



# Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Low Newton

**For reporting year  
1 March 2019 to 29 February 2020**

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# Contents

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introductory sections 1 – 3</b>	
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the establishment	4
3. Executive summary	5
<b>Evidence sections 4 – 7</b>	
4. Safety	8
5. Fair and humane treatment	10
6. Health and wellbeing	12
7. Progression and resettlement	14
<b>The work of the IMB</b>	17
<b>Applications to the IMB</b>	18

## **Introductory sections 1 - 3**

### **1. Statutory role of the IMB**

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

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- 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
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- 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.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that States designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

## 2. Description of the establishment

HMP/YOI Low Newton opened in 1965 as a remand centre, with four wings holding young men up to 21 years of age and a discrete wing for women of all ages, on remand and sentenced.

The prison was re-roled as a women's prison in 1998 when it was refurbished. It now consists of eight residential wings, together with general prisoner use areas (for example, healthcare).

The establishment holds women of all ages, from 18 years onwards, on remand and sentenced. It includes those serving short sentences to those serving licence sentences and also restricted status (high-security) women.

- Number of cells (beds) 363 at maximum (271 in use as at 7 May 2020, due to COVID-19)
- Operational capacity is usually 344 (currently reduced to 277 due to COVID-19).

Most cells are single occupancy, with a small number of double-occupancy cells to cater for 'at-risk' women – that is, women assessed as unsuitable for single-cell accommodation.

Adult residents and young offenders are integrated. Risk assessments are carried out before it is decided on which wing a young offender should be located.

The age profile of the residents (as of 7 May 2020) is:

Age band	Number of residents
18 to 21 years	13
22 to 29 years	54
30 to 39 years	98
40 to 49 years	71
50 to 59 years	24
60 to 69 years	11
70+	01

Over 54% of the woman are either on remand or are serving a custodial sentence of six months or less.

Physically, there are serious problems with the roofs of various parts of the prison leaking water, and as a result there has been a restriction in the available number of education classrooms and workshops. This has meant a reduction in the number of jobs and facilities available to the women.

The Governor in post at the beginning of the reporting period left Low Newton in 2020 to take up a new role in the Prison Service, and the new Governor took up the position on 1 February 2020. The Board wishes to acknowledge the help and assistance given to the Board by the previous Governor and the work that was done in the prison under her command.

### **3. Executive summary**

#### **3.1 Background to the report**

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a significant impact on the Board's ability to gather information and discuss the contents of this annual report. The Board has therefore tried to cover as much ground as it can in these difficult circumstances, but inevitably there is less detail and supporting evidence than usual. Ministers are aware of these constraints. Regular information is being collated specifically on the prison's response to the pandemic, and that is being collated nationally.

The Board is currently under complement, with only four members currently in place. Two of these are dual boarding with other establishments. New members have been recruited and are awaiting security clearance, which is on hold due to the pandemic.

Owing to the rehabilitative culture in Low Newton, the prisoners are referred to as 'residents' and that terminology is used throughout this report.

#### **3.2 Main judgements**

##### **How safe is the prison?**

It is the Board's opinion that the prison provides an environment that protects the safety of the residents. The establishment is kept clean, tidy and maintained both inside and outside. Staffing levels are high and prison officers treat residents with respect.

##### **How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?**

It is the view of the Board that the residents are treated fairly and humanely. The observed interactions between staff and residents have been good and friendly. We have observed good order or discipline (GOOD) reviews and adjudications, and are satisfied that residents are treated fairly.

##### **How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?**

The Board considers that residents' health needs are generally met well. Appointments take a short time to arrange and can be arranged over the telephone. Comparison of waiting times with local prisons shows the establishment in a favourable light. The Board is concerned about prisoners sent to Low Newton by the courts in the absence of community-based places of safety.

