

Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Northumberland

**For reporting year
01 January 2020 – 31 December 2020**



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Contents

Introductory sections 1 - 3	Page
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of establishment	4
3. Executive summary	5
Evidence sections 4 – 7	
4. Safety	8
5. Humane treatment	11
6. Health and wellbeing	15
7. Progression and resettlement	17
The work of the IMB	21
Applications to the IMB	22

Introductory sections 1 - 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

- i. The issues around the location and size of HMP Northumberland (HMPN) change little from year to year, with distance from other prisons and hospitals continuing to affect transfers and movements. The age of most buildings (over 40 years) was again reflected in the extensive programme of works carried out each week throughout 2020 (see section 5.1).
- ii. The certified normal accommodation of 1,348 category C prisoners also remains unchanged, with an average population in December 2020 of 1,222. This reduced figure has been helpful in the exemplary management of COVID 19 in the prison. There was a slight shift in the make-up of the prison, with 89% (as opposed to just under 83% in 2019) of prisoners classing themselves as White British; of the remaining 17%, just under 3% identify as Traveller or Gypsy and 4.5% were foreign nationals, the latter being an increase on 2019's figure of 3%. Eighteen percent of the prisoner population is either under 25 or over 55. This breaks down to 9% in each category.
- iii. Accommodation continues to be provided in 16 residential house blocks (five vulnerable prisoner wings, a 40-place drug and alcohol recovery unit and 10 mains wings. The 20-place wing for men on release on temporary licence (ROTL) and/or with category D status, reopened in 2018, continues to benefit the mains prisoners.
- iv. The prison is in its ninth year of operation by Sodexo. The healthcare contract has been delivered by Spectrum since April 2020.
- v. Services for prisoners nearing release are organised by Northumbria Community Rehabilitation Company (part of Sodexo). Volunteers and staff at the North East Prison After Care Society (NEPACS) continue to support prisoners' families.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

The evidence for this report has been gathered during a global pandemic which has required isolation and very limited movement for large parts of the year in large parts of the country. The North East in particular was subject to tier three, followed by tier four, restrictions in the second part of the year as well as the national lockdowns in March and again in December.

Face-to-face monitoring took place between January and 23 March; thereafter monitoring remained remote until 21 June. From 21 June to the introduction of the tier three restrictions on 12 October, a combination of face-to-face and remote monitoring was used due to the North East's initial placement in tier two restrictions, subsequently being heightened to tier three – the most restrictive tier at that time – on 2 December. On 20 December, tier four was introduced, and the North East was placed in it. As a result, members continued to monitor remotely to the end of the reporting year.

The Board has, therefore, tried to cover as much ground as it can in these difficult circumstances but inevitably there is less detail than usual. The prison has focused on keeping men safe and this has meant restricted regimes and social visits. That said, the prison has used technology to support in-cell learning, social visits and communication with the outside world in order to support prisoner's wellbeing and daily life.

The management of COVID-19 in the prison has possibly been the most impressive act taken to support prisoners. The prison's close working relationship with Public Health England and its capacity to act quickly on advice, enables us to report that there have been no deaths solely related to COVID-19 amongst prisoners in the reporting year (see section 4.2). At the year end there were no positive cases amongst the prison population. The decisive leadership at the prison should be commended for this.

It should also be noted that the response to the very difficult circumstances relating to the management of COVID-19 and reducing infection was embraced positively by the majority of prisoners. Their response is commendable.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

The Board feels the prison is a safe environment where many of the prison's initiatives are supporting prisoners to feel safe. The ongoing work led by the safer custody team has supported prisoners in reducing violent behaviour and the data demonstrates there has been a significant decline in violence (see section 4.3).

