



**Annual Report of the
Independent Monitoring Board
at HMP/YOI Rochester**

For reporting year

1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

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Introductory sections 1 - 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

Rochester is a Category C Resettlement prison for both adult male and young offenders; it has an operational capacity of 695. Prisoners are held in eight residential units: one is a dedicated drug reduction unit, six are general accommodation, and one caters for prisoners with enhanced privilege status, and has improved cell facilities. There is a separate Care and Separation Unit (CSU). One wing has been allocated for first night accommodation and induction into the prison. During the pandemic, this has changed to another wing being used as a Reverse Cohort Unit for all incoming prisoners to prevent spread of the Covid-19 virus.

The prison has four Edwardian built wings and 4 modern blocks. The older wings are challenging to maintain. The newer wings have continual ventilation and heating problems. Maintenance is provided by GFSL. The majority of cells are twin bedded. The grounds are spacious with each wing being a separate location. The open location of the prison gives plenty of opportunity for fresh air and outdoor activity

From May until October 2020, an Annex utilising the old Medway Secure Training Centre was established to provide Category D residents with suitable temporary accommodation during the Covid-19 lockdown period. The operational capacity remained at the same level.

In normal times, as a resettlement prison, the regime is intended to give prisoners training through a structured sentence plan. Rochester actively engages with prisoners to address their offending behaviour and offers opportunities to engage in behavioural programmes, training, education and work, linked to employment where possible. Increasing the links to real employment vacancies is a continuing aim. The Forward Trust manages the drug-recovery programmes; Kent Surrey and Sussex Community Rehabilitation Company prepares prisoners for release through help with housing, finance and mentoring. The physical well-being of prisoners is catered for through two well-run gymnasiums, offering competitive and recreational activities. Healthcare support for prisoners is available from the NHS/OXLEAS Healthcare team, with InReach for mental health wellbeing. The Chaplaincy has been fully staffed during the reporting period and can provide assistance across all faiths. The Spurgeons charity is involved with visiting arrangements, and more generally there is community support from various external organisations

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

Throughout this reporting period, and the exceptional conditions in place because of the Covid-19 pandemic, HMP & YOI Rochester has continued to provide a stable, safe and decent environment for prisoners. Its prison officers deal with offenders in their care as sympathetically and effectively as resources allow, despite there being some prisoners who are especially demanding and whose needs are increasingly difficult to meet. Social distancing arrangements have worked well; there were no cases of Covid infection at the prison during the first wave. There were some outbreaks in the second wave, but considerably fewer than at other Kent prisons.

It is indicative of the positive relationship between the officers and the prisoners at Rochester that many of the expected difficulties associated with lockdown (increased violence, self-harm and mental health) did not occur to the extent anticipated. Much of this is due to the Key Worker system, which continued throughout the year. The restrictive regime in place allows for 2 hours of association per day for each prisoner. This is an extreme arrangement which is not humane, but is necessary at present. The Board strongly supports the introduction of a more normal regime as soon as is safely possible.

In the main the most demanding prisoners are those with mental health issues, including those with an underlying substance abuse issue which may be exacerbated whilst in prison. The availability of contraband including new psychoactive substances (NPS) and other illicit drugs, mobile phones and tobacco has decreased during the year because of the restrictive regime in place. In turn this means incidents of violence, intimidation and, in turn, self-harming has lessened too.

Improved searching of all individuals entering the prison has proved successful in curtailing an avenue of entry for contraband into the prison. An airport style searching pod was due to be set up but building this has yet to commence.

Many of the buildings are Edwardian, structurally poor, and difficult to modernise. However, in spite of this, social distancing arrangements were introduced and are working well. There is still a vermin problem at the prison, but it has improved since the Board's last report.

As a resettlement prison, preparation for release is a key feature of the regime at Rochester. However all activity connected with Work, Education, and Behavioural Programmes had to stop due to the restricted regime. In-cell work was provided, and books from the library remained available.

Arrangements for the introduction of video visits was handled successfully, and allowed prisoners to keep in contact with family members, who were unable to visit the prison in person. The Chaplaincy assisted with video funeral arrangements, given that attendance at funerals was difficult to arrange at times.

No prisoners were released on temporary licence (ROTL), and while home detention curfew (HDC) continued, there is an ongoing issue of accommodation being

available to enable more prisoners with the correct profile to be released. There are too many Category D prisoners awaiting relocation to a prison with open conditions; the Board has received many applications about the disappointment and feeling of general unfairness the delay is causing.

A good decision was made by the Prison Service to utilise the old Medway Secure Training Centre building for housing Category D prisoners during the Covid outbreak. Known as the Annex (as it is run by HMP Rochester), it was open from May to October. The conversion was achieved speedily, and demonstrates what can be accomplished when all parties work together coherently. The Board was duly impressed and commends all those involved in achieving this project.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

HMP Rochester was in a lockdown regime for the report period. This meant less mixing between prisoners, which impacted on violence levels and inhibited passing of illicit substances. Consequently, it has proved a safe environment for prisoners. Levels of violence had been falling prior to lockdown, and the lack of incidents reflects the generally good and co-operative relationship there is between staff and prisoners at Rochester.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