##### **How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?**

A wide range of interventions are provided to assist in resettlement but particular areas of concern are finding accommodation and dealing with mental health issues. There is a huge variety in the lengths of sentences being served, which complicates arrangements. The lack of maintenance of the prison roofs has had a major effect on the education and training areas reducing the number of rooms and facilities available for the women to access.

### **3.3 Main areas for development**

#### ***TO THE MINISTER***

The Board has had, for a number of years, concerns regarding the number of prisoners who are suffering from mental health issues – in some cases, severe issues. As noted in previous reports, it appears that some women are being detained owing to the lack of places of safety in the community.

The healthcare unit diligently assesses prisoners and their mental health with a view to referral, where appropriate, to hospital at the earliest opportunity, but this can still take some time and is constrained by the difficulty of arranging a secure hospital bed.

#### ***TO THE PRISON SERVICE***

The deteriorating state of the prison roofs is of great concern to the Board. A number of classrooms and workshop areas are out of action. This causes a reduction in education and work opportunities for the women. There are also health and safety issues when buckets and other containers have to be put out to catch rainwater.

The Board wonders if, despite the previous assessment, there is any possibility of part of the prison being remodelled to allow for the residents to undertake bricklaying or DIY training courses.

The prison would benefit from more funding to provide extra domestic violence support, trauma counselling, supported accommodation and social work, both in the prison and on release.

#### ***TO THE GOVERNOR***

How does the Governor see the establishment progressing in the next three to five years?

Can the equality and diversity policy be displayed on all wings and also in areas where there is a high volume of resident activity?

Is there a case for more Listeners, as the prison currently has five and there are eight wings? Is the prison up to complement with mentors and red bands?

Is there any equipment that will identify Buscopan coming into the prison?

### **3.4 Progress since the last report**

The current Board members were not in post at the time of the last report. The current Board is looking to the future and has key objectives firmly in place for the next reporting year which include close monitoring of areas of special interest. The Board is particularly preparing for the induction and development of the new members when they are able to join the Board.

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

#### **4.1 Reception and induction**

The Board has observed new prisoners being processed on arrival and has found that officers are courteous and compassionate, particularly with first-time prisoners, adopting a firmer approach as necessary.

All prisoners are reviewed by healthcare staff, and issues and medicinal requirements are addressed. Many of the women arriving at HMP/YOI Low Newton have existing drug and alcohol abuse issues. These are addressed in the first instance on E wing, where new prisoners undergo a regime of detoxification and counselling.

Prisoners are transported by GEOAmey, and the Board has received a number of complaints regarding the late arrival of prisoners to the establishment.

#### **4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody**

High-risk residents are identified from incident reports and daily briefing sheets, and so on. These residents are discussed at a weekly safety intervention meeting, which is attended by heads of functions, and actions are set to support residents.

Assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents are a series of forms, held together in a bright orange folder, opened in response to concern that an individual in prison is at risk of self-harm or suicide. There are about 26 ACCTs open at any given time, and while on rota visits Board members check a random selection of files, to make sure they are up to date.

Risk-assessed residents are recruited for work as Listeners. The Listeners are trained by the Samaritans.

During the period of this report, there have been no deaths in custody and no reports from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman.

#### **4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation**

Over the period of this report, there have been 85 violent incidents. This includes fights, assaults on residents and assaults on staff. Security staff have identified 208 banned items during the same period.

The prison is concerned to stamp out bullying. The challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) system is the national case management model for those who are violent or pose a risk of harming others. CSIPs are used proactively to support those at risk of, or from, violence or bullying. It relies on staff making referrals wherever they feel there is due cause or whenever a violent incident occurs. Once a referral is made for support, it is screened by safer custody staff and may be progressed to an investigation. Where an investigation proves the need, a targeted, time-limited plan is initiated to support the individual.

#### **4.4 Use of force**

Members have been attending regular use of force meetings. Incidents are well documented, with lots of data, which is well presented, very clear and self-explanatory. Incidents in the prison are not common, but body-worn cameras are always used when they occur and footage is saved where injuries have been identified. Footage is often used for training purposes, as evidence of good practice.

