



# Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Ashfield

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

Published October 2020



**Contents**

<b>Introductory sections 1 – 3</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the establishment	4
3. Executive summary	5
<b>Evidence sections 4 – 7</b>	
4. Safety	12
5. Fair and humane treatment	14
6. Health and wellbeing	20
7. Progression and resettlement	22
<b>The work of the IMB</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Applications to the IMB</b>	<b>30</b>

## 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

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

2.2 The prison has a baseline certified normal accommodation of 416. For most of the reporting period, Ashfield was working to an operational capacity of 400 but from 9 March 2020, an additional 12 places were contracted for.

2.3 Accommodation consists of two main residential units, Avon and Severn, each with four wings accommodating between 40 and 60 prisoners, and the early days centre, which is a smaller, 16-cell unit which acts as a first-night and induction centre (and which, in spring 2020, became a reverse cohort unit for prisoners requiring regular hospital appointments and any new transfers in, if they had not self-isolated for 14 days in advance of transfer). There are 260 single cells and 78 double cells, all with integral sanitation, and eight shower cubicles on each of the main wings. Seven of the single cells are ground floor cells which are purpose-built for prisoners with disabilities, and there are two gated cells for prisoners requiring constant supervision. There is no separate care and separation unit.

2.4 Black and minority ethnic prisoners typically make up around 16.5% of the population, foreign national prisoners 6%, and those aged over 50 47.8% at any one time.

2.5 Services run by organisations other than Serco:

- Healthcare is commissioned by NHS England; the contract until 1 April 2020 was with InspireBetterHealth, a collaboration between Bristol Community Health (nursing services), Hanham Healthcare (GP services) and Avon and Wiltshire Partnership (AWP) Mental Health Trust (mental health services). InspireBetterHealth is responsible for dispensing medication. Time for Teeth operates the contract for dentistry. In addition, prisoners can access a variety of specialist clinics. From 1 April, the contract was taken over by AWP in conjunction with InspireBetterHealth, with staff, where relevant, TUPEd, across to AWP.
- Adult social care: South Gloucestershire Social Services
- Coaching: Coaching Inside and Out
- Voluntary services: Shannon Trust, Peace Education Programme (from The Prem Rawat Foundation), faith volunteers, Mothers' Union, prison visitors, Changing Tunes, Citizens Advice

2.6 As a contracted-out prison, Ashfield has a Director and a Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) controller. Martin Booth has been Director since April 2019.

2.7 Until the COVID-19 lockdown, when HMPPS suspended prison performance assessments, Ashfield was consistently assessed as a level 4 prison.

### **3. Executive summary**

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

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

#### **3.2 Main judgements**

It is the judgement of the Board that HMP Ashfield continues to be a particularly well-run prison, delivering a safe environment where prisoners are treated fairly and humanely. The Director, managers and staff are to be highly commended for maintaining the high standards for the prisoners' wellbeing and safety during lockdown, a view endorsed by many prisoners. An area of some concern for the Board, however, is prisoners' progression to resettlement.

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

In the view of the Board, Ashfield provides a safe environment:

- Levels of violence are low, with only four physical assaults over the last 12 months, all prisoner on prisoner.
- No evidence has been found of illicit substances in cell searches or tests, but drug-impregnated mail continues to be a threat, as identified by use of the Rapiscan.
- An increased focus on violence reduction by the safer custody team, including greater use of challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs), has helped keep incidents of violence low.
- Increased support to those having difficulties in coping (particularly during lockdown) through personal intervention plans (PIPs) has been important in maintaining safety.
- Levels of self-harm are relatively low, and assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) processes are effective.

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

Prisoners at Ashfield are treated fairly and humanely:

- The accommodation and catering continue to be of a high standard.
- The relationship between staff and prisoners is good. Particular credit must, however, go to residential officers and chaplaincy staff for their support to prisoners during lockdown.
- The Board could find no evidence of any institutionalised bias with regard to any of the protected characteristics.

- The incentives system continues to be closely monitored. The Board did not identify any trends indicating unfairness.

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

It is the Board's view that the healthcare provision is good and that wellbeing needs during a normal regime are met. There is concern that, if the HMPPS COVID-19 restrictions continue unchanged for a prolonged period, prisoners' wellbeing will be adversely affected.

- The healthcare service is assessed as being equal to, or often exceeding, that provided in the community.
- Mental health provision meets normal demand but COVID-19 restrictions have resulted in an increased waiting list for group sessions, which in a lockdown situation can lead to increased anxiety and agitation. However, telephone triage and distraction packs are being used to alleviate this.
- In a normal regime, prisoners have access to a wide range of educational, vocational and sporting activities, and enjoy over 10 hours out of cell. COVID-19 restrictions have resulted in limited time out of cell (90 minutes) and only essential services being delivered, which have involved a limited number of prisoners (for example, industrial and wing cleaners, horticulture, laundry, catering). Ashfield has done well to provide additional opportunities for exercise by use of the Astroturf, but without further easing of restrictions there is likely to be a detrimental effect on prisoners' wellbeing.

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

Although COVID-19 restrictions have affected some aspects of progression (not always negatively), there have been other issues prior to lockdown which need to be addressed to improve prisoners' progression:

- COVID-19 restrictions on the delivery of intervention programmes is significant and could potentially have adverse repercussions on prisoners with programmes forming part of their sentence plan.
- The increased availability of category D places (open prisons) during lockdown, facilitating a significant number of transfers out, is welcomed by the Board, as open prison conditions are seen for many prisoners as an important stage in their successful resettlement. It is critical that this recent level of availability is sustained post-COVID-19.
- The release of prisoners continues to be hampered significantly by the lack of suitable accommodation, including approved premises.
- COVID-19 restrictions have, understandably, had an impact on much of what Ashfield had planned to do in support of prisoners' progression, but the Board's view is that more could have been achieved prior to lockdown, particularly in relation to the progression wing.

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

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

Securing appropriate accommodation is fundamental to increasing a prisoner's chances of successful rehabilitation and reintegration into the community, particularly for men convicted of sexual offences. During this reporting period, five prisoners were released from Ashfield with no fixed address on the day of their release, thus requiring emergency housing. For others, approved premises places were only secured very close to the release date, causing increased anxiety.

- Can the lack of availability of appropriate accommodation for men convicted of sexual offences be raised with the minister for housing, communities and local government?
- When will plans for increased places in approved premises be realised?

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

Missing property in former establishments continues to be one of the top causes for complaint by prisoners. Ashfield has a good record of property management and has recently moved to an electronic property card system, to improve further both the efficiency and accuracy of record keeping.

