



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Brixton

**For reporting year
01 September 2019 – 31 August 20**

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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 IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

During the year under review, Brixton has continued as a category C resettlement prison. The certified normal accommodation is 528, and the operational capacity was 798 in August 2019. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the operational capacity was reduced to 760, to give some headroom for men who might be ill or shielding. The population fell below that when there were no transfers in and releases continued. At 31 August it was 729.

There are five residential wings: A accommodates general population and the London Pathways Unit (LPU) for up to 36 prisoners who have committed to psychological therapy. B is used for induction, C accommodates full-time workers and enhanced men; and D is a mixed drug recovery and wellbeing unit. G accommodates men convicted of sexual offences.

A wing	232 prisoners in 135 cells
B wing	150 prisoners in 88 cells
C wing	133 prisoners in 70 cells
D wing	48 prisoners in 26 cells
G wing	235 prisoners in 149 cells

During lockdown, the operational capacity of all wings was adjusted to accommodate

reverse cohorts of new receptions.

The segregation unit has seven cells and one special cell, which doubles as a holding cell.

Overall, the condition of the accommodation is unacceptable, and the cells are too small for two men sharing in normal circumstances: even worse when they were locked up for up to 23 and a half hours a day as a result of the Covid lockdown, and 24 hours on Fridays, when canteen is distributed.

The main external service providers, largely unchanged since last year, are:

- maintenance and kitchen: Mitie
- education and training: Novus, subcontracting to Bounce Back and Allandale
- The Clink Restaurant
- National Prison Radio
- call centre: Census Data Group
- Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC): Penrose, subcontracted by MTC Novo
- housing: St Mungo's subcontracted by the CRC
- work and benefits: Jobcentre Plus (JCP)
- healthcare: Care UK, subcontracting to Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust and others
- substance misuse and wellbeing (with healthcare): Forward Trust (FT)
- visitors centre, and work with families and children: Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)
- employment/training information, advice and guidance (IAG): Prospects, part of the Shaw Trust

Many other organisations, mostly voluntary, provide additional training, support and advice, and religious services.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

This report presents the findings of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) at HMP Brixton for the period 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2020. The reporting year falls into two parts: normal business up to 24 March, and the lockdown conditions after that. Until lockdown, the prison was making good progress, with improvements in safer custody and some progress in resettlement, better communication with prisoners, and efforts to improve the prison environment.

Since March, the priority has been on keeping prisoners and staff safe by severely limiting the number of men out of cell at any one time, and on improving conditions when possible, after careful planning. The Board ceased visiting in person on 19 March, resuming in mid-July and then only to visit the exercise yards. The Board did not consider it possible to go on the wings. This has had a significant impact on the Board's ability to monitor, having to depend more heavily on conversations with staff and on prison reports, and much less on talking to prisoners and observation of conditions on the wings. It has also been harder to discuss the contents of this report with staff managing different areas. The Board has covered as much ground as it could.

The Board was impressed by the speed and sensitivity with which the new Governor

and her staff implemented revised systems of working in March and April to respond to the threats from Covid-19, and by the professional and compassionate way that a very restrictive regime has been managed since. National guidance from HMPPS Gold command severely constrained Brixton's freedom to introduce local initiatives to improve conditions. The Governor and staff are to be commended for continuing to be creative in looking for possible improvements to the regime that they could introduce autonomously.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

Overall, the favourable trend towards a safer prison has continued through this reporting year, with reducing levels of assaults, use of force and self harm. During the early months of lockdown the established good relationships between staff and men helped the prison to maintain a calm and safe culture. In the Board's opinion, ensuring safety and wellbeing will become more difficult the longer the severely restricted living conditions continue.

The Board issued a questionnaire to men about to be released in July, August and September (see Annex A). Thirty-nine men responded in total. Of those who answered the relevant questions, 16 said they did not feel safe during lockdown, sometimes explicitly because of the fear of illness; 20 said they felt safe; 23 said they were fairly and humanely treated by staff and 10 felt they were not¹.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

There were continuing significant improvements in safer custody procedures and practices. Good collaboration between safer custody, healthcare, and Forward Trust, which offers programmes on drug rehabilitation and wellbeing, meant that a large number of men benefitted from individual attention and from a general reduction in the level of violence. Social care for older men improved, although there were too few activities for them. There were more initiatives based on protected characteristics, including on IEP². The keyworker system was closely monitored for quality interactions, and some men told IMB members about helpful relationships with their keyworker.

During lockdown, the good relationships between staff and prisoners, and open communication with them helped men to feel fairly treated. Although there was no in-cell education, the presence of healthcare and chaplains, and the range of in-cell activities helped men feel that the staff were doing their best for them.

The regime was predictable, before and during lockdown, but on Fridays pre-lockdown the distribution of canteen to cell doors on two of the main wings meant that those men had less time out of cell. On Fridays during lockdown, most men spent 24 hours in their cells, unlocked only to collect their meals after serveries reopened in mid July. Brixton's cells (except on C wing, which is newer) are too cramped to accommodate two men and a shared toilet humanely in these circumstances.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

Overall, healthcare was good: the number of staff and the hours covered for both physical and mental healthcare increased. There was good collaboration about men with the most urgent needs, including with safer custody and between the different

¹ Not all men answered all questions.

² The incentives and earned privileges system.

sections of healthcare and Forward Trust and the prison. Wing work, including dispensing and minor ailments, and mental health work continued in person during lockdown. Forward Trust went to cell doors for welfare checks and to provide written advice and distraction packs.

The chaplaincy, despite being very short-staffed when volunteers could no longer come in, visited the wings regularly during men's time out of cell, and comforted those who had been bereaved. There was continued support for the wide spread of religions, either through the chaplaincy or on prison radio.

Soon after lockdown, a thorough security, safety and drug strategy review was completed, and reviewed regularly. This strategy identified potential problems caused by the long hours men spent in their cells, and the absence of education and activities. Actions followed, including the formation of an activities committee, and continuing support of men most at risk.

After March, the innovative range of in-cell activities, access to additional TV channels and some books helped to keep men mentally active. The physical education instructors (PEIs) worked hard to maintain men's physical wellbeing, devising programmes for shielders and the elderly, and supervising short exercise routines and some equipment on the exercise yards. The food continued to be praised by prisoners and there were 'treats' during lockdown.

Despite these local initiatives, the conditions men endured were little different from those in segregation, where the impacts are recognised in the requirement for special dispensation after 42 days of segregation. There was no local scope for increasing time out of cell, except for a few men. The prison inspectorate (HMIP) has drawn attention, in its short scrutiny reports, to the difficulties faced by Governors in introducing local relaxations.³ But, to the Board's knowledge, there has been no national assessment of the mental health impacts, while the overwhelming majority of men continued to be locked up for 23 hours a day at the end of August.⁴ It may be many months before conditions return even partly to those which applied before lockdown. The Board considers that this makes it necessary for the risks to mental health as well as physical health to be taken into account in national guidance on lockdown.

The early release scheme, had it proceeded as expected, might have allowed more time out of cell for more men. Despite work to identify men who met the criteria, only one was released from Brixton. The small reduction in operational capacity allowed more space for shielders and later for transfers in under quarantine, but a significant proportion of men continued to share cells, and this meant there was no scope for more time out, given the limited space on the landings.

How well are prisoners progressed towards resettlement?

Until March, induction processes directing men to education and activities were more efficient, and efforts to improve attendance at education continued, but there were still too few activity places. After lockdown most routes to improved resettlement were blocked by national decisions to stop all education and training, and there was no effective programme of in-cell education. At the end of August only upwards of 70 prisoners were working, in the kitchen, as cleaners, wing representatives etc and in the Clink restaurant. The psychologists on the LPU continued to work one-one with men.

³ These impacts were also identified in the National Preventive Mechanism's submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights.

⁴ Men in the LPU, all in single cells, and on the smaller C and D wings were out for slightly longer.

During lockdown, there was an increase in the number of men transferred in with sentence plans specifying courses not available in Brixton. Some would be unable to complete the required courses before their release date.

Men who gained their D categorisation continued to wait too long for transfer to open conditions.

The PACT Route2Change programme continued remotely supporting men and their families outside, but there was no face to face contact between men and their families from March to early August. The Board regrets that Brixton, where there are no in-cell phones, was not a priority for the 'purple visits' video link with families.

Coordination of work on the seven resettlement pathways was improving by the start of lockdown, as was collaboration between agencies. In a welcome development towards the end of April, more information for prisoners was produced, along with a spreadsheet bringing together information for all the agencies involved. In May, a departure lounge opened, which was very helpful for men with no-one to meet them, providing information about the lockdown, about transport and applying for universal credit, providing mobile phones if necessary, and making appointments with accommodation providers.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

The Board continues to be concerned about the shortage of category D prison places.

