



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Belmarsh

**For reporting year
1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020**

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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 Belmarsh opened in April 1991, at a cost of over £105m. It occupies some 60 acres on the old Ministry of Defence Woolwich Arsenal site in south east London, 47 acres of which are within the perimeter wall. It is located alongside HMP Thameside, HMP/YOI Isis and Woolwich Crown Court.

It is a category A men's prison, and a core local prison within the high security estate. It primarily serves the Central Criminal Court and magistrates' courts in south east London and parts of Essex, as well as holding high security risk prisoners on remand and awaiting trial. Prisoners of all categories may be housed in Belmarsh.

At the end of June 2020, the certified normal accommodation at Belmarsh was 793 and the operational capacity (the maximum population it can hold) was 814. This was a reduced operational capacity from the prison's theoretical figure of 910, as a result of the changes to accommodation arrangements needed to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

The accommodation is spread across four equal-sized house blocks, a healthcare centre, a segregation unit and a high security unit (HSU).

The main providers of contract services to the prison are:

- Maintenance: Government Facilities Services Limited (GFSL)
- Healthcare: Oxleas Healthcare Trust
- Education: Milton Keynes College.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences dominated life in HMP Belmarsh, as for everybody else in the country, in the last few months of this reporting year. The pandemic had abated from its height by the end of June 2020, and some of the restrictive measures put in place at the end of March across the prison estate, and in Belmarsh specifically, had been eased slightly, but the prison regime was still very different from pre-pandemic normality.

In this report, the Board describes measures taken by the prison to deal with the pandemic, and explains how it has tried to uphold its independent monitoring role to the best of its ability during a period when most members have been unable to make visits to the prison in person, and when the Board's capacity to hear directly from prisoners about their experience has been drastically reduced. As explained in section 8, during this period of effectively 'remote' monitoring, the Board needed enhanced cooperation from prison senior managers and other staff, and it is grateful for their helpful attitude.

At the same time, assessment of the performance of the prison over the entire year should not be unduly influenced by being viewed through the prism of the recent pandemic. For nearly nine months of the reporting year, the prison was operating under normal conditions, and this report, in adducing evidence and arriving at its judgements and recommendations, gives full and appropriate weight to events during that period.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

Levels of violence in the prison inevitably dropped during the COVID-19 lockdown, when prisoners were largely confined to their cells, but even before that, prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff assaults were running at significantly lower levels than in the previous year. The Board is impressed by the dedication of staff and governors in trying to maintain a safe environment throughout the prison. The main area of concern is the existence of so many gangs, and the influence and pressure that these gang members exert on other prisoners and the ensuing conflict issues.

The issue of triple occupancy in cells designed for two remained a major area of concern from a safety perspective, as well as a decency one. The Board welcomes the intention to phase out triple-occupancy cells in 2020/21.

Throughout the pandemic, staff worked very hard to provide a safe and secure environment and were innovative in the many measures they introduced. It is also impressive that staff are considering which lessons can be learned from practices undertaken throughout the pandemic and which can be taken forward into the future.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

Belmarsh tries hard to ensure that its accommodation and public areas are kept in a decent manner. However, the shower areas, on which we have been reporting

critically for several years, continue to be a disgrace, and a cause of real concern. The prison is not well supported by GFSL at all, and the time taken to get even simple tasks completed is unacceptable to the Board. Facilities management requires review and radical improvement. Overall, and with local initiatives, Belmarsh tries hard to keep itself decently, and the advent of the in-cell telephone and television systems has been a major plus in the overall experience for prisoners.

It is not to minimise the deprivations experienced by prisoners during the COVID-19 lockdown to say that the manner in which they were managed was exceptionally good. Crucially, numbers of confirmed cases of COVID-19 were low. Prisoners were confined to cells for a majority of the time, but they still accessed showers and exercise, and had the chance of some physical education and association. Communication of information appeared to be good, and some workshops, where social distancing was possible, were kept open. Education continued, in a cell-based form. It is testament to how well Belmarsh was managed that it was among the first tranche of prisons to move from regime stage 4 (lockdown) to regime stage 3 (restrict) in Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)'s COVID-19 national framework roadmap.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

In general, the provision of healthcare services at Belmarsh by Oxleas National Health Service (NHS) Trust is of an entirely satisfactory standard, and liaison between prison discipline staff and healthcare staff works well. Mental health issues among prisoners are a significant concern, with most inpatient beds occupied by mental health patients. This concern was amplified during the pandemic, when face-to-face psychology work practically stopped.

Some issues highlighted in this report are adversely affecting the standard of healthcare service provision. The main problems are:

- cancellation of hospital appointments
- continuing high rates of 'did not attend' for outpatient clinics
- problems recruiting primary care nursing staff.

Management of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic within the healthcare centre and throughout the prison more widely was achieved in a controlled and professional manner. Very regrettably, one prisoner died after testing positive, and six others had tested positive up to 30 June 2020. There was an outbreak of cases among healthcare staff and discipline staff which led to inpatients being placed in a sealed bubble for several weeks. This action, and other measures detailed in this report, prevented wider spread within the prison. Overall, the prison's record on protecting prisoners and staff from infection was good. The prison benefited from being able to use spurs in its HSU as an isolation facility.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

Effective provision of purposeful activity within the prison remains hampered by difficulties in enabling sufficient numbers of prisoners to attend education and workshops, in part owing to conflicts. Purposeful activity was gradually building up at the end of the reporting year, after several months of severe limitations during the pandemic.

In education, on balance, the new provider (Milton Keynes College) made a promising start, with a number of interesting initiatives. However, several of these were not as successful as anticipated. The Board remains concerned that educational provision for prisoners in the HSU and segregation unit is not of a sufficiently high standard. Workshops are of variable quality, with some examples of very good practice and others less inspiring.

During the year, the work of the offender management unit (OMU) was hampered at times by cross-deployment of staff, although this stopped during the pandemic. The continuing shortage of category D places in the prison estate prevented some transfers out, causing a lot of dissatisfaction among the prisoners concerned. Probation staff look forward to the new arrangements for the unification of the National Probation Service, which, it is hoped, will make them more efficient and responsive.

For those prisoners seeking recategorisation, there have been problems in obtaining access to the courses needed to facilitate that. The Board did not encounter any major concerns in the course of this year with arrangements for the resettlement of prisoners on release, managed principally by the community rehabilitation company (CRC), but there have been practical problems with arranging pre-release interviews.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

For several years, our annual reports have highlighted the deplorable and unacceptable condition of the shower areas at Belmarsh. Assurances that the necessary comprehensive refurbishment would take place have not been fulfilled. Will the minister direct HMPPS to allocate funding for this works programme and to ensure that it takes place in 2020/21 (see section 5.1)?

The end of custody temporary release scheme was announced before the prison had received guidance and information on how it would operate, causing it problems in dealing with inquiries from prisoners, their families and their legal representatives. Will the minister ensure that, in future, prisons which are required to implement such nationwide policies are fully informed and prepared before policies are publicly announced (see section 7.6)?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

Will HMPPS work with the prison and Serco to ensure that Belmarsh prisoners are not delayed in returning to the prison after attending court (see section 4.1)?

Will HMPPS take steps to achieve significant improvement in the timeliness and efficiency of facilities management work at Belmarsh (see section 5.1)?

Will HMPPS work with the prison to ensure that three-person occupancy of cells at Belmarsh is ended in the course of 2020/21 and is not reintroduced after that (see section 5.1)?

Will HMPPS reform the system of handling prisoners' property throughout the prison estate, so that it works effectively at ensuring that prisoners are united with their

property swiftly and correctly whenever they move in the prison system (see section 5.8)?

Will HMPPS confirm whether the known error in the national prison visits booking system has been resolved? (section 7.4)

TO THE GOVERNOR

Will the prison take steps to encourage greater use of body-worn cameras in the high security and segregation units, to bring levels of use in line with the rest of the prison (see sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2)?

Will the prison review the policy relating to the provision of in-cell telephony in the HSU, with a view to permitting in-cell telephone use for this group of prisoners, in line with other high-security prisons and subject to necessary security restrictions (see section 5.2.1)?

Will the prison take steps to remedy the continued poor ventilation in the HSU (see section 5.2.1)?

Will the prison take steps to ensure that all prisoners in the segregation unit receive the amount of daily exercise to which they are entitled (see section 5.2.2)?

Will the prison implement recommendations 26 and 27 of the 2017 Lammy Review in its handling of all complaints, not just discrimination complaints, and change the process for complaints to accommodate them (see section 5.7)?

Will the prison take steps to improve the environment of the outpatients holding room (see section 6.2)?

Will the prison make every effort, along with Milton Keynes College, to ensure that education is better tailored to the needs of the prisoners and available to more of them, and to improve education offered to prisoners in the HSU and the segregation unit (section 7.1)?