Given that prisoners at HMP Rochester have been locked up for 22 hours per day because of the pandemic restrictions, the Board cannot report that prisoners are being treated in a humane way. However, within these necessary restrictions, the Board considers the regime has been delivered in a humane way. This is in spite of the ongoing difficulties the prison faces, such as deteriorating buildings and the availability of drugs. The Board's perception is that prisoners are being treated fairly, with adjudications conducted correctly, the conclusions reasonable and the outcomes just and fair. Assessment Care in Custody Teamwork (ACCT) and Good Order or Discipline (GOOD) reviews are undertaken within required timescales, with some positive outcomes. The Board's view is that provisions for Equalities and Safer Custody are good and the prison is operating in an equitable way. The lack of availability of open conditions means that too many prisoners are awaiting transfer to Category D establishments, which is unfair on those prisoners who work towards gaining this status change.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

Healthcare appointments are commensurate with community NHS provision. Mental healthcare and drug recovery arrangements are good. The Key Worker scheme has been introduced successfully and played a key role in the prison's stability during the

lockdown period. There is good provision for exercise, which has started to resume, and the Chaplaincy team works hard to engage with all prisoners, not just those with faith. The vermin problem is less severe than reported last year.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

Unfortunately, the restricted regime impacted on all aspects of resettlement, and those prisoners leaving, while getting some basic support, did not have the usual preparedness for release which Rochester can provide. Relatively few behavioural programmes took place due to social distancing. As restrictions are relaxed, the Board hopes that meaningful occupation for the prisoners can be identified, and supports the prison is its aim to re-examine what it can provide.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- a) The Board still retains the view that in order to enable a better outcome for prisoners and reduce re-offending, increased funding for resources should be allocated across the entire prison estate for tackling drug-use by prisoners. This includes improvements in security technology and intervention programmes.
- b) Re-offending rates cannot be reduced unless there is suitable accommodation for all prisoners who have completed their sentence; too many prisoners are released from Rochester to become homeless rough sleepers. The Board retains the view that the recent initiative for prisons to refer those at risk of homelessness to local authorities, as referred to by the Minister in replying to previous reports, is not working and does not seem to be producing any improvement.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- a) Property losses on transfer: Yet again, there appears to have been no progress in resolving the problems which occur when a prisoner and their property are transferred from other establishments. Frustratingly items are still going missing and unnecessary delays occurring. This is a transport issue, not one of volumetric control. Lack of ownership over this re-occurring problem is frustrating. When will a revised framework for ensuring the effective transfer of prisoners' property come into being?
(Paragraph 5.8 a and b refer)

- b) There are too many Category D prisoners in Rochester awaiting transfer to open conditions. The creation of the Annex mitigated this during the May to October, but this was just a temporary fix. More Category D accommodation needs to be resourced. It is unfair for prisoners to be encouraged to gain Category D status, when the opportunities for transfer to open conditions are so limited. *(Paragraph 7.3.4 refers)*

TO THE GOVERNOR

The Board is still noting that cell clearance checks remain haphazard and many are not conducted properly, particularly when an individual is moved to the CSU from a double cell. Can this be addressed please? *(Paragraph 5.8.c refers)*

3.4 Progress since the last report

Key Working has proven its worth in contributing towards the stability of the prison, especially during the first lockdown period.

The introduction of video visits was challenging. The open location of Rochester with each wing in its own building meant a separate dedicated location had to be identified, and set up. It was managed well, has been a successful innovation and was implemented within the timescale required.

Body searching for **all** incoming personnel into the prison was introduced. It has been carried out in a considerate way, and has added to the preventative security provisions at the prison.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4a Impact of COVID on the prison and IMB monitoring

4a.1 The Board's view is that HMP Rochester has remained stable and safe during the lockdown year. The Senior Management Team and officers at the prison have handled what could have been an extremely difficult situation with skill and commitment, and are to be congratulated.

4a.2 The new regime was introduced efficiently and sensitively. The prisoners understood why the measures were put in place and, in general, supported why they were being taken. By the end of the year, the prisoners are quite naturally wishing for more freedom, but compliance with restrictions is holding. There is no doubt locking up the prisoners for such long periods limited bullying, intimidation, drug activity and violence. And there are some good lessons to be learnt from this period about how to manage freeflow, security and medication delivery. However locking up prisoners for 22 hours each day is excessively restrictive and should cease as soon as possible. Planning is underway into how to manage the release of restrictions, and the Board is monitoring how these plans are developing.

4a.3 During the first lockdown period there were no Covid cases amongst the prisoners. There were however outbreaks on several wings during the second lockdown period, but the number of prisoners catching the virus was remarkably low due to good containment management. At time of writing there are no cases at the prison. Covid testing has been successful with a staff take-up of 70%. To date, 293 prisoners have been vaccinated; with a declining rate of 26%, mainly in the younger age range.

4a.4 As referred to in last year's report, the use of the former Medway Secure Training Centre for housing Category D prisoners was a useful innovation. Known as the Annex, the conversion was achieved speedily and demonstrated what can be achieved when all parties work together. Its purpose was to free up accommodation within the main prison for social distancing on wings, enable shielding and accommodate isolation where necessary for prisoners. The Annex was open from May until October, and in effect worked as a separate prison from Rochester, with officers being re-directed to it. The Board monitored the Annex before it was used and while it was in place, and thought it was an excellent, clean and safe environment for the prisoners housed there. It was a good initiative but a very expensive one, hence its closure by HMPPS. This was disappointing as it did provide good accommodation and achieved its aim in releasing space for isolating incoming prisoners.