The Board notes that the Justice Committee report of July 2020 repeated its 2013 recommendation on the need for a strategy for the ageing prison population. The Board considers that this need is very evident in HMP Brixton.

In relation to lockdown, the Board regrets:

- that more low-risk prisoners were not released early, even by a week. This would have reduced overcrowding, allowed more men more time out of cell, and thus helped to safeguard the mental and physical health and wellbeing of prisoners and staff. The Board would ask that this be reviewed as the pandemic continues;
- the inadequate emphasis on continuing some form of in-cell education tailored towards qualifications later, and access to library services;
- the inadequate emphasis on maintaining family ties, especially in prisons like Brixton without in-cell telephony.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

The Board

- considers that the size of cell considered adequate for two men sharing, in normal conditions and even more so in lockdown, is neither decent nor humane;
- regrets that the OMIC2⁵ changes to give resettlement prisons resources to complete sentence plans have not yet been introduced.

The Board would ask that:

- the mental health impacts of lockdown be assessed urgently, and action taken

⁵ The second phase of the offender management in custody programme

to mitigate them;

- a mechanism to provide some education and training, and better access to books, be considered a priority as lockdown continues;
- mandatory drug testing be reintroduced as soon as possible;
- more importance be placed on transferring prisoners to establishments where courses required in their sentence plans are offered, and not to resettlement prisons;
- the canteen and telephone contracts be reviewed to make goods and calls more affordable;
- the introduction of the long-promised property tracking scheme be expedited, not least to save costs;
- a strategy for older prisoners be produced as a priority;
- a commitment is made to retain free 'purple visits' video calls after lockdown;
- as prisons return to a more normal regime, it is made a priority and funding is made available to provide all men in resettlement prisons with an activity that will reduce their risk of reoffending on release.

TO THE GOVERNOR

The Board raises local concerns with the Governor as and when they arise.

3.4 Progress since the last report

Before and during lockdown, tighter security processes to prevent entry of drugs and mobile phones, and searches for them within the prison continued. There was more collaboration between the security and safer custody departments on working with perpetrators and victims to head off problems. Support for men with complex needs was well organised, and often appreciated by the men themselves.

More prisoners reported to the IMB that staff had helped them. This included wing officers, keyworkers, offender managers and agencies. The basis of trust established, particularly between wing officers and men, meant that the lockdown was accepted with resignation, despite its severity, and there was very little self-harm or violence on the wings until the hot weather in August.

The new Governor introduced 'community notices' to replace the separate notices for prisoners and for staff (PINs and SINs), making communication more inclusive.

Work on diversity and protected characteristics was more developed, and during lockdown, meetings with staff and some prisoners discussed responses to Black Lives Matter. Communication with prisoners during the pandemic was very open. The prisoner council met every fortnight instead of monthly until mid-August.

The Board congratulates the Governor and all the staff involved for their achievements during lockdown. The necessary changes were introduced quickly and efficiently, a predictable regime established, and an activities committee set up. Essential services were provided throughout, like healthcare and oversight of men more at risk and with complex needs, increased cleaning, good food, personal hygiene and PPE, and welfare provision by chaplains and keyworkers. The prison's joint safety and security strategy was regularly reviewed to ensure that the threats during lockdown were prioritised and adequately monitored. More help was available for prisoners being released from early May.

There was little or no public recognition of prison staff as key workers: but many

prisoners recognised the goodwill and help they received, and the prison remained safe and calm, in very difficult circumstances for staff who were themselves at risk and anxious for partners, children and relatives.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

The processes for reception and induction remained largely unchanged in the first half of the year, a weekly induction fair for Brixton activities having been successfully introduced in the previous year. Induction paperwork was streamlined. It was planned to make the induction sessions more interactive, but this could not be progressed because of lockdown.

For the first month of lockdown no new prisoners arrived at Brixton and the roll fell to about 700. The first intakes came in large groups from a few prisons, making quarantining them in 'reverse cohorts' easier. Smaller groups, generally in even numbers to facilitate cell sharing, started arriving later. Transferees should have shown no symptoms of the virus for 48 hours before transfer, and all were kept separate from other prisoners for 14 days, on one floor of B (and for vulnerable prisoners) G wing. They were given updated leaflets on induction and a new leaflet on Covid-19.

Interviews, including with healthcare, were carried out in the first two days as usual, in portacabin rooms, but there was no induction fair. Education assessments did not happen after lockdown in March (see section 7.1). This meant that none of the men arriving got any direction towards improving their skills. It is not likely that a full induction programme will be offered for some months. From July, Prospects (the agency providing information, advice and guidance assessments for the education provider) produced a monthly newsletter, which was well received.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Overall, the favourable trend towards a safer prison has continued through this reporting year. From January, safer custody (SC) monthly meetings, were merged with those for security and for drug rehabilitation to encourage more collaborative working. Because of lockdown, and the pressures of related work and EDMs⁶, this work has not progressed as much as was hoped.

The SC team has benefited from the commitment and continuity of staff. It won a national Openness, Innovation & Learning award. Interventions before lockdown included Geese Theatre, TimeWise and a Man's Club. These are unlikely to start again until 2021. In January a programme to improve ACCTs & CSIPs⁷ began, with the aim of making custodial managers accountable for improving care maps and the quality of interventions, and embedding safer custody into standard practices, with risk assessment and creativity in setting goals.

Contingency planning for Covid-19 was started early: preparation for multiple deaths, mortuary facilities, emergency medical procedures for Covid-infected men, and support for bereaved prisoners who could not attend family funerals.

During lockdown, the downward trend in self-harm continued: the monthly average for September to February was 22 incidents; 11 from March to July. In August, coinciding with the hot weather, there were 14 incidents of self-harm, by nine men. Sixteen men required hospital treatment and a further five a hospital bed. ACCTs opened have averaged 15 a month with usually six or fewer open at any one time. Board members attended some excellent ACCT reviews, which on one occasion included the

⁶ The comprehensive project plans for areas of prison work proposed for relaxation under lockdown.

⁷ Support plans for men at risk of self-harm, or of perpetrating or suffering violence.

prisoner's partner. The Board commends the patience and personal commitment by individual officers to the long-term recovery of seriously damaged individuals.

Despite the inability to train them during lockdown, Listener numbers have been sufficient, averaging 14 at any one time, with arrangements to cover any wing that has none resident. Listeners are debriefed weekly by Samaritans. The Samaritans phones are used very regularly on G wing. Staff are instructed to respond within an hour to any request for a Listener or a phone. Night arrangements were checked on a Board visit to the prison in January. Some Listeners were due to leave Brixton in the autumn, and at the end of August, 17 men had been cleared to go for assessment for training.

The Board records with regret that there were two deaths in custody. In April, a prisoner died while in hospital, and in July a man died in prison two weeks after major surgery. He had been cared for on the wing with kindness and coaxed to eat with specially prepared meals. Both deaths have been confirmed as natural at post mortems. The prison's three family liaison officers were in touch with relatives.

A coroner's report, in June 2020, on a death in custody in May 2018 had, unusually, no recommendations for the prevention of future deaths: the recommendations made in the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) investigation (September 2019) had been implemented.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

Assaults averaged 13 a month before lockdown, down from 19 in the six preceding months, seven a month after lockdown. Cohorting of prisoners reduced numbers potentially circulating in association, from 130 up to 230 before lockdown, to 44 at most. This impeded the distribution of drugs, gave aggressors and victims less chance to meet and made these smaller population groups feel generally safer. As with self-harm, the number of assaults increased in August, to 11, nearer the previous monthly average: two were serious. There were two assaults on staff, and one accidental injury while trying to prevent self-harm. Of 129 assaults during the year, five required hospital treatment and a further three required an overnight stay.

The decision in mid June to use CSIPs with hooch offenders proved successful both in correcting behaviour and in providing leads for searches: 24 litres of hooch were found after CSIP interviews in the first week. A prisoner who was persistently drunk over several months (despite staff interventions) responded very positively and by early August had been sober for six weeks. Staff became more proactive in searching for hooch: "you don't need a dog to smell it".

The nature of the violence changed: before lockdown it was mainly driven by drugs/debt; afterwards, it appeared to be hooch-driven.

Self isolators have averaged under two in any month (although there were four to six from late July to mid August), the most frequent reason being debt. Statistics collected in the daily report (DOR) have not always been accurate, but the Board was assured that all self-isolators were seen by safer custody, and also discussed in the weekly meeting with other prison departments including healthcare.

There have been no serious incidents caused by violence. The command suite was opened for one incident at height in January and another in August, both involving only one man and both safely resolved. During lock-down, board members have been able to speak to a small sample of prisoners by phone or in exercise yards: they have told us they feel safe.