- Are there plans for all HMPPS establishments to move to electronic property management systems? This would greatly facilitate transfer between establishments.
- What more can be done to improve the management of property, to reduce the volume of lost property? The cost in resources in following up complaints often far exceeds the value of the items.

As reported last year, the issue of prisoners arriving at Ashfield with incomplete or inappropriate contact arrangements from their previous establishments has continued – and, in fact, worsened. This issue causes prisoners and their families anxiety while checks are carried out.

- What more can be done to ensure that other prisons conduct accurate and robust assessments of contact arrangements?

#### ***TO THE DIRECTOR***

The Board appreciates that COVID-19 has had an impact on many plans that Ashfield had for enhancing prisoners' progression. Once restrictions have eased sufficiently:

- Can plans for the progression wing be advanced, to encourage greater independence and prepare prisoners for the next stage of their sentence?

### 3.4 Progress since the last report

<b>Issue in previous report</b>	<b>Progress/update</b>
<p><b>For the minister</b> Lack of category D places in the South and South West</p> <p>Shortage of approved premises spaces</p>	<p>The increased capacity at HMP Leyhill created by the installation of accommodation ‘pods’ during the pandemic has led to a very significant reduction in the number of Ashfield category D prisoners awaiting transfer to open conditions. This is a most welcome development.</p> <p>The plans to create additional 200-bed placements in the male and female approved premises estate have yet to materialise. The majority of prisoners released from Ashfield require approved premises places, and it takes much resource and time to find suitable places, sometimes not secured until 24 hours of release.</p>
<p><b>For HMPPS</b> Need for greater access to programmes for prisoners maintaining their innocence</p> <p>Contact arrangements for prisoners transferring in are incomplete</p>	<p>The Board welcomes the response from HMPPS that for Horizon programmes the number of individuals who are completely maintaining their innocence can be increased to three per delivery group if certain criteria are met. For Kaizen it is a locally led decision by the prison.</p> <p>In last year’s report, there had been five examples of incomplete contact arrangements. In this reporting period, disappointingly, this has more than doubled to between 10 and 15.</p>
<p><b>For the Director</b> Protracted process for establishing, approving and progressing projects of improvement</p>	<p>This has improved. A number of projects are under way/have been completed, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) The library makeover has been approved and completed.</li> <li>(ii) The gatehouse refurbishment project has been approved, started and is ongoing.</li> <li>(iii) Residential unit ‘bubble’ refurbishment due to be completed by the end of 2020.</li> <li>(iv) Chapel tea point installation. Completion due November 2020.</li> <li>(v) Waste management unit project nearing completion summer 2020.</li> </ul> <p>A project board to discuss and prioritise work has been set up, which the Board welcomes. However, this only started in February; it is due to meet every two months and was disrupted owing to COVID-19, so it is too early for the Board to comment on its effectiveness.</p>

<p><b>Accommodation</b> Problems with the supply and temperature of water in residential units</p> <p>No hand-washing facilities in wing laundries</p>	<p>Cold-water storage tanks and cold-water booster sets have been replaced across the whole site (completed by the end of January 2020). All heating boilers and associated items were replaced with upgraded versions, and completed by the end of September 2019.</p> <p>To address the water temperature and provide additional safety to prisoners, the replacement of all thermostatic mixing valves started in Avon residential unit. This enables the monitoring of water temperatures, to reduce the risk of scalding, while at the same time ensuring that the temperature is high enough to reduce the risk of Legionnaires' disease.</p> <p>Hand gel dispensers have been installed in both residential unit wing laundries.</p>
<p><b>Food</b> Prisoners allocated to the kitchen without an interview, which had an impact on catering standards, and posed health and safety risks to others</p> <p>Dissatisfaction of some of the vegan prisoners due to perceived lack of vegan choices and variety</p> <p>Lack of diabetic items available from the shop</p>	<p>Kitchen managers now have the opportunity to interview.</p> <p>When compared with other establishments, Ashfield does provide a reasonable vegan selection but it is a different range from that available in most prisons due to differing suppliers. One notable difference is the availability of vegan mince, which Ashfield's suppliers struggle to supply. Meeting with vegan prisoners to discuss issues has led to better understanding of supply issues.</p> <p>This continues to be an issue. The catering manager is sympathetic to the requirement but the widely held view is that it is for diabetics to self-regulate. More detailed listing of ingredients of items available in the shop will facilitate this (see section 5.1).</p>

<p><b>Equality</b> Less dynamic and proactive promotion of equality and diversity matters at senior management level</p> <p>Irregular attendance of nominated senior managers at the meetings held by the different forums</p> <p>Frequency of diversity and equality action team meetings had been reduced to quarterly and there was little evidence of any in-depth analysis of the numerous statistics presented to meetings</p>	<p>There have been positive responses to these concerns, and there was evidence of steady progress being made before this was curtailed by the COVID-19 regime restrictions from March 2020 onwards (see section 5.4).</p> <p>Attendance by prison staff has continued to be variable, to the exasperation of some forums which, in October 2019, recorded in their minutes that some had seen neither their senior management team 'lead' nor their prison officer champion for five months. In July 2019, for example, six out of the eight forums had no prison staff present at their meetings, although there was a steady improvement over the autumn and winter, until the forums meetings had to be halted altogether as a consequence of COVID-19 precautions from March 2020 onwards.</p> <p>There is some evidence of in-depth analysis but areas of enquiry might usefully include why a numerically disproportionate number of complaints seem to be received in some months from the black, Asian and minority ethnic community; for example, in February 2020, 31 complaints were received from white British prisoners but 18 from black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners, and the figures for May 2020 were 31 and 17, respectively). Similarly, while the overall number of adjudications is very low, the 21–29-year age group and the black, Asian and minority ethnic population also seem to figure disproportionately in comparison with other age groups and ethnicities.</p>
<p><b>Education</b> Absence of AshMag, a high-quality and popular magazine produced in the library</p>	<p>Its absence was due to lack of suitably skilled resource. The magazine is now back in production (except for during the initial months of lockdown).</p>

**Offender management, progression**

Last year's report noted that only three workshops (providing advice on approved premises, open prisons, and so on) had been held, compared with six in the previous reporting period

Disappointingly, no workshops have been held during this reporting period. Ashfield had planned to hold one workshop per theme, so four workshops overall – one each in September and December 2019 and then one each in April and June 2020. However, the transition to the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model diverted resources. This resulted in the workshops planned for September and December being deferred until April 2020. COVID-19 has meant that the April and June workshops understandably have had to be cancelled. At the time of drafting this report, Ashfield has advised that no other workshops will take place for the foreseeable future.

