



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Featherstone

**For reporting year
1 November 2019 – 31 October 2020**

Published January 2021



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Introductory sections 1 - 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

2.1 HMP Featherstone is a public sector adult male, closed category C training and resettlement prison, situated eight miles north of Wolverhampton. It opened in 1976 and occupies part of the same campus as HMPs Oakwood and Brinsford. It receives prisoners mostly from local prisons HMPs Hewell and Birmingham.

2.2 The prison has a baseline certified normal accommodation of 671, with an operational capacity of 687. This operational capacity was temporarily reduced to 668 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of cells, apart from those on House 5 (the induction wing), are single occupancy.

2.3 As of 31 October 2020:

- 0 prisoners are unsentenced
- four prisoners are serving less than 12 months
- 152 prisoners are serving between 12 months and four years
- 394 prisoners are serving determinate sentences of longer than four years
- 25 prisoners are serving imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentences
- 44 prisoners are serving life sentences (non-IPP)
- 31 prisoners are serving extended determinate sentences
- 31 prisoners are foreign nationals.

2.4 The accommodation comprises seven residential wings. The figures below represent a snapshot of the day the data was collected, and are not maximum occupancy figures:

House block 1 – A two-storey block holding 116 prisoners, with a maximum capacity of 120

House block 2 – A two-storey block holding 59 prisoners. During the COVID-19 regime, one spur was reserved for the isolation of symptomatic prisoners. House 2 has a maximum capacity of 120 prisoners when operating as a regular house unit

House block 3 – A two-storey block holding 116 prisoners, with a maximum capacity of 120

House block 4 – A two-storey block holding 114 prisoners, with a maximum capacity of 120

House block 5 – A three-storey block holding 88 prisoners. During the COVID-19 restrictions, cells on different levels were reserved for cohorts of incoming and outgoing prisoners, to ensure that there was no cross-contamination

House block 6 – A two-storey block holding 35 prisoners, normally occupied by enhanced status prisoners. Cells in this wing do not have access to integral facilities

House block 7 – A two-storey block holding 76 prisoners, normally occupied by enhanced status prisoners. During the COVID-19 period, one spur of cells was reserved for vulnerable prisoners under shielding arrangements.

Care and separation unit (CSU) – A two-storey block holding up to 10 prisoners in standard cells, plus a special cell.

2.5 The prison serves the Warwickshire and West Mercia areas for resettlement purposes. Prisoners are expected to improve their educational levels, work and train in preparation for release in the final part of their sentence. Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, over 75% of prisoners were involved in activities.

2.6 Key providers of services are:

- Physical care provider: Care UK
- Mental health provider: Inclusion (Midlands Partnership NHS Trust)
- Learning and skills provider: Novus
- Community rehabilitation company (CRC): Warwickshire and West Mercia CRC
- Escort contractor: GeoAmey
- Catering services: Bidvest
- Medication: Lloyds Pharmacy Services
- Library service: Staffordshire Library Service
- Ordering and delivering of canteen items: DHL
- Maintenance: Amey

2.7 There is a gym, healthcare department, kitchen, education department, library, chaplaincy, reception and visits hall, as well as extensive workshops and horticultural areas. Other departments are located either in the main administration block or elsewhere around the prison. The visitors centre is located separately, at the front of the main prison, and is operated by Barnardo's.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

3.1.1 This report presents the findings of the Board at HMP Featherstone for the period 1 November 2019 to 31 October 2020. For the first four and a half months of the reporting year, Board evidence – both qualitative and quantitative – was obtained from observations on prison visits, conducting rota reports, attending meetings, scrutiny of prison data, taking applications from prisoners and from informal conversations with staff and prisoners alike. On 17 March 2020, following guidance from the secretariat relating to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, visits to the establishment stopped and were replaced with remote monitoring arrangements. Board members received every assistance from all prison staff in attempting to gain information, but direct access to prisoners was extremely limited and hence had an impact on the evidence collected. Limited visits to the prison restarted in June 2020, while maintaining the additional remote monitoring facility, but stopped again at the end of October, with the introduction of the second lockdown.

3.1.2 Remote monitoring included:

- teleconferencing for Board meetings and regional forums
- regular telephone rota questioning of staff on the house units and in other departments
- the collection of prisoner applications by prison staff, which were then forwarded to the Board
- email correspondence with the prison council prisoner lead, facilitated by the IMB clerk
- weekly telephone conversations with the Governor
- participation in the IMB 0800 applications line, accessed by prisoners from their cell telephones.

3.1.3 Prior to COVID-19 restrictions, the Board saw significant improvements in the effectiveness and operational running of the establishment. Some major improvements were made to the residential wings, and the clean, rehabilitative, enabling and decent (CRED) programme was continued. During the COVID-19 restrictions, further improvements to building maintenance, decoration and cleanliness were achieved (see section 5.1).

3.1.4 Despite the difficult operating circumstances during the pandemic, staff and prisoners alike rose to the challenges and cooperated well to ensure that everyone remained safe. The prison council was instrumental in improving communication with prisoners, gaining feedback and securing compliance with the new regime requirements. The restricted regime saw reductions in the number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) cases, self-harming, violence levels and use of force, resulting in prisoners reporting that they felt much safer (see section 4.3).

3.1.5 The prison saw some major changes in staff, particularly at a senior level. A new Governor took up appointment right at the start of the COVID-19 restrictions and implemented some substantial changes to the leadership of functional areas. The

operational staffing levels averaged 207 staff, with an attrition rate of 11% (approximately). Some important challenges arose in the context of societal racial tensions and also the perceived treatment of female staff (see paragraph 4.3.3).

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

3.1.7 The Board is appreciative of the efforts of the Governor and all the staff for their support and encouragement in enabling the Board to maintain its monitoring role during the pandemic.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

3.2.1 The Board believes, for the most part, that prisoners are safe. Both prior to and during lockdown, the atmosphere within the prison appeared largely positive, with good relationships developing between staff and prisoners, thus creating a climate where individuals could raise concerns. Throughout the year, the prison safer custody team has taken a robust approach to collecting data, monitoring and managing situations as they arise, and has initiated a variety of approaches to address problem areas. However, the prison population includes a large number of prisoners convicted of violent crime, often with links to organised crime groups, so there remains a concern that there is often pressure on more vulnerable prisoners to hold illicit items. The ingress of drugs and mobile phones, and the production of 'hooch' create opportunities for trading, bullying and consequential debt. With restricted access during the pandemic, there has been a reduction in the number of illicit items found, thus creating a more secure environment, where some prisoners have been able to improve their wellbeing (see section 4.6).

3.2.2 Prior to the restricted regime, there had been a reduction in the number of prisoners who self-harmed, and an improvement in their management, and that improved further with less movement around the prison and thus less opportunity for bullying (see paragraph 4.2.4). There were a few prisoners who actively misbehaved, in order to be placed in segregation as a preferred option to normal location and in the hope of securing a transfer to another prison. The Pulse survey of prisoners, collected by the prison council, has proved to be a good barometer of prisoners' perception of safety (see paragraph 5.3.2).

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

3.2.3 Generally, prisoners are treated with respect, good humour and care, even under the most difficult of circumstances. The CSU, in particular, faced challenges, managing several prisoners with difficult mental health issues. The Board observed officers making every effort to improve the wellbeing of these prisoners and attempting to make a real difference to their circumstances. Staff do not always have

specialist mental health training but have done their best, and should be congratulated on their patience and perseverance (see section 5.2).

3.2.4 While the formal complaint system is managed efficiently, other prison application systems are not always consistently applied on different residential wings. Paperwork can sometimes be slow in getting to the correct areas or be lost completely, thus creating frustration (see paragraph 5.7.1).

3.2.5 The fabric of the building, despite having undergone some refit and redecoration, is still poor. Many cells are dark, with shoddy windows and a heating system that is not fit for purpose. Even before lockdown, and despite there being dining facilities, most prisoners eat their meals in cells, close to the toilet. Showers, while showing signs of improved cleanliness, have been subject to Legionella bacteria. The showers on house block 5 are totally inadequate and should be condemned (see section 5.1).

3.2.6 The lack of access to educational programmes and the poor performance of Novus was of major concern even before lockdown. The inability to provide programmes that are critical for addressing prisoners' sentence plans has had an unfair impact on their chances of demonstrating progression, and possible access to parole or re-categorisation (see section 7.1).

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

3.2.7 The provision of medical services is adequate, generally well managed and consistent with provision in the community. COVID-19 placed additional pressure on the provision of all services, while the track and trace system sometimes resulted in depleted staff resources (see section 6.1).

3.2.8 The system for booking appointments is outdated, and improvements to an accessible IT booking system would help all parties. There is an increasing number of prisoners who present with very challenging mental health problems, and systems of referral do not appear to be well coordinated, which means that some prisoners do not receive the most appropriate care (see section 6.2).