Will the prison take further steps, by effective use of risk assessment and other means, to increase significantly the number of prisoners with access to meaningful work experience and training (section 7.2)?

3.4 Progress since the last report

Comparing the fairness and decency of treatment of prisoners at Belmarsh in this reporting year with the previous one is not a simple task, largely because of the impact of the restrictions imposed to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. This had seriously detrimental effects in a number of areas: it brought an abrupt and total halt to purposeful activity; it deprived prisoners of the opportunity to see family and friends, in person on visits; and it confined prisoners to their cells for up to 23 hours a day.

Some mitigation of these deprivations was possible, and we were repeatedly assured by prison managers that prisoners were understanding of the rationale behind restrictions and the objective of protecting them from COVID-19 infection.

There have been some important positive developments since our last report:

- There has been a reduction in incidents of prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff violence, although levels of gang activity and violence remain worrying.
- Welcome progress has been made on reducing the number of cells occupied by three people.
- Equality issues were handled well.
- The new incentives and earned privileges (IEP) policy for the prison is a significant improvement.
- There has been greater use of body-worn cameras, although they are not yet routinely worn by all staff, including in the HSU and the segregation unit.
- Governance of use of force has improved.

On the other hand, incidents of self-harm have unfortunately increased. It is extremely frustrating to have to report again on the continued failure to refurbish the shower areas across the main house blocks. It is also disappointing that the upgrade of the HSU has not resolved the inadequate ventilation and high temperatures suffered there during the summer months.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Reception continues to see a high volume of movement; in a fairly typical month, January 2020, there were 845 movements in and 844 out (arrivals, releases, transfers, movements to and from hospitals and courts). A major concern for the staff in reception is the large number of conflicts they have to deal with when transporting prisoners for court appearances. The problems are not simply restricted to keeping prisoners safe by separating members from different gangs (made worse by the fact that not all gang members are willing to declare their gang membership), but also the time it takes to get prisoners off the vehicles and through reception upon return from court, with the inevitable knock-on delays, resulting in prisoners being late for (or even missing altogether) exercise or showers. This was exacerbated by transportation delays in the escorting of prisoners returning from court under the contract with Serco.

The body scanner installed last year was effective in identifying prisoners attempting to smuggle illicit items into the prison.

From the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, all prisoners coming into the prison (whether from court or prison transfer) were screened at the reception sterile area as soon as they disembarked from the van. A healthcare worker carried out the initial screening process and was expected to wear protective equipment. The assessment included taking prisoners' body temperature and going through the COVID-19 screen specific questions. Following the screening, patients were categorised into four groups, and, subject to their categorisation, either proceeded to the first night centre, self-isolated for seven days, self-isolated for 14 days in their cell, or isolated in the HSU. A COVID-19 support log was prepared for all those with symptoms, and prisoners appeared to be well managed. HM Inspectorate of Prisons' (HMIP's) report on its short scrutiny visit in May 2020 highlighted Belmarsh's good practice.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There was a large increase in incidents of self-harm in the period April 2019 to March 2020 (444), compared with the same period in the previous year (266). However, this was mainly attributable to a small number of individual prisoners, each with very large numbers of incidents recorded. Belmarsh remained one of the prisons in the high security estate with the lowest recorded figures.

There is a prison pilot under way for upgrading the assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) process in place for prisoners deemed to be at risk of suicide or self-harm, but Belmarsh is not involved in this. Generally, it is considered that ACCTs are well managed in the prison.

There were five deaths in custody in the reporting year: one of these was alleged murder, one COVID-19-related and three were apparently self-inflicted. The inquests have not yet been done.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The safer custody team maintained the same level of staffing as in the previous year, with one custodial manager, one administrator and four officers. However, during the pandemic, this team was augmented by the custodial manager for equalities and use of force, four more officers and one senior officer. This team will be renamed as the 'safer prisons team'. During the pandemic, the team was responsible for the provision of extra care and support to prisoners with complex needs and vulnerability. A visitors/family telephone line was introduced in January 2020, with 24-hour cover. Processes were in place to ensure that all calls were logged and responded to. Relatives were especially grateful for the additional contact this has given them. HMIP visited the prison in May 2020 for one day, to review the work being done during the pandemic, and recognised some of it as 'best practice'. It is planned that many of the new processes and working practices put in place during the pandemic will be retained as the prison returns to normal working.

The figures for assaults on prisoners and staff are shown below:

	Apr 18 – Mar 19	Apr 19 – Mar 20
Assaults on staff	161	105
Assaults on prisoners	299	267

The prison considers the reduced figures to be attributable to a number of factors: improved staff/prisoner relationships, the introduction of key workers, increased use of body-worn cameras, better management of complex prisoners, and more one-to-one work. Overall, the emphasis has shifted to engaging and understanding prisoners with complex issues, rather than initiating punishment as the first recourse. This is reflected in the new IEP system introduced (see section 5.6).

There were 110 drugs finds between June 2019 and May 2020. The censor's department made the most finds by use of the itemiser, which prevented 42 contaminated letters/pictures from entering the establishment. Most of these items were contaminated with 'spice', followed by cannabis and then a variety of other substances. A number of the finds elsewhere in the establishment were also suspected paper contamination and subsequently tested positive for spice. The itemiser machine was key in identifying substances found elsewhere in the prison. A further four drug finds were in reception, due to the use of the body scanner. In the last months of the reporting year, the number of finds went down owing to the pandemic. This led to a decrease in searching and a potential decrease in trafficking. However, during this period there was an increase in the amount of contaminated mail coming in, mainly bogus Rule 39 mail.

Intelligence on prisoners suspected of being under the influence of illicit substances did not fluctuate much from month to month. When medication is found in large quantities or in possession of a prisoner they are not prescribed to, such finds are included in drug find statistics. Medication finds accounted for a small minority of the 110 drugs finds during the year.

Over the same period there were also reported:

- 10 alcohol finds ('hooch'), but no intelligence was received suggesting that prisoners had been found intoxicated with alcohol
- 150 weapon finds: the majority of these were classed as minor, with house block 4 having the majority. This could be attributed to two lockdown searches taking place, and previous issues around gang culture
- 23 mobile phone finds, 16 of which were intercepted in reception, the majority after being identified by the body scanner.

As well as mobile phones, there were 18 USB/SD cards, six drug finds, three SIM cards, two tobacco finds and two weapons found using the body scanner in reception, and other items were found in prisoners' property through use of the x-ray machine and staff searching. There was no new technology in use at the end of the reporting year, and an upgrade was planned for the body scanner.

Two dedicated search team (DST) officers completed the Metropolitan Police exhibits officer training at Hendon, as a result of some work done with senior police officers involved in a London prisons and police strategy in 2019. This was the first time such training has been completed by HMPPS staff. These staff will hopefully be used to influence changes in the national DST training package. The local evidence preservation training was updated, to ensure that staff were being taught to preserve evidence to Crown Prosecution Service charging standards. Too often, cases could not be progressed because the evidence has not been handled properly. It is hoped that this training will improve the prison's ability to assist the police in getting a successful prosecution when a serious crime has been committed in prison.

There continued to be a large number of gangs identified within the prison, resulting in difficulties in managing conflicts. Some funding was allocated to the prison early in the year to facilitate work with outside agencies. However, this work had to be placed on hold because of the pandemic. It restarted at the end of the reporting year, with efforts being made to bring in local people with knowledge of gangs and conflict management. As a result of costs, this will need to be limited to small-scale initiatives. One part-time person continued to work in the safer custody team, with prisoners, mainly gang members, on motivational work relating to gang membership.

Staff came to a general acceptance of the value of body-worn cameras, and these were widely used during incidents and unlocks. Previously reported technical issues with the cameras seem to have been resolved during the year.

The numbers of prisoners self-isolating were very low towards the end of the year. The prison considers that this is because prisoners felt safer during the lockdown and were managed effectively at that time. The Board hopes that this improved management will continue for this group of prisoners as lockdown is eased.

The work being done at Belmarsh through the challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) system for violent individuals is recognised by HMIP as best practice in the high security estate. By trying to help and progress difficult prisoners, rather than placing an emphasis on punishment, improved results are being seen, with prisoners being able to be removed from CSIPs. For example, two very difficult prisoners, with many violent incidents recorded, were given jobs as enhanced cleaners, and one was looking to be recategorised as category C. The prison is considering many more progressive and innovative ways of managing this group of prisoners, one being to involve families in their CSIP progression and planning.

4.4 Vulnerable prisoners, safeguarding

The number of vulnerable prisoners (VPs) reduced considerably, so that by the end of the reporting year there was no need for the VP overflow, and most VPs were on the main VP spur.