During the calendar year 2019, there were 182 incidents in which force was used, 47 of which were attributed to one individual. Non-compliance and to prevent self-harm were the most common reasons for using force throughout the year.

There has been an increase in the use of guided holds, and this is a most positive feature. However, for safety purposes, control and restraint has to be employed on occasion, to prevent injury to officers and residents.

#### **4.6 Substance misuse**

There is an issue with the misuse of Buscopan in the prison, which has been going on for some years. A high percentage (nearly 50%) of the women receive methadone (see section 6.5).

## **5. Fair and humane treatment**

### **5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food**

Accommodation on the wings is inspected by the Board, as well as the general areas such as the corridors, the healthcare unit, the care and separation unit (CSU), and the kitchen. Residents take pride in cleaning these areas and keeping the prison tidy.

Residents are able to make their meal choices from weekly menus that are issued to them. Although the catering budget is low, residents are offered meals which are nutritious, well cooked and presented, and of good variety. Meals are planned and prepared in accordance with food and hygiene regulations, with options available to meet cultural, religious and medical dietary requirements. Healthy eating options are also available.

Board members are invited to taste the meals on their visits, and these have always been found to be excellent. There is also a comments book available, for residents to note their opinions about the meals that they are receiving.

Regular surveys take place to obtain the residents' opinions. The suggestions are adopted where possible. Regular theme nights are also a feature, and these have always proved to be popular. Prisoners also have the opportunity of raising issues at the monthly prisoner council meetings.

Residents working in both the main kitchen and the training kitchen can gain national vocational qualifications from having their work assessed.

### **5.2 Segregation, special accommodation**

There are three cells, an adjudications room and an interview room in the CSU. Staff in the unit are very good at building up a rapport with residents and encouraging them to improve their behaviour. Comparatively few women are placed on GOOD, rarely for more than 14 days and more often up to seven days.

A Board member is informed of any move to the CSU and, if possible, visits the resident before observing the 72-hour GOOD review. Review panels are conducted by a governor, attended by the appropriate members of staff, with all the necessary information to hand. The resident attends and is encouraged to make representations. Reviews subsequent to the 72-hour review are aligned to take place on Wednesday afternoons, when a Board member can be available to observe. The Board considers that the reviews are conducted fairly.

The Board has been concerned for some years about seriously mentally ill women sent to prison because there are no places of safety in the community. They arrive exhibiting extreme behaviours and have to be segregated. Prison is not the appropriate environment for these women.

Residents awarded cellular confinement at adjudication are listed on a board in the CSU, but are usually located on landing cells. Visiting Board members check the board and then visit anyone on cellular confinement.

Board members observe adjudications while making rota visits.

### **5.3 Staff–prisoner relationships, key workers**

The Board considers that staff–resident relationships are good. We have observed good interactions between both parties. The Board considers that there is a good atmosphere in the prison.

The Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model has not yet been introduced into the female prison estate. The formal key worker role is therefore absent but staff maintain good working relationships with residents and are supportive of them.

### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

The Prison Service has a positive duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, and promote equality of opportunity for, and good relationships between, people of different racial groups, religions, age groups, abilities and sexual persuasions. This is done by reviewing its policies, by education and investigating complaints raised by prisoners, and taking action against any member of staff, prisoner or visitor who uses insulting language or behaviour.

Policy at HMP/YOI Low Newton is driven by monthly meetings of the equality and diversity team. The meeting serves to review prison policies and actions which are relevant to minority groups, including foreign nationals.

There are currently eight foreign nationals in Low Newton (one each of Indian, Irish, Palestinian, Vietnamese, Jamaican and Romanian, and two of Polish nationality). As of 7 May 2020, there were 29 Black, Asian or minority ethnic residents, making up 10.9% of the prison population.