4a.5 The Board at Rochester did not have a presence at the prison between April and June. It did however receive regular updates, reports and correspondence from the Governor, senior managers and other prison departments. From June onwards, the Board was able to return to deal with applications, due to the location of the IMB office in the Gate House. Board meetings resumed in late July and the Board returned to restricted monitoring shortly afterwards, and continued for the rest of the reporting period. (Further information at Section 8)

4. Safety

Concerns that lockdown would produce increased incidents of suicide, self harm, bullying and intimidation fortunately did not materialise. This enabled the Safer Custody team to take a different approach to their work, with complex case reviews being held; working more closely with the regional psychology unit, and having a welfare transition arrangement in place for those young men transferring from Cookham Wood.

4.2 Reception and induction

Both functions work well, and the Board is satisfied that healthcare checks are being undertaken for those arriving at the prison. In normal circumstances, E wing is a dedicated induction wing, with additional support being given to first-time prisoners. However during the pandemic, R and F Wing became dedicated Reverse Cohort Units in order to prevent the spread of the virus. All entering prisoners are spending two weeks on these wings, before moving onto other prison wings. Each cohort receives a controlled period of time out of their cells. Induction briefings and First Night processes were continued.

Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 There have been no deaths in custody this year. There is one inquest outstanding from a death two years ago; all PPO recommendations resulting from this were completed last year. (Unfortunately a death has occurred in May 2021, which is outside the reporting period.)

4.2.2 ACCT reviews are, in the main, completed properly. ACCT numbers are around 23 per month, slightly less than last year. It is pleasing to report this decrease given the restrictions in place at the prison. The number of ACCTs and SASH (Suicide and Self Harm) incidents seem to be following a complementary trend. Some prisoners use self-harming as a coping mechanism, and the has noted self-harm and violence are more prevalent on Fridays and Mondays, which is related to canteen delivery.

4.2.3 Ligature incidents are averaging about 2 per month. This is reduction on the number of incidents occurring before the lockdown, and much less than anticipated. Given the lockdown arrangements at the prison, this is positive news, and underlines the support officers at Rochester have given to the prisoners during the year. The Board would like it noted that commendable swift action by prison officers has on many occasions prevented attempts by prisoners at self-inflicted death.

4.2.4. While there are still a few members of the Listeners group, most of the prisoners trained as Listeners have now left the prison. During lockdown, prisoners had access to a dedicated Samaritan phone. The qualified Samaritan Leader is due to return to the prison soon to re-start the Listeners training programme. All Listeners must be security cleared, with 9 months of their sentence left to serve, and attend consecutive training sessions held on Saturdays, during which they are assessed for trustworthiness and role suitability. Listeners visit in pairs, to ensure correct procedures are being followed.

4.2.5 As reported last year, the number of requests at Rochester for Listeners to visit over the past year is lower than at other Kent prisons. It is not clear why this decrease is still occurring; perhaps a lack of need, or possibly some reluctance by officers to call the Listeners in. The Board has discussed this with Listeners at the prison, with Safer Custody and the Samaritan leader. The Board will continue to monitor this during the year.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 The availability of drugs, especially NPS, at Rochester continues to be the main issue for safety and security management at the prison. Drug-related debt, and the subsequent bullying and intimidation remain significant elements of life at Rochester. However, during lockdown incidents of both bullying and intimidation decreased, mainly due to freeflow being stopped and timed management of association within the wings.

4.3.2 Prior to lockdown, violence levels were falling; as expected, during lockdown this trend continued with 129 incidents (cf 275 violent incidents recorded the previous year). During the reporting period 119 weapons were found, a drop from last year (cf 135). Challenge, Support and Intervention Planning (CSIP) arrangements are working well, with good analysis of and action being taken from the statistics provided.

4.3.3 It is difficult to assess if violence at Rochester is gang-related. It doesn't seem to be the case, but lockdown may have masked this. At present the majority of prisoners at Rochester will not be aware of who is at the prison, so this is likely to become an issue on reopening; and the Board will monitor this closely. There is a new initiative related to knife crime (Project 507) due to start next year.

4.3.4 The Board retains the view that Rochester continues to be a safe environment for those living there. Visiting wings during lockdown the Board has noted that the atmospheres have been good and unthreatening, with groups of men chatting amiably with each other and with staff.

4.3.5 The Board visits the few prisoners who are self-isolating, and checks that arrangements to support those who are doing so are appropriate. The VR (Violence Reduction) gym session that was available for prisoners who are self-isolating, and was an effective way of re-integrating vulnerable prisoners unfortunately has to be discontinued because of Covid restrictions.

4.4 Safeguarding

From evidence through conversations with prisoners, Safer Custody at Rochester continues to provide good support. The team has recently undertaken a prisoner survey around safety issues, and the response is positive. Any prisoner who is at risk from fellow inmates has been swiftly protected. Unfortunately, the only safe accommodation is within the Segregation Unit, and it takes time for transfer arrangements to be made.

4.5 Use of force

4.5.1 Figures for April 2021 (which are indicative of the monthly figures for the reporting period) show there were 32 Use of Force (UOF) incidents of which 3 were planned and 29 spontaneous. In April 2020 there was a very serious risk to life hostage incident during which Pava was used. The Board did not attend this incident as it occurred during the lockdown period. However it was kept informed of developments by telephone and email. This appears to have been the first time Pava has been used at Rochester.

4.5.2 The majority of incidences of UOF are for those aged between 22 -29. In contrast to last year, the trend for more UOF on Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (BAME) does not seem to have continued. But this may reflect the changeable number of young BAME prisoners at Rochester. For example in April 2021 of the 33 incidents recorded, 30 are classed as being White, and 3 BAME. However for the previous month, it was 25 White and 12 BAME. The Board's view is that UOF does not seem biased towards BAME prisoners, and, in general, is in keeping with the ethnic diversity of the prison – see paragraph 5.4.1.