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

The Board's view is that prisoners at HMPN are treated fairly, and that many staff exercise scrupulous care in dealing with those who are extremely vulnerable. This is particularly evident in the segregation unit, where staff often deal with the most

challenging and vulnerable prisoners. Rota reports reflect, with high levels of frequency, the care, knowledge and expertise of staff at all levels.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

In most cases prisoners' health and wellbeing needs are being well met. The management of the COVID-19 outbreak is an excellent example of this. The decision to focus on keeping prisoners safe, even though it required some robust interventions was, in our opinion, the right one. This has been supported by the fact that the COVID-19 cases amongst staff and prisoners were relatively low with occasional spikes.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

The inevitability of restrictions has meant a significant reduction in opportunities to engage in education, work and appropriate training. Although the prison has worked hard to find alternative solutions, external restrictions mean these are yet to be implemented.

The current national circumstances related to the pandemic make opportunities for employment and training extremely limited, if available at all. This, combined with high unemployment rates in the North East, and the restrictions on opening for many businesses as a result of the pandemic, give very few realistic chances of gainful employment or training for many prisoners on release.

3.3 Main areas for development

Prioritising opportunities for men to re-engage with learning, employment and training to mitigate the disadvantages of lockdown and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on preparation for release.

TO THE MINISTER

Following on from our previous concern, voiced in our 2019 report, regarding a lack of sufficient places within specialised facilities for men with severe mental health (MH) needs in the North East, the Board feels that this is still a pertinent concern. This concern was illustrated by one prisoner's period in segregations, extending over 100 days due to no available places within a local specialist MH facility.

TO THE DIRECTOR

Whilst the Board fully supports the protective measures deployed by the prison to proactively mitigate any potential negative consequences of the pandemic, we welcome the return to enhanced regimes and recommencement of social visits for the men at HMPN at the earliest possible opportunity.

3.4 Progress since the last report

Since the last report there have been a number of notable steps despite the impact of the global pandemic:

- i. The healthcare contract has been awarded to Spectrum and this has meant a more cohesive approach to provision, including medical provision on site on the residential house blocks' wings. This saves time for men needing to attend healthcare appointments and as a result reduces loss of earnings
- ii. Adherence to, and employment of, systems within the prison have stabilised and this is reflected in the reduction of violence, and self-harm (see section 4.2).

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

The prison management's stated priorities for the year included:

- Reduce the availability of drugs through use of intelligence to disrupt supply
- Increase staff visibility and engagement with prisoners to help them feel safe and therefore be more likely to engage with the regime
- Adhere closely and consistently to processes such as the challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP), as this sends a clear message that unacceptable behaviour is not tolerated
- Keep prisoners occupied to minimise boredom and the likelihood of disruption and poor behaviour

Progress on some initiatives was inevitably halted whilst movement across the site was restricted. This meant access to Listeners was limited, although the Samaritans' helpline continued to be available. However, a peer support level 2 qualification was developed for both mains prisoners and vulnerable prisoners (VP), enabling men to learn, through a mentor, how to help other prisoners in violence reduction, drugs strategies and coping mechanisms.

4.1 Reception and induction

Throughout 2020 a steady flow of prisoners continued to arrive almost every day, often as many as 10 at once, and up to 18 on the same day. Recognising that the most likely ingress for COVID-19 was via reception, managers immediately imposed rigorous controls in that area. This meant, as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) pointed out, that peer mentors could not be present to support new arrivals, and we accept that the quality of experience for new arrivals may have been affected. On the other hand, during the short period when visits were possible, members often visited reception to enquire about property issues: we saw nothing to change our view that men arriving at HMPN are treated with courtesy and consideration.

It was essential to ensure that new arrivals were placed in quarantine for the required period (14 days initially) which prompted the prison to identify separate parts of residential house blocks for these "reverse cohorts". Towards the end of the year we obtained detailed information which confirmed numbers as follows:

Table 1: Reverse cohort statistics for the final quarter 2020

Month	Intake Isolation		*Close Contact Isolation	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
October	25	80	2	41
November	19	55	9	171
December	6	60	1	118

*i.e. close contact with men who later tested positive

We have included all isolation figures to indicate the scale of the task facing the prison. Initially two residential house block wings were identified for this purpose

(one for mains prisoners, one for VPs) but up to four were used. We congratulate staff on the effective management of these groups of men, alongside continuing to operate residential house block wings under the revised regimes which the pandemic demanded. Inevitably, the usual induction process was curtailed, although a significant number of arrivals had previously served sentences and needed only a brief introduction to prison life.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

During 2020, there were four deaths in custody recorded at HMPN. Two of them were men with pre-existing conditions who died in hospital, whilst a third collapsed and died on site from what was later confirmed as natural causes. The fourth death appeared to be by the prisoner's own hand, although the final Ombudsman reports have not yet been received. One of the four who died, as the result of a significant stroke, was also COVID-19 positive.