### **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

A number of chaplains and volunteers from different faiths (Church of England, Muslim, Free Church, Quaker, Buddhist, Jehovah’s Witness, Roman Catholic) provide support to the residents. The chapel is an important meeting place in the prison, as well as a place of worship.

### **5.6 Incentives and earned privileges (IEP)**

The prison has reviewed the IEP system in line with national guidelines. Processes are in place to make sure that an adjudication or GOOD review is held appropriately. This is to avoid issues that should be dealt with by a warning or low-level intervention escalating to something that involves additional punishment.

### **5.7 Complaints**

Information on complaints is seen every month by the Board at the monthly meetings.

### **5.8 Property**

In previous years, issues with residents’ property have been a major problem but during this reporting period the Board has not found it to be a problem.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Physical healthcare**

G4S held the health service contract during the reporting period. It will be Spectrum CIC from 1 April 2020. The Board's experience of healthcare provision is positive. Prison and medical staff are helpful and informative. Full medical screening of new residents is undertaken by healthcare staff in reception. Residents can get appointments with a general practitioner or dentist quickly. A comparison has been made with the waiting time for appointments in other local prisons in the north east, and HMP/YOI Low Newton comes out very favourably.

### **6.2 Mental healthcare**

Again, the Board is of the opinion that mental healthcare provision is appropriate for most residents. However, the availability of mental health beds in outside hospitals is limited and referrals can take time, which is detrimental to the residents concerned.

The psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE) unit is for residents who have previously completed high-intensity treatment, and helps to maintain the developments they have achieved. There are currently 29 residents on the PIPE unit. It has the capacity for 40 residents when full.

The Primrose unit (for those with dangerous and severe personality disorders) is now part of the pathways for all female estates. It is a joint initiative between the Prison Service, the Department of Health and the Home Office. Its purpose is to deliver more effective interventions to dangerous women, to reduce risk to themselves and others. The programme offers skills for life, therapy to address unsolved psychological trauma, and behaviour therapy to treat personality disorders and self-harming behaviour.

The women live within a normal location and associate with other residents and attend a specified area to undertake their courses.

The prison currently has five resident Listeners, who provide peer support to residents needing to talk.

### **6.3 Social care**

Social care is provided by a social worker. Provision is made through Durham County Council.

### **6.4 Exercise, time out of cell, gym**

The gym service is provided by Prison Service physical education instructors under the reducing reoffending function. The gym offers employment, either full- or part time. The residents can also visit the gym for recreational purposes. These sessions are timetabled each week. Qualifications can be gained. All residents gain manual handling and first-aid qualifications when working in the gym. In addition, a range of different qualifications up to level 2 are offered – for example, in personal training.

Residents can also complete level 3 and above qualifications via distance learning. One resident is completing level 3 in personal training.

## **6.5 Drug rehabilitation**

Methadone is issued, on average, to over 150 of the residents. Buscopan is the drug of choice in the prison. It is readily available in the community and has been easy to smuggle into the prison. It is undetectable by mandatory drug testing (MDT) or drug dogs. MDT positive rates have increased, with the primary drugs detected being non-prescribed opiates. Vape cartridges are traded between the women to pay for drug debts.

The establishment has recently introduced a drug strategy, in line with the national drug strategy. It will look at the three key elements:

- eliminate supply
- reduce demand
- promote treatment and recovery.

Regular meetings of the drug strategy team look at the current situation and develop interventions. New prisoners are searched at reception. The drug and alcohol recovery team (DART) is very proactive and holds intervention and awareness courses. There are DART peer mentors, who help other prisoners.