4.4 Vulnerable prisoners, safeguarding

Prisoners vulnerable because of the nature of their offence are housed on G wing. There is no separate accommodation for prisoners otherwise considered vulnerable. A transgender prisoner spent some time in the LPU before release. Men transferred into Brixton who say they are at risk from other prisoners are considered by safer custody. Only rarely is a prisoner transferred out for this reason.

Older prisoners are housed on the first floor of G wing, and on the ground floor of A wing. Conditions in the cells are particularly unacceptable where shared, with space for only one man to sit, and bunk beds too narrow for mattress toppers to help prevent bed sores. As ever, most men eat their meals in a cell with a toilet (now more often screened, if only by a plastic curtain). G wing has only one larger en-suite cell on the ground floor that will take two hospital beds. The lift installed last year is in use from ground to first floor, although it is not clear how regularly. A second ground floor cell, which has room for a hospital bed was not fully made ready for use by the end of August. It has a water supply but no shower or alarm bell.

4.5 Use of force

Use of Force reports averaged 17 per month before lockdown, 11 after. Training was completed for use of PAVA, rigid handcuffs and a new protective technique (SPEAR); and observed by several IMB members. About 50 body-worn cameras (BWC) were drawn daily, more in lockdown. Officers say they feel safe in Brixton without BWC or other protective equipment. PAVA was not used, and staff at all levels have told board members that they would talk a man down rather than use it. Batons were drawn three times, in two incidents.

4.6 Substance misuse

The focus has been on routes of possible entry for illicit substances: people, post and throw-overs. An extra 'passive' dog assigned to Brixton meant that visitors were monitored more frequently. An airport-style screening machine was tested but not introduced before the end of the reporting year. Prisoners arriving in Brixton from other establishments had their papers scanned to prevent paper impregnated with drugs getting in. Random inspections of staff at the gate continued, and are also made in the prison, sometimes with 'passive' drug dogs.

Rapiscan monitoring of post is routine. During lockdown letters sent from other prison establishments and from unlikely sources such as DVLA tested positive for drugs. The prison has investigated, and amended procedures to ensure that false positives are more thoroughly investigated.

The prison's location means that throw-overs are a constant threat, and the netting was regularly inspected. Increased perimeter monitoring was introduced after a review in April. Cell searches were regularly carried out, often using the two 'active' dogs, one of which is trained in hooch detection (IBAD).

After March, national drug-testing was no longer available. There were also some long-term staff shortages in the security department. Although there were fewer apparent avenues for distribution of drugs with the restricted regime, this was offset by the risk that prisoner frustration might have increased demand. The reduced daily interaction of staff with prisoners also reduced the number of intelligence reports, although the number of reports was increasing by the end of August.

There had already been signs of hooch being used as an alternative to other drugs, and it was the primary cause of staff assault after November 2019. Deployment of the IBAD and management via CSIP were used to address this issue, resulting in a

marked reduction of hooch related incidents and finds.

The drug testing EDM was not included at recovery level 3, where Brixton stood at the end of August, and there was no information from HMPPS about it. The Board is concerned about this because it removes a deterrent to drug use. Without a lab test the independent adjudicators are reluctant to make a guilty finding, and without recourse to the basic level of the IEP scheme there was no other sanction.

The prison increased searching, and spot checks were also introduced on prescription medication 'in possession', as this was the case for most medication after lockdown.

Random monitoring of prisoner phone calls (5%) was reintroduced in the spring after a review. Staff training and 'nudges' about security were increased. Instances of unlocked gates were followed up regularly.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Over the last twelve months there was no substantial change to the accommodation at Brixton. Cramped and undignified even when men were able to leave them during the normal working day, Brixton's small cells must have felt almost intolerable since lock-down began in March.

Before March the Board occasionally noted a lack of cleanliness on wings, although efforts were made to ensure that cells emptied for new arrivals were thoroughly cleaned and kitted out. After March, when cleaners continued to be unlocked to clean phones, showers and other public areas after each group of men completed their time out of cell, both staff and men commented on how clean wings were. For men who were, especially initially, nervous about catching Covid-19, this must have been reassuring. Towards the end of the summer, rats were more visible, even inside, possibly because of the lack of activity on the site or of some maintenance work. Waste management was reviewed in August and cleaners given additional time out of cell in the evenings to ensure all food waste was removed from wings; Mitie stepped up anti-vermin work.

Isolation areas were quickly set up for those few men who were symptomatic or needed to quarantine as a result of contact with the infection (by the end of August only one man, a recent transfer from Pentonville in March, had tested positive) and for the large number of men (73 in mid-April) medically assessed as needing to shield (see section 6.2).

Prison meals continued to receive praise. Brixton came second to East Sutton Park, which has its own farm, in an Inside Time survey of food at all prisons in May. Kitchen staff visited the wings regularly to get feedback. From March to July, when serveries reopened, food was pre-packed and delivered door to door. G wing prisoners worked in the kitchens throughout, but no NVQ training was possible. During lockdown the kitchens provided extra 'treats' each day – ice cream, additional fruit or a cake, and a bottle of water a day in hot weather.

The prison buildings are old, and maintenance continued to be a problem. A foul waste leak developed over one of the meal serveries in January, not long after it had been mended. Mitie told the Board the pipework was archaic and difficult to access. Showers were refurbished and repainted but soon peeled, especially the flooring, and needed further attention, as has been the case for years. There were some problems with water pressure and temperature on top landings.

As part of the programme to improve the prison environment, pictures were attached to the C wing yard fence, there were photographs of prison activities in the centre corridor and elsewhere, and the A wing yard was redesigned to include flower beds, not all planted because the Novus employed gardening tutor was not in the prison after lockdown. Some of the G wing men usually employed in the garden behind their yard were allowed under officer supervision to keep it going at a basic level, and the tubs of flowers around the gate area were kept flourishing. After visits resumed, it was decided to redesign the area where visitors are searched, to make it more welcoming.

The Board heard complaints about the price of some canteen items and the fact that the HMPPS contract with DHL prevented men from buying cheaper alternatives from other catalogues. Although there were some shortages from men overstocking at the beginning of lockdown, there were no continuing problems. Catalogue order forms were simplified in the summer.

Civilian staff shortages over the winter (the business hub was said to be at half strength in January) meant that there was some delay to incoming post, and to the processing of catalogue orders, canteen repayments and PIN phone changes. After lockdown staffing levels were affected by the absence of those shielding. Stocks of medical PPE and cleaning supplies were purchased well in advance, and there were no shortages in the first few months of lockdown.

The facilities list was relaxed so that a wider range of items, including craft supplies, could be bought, but deliveries were often slow or orders rejected as 'out of stock'. Art materials for the weekly competitions were provided separately. Prisoners were allowed to receive clothing by post, because it could not be brought in on social visits, but there were no other changes to what could be posted in.

5.2 Segregation, special accommodation

As during last year, regular segregation unit staff continued to work with consistency and compassion with some very difficult men. The men involved have often acknowledged this to the Board. "It's alright down here", one man said with some surprise in his voice'. Segregation staff were part of the SC team that won a national award (see 4.2).

The unit is small relative to the size of the prison (only seven cells), and has been commendably little used throughout the year, both before and after lockdown. Most stays were short, the longest being for men recategorised to B and waiting for transfer. One man remained in the segregation unit for 3-4 months, the first to exceed 42 days since June 2018, because of the difficulty of achieving a transfer for him.

The special (unfurnished) cell has not been used since November 2018, apart from briefly for searching. The cell adapted for constant supervision in the segregation unit has been used only three times since 1 September 2019 (and only three times in the previous reporting year), underlining the decency and care with which segregated men are treated.

Although living conditions have improved since the unit was refurbished in 2019, contractors worked only on the rising damp: so damp spreading from the floor above soon reappeared on the walls. After the refurbishment, the prisoners' phone did not work; it was mended in February 2020. Damage-resistant toilets and basins, on order before September 2019, have still not been installed. Money was not available to extend the segregation unit to provide an additional room for adjudications, reviews and other interviews. After March most adjudications were heard on the wings.

During lockdown the number of adjudications was lower than normal, an average of 77 per month between April and August, compared with an average of 164 per month

between December and February. In August, adjudications increased to 94. Records were generally well kept. Adjudicators would sometimes suspend a penalty (eg confinement in cell, in segregation or on the wing) to give men a chance to improve behaviour. The independent adjudicator (IA) was not permitted to visit after March until the end of June. Some IA cases were dealt with by governors. The most serious were referred to the police or adjourned until the IA's return. Before lockdown, adjudicators informed Novus when men were moved to segregation, so that Novus could provide them with learning materials and feedback.