3.2.9 The extended period of confinement to cells for 23 hours a day has been difficult, and detrimental to the mental health of some prisoners. The likelihood that this will continue indefinitely is beginning to take its toll.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

3.2.10 The change in the education provider to Novus, with serious underperforming in the staffing and delivery of programmes, thus affecting prisoners' outcomes, has been challenging for the prison (see section 7.1). Prison managers made every effort to deal with these shortcomings and it was frustrating that they were unable to make progress because of the nature of the contract. During the lockdown period, there was scant provision of educational services, apart from limited in-cell materials. By October 2020, there was the start of some very limited activity.

3.2.11 There are many opportunities for work in the wide-ranging workshops and throughout the prison's domestic provision. The Board often observed a lack of meaningful engagement and development of skills prior to March 2020. During the COVID-19 restrictions, a limited number of prisoners was able to engage in work,

and they displayed higher levels of motivation; however, the majority were confined to enforced indolence, isolated in their cells. Production outcomes on the limited workforce numbers were achieved or exceeded. This raises the question of what might be the most suitable model for the future.

3.2.12 Resettlement provision from the CRC appears on the surface to be reasonably comprehensive. However, the Board survey of 63 prisoners indicated that outcomes were not always achieved, and that there was concern and anxiety among prisoners on a range of topics (see section 7.5).

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Despite expenditure on a refurbishment programme, much of the residential accommodation, such as windows, heating and showers, is below the standard expected in the 21st century. While there has been some improvement in the operation of the maintenance contract, prison managers are often frustrated by the lack of progress, which is outside of their remit.

How will the minister support the improvement of the physical infrastructure?

- The Board considers that the change of education provider to Novus in April 2019 has resulted in a number of significant and challenging issues, which have had a detrimental impact on the education provision. Poor staff recruitment, retention and increased sickness levels have resulted in non-delivery of new courses that were included in the annual delivery plan provided by Novus. The Board considers that the quality and quantity of the education provision have fallen sharply since its last annual report, and that the delivery plan commitments made by Novus have not been achieved.

How will the minister ensure that the awarding of contracts is more robust and subject to scrutiny in the future?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- The restrictions introduced to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in the cessation of education programmes, rehabilitation initiatives and many key worker contacts which are fundamental to the completion of sentence plans. While the Board understands the reasons for the constraints, they have an adverse impact on the life chances of prisoners and the achievement of a rehabilitative culture.

What plans does the Prison Service intend to put in place to address these shortcomings for the future?

- The performance of the education provider has been consistently poor and fallen short of the required outcomes, with no significant penalties being operated.

How can the Prison Service take a more proactive role in both the negotiation and monitoring of the contract process, to ensure that public funds are well spent to achieve the agreed outcomes?

- The ageing infrastructure of the buildings – in particular, the poor standard of shower facilities and the kitchen – are inadequate for daily usage for the number of prisoners using them.

What additional resources can the Prison Service provide to ensure that a minimal acceptable standard is available?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- The number of drug and illicit finds continues to be of concern. Lockdown restrictions suggest that items enter the establishment through staff channels/official visitors, yet there are still only limited searches undertaken.

Can the Governor consider a more robust approach to the scrutiny of all staff/official prison visitors?

- While the performance of healthcare staff appears adequate, there are a number of concerns: attendance at segregation reviews and use of force incidents; the monitoring of self-dispensing of medication held by prisoners; the operation of the healthcare complaints procedure; the thoroughness of mental health reviews and the reporting relationship with general healthcare.

Can the Governor discuss these shortcomings with the head of healthcare, to ensure that measures are in place to address the concerns?

- The length of time spent in the CSU for a small number of prisoners gives some cause for concern.

Can the Governor explore alternative approaches for some of these difficult cases at a regional level, to see if there is a better approach?

- The general application system for prisoners is not always consistent across house blocks.

Can the Governor investigate and monitor the system, to ensure a consistent and timely approach, and consider any training for new staff?

3.4 Progress since the last report

Concerns highlighted in last year's report were as follows:

Addressed to:	Concern October 2019	Current assessment October 2020
Minister	Poor state of the fabric of the prison	Cosmetic refurbishment achieved brighter look; major improvements still required
Minister and Prison Service	Operation of the maintenance contract	Improvement to repairs programme and better

		relationship and follow-up by prison managers
Minister and Prison Service	Poor/non-performance of the Novus education contract	Worsened and ongoing
Minister	Ensuring adequate staffing levels	Achieved
Prison Service	Handling of property transfers	Improved. Robust handling by prison ensures only occasional issues. However, backlog built up during lockdown with prisoner purchases
Prison Service	Kitchen refurbishment	No progress
Governor	Follow-up on education contractor shortcomings	Established monitoring and follow-up but unable to make progress
Governor	Perceived safety of prisoners on house blocks 1–4	Much improved and active interventions. Lockdown changed situation, with better levels of safety
Governor	Thoroughness of cell clearances	Occasional lapses of correct procedure
Governor	Control of waste	Ongoing
Governor	Mismatch of perceptions of healthcare services with prisoner perceptions	Ongoing

Improvements made during the year were as follows:

- use of CRED programmes around the prison, with refurbishment of cells and decoration of general areas
- introduction of in-cell telephony, which has been very beneficial, particularly during lockdown
- extensive work in gardening and horticulture, to provide a better environment and home grown produce
- refurbishment of house block 6 showers
- proactive initiatives around equality and discrimination
- calm, safe and cooperative environment created, particularly during lockdown, enabling some prisoners to detoxify
- introduction of 'Purple Visits', using technology to maintain family contacts
- introduction of the IMB 0800 applications line, which gave prisoners direct telephone access to the Board from their cells
- active prison council, undertaking Pulse surveys of prisoners' views.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

The Board acknowledges the outstanding effort and dedicated work of all staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teams have been meticulous in planning and coordinating their approach to managing the welfare and safety of prisoners, and responsive to the ever-changing situation. Prisoners and their families alike have expressed their thanks for the way in which the situation has been handled. The pandemic appears to have fostered a cooperative environment, where staff and prisoners have worked together in keeping the prison clear of the virus until late October 2020.

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 The reception area provides a welcoming environment both for new prisoners and those leaving the establishment. Prisoners are dealt with efficiently, with thorough health screening, particularly since the onset of COVID-19. There has been an increasing number of prisoners received from other establishments with severe mental health problems who were unfit to travel. Some prisoners arrived without their required medication, and information on their needs was not shared by the releasing prison. As Featherstone does not have an on-site pharmacy, this sometimes resulted in prisoners being without medication, particularly over a weekend. Healthcare staff, on a number of occasions, had to return prisoners to the despatching prison, which was very unsettling for the individuals concerned.

4.1.2 There is a reception orderly who deep cleans the area twice a day, to help control infection. During September and October 2020, as courts reopened, there was increased pressure on the establishment to accept additional prisoners, even from COVID-19-positive prisons.

4.1.3 The induction programme for new prisoners was well structured and comprehensive. It was conducted with concern for the wellbeing of prisoners, and every effort was made to ensure that basic items, such as vapes, toiletries and £1 telephone credit were provided, in order to avoid initial debt arising. Since the regime restrictions came into operation, the induction programme has been reduced, as there is little or no education or work available. New prisoners are kept as a cohort for showers, exercise and meals, and have access to Listeners and the duty governor. Staff on the house block 5 induction wing have had a challenging regime to follow, with up to five different cohorting arrangements. They should be congratulated on maintaining a positive climate despite these difficulties.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 Over the reporting period, the safer custody team have given detailed attention to vulnerable prisoners who require support. There are robust multifunctional systems in place to collect relevant data, and staff have a detailed knowledge of individual cases and the interventions being utilised.

4.2.2 A total of 262 ACCT documents were opened during the year, largely in line with previous years. Reviews and associated paperwork were completed fully when checked by the Board. There was a marked decrease in the number of ACCT documents opened during the COVID-19 period, which was surprising. There was one week in September 2020 when there were no open ACCT documents at all.

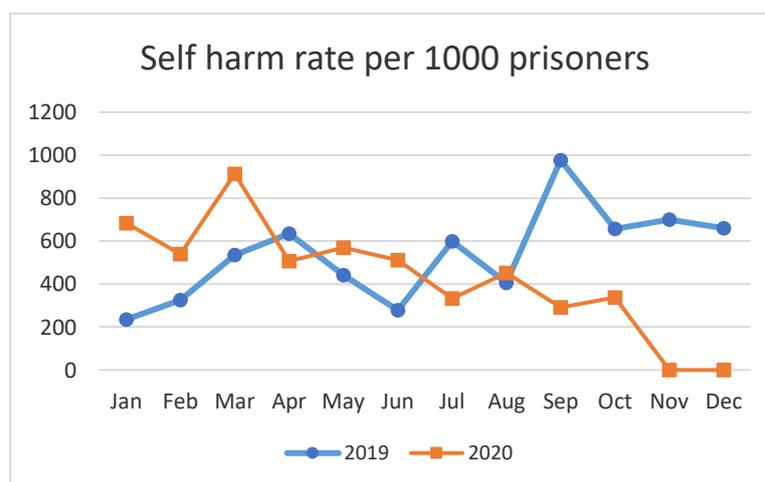
After such long periods of isolation and restriction, this raised some concerns as to whether deteriorating mental health was being overlooked. The Board was reassured that the Governor expressed some disquiet about this reduction and highlighted to staff, in a weekly newsletter, the need to be aware of possible issues.