4.5.3 A monthly review of UOF has been introduced, which the Board is attending as an observer. Training points emerging from this meeting are being followed up, but generally UOF appears to be proportionate and well managed.

4.5.4 The National Team were called to the prison 6 times during the year, compared with 4 times last year. Four were for incidents at height, one for a hostage situation and another the very serious incident referred to 4.5.1 (although by the time the National Team arrived, the incident has been brought under control by the trained staff team at the prison).

4.6 Substance misuse

4.6.1 The openness of the Rochester site presents the greatest challenge for the security team in its effort to stop illicit substances and mobile phones coming into the prison. During lockdown, the number of items being thrown over the prison fences has fallen. Unfortunately, contraband is still entering the prison illicitly. Plans have been developed during the year for an airport-style entrance pod to be built, and although approved, the pod has yet to be built. In the meantime, improved body searching of all incoming personnel has been introduced prior to the pod being in place. This is being undertaken in a considerate yet thorough manner.

4.6.2 Another way drugs are coming into the prison is via items sent into the prison, such as drug-impregnated paper, and items of clothing (for example on the labels). All incoming mail is now photocopied before it reaches the prisoner. Solicitor's letters are swabbed and any which appear suspicious or fake are opened in accordance with regulations. Intelligence-led searching of wings and cells has also produced good results in finding contraband.

4.6.3 The rise in fermenting liquid ('hooch') being brewed at the prison continues, with an average of 10 finds per month. When other illicit substances are in limited supply, 'hooch' is attractive as it is easy to brew. However its effects are disruptive

with drunken prisoners becoming violent. Fermenting liquid search dogs have proved particularly successful in locating 'hooch' during the reporting year.

4.6.4 For the majority of the year, mandatory drug testing did not continue at Rochester due to lockdown. It was re-introduced in March 2021 for suspicion testing only.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 Maintenance at Rochester remains challenging, but it is pleasing to report the improvement in GFSL's performance has continued. The older blocks require constant physical maintenance of some kind, such as repairing showers, fixing the ventilation and various flooring and lighting issues. Some of the replacement flooring on wings has not been satisfactory. The Board retains its view that the older buildings are meeting a **minimal** standard of acceptable accommodation. Ventilation problems persist on the newer wings, which are now well-past their original use dates. This means that their building infrastructure is failing and requires an increasing number of maintenance interventions. Each wing regularly has washers and tumble driers out of action due to overuse, with GFSL constantly being required to fix breakdowns. A recent Clean and Decency Audit produced an Amber grade, so improvements are required. However, the Board's view, evidenced from its weekly wing visits, is that cleanliness is good on all wings.

5.1.2 The position on vermin has much improved from that reported last year. Rentokil's efforts have been more effective. Most importantly, metal waste bins for food waste (which are mouse proof) have replaced the previous plastic ones to good effect. The food macerators, however, are difficult to repair when they breakdown, as they are old and obtaining parts has been an issue.

5.1.3 *Catering:* Throughout the lockdown period, the kitchen provided a range of nourishing and balanced food. It was fully staffed, although it was impacted with the loss of some prisoner workers due to the Covid outbreak on H Wing. There has been an improvement in GFSL's speediness in responding to repairs and some key pieces of equipment have been replaced. When it returned to regular monitoring, the Board visited the kitchen each week during the reporting period. It notes food is hygienically prepared with health, religious and cultural needs being met. The Board has good evidence for the performance of the kitchen, as it did not receive any applications about food this year.

5.1.4 *Canteen:* Recently the Board has noted an increasing number of applications relating to refunds on canteen items, especially when transfers between prisons take place and items go missing. There is a proven link between self-harm/violence taking place on canteen delivery days, with pressure to give up items etc. The Board will look into this more closely in the coming year.

5.2 Segregation, special accommodation

5.2.1 This year, due to the restricted regime, the number of prisoners held in the Segregation Unit (CSU) has decreased considerably. Unfortunately it is still being used by prisoners as an opportunity to escape from the drug and debt culture of the prison with some prisoners committing an offence in order to gain access to the CSU and then refusing to leave. This is not the purpose of CSU, and the Board continues to monitor this closely.

5.2.2. The way in which Good Order and Discipline reviews are handled changed, and this change has taken a while to settle in. Following its return to in-prison monitoring in the autumn, the Board has aimed to attend all reviews and as many adjudications as it can. Importantly, the Board continues to be informed within 24 hours of new CSU arrivals. With few exceptions, all reviews and adjudications are conducted carefully, fairly and appropriately.

5.2.3 Many prisoners in the CSU are exceptionally difficult to manage, and having a settled cadre of officers working in CSU facilitates a skilled and experienced approach to dealing with them. One occupant with considerable mental health issues, who remained at the CSU for several months, was extremely challenging and required a lot of support and attention. The Board commends past and present CSU teams for their professionalism and patience.

5.2.4 Encouragingly, Special Accommodation has been used on just one occasion.

5.2.5 Fortunately, this year, there were relatively few cases when the 42-day time limit was exceeded. The majority of these arose when a prisoner's status is changed to Category B, and transfer became difficult due to lockdown.

