



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Wymott

**For reporting year
1 June 2020 – 31 May 2021**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Wymott is an adult male category C training prison. The population comprises approximately 40% mainstream category C prisoners and 60% prisoners convicted of a sexual offence (PCOSO). The majority of the prisoners are serving sentences of four or more years. Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, the prison had an operating capacity of 1,174 prisoners but this was reduced to 1,020 in May 2020, to enable all prisoners to be accommodated in single cells. It has recently been increased to 1,035.

In its usual form, the accommodation comprises a number of specialist wings, including a care and reablement wing (supported by an older prisoners' activities centre (CAMEO), delivered by the Salvation Army), a drug therapeutic community wing, two psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE) units (for prisoners with personality disorders), an integrated drug treatment programme (managing prisoners on a controlled methadone programme), four wings for PCOSO and three other wings. Since March 2020, the prison has worked with Public Health England (PHE) to reconfigure the population and function of the wings, to provide a protective environment for all of the prisoners, particularly those who are exceptionally vulnerable. Wings were repurposed for shielding these prisoners, the reverse cohorting of those coming into the prison, the isolation of positive cases or essential workers' wings.

Healthcare services are provided by Greater Manchester Mental Health Trust (GMMHT). This includes primary care, dentistry, mental health care and a range of other services. The prison now has an in-house pharmacy. Delphi Medical provides the drug and alcohol recovery service.

Education is provided by Novus, and a full education programme is normally on offer, from pre-entry level up to degree level, with a particular focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills. Group classes have been suspended since March 2020 because of the pandemic, but in-cell materials have been provided for some prisoners to continue their studies (see paragraph 7.1.1).

The prison workshops can offer a range of employments, many of which lead to nationally accredited qualifications. Some of these workshops are operated on a commercial basis, providing quality services to external clients and effectively constitute a 'working prison'. Most of the workshops have been closed to prisoners throughout the reporting period, but during this time the prison has been exploring new opportunities for the prisoners through developing links with local employers (see paragraphs 7.2.1 and 7.2.4).

A range of offending behaviour programmes, to help prisoners address their offending behaviour, is provided by the North-West Regional Psychology Services and the local programmes team. These too have been suspended, but a restricted service is now beginning to be offered.

As Wymott is not a designated resettlement prison, the resources for preparing prisoners for release are limited. Through-the-gate services are provided by Achieve North-West and the community resettlement company (Sodexo), which work with individuals being released outside the probation service. The prison has also developed its own pre-release support programme.

An active chaplaincy supports a range of faiths, and the full-time chaplains are assisted by sessional ministers and volunteers. Pastoral support and family liaison are provided through the chaplaincy. While collective worship has not been possible during the pandemic, the chaplaincy staff have worked tirelessly to visit individual prisoners and to provide weekly faith packs (see paragraph 5.5.2).

The PE department consists of a large sports hall, a well-equipped gym, and a full-size outdoor sports field. During the pandemic, part of the outside area was used to house a number of temporary accommodation units as a contingency, but they were never used and are now being removed.

General maintenance within the prison is provided by Amey, and the visitors centre is managed by Phoenix Futures (see paragraph 7.4.7).

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

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

Although Covid-19 restrictions are now beginning to be lifted in the outside community, the Prison Service has understandably had to be more cautious due to the increased risk of spread in a closed community. The lifting of restrictions nationally has been, and will continue to be, slower than that on the outside, in order to keep prisoners safe. A four-stage recovery programme is being followed, with progression from one stage to the next being subject to national approval. The prison is currently in stage 3.

The Wymott IMB withdrew from the prison at the start of the pandemic, but continued to monitor remotely. Board members returned to direct monitoring at the start of August 2020, and have attended the prison continuously since then. The prison also received a scrutiny visit from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) in August 2020.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

Overall, the Board considers that prisoners are relatively safe at Wymott. All of the staff have worked extremely hard, through very challenging times, and it is to their credit that no prisoners have died from Covid-19. Sadly, four members of staff have been lost. Levels of self-harm and violence have both gone down during the restricted regime (see paragraphs 4.2.1 and 4.3.1). Reported incidents of drug use also went down (see paragraph 4.6.1). Prisoners have regularly told Board members that they feel safer not mixing in large groups (see paragraph 4.2.1). However, there remain some serious concerns around drug-related deaths (see paragraph 4.2.3).