	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Total
2018/19	13	23	13	12	28	18	31	24	25	25	17	19	248
2019/20	24	17	34	27	24	17	22	27	18	19	21	12	262

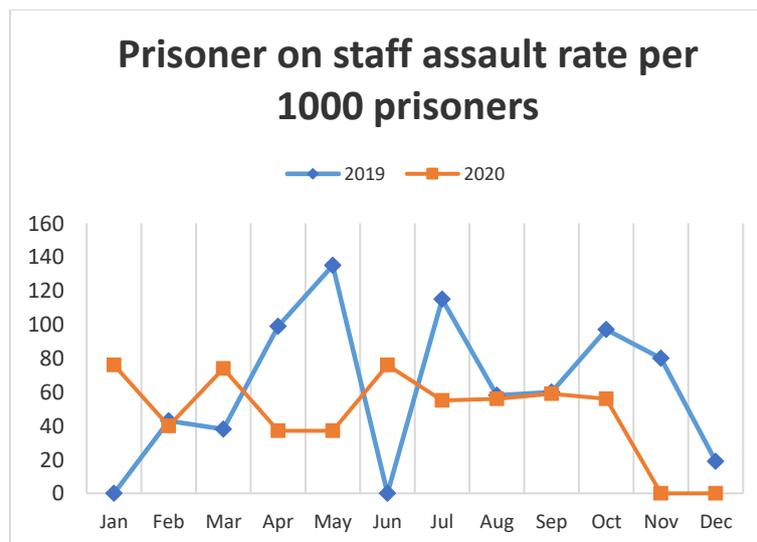
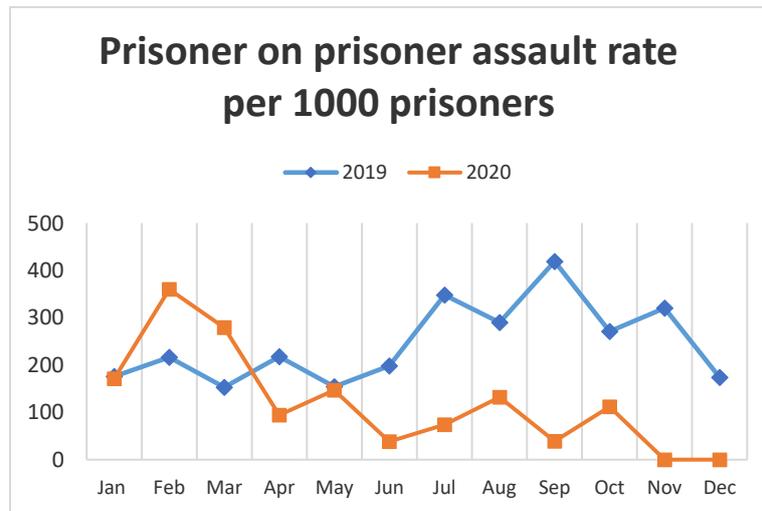
Table of ACCT documents opened

4.2.3 There was one death in custody, in January 2020, of a prisoner on an ACCT document. The prisoner had a history of long-term prolific drug use. The final report of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman was received in September 2020, which raised a question about how psychoactive substances could be so easily obtained in custody. It recommended that healthcare staff review prescriptions of medicines more regularly. This was implemented by the healthcare department, yet the Board has questioned other cases where a prisoner has been able to store medication over a period of time and use as a tradable commodity.

4.2.4 Safer custody and psychology staff work closely together to try to identify causes of self-harming. The involvement of families appears to be a positive move, and Twitter access for families has been used to strengthen those links. A small number of prisoners was responsible for a large proportion of self-harm cases. It is interesting to note the significant reduction in incidents that occurred at the start of the lockdown period.



4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation



4.3.1 The Board observed significant improvements in the day-to-day atmosphere within the prison as staff took a proactive approach to safety and security. There was a marked decrease in violent incidents in March 2020, attributable to the curtailed level of operations and movement of prisoners. At the start of the year, poor behaviour was being challenged more frequently, and the introduction of the new incentives and earned privileges (IEP) scheme was designed to support this approach. However, the Board found that there was little understanding of the new IEP framework and no significant change in approach. The offender management in custody (OMiC) model was well developed at the establishment, and beginning to be embedded in the culture of the prison. The Board followed eight prisoner cases over a period of six months, and these indicated that some positive outcomes were being achieved (see section 5.3). Sadly, since the advent of COVID-19, this programme has largely been shelved, apart from for the more violent prisoners on challenge, support and intervention plans. Any new transfers who have a violence in prisons

estimator (VIPER) score of 3 or higher are seen, in order to ensure that they are appropriately supported. While it is recognised that work with these prisoners is important, many other prisoners now lack the support that they require and have little opportunity for interaction with a key worker.

4.3.2 There were several changes of senior leadership during the reporting year, which, together with the suspension of regular meetings, had an impact on the excellent work that had been initiated in previous years. The Board is pleased to report that, by October 2020, more stability appeared to have been achieved in this important area.

4.3.3 During March 2020, at the start of the new Governor's tenure, issues were raised about the bullying behaviour of some prison officers. There were two incidents in particular, relating to minority ethnic groups. This coincided with the more general awareness in the community of the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign. There were also emerging issues from female staff about the unacceptable behaviour of some of their colleagues. The incoming Governor immediately took a strong lead by undertaking investigations and disciplinary action where required, communicating clearly with all staff on the acceptable professional values required and initiating various task groups. This was well received by the prison council, and prisoners generally. The Board welcomed this strong lead, as staff behaviour towards colleagues is often indicative of their treatment of prisoners.

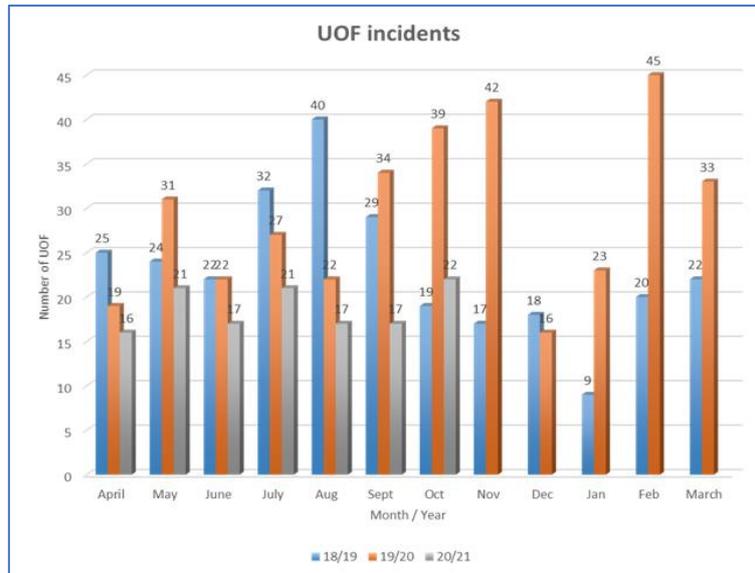
4.3.4 Prior to lockdown, significant progress had been made in the handling of self-isolating prisoners. Key worker interventions, tackling bullying and encouragement to engage in the prison regime, were beginning to steadily reduce the number choosing to self-isolate. Since the COVID-19 enforced isolation on the whole prison population, it has been more difficult to identify those who might be struggling to cope. As of October 2020, there are seven prisoners classed as self-isolating, and they are supported by staff and key workers, and seen by a duty governor as part of the welfare checks. They have been provided with their own regime, to allow for domestics and showers. Those prisoners who appeared isolated through lack of family contact and had not used their PIN telephones were checked to ascertain if there was any support they might need. There is an awareness that more needs to be done by mental health staff, now that they have returned to working on-site, but there seems to be little face-to-face interaction.

4.4 Vulnerable prisoners, safeguarding

4.4.1 At the start of COVID-19, the majority of vulnerable prisoners were relocated to house block 7, where shielding arrangements could be more effective as the cells have integral shower facilities. There is one prisoner requiring social care, but the layout of the wing makes it difficult to meet his needs. Consideration is being given to converting a double cell into single use, in order to accommodate him more appropriately, as he does not wish to relocate elsewhere.