The prison has a draft local policy for safeguarding, and this area has not previously been reported upon. Specific issues are:

- Prisoners identified as care leavers (that is, those who have been in care, before coming into prison) will receive additional support both within the prison and from social services when they leave prison. This support on leaving prison will include support with housing and jobs.
- The safeguarding policy also covers the process for child and victim support.
- Staff are covered by the safeguarding policy, whereby they may be identified, for example, as being victims of domestic violence. In these cases, they may be put in touch with outside agencies.
- Links are being established with the local boroughs in relation to housing and business.
- A new project on young people in gangs is about to be released.

4.5 Use of force

There were 322 use of force incidents in the prison from July 2019 to March 2020, and during the pandemic lockdown there were a further 126 incidents. There was a slight upward trend in incidents over the reporting year, and between January and May 2020 there was an increase of over 60 incidents compared with the same period in 2019. When there is an incident, the emergency control room is supposed to remind staff to activate body-worn cameras.

Most incidents entail control and restraint; there were 347 of these between April 2019 and March 2020. There were also 116 incidents in which handcuffs were used and three incidents when batons were drawn, but not used. It is difficult to find information regarding instances of the use of excessive force, if any. No figures are held on a database.

This year, the Governor introduced a safer prisons group, consisting of staff tasked with improving all elements of use of force. In autumn 2019, a use of force coordinator was put in place to devise a system to ensure that all paperwork relating to an incident is submitted within 72 hours of the occurrence of the incident, and to implement a training course in the use of PAVA spray (an incapacitating spray, similar to pepper spray), SPEAR (Spontaneous Protection Enabling Accelerated Response; a close-quarter personal defence method) and rigid-bar handcuffs. This training was suspended nationally during lockdown, and PAVA has not been used in the prison.

In our last annual report, the Board asked the Governor to bring forward improvements to ensure completion of use of force reports in a timely manner. At the end of the reporting year, only 12 reports were outstanding, and these all related to use of force incidents which took place in the last month of the year. This represents commendable progress compared with the position a few years ago, when there

were over 500 items of outstanding and missing paperwork. The Board is pleased with the progress made in improving governance of the use of force in the prison.

4.6 Substance misuse

A new drug strategy has been promulgated by HMPPS. In addition, during the course of the year, one of the matters which Board members looked into over a period of a couple of months when making rota visits was the operation of the mandatory drug testing programme. This was judged to be running satisfactorily and with due regard to prisoners' rights.

Information on drugs finds during the year is contained in section 4.3. The Board heard some reports from prison staff that levels of drug misuse and attendant problems of disorder declined when regime restrictions were imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In June 2020, at the end of the reporting year, there were 44 prisoners on drug programmes and receiving support; in the same month, 10 individuals were given post-release treatment and support.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

HMP Belmarsh has a published decency policy but there are no published standards of cleanliness. Nor is there a process for ensuring that residential areas are cleaned and maintained to a published standard. However, the Board has noted that, in general, the prison accommodation is clean and in fair decorative order. Some useful self-help initiatives have taken place – for instance, the painting of house block 4, which has made a significant improvement in the appearance of the house block. The Board's main concern remains the dilapidated state of showers across the prison (see below). Belmarsh was inspected by the operational and systems assurance group on 9 and 10 March 2020.

After many years of reporting critically on triple occupancy of cells not designed for three people at Belmarsh, the Board was encouraged by some positive developments this year. In March 2020 triple occupancy was ended in 15 of these cells as part of measures to deal with the pandemic, and a plan was put in place to phase out triple occupancy altogether over a six-month period starting in June 2020, alongside a reduction in the prison's operational capacity. Provided that there is no back-tracking on this plan, this single action will, at a stroke, remove one of the main reasons for prisoners being accommodated in inhumane conditions. The Board understands, however, that this plan may be halted or reversed if pressures re-emerge in the national prison population. The Board is strongly of the view that triple occupancy of cells which are not designed for three people must end at Belmarsh, and should under no circumstances be reintroduced.

Public areas were generally well maintained, with prisoner art, and clean and informative noticeboards. Outside areas were largely clean and tidy, and the gardens well maintained. The Board noticed a positive change in the overall cleanliness of outside areas in the second half of the year.

As mentioned above, the condition of the communal showers in all house blocks has remained a disgrace and wholly unacceptable. The Board has reported adversely on this for a number of years, without the matter being resolved. The shower areas have been the subject of repeated annual refurbishment bids to the centre which have consistently been refused or postponed. The Governor indicated to the Board that money had been found for a localised revamp of some showers, but the limited nature of this welcome initiative does not affect the urgent need to undertake comprehensive refurbishment of all shower blocks across Belmarsh. The Board considers this to be a failure, and draws it to the attention of the minister as a matter which must be resolved.

The overall standard of facilities management by GFSL, which took over responsibility for this following the demise of Carillion, continued to cause concern, both across the prison and during our monitoring process. Despite monthly meetings taking place between the Governor and GFSL managers, problems remained over the time taken to effect minor repairs and the inordinate amount of outstanding repairs. During the year, the Board monitored the speed at which repairs are carried out. On a few occasions, it was noted that work was carried out expeditiously but, in

general, work was slow to be completed, especially if it required supplies, such as a replacement sink. There was no agility or flexibility at all in the works system. This is a matter of concern to the Board which we bring to the attention of HMPPS.

Deep cleaning of food areas, including kitchens and bistro areas, was carried out on a regular basis. Descaling of toilets took place every six months under a localised prison initiative. Cell ventilation in the house blocks was adequate and was not a source of complaint. Furniture within cells was of mixed quality, while cells were generally in a good state of repair. Education classrooms, workshops, the chapel and the visits area were all in an acceptable state of decoration.

The installation of in-cell telephones, completed as the COVID-19 lockdown confined prisoners for much longer in their cells, was a positive development. Along with additional telephone credit, it allowed prisoners greater contact with their families and was very well received by prisoners, especially as it came at a time when social visits had been stopped.

The addition of televisions in each cell was also exceedingly well received, coming as it did just before the COVID-19 lockdown. The introduction of a prisoner information channel was something of a masterstroke. The speed with which the system was installed was impressive, and is a lesson on how tendering and works can do things with speed, when required.

The prison received £2.19 per prisoner per day for food, based on a roll of 802 prisoners. The additional cost for any specific religious or dietary needs had to be met from this budget. In addition, the prison provided special meals for all the religious festivals throughout the year. The level of complaints about food to the prison and the Board remained low.

Throughout the pandemic, daily comfort packs and bottled water were handed out. The cost of these was met centrally, so did not affect the prison budget. During the pandemic, the number of prisoners working in the kitchen regularly was eight or nine, down from the normal 14 or 15. However this worked well, as the prisoners concerned worked hard and were very committed. The staff mess, BelMar, was kept open throughout.

5.2 HSU and segregation unit

5.2.1 HSU

The HSU at Belmarsh has four spurs and a total capacity for 48 prisoners, plus one constant observation cell and one disabled cell. The average occupancy level over the reporting year was 10, and only one spur was in use. In addition, from March 2020 two other spurs, with a combined capacity of 24, were used to isolate suspected COVID-19 patients and those being tested and quarantined for 14 days minimum on arrival in prison.

The HSU's segregation unit was empty for most of the reporting year, but three prisoners were placed there in March 2020 following a serious assault on an officer.

During the year, refurbishment of the HSU's spurs, showers, video link and visits suite was completed. In the 2018/19 annual report, the Board referred to the poor

ventilation in the HSU, making conditions deplorably hot for prisoners and staff in the summer. In his response, the Governor admitted that the air exchange system had not been working effectively for a number of years, and said that its repair as part of the HSU upgrade would increase air movement by 30%. However, the HSU has remained hot, and the new sealed windows installed in the spurs have not allowed cool air to circulate, with fans still having to be used. The Board does not consider this to be acceptable.

Until early March 2020, the HSU was operating a full regime, under which prisoners had daily access to telephone calls, showers and an hour's exercise. After a fight in March 2020 between Muslims and non-Muslims, during which an officer was seriously injured, a split regime came into effect, with no periods of association, and exercise limited to once a day, with telephone calls booked and facilitated. The COVID-19 measures meant that there were no visits, and the interpreter was unable to come in. Tensions between the two groups of prisoners have continued. The HSU governor has told the Board that prisoners who were not involved in the fight remain fully compliant with the current regime and have praised the prison for keeping them safe.

In the HSU, the custodial manager, senior officer and one patrol officer wear a body-worn camera, but there are not enough for all staff to draw one each day. The Board is disappointed that there are so few body-worn cameras being worn routinely by officers.

Prisoners continued to be employed as cleaners in the unit during the COVID-19 lockdown, but the Board is disappointed that there has been no work for prisoners in the garden since summer 2019. The education department continued to provide prisoners with printed handouts, which they were paid for completing. In the last annual report, the Board called for improved in-cell educational provision in the HSU, and before the COVID-19 lockdown Milton Keynes College had put together and rolled out a distance learning package. The HSU governor was planning to look at delivery of a better package with the college once all spurs were open, but that governor has now left Belmarsh and there had been no further progress by the end of the reporting year.