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

In general, prisoners at Wymott are treated with fairness and humanity, although lockdown has inevitably impacted upon time out of cell and family contact. The Board would wish to recognise the good work being done in the prison using the 'buddy' system, in association with Recoop (see paragraph 5.4.3). Rota reports have regularly noted positive interactions between staff and prisoners. The Board would also wish to commend the chaplaincy team for their sustained support for individual prisoners (see section 5.5). There are still significant issues relating to poor handling of prisoners' complaints, and loss of prisoners' property (see sections 5.7 and 5.8).

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

In general, prisoners' health and wellbeing needs are being met. Healthcare staff are to be commended for the efficient roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccination programme. However, certain long-standing problems remain, notably the distribution of medication, inadequacy of premises and waiting times for dental services (see section 6.2).

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

Opportunities for progression have been very limited during 2020/21, and this has been a source of frustration and anxiety for many prisoners. Offender management work was only being carried out remotely for much of the year (see paragraph 7.3.1) and offending behaviour programmes ceased entirely for many months (see paragraph 7.3.2). Recategorisation reviews continued remotely (see paragraph 7.3.4), although transfers to open conditions were stopped for a time. Parole hearings were suspended for several months and there is now a significant backlog. The Board is concerned that much of the through-the-gate work is still being done remotely, and often with only limited involvement of the prisoner (see paragraph 7.5.1).

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Wymott still holds a significant number of prisoners serving indeterminate sentences for public protection (see paragraph 7.3.3). Are there any plans to give these prisoners some cause for optimism?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- One wing in Wymott has already been lost because of failing to meet health and safety legislation. Other wings have been in a dire state for many years. Is funding to be made available to replace the lost accommodation? What plans are in place for the other two wings that the Board has highlighted for a number of years (see paragraph 5.1.3)?
- Can Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) give any indication of a timescale for kitchen improvements at HMP Wymott (see paragraphs 5.1.9 and 5.1.10)?
- Can HMPPS provide assurance that the prisoners' property framework is having any impact on the amount of property still going missing across the estate (see paragraph 5.8.1)?
- Is it anticipated that there will be an increase in the budget for prisoners' pay very soon (see paragraph 7.2.5)?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- The Board seeks reassurance that prisoners' complaints will be dealt with in a timely and effective manner (see section 5.7)
- How does the prison intend to ensure that the actions identified in the action plan following Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reports into deaths in the prison are implemented effectively (see paragraph 4.2.3)?
- The Board would like to see the prison ensure that prisoners due for release are informed in a more timely manner about the arrangements in place for them (see paragraph 7.5.1).

3.4 Progress since the last report

- Work on the main boiler house and hot water supply to the wings is now complete. As a result, there are far fewer complaints from the prisoners about issues with the heating and hot water.
- The Board is pleased to note the reduction in reported acts of violence and self-harm (see paragraphs 4.2.1 and 4.3.1), and would hope to see that continue as the prison moves through the Covid-19 recovery stages.
- The pandemic has clearly hindered progress in a number of areas. The Board feels that it would be unfair to expect to have seen significant improvement during such a challenging period.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

The safer living team has continued to support and maintain prisoners' safety during the pandemic, particularly that of the most vulnerable prisoners. They oversee a range of safety functions, including the assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) process, the diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) board, violence and self-harm, and the use of force committee.

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 Receptions paused at the start of the pandemic, but by August 2020 the prison was again receiving around 10 prisoners a week. Prisoners have been spending the first 14 days on one of the reverse cohorting units (RCUs), to ensure that they were Covid-19-free before moving to one of the other wings.

4.1.2 Prisoners on the RCUs could not access Purple Visits video calls (see also paragraph 7.4.3). Their time out of cell was very limited for a period, when the units were holding a number of small cohorts who needed to be kept separate, but this was gradually extended.

