur with this.

9.5 The library continues to be well resourced, offering books, CDs, DVDs and games. It is regularly used by over 60% of Ashfield's population, whether by remote borrowing through the touchscreen information kiosks or by an increasing number of actual visits. Initiatives in literacy and numeracy through the Shannon Trust and SumHelp are promoted, and men are encouraged to submit work to national art, poetry and writing competitions. Ashfest, an arts festival using external facilitators, held for the first time in Autumn 2018, was a great success. The men whom the Board spoke to were genuinely appreciative of the chance to enjoy these new experiences. A second Ashfest was held in spring 2019.

9.6 Over the past few months, the Board has received a number of comments concerning the absence (awaiting suitably skilled prisoner resource) of AshMag a high-quality magazine produced in the library; this regularly carried in-depth articles on new initiatives or subjects such as resettlement, and the Board feels that this has been a loss to the prison's population.

9.7 The gym remains a popular and well-run facility, and has increased its staffing level from three to four officers. Sixty-three percent of Ashfield's population was accessing the gym between January and March 2019, and this has now risen to 70%, although more work still needs to be done to attract those aged 60+. While many traditional activities, such as the weights room, football, badminton and bowls, remain popular, there is greater focus on health and functional activities which support general wellbeing and cater for the wide age range of the population. There has been an increase in activities presented in the form of academies, where active sport is mixed with theoretical aspects, and new activities have been introduced, including yoga, involving an external facilitator. Competitions reflecting national events, such as the Cricket World Cup, are held.

9.8 The Board has received comment about a lack of activities available at weekends. The gym has a member of staff on duty, and sports sessions are available, on both Saturdays and Sundays. As a result of limited resource, however, the library is not open, due to limited resources, and little else is routinely scheduled, other than events organised by safer custody staff.

## **10. WORK, VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT**

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10.1 Virtually full employment and training numbers are being achieved for all non-retired men, and the prison continues closely to monitor age and ethnicity spread across departments.

10.2 The range of qualifications offered is good and continues to expand, with more at level 2 and beyond introduced over the past year. For example, painting and decorating, plumbing and plastering, and carpentry now offer joint level 2 qualifications, and the waste management group will shortly offer qualifications for the first time.

10.3 Wherever possible, vocational training is organised to provide services of use across the prison and, in some cases, for external organisations – for example, light industries, design and print. The Board commends these initiatives.

10.4 Quantitative monitoring of work and vocational training is thorough, and the Board is pleased to learn that measures to judge qualitative outcomes are being considered. There is to be an increasing emphasis on ensuring that training and work offers skills to aid resettlement, in particular allowing greater focus on the potential for post-release self-employment.

## **11 RESETTLEMENT PREPARATION**

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11.1 Intervention programmes are a key element of the sentence plans for many of the men who are transferred to Ashfield. During this reporting period, the Serco interventions team has continued to deliver both the Kaizen and Horizon programmes, and are due to commence delivery of Becoming New Me Plus in September 2019 for those with low-level cognitive skills. A major challenge for Ashfield, however, is the number of men transferred in who are suitable for programmes but are maintaining their innocence (only two of whom are permitted per course). This results in a number of men reaching their release date without having attended a programme. Ashfield interventions staff are to be commended, however, for securing approval from the HMPPS interventions team to accept on courses some of the men who are claiming innocence. This will help reduce the numbers who reach release without treatment.

11.2 The HMIP inspection was critical of the rehabilitation and release preparation in a number of areas, one of which was the number of offender assessment system (OASys) records that were out of date. HMIP considers any record over 12 months old out of date, whereas the HMPPS OASys team advise that any record over three years old is considered out of date. Ashfield is working to the latter guidance and, using that guidance, 37 OASys cases belonging to the National Probation Service were out of date, whereas only two owned by Ashfield offender management unit (OMU) were. The HMCIP figure was 45%.

11.3 Disappointingly, only three workshops have been held in this reporting period, compared with six reported previously. Two were held on approved premises, and one was held on understanding and preparation for Parole Boards. An annual mental health awareness day, scheduled for October 2018, was cancelled at the last minute; this was scheduled to have presentations on probation, approved premises and open prisons, so would have effectively delivered two more workshops. The cancellation was due, in part, to staff shortages.

11.4 Once again, the Board has a major concern about the number of prisoners released directly from Ashfield. As a category C specialist training prison, the number released should be low, but this reporting period saw yet another increase in this number (84, compared with 73 in the last reporting period). Particularly concerning was the number released with no fixed address (14). Of the remainder, 43 were released into approved premises and 23 into other accommodation. Difficulty in securing approved premises spaces continues to be a significant challenge due to the shortage of available places, and prisoners can be left to within 24 hours of their release not knowing where they will be accommodated.

11.5 The situation with regard to the number of category D prisoners awaiting transfer to an open prison has not improved. The average number on the waiting list has been running at 66. Despite expectations that HMP Hollesley Bay would be accepting men convicted of sexual offences, this has yet to materialise, so, yet again, HMP Leyhill and HMP North Sea Camp are the only realistic options available (HMP Prescoed, although accepting category D men



convicted of sexual offences, has a small operating capacity, and a waiting list at neighbouring HMP Usk). The move to an open prison is an important step in preparing men for release, and the inability to accommodate the numbers achieving category D status is very disappointing.