Someone from the senior management team, healthcare centre, mental health team and chaplaincy visited the HSU on a daily basis, and representatives from psychology and education departments visited at least once a week or as required. When weekly Board rota visits took place before the COVID-19 lockdown, the HSU was always part of those visits. In the last annual report, the Board raised concerns about the speed of telephone call clearance for the approved visitors scheme for HSU prisoners, and the Governor ascribed delays to a lack of police resources. No issues have been raised in this reporting year regarding delays in telephone clearance.

There were no use of force incidents in the HSU until the fight which took place there in early March 2020, which led to three control and restraint incidents and three batons drawn. During the COVID-19 lockdown, there were two planned interventions on a spur in May and three further control and restraint incidents that month.

The Samaritans telephones are in the association area of the spur, so, despite the hood around the handset, calls are not effectively private or confidential. At times, the sound was poor and the handsets were sometimes broken. Prisoners are given a

£10 credit on the Samaritans universal PIN. Security in the prison does not allow in-cell telephones for HSU prisoners. The Board questions why arrangements can be made, consistent with security requirements, to allow in-cell telephony in other high-security prisons but not at Belmarsh. There is no provision for Listeners for HSU prisoners, but the prison was reviewing that policy at the end of the reporting year.

5.2.2 Segregation unit

All 16 cells in the segregation unit were, for the most part, in full working order over the reporting year, with an average occupancy of 11. There was some minor damage to cells, such as the smashing of observation panels, recorded during the year, and no cells were out of use for longer than 24 hours at a time. There were no more than three or four short 'dirty protests' over the reporting year.

Two cells are reserved for close supervision centre (CSC) prisoners, who are managed by senior staff in HMPPS. Both cells were occupied during the reporting year. The prison receives payment for CSC use of the cells, plus two extra staff members.

At the end of the reporting year, the showers on the unit were in good working order, although the flooring was in need of a deep clean, planned for after the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. All other facilities were to a good standard. The unit's cleaners completed the prison's painting and decorating course and they painted cells and landings as required.

Prisoners on the segregation unit were visited on a daily basis by a governor, a member of the chaplaincy, and mental health and healthcare staff. The psychology team regularly visited any CSC referrals and others with complex and challenging needs, and offered support to officers working on the unit. Until COVID-19 restrictions were put in place, the Board visited at least once a week, to attend Good Order or Discipline (GOOD) reviews and to speak to each prisoner. There were no permanent Listeners on the unit, but a Listener from one of the house blocks could be called to attend if necessary. All prisoners had access to the Samaritans telephone, but telephone reception could be sporadic.

The segregation staffing level is a senior officer and six officers. The unit was well staffed before the COVID-19 lockdown, so a full regime continued to be offered to prisoners who were on a multi-unlock protocol, although at times the unit operated at near full capacity and it was difficult to manage the regime. The use of segregation in the last few months of the reporting year was well managed, and most prisoners stayed for short periods. Over the year, there were far fewer prisoners on the highest level of multi-unlock – that is, requiring at least six officers present to unlock them. An agreed profile was established to support high multi-unlocks. Towards the end of the year, the multi-unlock system was reviewed by segregation unit managers and a new policy was written, with reviews routinely carried out on the unlock levels in the unit.

The senior officer wears a body-worn camera, and it is left to the choice of other staff whether to wear one. These are effective and have been accepted well by prisoners; they are now added to unlock protocols for those prisoners who require it. The Board is concerned that the wearing of body-worn cameras is not mandatory on the unit.

CSC prisoners continued to be entitled to an hour's exercise a day on application, including the use of the segregation unit gym. They could also use the AstroTurf for 40 minutes of circuit training at the main gym, under supervision, on Sundays. A risk assessment was in place which allowed non-CSC prisoners to share the exercise yard but, due to the complex prisoner group housed on the unit, it was sometimes not possible to achieve this. Non-CSC prisoners were still entitled to one hour's exercise each day but only if the unit was not full. When the unit was full, they could find themselves restricted to 30 minutes' exercise per day, and they needed a specific reason to be able to use the unit's in-house gym. The Board is concerned that non-CSC prisoners are still not receiving their full exercise entitlements.

On arrival in segregation, prisoners were offered distraction packs and also in-cell education packs. They are paid when they complete the education pack. They had daily access to the unit's library and, on general application, to the main Belmarsh library. Prisoners held on the unit on GOOD provisions were offered jobs such as cleaning the showers and exercise yards, stamping letters and painting cells. Prisoners on cellular confinement had no access to jobs. The Board is disappointed that negligible progress has been made in response to its request, made in its previous annual report, for improvements to educational provision on the unit.

Prisoners in segregation who refused to return to normal location were put on a basic refusal regime (three showers per week and no television or radio) unless the refusal to return to normal location was due to them being under threat. The Board is pleased that the number of prisoners on this regime dropped dramatically over the reporting year, and by the end of the year it was only being used at times when the unit was full.

There were 36 incidents of use of force on the segregation unit over the reporting year, twice as many as in the previous year. In the last three months of the year, during the COVID-19 lockdown, there were nine incidents.

Weekly GOOD reviews were held throughout the year, including throughout the COVID-19 lockdown. During lockdown, Board members attended remotely by teleconference, apart from one or two occasions when they were not able to connect. Board members also found it difficult to hear much of the exchanges during reviews, and to contribute.

Prisoners continued to throw large amounts of litter out of their cell windows, making it almost impossible to keep the outside area clean.

Segregation staff held regular sessions with the psychology team, in order to improve the wellbeing of staff working with challenging behaviours.

Before the COVID-19 lockdown, between 10 and 15 adjudications were held per day in the adjudications room on the segregation unit, conducted by a governor or an outside independent adjudicator. During lockdown, adjudications were held on the house blocks, in order to minimise the risk from movement. The average number per day has reduced to between eight and 10. At the end of the year, the segregation unit had 64 adjudications remanded, 40 fewer than at the start of lockdown.

5.3 Staff/prisoner relationships, key workers

Relationships between staff and prisoners were generally good. Throughout the year, the Board witnessed staff engaging well with prisoners and generally encouraging them in safe practice. The key worker scheme was introduced, to the benefit of prisoners and staff alike, and was well received, although unfortunately it had to be put on hold during the pandemic lockdown.

Prisoners were normally positive about staff support and, according to reports that the Board received from prison managers, most accepted the need for regime restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The support of vulnerable people at this time was particularly good. The COVID-19 working group had a list of around 160 people with various types of vulnerability; each of these was risk assessed for daily, three-day or five-day personal checks, and was seen or telephoned on these days, with a spreadsheet keeping track of all these contacts.

A Prisons Research Centre Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) exercise was due to take place at Belmarsh on 18 May 2020, but was postponed because of the pandemic. The Belmarsh assurance team started its own survey, issuing over 700 questionnaires to prisoners, about 10% of which were completed. Analysis of some returns showed that the majority of prisoners said that they were treated with respect by staff, and most prisoners who had been allocated a key worker had found this new process to be effective, and their key workers to be helpful.

Belmarsh has an active and engaged prisoner council, and Board members attending meetings were impressed by the relationships between staff and prisoners.

A protocol is in place between the Board and the prison, whereby instances of allegations of staff heavy-handedness and bullying are investigated by the Deputy Governor and the outcomes provided to the Board.

Overall, the Board judges that staff/prisoner relationships have been good, and mechanisms are in place to investigate when that might not have been the case.

5.4 Equality and diversity

The Board is pleased to report that equality has been well managed, with strand leads appointed to all the nine protected characteristics areas, and a proactive approach taken throughout. There has been an impressive range of events planned and held throughout the year to celebrate all areas – see calendar for 2020 below:

APRIL	SEPTEMBER
W/c 1 st - Autism Awareness week	8 th - International Literacy Day
Thursday 9 th - Start of Passover	23 rd - Bi Visibility Day
Saturday 25 th - Start of Ramadan	Black History Month
MAY	OCTOBER
W/c 4 th - Deaf Awareness Week	Wednesday 7 th - World Smile Day
W/c 20 th - Mental Health Awareness Week	Wednesday 14 th - World Sight Day

Saturday 23 rd - Eid	NOVEMBER
JUNE	Islamophobia Awareness Month
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Awareness Month	W/c 8th - Inter-Faith week
JULY	Friday 13 th - World Kindness Day
Saturday 11 th - World Population Day	Saturday 14 th - Diwali
Thursday 30 th - International Friendship Day	Thursday 19 th - International Men's Day
Friday 31 st - Eid	DECEMBER
AUGUST	2 nd - International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
1 st - Yorkshire Day	3 rd - International Day of Persons with Disabilities
Friday 21 st - World Senior Citizen Day	

Regular equalities meetings have been held, with good prisoner representation from all house blocks, including the vulnerable prisoners spur. These meetings were put on hold from March 2020, owing to the pandemic, but were planned to restart at the end of the reporting year.

