



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Exeter

**For reporting year
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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.

Abbreviations used in the report

ACCT	Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork
BAME	Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic
BWC	Body Worn Camera
CES	Clothing Exchange Store
CRC	Community Rehabilitation Company
CSIP	Challenge Support and Intervention Planning
CSRA	Cell Sharing Risk Assessment
CSU	Care and Separation Unit (Segregation)
DIC	Death in Custody
DIRF	Discrimination Incident Reporting Form
EDMs	Extraordinary Delivery Models

GFSL	Government Facility Services Limited
GOoD	Good Order or Discipline
KW	Keyworker
MDT	Mandatory Drug Tests
OSG	Operational Support Grade
PGD	Prison Group Director
POELT	Prison Officer Entry Level Training
PPO	Prison and Probation Ombudsman
PS	Psychoactive Substances
SaSH	Suicide and Self Harm
SMT	Senior Management Team
SRB	Segregation Review Board
UoF	Use of Force
VP	Vulnerable Prisoner

2. Description of the establishment

2.1 HMP Exeter is a Category B local and resettlement prison. It is a traditional Victorian inner-city establishment built in 1853. HMP Exeter remains under constant pressure due to limited capacity for expansion and deterioration of its structure and fabric. Its operational capacity is 536, although numbers are usually around 480 and the operational capacity has been reduced at times during the year for both scheduled and urgent maintenance work to be undertaken. By the end of the reporting year it was around 420. Most prisoners share a cell and the majority of these have in-cell sanitation with the exception of D wing, which accommodates prisoners on the enhanced level of the incentives and earned privileges (IEP) scheme, who have 24-hour access to communal facilities. The cell sharing risk assessment (CSRA) rating at Exeter provides for between 70 and 86 single occupancy cells. Prisoners at Exeter have access to in-cell telephones.

A feature of HMP Exeter is F Wing, a social care unit holding up to 11 prisoners, which also contains a palliative care suite for terminally ill prisoners and a constant watch cell. F wing often receives prisoners from establishments where this specialist end of life care cannot be provided.

At the end of the reporting year, 6% of the prisoner population were defined as young offenders (between 18 and 20 years), 12% were between 21 and 24 years, 22% between 25 and 30 years, 32% between 31 and 40 years, 17% between 41 and 50 years, 6% between 51 and 60 years, and 4% of the population were over 61 years. The ethnicity structure of the prison can vary marginally from month to month, but at the end of 2020 the BAME population comprised 16% of the population. Data for disability shows that 46% of prisoners presented with a disability.

As a local and resettlement prison Exeter normally has a high turnover of prisoners although COVID-19 has increased the length of stay for certain groups of prisoners. It fulfils a number of functions, not all of which are compatible. It receives both remand and sentenced prisoners (adults and young offenders) primarily from courts within the South West of England. Prisoners arrive with high levels of need and increasingly with mental health issues. Although the regime, opportunities and facilities offered are best suited to those on shorter sentences, an increased resettlement role has meant that higher numbers of longer-sentenced prisoners are transferred from elsewhere. For these prisoners, who have very different needs from the other groups, the regime and occupational/training and work opportunities offered at Exeter are not always well suited to resettlement needs.

2.2 Key providers:

- Healthcare is provided by Practice Plus Group, formerly known as Care UK, with some services contracted out.
- Mental health services are contracted out to the Devon Partnership Trust.
- Substance misuse services are provided by EDP Drug and Alcohol Services.
- The community rehabilitation company (CRC) is the Dorset, Devon and Cornwall CRC.
- Learning and skills activities are provided by Weston College.

- The escort contractor was Geo Amey, but Serco have now taken over the contract.
- Maintenance is provided by Government Facility Services Limited (GFSL).
- Choices Consultancy Services delivers family services.

In addition several voluntary organisations provide a range of smaller services.

HMP Exeter is part of a south west prison group (which also includes HMP Channings Wood, HMP Dartmoor and HMP Guys Marsh) and a number of services and resources are shared.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This report presents the findings of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Exeter for the year 2020. From March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the Board's ability to undertake its normal monitoring. The Board has, therefore, tried to cover as much ground as it can in these difficult circumstances, but inevitably there is less detail and supporting evidence than usual. Ministers are aware of these constraints. Regular information was collected specifically on the prison's response to the pandemic, and that was collated nationally.

3.1.2 The Board's report is based on some direct monitoring of accommodation, facilities and services, remote review of documentation, records and data, external reports (PPO), attendance at some prison meetings, conversations with some prisoners, staff and other agencies, and monitoring of prisoner complaints and dealing with prisoners' applications to the IMB. The IMB has not been able to speak with prisoners as much as in previous years.

3.2 Background to the report

3.2.1 Between the end of March and September 2020 the IMB was monitoring remotely. In this the Board was well supported by the governing governor and SMT who arranged for Board members to receive a daily verbal update from the duty governor, the weekly bulletin, daily handover log and list of prisoners held in the CSU. This information enabled the IMB to maintain an awareness of what was happening at the prison and also provided an agenda for remote monitoring and continued links with key prison staff and areas. During the remote monitoring period the CSU was contacted at least every other day and a verbal update report was given. Healthcare, residential services and safer custody were contacted on a weekly basis and a verbal status report was given. Minutes of meetings were circulated. Some of these arrangements continued throughout the year, but in September some direct monitoring resumed.

Arrangements were implemented to enable prisoners to continue to be able to communicate with the IMB via the applications system. In addition to setting up plans to receive and respond to written applications remotely, HMP Exeter was one of a number of prisons that participated in the 0800 applications phone line service where prisoners could verbally communicate their concern, which was then recorded by a member of an IMB, via the call-handling service, and forwarded to the IMB at the prison. Several members of Exeter's IMB volunteered as call handlers for this service. During this period the Board feels that there was very good opportunity for prisoners to raise concerns with them. Although prisoners at Exeter did not take much advantage of the 0800 applications line, we commend the IMB Secretariat for the introduction of this service and its innovative contribution to enabling IMBs and prisoners to keep in touch. Applications to the Board decreased by 44% in 2020 (see section 8).

The IMB is grateful to the Governor and prison staff for the extraordinary and additional arrangements put in place to enable the Board to continue its monitoring role during the year.

3.2.2 The Board has been impressed by the prison's response to and management of the significant challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and notes how settled the prison has been, given the severe restrictions. Following directives from HMPPS, robust measures were implemented to reduce opportunity for virus transmission and prisoners with health vulnerabilities were given the opportunity to shield. The daily regime was amended, cohorting (a system designed to group and/or separate certain groups of prisoners) was implemented, services reduced and visits curtailed. Throughout lockdown Exeter continued to receive prisoners from local courts. To its credit, during the first phase of the pandemic the prison recorded no cases of the virus and although during the second phase (November onwards) cases were recorded amongst prisoners and staff, numbers were comparatively low and managed actively and successfully to limit the spread more widely (see also paragraph 6.2.2) The Board regrets, but understands, the need for prisoners to be locked in-cell for so many hours each day. The restricted daily regime came at a cost to prisoners in terms of reduced opportunities to engage in education, work and training, social interaction and other activities. The impact on prisoners at Exeter is likely to have been particularly severe because most cells are shared by two people, which not only makes them cramped, but limits opportunity for privacy. This situation lasted for most of the reporting year. The presence of the virus in the community and at the prison had a negative and disruptive impact on both prisoners and staff. In this respect, and through no fault of its own, the prison environment did not always provide an experience conducive to prisoner well-being and resettlement and rehabilitation (see paragraphs 3.3.2 and 3.3.3).

3.2.3 The reporting year also continued to cover a period when the prison was taking forward both a performance improvement plan (PIP), agreed with the prison group director (PGD), and an action plan arising from the last (2018) HMIP inspection report when the urgent notification protocol (UNP) was invoked. Both were the subject of regular monthly review meetings by the SMT and functional heads within the establishment, and the PIP was reviewed quarterly with the PGD. The Board had an open invitation to attend the review meetings. However, in order to deal with the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and successive lockdowns, explicit work on the PIP was suspended, although, where possible, actions were incorporated into "business as usual". At the end of the year, the continuing need for the PIP was being discussed with the PGD. Work on the action plan following the HMIP report has continued.