4.5 Use of force

4.5.1 The Board considers the use of force, both planned and spontaneous, to be well managed. It is taken seriously, and detailed information is collected, analysed and shared widely. Meetings on use of force are held regularly, and case notes and videos are scrutinised for learning opportunities. The training of staff in this area is well developed and thorough. All staff have received training in the use and effect of PAVA¹ and rigid-bar handcuffs, and the Board has observed the training. These are reserved for serious incidents, where other methods will not result in an effective and safe de-escalation.



4.5.2 Incidents of use of force show a marked reduction over the year, which is largely attributable to the restricted regime and prisoners complying well with instructions. Analysis of the figures by location, ethnicity, time and individuals do not indicate trends that require further investigation. A small number of prisoners were involved in multiple incidents, which skews the results. Staff involved in multiple incidents are also subject to scrutiny.

4.5.3 There were two incidents on 4 August 2020 where PAVA was drawn. In the first incident, it was drawn but not used, and proved to be effective in de-escalating the situation. In the second incident, two canisters of PAVA were drawn and used, and quickly brought the situation under control. Healthcare staff attended the incident. Detailed scrutiny of this incident took place with a team of staff, as well as the Board, and as a result further training and discussion took place with the individual staff involved.

4.5.4 At the start of the year, there were issues with the lack of completion of form F213 (the form used to report injuries of prisoners) by healthcare staff. There were attempts to improve their completion and return, but at the end of the year this still remains a concern, as does the attendance of healthcare staff when a 'code blue'² is called.

¹ An incapacitant spray dispensed from a handheld canister. It contains a 0.3% solution of pelargonic acid vanillylamide (PAVA) in ethanol, with nitrogen propellant.

² A 'code blue' is called when serious breathing/collapse is indicated.

4.6 Substance misuse

4.6.1 Regular cell searches were conducted in the early part of the year, based on security intelligence received. During the lockdown period, the number of searches was reduced, as there were issues about cross-contamination of COVID-19.

4.6.2 Significant finds of illicit items, particularly drugs, mobile phones and 'hooch' (illicit alcohol, usually made from fruit), were made throughout the year, although there was a distinct reduction noticed late in March 2020, consistent with the reduction in movement around the prison site, and in visitors to the establishment. From April 2020 onwards, finds of illicit items have dropped from being considered a serious risk to a manageable risk. There have, however, been significant finds of hooch, which appears to be the substance of choice, as it can be more readily made from easily available foodstuffs. A total of 104 litres of hooch was removed from circulation during September 2020.

4.6.3 Early in the reporting year, in November 2019, psychoactive substances (PS) were continuing to be an issue. The drugs strategy team was proactive in trying to reduce levels of both supply and demand by working with healthcare staff in controlling prescribed medication and providing amnesty boxes.

In January, a community notice was sent out to all prisoners, advising them that from December 2019, the government laboratories had increased the number of strains of PS that can be detected during mandatory drug testing (MDT). It was made clear that this had resulted in a significant increase in the number of prisoners testing positive for PS during MDT. Prisoners were made aware that if they misused PS and subsequently failed an MDT test, it would have a negative impact on their IEP status and could have an impact on progression through their sentence by affecting decisions made around re-categorisation, release on temporary licence (ROTL), home detention curfew (HDC) and parole. If prisoners needed support, it was suggested that they speak to wing staff, key workers, prison offender managers (POMs), peer support workers or any member of healthcare or Inclusion staff. However, in early April, HMPPS published guidance that, during the COVID-19 period, MDT was to be suspended.

4.6.4 The Board has often raised the need for more rigorous testing but the prison believes that intelligence-led searching and testing is more effective and a better use of resources. Mail screening has found illicit substances on letters, cards, and both Rule 39³ and bogus Rule 39 letters, particularly during lockdown. Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, 11 prisoners were placed on closed visits with additional security observation. While COVID-19 restrictions and the lack of visits have helped restrict the entry of illicit substances to the prison, prisoners have still found access to these items. Throwovers have been limited and, while it is possible for an occasional prisoner to have the knowledge and resources to produce these items in their cell, the inevitable conclusion is that staff or visitors are the main mechanism for entry. One member of staff admitted being responsible for the entry of contraband and was duly referred for police action. However, the Board believes that this is unlikely to be an isolated case.

³ Rule 39 covers confidential correspondence between a prisoner and their legal adviser.

4.6.5 Some tightening up of in-possession medication by healthcare staff, and checks on syringes at medication hatches, is also required, to ensure that medication for personal use is not stored or traded.

4.6.6 The drug strategy programme started well, with a robust approach on both supply and demand. Some attempt was made to up-skill key workers on drugs education. Work progressed with campaigns and displays, and also increased access to recovery and support, together with an integrated approach to avoiding and managing debt. Since lockdown, this work seems to have been on hold. From March until September 2020, there were no programmes or activities for prisoners to access.

4.6.7 The reduced supply of illicit substances during lockdown unfortunately means that the price of commodities goes up, and therefore debt increases. There are some key individuals in the prison responsible for creating 'business opportunities' and, unfortunately, victims. Work has been done to ensure that this is captured on a database and addressed. National adviser, Karen Slade, was invited to the prison to talk about ways of managing vicious circles of debt, and informing staff about the work now being done on the existing debt policy. The prison council has been supporting this and provided survey information, so that an engaged approach can be taken.

4.6.8 During lockdown, the distribution of canteen items has taken place at the cell door, rather than in full view of other prisoners, thus helping to reduce bullying.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 HMP Featherstone has a total capacity of 687 prisoners, accommodated across seven house units. Occupancy remained reduced as house block 2 completed a refurbishment programme. This was fortuitous, as it assisted the provision of isolation arrangements for those with COVID-19 symptoms when required in March 2020. The cleanliness and ventilation of cells is variable. Although the majority of cells are for single occupancy, during the increased period of isolation it has meant that prisoners have had to eat all meals in a confined space next to a toilet, and use sinks for a variety of washing purposes. The deep cleaning and programmes of painting in all areas have helped to improve the situation, so that the whole site has a fresher and more welcoming appeal. However, this does not overcome the basic underlying poor quality of the infrastructure and lack of investment in structural improvements.

5.1.2 The introduction of in-cell telephones before March 2020 was advantageous in maintaining the stability of the establishment, as prisoners were able to contact their families directly. It also meant that they could access the IMB 0800 applications line and Samaritans if required. Thirteen prisoners submitted 23 Board applications via the IMB 0800 applications line between March and June 2020.

5.1.3 Work on buildings and furnishings continued at the end of 2019, which saw a welcome improvement in standards. House block 6 showers, toilets and washbasins, which have long been a source of concern for the Board, were finally refitted to an

acceptable standard. Prisoners were moved to house block 2 to facilitate quicker completion.

5.1.4 House block 5, which under COVID-19 arrangements accommodates isolating cohorts of new prisoners, prisoners about to be released and general population prisoners, coped well with supplies of prison clothing and deep cleaning programmes. However, the showers on this house block have for some time been in an unhygienic state, with many out of action. By September 2020, there were only seven usable showers for a population of 88 prisoners. This is totally unacceptable and creates difficulty in managing the complex regime. The showers on house block 2, which had been refitted, were subject to an outbreak of Legionella, and specialist attention is now required on an ongoing basis.

5.1.5 The provision of meals continued as normal during the regime restrictions, and prisoners were able to collect their food on a well-regulated rota basis, ensuring that social distancing was observed. The standard of food is acceptable but variable, although menus are reviewed and changed to ensure they provide what is required. The Board was pleased to see the addition of large quantities of fresh produce utilised from the prison garden. As we reported last year, there remains a great deal of waste food, up to 20 tons per week, which represents a waste of resources.

5.1.6 Prisoners were provided with additional comfort snack packs between March and August 2020, and this was well received. The kitchen equipment is ageing and constantly in need of repair. An urgent capital investment is required to bring it up to modern standards.

5.1.7 The gym was widely used, and a variety of programmes, suitable for a range of prisoners, was provided between November 2019 and March 2020. Unfortunately, since the lockdown it has been out of use, although there has been some limited provision available on the Astro-turf area. COVID-19 test and trace severely affected staffing levels during October 2020, so many planned initiatives to add variety to the regime were put on hold, as staff had to be deployed to basic duties.

5.1.8 A new security area with X-ray scanners is scheduled to be built adjacent to the front gate of the prison. This is well overdue, but once completed should help to prevent the ingress of illicit items.

5.2 Segregation, special accommodation

5.2.1 During the reporting year, 134 prisoners were located in the CSU, which corresponds closely to the number in 2018/19. During the COVID-19 restrictions, the CSU received fewer prisoners than under normal circumstances, as, wherever possible, prisoner misdemeanours were dealt with on the house block locations. More serious issues which would normally be considered by an external adjudicator did not take place until July 2020, and then only by video link. Information technology (IT) equipment had to be shared with neighbouring prisons, which meant that some were dismissed as they were out of time. This highlights the extent to which the IT resources of the prison estate are behind the times.