5.3 Staff-prisoner/detainee relationships, key workers

5.3.1 The Board has been pleased to note that key working continued at Rochester throughout the pandemic period. During the first lockdown, it was regarded as instrumental in ensuring the prisoners bought into the new regime with its restrictions. During the second lockdown period, it was not possible to allocate as many staff onto key working duties because of officer shortages, caused by vacancies, and those shielding or on sick leave. However the system is still in place and working in principle. The prisoner experience of key working is mixed; depending on how it impacts on them. Some have found it very helpful, especially in taking forward problems they are experiencing, while others report they rarely see their key worker. An officer recently reported to the Board that he found key working the most interesting part of his role; although he commented it was a chance for prisoners to be manipulative.

5.3.2 Importantly, during lockdown Rochester has been stable, and key working has contributed to this. Compliance with restrictions is good, and social distancing and mask wearing, in the main, is observed. This could not have been achieved unless there was buy-in by the prisoners to the arrangements in place and is

indicative of the level of positive interaction there is between prisoners and staff at Rochester.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 The Equalities Team provides regular reporting with analysis aimed at identifying trends, relating it to reasons for self-harming and violence, and thereby being able to identify possible discrimination within the prison. There is an effective partnership between governors and officers. The team works well with prisoners, holding open and constructive discussions. The chart below based on April 2021 figures outlines the current ethnicity and mix of Adults and Young Offenders at the prison.

	No of Residents	% of Residents	White British	BAME	% White British	% BAME
Total Residents	652	100%	462	190	70.86%	29.14%
Adults	574	88.04%	408	166	71.08%	28.92%
YOs	78	11.96%	54	24	69.23%	30.77%

The significant change from last year's reporting for the same period is the decrease in BAME prisoners at Rochester (cf 36% last year). In addition the ratio between White and BAME YOs has reversed, with more white YOs at the prison, compared with equal numbers last year. The mix of adults and YOs remains the same.

5.4.2 Adjudication hearings: The Board continued to monitor whether a higher proportion of BAME prisoners appear at adjudication hearings, and from the prison statistics and our own observations, they do not.

5.4.3 The average number of Discrimination Incident Reports (DIRF) has slightly increased to around 14 per month. Due to Covid restrictions, the Board has been unable to establish if prisoners and staff are less or more inclined to categorize an incident as racist. However it notes that data collection and analysis continues to be good, and that concerns are investigated thoroughly. The Board received just 1 application about equality this year. As noted last year, there are still relatively few prison officers from BAME communities, although there are BAME staff working in other prison areas. While this probably reflects the local employment situation, given the numbers of BAME prisoners, it is unfortunate there are so few BAME officers.

5.4.4 The majority of prisoners are below the age of 39, with very few aged 60 and over. The Board has noted that issues affecting elderly prisoners or those with impaired mobility are considered appropriately, and taken into consideration during the lockdown period. At present, 38 % of prisoners have a self-declared disability, a small increase from last year (NB: many prisoners declare more than one disability). The biggest change is that at 1 April 2021, 136 prisoners self-declared a mental illness and circa 64 with learning difficulties including dyslexia, once again an increase from last year. The Board believes this may be indicative of the lockdown restrictions, and will continue to monitor this as restrictions lessen.

5.4.5 The focus on identifying those prisoners who are “Care Experienced” has continued. At present, just under 10% of prisoners come into this category – an increase on last year. Care experienced prisoners do seem to feature more prominently in a self-harm or violent incident, but not to any disproportionate degree. The Board has discussed this with the Governor on several occasions during the year, and it shares his view that the number of prisoners identified as being “care-experienced” may be a little on the low side, especially judging from conversations held with prisoners.

5.4.6 Foreign Nationals: The number has decreased from last year, currently standing at 33 from 16 different countries. It does fluctuate throughout the year. The Board notes that Foreign National prisoners are treated fairly and given appropriate assistance where necessary.

5.4.7 The Board has monitored those prisoners who need special accommodation because of disabilities, and are satisfied this requirement is being properly addressed.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 The Chaplaincy team are respected by prisoners for the help they bring. Unfortunately religious services have been discontinued due to Covid restrictions, and there is no date set for when they will restart. This is frustrating for both the Chaplaincy team and prisoners. Bible study groups have continued on wings.

5.5.2 The Chaplaincy were able to provide one-to-one pastoral care for prisoners, especially with bereavements; helping to organise escorts for funerals or arranging video attendance to a funeral in the chapel. The Sycamore Tree Restorative justice programme could not take place, and sadly the individual, who ran the programme at Rochester and was such an inspiration, has died. There are no plans at the moment about how this is to be managed in the future.

5.6 Incentives and earned privileges

The new Incentives Policy Framework which was piloted at Rochester (and described in detail in our last report) has become embedded and is working practice. It appears to have worked satisfactorily during the Covid restriction period as the Board are not receiving the complaints about IEPs as it did previously.

5.7 Complaints

The complaints process continues to be run efficiently. This year 2103 complaints were handled by the Complaints Unit compared to 2022 last year. The Board notes that the number of complaints has increased by 7% over the past two years, without additional resources being allocated. 95% were replied to within the required time period, although some are interim replies. As noted in previous reports, most delays arise from slow responses from other prisons, which is frustrating for prisoners. Most complaints continue to be generated for missing property. Unfortunately, there have

been some “serial complainers” at Rochester over the past 12 months, which inflate the figures. (NB: Complaints about Healthcare are not included in these figures.)