3.2.4 This has been another challenging year for the prison in terms of staffing despite the very positive efforts to both recruit and retain staff. Due to promotions and secondments the senior leadership team has again not been stable with a number of posts filled on a temporary basis. The impact of this has been aggravated by COVID-19 and staff sickness or the need to isolate or shield. At the end of the reporting year the prison was waiting to hear whether it had been awarded "complexity status", which would result in greater resource to strengthen the SMT. An observation of the Board is that greater strength in depth could help the prison to better withstand some of the staffing challenges at middle and senior management levels. The recruitment of a cohort of Prison Officer Entry Level Training staff (POELTS) early in 2020 did help to improve the staffing situation later in the year once they had completed their training. Nevertheless, the recruitment and retention of staff remains a constant issue for the prison. At the end of the reporting period the staff-in-post position across all officer grades showed the prison to be fully staffed,

which was commendable and reflected the successful efforts to both recruit new and retain experienced staff. However, during the year staff available for duty varied and COVID-19 sickness and isolation requirements compounded this. In December staffing available for duty was 82% of staff-in-post.

3.2.5 In addition to the COVID-19 restrictions, the deteriorating fabric of the prison and projects to maintain, refurbish and improve residential wings and other services have meant that for a significant part of the year the prison has operated with some reduced facilities (gym/sports block, C wing showers, all of D Wing and workshops) and a temporarily reduced operational capacity. Many of these projects have suffered delays and overrun deadlines. By the end of the reporting year the refurbishment of D Wing was six weeks overdue, because of delays by the contractors, and at times GFSL have not been able to keep on top of maintenance matters. Some areas of the prison, including some parts of the residential wings, have at times lacked an appropriate level of heating (see paragraph 5.2.2).

3.2.6 The challenges of the year have highlighted again the significant number of prisoners received at Exeter with existing mental health issues. Given its role (see paragraph 2.1) and background, Exeter is not well equipped to look after such prisoners and referrals to secure units often take too long because places are limited (see paragraph 6.3). In terms of impact, prisoners are often held in inappropriate conditions and the risks to staff and other prisoners are increased.

3.2.7 Some aspects of administrative functioning at the prison have been a matter of concern to the Board during the year and the Board is not always confident that the Governor and SMT are as supported as they need to be for effective performance. An example of this is that arrangements do not always seem to be in place (or implemented) to cover key work or duties during periods of staff absence. Additionally, the recording of some important occurrences, procedures or incidents is sometimes poorly or partially completed (see paragraphs 4.5 and 5.7). Although the activation of body worn cameras (BWCs) has improved since the IMB first raised this in 2018, and in some cases has provided a sound evidential base for subsequent actions, the Board believes that there is still some scope for further progress in this area (see paragraph 5.2.7).

3.2.8 Because of the unsettled year the schedule of prison meetings has been disrupted, but has been maintained. However, the Board is conscious that raised expectations in terms of attendance, multi-disciplinary representation and accountability has created an improvement in the meetings culture at the prison.

3.2.9 In line with a number of other local prisons (but unlike some) across the year, during the operation of restricted regimes, Exeter has seen a downward trend in reported and violent incidents (see paragraph 4.3). The prison has attributed this to the relative “stability” the restricted regime has provided to prisoners and, as a consequence, reduced levels of frustration. In addition to less opportunity for prisoner contact, which was one outcome of the regime, opportunity for violent incidents has also been limited by the implementation of the cohorting system (see paragraph 4.3). This arrangement allocated identified prisoners to different groupings, which were then separated for activities where prisoners could interact such as exercise, collection of meals etc., thereby reducing the opportunity for confrontation and altercation.

Incidents of self-harm have varied monthly over the year, although the general trend to September 2020 showed a steady reduction, but there was an increase towards the end of the year (see paragraph 4.2). However, data shows that a small number of prolific self-harmers account for a disproportionate number of self-harm incidents.

The prison's analysis of incidents does not conclude that COVID-19 restrictions have been a particular trigger for self-harm incidents.

3.3 Main judgements

3.3.1 How safe is the prison?

Paradoxically, in terms of prisoner-on-prisoner violence the prison appears to have become a much safer environment during 2020 (see paragraph 4.3). However, the situation this year has been unusual and complex and the reduction in violence is likely to be because control strategies, designed to limit COVID-19 transmission, also reduced opportunities for violence. Measures taken to reduce risk during the pandemic have shown that the prison has taken prisoner safety seriously. For example, commendable efforts to interrupt the supply of illicit substances, often associated with debt and bullying, from entering the prison reflect a multidimensional approach to improving prisoner safety. The Board is also satisfied that the use of force by staff has been necessary, proportionate and tightly managed throughout the year. However, while vulnerable prisoners appear to be identified and supported, the Board does have some concerns about the case management of two processes specifically designed to safeguard prisoners: ACCTs (see paragraph 4.2) and CSIP (see paragraph 4.4).

That said, the Board is satisfied that the prison is committed to and continues to persevere on a number of fronts to keep prisoners safe.

3.3.2 How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

The structure and fabric of the Victorian prison creates some challenges in terms of appropriate and humane living conditions. For example, the location and environment of the segregation unit is not conducive to the care and rehabilitation of some of the prison's most challenging occupants (see paragraphs 5.2.2, 5.2.5). Delays to basic and scheduled maintenance can also undermine the prison's decency agenda. The presence of the COVID-19 virus in the community and at the prison created additional and unfavourable conditions, such as reduced privacy (see paragraph 3.2.2). However, written communications with prisoners, for example responses to complaints or DIRFs, reflect professionalism, respect and fairness in treatment. Another important element of humane treatment is enabling contact with families and the prison has made efforts to achieve this.

In summary, the staff of HMP Exeter generally do their best to ensure that prisoners are treated in ways which are humane, just and fair. However, some environments, resourcing issues and operational considerations have sometimes prevented this from being achieved fully.

3.3.3 How well are prisoners' health and well-being needs met?

The Board feels that healthcare and the prison responded well and worked effectively together to manage the COVID-19 pandemic and reduce the risks of contracting and transmitting the virus. However, the Board notes again, with

increasing concern, the number of prisoners with serious mental health conditions, and those requiring a transfer to a secure psychiatric hospital. Prisoners with mental health conditions are often held in inappropriate conditions and the risks to staff and other prisoners are increased (see paragraphs 3.2.6 and 6.3). Also of some concern is the proportion of applications the Board receives about healthcare matters, including the healthcare complaints system (see paragraph 6.2.1). This is an area that the Board will monitor closely next year as it has not been possible during 2020.

As experienced in the wider community, and as a result of social distancing requirements, opportunities for prisoners to engage in activities conducive to their well-being have been severely curtailed during 2020.

Overall, the Board is satisfied that the standard of healthcare provision prisoners receive is equivalent to that available in the wider community. Although prisoners have access to a full range of clinical services, COVID-19 restrictions curtailed the operation of some specialist clinical services.

3.3.4 How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

Many prisoners at Exeter are on short-term sentences and, as a result, do not always have sufficient time to make meaningful progress towards resettlement. Additionally, the disruptions to education and workshop activities and the limited accredited work and training currently available at the prison (see paragraph 7.2) means that prisoners are not prepared for release as well as they could be. There are also examples of prisoners at Exeter who appear “stuck” and unable to progress and meet their sentence plan requirements. Limits on movement across the prison estate during the pandemic have intensified this situation. Again, there has been limited keyworker involvement (see paragraph 5.3).

In summary, the situation outlined above perhaps reflects the challenges of a local prison, but also demonstrates that there is currently insufficient investment to support the rehabilitative and resettlement role of the prison.

It remains a concern that many prisoners still leave the prison to homelessness or no fixed abode.

3.4 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

Availability of accommodation on release

Will the Secretary of State exert influence to ensure the provision of suitable permanent accommodation for prisoners upon release, so that no prisoner ends up homeless or with no fixed abode?