## Evidence sections 4 – 7

### 4. Safety

In the course of the reporting period, the Board has noted significant improvements in the provision of a safe and supportive environment, and a more holistic approach to safer custody. The safer custody team, together with the residential officers, are to be highly commended for their work during COVID-19, when the lockdown inevitably created a unique set of challenges. A safety and decency survey conducted by the prison in April elicited 170 responses from the 400 sent out. When asked if HMP Ashfield had responded in the right way for safety, 42% agreed and 36% strongly agreed. When asked if Ashfield was a safe and decent place under lockdown, 48% agreed and 34% strongly agreed.

#### 4.1 Reception and induction

The reception and induction processes at Ashfield are well structured and effective in introducing new arrivals to the establishment. Until COVID-19, when the Board moved to remote monitoring, new arrivals were routinely asked about their reception and induction, and the feedback was consistently positive. Healthcare staff assess all incoming prisoners on the day of arrival, and education assessments, together with work preference interviews, are undertaken within 10 days of arrival. First night and early days support arrangements are thorough and randomly checked by Board members on rota. All new arrivals spend approximately 14 days in the early days centre, where a programme of induction is arranged, including appointments with relevant departments, tours round the prison, introduction of support services, including 'Here to Hear' peer supporters and awareness sessions conducted by induction orderlies. In the period of the report, there have been no formal complaints or Board applications received on reception processes. Interdepartmental risk management meetings are held fortnightly, where risk is assessed collectively. These meetings are well attended by relevant staff, and this year were restructured to be chaired by the senior probation officer, to give greater emphasis to resettlement and rehabilitation needs.

New arrivals are consistently complimentary about their first impressions of Ashfield. When asked how he found Ashfield, one new prisoner who suffered from mobility issues said that he had 'come to heaven from hell', and another stated that he was very impressed with his first 24 hours and found Ashfield to be comparatively relaxed compared with his previous establishments. The only occasional complaint was information overload.

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

Over the period of the report, 100 ACCT documents were opened, an increase of 14 since the last reporting period. Of those, 68 related to self-harm incidents, an increase of 12 since the last report. One prisoner accounted for nine self-harm incidents, another for six, and five prisoners had three or more incidents. The majority of incidents were related to cuts, many of which were superficial. Four incidents resulted in hospital visits. No particular trends have been identified and the lockdown period did not result in any significant change to ACCT numbers. The

ACCT process, as conducted in Ashfield, is well executed, and case documents are reviewed by custodial operations managers once a day, safer custody staff three times a week and the duty director once a week. Prior to COVID-19, Board members regularly reviewed ACCT documentation, spoke to individuals on ACCTs, occasionally attended ACCT reviews during their rota visits and consistently found the process well managed, generally appreciated by the prisoners and providing effective multidisciplinary support.

During lockdown, safer custody prisoner representatives were very active, and the prisoner information and advice committee (PIAC) prisoner representatives from each wing were also made aware of the triggers/behaviours to look out for which would indicate a prisoner in need of support.

The Board has to report that during the reporting period, sadly, there were three deaths in custody. All occurred in hospital. The related Prisons and Probation Ombudsman reports have yet to be formally released.

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

Four physical assaults were recorded during this reporting period, all prisoner on prisoner, which were quickly dealt with and appropriate action taken. There was one minor assault of spitting – again, prisoner on prisoner. In the previous reporting period, there had been five physical assaults, including one on a member of staff. The CSIP initiative has been implemented to address challenging behaviour. This is a multidisciplinary approach which focuses on those who pose a raised risk of being violent, and works with them to change their behaviour. In total for the reporting period, there have been nine CSIPs. As a result of quality assurance of the CSIP process, there has been a significant drive to improve the overall reporting of violent incidents, in support of which the safety team, inter alia, developed a revised violence reduction book, which sits alongside the CSIP process and supports evidence gathering and documentation. The team is to be commended for its continued focus on improving safety. Generally, prisoners report Ashfield as being a safe environment and are complimentary about the lengths staff will go to, to support individuals.

### **4.4 Vulnerable prisoners, safeguarding**

In this reporting period, the Board has noted a good approach to accommodating and supporting vulnerable prisoners. The offender management unit (OMU) assesses prisoners prior to transfer, to ensure that – for example, in the case of prisoners with a disability – appropriate accommodation and measures are in place to support them. Prisoners with restricted mobility are assigned a ‘buddy’ (a fellow prisoner) who is responsible for aiding their movements around the establishment and supporting them when needed. Once prisoners have arrived at Ashfield, further assessments are conducted during induction, which will help identify any particular needs. This may result in setting up a PIP, which results in regular meetings with the safer custody team, which identifies and monitors support for the prisoner. A PIP can be set up at any time and is used to support any prisoner who is experiencing difficulties which can be manifested through disruptive behaviour. It can also be used to support those with learning disabilities and conditions such as autism. During the reporting period, the use of PIPs has increased, particularly during the COVID-19 lockdown. The continued confinement, with limited time out of cell and no visits for

some prisoners, has been very difficult, and, sadly, during this time some prisoners lost relatives to the virus, so additional support has been very much required. For the period July 19 – February 20, the most PIPs in place at any one time were 10 but from April 2020, the numbers increased, with the largest number at any one time being 18.

A total of 116 prisoners were identified as being at risk/vulnerable under the COVID-19 risk criteria, not all owing to age as it also included younger prisoners with underlying medical conditions. This group was given protection through a number of measures, such as being unlocked first for food, and showering and exercising separately. Of these 116 prisoners, 36 were identified as being in the highest risk category for vulnerability to COVID-19 and were prioritised for single cells. Only nine of the 36 were in double cells and, of these, five were relocated to singles when cells became available but four chose to remain in double cells (with their cellmate's agreement).

#### **4.5 Use of force**

There were nine use of force incidents in this reporting period, a decrease of 10 from last year. Four related to the application of handcuffs, one to batons being drawn, one to the use of control and restraint, and the remaining three were either pushing away or guiding holds. Body belts are not used at Ashfield. PAVA training for all eligible staff has yet to be delivered. Any use of force is subject to a thorough review by a senior manager, to assure that such actions are justified and proportionate. The Board has not received any complaints or concerns from prisoners subjected to use of force.

During the reporting period, there were 243 routine cell searches and 173 intelligence-led/target cell searches. This is an increase since last year, following a policy change in June 2019. In terms of finds, there was a mixture of improvised aeriels, explicit material, fermented liquid, non-prescribed medication, diaries/notebooks with coding etc.

#### **4.6 Substance misuse**

There were no positive mandatory drug tests during this reporting period, and there was only one positive test from an intelligence-led drug test, which identified non-prescribed medication. There was concern about drugs being present in one of the residential wings in the early part of the reporting period but cell searches failed to reveal anything.