5.2.2 Those prisoners confined to the CSU presented staff with some really challenging behaviours. The Board was impressed by the dedication, compassion and skills of the staff on the unit in creating a positive climate, where some of the issues could be addressed. They acted in a firm but fair way and went well beyond what might be expected. A total of five ACCTs were opened during the year for segregated prisoners. The concern of the Board is that some prisoners with extreme behavioural patterns and psychological issues were clearly not in the most appropriate place to meet their complex needs, and a small number were sectioned under the mental health provisions.

5.2.3 Since November 2019, a total of eight prisoners exceeded 42 days in the CSU. One prisoner remained on the unit from February to September 2020, completing a total of 205 days before permission was given by Gold Command (national-level command) authorisation for a transfer. In all cases, the Board was included in the discussions on segregation management and the monitoring of the health and wellbeing of the individuals. In these cases, every attempt was made to find a more appropriate solution but this was not always possible, particularly during COVID-19 restrictions.

5.2.4 Despite the CSU requiring full refurbishment, cosmetic improvements through the painting of all areas and the replacement of damaged doors and observation panels has taken place, and have provided a much brighter environment.

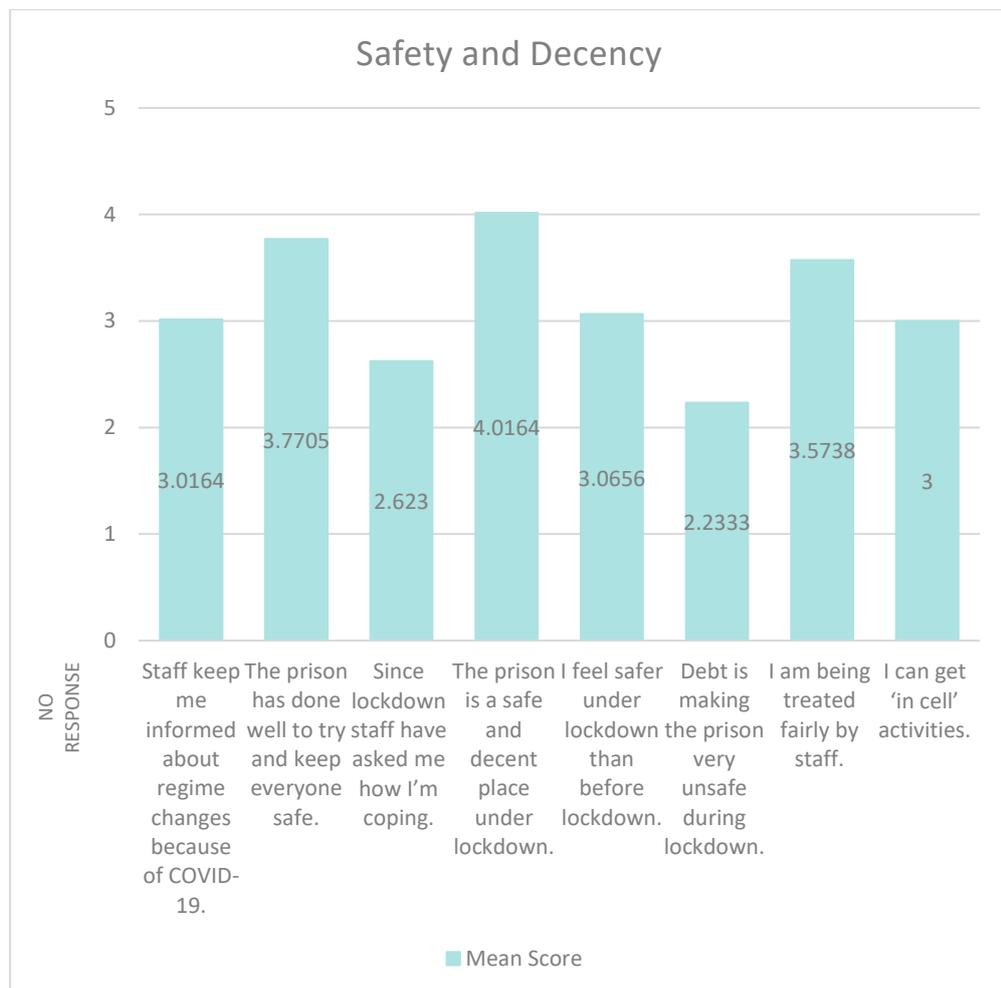
5.3 Staff/prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 Since the introduction of the restricted regime in March 2020, prisoners generally have been accepting of the situation and cooperative. Having access to a television and in-cell telephony meant that they could follow the progress of the pandemic in the UK and globally. The atmosphere generally has been quiet, calm and positive. Prison officers described the prison as settled and running smoothly, with prisoners getting exercise and access to showers on a daily basis, on a rota basis. However, having only 30 minutes a day out of the cells represents a challenging regime for all. Surprisingly, mental health concerns, which were anticipated, did not on the surface, appear to be as great as expected although there is a risk that some cases have been overlooked. The provision of in-cell distraction activities and library services were welcomed. Many prisoners found that the restrictions allowed them space to detoxify from drug use, consequently becoming less troublesome. There have been a few notable successes where the Board has observed a huge transformation in the wellbeing and positivity of individual prisoners.

5.3.2 The prison council contributed to the cooperation and compliance observed during the lockdown and the creation of a calm climate. It has been instrumental in collecting data, conducting Pulse surveys and communicating changes to the prison population. The Board received a letter from the prison council lead, who said:

‘It seems here at HMP Featherstone we have been fortunate that the whole management team recognised that along with their own considerable efforts to keep prisoners, staff and officers safe, the use of the Council for inmate communication is probably one of the most effective tools they could and have deployed. We have been supported by everyone...’

The Pulse surveys have provided a useful insight into the perceptions of the prison population on a variety of topics, which has been able to inform various approaches.



Pulse survey responses for June 2020

5.3.3 At the start of the reporting year, the prison was making excellent progress in rolling out of the OMiC programme. Key workers were in place for most prisoners, and staff were growing into these roles. Quality assurance checks were used to gain a picture of the quality of the interactions and the recorded notes, in order to pick up where improvements were needed. The Board undertook a small monitoring exercise, following the journey of eight prisoners from mid-2019 through to February 2020. Each prisoner was interviewed by the Board member each month, to ascertain how they were progressing. The picture that emerged was patchy. Some key workers had established excellent working relationships and were helping to unblock some of the issues that prisoners were experiencing. In other cases, there was a lack of follow-through on prisoners' concerns. Frequently, the offender key workers reported that they were under pressure with their workload, and hence had not followed up on these. In March 2020, the scheme was suspended. Priority was given to the most urgent cases, based on their level of risk or vulnerability, but it has left the majority of prisoners in limbo, with very little support. The Board understands why it has been necessary to consider the use of resources and suspend the

development of the model but, nevertheless, feels that this is a retrograde step, having a considerable impact on the preparation for release.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 The Board monitored prison managers' approach to equality through the well-attended bi-monthly equality meetings for the first part of the year. The Governor chaired the meetings, with functional governors leading on protected characteristic themes. Issues around equality are taken seriously, given a high priority and promoted through equality special summits. The new Governor has demonstrated a strong lead in this area and emphasised the core values of the establishment.

5.4.2 Comprehensive data is provided to the meeting, so that analysis and action can be taken on protected characteristics. Relevant data is also embedded and collected into other portfolios, such as safer custody, which helps inform the treatment of different groups. In general, the Board felt that there were no worrying trends identified by detailed examination of the statistics. The new Governor gave a clear lead when unacceptable behaviour was highlighted (see paragraph 4.3.3).

5.4.3 A wide range of events was planned and delivered, where the regime allowed. Sarah McKnight from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) visited the prison and ran an event relating to women in the workplace and the tackling of unacceptable behaviour. Featherstone has undertaken to be a pilot for a 'climate assessment, level 1' survey, which, it is hoped, will highlight issues to be addressed. This can only have a positive influence on the prisoner experience.

5.4.4 The prison council promoted events for prisoners, which were well publicised and attended. Black History Month, in October 2020, was held with social distancing arrangements in place in the gym, and a variety of materials was displayed on the house blocks. The kitchen supported a large number of festivals, with special food menu choices available to all.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 The faith and pastoral provision is well organised and robust, although the failure to appoint a Church of England chaplain was disappointing. Under normal circumstances, prisoners are able to continue following their faith and receiving support. Prior to lockdown, a variety of festivals were celebrated.

5.5.2 During the COVID-19 restrictions, some members of the chaplaincy were unable to attend as they were self-isolating. However, those remaining worked extremely hard to ensure that there was individual support for prisoners through private prayer, and attendance at ACCT reviews and in the CSU. Daily visits to the CSU were an excellent source of support for some prisoners. Individual conversations and prayers with chaplains on the house blocks or in the chaplaincy were able to take place in line with national recommendations on social distancing.

5.5.3 Prisoners suffering a bereavement have been allowed a virtual call with family. Those prisoners who were having no family calls or visits have received additional support.