5.8 Property

The Board received 48 applications relating to property this year, a decrease from 60 in the previous year. There are three key issues to be addressed:

- a) Too many transferring prisoners arrive without their possessions including family photographs (the loss of which is detrimental to their well-being) and it takes an unacceptable length of time for these to arrive and often items go missing. It is a source of needless frustration for prisoners, and hard-pressed wing staff who are left to deal with the consequences.
- b) Some time ago, HMPSS indicated that work on a new prisoner property framework would start once the new incentive scheme was in place. The Board noted this, but has not seen any evidence this has started. The Board is seeking reassurance this work will be completed.
- c) As highlighted on previous reports, the loss of property within the prison usually arises from the lack of a cell check following a disciplinary incident, and the individual’s removal to the Segregation Unit. The possessions belonging to the prisoner who is being removed become 'available' to other prisoners, especially when a prisoner is removed instantly from a double cell, and the cell is not closed down. There continues to be a lack of care around securing personal items in these circumstances continues. The Board has raised this as an issue on previous reports, and is doing so yet again. The Board strongly recommends more effective control is required over cell checks on all wings.

At times over the past year, the Property Office was not always open, due to staff being redeployed to other duties. There is a backlog, partly caused by excess property not being taken home by visitors. The Property Staff are always helpful to the Board when making enquiries, and when open, it is run efficiently. The Board notes that, in general, prisoners are treated with consideration and understanding about their missing property.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Physical healthcare

6.1.1 Primary Healthcare is provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. There is nearly always a staffing shortage and this reporting period has been no exception. Fortunately, the prison did not have the large number of virus cases as seen elsewhere, and the Healthcare team were able to carry out their roles without too much disruption. Full PPE has been provided and all necessary precautions taken.

6.1.2 The waiting time to see the GP is commensurate with that in the community, with additional time being allocated for emergency appointments. However, anxiousness about appointments to see the GP remains a key issue for prisoners, as do appointments being missed through poor communication, delays in medication delivery, medication for new arrivals and frustration over arranging escorted hospital visits. The number of complaints received by Healthcare management about its provision during the reporting period was 633. As statistics were not available last year, the Board cannot comment if this indicates an increase. The Board received 56 applications on healthcare, which is the highest number in an application category. We were also aware of calls made to the IMB Secretariat and to IMB 0800 line about delivery of medication. During the late autumn, the Board also had concerns that when dealing with applications the information being provided by Healthcare was not always accurate. This issue was raised with the Senior Manager.

6.1.3 Fortunately, changes made since January do seem to be working:

- To address the doctor's appointment frustrations, a new system of appointment triage was introduced. A dedicated nurse visits wings to speak to prisoners and collects applications. There are leaflets explaining how the healthcare appointment system works. The Board has noted this new scheme is working well, in part due to the nurse who is running it (she is a good communicator, capable and hard-working).
- There is now a dedicated Governor focusing on healthcare delivery and working in liaison with the Senior Oxleas Healthcare Manager. The appointment of an experienced Assistant Manager in Healthcare and a new Pharmacy manager and Pharmacy technician are certainly beneficial to healthcare delivery.
- A Healthcare Board meeting which includes all parties associated with healthcare: Oxleas, InReach, Forward Trust, the Pharmacy and senior prison managers, is held monthly to report back on performance, the introduction of changes and organisational issues (such as delivering prisoners on time for appointments, etc). The Board is an observer at this meeting in order to get updates on performance across all healthcare areas.
- A Healthcare Forum takes place regularly, once again with representatives as above, plus prisoner representatives from each wing. The wing representatives play an active role at the Forum, and all Board members who have observed this meeting report how positive it is. It is producing better understanding around prisoner expectations and enables some individual difficulties to be addressed.

The success of the changes is illustrated by the decrease in the number of complaints received by Healthcare. From April 2020 to January 2021 the average was 58 per month; following the changes in February to March, this decreased to 23 per month. This is a positive indicator of success.

6.1.4 The problem of prisoners diverting their opiate medication was lessened during lockdown, with the delivery of medication on wings. However, this practice was not following NHS guidelines and had to cease. Prisoners are once again receiving opiate medication at the two healthcare sites which, with the open location of Rochester, provides opportunities for diversion. The success of the “delivery on the wings” initiative in preventing medication diversion, has led to some new plans about how to deliver medication in the future, with consideration being given to a dedicated pharmacy site on several wings.

6.1.5 Unfortunately, the nurse-led clinics which used to be held are not currently taking place due to restrictions. The optician is visiting the prison again, so too is the dentist. He has a backlog of about 122, and is at present only dealing with emergency appointments.

6.1.6 Covid Vaccinations: The delivery is following NHS guidelines and is being delivered successfully. By April 293 prisoners had been vaccinated, with a decline rate of 26%.

6.1.7 The Board has noted a step change in the delivery of primary healthcare over the past couple of months. It has been a challenging time to those providing healthcare to a very difficult group of clients. During the year, the Board has witnessed healthcare staff deal with anxious and sometime very rude prisoners with care and politeness.

6.2 Mental healthcare

6.2.1 The service is provided by NHS/Oxleas Inreach. The team has a heavy workload - at present two posts are unfilled. As at April 2021, they have 71 on their books, plus 13 with the psychiatrist. In addition, there are 37 with ADHD. During lockdown, the focus was dealing with those prisoners with psychosis illnesses. There have been several prisoners this year with considerable mental health problems exacerbated by lockdown; one has been sectioned. However, as restrictions ease, the In Reach team will have better access, and more clinics. This will also enable them to focus on those with ADHD. The latest Equalities report, notes that over 136 prisoners at Rochester have self-identified as having a mental illness. If necessary, prisoners are referred to the inpatient service at Elmley.