The IMB was told about rule 45 reviews, and attended when possible before lockdown. Mental health and Forward Trust (FT) staff made positive contributions and governors dealt fairly with men, allowing them to put their case. Reintegration reviews, when a man is moved back to the wing, emphasised the role of keyworkers, and more problematic men were referred to CSIP and FT.

IMB attended one SMARG meeting in October, when the higher incidence of violence among younger men was discussed. In the Brixton population, younger men were at that time more likely to be BAME.

5.3 Staff-prisoner relationships, key workers

The Board commented last year on the positive relationships between staff and prisoners and the beneficial impact of keyworker sessions. We have heard from officers and men that these good relationships continued. In August one man on the exercise yard described his keyworker as "brilliant", and others praised their offender managers and agency workers. The general impression was that 'there are worse prisons than Brixton'. These relationships, during the stresses of lockdown, and the bereavements and anxieties that so many prisoners and staff had to bear, contributed to the calm atmosphere in the prison and the acceptance of the restrictions.

During lockdown, 'community notices' encouraged prisoner engagement. The notice issued on 7 August, for instance, covered the Governor's impressions of the first social visits, the winners of the recipe competition, encouragement to start in-cell work on basic English and maths, and the possibility of escorted visits for relatives' serious illness and for bereavements.

Staffing levels fell over the winter: eight down in November, 27 by January, apparently as a result of higher salaries on offer in police and immigration forces. POELTs (new prison officers) were recruited but were away from the prison for training, so the shortfall had some impact on keyworker contact time. The prison did well to continue weekly key work after lockdown at 69% (target 75%), dropping sessions to every other week only in July. Weekly visits continued for men considered vulnerable, and quality assurance of key worker contact records was stepped up. The Board knew that selection of key workers for the most troubled men was careful, with some very good results. Frequent (initially daily) welfare checks were completed for all men.

A number of uniformed and civilian staff members contracted Covid-19 when the infection rate was highest in London, and others shielded. There were no new cases among men or staff during the summer. From March onwards, the prison was able to sustain a reliable 'locked down' regime.

5.4 Equality and diversity

This year, the prison made significant progress in collecting and analysing data about the impact of policies and practices on groups with the same protected characteristics. It also introduced improved quality assurance procedures, including for complaints of discrimination (DIRFs). These have historically been low, perhaps because of lack of confidence in the process, with responses often delayed.

While the prison's population changes significantly in the course of a year, there is little variation between the proportions of men with the relevant protected characteristics. On average during the year, just over half of the prison's population was from BAME communities; almost a fifth had a disability; over a third was Christian, almost a quarter Muslim; just under a tenth were aged 65 or more while a quarter were under 30.

Before the pandemic, a disproportionate percentage of the men on basic IEP, around 40, were BAME (55% in February 2020) but a greater disparity was due to age, with younger men significantly more likely to be on basic IEP, and also more likely to be BAME (see section 5.2). Safer custody responded by trying to work more effectively with younger men to develop emotional maturity and cognitive functioning skills. During lockdown, the numbers on basic IEP were too small for any useful analysis by protected characteristics. The IEP scheme itself was monitored by a joint staff/prisoner forum (see section 5.6).

Complaints from prisoners (Comp 1s) in the quarter ended 31 March, the last period for which data were available, were in line with the ethnic, disability and religious adherence profile of the prison's population.

The prison continued to celebrate religious festivals – special meals, for instance at Christmas and Eid-al-Fitr were for all prisoners – and this year Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) month as well as the long established Black History month. In an initiative sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement, a programme was started to increase the awareness of staff and equality representatives from each wing about racism, drawing on lived experience. The aim was partly to develop trust in the prison's staff through a renewed emphasis on procedural justice and on challenging unacceptable behaviour. There were also events to promote acceptance and provide support to the LGBTQ+ community. A mural, with portraits of Mary Seacole and Benjamin Zephaniah, was painted by prisoners in a small neglected area by the B wing yard, with an LGBTQ+ rainbow on the window bars.

There were periodic health checks of the local equalities plan, highlighting areas for action. Self-completion of the staff profile information across the prison service improved significantly over the last year and also in Brixton, except in relation to disability, where reporting is poor.

Equalities work was supported by a number of stakeholders, including the Irish chaplaincy (GRT community), the Zahid Mubarek Trust, and the National Centre for Diversity.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Religious adherence at 31 December 2019 was:

Muslim 199, Catholic 139, Anglican 124, no religion 123, 'other Christian'⁸ 106, 'other religion' 29, Buddhist 14. Numbers of Hindu, Sikh, and Jewish adherents were seven or fewer. The chaplaincy serves a wider range of faiths, including Eastern Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormon, Pagan, Rastafarian, Russian Orthodox, Spiritualist and Zoroastrian.

The chaplaincy has not been fully staffed for a number of years. Throughout this year, there were two full time chaplains instead of four: the Muslim chaplain acting as managing chaplain, and the Catholic chaplain. The prison was saddened by the death of the Anglican chaplain in the autumn. A Quaker sessional chaplain and a new

⁸ 'Other Christian' includes Baptist, Celestial Church of God, and Pentecostal.

Anglican full time chaplain will start duty in September. There were four prison visitors.

Before lockdown, a significant number of volunteers, as well as the quota of sessional chaplains, helped to cover statutory tasks and pastoral support including study classes. As in previous years, and until lockdown, Catholic mass was celebrated on Saturdays by a volunteer priest: Protestant Sunday services were conducted by the Baptist and Pentecostal sessional chaplains and by volunteers from All Saints Peckham Church of England. Communion was available at some Anglican services.

During lockdown, when access to the prison was restricted, there was a very heavy load on the two full-time chaplains, with only one sessional chaplain in for two days a week, and no volunteers. Statutory duties were covered seven days a week. It was particularly difficult during the early weeks of the pandemic, when chaplains were comforting a large number of men who had been bereaved. Chaplains met men individually in a room on the wing, and in some cases arranged for them to see the funeral via iPad.

The HMPPS restrictions did not allow for any services to be held, although the chapel would allow social distancing (and was being used for staff and prison council meetings), because that would involve mixing of cohorts. This was particularly hard during Ramadan and for Eid-al-Fitr and for Easter: the chaplains felt there was a 'pent up demand' for services. Services were broadcast on National Prison Radio throughout lockdown: there was a faith-based reflection every weekday (Sikh, Pagan, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish) on the breakfast show, a Muslim sermon and call to prayer on Friday, and a Christian ecumenical service on Sunday.

5.6 Incentives and earned privileges

The prison recognised that the existing IEP scheme did not encourage good behaviour and welcomed the opportunity in late 2019 to review and revise it. They had started to hold multidisciplinary focus groups to design a more rewards-based incentives system and a more encouraging approach in staff conversations with prisoners in line with procedural justice.

Progress was overtaken by lockdown in March, when the IEP scheme was essentially suspended in line with national guidelines. Men on enhanced IEP continued to get a few benefits, for example the ability to move to C wing (bigger cells with separate toilets) and to spend more money each week. Brixton continued to use basic IEP as a short-term sanction for very poor behaviour (justified in a defensible-decision log entry) but time spent on basic was short and there were often no men on basic. All men (other than those in the segregation unit) had a TV in cell and all were given additional money (£5 per week) for phone calls, to help maintain family contact. On 20 August, 58% of men were on enhanced IEP, 41% on standard and only 1% on basic. At the same time last year the proportions were 48% enhanced, 49% standard and 3% basic. Some men on enhanced IEP on A wing preferred not to move to C wing, in spite of its better accommodation and more time out of cell.

5.7 Complaints

In general, responses to prisoner complaints (Comp 1s) were timely and politely phrased. The number of complaints to the prison (Comp 1, 1A and 2) remained fairly steady during the year (139 before lockdown in February; 131 in August).

The number of applications to the Board fell to a new low of 315 over the reporting year, compared with 362 last year (see 'Work of the IMB'). By contrast, in 2013/14 the Board received almost 1100 applications. This suggests a welcome and continued reduction in prisoners' dissatisfaction with their treatment.

Applications decreased after March, to only four in April, building up to 20 in August (when board members were regularly visiting exercise yards and so more visible), compared to an average of 35 from September to March. Only four applications were received through the national 0800 phone number, understandably given Brixton's lack of in-cell telephony and the limited time out of cell.

As in previous years the two largest categories of application to the Board were sentence related (66) and property (55), between them accounting for almost 40% of all applications. These were also among the most frequent subjects of Comp 1s (along with claims for canteen refunds following transfer). Most property-related applications concerned property lost on transfer (46 out of 55); applications about property lost within Brixton fell to less than one third of their numbers in previous years.