Appropriate provision for prisoners with mental health issues

Will the Secretary of State exert influence with colleagues to improve the transfer arrangements for those with severe mental health issues, to an environment more suitable to meet their mental health needs? The Board remains concerned about the difficulties encountered in transferring prisoners with severe mental health issues,

often held in the segregation unit, to an environment where they can be effectively treated and supported. (See paragraphs 5.2.6 and 6.3).

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

Humane regimes post COVID-19

Will the Prison Service ensure the right balance between managing COVID-19 risks and providing sufficient meaningful activity and time out of cell, and that prisons are prepared and encouraged to restore activities as soon as it is safe? There are concerns that prisons will continue to operate restricted regimes “as the new normal” and for longer than is necessary. (See paragraph 3.2.2).

Learning lessons from the pandemic

Will the Prison Service evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on prison operation in order to learn lessons for the future and to retain those positive initiatives that have improved the lives and experiences for prisoners (for example, Purple Visits and streamed funeral services - paragraphs 5.5 and 7.4)?

Data collection and reporting

Will the Prison Service increase support given to prisons regarding how the required data collection and reporting processes can be practically applied to make a positive impact on the operation of the prison and the lives and experiences of prisoners? (See paragraph 4.2).

Prisoner property

Will the Prison Service undertake to improve the arrangements within the prison estate and with its transport contractors in giving prisoners’ property a higher priority and ensure better care and management of property on transfer between prisons? (See paragraph 5.8).

Maintenance and decency

Will the Prison Service review its quality assurance arrangements to improve the effectiveness of GFSL in providing an efficient and responsive maintenance service which supports the Governor’s efforts to embed a dignity and decency agenda? (See paragraph 3.2.5).

TO THE GOVERNOR

Night cover staffing in the CSU

Will the Governor consider deploying dedicated staffing in the CSU to provide night cover and/or increase viewing access to CCTV in the CSU so that it can be viewed from the A2/3 wing offices? (See paragraph 5.2.2).

Case management of ACCTs

Will the Governor arrange for refresher training for all prisoner-facing staff and implement arrangements for more effective monitoring of compliance and case management procedures? (See paragraph 4.2).

Key worker engagement

Will the Governor undertake to improve the priority given to key worker activity and ensure that key workers are given the time to perform their role rather than being allocated to other duties? (See paragraph 5.3).

CSIP

Will the Governor undertake to improve staff “buy in” and commitment to CSIP and monitor compliance and case management? (See paragraph 4.4).

Fitting of bed rails to bunk beds

Will the Governor prioritise the fitting of bedrails to top bunk beds in all cells to reduce the risks of injury and litigation? (See paragraph 5.1.1).

Resettlement and rehabilitation culture

Will the Governor prioritise and increase investment in the rehabilitative and resettlement role of the prison by establishing better education, training and workshop opportunities to improve prospects on release? (See paragraphs 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3).

Communication with the IMB

Will the Governor continue to build on improvements to notify the Board of serious and other notifiable incidents or events?

3.5 Progress since the last report

The Board is pleased to note improvements in the following areas since the last report:

3.5.1 Safety

- Use of force documentation – improvements made in the timely completion of documentation and in quality of reporting (see paragraph 4.5).
- Segregation review boards – improvement regarding the regular attendance of healthcare/mental health (see paragraph 5.2.3).
- Multi-disciplinary attendance at ACCT reviews.
- Staff recruitment – efforts to recruit and retain staff were successful and at the end of the reporting year all officer grades were fully staffed (see paragraph 3.2.4).
- Supply of drugs – successful efforts to reduce the supply of illicit items and drugs into the prison (see paragraph 4.6).

3.5.2 Fair and Humane Treatment

- Dignity and decency agenda – improved expectations with regard to cleanliness have resulted in improvements in communal areas. The scheduling of major maintenance matters has seen improvements to showers and some residential accommodation (see paragraph 5.1.1).
- Complaints process – significant improvement has been made in terms of the presentation and quality of responses. Quality assurance procedures have been strengthened (see paragraph 5.7).
- DIRFs – responses show some improvements in terms of the investigatory process and quality of response.

3.5.3 Health and wellbeing

- Healthcare/mental health staff - improved and now regular attendance at SRBs (see paragraph 5.2.3).

3.5.4 Progress made with other areas raised in 2019

The Board is also pleased to note that there have been a number of other areas of improvement since its last report:

- Prison meetings – an improved meetings culture in terms of attendance expectations (see paragraph 3.2.8).
- Segregation review boards – arrangements have been implemented to hold SRBs for prisoners held beyond the first 72 hour review on fixed days of the week (see paragraph 5.2.3).
- Communication with the IMB – the Board is now routinely provided with the daily handover document (see paragraph 3.2.1) and list of prisoners transferred to or held in the CSU (see paragraph 5.2.3). Communication about other notifiable incidents or events is improving.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Reception has remained surprisingly active during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some transfers between prisons and the resumption of criminal hearings in local courts.

The introduction of a body scanner in September has perhaps created a more challenging environment for newly arrived prisoners though it has contributed to a better atmosphere in the rest of the prison. It has added to the workload of the CSU, where prisoners showing positive on their scan are held under the *Secreted Items Policy* (see also paragraph 5.2). We understand that by the end of the reporting period, the existence of the body scanner had become well-known outside the prison and its deterrent effect was being noticed. However, prison management were also concerned that other trafficking routes were being established.

In our previous report we noted that newly arrived prisoners are located on C4 landing and we were concerned about levels of violence and self-harm there. In the last three months of 2020, C4 again appeared at or the near the top of the monthly figures for self-harm and accounted for a sixth of all the incidents in the prison over those three months, with C3 being the second most frequent location. We remain concerned about C4 as a location for new receptions, but note that the monthly analysis of self-harm data (see paragraph 4.2) includes a particular focus on C4 landing where new arrivals are normally placed.

Under the COVID-19 regime, newly arrived prisoners are isolated on C4 for a quarantine period. Violence and self-harm on that landing continue to be monitored in the relevant staff meetings, but have reduced – although this may be the result of the restricted regime and colour cohorts.

We have not been able to gather evidence this year on how promptly the prison has been able to conduct full induction processes.

We are pleased that the Choices staff have continued to work in the reception area and support family contacts for newly arrived prisoners.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

The average monthly number of ACCTs opened in the year has remained consistent at just under 70 for a prison population which has varied between 420 and 480. However, individual monthly numbers have fluctuated more widely, with over 80 opened in the months of July and October. Monthly safer custody meetings have attributed this to over-cautious staff dealing with new receptions. In most months over half the ACCTs were opened in reception or the first night centre. The Board is sympathetic to such caution and notes that many of the ACCTs were closed either after the first review or soon after. The Board has been told that the increase in the use of suicide and self-harm (SaSH) forms for newly arrived prisoners may also explain a greater use of the ACCT, as the prison tries to respond to some criticisms around ACCTs, highlighted in a PPO report in the previous year. The Board

continues to have some concerns about the case management of the ACCT process.

Incidents of self-harm varied between 35 and 83 a month over the year. Although the general trend, to September 2020, showed a steady reduction, the last three months of the year showed significant increases, with the 83 incidents in December 2020, by far the highest of the year. Prolific self-harmers accounted for a large proportion of such incidents. For example, of these 83 cases, 15 prisoners accounted for 65% of all incidents.

IMB attendance at some safer custody meetings and review of minutes and data shows that at the monthly meetings there is scrutiny of the location of such incidents, the age, ethnic and religious background of the prisoners involved, the reliability of the paperwork involved and the reasons for ACCTs being opened or self-harm occurring. While this analysis might improve understanding of the “who and why” associated with ACCTs, it is not always clear how such information impacts on improvements to the operation, management and accountability of the ACCT process.

The Board was disappointed that the Listener service was suspended in April, but understands that by November this had been re-started, with efforts to recruit additional volunteers. Throughout the year prisoners have had access to the Freephone Samaritans number which they can call at any time from their in-cell phones.