Reports on two earlier deaths were received from the Ombudsman in June 2020 and another at the time of writing this report, January 2021, regarding a death in March 2020. The Ombudsman made conclusions that HMPN staff could not have foreseen these deaths. Recommendations were made to healthcare, which we aim to monitor in the upcoming reporting year.

There has been a steady and sustainable decline in incidents of self-harm across 2020. In January 2020 there were 50 incidents carried out by 27 prisoners. This reduced to 27 incidents carried out by 21 prisoners in June, and there was a further reduction to 23 incidents by 17 prisoners in December.

Prisoners on assessment care in custody and teamwork plans (ACCTs) are managed successfully, targeting individual needs and being reviewed appropriately in line with published guidelines. At the time of writing, there are 14 open ACCTs with an average of nine open at any one time throughout the reporting year. This is a significant improvement on two years ago when the average figure was at least double this and often more. The Board has established this is due to a combination of better management on the residential wings of day to day issues, and significantly stronger leadership and management of the ACCT process.

Our monitoring of prisoners in these groups has been mainly on a remote basis. Table 2 shows the figures for the year:

Table 2: Self-harm and ACCT statistics 2020

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Incidents	50	61	56	32	32	27	34	38	17	21	32	23
Prisoners	27	34	35	26	22	21	21	22	13	16	25	17
ACCTs opened	45	54	58	32	40	39	44	36	26	33	38	30

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

We had limited opportunity in 2020 to expand on the figures available to us, by direct observation or conversations with prisoners. As we observed in the previous paragraph, to some extent they speak for themselves. We have no information on how many men chose to self-isolate before the first lockdown or during brief periods when a slightly more relaxed regime was introduced. The figures for assaults and

adjudications (not all of which relate to assaults, as they include finds) show the ongoing picture throughout the year:

Table 3: Assaults and adjudications statistics 2020

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Assaults	29	16	20	14	12	12	9	13	4	6	11	6
Adjs (Proven)	292 (108)	309 (119)	173 (71)	193 (102)	170 (91)	249 (133)	119 (74)	129 (52)	114 (56)	96 (49)	94 (35)	131 (52)

4.4 Vulnerable prisoners

Vulnerable prisoners continue to be managed safely across five separate residential units. These men have access to separate libraries and education facilities and have separate visiting times to ensure appropriate safety measures are in place.

4.5 Use of force

We have not attended any use of force (UoF) meetings in the last year and the figures for the last quarter suggest that incidence rates are low.

Table 4: UoF statistics for the final quarter 2020

Month	Number of instances	Number of days
October	8	7
November	15	8
December	14	10

4.6 Substance misuse

The availability of drugs inside the prison has been a continuing concern in recent years, despite the introduction of the counter measures documented in our previous reports. Towards the end of the year, we checked the information relating to “finds” on a daily basis. Figures for October highlighted the following:

- “Fermenting liquid” was found seven times on five days, mainly in cells.
- Nine separately identified drugs were found on 37 occasions on 20 days; five finds of powders and tablets were also retrieved. Almost all of these were in incoming mail addressed to different prisoners on all but four wings.

This represents a sustained effort to send drugs into the prison, despite the continuing vigilance of staff who monitor mail and search cells, often with dogs. We are under no illusion that this does not reflect every attempt, as even during lockdown, with no visits, men presented displaying the effects of substance abuse.