5.8 Property

There was more emphasis on applying the existing rules about the limits on property held in-cell, for health and safety reasons. Property being transferred from previous prisons (separately from the limited number of bags permitted to accompany each prisoner) remained the cause of many prisoner complaints. These were forwarded to the relevant prison, but responses continued to be slow at best, despite the Brixton team following them up.

More emphasis on 'volumetric control' appears to be the only outcome to date of the property review which has been in progress in HMPPS for six or seven years. As the PPO has identified, property is the source of many complaints that it receives. The financial cost of tracing lost property, and the costs of compensation, must also be rising. The Board hopes that a new system appears soon.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare: general

Primary healthcare, including pharmacy and counselling, is delivered by Care UK. Mental health services are provided by Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust. Forward Trust delivers substance dependence treatment programmes and health and wellbeing services on D wing and across the other wings. The dentist, optician, podiatrist, physiotherapist and occupational therapist services are contracted out by Care UK.

A new Care UK contract came into force at the beginning of the reporting year, providing evening cover with two nurses on duty until 8.30 pm seven days a week. The mental health team also extended its service, with nursing staff on duty at weekends. Both services have had to use agency and bank nurses through the year.

Until lockdown, healthcare had a stand at the weekly induction fairs with information about all their services. Wings have healthcare reps (at the end of August, two did not). Attendance at ACCT and rule 45 reviews, and at the weekly safer custody meeting about men in particular difficulty has generally been good, especially from the mental health team. All parts of healthcare attend a weekly meeting to review medically complex patients. The health and well-being co-ordinator held daily referral meetings attended by primary healthcare, mental health, counselling and FT. Regular monthly meetings have resulted in improved communication between the prison residential team and healthcare.

Healthcare complaints average about ten a month, with most being requests for further treatment information.

The increase in both physical and mental health staffing has led to a shortage of workspace across healthcare. The pressure eased when staff began working in shifts from home during lockdown level 4, but when all staff returned in July the difficulty of maintaining 2m distance became acute, particularly for therapeutic teams who need to work together for information sharing and support.

The deep cleaning of consulting rooms (recommended in the HMIP report of March 2019) was not started (it will begin in September 2020). There was a shortage of consulting rooms on the wings. There was a good supply of PPE throughout the Covid-19 period.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Staffing levels remained adequate with two GPs providing weekday cover. A paramedic (popular with men and staff) joined part-time in January. Additional administrative support half way through the year resulted in more efficient recording and answering of complaints.

All men had a health screening on arrival and a second screening within 72 hours. Since April the second screening, including mental health, was done the following day, before men went into 14 day quarantine in their reverse cohort.

At the start of lockdown, using the same criteria as in the community, all men were assessed by the GP for shielding and 73 identified. All those shielding and in quarantine received daily healthcare and welfare checks. Some men opted out of shielding, and their decision was recorded.

Waiting times were generally in line with those in the community. When excessive, (69% of the physiotherapist's and 56% of the podiatrist's patients were waiting more than six weeks to be seen in December and January respectively) extra time was allocated for practitioners to catch up. The Board received some complaints about waiting time for the smoking cessation clinic, always in high demand. The number of missed appointments for GP sessions before lockdown remained stubbornly high at around 10%, with no follow-up about the reasons.

All clinics stopped and most sub-contractors ceased visiting in March. Nurses triaged patients for the dentist and optician, who continued to give advice by phone. By the end of the reporting year, all staff had returned to the prison, except for the occupational therapist, who was shielding. The dentist was seeing five men a day. The optician, podiatrist and physiotherapist were seeing men on the wings. GPs had been seeing men on the wings since April, having found consultations by phone unsatisfactory.

Seventy-one men had hospital appointments cancelled during lockdown. Hospital appointments began to open up and be re-scheduled from June. At the end of the reporting year 35 men, six of them over 70, were still waiting for hospital appointments that should have happened in lockdown.

At the beginning of the year about 40 men had methadone prescriptions. In November this had almost doubled and was impacting on the dispensing timetable, with reports of men not going to activities because of the delays. By the end of the year the numbers had dropped back to manageable levels, partly as a result of the fall in the roll and partly because of the different age and substance misuse profile of the men transferred in. Some presented as more complex cases, with longstanding use of multiple drugs.

After the lockdown the majority of men had medication in possession (IP). A system of spot checking IP medication to identify and reduce the risk of diversion was implemented on 1 September 2020. Prison supervision of the dispensing hatches

continued to be uneven although nursing staff reported an improvement during lockdown.

All men had pre-release appointments with a nurse. There were instances reported of men leaving without their medication in the first half the reporting year. This did not happen after February, and after lockdown men were released with 28 days' supply of medication. In the summer, men started being offered a log in to the Socrates app to access their medical records, local GP services and health advice. Of the 77 men released through the departure lounge in July, only four took up the offer, perhaps because a smart phone is needed, and the scheme was put on hold.

6.3 Mental healthcare

Mental health carried a case load of between 100 and 120 men throughout the year, and updated safer custody daily or as necessary about individual cases. The five Care UK counsellors were seeing about 30 men at any one time. In the reporting period two patients were transferred to a secure hospital beds, within the 14 day statutory time limit.

Mental health increased staffing, with two clinical psychologists and two social workers, one of whom does critical time intervention, seeing men up to 6 weeks following release. There are vacancies for two more psychologists and occupational therapists and another nurse.

When men were locked down, men on the mental health list received regular welfare checks, although confidentiality was an issue, with most men sharing cells. After June, when men were able to be seen face to face, it was sometimes difficult for practitioners to find free rooms for consultations on the wings. On A wing clinicians regularly had to give therapy sessions in a small gated space outside the methadone dispensary.

In the LPU, men on the offender personality strategy pathway commit to psychological therapies. Group work ceased after lockdown but the psychologists continued to come into the prison and work with their patients individually. There were 25 residents at the end of the reporting year, down from 35 in April. Even during lockdown, because all men were in single cells, they could be out of cell for longer while maintaining social distancing.

At the time of the lockdown, forensic psychologists employed by the regional HMPPS service were working with three Brixton men with personality disorders (see section 7.5).

6.4 Exercise, time out of cell, gym

Before lockdown, time out of cell on Mondays to Thursdays was generally adequate, with men in full time employment or training out of their cells for up to 10 hours per day. Men on standard IEP complained that they had only a few hours out of cell at weekends.

During lockdown, time out of cell was severely limited by the requirement to keep men properly distanced by dividing them into cohorts of about 25 at first, more later. There was a slight decrease in operational capacity (from 798 to 760) which allowed men who were shielding to be accommodated in single cells and made space to quarantine 'reverse cohorts' of men transferred in from elsewhere, but it was not enough to relieve overcrowding.

On Brixton's two largest wings (G wing 234, A wing/LPU 220 men) this meant organising time out of cell (regime) for ten separate groups of men. The induction wing, holding 164 men, was equally stretched because of the reverse cohorts. On

these three wings, from March to June, up to 600 men had only 30 minutes a day out of cell on six days a week, for a telephone call, a shower and some fresh air.

This is the standard regime for men in segregation, for whom there is a legal requirement to review continued confinement fortnightly, because of the recognised risk of this level of confinement to mental health. This requirement was not mentioned in the HMPPS operational guidance issued on 27 March, although it included very comprehensive advice on prisoner physical and mental welfare.

In early June as conditions relaxed slightly, time out of cell was increased to 60 minutes per day and more men were unlocked together to facilitate this. Men on the smaller wings (C, D and LPU) were out of cell for up to 90 minutes, six days a week. There are no telephones in Brixton's cells: so men had to wait their turn for the one phone on the landing, at a time which might not be convenient for the people they were calling. There was a small number of 'locked down' mobile phones to which men could request in-cell access, and men could also request an early evening phone call on the landings.

Before lockdown the PE department were reaching out to new partners to support men on release. A new three day classroom-based course designed to encourage men to join a boxing club on release started in late January and attracted interest from about 18 men. Fulham rowing club was also about to start training Brixton men with a commitment to support them after release.

After lockdown gyms were closed. PE staff made regular welfare checks to all men in their cells. They had a presence on all exercise yards and offered small groups of prisoners supervised exercise routines and access to exercise bikes, rowing machines and weights equipment, properly sanitised between users and very popular. They ran separate exercise sessions for men who had a medical vulnerability, for kitchen workers, and for older men. At the end of the reporting period they started to offer early evening exercise sessions on the C wing yard for prison workforce and Clink workers.

6.5 Social care

An increasing number of men needed social care. In August, 20 men had care plans, three with a full personal care package. An agreement with Lambeth provided for local authority assessment, personal care by Care UK, and other support from 'social care peers', prisoners trained to offer support with routine tasks like collecting food and clean laundry. The Lambeth/Brixton package was praised by the PPO. At the end of the summer, there were discussions between the Governor and the Lambeth CEO with a view to wider co-operation.