During the reporting year, there were six deaths in custody: four from natural causes, of whom two were in the palliative care suite, and two which were self-inflicted. As is normal practice, all of these are being investigated by the Prisons and Probations Ombudsman (PPO), but none, as yet, have been the subject of an inquest. At the end of 2020 there were 17 outstanding inquests and the continuing impact of the pandemic means that many of these are unlikely to be held in the near future. Notwithstanding that, the Board continued to review preliminary conclusions reached by the PPO and to monitor any recommendations regarding good practice, improvements and areas of the prison which potentially gave rise to concern. The Board attended, as an observer, one inquest during the year.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

There has been a marked reduction in the number of prisoner-on-prisoner violent incidents from the start of 2020, from nearly 40 incidents a month to less than 10 a month in September, but the last quarter of the year saw a steady increase to just over 20 incidents reported in December. In its own analysis of the situation, the prison concluded that the reduced number of violent incidents was due to the restricted regime and the “cohort” system implemented across the establishment. However, the prison felt that it was not the restrictions, as such, that had the positive impact upon violence rates, but rather the additional stability the restrictions provided in that prisoners could rely on the regime to deliver what they were entitled to, when it had been promised, thereby reducing prisoner frustration. However, data suggests that there has been an increase in the number of incidents occurring in-cell, which is

to be expected given that most cells are shared, creating a cramped environment with little privacy (see paragraph 3.2.2).

There has also been a continued decrease in the use of weapons and a subsequent decrease in the severity of injuries suffered by the victims of violence.

Across the year there have been 78 assaults on staff, which have generally been towards the lower end of the scale and involved:

- Physical assault (40)
- Spitting incident (12)
- Object thrown including liquids (9)
- Pushing/barging (17)

Prison analysis of these incidents suggests that many can be seen as a by-product of staff managing prisoners displaying non-compliant behaviour or reacting poorly to staff instructions.

Assaults on staff account for 31% of all violent incidents, a slight increase on the previous year. Twenty of these incidents were deemed serious enough to refer to the police. We commend the prison for the robust stance taken regarding assaults that pass the threshold for police referral.

The introduction of a body scanner in reception, which has restricted the supply into the establishment of unauthorised articles, has the potential to reduce the scope of bullying and thereby the associated violence, but also potentially generates other forms of bullying and intimidation as dominant prisoners generate new sources of currency and trade.

The challenge support intervention programme (CSIP) is designed to both manage and support those prisoners identified as some of the most violent and also safeguard and support those defined as the most vulnerable, not all of whom will be located on B wing. In 2020, and following comments made in our 2019 report, we intended to undertake a period of focussed monitoring on CSIP. Unfortunately this did not prove possible, but the Board's concerns about the effectiveness and management of this strategy remain.

The Board has observed that CSIP referrals and reviews have not always been undertaken in a timely manner and that compliance with the requirement for daily entries into the prison information system (CNOMIS) has been low. In December only 51% of the expected entries were made. The prison is aware that further work needs to be done to increase engagement and "buy in" from staff with regard to CSIP and this is now a focus for improvement driven by the PGD. At the end of the year a Governor's notice to colleagues was issued on the subject of improving CNOMIS entries and CSIP referrals.

4.4 Vulnerable prisoners, safeguarding.

B wing accommodates prisoners who are vulnerable either because of the nature of their offence or because of an underlying condition or risk situation which requires additional safeguarding measures. Employment is provided which is separate from

the rest of the prisoner population. The Board is pleased that while the main workshops could not be used for other prisoners from March 2020, employment sessions continued there for vulnerable prisoners. The occurrence of violent incidents in B wing was much lower than in A and C wings as was the number of ACCTs opened during the year.

Earlier in the year the Board became aware that parts of B wing were being used as “overflow” for the temporary location of some prisoners who did not meet the criteria for location on the wing. An impact of this was that staff and prisoners alike reported some potential safeguarding concerns, although different regimes were facilitated.

The Board has noted that across the year there have been an increased number of gate and lock compromises recorded. Some of these related to broken keys, but of more concern is the number of incidents reporting gates having been left open/unlocked, which has the potential to undermine security efforts and safeguarding strategies designed to keep different cohorts of prisoners safe.

4.5 Use of force (UoF)

Because of COVID-19 restrictions monitoring has been more challenging this year. The Board received copies of the daily bulletins via CJSM from the beginning of the first lockdown, and was able to monitor overall numbers as well as receiving monthly UoF reports. No Board member was able to observe an incident involving use of force during the year. As restrictions were relaxed, members were able to attend some monthly meetings. The meetings, which are chaired by either the governor or deputy governor, take a thorough look at the statistics from the previous month, including whether there any concerns about excessive use of force by individual officers, and if there are any equality or diversity concerns.

At the end of the year one Board member undertook a dip sampling exercise of paperwork, looking at six cases from each month. Overall, the quality and completion of paperwork showed some improvements from the previous year and improved throughout the year. All the paperwork in the sample had been checked by a supervising officer (SO). Where the SO identifies a training need this is taken forward with the individual officer and best practice is communicated. Wider issues are added to the local training syllabus.

The total number of UoF incidents recorded for 2020 was 356, which is 24% down on the previous year (469). Prisoners are regularly offered the “strategy of choices” approach, which evidence from the daily handover record suggests is often successful in defusing a situation and avoiding the need for force to be used. Most incidents were spontaneous rather than planned and, in the sampling exercise, the Board has seen no evidence of force being used inappropriately. Annex A documentation was of variable quality, but most appeared to have been completed in a timely way and it was possible to form a picture of the incident from different perspectives. However, recording of the use of body worn cameras was inconsistent. The most notable issues with the paperwork were:

- missing F213s although this became increasingly rare
- forms not dated and signed by the orderly officer
- the prisoner debrief form being sketchily completed

On the latter point, however, the Board recognises that a number of prisoners refuse to engage after an incident, or refuse to acknowledge that they could have handled the issue in a different way.

4.6 Substance misuse

Availability of illegal substances has been a constant problem with HMP Exeter. The main sources of supply were identified as recalled prisoners, visits, “throw overs”, and incoming mail, including purported legal (R39) mail. During 2020 action has been taken to reduce the availability of several of these access points:

- Throughout the year the prison has continued the practice of photocopying all prisoner mail, except legal correspondence. Prisoners receive the photocopy while originals are stored in personal property. The authenticity of apparently legal correspondence is checked with a phone call.
- Visits were suspended altogether from March to August and this certainly reduced the amount of drugs entering the prison.
- A body scanner was installed in reception in September. This resulted in much improved detection of concealed contraband. Towards the end of the year it was noted that fewer items were being detected; it appeared that the presence of the scanner had acted as a deterrent.
- Towards the end of 2020 it appeared that the supply of illicit substances within the prison was again rising and senior management had concerns that alternative routes into the prison had been established.
- Intelligence-led cell searches have been successful in locating drugs, other contraband and “hooch”.
- The substance misuse team continued to offer programmes to address addiction throughout lockdown on a 1-1 basis to prisoners except those in isolation.

However, MDTs were suspended due to COVID-19 and at the end of the reporting year were still not operating.

As drug-related finds decreased during 2020, alcohol-related (“hooch”) finds increased in comparison to the previous year (up by 17) and analysis suggests that this was a likely impact of the body scanner as well as the successful revision of procedures to intercept PS via R39 mail, which has reduced access to drugs and other substances. The Board commends the prison for its constructive actions in tackling this perennial problem.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 The Board has been pleased to see that, notwithstanding the COVID-19 challenges, and a certain amount of uncertainty about funding, some major work has started to improve the accommodation. It is particularly encouraging that work on the fire alarm systems has begun as part of a major refurbishment of D wing. This is intended to be the start of a rolling programme, with B wing due to be next. It is regrettable, however, that, at the time of writing, the refurbishment was six weeks behind schedule. Work has also been undertaken on the showers in A wing, and in reception.

The Board has been concerned by the frequency with which there were problems with the boilers and the provision of hot water to some of the wings; and with the inconsistent performance of GFSL in dealing with this and other issues. We have also been concerned about the presence of rats from time to time, and the damage they have done to communications and IT networks in some areas of the prison including the control room and F Wing, notwithstanding the best efforts of the prison which has brought in experts to deal with the problem. However, visits to the prison at various times during the reporting year have again identified that rubbish, including food waste, piles up outside the wings and particularly in the kitchen area. This does little to discourage the rats.