Details of some of the specific areas covered:

- There has been regular monitoring of statistics for adjudications, use of force, and so forth, and although there is a high proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners at Belmarsh, there is no evidence that this group has received unfair treatment.
- The prison has made provision for all religious groups represented in Belmarsh. It was difficult to accommodate Ramadan during the pandemic, but prisoners were grateful for the efforts made. Similarly, a special meal was prepared for the celebration of Eid al-Fitr. Chaplains provided service sheets during the pandemic for all prisoners who regularly attend services.
- Alterations were made to the management of discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs), to ensure a more in-depth review of all forms submitted and a faster turnaround period. Ten per cent of DIRFs are quality assured by the governor in charge of this area, and a further 10% by the Deputy Governor.
- One transgender prisoner was released during the year, and a further transgender prisoner was transferred in, with no specific issues reported.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

From March 2020, the chaplaincy was seriously affected by the absence of several team members due to health vulnerability or COVID-19 symptoms. Despite this, and with the help of a temporary imam, the chaplaincy maintained a consistent service, visiting all house blocks each day and distributing weekly resource sheets for the main faiths.

Ramadan started on 24 April 2020, and the prison made preparations in advance for managing it under the COVID-19 restrictions. Prisoners were fully informed of the

new arrangements. The prison delivered meals in containers between 4pm and 5pm each day, so that they remained warm until the fast was broken. The arrangements worked well.

5.6 Incentives and earned privileges

The prison complied with the new incentives policy framework within the timescale required, by compiling an incentives and privileges policy which was appropriate for the establishment. Forums were initially held to discuss the contents of the policy, involving prisoners as well as various staff members, and there are plans to continue to hold these every three months. The new policy, which has clearly stated expectations and a menu of incentives, focuses on reinforcing positive behaviour, rather than the previously used punitive approach. It also gives greater room for discretion when managing a prisoner, to encourage compliance and improved behaviour. For example, if a prisoner is placed on the basic regime, he can be removed from this punishment earlier than the original 28 days if he makes good progress.

Prisoners are placed on standard status on entry to the prison, and this is reviewed after three months. The implementation of the policy depends heavily on input from key workers – who have had a raised profile around the prison from the beginning of the year. Prisoners are involved in the review of any downgrading, and must be supported by their key worker if they have a particular issue, such as being on an ACCT or having learning difficulties.

An emphasis has been placed on standardising expectations for behaviour across the prison, as they can be variable. Staff are encouraged to look for and commend good behaviour, which has been a cultural change for some. Incentives include additional telephone calls, additional clothing exchange and the facility to buy a 'goody bag' from the visits hall. Others are being considered, such as additional time out of cell.

The Board welcomes the new policy. It has generally been well received, and implementation across the prison has been consistent. One successful prisoner meeting has been held. However, the incentives policy framework was put on hold owing to national COVID-19 restrictions, and all basic regime prisoners were reinstated to standard. Moreover, as mentioned above, staff were unable to carry out key worker duties during the COVID-19 lockdown. The Board is hopeful that this positive initiative will regather momentum over the coming year.

5.7 Complaints

Statistics on complaints to the prison for the period April 2019 to Mar 2020 are given in the table below (for consideration of the handling of complaints about healthcare, see section 6.1). By far the highest number of complaints received continued to be about property (see also section 5.8) and accommodation issues in residential areas.

The Board sees prison complaints regularly in the course of its work, and has sometimes been unimpressed by the standard of the responses given. Complaints were sometimes returned undated and unsigned, and with comments not adequately addressing the issues raised. This is despite a regular internal audit carried out by the prison of 10% of responses to complaints each month.

Location	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Totals
Adjudication	2	2	1	3	0	3	4	2	2	3	2	1	25
Activity Allocation	1	0	0	0	5	7	14	14	8	5	2	1	57
Application System	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bullying	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	7
Canteen	17	11	16	11	18	19	11	13	5	9	6	1	137
Catalogues	4	6	5	12	2	4	7	4	5	1	4	7	61
Cleaning/Hygiene/Supplies	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Closed Visits	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Complaints	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	3	12
Disability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
DOC/Conflict	5	7	4	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Education	9	2	0	8	3	8	2	0	0	2	5	0	39
Employment	8	9	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	21
Equalities-non racial	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6	0	0	0	0	12
Equalities-racial	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Finance / Cash	6	10	10	6	8	8	9	14	7	6	11	8	103
Finance/Cash (Other Establishment)	3	0	1	1	0	4	3	2	6	1	5	10	36
Foreign National	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Food	3	3	8	1	6	4	6	3	2	1	2	2	41
Gym	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	2	7
HDC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
IEP	9	16	7	7	10	20	10	10	5	3	1	0	98
Letters / Censors	10	11	11	5	12	14	11	10	7	4	8	11	114
Library	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Newspapers / Magazines	10	7	4	3	2	8	2	3	5	3	0	4	51
OASys/Sentence Plan	7	8	10	3	2	14	17	11	14	13	11	7	117
Other	13	26	16	18	11	33	24	26	17	13	37	30	264
Other Prisoners	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Own accomodation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Parole	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Pay	10	4	11	9	5	4	2	3	2	0	7	5	62
Pay (Other Establishment)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Pin Phones	6	9	9	8	7	6	11	7	6	4	11	3	87
Post (Incoming)	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Post (Outgoing)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Post Rule 39	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Property Damaged	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Property Lost/Stolen	4	4	7	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
Property (Other Establishment)	6	25	11	13	5	1	6	0	8	5	8	3	91
Property Reception	34	30	24	43	40	35	33	31	17	11	12	11	321
Property Houseblock	1	4	4	9	1	5	12	4	6	9	5	12	72
Property DST	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Property HSU	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Re-Categorisation	7	9	3	3	12	8	4	2	5	0	2	3	58
Reception	3	4	1	0	9	25	20	20	23	19	37	24	185
Regime	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Religion	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	4
Residential	34	25	47	29	19	18	29	27	25	27	35	33	348
Security	4	10	4	2	4	13	5	9	8	7	14	10	90
Segregation	1	0	0	0	5	0	4	0	1	0	2	1	14
Sentence Calculations	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	4
Showers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Staff	5	3	9	9	2	5	10	6	2	14	7	11	83
Transfer/Allocation	9	14	10	9	16	18	24	19	14	11	13	10	167
Visits	8	16	16	4	14	12	7	4	5	4	11	6	107
Visits Booking	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Violence	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Write-Up	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	8
Work	1	7	6	5	4	3	0	2	2	0	2	3	35
Totals	247	288	263	237	229	305	296	253	210	184	274	223	3009

The final report of the Lammy Review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system, published in 2017, made the following two recommendations regarding the management of complaints:

Recommendation 26: HMPPS should clarify publicly that the proper standard of proof for assessing complaints is 'the balance of probabilities'. Prisons should take into account factors such as how officers have dealt with similar incidents in the past.

Recommendation 27: Prisons should adopt a 'problem-solving' approach to dealing with complaints. As part of this, all complainants should state what they want to happen as a result of an investigation into their complaint.

In the context of the Lammy Review, these recommendations appear to be intended to apply to complaints of discrimination incidents, but the Board considers that their application to all complaints would be welcome. The Board asks the prison to implement these recommendations for complaints in general, and to change the process for complaints to accommodate them.

5.8 Property

The handling of prisoners' property, whether in prison or on transfer to prison, remains a serious unresolved issue. Prisoners can wait a significant and unreasonable time to receive their property. In some cases, there seems to have been dispute over whose responsibility it is to reunite prisoners with their property, causing frustration for prisoners, for staff seeking to reunite prisoners with their property and for Board members, who continue to deal with issues around missing property, notably property lost during transit between prisons and within the prison. There were 60 prisoner applications to the Board concerning property during the year – appreciably lower than the previous year but still high.

This trend appears to be nationwide. The IMB National Annual Report 2017/18, published in June 2019, stated that 23.1% of applications to Boards across the prison estate concerned property, higher than any other subject.

The impact of lost property is not restricted to the frustration and upset it causes but also has a financial impact on the estate; there was a cost to the public purse of just over £2,840 for lost or damaged property belonging to Belmarsh prisoners in the reporting year.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare: general

Healthcare is run by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, and a new head of healthcare took over during the year. Social care is delivered by Change Grow Live (CGL), on behalf of the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The first objective of the National Partnership Agreement for Prison Healthcare in England 2018–2021 is ‘to improve the health and wellbeing of people in prison and reduce health inequalities’. Frequent reference is also made by those delivering healthcare in Belmarsh to the aim of providing healthcare of an equivalent standard to that available under the NHS in the outside community.