11.6 In response to the frustrations of category D prisoners and those close to release, plus the recognition that more needs to be done to prepare men for release, one of the wings, Severn A, has been designated as a progression wing. It was established in June 2019 and the first intake was due to be 23 category D men and 35 'parole window' prisoners, and those within their last six months of custody. This is a work in progress as, initially, the only major change to the regime for the individuals on this wing was a later lock-up time of 7pm, but the wing is due to have free-standing furniture, carpeting in communal areas and a mini-kitchen with a washing machine, drier, refrigerator and microwave oven. It is too early for the Board to comment on this initiative, other than to welcome it in principle.

11.7 Changes under the offender management in custody model will make a significant difference to how the offender management function at Ashfield is delivered. A senior probation officer joins in October 2019, and four probation officers are due to join the team by the end of 2019. These changes and their effects will be reported on in next year's annual report. Already, however, in preparation, the OMU has been engaging with probation officers in the community to get OASys start custody assessments completed for every prisoner at Ashfield. There are currently only four outstanding (until the next intake of new prisoners, which could change that).

11.8. Other activities to support release include the extensive information and support provided by two orderlies on topics ranging from opening bank accounts to applying for benefits. Additionally, Citizens Advice staff visit on a regular basis, providing advice and support. The chaplaincy team has been working with faith-based community safeguarding teams, including the Quakers and the Church of England, to help support prisoners when released back into the community. There have been two 10-week Peace Education courses run, although, in response to concerns expressed by prisoners who were put off by the title, the second was rebadged as 'Self-Awareness'.

11.9 Another key area for supporting prisoners throughout their sentence, and particularly when they are released, is engagement with family and friends. Ashfield does this particularly well, and this reporting period saw the introduction of the Serco initiative 'Family/Friends at the Centre of Throughcare' (FACT), which gives families an opportunity to visit the prison and meet a prisoner's key worker, as well as see the prisoner. If the prisoner agrees, he can give consent to the family receiving regular updates from the prison regarding his progress, and, if required, the family can email his key worker with any concerns they may have. FACT was first launched in Ashfield in a family day on 16 April 2019. So far, there has been one official FACT day, but FACT is now going to be included in all family days and in weekend visits. There are usually four family days in a year; the last during the reporting year saw 11 families attend (approximately 60 people) The 'Storybook Dads' scheme, organised by the chaplaincy, has continued, where prisoners who are allowed contact with their children record stories for them; 23 recordings have been produced in the period of the report.

11.10 One area that can cause stress to prisoners is contact arrangements. Ashfield, quite rightly, thoroughly checks contact arrangements when prisoners arrive; although this can lead to a delay in re-establishing the contact arrangements that a prisoner has had at a previous establishment, it is very necessary for the protection of the public. However, in this reporting period, yet again, there have been instances (five) where contact arrangements granted at a previous establishment had contact applications that were either incomplete or had not been flagged correctly when checked with police, social services and probation services. This raises a serious concern about the rigour applied in some other establishments

to validating contact arrangements.

## C Section – The work of the IMB

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<b>BOARD STATISTICS</b>	
Recommended complement of Board members	13
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11
Total number of visits to the establishment	290
Total number of segregation reviews attended	5

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

The weekly rota visit has routinely included visiting all accommodation units, the kitchen/bistro, and the healthcare department. In addition to this, prison functions, services and departments are divided for practical monitoring purposes into seven themed areas (safer custody/pastoral care; sentence management and resettlement; prisoner employment and vocational training; prisoner education; prisoner services and facilities; dynamic security; and central services), to ensure that each theme is monitored in depth approximately every eight weeks (and at regular intervals in between if there are pressing or emerging issues that would benefit from further scrutiny.)

In addition to the weekly rota visit, one member a week attends to collect and respond to all applications from prisoners. Wherever possible, a rota or applications visit is combined with attendance at a prison meeting, such as the interdepartmental risk management team meeting or prisoner advice and information committee, an adjudication, a GOOD review or an ACCT review, but the scheduling of these often necessitates a separate visit. A night-state visit took place in the autumn of 2018.

One member retired in July 2018, having served a total of 15 years across two Boards. A national recruitment campaign in the early part of 2019 resulted in the appointment of four new members from May 2019.

Board members have continued to attend Serco-run training sessions within the prison, and two attended the National Conference. Additionally, training sessions have been provided at

monthly Board meetings. The Chair has attended South-West Chairs' meetings as well as being a member of, and attending, the meetings of the IMB Working Group of establishments holding men convicted of sexual offences.

The Board very much appreciates the most constructive and cooperative attitude taken by Serco staff and other providers alike towards its own members. Always helpful and receptive to our findings, the good working relationship greatly facilitates the Board's monitoring role, to the benefit of the prisoners. Additionally, staff, very willingly, respond to requests for briefings on developments both at Ashfield and in the wider prison estate, as well as the regular monthly senior management update.

## D Section – Applications to the IMB

This reporting period has seen the number of applications more than double compared with last year. However, it should be noted that 10 were submitted by one prisoner, and another two prisoners submitted six each. Compared with other prisons, however, the figures are low.

The categories attracting the highest number were B (17), which covers issues with IEP, adjudications and general discipline, and J (14), which covers staff/prisoner bullying. The latter included six from the same individual, which were subsequently withdrawn. Of the eight remaining, four related to alleged staff bullying and four to alleged prisoner bullying.

Code	Subject	Current reporting year	Previous reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	2	4
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	17	6
C	Equality	1	3
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	4	1
E 1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	7	6
E 2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	2	3
F	Food and kitchens	7	0
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	8	4
H 1	Property within this establishment	3	0
H 2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	6	1
H 3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	0	1
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	7	4
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	14	2
K	Transfers	3	2
	<b>Total number of IMB applications</b>	81 (incl. 5 confidential applications)	37 (incl. 1 confidential applications)