The cleanliness of communal areas is something that the Board has raised in previous reports. However, it is pleasing to be able to report that some elements of the decency agenda implemented last year have resulted in improvements to the cleanliness of the communal accommodation, landings and stairways.

During the year a number of prisoners have reported falling out of bed and from the top bunk, thereby sustaining injuries. Such incidents have, in the past, resulted in litigation claims with the prison paying compensation to injured prisoners. It was the Board's impression, following a Board meeting in December 2017, that work had commenced to fit bed rails and ladders to all bunk beds. It would appear that this work has not yet been fully completed, and the Board has been told that the remaining work will require removal of the old beds by contractors. Meanwhile, there remains an injury risk to prisoners and a risk of further litigation against the prison.

5.1.2 We have not been made aware of any significant problems with the provision of clean clothes or bedding during the year, although there was a temporary shortage of socks at one point, but by the end of the reporting year this had been addressed. However, the Board remains concerned about the cold temperatures in the CSU and the occasional lack of proactive arrangements to recognise this and respond by ensuring that there are sufficient stocks of spare blankets readily available (see also paragraph 5.2.2).

5.1.3 The kitchen has dealt with a number of challenges this year, including shortages of staff. Consequently, menu choices had to be reduced at various points in the year, but special dietary needs were met, including during Ramadan. The Board did not receive any complaints about the quality of the food, but a number of

prisoners were unhappy when arrangements were changed so that the main, hot meal, was served at lunch time with a snack in the evening. These arrangements were reviewed at the end of the year and will change for 2021.

5.1.4 Exeter had an electronic application (kiosk system) installed in April 2019, which has been well used by prisoners. A monthly analysis of data, which is presented to the performance and assurance meeting, provides accountability around timeliness of response times to prisoner applications. Access to the wing kiosks proved difficult at times during the year, due to the limited COVID-19 regime and restricted time out of cell. For most of April, as part of infection control measures, the kiosks were closed, but across the year 6000+ applications were made monthly. In total 66,360 applications were received and of these 1645 (2.48%) were not responded to within the expected timeframe. Data analysis shows that some areas of the prison consistently responded promptly to applications received (e.g. pin phones and activities) whereas with some other areas (e.g. residences, newspapers, catalogues and healthcare) there were some delays. However, it is clear from the data that, month on month, improvements were made in these areas to response times. The Board has confidence that this area of prisoner services is being actively managed and reviewed.

5.2 Segregation, special accommodation

5.2.1 In terms of regime, accommodation and prisoner services, the care and separation unit (CSU) was perhaps the area least affected by the COVID-19 arrangements operating elsewhere in the prison. The unit was able to follow the normal CSU regime with access to showering, telephones, kiosk, cell cleaning and exercise. From late March until September monitoring of the CSU was undertaken remotely and consisted of a review of the list of prisoners transferred to or held in the unit, and a telephone conversation with a CSU officer at least every other day. When some direct monitoring resumed, the CSU was visited weekly. Segregation review boards (SRBs) were monitored remotely (see paragraph 5.2.3).

The arrival at the prison of a body scanner appears to have significantly increased the workload and the number of prisoners held in the CSU. New receptions testing positive were located in the CSU under the *Secreted Items Policy* and held there until they could provide a negative test result. Monitoring suggests that such prisoners were normally held for the minimum length of time necessary.

The Board wishes to acknowledge the commitment and patience of the CSU staff who work positively to build relationships with and motivate some of the most challenging, disturbed and demanding individuals at Exeter, in order to support their needs and enable a return to normal location as soon as possible (see also paragraph 5.3). The Board is also grateful to CSU officers who have been willing to remotely update the IMB on CSU matters, respond to our queries and forward documentation.

5.2.2 The CSU is located in a basement on A Wing (A1) containing 8 cells, a special accommodation cell, adjudication room and shower room. The CSU office is at one end of the unit and staffed from 7.30am until 8.30pm (Monday to Friday) and until 9pm on Saturdays and Sundays. Late evening and night-time supervision is covered by officers from A wing upstairs, but CCTV covering the unit is visible from the CSU office only. Since refurbishment was completed in 2019 the CSU has consistently

had the capacity to hold and manage the more difficult prisoners. However, largely due to its location, the CSU remains a dungeon-like, unpleasant and austere environment. In the winter months it is often cold and the Board has occasionally found that not all officers are as understanding as they might be about the impact of this. Again the Board questions how conducive this environment is to the care and rehabilitation of some of the prison's most challenging occupants.

5.2.3 In the first three months of the year the Board managed to attend 36 segregation review boards (SRBs). From April and until the end of the reporting year remote monitoring arrangements for SRBs were in place and the Board monitored 22 reviews. This involved the *Continued Authority for Segregation* document being sent, after the review and via an admin office, to the IMB member on duty. The success of this was variable and dependent on receiving the documents; it did not happen consistently, hence the low number of remotely monitored reviews. This did improve towards the end of the reporting year, but not all reviews during the COVID-19 period were able to be monitored. A concern raised in our 2019 report was that healthcare/mental health was not routinely present at reviews. However, both our direct and remote monitoring this year shows that there has been a significant improvement in meeting this requirement. Likewise, there has been an improvement in the notification arrangements to the IMB relating to prisoners located in the CSU. The Board is pleased to report that this has now become routine.

Following concerns about the arrangements for SRBs raised by the IMB in 2019, in October the prison decided to hold SRBs for prisoners held beyond the first 72-hour review on fixed days of the week (Tuesday and Thursday). The Board welcomed this move, which has the potential to improve the attendance of those who should be present or invited. However, because of limited direct monitoring and shortage of space enabling social distancing in the review room, the Board has not yet been able to monitor the impact of this change.

From its remote monitoring the Board has found that SRB judgements and decisions are reasonable and is more confident that correct procedures are being followed.

Monthly SMARG reports have routinely been sent to the Board.

5.2.4 Records show that the special accommodation cell has been used on seven occasions during the year and the IMB is aware that its use is tightly regulated. However, the Board has not always been routinely informed whenever the special accommodation cell has been used.

Given the increasing numbers located in the CSU under the *Secreted Items Policy*, the Board believes that there have been some occasions during the year when the availability of a "dry cell" (one lacking any plumbing facilities) would have been beneficial to the prison.

5.2.5 As indicated in paragraph 5.2.1, the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions affected the CSU less than elsewhere in the prison. Prisoners continued to have access to education packs, reading materials and distraction packs. Exercise opportunities were limited to the yard, the exercise bike still not having been repaired and therefore unavailable for use. It is the Board's view that the location and limited facilities in the CSU make it difficult to provide an adequate and constructive experience. Issues raised previously over the availability of radios seemed initially to

have improved, but some prisoners have not been able to have radios because of unavailability due to damage inflicted by others.

At times during the year the Board has been concerned about supervision of the CSU particularly during the period from 8.30pm to 7.30am. This concern is accentuated when there are prisoners held on an open ACCT. During this period officers from A wing upstairs provide remote supervision, but CCTV coverage of individual cells is only visible from the CSU office on A1 (see also 5.2.2).

5.2.6 Across the year 2035 days were spent by prisoners in the CSU which is a 29% increase compared with the previous year. However, greater availability of cells and an increase in the number of prisoners received from reception under the *Secreted Items Policy* may account, in part, for this. 46% of days were spent on GOoD, peaking in January and February and 48% of days were recorded as cellular confinement.

440 (22%) of all days spent in the CSU were by prisoners from minority ethnic groups. Although this figure is higher than last year, and proportionally out of range, investigations suggested that it can be accounted for by a small number of individuals from the BAME community with complex issues, or being held until transfer or more suitable accommodation was available. COVID-19 restrictions inevitably had an impact on the movement of prisoners within the prison estate.

During the year 57 prisoners on an open ACCT were held in the CSU. While the Board remains concerned about the segregation of prisoners on an ACCT (see paragraph 5.3.5), monitoring of the monthly SMARG data indicates that initial healthcare safety screening is prompt and compliant and that at least one prisoner was removed from the CSU at initial screening, due to ACCT concerns.