The threat of drugs entering the prison continues undiminished, and the screening of items sent in using Rapiscan has returned 66 positive tests in the reporting period, mostly from books and letters.

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

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

The standard of accommodation continues to be very high, with the state of cleanliness and maintenance particularly good. There is a continuous programme of improvements, not only to maintain, but also to enhance the accommodation and

facilities. This includes regular repainting of cells carried out by prisoners from the painting and decorating workshop, and other general maintenance by the in-house Serco team. Wing workers evidently take pride in their work, and they are supported by prisoners from the industrial cleaning team for the more specialised cleaning.

One problem identified during the reporting period has been the algae build-up on the clear panels of the residential units' roofs, restricting the amount of natural daylight admitted, particularly in the winter months. The Board is glad to report that there is now a major planned project to replace the skylights and carry out general repairs to the ridges and cut ends. A drone survey has been carried out and the results are being evaluated at present. This work is planned to be carried out in 2021.

Predominantly, the catering is considered, and reported, by prisoners to be of a good standard, with many commenting that Ashfield's meals are of better quality than in other prisons. The Board has consistently reported on the kitchens as having a high level of cleanliness and being well organised.

Testament to the good standard of the food provided was HMP Ashfield coming third in a league table of prisons drawn up by the law firm, Stuart Miller, published in 'Inside Time'. Compiled using survey scores from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons on the food quality in prisons from around the UK, Ashfield scored an impressive 68.2%. In fact, there have been fewer negative comments about the food (61) via the touchscreen information kiosks in this reporting period, and these were mostly related to portion size, the filling within baguettes and the personal preference of food not meeting prisoners' liking. By contrast, there have been approximately 26 positive comments on the taste of the food. There have been only six formal complaints and no Board applications relating to food in this reporting period.

Credit should also be given to the catering department on how well they have managed and maintained the food quality and standards during COVID-19. Extensive preparations were made at the start of March, such as ordering additional items with a long shelf life, and temporary freezers. During the pandemic, as expected, there were some shortages of certain items, such as UHT milk, baked beans and eggs. However, there were no major issues and, on the whole, the kitchens worked very well in the circumstances. Kitchen workers operated in cohorts based on their residential units, and careful scheduling ensured that cohorts did not mix. Any minimal variation in menus was necessitated by a temporary lack of product availability. One major change was the move of the main hot meal to lunchtimes instead of the evening, which prisoners accepted as a temporary measure during lockdown.

The canteen shop has continued to be popular, although demand has decreased since the COVID-19 lockdown in March, as a consequence of prisoners receiving additional snack boxes by HMPPS, delivered directly to their cells, and the withdrawal of cooking/food heating facilities on the wings.

Requests from prisoners for a wider variety of specialist goods for order from the prison shop have met with some success, and work is currently in progress in response to a request for more detailed listing of ingredients in food products for sale

which may be unsuitable for those with specific cultural or religious dietary restrictions.

## **5.2 Segregation, special accommodation**

Ashfield does not have a separate care and separation unit. When there is a need to segregate prisoners, they are either confined to their own cell or, in exceptional circumstances, transferred to the induction residential unit, the early days centre.

The number of prisoners on segregation/confinement during the reporting period has, again, been low, with six prisoners being placed on good order and/or discipline (GOOD) and three on cellular confinement (CC). The Board reported five GOOD and 11 CC cases in the last report, so this represents a marked decrease in CCs. Board members have visited all prisoners placed on GOOD and CC, and attended all of the GOOD reviews, and in every case were satisfied that the process was fair and the outcomes equitable.

The number of new adjudications conducted in the 12-month period was significantly lower (90) than in the previous reporting period (217). Although the lockdown during the pandemic would appear to have contributed to fewer adjudications (only 13 in the period April – June, an average of 4.2 per month), the average for the previous nine months was only 8.6. This is a good indicator of a relatively stable and compliant population. Before the lockdown, Board members routinely attended adjudications, and found the majority to be objective, fair and conducted in a very professional manner. Any concerns that the Board might have had have been reported and subsequently addressed.

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

During this reporting period, Ashfield has had a good record of staff/prisoner relationships, particularly during lockdown. Prior to lockdown, one prisoner summed it up when he said that Ashfield was the best he had been in, and found that if you showed respect to officers, then they would repay this with the same level of respect. The majority of prisoners were very complimentary about how the staff had managed lockdown; this was summed up by one prisoner: 'They've [the prison officers] given 100%'. Several thank-you letters from prisoners were also received, and some had shown their appreciation of actions by officers, following two 'blue light' incidents, by kicking their doors in unison to replicate the hand-clapping for NHS staff.

Prior to lockdown, PIAC meetings were held monthly but changed to two or three meetings a week in the initial stages of the lockdown. This proved to be a very effective means of communication between managers and prisoners, complementing prisoner notices, and so on.

An initiative pre-COVID-19 to involve prisoners more had been the 'Free Thinking' meetings. A number of prisoners met the Director once a month, and it was an opportunity for them to pitch ideas for improving the prison.

Key working is well established at Ashfield, and before lockdown the number of sessions held was regularly exceeding 80% – often 83%. Prisoners are generally appreciative of key worker sessions, although, for some, weekly sessions seem excessive. The quality of key worker notes can vary, so this is recognised as an area for improvement, and is being actively pursued. Lockdown led to the suspension of formal key working sessions but wing officers ensured that, once a week, a record

was made of the welfare chats to each prisoner. Consistently, there has been a high number of entries each week, often 98%/99%.

#### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

Ashfield is unusual in its age profile (around 20–25% of the population at any one time is in the 50–59-year age group, and around 47% are 50 or over) and in having a much lower percentage of black, Asian and minority ethnic, and foreign national prisoners than is the norm elsewhere, averaging around 16% and 6%, respectively. It has also, until very recently, enjoyed a relatively low level of ‘churn’, which, together with being a specialist prison exclusively for men convicted of sexual offences, thus avoids the prejudice often encountered elsewhere in prisons. This undoubtedly helps to provide a degree of homogeneity and cohesion, which, in turn, contributes to the creation of a calm and stable environment in which prisoners generally feel safe and support one another.

Not only has this atmosphere continued in 2019/20, reflected in very low numbers of discrimination incident report forms being submitted (just 39 in total over the reporting period), but, more positively, there are also numerous examples of prisoners taking a genuine interest in improving the quality of life for fellow prisoners, regardless of differences. Examples of this include acting as ‘buddies’ for frail or disabled prisoners, working as ‘Here to Hear’ volunteers, taking on the role of prisoners advice line service (PALS) orderlies or working as Shannon Trust mentors. Until March 2020, different forums, each representing one of the ‘protected characteristics’, continued enthusiastically to organise successful and well-supported social and cultural events to promote mutual understanding, including Black History Month, Gay Pride, Armed Forces Day and World Faith Day. All of this helps to generate a positive and tolerant atmosphere in the prison.