6.2.2. Working with InReach are the Bradley Therapy Service, providing psychological interventions and counselling services. It usually runs workshops and longer courses on a range of issues, such as sleep difficulties, mindfulness, dealing with trauma and coping with bereavement. It also holds one-to-one support sessions. During lockdown this personal contact was suspended. However the team continued to be a presence at the prison, speaking through doors when necessary, and providing workbooks and activity packs to deal with the impact of being locked away for 22 hours a day.

6.2.3 A recent review by the Quality Network for Prison Mental Health Services found that the teams at Rochester were providing a high standard of service, with

prisoners saying they are listened to, and treated with compassion, dignity and respect.

6.2.4 The Board has remained in regular contact with the mental healthcare teams working at the prison during this challenging lockdown year. The Board retains its view that the provision of mental healthcare at the prison is good, and, this year, those working in mental healthcare have performed exceptionally well in difficult circumstances.

6.4 Exercise, time out of cell, gym

6.4.1 The outdoor gym sessions restarted in August, but were suspended during the second lockdown period. They were restarted in March, with indoor gym session restarting in April, as per guidelines. Additional equipment was provided on wing yards to mitigate the loss of gym sessions.

6.4.2 Physical activity sessions at Rochester are run by enthusiastic staff and are popular with prisoners. The two gymnasiums are well-equipped, and there is facility for indoor sports, such as badminton and indoor tennis. Usually sessions are offered to older prisoners and there is remedial gym-work for those with medical conditions. Sadly all this was suspended during the lockdown period.

6.4.3 In addition the extensive open layout of Rochester means there is opportunity for fresh air and exercise when walking to activities. The grounds are very well maintained.

6.4.4 The welcome restoration of evening association continued during the lockdown period.

6.5 Drug rehabilitation

6.5.1 Alpha Wing is a dedicated drug/alcohol recovery wing and works closely with the Forward Trust who lead on detoxification programmes. The Board was unable to report on their work last year due to restrictions, hence the fuller report this year.

6.5.2 At present Forward Trust have 191 prisoners on structured treatment (with care plan objectives, one-to-one and group sessions, and clinical treatment.) 60 of these are on clinical treatment. All are seen regularly, at least every 4 weeks, or more frequently depending on need. During lockdown, they continued with their work, although some prisoners had in-cell packs rather than face to face sessions. All programmes were stopped during lockdown but from June these will restart, such as Stepping Stones, workshops and other new initiatives. Prisoners get help from Forward Trust by being referred during induction, or through self-referral via their wing. In addition Forward Trust chase up prisoners who are found to be “under the influence”. Those on the programmes who then divert their medication are booked to see the GP for a medication review

6.5.3 Forward Trust have commented to the Board they thought the lockdown at Rochester was managed well, especially in part due to fewer illicit substances being available. However, they are now very concerned about the impact as restrictions

lessen, and the likelihood of more drug availability. The tolerance level of substance misuse for prisoners with addictions will be low, and consequently if they start taking drugs again the repercussions could be serious. They have noted a rise in drug usage over the last 6 weeks since restrictions eased.

6.5.4 The team is fully staffed with 3 managers, 8 drug and alcohol working therapists, and an admin team. There is also a manager and 2 nurses who administer the opiate substitution programme. This is undertaken every day and falls outside the remit of Healthcare.

6.5.5 The Serenity Garden referred to in last year's report, continues to act as a place of peace and calm for identified Alpha wing drug-recovering prisoners. They work in the garden and can rest there. Fortunately, this arrangement continued throughout lockdown. A prisoner recently said to a Board member how much he appreciated working there, and how it had help him gain his self-worth. The Board's view is that it is a welcome initiative, and hopes it can continue.

6.5.6 From its monitoring, the Board has seen the positive impact Forward Trust can have on prisoners, and will continue to monitor progress carefully.

6.6 Soft skills

Unfortunately, creative activities such as music, media and film were unable to take place this year.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 During this year, the Education department provided in-cell work packs, notably in Maths and English, as classroom-based sessions could not take place due to Covid restrictions. Consequently there is nothing further to report this year.

7.1.2 **Library:** The library continued to provide a limited service during the lockdown period, and has recently opened up to allow more book selection.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 With the restrictions, the only work which could be undertaken was Waste Management, Industrial Cleaning (for wings etc), Gym/Segregation Orderlies and in the Kitchen. All vocational training had to stop. Plans are now being developed for the resumption of training and work – especially as the previous work provided by Floplast will no longer be available.

7.2.2 The aim when normal activity is resumed, is to provide more meaningful work for the prisoners, rather than the repetitive activity provided in recent past. Activity such as stone masonry, welding, bicycle workshops and Railtrack will be continuing, as too will be the full range of skills-based training as delivered previously.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 The Offender Management Team (OMU) maintained business as normal during the pandemic - visiting clients and arranging video links for prisoners to see probation and the parole board. However, ROTL for maintaining family ties was suspended.

7.3.2 Some process changes means prisoners arrive at Rochester without an Oasys assessment, as they can be moved within 28 days of sentencing. OMU have therefore adjusted their data handling to identify a 10 week point from sentencing, and are working to this date to complete Oasys assessment. Consequently there will a 'backlog' due to new arrivals arriving constantly. At the end of May, there are about 60 outstanding. However, given the number of complaints from prisoners about delayed Oasys are few, the new system seems to be working satisfactorily. This is supported by the lack of any applications to the Board about this change.