At the beginning of the year, the Board were disappointed to see the rate of positive mandatory drug tests (MDTs) rising (14.71% in January, 20.9% in February, 26.87% in March). This is in part due to the addition of a wider range of tests for a wider range of drugs. The ongoing pandemic has restricted the use of MDTs so it is not possible to compare figures for the following months. The Board will monitor this in the coming year.

We have observed significant success as the result of the combined efforts of mail sensors and drugs detection continues to yield positive results, with the drug dogs regularly finding attempts to bring drugs into the prison either through post, parcels or overthrows. Improved patrolling of the extensive prison estate, by prison staff, has also improved detection of illicit parcels.

5. Fair and Humane Treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The age of most buildings (over 40 years) was again reflected in the extensive programme of works carried out each week throughout 2020. During the year there have been issues with water supply and heating, both of which have been managed extremely well and neither of which is particularly unusual for an estate of this size and age. Additionally, extensive roofing work has taken place to improve the working conditions in the workshops and a programme of technology installation to enhance prisoner communication with friends and family.

5.2 Segregation, special accommodation

The management of the care and segregation unit (CSU) is a useful indicator of how well good order and safety are managed across the prison.

For the first three months of the year, members visited regularly and noted an occupancy level ranging from 10-15 cells out of 18 in January and February, reducing to single figures in March. The levels stayed low for the rest of the year, sometimes as low as one to three. No special accommodation was used.

During January to March, members attended 23 segregation review boards and our reports reveal two key factors also relevant to the rest of the year:

- A handful of men remained close to and beyond 42 days, until either release or transfer. One of them was certified and eventually transferred for specialist mental health treatment; regrettably, this was not the only instance in 2020, and at the time of writing one man had been in CSU for nearly 100 days awaiting such a place. In our view, despite the level of care offered by staff, this is not in a prisoner's best interests.
- A small proportion of prisoners required the majority of staff attention, as they were uncooperative, tended to self-harm, and sometimes went on a dirty protest.

One observed example was a prolonged and patient attempt over two hours to transfer one man. Such behaviour by a vulnerable, yet violent, individual is exhausting for those involved as well as taking up significant levels of resource.

During the year we noted the sustained efforts to improve the surroundings on the unit, bearing in mind our previously recorded concerns about it: every cell was repainted, and anti-graffiti paint applied, exercise mats were made available and unsuitable or damaged furniture was replaced. Wherever possible, prisoners were provided with educational and recreational material, with the occasional option of a DVD player; shared exercise on the yard took place where practicable.

Because we are concerned when a man on an ACCT and/or with mental health problems is held in segregation, we pay particular attention to their care, and the recording of it. The following extract shows the position from April to June:

Table 5: Demographic and segregation statistics for second quarter 2020

	Disability – MH	Disability – other	Arrived on ACCT	ACCT opened whilst in CSU	Segregated for over 42 days
April	9	11	0	0	0
May	5	3	1	0	0
June	10	11	2	1	1

The information available to us about the remainder of 2020 indicates that this is typical of the whole period. The situation is carefully monitored by the prison through regular meetings, which a Board member normally attends. In all instances we consider that these men were best served in this location and that the level of care afforded was higher than would have been possible on a standard house block/residential wing. We also noted that the violent and/or disruptive behaviour of a significant number of those with mental health problems resulted from their condition or a failure to take their medication.

Meticulous adherence to procedures meant that 100% of all health screens for suitability for detention were completed within two hours and 100% of review boards took place within the required period. Of particular note, at one point in the year three individuals with severe mental health problems, which could have warranted transfer to a specialist unit, were managed and returned to a residential house block wing. The lower occupancy of CSU made this a realistic possibility but, in our view, it reflects the skills and dedication of those working there. Nevertheless, our continuing concern at the shortage of places on specialist units remains.

5.3 Staff-prisoner/detainee relationships, key workers

Unfortunately, key work was suspended during the first national lockdown in March. If any key work was to be given, it was very limited and basic. The Board welcomed that in June, HMPN delivered key work to priority groups, for example those with mental health issues, those preparing for release and those with a history of self-harm. In November, key work resumed in residential house blocks and face-to-face meetings with prisoners were restarted. This is something we will monitor in the following reporting year.