4.1.3 Inductions have been limited, as a number of the prison's specialist functions were suspended, but a Board member canvassed a number of newly received prisoners, and the feedback on their early days experience was very positive. They said that they understood and accepted the need for the restricted regime.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 There were 224 reported acts of self-harm over the reporting period, less than half the figure for 2019/20. This could be attributed to a number of factors, such as prisoners feeling safer only being out in small groups, or more frequent contact with officers doing wellbeing checks. The HMIP report in August 2020 suggested that the figures may be misleading as the prison's population was reduced at the start of the pandemic, but this seems unlikely as the population was only reduced by 154. There may also be a significant amount of hidden self-harm, as the prisoners have spent so much time in their cells.

4.2.2 The number of ACCT documents opened also fell by over half, from an average of 40 per month in 2019/20 to 19 in this reporting year. They began to creep up in April and May 2021, and this would seem to reflect a general feeling of building frustration and anxiety among a small number of prisoners who have struggled with the prolonged restrictions.

4.2.3 There were seven deaths in custody during the reporting year. Six took place in an outside hospital and all six appear to have been due to natural causes. The seventh death occurred in the prison, and appears to have been drug related, but this has yet to be confirmed at a coroner's inquest. The Board is concerned that PPO reports continue to make recommendations in relation to the legal context of risk assessments and failure to follow the national instructions on medical emergency calls, despite the prison providing training and issuing reminders to staff. In the case of the prison death, although the prisoner was a known user of psychoactive substances (PS), the Board was greatly concerned that he had apparently been dead in his cell for some time before he was found after morning unlock. The PPO

report's recommendations relating to this death referred to two issues that have been raised in previous reports: the apparent ease by which prisoners can get hold of drugs in Wymott, and the importance of staff carrying out welfare checks when unlocking prisoners. These have been incorporated into the prison's action plan previously, so it is worrying that they are still being raised.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 The number of recorded acts of violence also fell, from 154 in 2019/20 to 51 in 2020/21. Forty of these were prisoner on prisoner, and 11 were assaults on staff. Prisoners exhibiting violent or challenging behaviour were referred for consideration to apply a challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) to monitor and manage their behaviour.

4.3.2 The safer living team collate data on where and when violence occurs, to identify 'violence hotspots' that need careful management and supervision. They also explore the reasons for violence, and monitor the distribution by age and ethnicity. A Board member regularly attends safer living meetings, and no particular trends have emerged.

4.3.3 During the reporting year, the number of prisoners choosing to self-isolate has fallen to between three and five at any one time. This could be because the amount of time out of cell when they may feel unsafe has been much reduced. However, the Board does have concerns that one prisoner has been isolating since July 2020, and another since January 2021. They are offered the same daily regime as the rest of their wing, although they often refuse it, and are reviewed regularly by the safer living team. A Board member visits them periodically, and monitors their care.

4.3.4 The Board has not been called to attend any serious incidents involving violence this year. The presence of more staff on the wings has meant that minor disturbances have been quickly de-escalated.

4.4 Prisoners with specific vulnerabilities

4.4.1 Prisoners who are particularly vulnerable are identified and safeguarded through the safety intervention and complex case system, which can involve multidisciplinary teams. Relevant information is shared, and a member of the Board monitors this.

4.4.2 A small number of vulnerable prisoners are supported through the CSIP process, being allocated to a specific safety officer (see also paragraph 5.3.2).

4.5 Use of force

4.5.1 Use of force can involve anything from a guiding hold to control and restraint with use of handcuffs or batons. The prison's use of force data show that there were 169 instances where force was used to restrain prisoners, down from 280 in 2019/20. This was an average of 14 per month. The highest monthly figure was in July 2020, as was also the case in July 2019, possibly due to the effects of hot weather.

4.5.2 In May 2021, Wymott's use of force figure of 14 was 30% below the national average.

4.5.3 Body-worn cameras (BWC) were regularly used to record incidents. Handcuffs were used on 78 occasions. Rigid-bar handcuffs were introduced into the prison at the start of the reporting year, and are now used almost exclusively. Staff report that they enable them to bring potentially dangerous situations under control more quickly, which is safer both for staff and prisoners.

4.5.4 The Board is pleased to note that the completion of use of force reports has greatly improved, following the appointment of a custodial manager to chase them up. The use of force committee meets monthly and reviews a sample of BWC and closed-circuit television evidence; a member of the Board regularly attends.