## **6.6 Soft skills**

Soft skills are interpersonal skills. These are taught in education and learning, in courses such as hospitality, but also in more general terms by the interactions between staff and residents, and between residents. The Board has observed many of these interactions and notes the courteous way they take place in the majority of cases. Junction 42, a local north east charity, operates an excellent art workshop in the Education Centre. Religious groups make regular use of the chapel for discussion, interaction and friendship.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

The induction process is delivered by the Novus Advice team and provides individuals with a needs-led, one session, assessment and engagement programme which outlines the next steps of their learning journey. Self-assessment and reflective practices are used to identify key areas for personal improvement, with individual goals being set for the future. Learners are introduced to, and take ownership of, their holistic employment and training portfolio (ETP), which is linked to employability skills, empowerment and developing social and communication skills.

At the start of any new learning programme, the tutor discusses the information gathered at induction with the resident, and an action plan of interventions and strategies, if required, is created to enable each learner to access provision and overcome any barriers to learning. This is reviewed regularly, to ensure that the right support and adjustments are in place to enable learners to progress and achieve.

The library service was provided by Durham County Council, which provides the service in a number of local prisons. The contract has recently changed to Novus and the Board will be monitoring the change of service.

### **7.2 Vocational training, work**

The choice to the learner includes: functional skills English (entry level 1 to level 2); functional skills mathematics (entry level 1 to level 2); information and communications technology (ICT) (entry level 3 to level 2); business start-up; digital awareness; information, advice and guidance; retail; customer service; hairdressing; beauty; food production; hospitality; Open University and distance learning courses. Some of these subjects have natural progression links, which is a distinct benefit to the learner.

The prison is certified to deliver all WAMITAB level 1 qualifications, in anything from basic cleaning up to the specific use of machines and cleaning requirements.

There are sufficient purposeful activity spaces for every resident to have the opportunity to engage in part-time employment across the establishment, as a minimum, and residents are encouraged to participate in a blended learning approach, including part-time learning and part-time work opportunities. The provision primarily focuses on employability and social empowerment with English, mathematics, ICT and life skills. The courses are designed to support the resettlement of learners and to help them achieve economic wellbeing upon release.

The support and development of learners' functional skills (English and mathematics) and ICT skills are a high priority, and are developed throughout the curriculum.

The prison has recently created a café, which is run by trained residents, providing coffee and hot and cold snacks to staff members. It is intended to expand the use of the café to those residents with enhanced status.

Residents have expressed a wish to see more manual subjects, such as brick laying and a DIY academy. This has been explored but there is not enough space to allow for a new workshop.

The average monthly attendance from October 2019 to March 2020 was 75% (the average for the year was 72.64%). However, severe disruption throughout the winter months occurred owing to classrooms and offices being condemned because of roof damage causing flooding. Despite this handicap, the education staff coped remarkably well. Improving attendance is an area to be developed.

Equality and diversity are embraced and promoted by all staff members. The annual calendar of themed group projects is shared throughout the establishment, and focuses on the wider topics linked to equality and diversity issues.

The observations of teaching and learning conducted show that 100% were graded as good or better. All tutors receive two formal observations during the year.

During the period November 2019 to March 2020, it was a member's responsibility to monitor education as an area of special interest, and was taken up by a new member, .

The Board member has attended regular sessions, and has sat alongside the residents, observing the classroom learning process. The sessions have included induction processes, mathematics and English, business start-up, hospitality, customer service and digital awareness.

Observations have also taken place in hairdressing and beauty, and food production. Observations of residents' ETPs show that these are being used effectively and are of a good standard. There is clear evidence that all sessions are delivered by the tutors with enthusiasm, sensitivity to needs and a genuine desire to help the learner. At all of these sessions, the Board member has asked for feedback from the individual resident, and the vast majority of comments have been of a positive nature.

The atmosphere in all areas of education is conducive to learning and reform processes.

The Board will continue to regularly observe and monitor, in line with the National Monitoring Framework guidelines, and will provide evidence for Board key message number 6: 'Monitoring the range and adequacy of programmes preparing prisoner for release'.