Staff-prisoner relationships are generally good, and men have acknowledged this, particularly during lockdown. As additional evidence, thank you cards from prisoners have been sent, thanking staff for their frontline work and dedication to keeping prisoners safe during the pandemic. This reporting year, the Board has received a relatively low number of applications, compared to 2019, regarding staff/prisoner relationships (see page 22).

5.4 Equality and diversity

At the end of the reporting year, the proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) prisoners at HMPN is as follows:

- Black/Black British – 1.25%
- Asian/Asian British – 2.21%
- Mixed – 0.52%
- Other – 0.74%

The BAME population within HMPN is relatively low.

At the start of the reporting year, there were 41 foreign nationals; in June this rose slightly to 50 and in December, the total number of foreign nationals stood at 54.

In 2020, a total of 39 discrimination information report forms (DIRFs) were raised out of a population of 1372 men. DIRFs are dealt with well and efficiently. The low number of applications made to the Board in 2020 (three in total), regarding discrimination issues, reflects this.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Whenever IMB members attend segregation and ACCT reviews, a member of the chaplaincy team is present; when we could not be there, for much of 2020, we regard this commitment on their part as significant. We share the view of HMIP, who commented that during lockdown “the chaplains had done excellent work, maintaining face-to-face contact and support to prisoners throughout the establishment and providing faith resources”.

There are five chaplains, three full-time and two, including the imam, working three days a week, representing a wide range of faiths. Although regular worship had to be discontinued, in line with national guidance, the chaplains provided weekly faith packs, and talked to men through their doors or on in-cell telephones. The chaplains also helped men access services streamed on national prison radio, live-streamed funerals, and attend in person where this was appropriate. Their support to prisoners in distress or at times of great need, such as bereavement, has been exemplary and, in our view, reflects the focus across the prison to help prisoners get through these difficult months.

Alongside the core team of chaplains, there are around 40 volunteers. Volunteers deliver the Sycamore programme, part of the restorative justice programme developed by the Prison Fellowship, suspended for the time being; Junction 42, a faith-based charity that normally has two workers based in the prison, has continued to offer support by sending in packs and other resources. The chaplaincy team also coordinates the work of volunteers through the National Association of Prison Visitors, as well as a small number of letter writers. This model of working is exceptional and without it, prison life would be the poorer.

5.6 Incentives and earned privileges (IEP)

During the first lockdown, HMPN provided additional privileges to everyone, such as extra credit for in-cell telephones, regardless of IEP status. IEP restrictions on having

a TV and some other items were lifted and there was no charge for accessing the TV going forward. At the end of the reporting year, 619 prisoners were on standard and 616 were on enhanced IEP status.

5.7 Property

The steady flow of applications to the Board about property makes clear that even smooth transfers between prisons can give rise to property being misplaced. Despite other pressures on reception staff, however, prisoners' property is carefully managed and when we have needed to make enquiries there was no backlog in dealing with requests to view property. We note that there are no issues relating to property, or to the registration of property, and our view is that the record keeping of property cards is accurate and up to date.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

In April 2020 Spectrum took over the healthcare contract. We plan to monitor this more closely once the contract has run for a full year.

From March to May 2020, HMPN reported very few positive COVID-19 cases across the entire estate amongst both prisoners and staff, followed by four months (June, July, August and September 2020) COVID-free. We commend the healthcare team for all their efforts during this earlier period. We believe that the prompt decision to operate a restricted regime, reverse cohorts, wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and hold regular 'weekly outbreak' control team meetings, reflects the efforts of the prison and healthcare staff to effectively manage, and reduce, the spread of the virus throughout the year.

The Board reiterates the concern, which we raised in our 2019 report, about the lack of 24-hour residential care on site. Overall, there were 41 prisoners who were bed-watch patients, in outside hospitals across 2020. One prisoner receives palliative care in hospital and has done so for the past six months. Inevitably, there are implications for staffing and regime.