Before lockdown, a Lambeth social worker did assessments about every fortnight, and in lockdown he provided support by phone. Lambeth also supplied some aids, like walking sticks.

The equalities lead in safer custody is responsible for peer support provision; 16 men on G wing were being assisted by four peer supporters and three specially assigned prison officers.

Brixton does not have the facilities to provide end of life care. The prisoner who died in the prison this year was in a small room where the door was left open because there was no in-cell alarm. It took five weeks to negotiate a transfer place for another Brixton man, stuck in hospital, to a palliative care unit in the Isle of Wight prison complex. Healthcare did all they could to support both men, but a planned pathway could have reduced this delay.

6.6 Drug rehabilitation

The Forward Trust case load was between 230 and 250 men. Until March, FT offered men a wide range of psycho-social group therapies across the prison, except on G wing, where a single meeting was held one afternoon a week. There were staffing problems during the year, and a local manager had not been appointed by August. At the end of the reporting period there were six FT trained substance misuse peer supporters working across the prison, including one on G wing.

FT workers continued to work on all the wings throughout lockdown, doing welfare checks, giving clients distraction and information packs, and providing release planning including appointments and links to support after release. By the end of the reporting period the backlog of assessments had been completed and FT were back seeing their clients one to one.

A 12 step desistance programme for up to 20 men, committing to total abstinence, was run on D wing until all group work ended during lockdown. At the end of August, FT were preparing to restart it. Seven men were waiting to complete the programme, and a further nine had to complete the health and wellbeing courses also offered on the wing. Two small evening groups run by Alcoholics Anonymous and a group just started by Narcotics Anonymous, which all ceased after March, may not be able to resume until lockdown conditions are completely relaxed because some of the volunteers are shielders.

Since the end of 2019, men at risk of overdosing on release after abstinence received training, and a single dose of naxolone as they left. One such man was released in July without naxolone, after which co-ordination between FT and the pharmacy was tightened up.

6.7 Soft skills

Until March, Certitude, a charity working with healthcare, ran an accredited peer supporters course for some 20 men. During lockdown one employee continued to come in and offer informal support to five men, until training could start again. There were wing 'reps', for healthcare (three at end year), equalities (five), safer custody (violence reduction, eight), education and other areas, as well as the Listeners (ten at year end) and PIDs. Their role during lockdown was essential, because for a time they provided the only means of direct communication between men and other departments in the prison, who were banned from the wings. Healthcare workers and the chaplains were the only exceptions. During lockdown, it was recognised that the training given to other wing workers – cleaning, serving meals, doing laundry – could be improved.

A writing competition to mark Brixton's 200th anniversary was supported by the National Literacy Trust. There was a regular 'Penned by a Prisoner' post on the HMP Brixton Twitter account, including during lockdown. Men received a number of Koestler Trust awards, mainly for written work.

In March, the local radio producer and communications manager took over the activities committee formed by the safer custody governor. Safer custody continued to support the initiative, with two officers focussed on activities. The mental health psychology team helped promote activities, FT got their prisoner wing representatives to help, and the Certitude peer mentoring trainer joined the committee and got her representatives involved. Dedicated Covid-19 representatives were also appointed, because the PID workers on the wing got so busy with work from other departments. They distributed and collected quizzes, in-cell packs provided by Bounce Back, and other information. The committee also organised the supply of donated books from a

local Covid-19 mutual aid group and charities like Borderline Books.

There was a local radio talent competition – contestants rapped, sang, performed poetry or spoken word and were voted for by men on the wings. Creativity challenges included origami (morphing into paper aeroplanes) and a spaghetti and marshmallow design competition which produced Archie the dog, seen on Twitter and entered for the Koestler art prize. The officers seconded from safer custody produced a weekly general knowledge quiz (difficult without access to Google) and Did you know?, interesting facts on Fridays. A small budget was used to provide prizes, brownies from The Clink kitchen.

Food Behind Bars, a charity that campaigns for better food in prisons, provided the ingredients for Brixton's Best Chef. The three finalists made their dishes in the prison kitchen, where the catering staff pulled out the stops for them. The winning dish, Bangladeshi chicken curry, was on the menu at a Brixton restaurant, owned by one of the judges, with £1 from every dish sold donated to Food Behind Bars. Some men also kept lockdown diaries for the Lambeth Archives community project, with funding for stationery from Unlocked Graduates, a scheme to encourage top graduates into prison work.

Men were recruited for a National Literacy Trust employability initiative for men under 25 (13 completed the first workbook). The Explore project organised by the Royal Astronomical Society was run in August, three radio programmes, with in-cell packs and quizzes. There was a poetry competition, the Paperchains writing project, designed to capture the experiences of people in prison, and an art competition for World Hepatitis Day in July. Some men participated in 'A record of our own', a project by The Traveller Movement and the Zahid Mubarek Trust to capture the experiences of BAME and GRT people in prison during lockdown.

The Board believes the variety and inclusivity of these diversions contributed to cooperation by prisoners with restrictions, relatively low levels of self-harm and the maintenance of staff-prisoner engagement. Nevertheless, fewer men engaged in the competitions than was usual before lockdown. When IMB members spoke to prisoners, they reported watching a lot of TV. One man was reading the dictionary to improve his vocabulary.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

The education offering remained essentially unchanged from 2019 until lockdown although in September Novus appointed a specialist staff member to work with men needing additional learning support. About 30% of men in Brixton self-report a learning difficulty or disability, so this was a welcome development.

There was a significant delay in issuing qualification certificates for much of the year. In September 2019 195 were outstanding; by December the backlog was about 400, of which about half were apparently delayed by staff shortages in Bounce Back, and half awaiting external assessment. During lockdown the problem continued because the external assessor was unable to visit so certificates could not be cleared: this was being expedited by Novus in August.

All classroom education ceased on lockdown in March. Novus produced 147 in-cell education packs, one for each learner, before being withdrawn from the prison by HMPPS, but processes were not put in place to collect and mark completed work until July 2020, which must have been demotivating for men who were partway through qualifications. About one third of the men who had received packs had by then been

released. Tutors resumed work within the prison in early August, frustrated to have no direct contact with their classes but producing and marking tailored work packs.

Education assessments (basic and key skills builder tests) also ended on lockdown; the Board was told that tests had to be set and marked by Novus staff. A previous assessment could be used only if it was less than six months old, and only then if done by Novus. The Board felt these (presumably contractual) restrictions could usefully have been overridden during the lockdown, to help men make as much progress as possible. Assessments of the backlog of about 100 men had still not started in mid August.

Men doing distance learning were able to continue studying, though without access to a computer or virtual campus (VC)⁹ or to Novus staff support.

The library opened on Saturday mornings from September 2019, which increased the number of men attending. Forty-four per cent of men were borrowers, about the category C norm. Certificated qualifications for library orderlies were introduced in February. Staff worked hard to offer men an innovative and diverse programme, including visits by authors, but were hampered by the library's lack of space and its lack of access to VC. At the end of the reporting period faster data lines were installed in the prison. This should in future give men much improved access to VC, eg for job and accommodation information before release, as well as allowing them to sit exams online, eliminating the delays in obtaining qualifications.

After lockdown, the local authority library staff were immediately withdrawn by HMPPS, apparently without allowing them to close down their service smoothly. Boxes for returned books and DVDs on the wings filled up but could not be processed or replaced for at least three months. The Prison Reading Group 'Books for First Nighters' scheme allowed men in induction to choose and keep a new book. Charitable donations organised by the in-cell activities committee (see section 6.7) meant that the prison could continue to supply books to the wings, although they had to be quarantined between users and browsing was not permitted to avoid cross-contamination. Given the restricted regime after March, the Board felt that HMPPS should have given more priority to continued access to reading material. Access to statutory publications continued on request. There was still no access to DVDs at the end of August, although the number of TV channels available had been increased early in lockdown.

7.2 Vocational training, work

The number of unemployed men dropped to 94 in October 2019 when, according to prison reports, all activity places were allocated. Numbers fluctuated in succeeding months depending on the staff available to pursue men refusing to attend (almost always refusing classroom education; workshops were generally much more popular). The Board considers it will be essential to increase activity spaces when a more normal regime is possible, or to take other measures to offer men deprived of opportunities for training a better chance of being employed on release.

In January the call centre was about to start offering an entry level 3 customer service qualification. Bounce Back were also gearing up to introduce a new higher level diploma. The CSCS card qualification (which gives men access to construction work on release) was rationalised in autumn 2019 so that it could be completed on paper. There was a 100% success rate from November to February. Before lockdown the Clink restaurant reported a significant increase in the number of qualifications

⁹ A stripped down and secure internet service

achieved compared with last year.