One subject which was raised in our annual report for 2018/19, and which still came up frequently in the first half of this reporting year, was the timing of dispensing of medicines, including inconsistencies and changes in timing, and night-time medication being given out too early in the day, in mid-afternoon. As presaged in the Governor’s response to our report last year, some changes have been introduced, including greater prescription of in-possession medication, which have helped to reduce this problem.

At the start of 2020, healthcare staff introduced a system to audit their processes for dealing with prisoner complaints. In the first five months of the new system, there were a total of 89 complaints, of which the numbers in the main categories were:

- 35 concerning medication (for example, late dispensing; not enough provided)
- 15 concerning dental health (for example, time taken to be treated, quality of dental work)
- 15 concerning physical health (for example, lack of access to a GP)
- Eight concerning mental health (for example, lack of contact from staff after referral; depression under the restricted COVID-19 regime).

The average time taken to respond to complaints over this period was 10 days.

Plans for the Board to play a role in the audit process, thereby introducing an independent element into it, including assessing the quality of responses as well as their timeliness, had to be put on hold with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These plans will be resurrected next year.

Other feedback from prisoners about healthcare is given at the monthly patient council meetings, attended by Board members, which include prisoner representatives from all house blocks, along with the head or deputy head of healthcare, general and mental health staff, and pharmacy staff. These meetings unfortunately had to be suspended from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Section 6.4 covers the prison’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic; this section deals with other noteworthy issues in relation to physical healthcare provided within the prison, including the impact of the pandemic on normal primary and secondary healthcare provision.

In the annual report for 2018/19, the Board covered, in some detail, the problematic level of non-attendance at outpatient clinics, and the reasons for this. Despite steps taken to address the issue – for example, by changing from ‘three strikes and out’ to ‘two strikes and out’ for patients failing to attend the dental clinic – levels of ‘did not attend’ at outpatient clinics remained worryingly high. As a fairly typical example, on the morning of 17 October 2019, when physiotherapy, smoking cessation, dental and psychology clinics were running, only 14 out of 34 attended their appointments. The length of time that prisoners have to spend in a holding room, up to several hours, missing education, work or association, is a factor in their reluctance to attend appointments. The holding room is spartan, and during one visit we noted that the ventilation was malfunctioning, making the room very stuffy.

All outpatient clinics except emergency dentistry, podiatry and ultrasound were suspended from the start of the COVID-19 lockdown. From the middle of June 2020, some more clinics, such as the optician and physiotherapy, began to operate with reduced clinic lists and social distancing. GPs held most consultations over in-cell telephones during the lockdown but were resuming face-to-face consultations by the end of June 2020.

Staffing levels in primary care have been of concern during the year, with particular shortages of nursing staff. Recruitment problems have been exacerbated by the length of time taken to obtain security clearance – nine months in one case – which has led to candidates taking up employment offers elsewhere. Towards the end of the reporting year, there were 11 vacancies of band 5 nurses, and a major recruitment exercise was under way.

Inpatient capacity at Belmarsh is theoretically 33, with two wards of six beds each and 21 single beds in four wings, including one palliative care/end-of-life suite. For much of the year, this capacity has been lower – for a considerable part of the year, one ward had five broken beds. Fortunately, demand for inpatient beds has not exceeded capacity during the year, and replacement beds are now on-site and awaiting deployment.

Cancellation of hospital appointments was a troublesome issue. In January 2020, for example, out of a total of 89 appointments, 26 were cancelled. There was a range of reasons for these cancellations, the most common being patient refusal to attend or hospital rescheduling; liaison with the prisoner escorting team has generally been working smoothly. With the advent of COVID-19, there was a dramatic increase in levels of cancellation by hospitals of non-emergency appointments, and there is a backlog needing to be rescheduled. This mirrors the position in the outside community. In some cases, it proved possible to arrange hospital consultations by teleconference, and this may be something which could be developed further in the future, for initial consultations at least, in cases where hospital clinicians deem it appropriate.

6.3 Mental healthcare

The level of mental health need at Belmarsh remains high. As an indication of this, in June 2020, of the 18 occupied inpatient beds, 12 were for mental health patients. There was an unwelcome but unavoidable reduction to very low levels of active counselling and face-to-face psychology provision during the pandemic, at a time when many prisoners were feeling fearful and finding it difficult to sleep. Problems were especially pronounced for those having to endure the COVID-19 lockdown in

three-person cells. In April 2020, a new publication was produced for prisoners, Mental Health News, detailing the ways in which some psychiatric, psychology and substance misuse services would continue to be provided during the pandemic while maintaining social distancing.

ACCT folders were regularly checked by Board members during rota visits; they were generally kept well, and on the few occasions when discrepancies or lateness in recording entries or conversations have been noticed, action has been taken promptly to remedy this. Healthcare staff have been fully involved in ACCT reviews.

6.4 Healthcare: COVID-19

This has been an extraordinary year, in health terms. Like other prisons, Belmarsh responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with tight restrictions on regimes for prisoners, and other measures such as the ending of social visits. It introduced measures to quarantine or isolate symptomatic prisoners and those arriving in the prison pending testing and the results of tests. After some initial difficulties in accessing personal protective equipment, we were assured by healthcare managers that arrangements for obtaining this ran smoothly. With these measures in place, seven Belmarsh prisoners in total tested positive for COVID-19 up to 30 June 2020. One prisoner very regrettably died after transfer to hospital.

Staff were also affected: an outbreak of COVID-19 within the healthcare centre led to eight members of healthcare staff and seven members of discipline staff in total testing positive. This led to stricter control measures to protect inpatients in a self-contained bubble for a full month, from 12 May to 11 June 2020.

Members of the Board were not able to visit the healthcare centre for a three-month period between March and June 2020. During this time, we were reliant on information provided in writing by healthcare and prison managers, to enable us to understand the developments which were taking place. We are grateful to those involved for taking the time and trouble to keep us informed, although our inability to speak to prisoners receiving healthcare treatment meant that our monitoring could not take account of their perspectives.

On 26 May 2020, HMIP made a short scrutiny visit to Belmarsh, as part of research for a wider report on how outcomes for prisoners were being managed in the context of the impact of COVID-19. In relation to healthcare governance and delivery, including the effectiveness of liaison between healthcare and prison managers, HMIP's findings were generally positive, including the observation that most prisoners they spoke to were complimentary about the care provided to them by healthcare staff. HMIP was also positive about the provision of information to prisoners about COVID-19, and the arrangements to support and protect vulnerable and shielding prisoners. No other external inspections of healthcare provision took place this year.

At the end of the reporting year, in addition to social distancing and hygiene measures across the prison, the following arrangements for quarantining and isolating prisoners for the control of COVID-19 were in place:

- Spur 2 of house block 3 was designated as a 'reverse cohort unit' (RCU), for the temporary separation of newly received prisoners from the mainstream prison population for up to 14 days, allowing the prison to verify that each individual was not infected. As cells with multi-occupancy were used as single-occupancy for these purposes, the operational capacity of the spur came down to 40 from its normal 73.
- Prisoners identified as symptomatic on reception were located on the protective isolation unit (PSU), rather than the RCU. The PSU consisted of two spurs of the HSU, each with 12 single cells, giving a total of 24 available places.
- Prisoners identified as being extremely vulnerable were required to follow social shielding guidance and self-isolate for a period of at least 12 weeks from the date at which they were notified. The primary care manager wrote to all those meeting the criteria for shielding and reiterated the government's guidance, as well as reminding them of options like the VP unit on house block 4 and the older prisoners spur on house block 1. The contingency suite in the healthcare centre, with a maximum capacity of two, was also used when a prisoner was at significantly greater risk from COVID-19 owing to an underlying health condition.

6.5 Social care

During the year, a designated spur was opened for older prisoners (over 50 years of age), and this worked well, despite some early complaints about the environment and the regime. These prisoners were generally calmer and more settled than the rest of the prison population, but a larger proportion of them required social care and assistance. Their regime allowed for more time for them to be unlocked. At the end of the year, a 'grey matters forum', a special prisoner council for the over-50s, was being considered. Also under consideration was a buddy scheme, to help those with signs of dementia to engage more.

Good social care was provided by CGL. Prisoners were screened when they arrived in prison, and there was adequate provision of adaptive cells in the house blocks and in the HSU.

6.6 Exercise, time out of cell, gym

During the year, exercise periods have been consistent, and the number of times that they have been cancelled has been much reduced. The governance around this has now improved, and exercise could only be cancelled by the orderly officer in conjunction with the duty governor.

The consistency of time out of cell across residence improved, and generally all spurs were afforded time out of cell on a daily basis. At times, the resource management plan was used to prioritise work, but regime compliance improved in comparison with the previous year. With greater staff numbers, there was a welcome increase in the application of a full regime.