Turnover in the unit remains generally high, which suggests that prisoners are not being kept there longer than necessary. Certainly most SRB documents reference reintegration plans and strategies. However, the Board is aware that for some prisoners, particularly those with complex needs or severe mental health concerns, and where segregation is continued and prolonged, this may be because it has been considered that the unit can provide a positive low stimulus and safer environment until more appropriate and secure accommodation can be found. As in previous reports, the Board is disappointed that a shortage of specialist and hospital placements can result in prisoners waiting far longer than the target two weeks for a secure mental health placement (see also paragraph 6.3).

5.2.7 The Board has not been able to directly monitor adjudications for the majority of the year. However, review of the monthly SMARG document has enabled the Board to monitor data, if not procedure. 2773 adjudications were held across the year, which represents a decrease of 1606 (37%) compared with 2019. The monthly profile was consistent and stable and lacked the peaks and troughs of the previous year. 1251 (45%) of all offences charged were proven on the first appearance, which is an improvement on 2019, but the Board noted a consistent comment in the SMARG analysis, which referred to a need to improve the presented evidence and recommended training in the analysis of CCTV and BWC footage. This is consistent with IMB observations in some other areas (see paragraph 4.5).

2020 was the first full year of data collection around age and adjudication and again showed that the significant majority (66%) referred for adjudication were in the 25+ age bracket. Only 8% of 18-21 year-olds were referred.

It has been a challenging year for the prison to keep on top of adjudications and avoid backlogs, but there is evidence that the prison was monitoring this and were working to achieve this.

5.3 Staff / prisoner relationships, key workers

For obvious reasons, there were limited opportunities during 2020 for detailed observation of staff/prisoner relationships. There is the added challenge at Exeter of a shifting population, exacerbated this year by the temporary closure of D wing and the regular requirement to move prisoners on to make space for new receptions from the courts. There have been consistently good attempts to build relationships with prisoners in the segregation unit, and in F wing (social care unit). Lockdown did enable officers on the other wings to spend more time developing positive relationships with prisoners, particularly when a new tranche of officers took up their posts in the autumn, thereby relieving some pressure.

Review of the daily handover log also indicates that some officers are successfully utilising “five minute intervention” (FMI) and the recently introduced “strategy of choices” approach to de-escalate and engage with challenging and difficult prisoner behaviour (see also paragraph 4.5).

Delivery of the keyworker (KW) scheme has been distinctly intermittent (see also paragraph 7.3). Eighty-five percent of prisoners were allocated a KW, but during the first lockdown period, and with 40 trained KW officers short, there was no active key working taking place. However, arrangements were put in place, when the prison was in Level 4, for a Bronze Command to be assigned to ensure that the most vulnerable prisoners were visited each day. Physical Education Instructors were redeployed to help out with this work when it was not possible to run gym sessions. Across the year only 825 KW sessions were undertaken, which represents 3.5% of the expected delivery. The Board hopes that in 2021 KW activities are reignited and given the high priority required for this potentially beneficial scheme to become sufficiently embedded and start to have the kind of impact it should.

5.4 Equality and Diversity

As with other areas of this report, there have been limited opportunities for direct observation of the equality and diversity work being carried out in the prison. There was also a short hiatus when the equalities adviser had to revert to prison officer duties during the first lockdown and, for example, prisoner forums were temporarily suspended; they resumed in July. We have, however, received the papers that are considered at the monthly meetings, and the minutes of those meetings. There is also evidence that equality and diversity issues are becoming more embedded in the consideration of other matters, a good example being use of force (UoF): at the monthly UoF meetings, the relevant statistics on race, disability and religion are examined with a view to identifying any trends or action needed. There were no noticeable trends. The E&D team was also involved in the development of the

extraordinary delivery models (EDMs) to enable the prison to come out of lockdown restrictions.

Another way in which we have been able to monitor prisoner concerns is through scrutiny of completed DIRFs. During 2020, 22 DIRFs were submitted by prisoners and seven were received from staff. Reviewing these we were satisfied that they were investigated and that appropriate responses were provided.

In terms of outcomes for prisoners the equalities agenda is moving in the right direction, but because of the disrupted environment during the year it has not been possible to monitor whether this has become embedded at a cultural level and across the whole prison.

Issues which the prison needs to address with new prisoners are identified from the equality questionnaires completed in reception, or shortly after. This enables, for example, referrals to be made to the Shannon Trust. It is of concern that poor mental health comprises the highest number of declared disabilities on these forms, reinforcing issues the Board highlights elsewhere in this report (see paragraphs 3.2.6 and 6.3). Across the year an average of 46% of the prisoner population were recorded as having an identified disability. However, this figure is indicative as some prisoners may present with multiple disabilities, which are recorded separately.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Staffing issues in the chaplaincy, which were reported in the previous report, were only resolved mid-way through the reporting period. A new managing chaplain was appointed, but left after a few months for personal reasons. At the time of writing a new managing chaplain is expected to join the team after Easter. Despite the difficulties, the chaplaincy has maintained a presence throughout and continued to provide bereavement and pastoral support. Prisoners have been helped to remotely attend family funerals by video link, which has been much appreciated, and the Board hopes that this can be continued in more normal times. The chaplaincy has also participated in some wider prisoner review areas, such as with ACCTs.

5.6 Incentives and earned privileges

Because of the restricted regimes in place for the majority of the year, and the increased time spent in cell, the decision was taken to suspend the Basic regime status. The Board has not been in a position to monitor the impact of this, but recognises and welcomes the contribution this has made (through the provision of more privileges) to prisoners' wellbeing and to supporting a humane environment.

5.7 Complaints

Six hundred and thirteen complaints relating to issues at Exeter prison were received in 2020, which is marginally less than in 2019. Seventy-five percent were responded to within the expected timeframes. By the end of the reporting year 19 complaints were outstanding. The Board acknowledges that there have been a number of in-year staffing changes in the office which deals with prisoner complaints.

A number of prisoner applications received by the Board raised some concerns about the complaints system operating at the prison in terms of complaints being received by the relevant admin area and/or responded to in a timely manner.

From October (but backdated to July) the Board started remotely monitoring a sample of six complaints and their responses each month. It was very noticeable that significant improvements had been made since the previous report in terms of the presentation and quality of responses. All complaints reviewed were word processed, which not only improved legibility, but conveyed a sense of professionalism and showed that the complaint had been taken seriously. The best responses reflected some evidence of investigation and a meaningful response, which addressed all the issue(s) raised and provided a polite and factual response with advice. Outcomes for prisoners in terms of the quality of response has improved. However, it was not always possible to monitor the timeliness of responses because most of the individual forms reviewed did not record the date the complaint was received. Some response forms were not signed indicating who had responded and some were not dated.

As part of its quality assurance procedures the prison also quality assures six completed complaints monthly and feeds back to the individual who responded to the complaint, as required.

5.8 Property

Applications to the Board regarding property accounted for 11% of all applications received. They continue to be difficult for the Board to resolve satisfactorily and frustrating for the prisoner. Evidence from applications suggests that there are still some issues about property on transfer to the prison. These range from delays in receiving property to items actually being missing, often including legal papers and personal items. Prisoner complaints about this are sent to the transferring prison, which requires their co-operation, and it is not unusual for the complaints office to have to make numerous requests for a response, by which time weeks have elapsed since the transfer took place and tracking is very difficult. Internal transfers, particularly when a prisoner is moved to the CSU, can also be problematic, especially when property is not packed by the individual. There can also be long delays in receiving some property items when in the CSU. Overall, the Board believes that issues around prisoners' property do not always receive the priority, care, and investigation that they should and that this is a systemic issue across the prison estate. Centrally initiated improvements to systems and procedures could help to avoid some of the common property concerns raised by prisoners. Exeter paid £323.31 in compensation to prisoners for lost property during the reported year.