More evidence, in this reporting year, of promotion by senior managers of equality and diversity initiatives includes:

- improvements made to the facilities in the equalities room
- forums offering the recently refurbished visits room as an alternative to the chapel for participative special events
- involvement by PIAC representatives in the review of the new incentives and earned privileges (IEP) system in January 2020, following recommendations from the Lammy Review (see section 5.6).

In response to issues identified by the age and disability forum, initiatives included:

- a new system for six-monthly reviews of all personal emergency evacuation plans, for prisoners with limited mobility. Around 50 prisoners (about one in eight of the population) require one, and this was particularly urgent as many were out of date
- handrails and ramps installed to improve access to exercise yards, and the repair of potholes on pavements
- the provision of high-back cell chairs for those prisoners needing additional back support.

A rather more mixed picture emerges for those prisoners requiring specialist provision in response to their cultural or linguistic needs. The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have been successful in their request to be classified as 'W3' (in line with HMPPS establishments) which enables them to transfer more money onto their PIN telephone accounts, to take account of the fact that many family members have no access to landlines. However, technical and security difficulties have made the request by foreign nationals for video links to families abroad impractical. The prison is now more actively promoting the Big Word interpretation services for the prisoners who do not speak English, but the very fact that their numbers are so small means that any plans for the translation of key documents into different languages appears to have ground to a halt (see also section 5.1 for details on specialist items from the prison shop).

Overall, there is no evidence of any institutionalised bias with regard to any of the protected characteristics.

## **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

Prisoners have access to a wide range of faith support: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jehovah Witness, Judaism, Latter Day Saints, Paganism, Quaker, Rastafarianism, Sikhism and Spiritualism. There are four permanent staff representing Christianity, Islam and Paganism, while other faiths are supported by visiting ministers. All prisoners, irrespective of their faith (or with no faith), can request support from the chaplaincy staff, and this has been invaluable during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Undoubtedly, the chaplaincy staff have played a vital role in supporting prisoners through this very challenging time, regularly visiting exercise yards to be available for prisoners to talk to, and in particular providing support when relatives/friends have contracted the virus, and, sadly, in the case of 15–20 individuals, providing bereavement support. The supply of iPads to chaplaincy staff by HMPPS meant that prisoners could 'participate' in the funerals of loved ones – hugely important to those dealing with loss. The chaplaincy also runs a 'Living with Loss' course, comprising six/seven sessions, which during lockdown has been available as a virtual course of four sessions via the prison television channel. This medium was also used for both Muslim and Christian services, as well as a meditation course. On a weekly basis, faith advisers provided faith material for distribution to prisoners.

One of the chaplains has responsibility for family link work, including Storybook Dads (linking to the Angel Tree scheme, which provides gifts to prisoners' children at Christmas), official prison visitors (available to those who do not receive visits) and the family days. As a result of COVID-19, there have been only two family days in the reporting period but, as previously reported, these have been very well received (see also section 7.4).

At any time, prisoners can request one-to-one support through the chaplaincy, formerly known as 'personal intervention time', but now simply called 'one to one'. In the reporting period, this service was accessed approximately 2,300 times.

Before lockdown, the chaplaincy choir met two days a week. Changing Tunes, a charity that helps prisoners through music, held sessions, and these have been oversubscribed. The chaplaincy also operates a guitar and keyboard loan scheme for those who are on an enhanced regime; this has proved very popular – particularly during lockdown.

## **5.6 Incentives (formerly the IEP) scheme**

The number of prisoners on the basic regime is consistently low. The largest number in the period has been nine but more commonly it is under five. The scheme is generally applied fairly, and is monitored to ensure consistency across departments and residential units. In the reporting period, there have been 104 downgrades, of which only 16 were from the enhanced to basic level. There have been 221 warnings, the majority of only a month's duration, and the categories of behaviour attracting the largest number of warnings have been 'Call forwarding' and 'Attempting to make contact via social media', reflecting the criticality of contact restrictions in a prison for men convicted of sexual offences.

PIAC representatives were involved in the local interpretation of the new incentives policy (implemented in January 2020), which included the introduction of a reward voucher system for prisoners who repeatedly went 'above and beyond' in supporting others. A further review meeting to see how well the scheme was progressing was halted by COVID-19. Although there is monitoring of the number and distribution of behaviour warnings being issued, given that the emphasis of the new scheme is to incentivise good behaviour rather than punish poor behaviour, the fact that only two such vouchers have been issued between January and June of 2020 suggests that a joint prisoner and staff review would be of benefit.

## **5.7 Complaints**

A total of 861 complaints (Comp1/1A/2) were received in the reporting period, an average of 71.75 per month. It should be noted that serial complainants can inflate figures; for example, one prisoner submitted 21 complaints in July 2019, another submitted nine in October, and a further prisoner submitted eight complaints in March and seven in the following month. March saw the largest number of complaints (97), when lockdown was first introduced. The category with the largest number is residential, followed by property. Responses are delivered within the stipulated time frame and, based on periodic sampling by the Board, to a good standard. Periodically, reviews are also conducted by the prison. The most recent one identified that some responses to Comp1s could be more comprehensive, which might prevent a follow-on complaint ('Comp 1A'). Staff are encouraged to try to resolve issues before they become a cause for complaint.

## **5.8 Property**

Property management has continued to be of a high standard. Of 86 formal complaints in the reporting period, the majority related to items missing following transfers in/out, and were the responsibility of other establishments. The Board received eight property-related applications, of which five were due to property issues at another establishment. Ashfield moved to an electronic property card system in April 2020, which is facilitating many aspects of property management and will lead to an even higher level of accuracy.

The issue of missing property relating to other establishments continues to consume an inordinate amount of time and resource, and there is no sign of this improving.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare: general**

From 1 April 2020, the contract for provision of healthcare transferred to AWP (see section 2). Generally, the standard of provision is good and compares favourably with provision in the community. When Board members have visited the healthcare department and spoken to prisoners awaiting appointments, the feedback has usually been very positive. New arrivals are assessed by healthcare staff on the day of arrival, and healthcare staff are always involved in ACCTs, and particularly ACCT reviews. The reporting period has also seen a more active engagement of healthcare staff in safer custody meetings and the overall safer custody approach, to the benefit of the prisoners.