All vocational training ceased on lockdown. About a month later one Clink staff member was able to return to work to supervise three students in supplying meals for staff. They have gradually increased their own and prisoner numbers, preparing meals for staff, and introduced a meal delivery service within a five mile radius, that also employed a released Clink graduate.

On 20 August the Board was told that there were 71 (out of 714) men employed and regularly out of their cell for longer than the standard regime. A few more were unlocked for occasional tasks. The prison was looking to increase the number of men who could be employed in tasks that would improve the operation of the prison for the benefit of all prisoners (as opposed to training under the Novus contract, which was still not permitted centrally). The Governor also accepted a suggestion from the Board that the wing jobs should be rotated, or shift working introduced, so that more men had an opportunity to be working out of cell. All men were paid during lockdown, whether or not they were working: most of them were unable to engage in any activity or education.

7.3 Offender management, progression

During autumn and winter 2019 over 50% of men arriving at Brixton had no offender management system (OASys) report, essential for sentence planning. This is a longstanding problem which needs to be addressed centrally by HMPPS. In February there were 132 men with no OASys report. OMIC2 changes expected to give more resources to resettlement prisons for completing these reports had not materialised by August 2020. The offender management unit (OMU) is to be commended for substantially reducing the backlog by working extra hours during lockdown, in spite of staffing shortages, as a result of shielding and about half the prison's probation officers being transferred to work in the community from April to June. The staff complement did not rise to near normal until the end of August.

Only men within 12 weeks of release or those subject to the Parole Board or on recall were allocated a named prison offender manager (POM), and no clinics were held on the wings because of social distancing. There was telephone input from the prison psychology service on Parole Board cases.

Problems transferring men to open conditions continued from last year, in spite of weekly requests to the population management unit (PMU)¹⁰. In December 68 men were waiting (including 22 on G wing); in February the backlog was little changed at 65 (23 on G wing). Re-categorisation boards were delayed after lockdown until August because of staff shortages, leading to a substantial backlog. Because there was no movement to open conditions from March to June, the number of men waiting for transfer continued to grow, to 91 (29 on G wing) in early June. Transfers resumed in late July and the backlog had dropped to 55 by 20 August. But a large number of men must have been released from Brixton without the opportunity to improve their resettlement opportunities in category D conditions.

Five of the nine approved premises hostels in the London area were closed because of Covid-19 and the remaining four had reduced capacity. This increased anxiety for men who knew they would go out to hostels.

Home detention curfew (HDC) decisions continued to be made on time (certainly until early June). During November to February the average HDC refusal rate was around 20%, in all cases because of there being no suitable address. Assessments needed

¹⁰ The HMPPS unit managing transfers.

for men flagged up under the early release scheme announced in March were time-consuming and largely fruitless, with the criteria said to change frequently and only one man released from Brixton, in early July, before the scheme was entirely suspended. The IMB heard from men who felt hugely let down by what they regarded as an empty promise.

The Board's report for 2018-2019 drew attention to the number of men in Brixton, in particular those convicted of sex offences, who needed to do offending behaviour programmes which were not available in the prison. This year OMU staff worked hard not to accept men who needed to complete a programme. During lockdown, however, it was more difficult to stick to strict acceptance criteria. Staff monitored men's treatment needs so that they could be transferred to a suitable prison as soon as it was feasible and did what one-to-one work was possible with those who had too little time to complete a course before release. The Board has been unable to access figures of how many men were disadvantaged.

The number of immigration detainees being held in Brixton averaged at most five a month before lockdown, when numbers increased because there were few deportation flights. Twenty-six immigration detainees were transferred out in the last two weeks of August.

From April, there were video link appointments for courts, Parole Board hearings, and interviews with legal advisers, probation services and the police.

7.4 Family contact

Up to March, the Routes2Change programme run by PACT made good progress in work with prisoners (all were interviewed shortly after arrival) and their families. 200 men were signed up to the programme. Some children were being supported at school. This was despite initial problems with office accommodation and computer access for the augmented team within the prison. There were regular project board meetings, chaired by Lord Farmer. Some of the constraints the prison had to work within were recognised, and there were improvements in links with external agencies.

PACT kept up to date with men who arrived at Brixton during lockdown by interviewing them by telephone, using the facilities in legal visits to ensure confidentiality. At the end of August, 134 men had been triaged, of whom 50% wanted support, a higher proportion than before March. In-cell packs were available, including to men not on the PACT caseload, and men could apply for telephone appointments on weekday mornings. Men were also being referred to other support in the prison: mental health, Forward Trust, and Bounce Back for employment. PACT also planned to work more closely with education and training agencies once they returned to the prison.

Families could send short messages to prisoners via PACT. For Father's Day, one of the officers on the activities committee photographed men, dressed smartly as for a social visit, so they could send the photograph to their families.

PACT were also supporting 24 men after release, with an additional 35 expressing interest in help after release. Support by telephone included three-way calls with men and community agencies, a family helpline, community befrienders, and therapeutic play. There were also summer reading scheme packs for children.

Training for officers working in Visits was in progress before March, and there was a good programme of family days and other initiatives, for instance a course for prisoners about to become fathers. The new visits centre, found to be inappropriately designed, did not open until summer 2020, when visits started again. There was no progress in providing visitors for men who otherwise would not have visits (an HMIP

recommendation).

Social visits restarted on 3 August, with a four week rotation of hourly sessions for different wings, including vulnerable prisoners and shielders: two afternoon sessions on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday; two morning and two afternoon sessions on Thursday, and three sessions on Saturday and Sunday. Some slots, unavoidably, clashed with men's unlock times. Only three close family members, all from the same household, were allowed, and children had to remain seated. Men whose visitors were not a significant other or 'close family' as defined would have to wait, because priority was given to family connections. August visits went well, with visitors mostly compliant about wearing face masks and having their temperature checked before entry. Visits were not fully booked: the Board talked to a number of men who were upset by not being able to touch their children and disinclined to arrange a second social visit.

The 'Purple Visits' app for linking men with their family and friends, like WhatsApp, virtually, was not introduced until 10 August, and then suspended for 2-3 weeks to ensure risk assessments were sufficiently robust. There were some ongoing technical problems with the recognition of small children. The Board regrets that at Brixton, where there are no in-cell telephones, the system was not provided earlier.

7.5 Resettlement planning

The development of a new strategy and targets based on the summer 2019 needs analysis was delayed in the autumn because of other pressures on staff, including vacancies and changes. So there was little demonstrated progress in increasing co-ordination between departments and agencies. This was one of the failings identified in the 2019 HMIP report.

Targets were set by February 2020, but three of the pathways did not report progress: substance misuse (there was no local manager in Forward Trust); mental and physical health; and finance, debt and benefits. The prison's efforts to improve employment opportunities for vulnerable prisoners on G wing (a separate pathway) had been hampered by difficulties with the new procurement framework (DPS). Discussions with employers had restarted on providing more activity spaces (the previous attempt failed because matched funding from HMPPS was not available).

By February, however, there was improvement in other areas. The Job Centre Plus (JCP) reported good progress in supporting men to claim Universal Credit on release. The PACT Routes2Change work was also making good progress on fostering better relationships between prisoners and their families (see section 7.4). There were positive developments from the focus by OMU and the prison psychology service on improving offender behaviour, with input from safer custody, in the absence of formal offender behaviour programmes at Brixton. Although this could not overcome the problem that men had to be transferred from Brixton to complete courses identified in their sentence plan, it aimed to ensure that men were not left without help on behavioural challenges. The work of the CRC had become more clearly focussed. They were producing a spreadsheet collating all the help offered to any individual prisoner by departments and agencies in the prison, allowing gaps in support to be identified. Seventy-five men were signed up for an employability event on 10 March, and a number of initiatives were in prospect.

After March, JCP was withdrawn from the prison (but provided a hotline for prisoners); PACT continued, working remotely; and the CRC, unable to see men in person, provided questionnaires for men approaching release. In these difficult circumstances, they followed up with personal letters to the men who had not returned the questionnaire, and to those who had not provided all the necessary

information. After an information sheet was issued about the constraints of remote working during lockdown, more questionnaires were returned.

In April, a handbook for prisoners was produced, telling them what services were available via the CRC, including Covid-19 advice, and also resettlement plans for individuals. These were designed to include contacts for probation, accommodation, GP and other health and addiction support. From June, CRC staff interviewed men with complex needs and those who had not completed the questionnaire after a reminder letter.

There were two other important and welcome developments during lockdown. On 4 May a departure lounge was opened with CRC staffing in the old visitor centre. Healthcare advice was also available. Men being released got an appointment plan, which CRC workers discussed with them, and other advice, including referral to local authorities for emergency accommodation. From late June, they were given travel passes and masks, and a mobile phone if they had none. CRC staff also set up appointments for them with housing providers and with JCP for universal credit applications.