The Board notes that regime compliance is now monitored, and data kept on this, by the orderly officer. Up to May 2020, this was solely kept in hard copy in the orderly

office, but since then it has been kept in digital form and will be more accessible to the Board.

The gym is modern and well equipped. Staffing levels appeared to be adequate, and enabled proper supervision of gym users. During the COVID-19 pandemic period, the gym was moved to the Astroturf area, and this meant that gym use continued throughout the lockdown period, proving very popular and much used by prisoners.

6.7 Soft skills

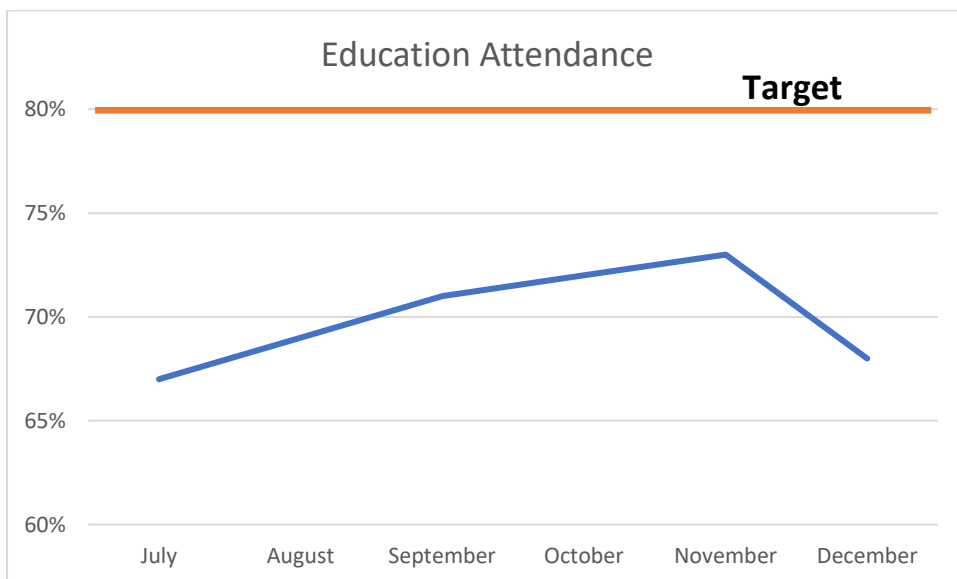
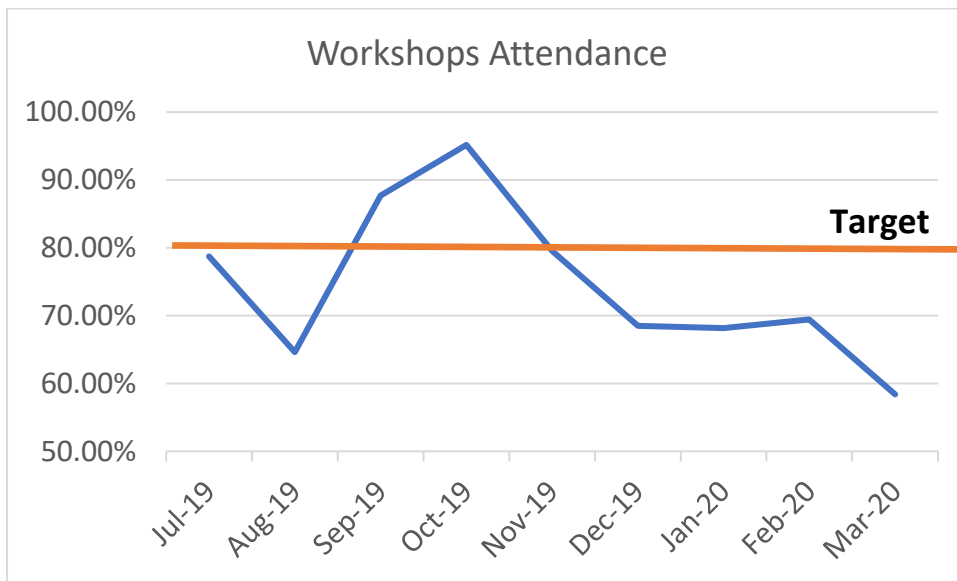
Our report last year called for better coordination between the prison and the Samaritans, and the Board is pleased to report that this appears to have been achieved. There have been enough Listeners on all house blocks, although a few were transferred out at the end of the year. To ensure appropriate access to Listeners, a single list was introduced to manage calls from all house blocks. There were two training courses for Listeners at the start of the reporting year. All prisoners on the house blocks were able to call the Samaritans, free of charge, on their in-cell telephones.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Purposeful activity attendance

In both education (college) and workshops (industry), attendance continued to be a problem during the reporting period. Risk assessments and conflicts reduced the numbers able to attend, and prisoners also found other activities preferable, some even preferring to remain on their house blocks.

Average attendance at education in the nine months of the year before the COVID-19 restrictions was 70%. At workshops, average attendance in the first six months of the reporting year was 74%. Target attendance in both cases was 80%. The following charts are based on figures verified by the prison.



In late March 2020, classroom-based education and most workshops stopped.

7.2 Education, library

In April 2019, Milton Keynes College took over the management of education in the prison, in the aftermath of a 'requires improvement' grading of education provision under the previous provider in a February 2019 Ofsted inspection. The college made a promising start, with some very good initiatives coming to fruition, such as music and other creative courses, as well as useful accredited training courses. However, some plans have seen a faltering start.

The new education manager left in December 2019, after just three months in the role; the acting manager made a determined start, and the education area began to look more inviting, with new and interesting noticeboards. However, it appears that she was a temporary appointment and she had not been replaced at the time of drafting this report.

Various factors inhibited the effectiveness of education:

- The timing of sessions had to fit in with the regime, which meant long lessons during which prisoners lost interest, although at times they were broken up with library sessions.
- Prisoners at very different levels of ability had to wait for attention or support in classes, which meant that some became disengaged.
- Those who wished to take examinations were held up owing to a lack of external invigilation, and some prisoners expressed frustration about this.
- Staffing issues meant that teachers, who are extremely willing and flexible, had to cover classes in which they were not expert.
- English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes contained prisoners with varying levels of English and ability, making it difficult to provide anything other than basic dictionary work, copying or wordsearches.
- Many, if not most, of those attending had a long history of failing academically; it was therefore extremely hard to sustain their motivation, especially with so many more attractive alternatives.

Elsewhere in this report, the Board expresses concerns about the standard of education offered to prisoners in the HSU and the segregation unit. For the general prison population, although category A and B prisoners are able to attend information technology courses, we are concerned that educational opportunities are not available to a larger group of prisoners because of risk assessments and conflicts.

The library had a pleasant atmosphere, and sessions were timetabled. Board members regularly observed prisoners reading, playing chess or chatting quietly during these sessions. Craft sessions were provided from time to time, where prisoners can make cards for their families; these were well received.

There was a good peer-to-peer reading programme, but it lacked trained prisoners to undertake it, as well as funding.

The computers in the library were finally installed in February 2020, after a wait of more than a year, and these became available to prisoners. It became possible to

access law publications, including Archbold, the Driving Theory Test, Word 2016, Excel and an ESOL course. Prison Service Instructions, Prison Service Orders and policy frameworks were expected to be installed and become accessible soon. The Board is concerned that these materials are only just being made available to prisoners online.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational provision was momentous. Milton Keynes College and library staff withdrew from the prison on 3 April 2020, in accordance with HMPPS guidance. They supplied distraction packs, which the activities hub distributed. There were discussions with the college regarding the provision of further learning packs and support, possibly by telephone, which eventually will lead to a full curriculum offer, albeit more cell-based than that provided before the pandemic.

During the pandemic, safer custody staff took over ensuring that all vulnerable prisoners have continued access to books. These are quarantined for 72 hours before being checked back in and put back on the shelves. All prisoners were able to put in book requests, which allocated operational support grade officers endeavoured to meet.

7.3 Vocational training, work

At the start of the reporting year, the prison introduced a holistic approach to the management of purposeful activity, combining what happens in education, workshops, gym and the daily work of orderlies, Listeners, and so forth. For example, there is a desire to have clear educational outcomes from workshop activities – a very worthwhile initiative. It will take some time for this to work into the life of prisoners, and there had been no notable changes by the end of the reporting year.

The prison conducted investigations into how the pool of those attending workshops could be widened to give more opportunities, partly through the management of absences and conflicts. In an effort to make some workshops more accessible to a wider range of prisoners, the prison reviewed areas where potentially dangerous equipment is used, and tried to eliminate these from courses.