6.2 Physical healthcare

At the end of March, all routine appointments (GP & dentistry) were suspended and for some time, only emergency dental appointments such as extractions continued. All GP appointments moved to telephone consultations (all prisoners have in-cell telephones) to reduce face-to-face contact whilst the pandemic is ongoing.

A concern of the Board's is that, at the start of the reporting year, waiting times were already long for dentistry (177 working days). The report by HMIP in September 2020 reported delays of 231 working days, and as of 31 December this was up to 249 working days, demonstrating an increase across the reporting year. Despite the commitment of the dental team, who increased from one to two days per week, they can only carry out limited dental care due to COVID-19 restrictions.

In February, prior to COVID-19, waiting time for a face-to-face GP appointment was an average of 17 working days. However, GP waiting time, as of 31 December, for a telephone appointment was 15 days (as mentioned above, all prisoners are given a telephone consultation before face-to-face appointments). At the time of writing this report, the waiting time is down to 5 days. The Board will continue to monitor waiting times throughout the next reporting year.

6.3 Mental healthcare

During 2020, the mental health team started providing prisoners with information booklets about their services at reception, which will continue to be provided in the future. As this is a new process, we intend to monitor this in the coming year.

In February 2020, an exciting new development for the Northumberland's mental health service saw five prisoners become ready to undertake their role of mental health peer support after completing training. During lockdown, mental health peer

support training was adapted so any prisoners who wished to complete training could do so in-cell. Newly trained prisoners continued to be followed closely with weekly one-to-one supervision with the mental health team. House block staff report, to the psychological well-being practitioner, that this has been helpful to prisoners.

6.5 Exercise, time out of cell, gym

Time out of cell was reduced to one hour and the core day regime was restricted in the first national lockdown at the end of March. During their one hour out of cell, prisoners had to collect meals, use the kiosk, shower and had access to exercise (in open air). Different prisoners across a house block would be let out at different hour slots across the day, to reduce risk of infection and allow for social distancing. This also meant that libraries were closed as well as the gym, so time out of cell was limited further. Those who were deemed as essential workers, such as waste management, kitchen, laundry and residential wing cleaners, remained in employment.

Inevitably, access to gym equipment on residential house blocks was limited. On a positive note, outdoor physical education (PE) sessions restarted in August, with 60% uptake by prisoners. Indoor gym was also on offer in December, but with much smaller class sizes due to social distancing measures in place.

6.6 Drug rehabilitation

MDTs were suspended when COVID-19 restrictions were implemented; as a result the Board does not have a complete picture of MDT rates across the reporting year. Despite the restrictions, the drug and alcohol recovery team (DART) has maintained its service provisions. Prisoners registered with DART received support via in-cell phone calls to discuss withdrawals, find alternative coping skills, prepare for release, and check up on the prisoner's emotional and physical well-being. At a rate of approximately 40 calls per worker per day, DART has maintained an exceptionally high level of valuable contact with prisoners on their caseload (approximately 450), at a time when interaction is limited. Because of the evidence that those released from prison are at high risk of an overdose, these men are discharged with a naloxone kit (naloxone is an emergency medication that can reverse the effects of an overdose).

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, Library

The developments in education, training and work looked promising at the beginning of 2020, with the prospect of new contracts. Unfortunately, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions have meant that many of these opportunities have yet to come to fruition. NOVUS took the decision to withdraw from physical delivery within the prison from March, in line with national guidelines for education provision. However, NOVUS had not yet returned by the end of 2020.

When lockdown restrictions were lifted, distraction packs were issued to those registered in education and further packs were issued to those who required materials which they would ordinarily obtain from education or library services.

The following were offered to prisoners during restrictions:

- 1800 in-cell packs were supplied to prisoners in education, with a further 5755 in-cell packs including distraction materials.
- Scoring sheets were provided for prisoners in education to self-mark.
- 1792 in-cell resource packs were made up of learning material related to the curriculum.
- 43,000 in-cell packs were delivered to prisoners by services such as DART, Junction 42, Shannon Trust, Age UK and mental health services.
- Library books were delivered to residential house blocks on a weekly basis.
- Coracle Inside, a new IT initiative, provided pre-loaded laptop games.
- 226 out of 231 education places were filled.