7.3.3 HDC: Pleasingly the numbers being released on HDC were maintained due to an improvement in the reports (from Police and Social Services) being returned on time. Once again the lack of approved hostel placements has impacted on HDC opportunities. For those hoping for HDC, this is frustrating and difficult to cope with at times.

7.3.4 Category D: Lack of Category D places remains a significant problem. All applications to the IMB concerning categorisation relate to frustration felt by prisoners who have worked towards getting Category D status, only to find they remain at Rochester in Category C conditions. Currently there are 75 Category D prisoners waiting to move to open conditions. The position has been made more difficult because of reduced capacity in the open estate from the upgrading of accommodation. The Board continues to be concerned about these delays, and is pressing for more Category D conditions to be made available.

7.3.5 Probation: Having a full time Senior Probation Officer at the prison throughout the reporting period has been beneficial. Unfortunately she has now left and a replacement is not due until later in the year. Probation staffing improved during the year, and the OMU department is operating at its target figure. This means prisoners being allocated appropriately in line with Offender Management In Custody (OMIC) arrangements, whereby Prison Offender Managers no longer deal with high risk cases. In addition links with community probation have improved with the implementation of Stage 2 OMIC.

7.3.6 Offending Behaviour Programmes: These were stopped at the beginning of the lockdown period and, with social distancing requirements, are only just returning in a limited capacity. As Rochester is a resettlement prison, the delivery of these programmes is an important function. The lack of access to the programmes is frustrating for prisoners, as they are unable to complete their progression to open conditions. There are plans to resume full OB programmes as soon as possible, and to include additional programmes to address domestic violence, a significant issue with prisoners at Rochester. If this happens, Rochester's role as the Resettlement prison for the area will be enhanced.

7.4 Family contact

As with the rest of the prison estate, prison visits have been disrupted. All visits were stopped when lockdown commenced in March 2020. They resumed with limited 45-minute sessions when the first lockdown ended, until further restrictions came in during the Autumn. Visits restarted on a similar restricted basis from May 2021. The introduction of video visits (called Purple Visits) was managed well and delivered on time. This was challenging for Rochester with its open location, as wings did not have video facilities. The process to enable the video visits to happen has worked well, and was a welcome innovation. In the Board's view, Purple Visits are worth continuing in the future. The key issue will be staffing both kinds of "visit", given the pressures on staffing already in place.

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 This continued throughout the pandemic. All prisoners are contacted by Kent, Surrey and Sussex CRC, via the Through the Gate programme, which includes help with housing, employment, finances and mentoring. Unfortunately this contact was via letter rather than in person.

7.5.2 The housing officer works hard to find suitable accommodation on release for all those leaving, especially when trying to link this up to a job opportunity. About 25 prisoners have been released in the past 12 months without any accommodation, and consequently homeless. The change in process for liaison with local government does not seem to have increased the availability of accommodation. Given that accommodation in the South East is at a premium, the frustrations felt by the Rehabilitation Team are considerable. The Board monitors the preparation for release closely, and retains the view that too many prisoners are released to become rough sleepers. This in turn is a key factor likely to cause re-offending.

8. The work of the IMB

8.1 Covid-19 Response Arrangements: The Board at Rochester did not have a presence at the prison between April and June. It did however receive regular updates, reports and correspondence from the Governor, senior managers and other prison departments. From late June onwards, the Board was able to return to deal with applications, due to the location of the IMB office in the Gate House (which is outside the main prison site.) The co-operation the Board received from all departments within the prison when dealing with applications at this time (albeit at one remove) was good. Board meetings resumed in July and seven members of the Board returned to restricted monitoring duties, which continued for the rest of the reporting period. Those Board members who were unable to come into the prison were kept informed via emails and telephone calls, and were invited to join board meetings via telephone conferencing. The Board did not take part in the national initiative of the 0800 Helpline, due to its continuing presence at the prison.

8.2 At present there are 9 working members of the Board. Two members left the Board at the start of the pandemic and another long-standing member stood down in December under time-served rules. The Board has recruited 2 new members, who have yet to join the Board.

8.3 The Board continues to enjoy a constructive working relationship with the management of Rochester prison. Either the Governor or his Deputy attended all Board meetings this year. Action points are regularly followed up. The Board wishes to express its gratitude to the Senior Management Team and all staff at Rochester for their openness and willing support to the Board during the year.

8.4 All statutory visits and those relating to individual members' Areas of Special Interest have been undertaken. The Board regularly attends GOOD reviews and has a positive working relationship with the Segregation Unit staff. It is informed promptly of incidents requiring attendance. There is a regular training session held before our monthly meeting, with speakers from across the prison. The revised Monitoring Framework is being used as a guide in how the Board conducts its work.

8.5 The considerable decrease in the number of applications to the Board is more than likely due to the departure of several prolific applicants and the COVID lockdown arrangements at the prison.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	20 – but decreased to 14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	12
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	190
Total number of segregation reviews Attended	Data unavailable

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	14	7
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	16	4
C	Equality	3	1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	32	5
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	25	6
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	Included above	Included above
F	Food and kitchens	7	0
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	58	56
H1	Property within this establishment	60	48
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	Included above	Included above
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	Included above	Included above
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	36	11
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	26	6
K	Transfers	21	5
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	41	14
	Total number of applications	339	163



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