The number of prisoners taking part in the workshop packing teabags reduced to a maximum of 35, including a maximum of eight category A prisoners, by the end of the year. This is boring, routine work. However, the separate teabag session for vulnerable prisoners was seen to be industrious and well organised.

The recycling workshop started early in the reporting year and, on the whole, went well. It is hoped that a new location will enable more prisoners, including category Bs, to attend.

The industrial cleaning workshop has changed its target qualification from the British Institute of Cleaning Science to the Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB). It has taken some time to set up the administrative arrangements, reducing opportunities for prisoners to engage in useful activity.

The painting and decorating workshop continued to provide an excellent offer, with a very enthusiastic instructor, who also used the training to extend men's arithmetical techniques. However, attendance was low for periods during the year, and the instructor was keen to give more opportunity to those prisoners who could not attend

because of risk assessments; the prison intended to review the use of tools in order to make the course more inclusive and increase participation.

The new textiles workshop was smart, and ready for workers from January 2020, but its opening was unfortunately delayed by recruiting issues and a roof leak.

A new workshop, offered as part of the education framework by Milton Keynes College, prepared prisoners for several qualifications, including, among others, health and safety, the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) and manual handling. This is the first time that this has taken place in a category A prison. Prisoners took the final tests in a mobile unit, and a large majority passed. A good result from this workshop gives prisoners an opportunity for a guaranteed interview and much improved employment prospects on release.

Pathways to Recovery provides a wide range of useful programmes to help prisoners in their substance dependencies.

As with education, the impact of the measures taken across the prison estate to control COVID-19 has been dramatic. From 23 March 2020, a national directive stated that only essential work in prisons should be continued – defined as waste management and essential cleaning. Education, gym and industries were closed. Food packing was later classified as essential, and several socially distanced workshops were opened up.

During the pandemic, industrial cleaning staff supported residential areas with stronger cleaning products, and advice on cleaning schedules and routines. They also supervised the cleaning of the spurs used for COVID-19-related isolation, and other deep cleans in the prison.

Some workshops operated throughout lockdown; just before the end of the reporting year, we were pleased to note that a slow and careful reopening of other workshops had begun, with reduced numbers and practising appropriate social distancing.

7.4 Offender management, progression

During the year, the work of the OMU was hampered at times by cross-deployment of staff, although this stopped during the pandemic. The continuing shortage of category D places in the prison estate prevented some transfers, causing a lot of dissatisfaction among the prisoners concerned. Probation staff look forward to the new arrangements for the unification of the National Probation Service, which it is hoped will make them more efficient and responsive.

At the end of the reporting year, there were seven prison offender managers and 4.2 full-time-equivalent probation staff. There is a complement of six probation staff, and plans are in place to get fully staffed in the near future.

A plan for the probation team to work within the OMU was put on hold when the pandemic started. During the pandemic, immigration staff were not allowed to work in the prison; instead, they were working remotely and liaising with staff in OMU, who carried out prisoner liaison on their behalf.

Some of the working practices forced upon probation staff by the pandemic were changes that many would have liked to have had in effect for some time. This

included working on a rota of two days in prison, three days at home. Prison laptop computers were provided, equipped with access to all prison systems, including the Prison National Offender Management Information System (P-NOMIS), and staff were allocated iPhones. Microsoft Teams and video links have been used as routine, with greatly improved outcomes. The prison considers that the expanded use of technology has been a good thing, allowing more creative ways of working.

7.5 Family contact

The prison uses the national prison visits booking system, and although most of the system errors have been resolved, there is a known issue whereby the system indicates that a slot is available when in fact it is not. It is hoped this will be resolved by HMPPS. There continued to be a significant number of complaints about visits, although the trend shows that this was reducing (see table in section 5.7). There was no longer an email backlog to be managed. One area of concern was the occurrence of several disturbances and fights in the visits hall because conflicts between prisoners had not been identified beforehand.

Previously, concerns were raised by the Board about individual incidents when visitors have arrived late and been turned away. The prison responded that it was necessary to adhere to the times specified, in order to maintain security in the visits hall.

The information for visitors has constantly been updated. The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) organised family days, held once a month, and the prison tried to ensure that these days were shared fairly among as many different prisoners as possible. Enhanced and standard prisoners were allowed to attend family days, provided that they did not have any recent negative entries or adjudications.

During the pandemic, visits staff were redeployed to other areas in the prison. They were, however, responsible for the production of one-minute video messages, where prisoners are filmed and are able to send messages to their families.

At the end of the year, consideration was being given to the management of resumed visits as lockdown is eased, but there is no easy solution available.

7.6 Resettlement planning

Closer working between teams involved in resettlement improved as the year progressed, providing stronger support for those with mental health issues or an uncertain family network. There were, however, a number of continuing problems obstructing effective provision of resettlement to prisoners on release from the establishment.

Prisoner applications to the Board show that a substantial number of those nearing the end of their sentence, or who wish to strengthen their case to progress to category C or D status, felt hampered by a lack of courses to enable that progression. There was also a problem with pre-release interviews. With no dedicated space on the house blocks for these interviews, a room needed to be booked in advance. Officers have been instructed not to take prisoners out of

education classes, and therefore to restrict their interviews to times that prisoners are locked up or during association. The former requires conversations through the cell door, which is not good for confidentiality.

Local non-category A prisoners who are moved to other prisons after sentencing should ideally return to Belmarsh six months before their release, to assist their resettlement into the local community. The reality is that many stay in Belmarsh for years, and category C and D prisoners are unable to move out to more suitable accommodation because of the lack of spare capacity throughout the estate. Exceptionally, during the COVID-19 lockdown all category D prisoners were transferred out of Belmarsh. Although generally welcome, this had the unfortunate result that the prison lost several Listeners.

Preparation of prisoners for release is primarily the responsibility of CRC staff. This work continued during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Board has been unable to confirm that all prisoners have had accommodation to go to, but the St Mungo's homelessness charity continues to work with vulnerable prisoners.

During the year, several prisoners released on licence were recalled to Belmarsh just a few days before their sentence expiry date. This created a great amount of work for various departments, and disappointment for some prisoners, who were eventually detained beyond this date because the administrative work could not be completed in time.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the press was alerted to the nationwide early release scheme before the prison was given any guidance or powers to implement it. This resulted in the prison having to field many requests from prisoners and their families, who had their hopes falsely built up, as well as contacts from legal representatives. As is well known, the scheme resulted in a very small number of prisoners across the country obtaining early release, in comparison with the numbers referred to when the scheme was announced. Only two prisoners at Belmarsh might have been eligible for the scheme, and neither was released owing to various complications.

8. The work of the IMB

Over the course of the year, the recommended complement of the Board was reduced from 20 to 16, and the number of members of the Board fell from 14 to 11. Long delays in counter-terrorism clearance, which we have raised several times in the past, continue to affect recruitment to the Board adversely. Towards the end of the year, our Chair had to stand down from that role for health reasons, and, in line with our agreed contingency planning, one of our Vice Chairs took over as acting Chair.

Apart from the teleconference Board meetings held in the last three months of the year, all Board meetings had a training slot, with a member of staff responsible for a particular aspect of prison policy coming to explain and discuss their work. In addition, we held an extended training workshop following one Board meeting, to discuss and update our policies on rota visits and handling applications.

Two members of the Board carried out a review into the conduct of rota visits during the 2018/19 reporting year and presented a report of their findings to the Board. As a result, the Board made changes to the recording of rota visits, to ensure that statutory requirements were being met and that all areas of the prison would be visited sufficiently frequently, and by diverse members of the Board.

Following the introduction of lockdown at the end of March 2020, we switched to an almost entirely remote system of monitoring the prison. No obstacles to members making visits were imposed by the prison itself, but for most members of the Board it was not possible to visit.

At our April 2020 Board meeting, we agreed a policy covering how we would maintain our monitoring as effectively as possible during lockdown. In brief, this entailed setting up a system of regular information flow from prison managers to the Board via our Chair, and Board members dialling in to the weekly session of GOOD reviews and to other important meetings. Before lockdown, a member of the Board had attended every GOOD review session in person. We also set up a remote system of dealing with prisoner applications.

The Board is grateful to the prison authorities for their support and assistance during the period when our ability to visit the prison was severely curtailed. However, face-to-face contact and discussion with individual prisoners and prison officers is at the core of effective monitoring work, and there is no doubt that our very restricted capacity to talk to them about their perspective and experiences over the last three months of the year means that our monitoring of the prison over this period has been very far from ideal. Information in this report about activities in the prison during lockdown should be read in that context.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	14

Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11
Total number of visits to the establishment	290

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	27	13
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	23	4
C	Equality	4	17
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	21	13
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	38	32
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	23	45
F	Food and kitchens	2	3
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	29	43
H1	Property within this establishment	68	30
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	47	30
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	3	8
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	21	41
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	75	67
K	Transfers	41	18
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	0	0
	Total number of applications	422	364



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