As of 10 December, HMPN had the highest engagement of Northern prisons, with 25 prisoners engaged in distance learning, with help from the prison educational trust in providing grants to allow this to happen.

The first lockdown resulted in a positive and considerable increase in reading by prisoners and Borderline Books gifted a number of books to the prison to help refresh the stocks. Boxes of 30-40 books (minimum) were circulated to every residential house block each week. Foreign language requests were fulfilled whenever asked for, especially for new receptions, for example one prisoner required books in his first language (Romanian). Prisoners have also continued to engage with the library and the prison is above target with 57% of prisoners enrolled and 47% active. Of 144 prisoners enrolled in the reading challenge, 115 completed it and were rewarded.

7.2 Vocational training, Work

Restrictions have continued to reduce the workforce throughout the prison:

- At the end of the reporting year, the number of men unemployed was 446.
- Number of hours worked was 21975.
- Only 99/140 industry places were available.

- However, workshops supplying essential items, such as PPE, remained in operation
- In addition to this, all 165 residential house block jobs were in operation. Employment that helps maintain the prison regime, such as cleaners, cooking, and laundry is still in place.
- Redevelopment of brickwork was introduced to generate more employment opportunities.
- On a positive note, two men are awaiting their Level 2 gym instructor qualifications.
- In 2020, Café 16, run by the Oswin Project, supported up to 10 prisoners towards baking qualifications. At least one man has been released with secure full-time employment, which again is run by the Oswin Project.

7.3 Offender management and progression

There are currently 55 category D (cat D) prisoners at the prison, of which 37 are mains prisoners and 18 are VPs. Of those men who have applied for a cat D place, transfer opportunities are limited. One factor that directly impacts cat D prisoners at HMPN is that all transfers currently have to be local/in-region, leaving HMPN with one cat D prison for VPs and two cat D prisons for mains prisoners. Wider transfers are not envisaged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Offender management was progressively implementing the new offender management in custody (OMIC) system and preparing for the reintegration of community rehabilitation company (CRC) and probation services. Additional work was required early in the year in relation to two national early release initiatives, though no prisoners qualified despite nearly 200 being considered, each needing considerable time and effort.

The offender management unit (OMU) continued to process release preparation documentation as usual during national restrictions, along with HDC reviews (96 prisoners were released in this way during March-June) and also facilitated eligible cat D transfers (88 in the first six months of 2020).

7.4 Family contact

Prisoner links with family were compromised by the loss of social visits during the first phase of national lockdown restrictions. When visits restarted the uptake was low, at only 30% of capacity. In November 2020, social visits were withdrawn again in line with national restrictions. Provision of enhanced phone credit and the cheap tariff helped mitigate this. The e-mail a prisoner scheme was promoted and received up to 100 e-mails a day.

Purple visits (PV) were introduced in mid-December 2020, and are actively encouraged by staff at HMPN, which is important, as men have to apply for a PV on their own account (and be approved by security). PVs are in one-hour sessions and there are two sessions per day during the week. The recipient of the video call is checked, face recognition is used, and all calls are monitored throughout. There is the opportunity for six prisoners per house block to use this system at one time. It is evident therefore, that the prison was making attempts to maintain prisoner links with

family. This is important for successful resettlement, but overall the evolving unpredictable nature of the pandemic presented inevitable challenges.

7.5 Resettlement planning

2020 opened with several prison initiatives that promised benefits for resettlement processes:

- The career centre recruited and trained three extra staff to assist prisoners into employment and career opportunities upon release.
- Links were being forged with a growing number of employers with a view to ROTL placements.
- Collaboration with Northumberland County Council was being explored to support education and employment activity upon release.