It was not possible to collate the departure lounge statistics with the overall number of releases from May to end August. About 30 men a month used the departure lounge, less than half the number released (288), who could have made other arrangements. On this assumption, services used were:

• phone call to family, friend, cab firm	64
• phone call to St Mungo's, a local authority, National Probation Service	18
• mask	20
• mobile phone	14
• information about housing and JCP	18
• letter to St Mungo's	3
• phone charging	6

Two men got advice about Bounce Back, and two about bank accounts. Only one is recorded as speaking to healthcare, and the issue of travel passes was not recorded.

'No Going Back', a partnership funded by the City of London Livery Companies and delivered by Bounce Back, already well established in Brixton and other prisons, launched formally on 1 July as a one-year pilot, for which the results will be assessed. Men in Brixton had already signed up, through National Prison Radio, and a total of 26 were signed up by end August. The project offered individual help for men, who would be offered jobs in organisations connected to the livery companies, particularly in construction, logistics and environmental cleaning. On release, men would be supported to get training (since none was available in the prison), upskilling and employability advice and, crucially, help with accommodation. Men were also provided with kit – tools, work clothing, iPads for training courses.

The work of the IMB

The Board did not visit Brixton between mid-March and mid-July. Instead one or more designated board members phoned and emailed key areas of the prison, to produce a weekly rota report. Other board members fed into the report if they had phoned into a meeting or had additional information from their special area of responsibility. The Board received copies of key prison documents including daily operational reports, staff and prisoner information notices and minutes of key meetings such as the weekly SIM for the most vulnerable prisoners. We were well-supported in this by our clerk, who also collected and scanned applications.

In June the prison started facilitating weekly phone calls for the duty board member with a few prisoners (initially PID workers or orderlies but as time passed, men who just happened to be on the landing and were willing to talk). Board members were pleased to re-establish some contact with prisoners and reassured by what we were told. Correspondence between one of the prison visitors and men on G wing corroborated our experience. In July the Board resumed a small amount of in-person monitoring by standing on exercise yards to talk to prisoners and staff and attending prisoner council meetings.

The Governor or Deputy attended the monthly phone-in board meeting. Board members are extremely grateful for the time afforded us by governors and by staff at all levels, and for the prison's ready support in making remote monitoring possible.

At the beginning of the reporting year the Board had 11 members, one of whom was still on probation and one on sabbatical. The complement was 20. Eight new members joined the Board, three members (one of them a probationer) resigned, and one took sabbatical leave. At the end of the year the Board therefore had 16 members, one of whom comes to the end of tenure in December. During the year, the complement was reduced to 14. Unfortunately the probationers' familiarisation with the prison has been prevented by lockdown.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of board members	14 (changed from 20 mid-year)
Number of board members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of board members at the end of the reporting period	16
Total number of visits to the establishment	316
Total number of segregation reviews attended	Not recorded

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	11	12
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	49	34
C	Equality	8	5
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	21	6
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	30	14
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	9	12
F	Food and kitchens	7	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	34	35
H1	Property within this establishment	26	9
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	43	46
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	10	7
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	47	66
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	61	51
K	Transfers	6	16
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	0	0
	Total number of applications	362	315

Annex A: Resettlement Monitoring Survey

In previous years, Board members have interviewed prisoners scheduled for release in the summer. Because this was impossible during lockdown, men scheduled for release in July, August and September were sent IMB questionnaires. 39 responded, much less than half the number in 2019, when there were 85 responses for two months of releases.

The same three areas were covered: accommodation, job or training on release, and whether men felt they had been helped. In previous years, men were asked if anyone had come to see them, but since this was impossible in lockdown, they were asked instead if they felt they had been helped with resettlement, either by receiving the questionnaire which the CRC sent out (see section 7.5) or by other agencies. Some (recorded under 'no'), said they did not feel helped either because they had not registered receiving the CRC questionnaire, or because they did not find it helpful. Although a high percentage said they had no accommodation, many were found somewhere temporary to live, by the CRC staff working in the departure lounge (see section 7.5).

The table below gives the percentage answer to these questions, followed in square brackets by the 2019 response. Because it was possible to return the questionnaires anonymously, for this year men on the main wings cannot be differentiated from men on G wing, who have different resettlement issues. Two of the respondents were immigration detainees, and their answers were not included in the results, which come therefore from 37 men. Percentages are rounded.

Accommodation on release?	Percentages [2019]	Work or training on release?	Percentages [2019]	Acknowledged questionnaire and/or felt helped	Percentages [2019]
Secure, own or with family or friends	36 [33]	Arranged	15 [12]	Yes	35 [67]
Insecure, less than a week	12 [5]	Leads	0 [33]	No	56 [23]
Hostel, approved premises or rehabilitation	10 [30]	Infirm, retired, in rehabilitation	23 [16]	No answer	10 [10]
None, or only an appointment	43 [32]	None	59 [38]		

It is more difficult to draw conclusions from the survey this year, because of the unprecedented circumstances, the smaller number of men surveyed, and because the Board could not get clarification of answers or supplementary information.

Accommodation

About the same number of men reported having secure accommodation on release as last year. Significantly fewer expected to go to a hostel, and more were likely to be in temporary accommodation, or had nothing at all arranged. This year, more men got temporary accommodation through the departure lounge, some through the

Homeless Persons Passport¹¹. In August (when there was a problem with collating the statistics), 25 men were released:

- 'direct' accommodation, with family or friends; in approved premises; provided by the local authority - 12
- Homeless Persons Passport – 7
- did not provide information to CRC after follow up – 6.

Men who needed approved accommodation were likely to be affected by the much lower availability of such premises in London, even compared with previous years. Men with nowhere to go commented that this increased their anxiety. The lack of an address also made it impossible for them to plan ahead, for being registered with a GP and finding a job.

Work or training

Surprisingly, a higher percentage of men had jobs fixed up this year. Three of them said this was through their own contacts; one mentioned Bounce Back and another that he was doing a CSCS course, possibly via Bounce Back, which men could sign up to via prison radio (see section 7.5). One man said that Key for Life was going to help him find work. No men had job leads, and around 50% more had no job to go to.

A higher number of men said they had had no help from the prison. No job fairs, courses or activities had been running since March, and none of the relevant staff, including the CRC, was able to go on the wings. None of the men who had no housing had a job fixed. One, who had 'just got on and did my time, that's what I do always' during the lockdown, also said he had 'got no one' outside, and no help from anyone in the prison.

Resettlement help

The percentage of men who felt they had been helped was half that of last year. The CRC had sent questionnaires to all men and followed up with letters for those who did not return them. Some men recognised that this was an attempt to help, and that no one could interview them initially. After 10 June, however, CRC staff did interview men with complex needs and those who had not returned the CRC questionnaire. One man said that he had seen 'all these people' (his keyworker, OMU and 'someone else'), that they were well meaning but 'not 1 thing has been sorted out for me'.

Others mentioned help from their keyworkers, OMU, Forward Trust and probation staff. One had had a bank account fixed up.

Additional questions

This year there were four additional questions:

- do you think the arrangements for your release have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic
- during the pandemic, did you feel safe in the prison, and
- did you feel you were treated fairly and humanely by staff
- have you been told how to register with a GP on your release.

For these answers, all 39 responses were counted. In the table below, actual numbers are given, not percentages.

¹¹ This provided accommodation for up to 60 days, and was funded by NPS.

Arrangements affected?		Felt safe?		Fairly treated?		GP?	
Yes	21	Yes	20	Yes	23	Yes	13
No	13	No	15	No	10	No (two of these had a GP)	18
No answer	3	No answer	4	No answer	5	No answer	8
Don't know	2			'Mostly but not always'	1		

Most of the men who felt the lockdown had affected their release arrangements cited the fact that no one could come to see them. One said explicitly 'and that has raised my anxiety extremely', another that because he could not contact anyone, he was 'scared that I will have no choice to resort [sic] to my old ways which I really don't want'. The two men who were being deported were distressed to have been waiting since December 2019 and April 2020 respectively. It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of the lockdown on prisoners' levels of anxiety coming up to release, often a difficult time, quite apart from any anxiety about the pandemic.

Of the three who were worried about housing, one mentioned the shortage of places in approved premises, and two the fact that homeless people were being prioritised (not realising that he might benefit from this).

Four of the men who did not feel safe mentioned the lack of social distancing. Two of them commented that they 'were just left to rot in the cell' and 'treated like animals with a disease'. One who felt safe said 'I feel it's inhumane and difficult to be out 6 hours per week for months'. It is to the credit of uniformed staff that more men felt well treated than not, even by three of those who did not feel safe. A few recognised that staff had 'their hands full', and thanked them for their support.



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