6.0 Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The Board would usually conduct a survey, by conducting interviews with prisoners, to help assess the quality of healthcare in the prison. However, it has been impossible to do this this year because of the pandemic. The Board's assessment of the quality of healthcare provided in the prison is therefore largely based on reports from and discussions with the heads of healthcare and mental health, with whom the

Board has kept in close touch during the year. Prisoner applications have also provided a source of feedback.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 Primary care is provided by Practice Plus Group, formerly known as Care UK. Healthcare services normally operate seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Clinics, including dentistry, physiotherapy, radiology and ophthalmology, are held from Monday to Friday. Prisoners can book their own appointments using the wing kiosks. During the year there were 23,946 face-to-face healthcare appointments. Staffing has generally been good during the year and at year end there were no vacancies.

In 2020 18% per cent of all applications received by the IMB raised issues about healthcare. Although fewer applications were received (see section 8) the percentage was proportionally consistent with 2019 applications data. Healthcare remains the highest identified category of applications received by the IMB. Healthcare's approach to dealing with concerns and complaints follows a tiered approach. During the year 188 prisoner "concerns" were registered and 27% of these were responded to within 5 days. Of the remainder, 14% were upgraded to either a stage 1 complaint or complaint status. Via their applications some prisoners have raised with the IMB the issue of overdue responses.

6.2.2 Generally, Practice Plus Group seem to have coped well during the COVID-19 pandemic and staff have worked hard to ensure that prisoners continued to receive good healthcare and were protected from contagion as much as possible. Prisoner (and sometimes staff) co-operation with social distancing, and later mask-wearing, has been variable, but healthcare staff have tried to ensure compliance.

Practice Plus Group staff adopted PPE from March, much earlier than operational staff and prisoners, for whom mask-wearing was not mandatory until 30 October (except for prisoners meeting official visitors, where mask-wearing for both was mandatory from early July). There were no significant difficulties in obtaining PPE.

There were no cases of COVID-19 in the prison until the end of October, when Practice Plus Group and the prison's senior management team liaised with Public Health England (PHE) to discuss outbreak control. By 6 November, eight prisoners and 19 staff had tested positive and 70 staff were self-isolating. Up to 31 December there had been 20 confirmed COVID cases amongst the prisoner population. It is to the prison's credit that the prison remained COVID-19 free for so long. There were very few cases of COVID among healthcare staff. On-site COVID-19 testing for staff started in November.

Any prisoner presenting with COVID-19 symptoms was isolated for 14 days (subsequently 10 days when the isolation period shortened in the general population), with their cell mate if they had one, and tested for the virus. They were monitored twice a day by healthcare staff and any prescribed medications were delivered to their cells. No prisoners were transferred to hospital for treatment for

COVID-19. New receptions and prisoners transferred from other prisons were placed in a “reverse cohort” and isolated for 14 (later 10) days as a precautionary measure.

6.2.3. The Board was aware of a number of matters which have had an impact on the healthcare experience of prisoners:

- access to the wing kiosks, and therefore the opportunity to book healthcare appointments, has sometimes proved difficult this year, due to the limited COVID-19 regime and restricted time out of cell.
- smoking cessation clinics had to be suspended from March, but nicotine replacement therapy remained available.
- about 50% of prisoners were allowed to have some medications “in possession” during the COVID regime, each prisoner having first been risk-assessed. However, there are no secure storage facilities in cells. In-possession medication procedures were reviewed and strengthened following a couple of incidents where prisoners were found to have hoarded medications.
- since March, 832 healthcare consultations have taken place by telephone, using prisoners’ in-cell telephones, in order to reduce person-to-person contact; where this has not been appropriate, consultations have taken place in person. The average waiting time to see the GP was seven days.
- prior to the lockdown in March, there were still missed appointments because of a shortage of “runners” to escort prisoners. This remained a problem at times under the restricted regime because of staff absences. In 2020 there were 1089 “did not attend” missed appointments.
- prisoners arriving from court on Fridays and Saturdays still experienced delays or interruptions to their medication and difficulties obtaining medical notes.
- the lack of an on-site pharmacy also meant that prisoners had to wait 24 hours for their prescription and medication. A new full-time pharmacist will be starting in January 2021 and the Board hopes that this will improve this situation for prisoners.
- during the COVID-19 restricted regime, medication hatch times have been extended to facilitate timely delivery of medications. Prisoners in isolation have their medications delivered to their cells.
- the Board was pleased to see a primary care discharge coordinator appointed to manage prisoners’ medications and liaison with community healthcare on release. This has also helped with prisoners being transferred to other prisons.
- there have been fewer suspected PS incidents (76) requiring urgent medical assistance (prevalence of PS in the prison has reduced during COVID-19, see paragraph 4.6). Additionally, there have been fewer ambulance attendances as staff have become more experienced at dealing with the effects of PS.

6.2.4 Dentistry. The dental service is provided by Time for Teeth, which normally operates two days a week. From March there was an emergency service only (as in the wider community). There were also difficulties with any treatment involving aerosol-generating procedures (AGPs) as the prison did not have the ventilation equipment necessary to ensure safe working. A ventilation unit was subsequently sourced. The dental team have been seeing routine patients for examinations and

will return to AGPs now that the ventilation is in place. The average waiting time to see the dentist was 3.5 weeks.

6.2.5 Optician. In normal times prison opticians provide a service two days a month, but as in the general community, from March they operated an emergency service only. From June the optician has been running clinics at 60% of the normal contracted sessions. The average waiting time to see the optician in 2020 was 3.4 weeks.

6.2.6 Physiotherapist and podiatrist appointment waiting times were 4.6 weeks and 4.25 weeks respectively.

6.3. Mental Health

The mental health service is provided by the Devon NHS Partnership and the mental health team provide seven-day-a-week care, with cover from an on-call service. Staff include psychiatric nurses, a learning disability nurse, psychologists who can provide guided self-help, and a psychiatrist three days a week.

It has been a difficult and very busy year for the mental health team, as many prisoners have struggled with mental health problems during the restricted COVID-19 regime. Although self-harm incidents (see also paragraph 4.2) increased towards the end of the reporting year, it is worth noting that figures can be distorted when there are individuals in custody who are prolific self-harmers. In 2020 the number of self-harm incidents per month varied considerably from 17 to 78 (78 being December, understandably a stressful time for prisoners). However, these statistics are not noticeably worse than during 2019. During the first lockdown, prisoners were relatively calm and understood the reasons for the restricted regime, but during the summer when conditions had improved on the outside, they became more restive and self-harm increased. On the other hand, some prisoners felt safer with fewer prisoners out of their cells at the same time and a less stressful atmosphere on the wings. Incidents of violence reduced markedly compared with 2019 (see also paragraph 4.3).

During the reporting period the following matters were noted:

- since March, staff tried to minimise face-to-face contact where possible to reduce risk of contagion. Urgent cases were seen and other prisoners received a letter explaining that they would be seen as soon as practicable.
- all ACCTs are reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team including mental health, and prisoners are seen within the first 24 hours. Referrals, which can come from any staff working with the prisoner, averaged 32.2 a week and were triaged according to need. During 2020 there were 1663 referrals for mental health assessment. There were 67 ACCT reviews in November (they usually average around 40-50 per month), thought to be because levels of anxiety among prisoners were higher after the first outbreak of COVID-19 cases in October. ACCT audits were carried out each week (see also paragraph 4.2).
- since March, psychologists conducted initial assessments on the telephone. All face-to-face prisoner support groups were cancelled.

- prisoners were given written advice to support their mental health, such as distraction techniques.
- mental health staff delivered on-site training on suicide awareness to new uniformed staff.
- it has not been possible to run any but essential training in the prison in 2020 and therefore a planned training programme for all operational staff in mental health awareness has not taken place.

There remain problems with transferring prisoners with severe mental health issues to a secure psychiatric unit even though the referral system aims to transfer prisoners within 14 days. The Board has mentioned this in every report for the last five years. Transfer times seem to have improved only slightly during 2020: of the 19 transfers from Exeter, five were within the recommended 14-day limit, five waited for more than 40 days and one for 89 days. The average waiting time was 29.5 days. The Board feels strongly that prisoners who have been assessed as needing secure psychiatric care must be transferred swiftly; the CSU is no place for acutely ill psychiatric patients (see also paragraph 5.3.6).