The healthcare department has its own complaint system, and in the reporting period there were 61 complaints, of which 15 were upheld, 43 not upheld and three deemed not applicable. The trend for complaints in the first half of the reporting period was for issues of medication (as in the last report), where prisoners have complained that their medication has been stopped on clinical grounds or the same medication is prescribed but under a different brand name. It is accepted that prisoners should be forewarned about such instances, which might help to reduce the frustration that they feel when they occur. In the second half of the reporting period, the trend of complaints was more about the delivery of healthcare services or perceived omission of care.

### **6.2 Physical healthcare**

Healthcare staffing levels during the reporting period have fluctuated but the arrangement whereby healthcare staff cover both HMP Leyhill and Ashfield has not adversely affected the service. During the lockdown, there was a reduced healthcare staff presence but, as appointments are predominantly by telephone, this has been manageable. GPs attend three times weekly, a dentist weekly (once restrictions eased a little – although under COVID-19 restrictions, only essential procedures are carried out) and a physiotherapist weekly, and clinics for audiology, optometry and ultrasound were all weekly pre-COVID-19 but are now monthly. A podiatry clinic was held twice a month but under the COVID-19 regime only foot wounds are being treated, with a telephone advice service for other issues.

There is now in place a newly appointed medicines management team, comprising a team leader and two pharmacy technicians. They issue and dispense medication, run clinics in medicine reconciliation, and conduct medicine reviews and compliance checks.

In terms of preventative healthcare, screening for bowel cancer is undertaken for those prisoners aged 60–69 years who meet the criteria. Screening for abdominal aneurysms and diabetes is also conducted for those who are eligible. As at June 2020, there were 54 prisoners with diabetes, 74 with asthma and 23 with COPD.

There were no backlogs of appointments identified throughout the reporting period (pre- and post-lockdown). Most prisoners are seen within a week of booking an appointment, and urgent appointments are seen on the day. Consistently, when prisoners in the waiting room (pre-COVID-19) were asked about the quality of the healthcare service at Ashfield, they were very complimentary and had no concerns.

### **6.3 Mental healthcare**

Staffing for mental healthcare comprises one recovery support worker, one recovery support coordinator and one full-time band 6 mental health nurse, with, additionally, one part-time non-medical nurse prescriber, who provides two clinics at Ashfield and one at Leyhill (varying, depending on clinical need). The psychologist visits once a month to run a clinic but can be called up to attend more often if there is an urgent need.

As reported in the previous report, treatment is predominantly group based but one-to-one work is available if a clinical need is identified. Prisoners assessed as having neurodevelopmental needs may have reasonable adjustments made to their compliance with prison rules.

Group courses continue to be provided, although during the initial period of lockdown they had to be suspended. Due to resume in July, albeit with reduced attendance, the priority is on groups providing support for those struggling with the lockdown regime. Thus, the 'anxiety' course, with five sessions, and the 'low mood' course, offering four sessions, will start at the end of July. There is a waiting list for all courses which, with fewer attendees, will worsen. The numbers of prisoners awaiting groups (as at June 2020) include 26 for 'anxiety', 19 for 'low mood', 10 for 'alcohol awareness' and 12 for 'relapse prevention' (a new course for 2020).

During lockdown, prisoners did not have ready access to AWP but, because Ashfield has in-cell telephones, the mental health team conducted a telephone triage system, allowing prisoners to contact AWP if the need arose. In addition, updates, distraction packs and self-help guides were distributed on a regular basis.

In terms of new initiatives (prior to COVID-19), AWP introduced a 'stabilisation' group, targeting prisoners who have a history of trauma. This programme does not deliver trauma therapy but enhances coping skills to alleviate some symptoms associated with trauma. In addition, there were plans for several new one-hour education sessions to be offered (currently postponed owing to COVID-19), dealing with various topics, including sleep and self-esteem, together with a new relaxation session. These will be introduced as restrictions are eased.

### **6.4 Social care**

Social care requirements are met through South Gloucester Council. A social worker from the council is responsible for facilitating social care referrals. The waiting time for these referrals is generally about one to two weeks (except during the COVID-19 pandemic). Necessary, appropriate equipment is always delivered promptly by Medequip.

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

Football, badminton, volleyball, rugby, cricket and bowls have continued to be offered but all had to be suspended during lockdown. Prior to that, significant efforts had been made to accommodate older prisoners, so, as well as badminton and bowls, there had also been seated volleyball and special sessions in the weights room. When one 79-year-old prisoner was asked about seated volleyball, he said that it was his first time playing, and that he had thoroughly enjoyed it. A further member of gym staff has been appointed, and greater emphasis placed on a better structuring of sessions – for example, including warm-up and cool-down routines. Future plans include first-aid and manual handling courses but these will not start until the easing of lockdown rules.

During lockdown, typical time out of cell has been around 90 minutes daily for the majority of prisoners – an hour's exercise plus time for showering, using the touchscreen information kiosks, etc. This has been the same, seven days a week, since the beginning of lockdown. Additionally, prisoners can book time out once a week on the Astroturf, to walk or run round supervised by gym staff (but they have to be in their wing cohorts, to minimise the risk of infection). Pre-COVID-19, prisoners were used to having 10 hours out of cell a day, with the full range of educational, vocational and sporting activities, so lockdown has been a huge change for them.

In this reporting period, the gym has had a major upgrade, with the installation of a new floor.

## **6.6 Soft skills**

Prior to lockdown, two yoga sessions were offered weekly, run by an external facilitator, and were well received. Meditation sessions have continued for all of the reporting period, delivered by chaplaincy staff (see section 5.5).

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

Following the 2019 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons report, particular emphasis has been placed on monitoring progress and providing guidance to prisoners following each 16-week education module; this includes discussion about achievement, and planning for their most appropriate next steps, consistent with sentence and resettlement goals. Also following the HMCIP recommendations, statistics on the qualitative outcomes of courses are now routinely collected and included in regular monitoring data.

The range of courses and qualifications provided is comprehensive, although the number and levels offered have remained largely static. Classroom attendance remains high and the cover teachers appointed in 2018/19 provide an enhanced back-up compared with what was previously possible, ensuring that such classroom time is better used. However, there was a concern in the summer months of 2019 about the number of education and vocational training classes which were closed or running unsupervised, or only partially supervised, in the absence of official teaching/training staff. The Board appreciated that it was during the school holidays, when staff might well want to take annual leave for family holidays, and that there were staff off sick, but the appointment of cover staff should have alleviated these issues. This was subsequently taken up by senior managers and addressed.

Distance learning is encouraged and supported by the prison, and statistics to the end of 2019 show that over 50 prisoners (12% of the population) were engaged in a variety of external courses, half through the Open University.