5.5.4 Foreign national prisoners were provided with international telephone credit during the lockdown, so that they could keep in touch with family. In January 2020, there were 49 foreign nationals at the prison, from 22 different nations. Over the course of the year, that figure has significantly reduced because they were transferred to either HMP Moorland or HMP Huntercombe, which are better equipped to deal with their particular issues and concerns. Home Office Immigration Enforcement surgeries took place when possible

5.6 Incentives and earned privileges

5.6.1 The IEP system was not always consistently operated, so, in January 2020, a new policy was consulted on and published. The Board planned to follow up on the new policy in March 2020, as, after discussions at the prison council, it was clear that neither staff nor prisoners were aware that a new system had been introduced. However, the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions meant that the IEP system was largely suspended, in line with national guidelines, and all prisoners were placed on the standard level. It seems unfortunate that, for prisoners who have taken on some additional responsibilities, such as prison council representatives, this could not be recognised in some way and recorded on their record.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 During the year, there were 853 complaints submitted, with the largest category relating to residential and security issues. From Board observations, it appears that complaints submitted through the formal prison system have been well managed and dealt with in a timely and efficient manner. The Board is, however, concerned with the general application process, whereby prisoners submit requests/queries for the attention of prison departments or governors. While there is a system for recording and dealing with these queries, it is not consistently applied. Some staff are meticulous in recording and dealing with requests, but others either do not know how the system works or are happy to leave it to other colleagues. Paperwork too often gets lost or sent to the wrong area, so that prisoners are left waiting for an answer. The system is not fit for purpose and requires review.

5.7.2 The number of Board applications reduced from 174 in 2018/19 to 213 in 2019/20. This is largely attributed to the lockdown of prisoners and the difficulty in readily accessing forms. The Board made every effort to communicate with all house blocks by displaying notices, providing sufficient forms and communicating with the prison council, so that all prisoners were aware of how the Board could be contacted. The largest number of applications were sentence related, which is understandable as little movement was taking place to category D prisons, and parole board hearings were delayed. The second highest category, again, related to healthcare issues. The Board has concerns about the way in which healthcare complaints are dealt with. Prisoners are not fully conversant with the system and how to get a complaint logged, so they feel frustrated and ask the Board for help. Compared with last year, property complaints within the establishment remained consistent but there was an improvement with the handling of property on transfers (see section 8).

5.8 Property

5.8.1 The Board is pleased to report that the situation with prisoners' property within the prison improved considerably over the year, even though the number of Board applications remained similar to that in previous years. Staff resources and effort were directed towards clearing some of the backlog of property that was being held in storage. The recording of property on prisoners' property cards was completed in detail at reception. Since the restrictions on prisoner movement came into force in March 2020, the position has eased in respect of transferring prisoners' property. However, since then, prisoners have been ordering a large number of items from approved catalogues; the Governor picked up on this quickly and approved overtime, to help ensure that items were dealt with.

5.8.2 On occasions, there have still been problems with cell clearances. New staff do not always appear to be fully conversant with how the system should work and how property can be secured. The lack of freedom of movement within the prison, however, has meant that this problem has reduced.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare: general

6.1.1 NHS England commissioned Care UK to provide health services from April 2016. Care UK subcontracted several services, such as mental health, but maintained primary responsibility for the provision. The deputy head of healthcare was promoted to head of healthcare in January 2020 and a new deputy head of healthcare was appointed in May 2020 but left shortly afterwards. Subsequently, the clinical lead was temporarily promoted to deputy head of healthcare. A senior pharmacy technician was appointed at the end of March. On 29 October 2020, there were nine full-time-equivalent staff in post, with 3.5 vacancies. When necessary, agency staff have been used to cover staff shortages, holidays, illness and night shifts.

6.1.2 Healthcare staff attend inductions and ACCT/segregation reviews but the Board has noticed that attendance at good order and/or discipline (GOOD) reviews has deteriorated over the year. Those staff attending are often ill informed on the background of the prisoner attending the review, so meaningful discussion cannot take place. Despite the Governor bringing this to the attention of the healthcare department, there has been little improvement.

6.1.3 The patient participation group, which includes the prison council, was launched in December 2019, and the local delivery board in August 2020, both of which help in taking a more inclusive and informed approach. A pain management clinic was introduced in the early part of 2020 but was suspended as the lead was taken ill with COVID-19. Links between healthcare and prison staff/managers appears to be generally good. The healthcare department received 149 complaints in the reporting period. The key concerns raised were about medication, clinical care and appointment referral times. The Board received 19 healthcare-related applications, and the main issues were about the ongoing management of prisoner treatments. The Board has some concerns about the management of healthcare

complaints. Prisoners are not fully aware of what constitutes a complaint or how to go about submitting one. Sometimes, complaints are dealt with as 'concerns', which are then not entered into the reporting figures, and in some instances the dates of concerns and responses are not logged.

6.1.4 Intensive life support face-to-face training took place in August 2020. All other healthcare training has been virtual.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 Twenty-four-hour nursing care is now provided, and the physical care of prisoners appears generally to be of a good standard. Waiting times for various services have fluctuated, particularly since the outbreak of COVID-19 and lockdown. Generally, waiting times are in line with those experienced in the community, although occasionally they were breached. During lockdown, extra GP appointments, including telephone consultations, were organised, to reduce the waiting list. There was an unacceptably long wait to see the dentist. As at 29 October 2020, the waiting list stood at 195, but it has been higher. Additional sessions have been requested and it is hoped that the waiting list will be reduced. This particular concern was raised at regional level.

6.2.2 The total number of healthcare appointments booked across all clinics in the reporting year was 16,944 (excluding April and May, when there was no reporting owing to COVID-19). Prisoners attended 13,401 appointments (excluding April/May, as above). The non-attendance rate for all appointments during the reporting period averaged 6.98% (excluding April/May). The introduction of in-cell telephones has, no doubt, assisted in the booking of healthcare appointments. Hospital appointments continued during lockdown but were considerably reduced, consistent with the wider community experience. However, there were no urgent cases that were outstanding, and no concerns about escorts to hospital appointments. Healthcare staff continued to fulfil their appointments during the lockdown period.

6.2.3 Over the lockdown period, the healthcare department has generally seen a reduction in codes red and blue, a fall in violence-related incidents and an increase in the use of PS. Overall, there was not a significant rise in self-harm incidents over the course of the reporting period but towards the end of the reporting period this was on the increase, together with associated debt issues.

6.2.4 Towards the end of October 2020, there was an outbreak of COVID-19 on house block 6, with 34 prisoners testing positive. As a result, the house block was locked down and isolated. Staff wore personal protective equipment and prisoners were still allowed some time out of their cells. The prison was declared an outbreak site by Public Health England and put into 'command' mode. It was decided that social visits should again be suspended until the outbreak was controlled and the spread of COVID-19 was manageable on the site.

6.2.5 At the start of the reporting year, the Board was concerned at the lack of cooperation and discussion provided by healthcare staff. However, as the year progressed and a new deputy of healthcare was appointed, there was a distinct improvement, and willingness to engage with issues raised, and the Board welcomes this.

6.3 Mental healthcare

6.3.1 The mental health in-reach team currently has four members, including the team manager, with one nursing vacancy, and has a combined caseload of 89 patients. During lockdown, there was no increase in the number of referrals, and patients were red, amber, green (RAG) rated and were typically seen within two to five working days, depending on need. They were provided with a range of intervention packages (including puzzles and workbooks) which were tailored to individual patients' needs. During lockdown, mental health staff saw high-risk patients but no group services operated. The concern of the Board is the blurring of responsibilities between mental health and psychiatric services, and whether or not prisoners have a clearly identified diagnosis. This is not always helpful in the care of challenging prisoners, where prison officers are left with little information and have to cope with only basic training.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1 There is a memorandum of understanding with Staffordshire County Council for the provision of social care for those struggling to complete daily tasks without extra help or aids. The healthcare team is continually looking for innovative ways of improving social care. Individual prisoner needs are raised and discussed at the local delivery board. The provision within the prison is very limited for those with additional needs, yet, with some additional funding, provision could be made for better access. The Board had hoped that a lift would have been installed by now but because of security/financial issues, this has been put on hold. It is anticipated that the work will be carried out in 2021, thus providing a necessary and very useful provision for prisoners/staff and visitors with mobility issues.

6.5 Exercise, time out of cell, gym

6.5.1 On 3 April, HMPPS published detailed guidance, setting out expectations for regime management across the entire prison estate following the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting in stage 4 lockdown. Inevitably, this meant that prisoners were incarcerated for 23 hours at a time, with limited access to exercise and showers. On the whole, prisoners accepted this situation and appreciated that it was for their general health and the wellbeing of the prison as a whole. They could see that this was happening globally and that everyone was having to be patient and make sacrifices in extremely difficult and unparalleled times. As of 28 October, there were 49 staff off work as a result of the track and trace system, of whom 10 tested positive, including two governors. Naturally, with diminishing staff, this placed considerable strain on the remaining staff on-site, and they should be commended for their hard work and significant efforts in keeping the restricted regime running.