In response to the increasing number of short sentenced prisoners (around 30% of receptions), dynamic purchasing scheme (DPS) funding was being used to develop courses for short-stay prisoners and the prison was actively developing intensive exit/resettlement support for this group. To enhance prisoner understanding and access to help, in relation to benefits, financial management and housing, negotiations were ongoing with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Crisis and Shelter to provide courses on site. New work in education and cultural engagement was commissioned via the charity Junction 42, which was well received, and the introduction of an in-cell educational TV channel and telephone also enhanced opportunities for engagement.

However, as the pandemic took hold work was disrupted and links with partner external agencies became difficult to maintain as the agencies could not attend.

During the first national lockdown, as well as during tier three restrictions, probation and CRC staff had no face-to-face contact and parole board preparation activity was limited. Offending behaviour programmes and one-to-one work ceased, ROTL was suspended and prisoner transfer requests were put on hold. Shelter, NEPACS and through the gate services were unable to operate as usual, though some remote working allowed a reduced service to continue.

Despite the conclusions of the HMIP report in September 2020, in the period following initial lockdown through the gate services resumed activity and Shelter restarted activity on site. As part of sentence planning leading to release, the careers centre has been providing information, advice and guidance, and actively working to promote personal learning plans for new receptions, though uptake of careers advice has been low.

The departure lounge (a project delivered by NEPACS to support families and newly released prisoners in the visitor centre outside the establishment), has not been able to operate normally. However, staff are providing discharge packs with COVID-19 related information and guidance prior to release for prisoners. We are impressed with the commitment and responsiveness of staff in seeking to deliver an effective resettlement experience despite the challenges. We are pleased to note that the

prison regards this as a priority area for improvement in their quality improvement plan for 2021.

All the above we take as evidence of the prison management being both proactive and responsive to improving and widening the resettlement experience.

8. The work of the IMB

The work of the Board has required alternatives to face-to-face monitoring in light of the pandemic that the country faces.

In our November 2019 recruitment campaign, we were fortunate enough to recruit three new members all of whom have remained with us. Members have supported each other as best they can and the use of technology to facilitate meetings has been widely used by all. By early 2020, the Board had five new members all of whom have remained committed to the Board throughout the reporting year. New members have engaged with online training and have had some direct monitoring experience.

Lines of communication with the prison have been extremely good, information gathering, and sharing has led to a strong emphasis on scrutinising data in the later quarter of the year. We must acknowledge the extra work that the prison has put in to support our enquiries over the past 12 months and the support they have given us has proven invaluable.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11
Total number of visits to the establishment	(see below)
Total number of segregation reviews attended	(see section 5.2)

* For at least half the year monitoring has taken place remotely due to national and local restrictions, as well as restrictions for members who may have been shielding or have underlying medical conditions. The prison regime was restricted, and we wanted to help mitigate any potential new infections within the prison. Members on duty contacted the segregation unit daily and the Chair had frequent telephone meetings with the director during periods of remote monitoring.

**Physical visits to the establishment have been severely restricted by local and national restrictions.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Board for their commitment and support over the past twelve months in very difficult circumstances.

Applications to the IMB

In 2020, the Board experienced a 60% decrease in applications (192) compared to last year (252). Most noticeably:

- Six applications in regard to visits, telephones, letters, compared to 21 applications in 2019.
- Nine applications were made in regard to purposeful activity (including work, education, library) compared to 14 in 2019.
- Four applications were made in regard to canteen compared to 14 in 2019.
- Twenty-one applications were made in regard to staff relationships compared to 44 in 2019.

However, the Board experienced an increase in applications regarding ROTL, home detention curfew (HDC) and sentence management: 32 in 2020, from 24 in 2019. This is understandable, as men did not understand the reduction in movement between establishments in line with COVID-19 restrictions and national guidance.

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	5	3
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	3	3
C	Equality	2	3
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	14	9
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	21	6
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	10	12
F	Food and kitchens	10	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	28	26
H1	Property within this establishment	30	17
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	15	18
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	14	4
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	24	32
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	44	21
K	Transfers	21	12
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	11	24
	Total number of applications	252	192



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