The prison information technology system continues to improve, and provides excellent support for educational activities. Ongoing external discussions are under way so that the virtual campus platform may be introduced to the establishment; this would allow a record of prisoner work and personal learning plans to be kept on a system which is linked with other establishments. Interactive whiteboards have now been fitted throughout the department.

The library has been comprehensively refurbished and now contains significantly more shelf space. It continues to be a valued and well-used prison resource, both in terms of actual use and also in its busy role providing a loan, delivery and return service to the wings for DVDs and computer games. It was reported that, prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, in this reporting period monthly visits to the library increased from 625 to 1,200, reflecting its popularity.

A further Ashfest arts festival was successfully held in Autumn 2019, with 20 workshops over four days, including a presentation by the head of the South West National Probation Service and events such as 'Food is art' – painting with chocolate in the bakery. The festival, now in its third year, continues to be a very popular event with prisoners.

The COVID-19 lockdown has inevitably stopped almost all educational activities. An appropriately managed loan service for DVDs and games has continued throughout this period and proven invaluable in helping to maintain prisoner morale. The in-house Serco tutors have also commendably provided education and activity packs (albeit not individualised) twice weekly to all prisoners. Where external providers have continued to run course modules (e.g. Open University), these have been supported.

The department has also been heavily involved in the development of the in-cell television network during lockdown. For a number of uses – information, education, physical and pastoral, for example – the opportunity has been taken to use the system more widely, and feedback that the Board has received has been extremely positive. It is anticipated that such uses will continue when a more normal regime returns.

## **7.2 Vocational training, work**

The unemployment rate is commendably low, and monitoring and reporting of occupation and training by age and ethnicity is good. The ethos of providing qualifications through work is applied well and training accreditations are now routinely reported, in line with HMIP recommendations. In line with these recommendations, there is a greater emphasis on ensuring that work activities aid resettlement skills where possible.

The Board would, again, commend the organisation of training and employment to provide services for use within the prison; the major upgrade to the in-house waste disposal facilities provides an excellent example of this.

Employment positions are worked in 16-week cycles and there are theoretical limits to how many cycles prisoners can remain on in the same department; feedback to the Board from several prisoners has challenged the assumption that this is consistently applied (see applications to IMB).

Lockdown for COVID-19 resulted in many vocational activities being suspended but some activity continued with reduced numbers (subject to COVID-19 risk assessments) in Light Industries, Electrics, Horticulture and particularly those impacting living conditions such as laundry, waste management and industrial cleaning.

New in this reporting period has been the Six Sigma 'Yellow Belt' training and accreditation. Of 10 prisoners trained in October, seven achieved accreditation.

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

Completion of an intervention programme is, for many prisoners coming to Ashfield, a key element of their sentence plan. Until lockdown, both the Kaizen and Horizon programmes continued and a new course, Becoming New Me Plus, started. This is a high-intensity programme adapted for individuals who have low-level cognitive skills. It had been originally planned to deliver this intervention as a group. However, owing to the relatively small population of Ashfield, only four prisoners were identified for this course. As this was not considered a sufficient number for group delivery, it was delivered on an individual basis. There are no plans to deliver this during the coming year due to resource constraints. A new programme that will be made available when restrictions permit will be the Healthy Sex Programme, which will be a significant addition to Ashfield's programmes offering, as it is often included in sentence plans for men convicted of sexual offences.

Of major concern to the Board is the effect of the COVID-19 restrictions on the delivery of programmes during the coming 12 months. There have always been more prisoners identified as requiring programmes than there are places but with the suspension of programmes and the reduced numbers, when they do resume, the backlog of prisoners waiting to do a course will have increased. This, potentially, could have repercussions on prisoners coming up for parole and release where completing a programme is part of their sentence plan.

This reporting period has seen the final stage of transition to the OMiC model, whereby probation officers are embedded in the prison, working alongside offender management staff (now called prisoner offender managers (POMs)). However, this is operated flexibly, to achieve a balance of workload. The senior probation officer joined at the end of September, and the four members of his team (3.5 full-time equivalents) joined over the following months, with the final person joining only at the end of July 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in community probation resources being depleted, and one probation officer was loaned out to help community probation services. Probation officers and POMs are now co-located in

the same office. The Board welcomed the introduction of the new OMiC model and, going forward, there should be benefits, although it is too early to assess this. Of real concern, however, has been the high turnover of staff (four left the prison in February 2020) in the former OMU function (now POMs), which has resulted in staff shortages and, particularly concerning, a lack of experience. A programme to train new team members is under way. Owing to COVID-19 the Board has not been in a position to assess the impact of this on prisoners.

The HMIP inspection report last year was critical of the number of offender assessment system (OASys) records that were out of date. HMIP views any record over 12 months old as out of date, whereas HMPPS considers that any record over two years, for determinate sentences, and three years, for indeterminate sentences, are out of date. At the end of this reporting period, there were only 19 OASys assessments 'out of date', compared with 39 in the last report (using the HMPPS definition of what constitutes an out-of-date record). While Ashfield will aim to meet HMIP standards (anything over 12 months being out of date), their initial target is to achieve HMPPS standards. Taking into account issues relating to the transition to OMiC, the numbers out of date at the end of the reporting period, compared with when HMIP visited, represent a significant improvement.

Up until May 2020, the category D waiting list (particularly for Leyhill) remained high. The restrictions on transfers imposed by COVID-19 meant that Leyhill had an increasing number of spaces they could not fill, which, together with the installation of accommodation 'pods', provided an opportunity for additional spaces for Ashfield, which is geographically close and had a clean COVID-19 record. In total, 66 prisoners transferred to Leyhill during the reporting period, and the waiting list for Leyhill fell to only 24, a much-improved position compared with last year. Eight prisoners transferred to HMP North Sea Camp and three prisoners to HMP Haverigg.

As set out in our last annual report, in response to the frustrations of category D prisoners, and the recognition that more needed to be done to prepare prisoners for release, to include those in the 'parole window', one of the wings, Severn A, had been designated as a progression wing in June 2019. Although now furnished with better, free-standing furniture and carpeting in communal areas, differentiating this wing from others, this is still considered to be 'work in progress'; before lockdown, the only major change to the regime for the individuals on this wing was a later lock-up time of 7pm. It had also been planned to provide a mini-kitchen with a washing machine, drier, refrigerator and microwave oven. However, this had not materialised by the time of the COVID-19 lockdown. Feedback from prisoners on the wing has been one of frustration with the slow progress of any changes. It was acknowledged that a lot of initiatives have been talked about but very little has got past 'pending'.