### **7.3 Offender management, progression**

Staff within the offender management unit (OMU) work with the community rehabilitation companies and other agencies, to progress residents through the system. Residents are sentenced to a great variety of lengths of sentence, each

needing an individual plan. They arrive with various issues, such as drug misuse, homelessness and mental health issues. Length of sentence and compliance or otherwise with the OMU means that these issues cannot always be fully addressed.

HMP/YOI Low Newton provides a wide range of interventions in the prison in order to help residents stop reoffending after release. Included in these are the Thinking Skills Programme, drug and alcohol support, 'through-the-gate' services, counselling and mental health support.

The prison would benefit from more funding to provide extra domestic violence support, trauma counselling, supported accommodation and social work, both in the prison and on release.

#### **7.4 Family contact**

Visiting is facilitated by NEPACS which is a North-East charity providing support for prisoners and their families. NEPACS, prison staff and some prisoners on release on temporary licence (ROTL) help in the visitors' centre, helping with the families and running the café. The visitors' area has flexibility, in terms of layout, and this is used to good advantage for a variety of types of visit. Board members regularly attend visits and note the positive effect they have on the prisoners.

#### **7.5 Resettlement planning**

The main areas of concern in preparing the residents for release are finding suitable accommodation, giving them support from the gate to appointments, and providing appropriate mental health support.

Approximately 15–20% of the women are released without suitable and safe accommodation, particularly those who are from the Cumbria area.

A survey was conducted in January 2020 by Board members, to ascertain the problems which might occur for women on release. All the women who were to be released during a selected fortnight were interviewed, and 40% said that they had no permanent suitable and safe accommodation to go to. All of them said that they had received help to prepare for release – 40% said that this was excellent and only 20% said that this was poor. Again, all the women said that they had drug, alcohol or mental health issues, and one said that she had a gambling problem for which she had received no help. It is hoped that the Resettlement Planning Survey will be repeated next year and become a regular source of information.

## 8. The work of the IMB

The Board at HMP/YOI Low Newton is below strength. At the start of the reporting period there were only two members. Two more members who are dual boarding have joined the Board, bringing membership to four. A joint recruitment campaign with HMP Frankland has been carried out, and three new Board members have been appointed to Low Newton but are awaiting security clearance.

Duties are arranged into two rotas. In the first, a member will visit the establishment and deal with any outstanding applications, and also receive applications directly from prisoners ('on the hoof') during the visit. Prisoners in the healthcare unit, CSU and on cellular confinement will be visited, along with a visit to the kitchen. Some or all of the wings will be visited, along with other areas of the prison as appropriate. If there are GOOD reviews or adjudications taking place during the time of the visit, the member may observe proceedings.

The second rota is specifically for Wednesday afternoons, when a member attends GOOD reviews. The prison aligns GOOD reviews after the initial 72 hours to take place on Wednesday afternoons, so that the member can observe. The member telephones to confirm that reviews are planned, in order to prevent attendance unnecessarily.

Board members try to attend prison meetings as observers when it is relevant and possible. This has been difficult owing to the reduced number of Board members.

The Board offers an open invitation to the Governor or the Deputy Governor to attend the Board's monthly meeting, where the Governor delivers a report and answers queries raised by Board members.

### Board statistics (not all completed due to lockdown restrictions)

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	2
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	4
Total number of visits to the establishment	xxx
Total number of segregation reviews attended	xxx

## Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions		<b>1</b>
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions		<b>5</b>
C	Equality		
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell		
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions		<b>6</b>
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends		<b>1</b>
F	Food and kitchens		<b>3</b>
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care		<b>11</b>
H1	Property within this establishment		<b>4</b>
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location		<b>2</b>
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)		<b>1</b>
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew, ROTL, parole, release dates, recategorisation		<b>1</b>
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying		<b>3</b>
K	Transfers		<b>1</b>
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system		<b>3</b>
	Total number of applications		<b>42</b>



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