6.5.2 The prison has managed the situation well. The provision of in-cell telephones before lockdown has enabled prisoners to keep in touch with family and friends. Prisoners were given extra PIN telephone credit, which is still ongoing, and this has been helpful to those with limited funds. Visits were cancelled but restarted in June 2020 in a limited and regulated way. The take-up of visits has been disappointing, with prisoners explaining that both they and their families found it difficult with the lack of physical contact allowed. 'Purple Visits' (a virtual facility using laptop computers) has been welcomed by some prisoners but had a poor take-up, as the technology is very sensitive and not always available to families.

6.5.3 The restricted regime has allowed some prisoners to work, with social distancing being maintained as much as practically possible. Pulse surveys carried out by the prison council in August seemed to indicate that prisoners wanted more time for exercise. Infection control was paramount, and steps were taken to isolate and shield those prisoners who were at high risk of COVID-19, and to isolate, for up to 14 days, those coming into the prison, and also those leaving the prison, whether on release or transfer elsewhere (subject to authorisation of Gold).

6.5.4 The gym has been closed since lockdown. However, outdoor circuit training and running classes have been operating in a limited way. The gym staff were hoping that weights training would resume as soon as possible but that was subject to authorisation following published HMPPS guidance.

6.6 Drug rehabilitation

6.6.1 There are currently four psychosocial workers in the drug rehabilitation team, including the team leader. Pre-lockdown, they were operating programmes and interventions normally.

6.6.2 During lockdown, the drug rehabilitation team was proactive, providing in-cell workbooks and activities, but group work has not been possible. All referrals are RAG rated, and 15-minute assessments are carried out within two to five days, depending on how urgent the case is, and supported accordingly. If necessary, these prisoners are signposted to external service providers. The team attends all ACCT reviews.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 The education provision, delivered by Novus since 1 April 2019, covers 25 vocational qualifications at various levels, plus mathematics and English functional skills. At the start of the contract, Novus should have carried out an annual student/course/staffing analysis, setting out the needs of the establishment. By February 2020, 11 months into the contract, this was still not completed.

7.1.2 Board rota visits prior to the lockdown indicated that Novus was not giving any guidance or support to either teachers or prisoners in the industries area, but purely concentrating on the attendance figures. The prison raised these concerns with Novus staff, as it was for them to address the concerns, but there was little progress.

7.1.3 The academic development plan was still only in draft form, as of February 2020, despite the prison having completed its elements and forwarded it to Novus in December 2019. Education meetings held between Novus, the Ministry of Justice and the prison, and attended by the Board, showed that actions from as far back as May 2019 remained uncompleted, despite the relevant governor raising concerns.

7.1.4 Staffing issues in the education department were a major concern for the Board. Staff retention was poor, and there were resignations from key posts and difficulties in recruiting appropriately skilled staff, together with high rates of sickness,

which had a severe impact on the ability of Novus to operate courses according to the delivery plan. By November 2019, Novus was in turmoil and had subcontracted parts of its work to Nacro (a national social justice charity). It was hoped that at the seven months point of the Novus contract, any teething problems would have been resolved, but they became subject to an internal quality review. During this time, Novus refused to engage with the Board when questions were asked, and told its staff not to speak to Board members. The impact of these shortcomings had a detrimental effect on prisoners' ability to progress.

7.1.5 Levels of attainment in English and mathematics show significant underperformance in all areas.

Course completion in English and Maths for 2019/20

There was serious underperformance in the majority of the provision, and an overall contract achievement of only 63%.

7.1.6 On 25 March 2020, owing to the pandemic, all education staff withdrew from the site following Novus guidelines, so no education provision or courses were run. By July 2020, Novus was still not undertaking face-to-face sessions, or dropping off or collecting work. Novus staff returned to the site in September 2020, although they continue to work from home and visit on an ad hoc basis for two or three sessions per week. Prisoners are now offered a home-type learning environment, where work is marked and returned, and support provided via the prison telephone system. However, the quality of the resources is poor. Uptake of courses by prisoners is low.

7.1.7 The prison education team worked hard during this period to roll out and circulate in-cell information. Industrial cleaning is now being delivered in a classroom setting.

7.1.8 Prisoners have complained to the Board and through the prison council that there is a lack of courses to aid progression, thus having an impact on their outcomes. This, together with delays with sentence plans and opportunities to see probation staff, can detrimentally affect a prisoner's chance of parole or re-categorisation.

Course	Aims contracted	Aims completed	Comments
English entry-levels 1, 2 and 3	56	39	
English entry-levels 1, 2 and 3 delivered in industries	24	0	Not run since Oct 19 owing to vacancy
English Level levels 1 and 2	80	37	
Mathematics entry-levels 1, 2 and 3	56	14	
Mathematics entry-levels 1, 2 and 3 – industries	24	0	Not run since Oct 19 owing to vacancy
Mathematics levels 1 and 2	80	35	

7.1.9 Students enrolled on Open University courses have continued to work steadily during lockdown, although a couple have deferred as it has been difficult to access the library for resources. Access courses can be provided through the Prison Education Trust, and Featherstone has prisoners who have used this route to access the Open University.

7.1.10 The library is well run and stocked with up-to-date reading material, resources and displays. All staff there are welcoming and helpful. In April 2020, Staffordshire Libraries removed all staff, and the receipt of daily newspapers stopped. Monthly subscriptions of magazines remained. The Six-Book Challenge continued, and until February 2020 there were book/reading club meetings every two weeks. During lockdown, a limited library delivery service was operated by two orderlies and one operational support grade, who visited all house blocks on a rota basis to collect and replace books as required. Distraction packs/word searches, quizzes, and so on, were left on pool tables on each house block for prisoners to access. About 100 library books were distributed each week to prisoners' cells. Loaned books on return are quarantined for 72 hours before redistribution.

7.1.11 By July 2020, applications were reintroduced for the Storybook Dads scheme. Over lockdown, at least 60 videos were completed and sent out to families, and it is hoped that this can continue into the Christmas period.

7.1.12 Since August 2020, library staff have returned to phased operation, in order to get services back to some normality.

7.2 Vocational training, work

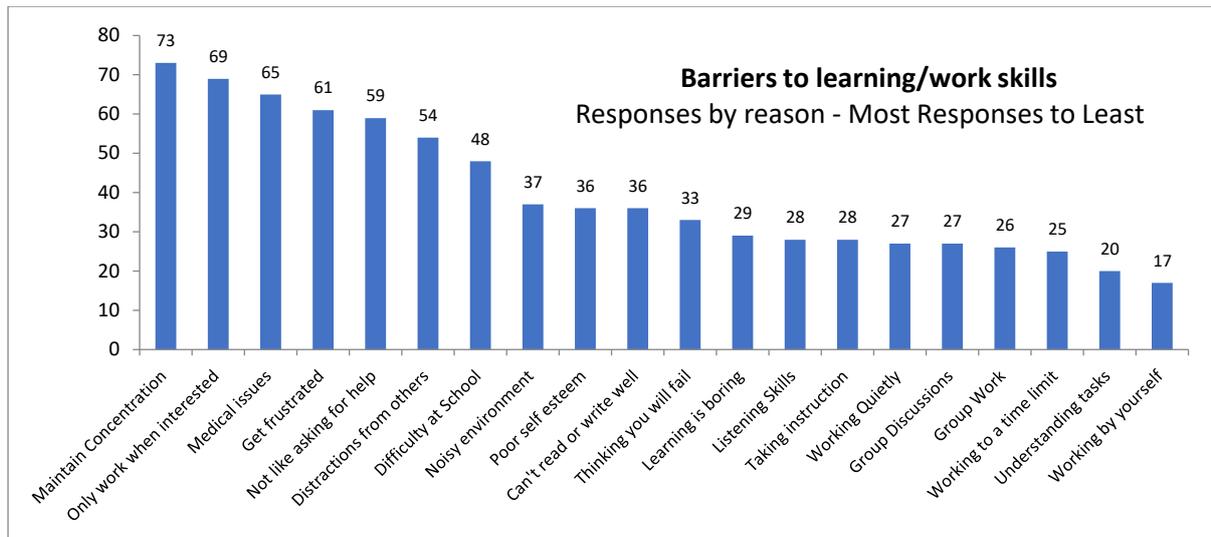
7.2.1 A new initiative was introduced in December 2019, together with Bridgetown Tyres, giving the opportunity for 10 prisoners to undertake a tyre course lasting for 10 weeks. Engineering workshops secured work in making a variety of items for the NHS, Prison Service and the army, such as mobile phone lockers for prison reception areas, small/large shadow boards, ladder guard rails, tubular chairs, beds, laundry trollies, padded chairs and floor fixing plates.