6.4 Social care

F wing holds those prisoners in need of social care. Referrals for social care can come from a variety of sources, including self-referral, and these are collated by Care First, then assessed by an occupational therapist and social worker before care is allocated. Prisoners who need help with daily living activities may also receive assistance from trained prisoner “buddies”. However, F wing holds elderly and or clinically vulnerable prisoners and the Senior Management Team sought to reduce the risk of COVID-19 contagion by restricting all non-essential footfall as well as prisoners’ time out of cell and interaction with other prisoners. Buddies have thus not been on the wing since March, although the wing orderly was made a temporary resident to avoid cross-contamination between wings. There have been no cases of COVID-19 on F wing.

F wing also hosts a palliative care suite, which enables end-of-life care in a supportive environment, with a GP lead and specialist in palliative care, supported by the local hospice service.

6.5 Exercise, time out of cell, gym

Time out of cell has been a concern to the IMB since the restrictions to prevent and/or suppress the transmission of COVID-19 were implemented. The impact on prisoners at Exeter is likely to have been particularly severe because most cells are shared by two people, which not only makes them cramped, but limits opportunity for privacy and personal space. Pre-COVID-19 full-time workers spent approximately 8.5 hours a day out of cell and unemployed prisoners 3 hours. During the COVID-19 restricted regime prisoners averaged 1.5 hours a day for fresh air/exercise and domestics, with an additional 30 minutes for collecting meals and medication. Outbreaks of the virus further reduced time out of cell and with numbers isolating and limited staff availability, sometimes the only unlock time safe to facilitate was for collection of meals and medication.

For most of the year access to the gymnasium was limited in alignment with government restrictions on wider community access and use of gymnasiums. PEIs provided in-cell activities with some written guidance and this continued throughout the year. When guidelines allowed, some outdoor PEI led exercise was available. Use of the gym at Exeter has always been very popular and the restrictions on its use during the pandemic will have impacted on the wellbeing of some prisoners. PEIs were regularly redeployed to support across the prison including with keyworker duties (see paragraph 5.3).

6.6 Drug rehabilitation

See paragraph 4.6.

6.6 Soft skills

In a year during which some prisoners have been locked up for almost 22 hours a day for 9 months, and strategies have been implemented to minimise direct and personal contact, it should come as no surprise that there has been a sharp deterioration in activities under this heading.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

Education is provided by Weston College and evaluation shows that courses are well regarded by prisoners. Unfortunately at the start of 2020 education was often disrupted when staff shortages meant that prisoners could not be escorted to the education block and therefore missed classes.

After lockdown in March all Weston College staff were withdrawn from the prison. However, education packs were made available to prisoners to complete in cell within two weeks, for which they received the usual payment. The work was marked by Weston College tutors. The Board was disappointed that the educational support for prisoners was so limited during lockdown. From November some Weston College staff returned to working within the prison. Although no face-to-face teaching took place learners were able to access tutors by phone and there was also some peer support.

Despite not having an orderly to help, library facilities have continued with stocks of books, changed regularly, placed on each wing. The library, which was closed for much of the previous year after flooding, has been repaired but has not been accessible to prisoners for most of the year.

7.2 Vocational training, work

The main workshop had closed in November 2019 because of staffing difficulties. This has seriously limited the work opportunities for prisoners, but has offered the prison the opportunity to reconsider, for the future, the range and scope of vocational programmes offered. The Board welcomes the prison's approach to this, focussing on skills relevant to job opportunities in the South West, such as construction. Discussions have also started about developing a recycling/upcycling programme. The IMB will monitor these developments through 2021, but hopes that this area can

now become a priority for the prison because of its importance in providing experiences which could support the resettlement of prisoners in the community.

The VP workshop has operated throughout 2020 although with numbers limited in each session. This is mainly packing contracts, e.g. small DIY items, for external businesses.

7.3 Offender management, progression

Unfortunately, there has been limited face-to-face key worker and OMU worker activity during lockdown (see also paragraph 5.3). The prison acknowledges that this is so. A bold attempt was made in the autumn to reactivate the scheme, but this was defeated by the increase in COVID-19 cases. The IMB accepts, but regrets, that the constraints of staff shortages, staff off sick or isolating, combined with the constraints of a limited, COVID-19 safe regime have inevitably had an impact on both offender management and release planning. However, the Board is concerned that the key worker scheme has become a casualty of COVID-19 and has still not been embedded to a point where it begins to achieve its potential and have the kind of impact it could. Too often it appears that key worker activity is not given sufficient priority.

7.4 Family contact

Face-to-face visits were halted completely during the first lockdown in accordance with national practice. From August very limited visiting was resumed. No specially designated “family visits” took place owing to the need for social distancing. However, “storybook dads” was introduced in the autumn. From October “purple visits” (by video-link) were arranged for some prisoners. Although numbers have been small, and uptake not what was anticipated, this is a welcome development in terms of providing opportunity to maintain family links and the Board hopes it will be continued even when normal family visits become possible again.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Lockdown and consequent restrictions have seriously curtailed work within the prison to prepare for release. However, the CRC, Catch 22, has remained on site throughout and has made commendable efforts to continue work, albeit through the door or by telephone. Their part in induction, which includes assessment of resettlement needs, has been completed via an in-cell questionnaire. Catch 22 usually then engage with prisoners about 12 weeks before release and assist with planning. During lockdown this has still happened though primarily through written communication and discussion through cell doors. Some prisoners who need extra support are also offered telephone support via in-cell phones.

At the beginning of the year the prison was continuing to operate the “checkout lounge”, a monthly event in the visits hall inside the prison where prisoners nearing release can meet agencies to help with release planning such as accommodation, training, and mentoring; and the “departure lounge”, held on weekdays in the visitors’ centre outside the main gates, which is available to men as they are released and offers practical help with train times, clothing, phone charging, etc. The checkout lounge activities have not operated since COVID restrictions began, but the officer in charge of the departure lounge has attended to provide the same services in reception on release day.

Catch 22 has good relationships with local housing departments, especially in Cornwall. During the first lockdown the move to house all rough sleepers helped secure accommodation for prisoners on release. However, the situation worsened again when that programme ended. There continues to be an acute shortage in the South West of accommodation of various kinds: hostel, supported, or fully independent, for single men.

8. The work of the IMB

Throughout 2020 the Board has tried its best to fulfil its monitoring function and role at HMP Exeter. This consisted of a combination of direct and remote monitoring covering all the required areas (see paragraph 3.2.1). We have been fully supported in this by the governor and his SMT and the Board has been grateful to the various governors for their prompt responses to matters or queries raised in rota reports.

Each Board member has had responsibility for a special interest area and matters of concern were raised either directly with the governor or with the relevant head of service.

Throughout the COVID-19 period the Board met informally, by Zoom, every two weeks and the governor was able to join the Board on some occasions by teleconference. This enabled the Board to share its monitoring outcomes and identify any areas of concern. By the end of the reporting period the Board had returned to its formal monthly meeting, via Zoom, but continued with its informal update meeting.

Two members of the IMB participated in the national 0800 applications line project (see also paragraph 3.2.1).

The Chair participated in the regular Area Chairs' meetings.

The Board recruited five additional members.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	13
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6
Total number of visits to the establishment:	
• January – March	38
• April – December	37
Total number of segregation reviews attended	
• Direct monitoring (Jan – April)	36
• Remote monitoring	22

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year 2019	Current reporting year 2020
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	11	8
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	1	3
C	Equality	8	4
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	15	3
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	13	7
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	11	1
F	Food and kitchens	8	1
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	42	23
H1	Property within this establishment	24	7
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	7	7
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	7	4
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	10	10
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	32	14
K	Transfers	12	6
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	28	30
	Total number of applications	229	128

- Applications to the Board decreased by 44% in 2020. This is despite the Board writing to all prisoners, on two occasions, explaining that although the IMB may not be visiting, because of COVID-19 restrictions, they were still monitoring and available to receive, investigate and respond to applications. Prisoners were also informed about the IMB 0800 applications line. Use made of this line in Exeter was disappointingly low (5) notwithstanding the availability of in-cell telephones. We have not yet been able to investigate with the prisoner population the reasons for this or the reduction in paper applications and plan to do this via a prisoner survey in early 2021.
- Healthcare, as a category, continues to be the subject of the highest number of applications.



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