#### **7.4 Family contact**

Ashfield continues to foster and promote engagement with family and friends particularly well. For example, the 'Family/Friends at the Centre of Throughcare' (FACT) initiative continued during this reporting period, up until lockdown in March 2020. A total of 58 prisoners gave their consent for their families to be given regular

updates. There were seven FACT days (these days are in addition to the family visit days), which allow up to six families an opportunity to visit the prison; as well as meeting the prisoner, they can also speak to the prisoner's key worker, if available, or a member of the key worker hub. As part of FACT, the prisoner agrees to the family receiving regular updates from the prison regarding his progress, and, if required, the family can email his key worker with any concerns they may have. Ashfield is looking to increase the number of prisoners who participate in the FACT initiative, by promoting the scheme to new arrivals, and also through the use of leaflets and posters for families when visiting the prison.

Visits continue to be actively facilitated (except during the initial months of lockdown), and the visits hall has undergone a major refresh, with new, more comfortable chairs and better tables – a great improvement. In response to prisoners' requests, a pilot was carried out whereby Sundays were assigned as an additional family visits day, but, surprisingly, there were no takers when it was set up. Work has been under way to introduce video visits, which would be hugely beneficial to prisoners; however, the plan to introduce Purple Visits, which is in use elsewhere in the prison estate, has been caught up in contractual issues.

The chaplaincy team has continued with the Storybook Dads scheme, whereby those prisoners who are allowed contact with their children record stories for them. During this period, 32 recordings were made, compared with 23 during the last reporting period. This increase is particularly impressive, given the three-month period of lockdown. Individual prisoners were brought to the chapel during lockdown, so that recording sessions could continue.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

As a category C specialist training prison, the number of prisoners released should be low. Although the number during this reported period has slightly reduced (78 compared with 84 in the last reporting period), the Board continues to have concerns about the number of prisoners released directly from Ashfield. Of particular concern is that, in many cases, accommodation is only secured within 24 hours of release, and, very worryingly, five prisoners were released with no fixed address. While every effort was made to try to secure accommodation for them, they presented themselves to their community probation officer on the day of release before emergency housing could be offered.

The chaplaincy continues to work with faith-based community safeguarding teams, to try to ensure that prisoners can receive support when released back into the community. Citizens Advice has continued to provide advice to prisoners on a weekly basis, except for a couple of months at the start of lockdown. Prior to lockdown, this was delivered through one-to-one meetings but since June, once a week, a presentation is streamed through the television channel covering themes such as debt advice, bereavement, making a will, self-employment, benefits and housing support. These topics were chosen based on requests from prisoners.

In August 2019, a resettlement fair was held, where a total of approximately 20 internal and external organisations were represented, including those dealing with rehousing, education, the Department of Work and Pensions, open prisons, and

support organisations for prisoners once released. Every prisoner was given time to attend.

Ashfield has also been in exploratory discussions with employers such as DHL and Tesco about opportunities for prisoners when released.

## 8. The work of the IMB

Up until March, when lockdown measures were introduced, members of the Board were typically on-site around 20 or more times each month (including attendance at the monthly Board meeting). During lockdown, the Board remotely monitored the prison through weekly rota calls, particularly focused on the regime, residential accommodation, safer custody, healthcare, mental health support, the chaplaincy and catering. Monthly Board meetings were conducted by teleconference and consistently attended by the Director. Applications from prisoners continued to be collected, albeit via the complaints boxes, which the Board clerk scanned and forwarded to members using secure electronic email. In June 2020, the Board joined the national IMB project, providing an 0800 telephone line for prisoners to record applications.

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

In addition to the weekly rota visit pre-lockdown, one member a week collected and responded to all applications from prisoners. Wherever possible, a rota or applications visit was combined with attendance at a prison meeting, such as the interdepartmental risk management team meeting or prisoner advice and information committee, an adjudication, a GOOD review or an ACCT review, but the scheduling of these often necessitated a separate visit.

Two members resigned in December 2019, each having served over seven years on the Board.

Board members have continued to attend Serco-run training sessions within the prison, as well as awareness sessions provided at monthly Board meetings. The Chair has also attended South-West Chairs' meetings. The Board is also a member of, and attends, the meetings of the IMB working group of establishments holding men convicted of sexual offences. This has been covered by both the Chair and Vice Chair.

The Board would like to thank sincerely all of the managers and staff at every level at HMP Ashfield for their cooperation. Always responsive to the Board's enquiries and requests for information, the very positive and constructive attitude towards the Board greatly facilitates the monitoring role. Particular thanks go to the IMB clerk, whose support to members has been unstinting.

**Board statistics**

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	244
Total number of segregation reviews attended	9

## Applications to the IMB

This reporting period has seen a slightly lower number of applications than last year (seven). However, it should be noted that 10 were submitted by one prisoner via the 0800 line; of these, only one related to an issue that had arisen at Ashfield, the remaining nine being related to previous establishments. Compared with other prisons, the figures continue to be low.

The categories attracting the largest number were B (17), which covers issues with IEP, adjudications and general disciplinary; D (11), which covers purposeful activity; (an increase of eight) and J (12), which covers staff/prisoner bullying.

B – IEP, adjudications and general disciplinary - Four applications related to the same incident, whereby prisoners were reduced to the basic IEP level. After a review by senior managers, this was changed to the standard level. All others were thoroughly investigated, and the Board was satisfied with the action taken. In two incidences, the previous status was restored.

D - Purposeful Activity including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell – No particular trend to these. Two related to the same issue, of prisoners being expected to take a qualification when the brochure for the course stated that it was optional (satisfactorily resolved by managers). There were two which could have been categorised under equality, as they related to dyslexia and autism – again, satisfactorily resolved through the intervention of managers. Two related to the library, one of which complained about the underutilisation of the library due to the constraints of movement restrictions. One issue, which was raised in a couple of applications under this category, related to the policy of orderlies only remaining in post for 18 months, where it was perceived that the policy had not been consistently followed. There can be exceptions where, for example, a prisoner is due for release in a few months. Each case was investigated by the Board and raised with relevant managers, to ensure that there was consistency.

J,– Staff/Prisoner Concerns/Bullying- Included seven from the same individual relating to an incident that had occurred in a previous establishment. The remaining five were all very different, and only three were concerns about staff treatment of prisoners.

<b>Code</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Current reporting year</b>	<b>Previous reporting year</b>
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	4	2
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	17	17
C	Equality	1	1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	11	4
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	2	7
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	3	2
F	Food and kitchens	0	7
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	6	8
H1	Property within this establishment	3	3
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	5	6
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	0	0
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	10	7
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	12	14
K	Transfers	0	3
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	0	0
	Total number of applications	<b>74 (including 4 confidential applications)</b>	<b>81 (including 5 confidential applications)</b>



This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3)

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at [imb@justice.gov.uk](mailto:imb@justice.gov.uk).