7.2.2 During lockdown, some workshops were able to continue, despite having a reduced workforce, thus providing work for up to 40 prisoners. They have been operating from 9.30am to 3.30pm, with meals being delivered into the workshop areas. Production levels have been maintained and exceeded. Textile workshops, for example, were producing up to 16,000 T-shirts per month, employing 20 fully skilled textile workers. Those prisoners who remained in employment were handpicked and keen to work. For some, it was the only source of income to which they had access.

7.2.3 The horticultural area of the prison has greatly improved, with the arrival of a new member of staff. During the summer, there were impressive colourful displays of hanging baskets and containers by the front gate and around the administration block. A large quantity of vegetables was grown for the kitchen by three staff and four prisoners, and further initiatives are planned for the coming season.

7.2.4 In July 2020, the prison council facilitated a questionnaire on 'Barriers to learning or work skills', where 646 questionnaires were distributed, with a response rate of 37%. The Board has frequently reported the lack of engagement of prisoners

in the workplace, so it is hoped that this will provide some useful data to follow up when a return to work becomes possible.



7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 The Board considers the offender management unit to be well run. By the end of October 2020, there were 34 prisoners with no initial offender assessment system (OASys) assessment; however, only eight of these had passed the requisite 10 weeks from sentencing, at which point they become 'overdue'. The OMiC scheme unfortunately was put on hold in March 2020, and the concentration of effort was given to those prisoners who were deemed to be at high risk. Some probation offender managers are still working remotely, using various IT platforms. While this ensures that cases are dealt with, the lack of face-to-face contact is regrettable. Parole hearings during lockdown were conducted by video link, but many complex cases had to be postponed. A few prisoners have made the Board aware of the poor quality of the reports from the parole board, with statements being cut and pasted, including the name of another prisoner.

7.3.2 Prior to the COVID-19 lockdown and its associated restrictions in March, the establishment was offering the Thinking Skills Programme and Resolve offending behaviour programmes. The cancellation of such interventions was regrettable; however, Resolve restarted in October 2020 in a COVID-19-secure way, on a one-to-one basis, with a small number of individually assessed prisoners. A new programmes manager has also been recruited, along with further training for facilitators in preparation for the offering of Kaizen (an offending behaviour programme), with delivery hoped to start early in 2021.

7.3.3 Re-categorisation of prisoners continued during the year, with approximately 50–60 cases per month being considered. Movement to category D conditions before COVID-19 appeared slow and often a source of frustration to prisoners. Post-lockdown, movements to category D were put on hold for some months until an arrangement for transfer to an allocated prison, HMP Sudbury, was agreed. This enabled about 15 prisoners per month to be transferred, after isolating for 14 days prior to a move, in order to control infection. At the end of October 2020, there were approximately 53 prisoners awaiting a move to open conditions.

7.3.4 During the past year, a prisoner on ROTL was employed in the visitors centre at the front of the prison, to act as a point of contact for family support. This was the first case of ROTL that the prison had facilitated for some time, and worked well. Unfortunately, this was interrupted by the onset of COVID-19.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 The Board reported previously on the poor state of the children's outside play area at the visitors centre. Barnardo's managed to secure support from Wolverhampton-based WOW Stuff, a creative industries centre, which undertook a revamp of the play area, gardens and interior of the visitors centre. A biometric identification system is now up and running, and all staff have received training. The visitors centre website launched, and is now live, receiving 19,908 visitors in 2019.

7.4.2 The ROTL prisoner (see paragraph 7.3.4) assisted families by advising them of the initiatives available through the family advice support team. From March until July 2020, the centre was closed because of the pandemic. Visiting restarted in July under strict Public Health England guidelines, allowing three visitors from a family group, including children. The prison has managed the arrangements well, with every care and consideration being given to families. Visitor numbers have remained small, as there is reluctance to travel, often large distances, for a visit that prohibits any physical contact.

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 The Board has reported previously concerns about the effectiveness of resettlement services. While, superficially, the figures provided indicate that the paperwork was being completed three weeks prior to release, and that the outcomes for prisoner contact, the arrangement of bank accounts, and so on, were being achieved, discussion with ad hoc samples of prisoners shortly before release often indicated otherwise. During lockdown, some resettlement key staff were self-isolating, so it was difficult to secure up-to-date information. When asked in June 2020, the department did not seem to know how many prisoners had been released in the previous three-week period. Any outstanding paperwork was carried out via the internal mail, rather than face to face, so some prisoners fell through the cracks in the system. There were no Jobcentre Plus staff in the prison during the lockdown period.

7.5.2 In September 2020, the Board carried out a resettlement survey with 64 prisoners who were due for release in the coming three months. There was a return response of 46%. Eighteen prisoners were followed up by telephone, to gain further insights into their experiences. Many had filled in forms for HSBC Bank but had received no response, so 45% of prisoners reported having no bank account set up. Fifty-three per cent of prisoners did not know if they had accommodation to go to and 50% felt that they had no support network after release. Many prisoners said that they were feeling frustrated and stressed. It appears that communication between resettlement/probation staff and prisoners is not always effective.

One prisoner said:

'I have not been able to speak to anyone in person or on the phone about accommodation or about getting a job. I was doing level 2 City and Guilds in

manufacturing operations until coronavirus kicked in. Then, all courses stopped and I have been told nothing!

Another prisoner said:

‘Preparation for my release is not good. I have asked for ID and a bank account but nothing has been sorted out. I am very worried about how I am even going to survive when I get out!’

A prisoner with two weeks until his release said:

‘I feel let down, misinformed, with no guidance!’

However, there were some positive comments:

‘I am just waiting to hear what hostel I will be going to. I have worked hard to get here. I will continue with my in-cell booklet and will talk to my drug worker and probation. I have learnt my lesson. Thank you to all staff at Featherstone!’

7.5.3 From this small investigation the Board concludes that the approach to resettlement is not consistent across the prison, and requires some further detailed investigation.

8. The work of the IMB

8.1 At the end of the reporting period, the Board had a composition of six members, plus two members recruited just prior to the lockdown period. Despite great efforts to circulate information about the vacancies, public awareness of the Board and its work is scant. It is difficult to recruit those within the working population and from under-represented groups. Remote monitoring has made it difficult to integrate the new members into the full range of Board activities.

8.2 Rota visits were carried out weekly between November 2019 and March 2020 to different areas of the prison against a matrix, to ensure full coverage of monitoring. A written report was circulated to all other members of the Board, as well as to the Governor.

8.3 Board members attended GOOD reviews in the CSU twice a week, to ensure that prisoners were treated fairly, with processes adhered to and correct paperwork recorded. Board members attended a sample of external and internal adjudications of prisoners, as well as ACCT reviews.

8.4 Board members dealt with applications from prisoners twice weekly, to ensure timely completion.

8.5 Twelve monthly Board meetings were held in the reporting year, either in person or using Zoom technology, where key concerns were discussed and the Governor duly responded. As part of a programme of ongoing training and personal development, the Board invited a range of prison staff and prisoners to speak on relevant topics, and members also participated in prison training

events. The two newly appointed members completed the virtual new members' course.

8.6 Members attended a wide range of prison meetings as observers, in order to gain a wider understanding of prison issues. These included: senior management team, security, safer custody, visitors centre forum, equalities, health and safety, business development, segregation monitoring and review group, prison council, prisoner food committee, healthcare, use of force, sustainable development, drug strategy meetings, and full staff briefings.

8.7 The Chair/Vice-Chair attended the West Midlands Area Chairs meetings and virtual Zoom meetings. Members also attended IMB meetings of other prisons in the region and invited their Board members to attend HMP Featherstone Board meetings, to share development ideas. The Chair gave several presentations to newly recruited prison officers on the work of the IMB as part of their induction.

8.8 The Chair attended one serious incident when the command suite was opened, which was concluded within two hours.

8.9 From March until June, there was no physical presence of Board members on the prison site, and all members worked hard to gain information via telephone monitoring. From June until October, a mixture of remote and physical monitoring took place using the resources that were available in the most effective way. This ensured that situations which required face-to-face contact were prioritised for those members who felt comfortable to attend the prison. Four members of the Board volunteered to assist with the 0800 applications telephone line.

8.10 The Board appreciates the provision of good facilities and the positive working relationship it has with the Governor, the senior management team, all the prison staff and prisoners who have cooperated and assisted us in carrying out the monitoring role. Thanks are also due to the IMB clerk for her hard work and efficiency behind the scenes, supporting our monitoring role within the prison.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6 + 2 new appointments
Total number of visits to the establishment	203
Total number of segregation reviews attended	111

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	2	2
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	3	1
C	Equality	4	4
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	9	3
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	3	1
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	4	11
F	Food and kitchens	2	5
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	19	19
H1	Property within this establishment	14	14
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	43	8
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	0	3
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, recategorisation	26	22
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	16	16
K	Transfers	9	6
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	20	8
	Total number of applications	174	123*
	*(Include applications received via 0800 telephone line)		



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