4.6 Substance misuse

4.6.1 PS have continued to be the drugs of choice in the prison, although the number of reported incidents has been much lower than in the pre-Covid period. It is worth noting, however, that the prisoners have been spending much longer behind their doors, so some drug use could have been going undetected. Prisoners have been provided with harm reduction information relating to both PS and alcohol.

4.6.2 There has been an increase in the amount of illicit alcohol being brewed and also a rise in the trading of prescribed medication, presumably due to the reduced availability of other substances.

4.6.3 The prison now has a Rapiscan, to scan mail coming into the prison, and a body scanner in reception, to stop prisoners bringing drugs in from other prisons. It is hoped that these will help to reduce the supply of drugs entering the prison (see paragraph 4.2.3).

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 At the start of the pandemic, the wings were repurposed into isolation, shielding, reverse cohort and workers wings, and this meant that many prisoners had to move wings. For the early part of this reporting year, it was difficult to monitor the wings directly because of lockdown, so, until August 2020, the Board carried out remote monitoring of the wings.

5.1.2 For around seven months (June 2020 to January 2021), work continued on upgrading the boiler house. This resulted in many instances where there was loss of heating and hot water to all the wings, which could last for several days. G and H wings were particularly badly hit. Where necessary, extra blankets and heaters were provided. The work on the boiler house, and the subsequent loss of heating over the winter, did affect the older residents of I and B wings. Even with heaters on the landings, some prisoners stated that their cells were cold.

5.1.3 The infrastructure of A and B wings continues to be a concern to the Board. These wings do not have in-cell sanitation. The windows are single glazed with metal frames, which are not efficient in keeping the cold out of the cells. The wings have communal shower blocks that do not provide any privacy and so are not dignified or humane. The temperature of the showers varies often, from cold to too hot. The tiles continue to fall off the walls and toilets need to be upgraded. Fixed wooden-slat seats remain on some of the toilets, allowing all types of dirt to accumulate underneath, and are almost impossible to clean.

5.1.4 The electrics on A and B wings continued to cause problems. In September 2020, an electric boiler on one of the spurs broke; the prisoners were given additional kettles for hot water. Unfortunately, the electrics are so old that the supply could not cope with the increased consumption and continually tripped, resulting in loss of electricity. The Board is relieved to note that this now seems to be resolved.

5.1.5 The washing machines and dryers on some of the wings are old and have a small wash load. They break down on a regular basis and it often takes months for the repairs to take place. Prisoners have complained that personal items of clothing have gone missing when washing has to be taken to another wing.

5.1.6 During the pandemic, there has been a more intense cleaning regime on the wings, which has ensured that the communal areas have been kept clean. The prisoners have also been provided with additional cleaning materials for their cells.

5.1.7 In February 2021, the prefabricated J wing failed a fire safety inspection and was ordered to close. All the prisoners on the wing were relocated to other wings. The prisoners understood the reason and transferred without much protest, but the Board regrets the loss of this progressive wing. The building is to be demolished and a bid for funding for a new building has been submitted.

5.1.8 At the end of May, the prison was successful in gaining funds for limited refurbishment of some of the showers, mainly on the mainstream wings.

5.1.9 The kitchen, built in 1979, continues to struggle to cater for more prisoners than was originally planned. Much of the cooking equipment is old and items have been continually out of use, awaiting repair. According to the IMB rota reports over the year, between three and eight pieces were out of use at any one time.

5.1.10 The air filtration system in the kitchen does not always work, meaning that on these days, the kitchen cannot use any gas appliances until lunchtime. With the ongoing work on the boiler house, there have been instances of loss of heat and power in the kitchen. In February, the kitchen experienced very low temperatures; one day, it dropped to 4.5°C. Heaters could not be used as they risked tripping the power supply. In the same month, a leak caused additional lights to malfunction and the kitchen had a number of dark areas. This constituted both a health and safety, and a security risk. Despite these challenges, the kitchen staff have maintained food supplies to the wings and are to be commended.

5.1.11 In February, two members of the kitchen staff tested positive for Covid-19, resulting in the kitchen being deep cleaned. Contingency plans were in place for the possibility of many staff being off at the same time, and other members of the prison staff have been trained to ensure continuity of food supply and service. Fortunately, they have not been needed.

5.1.12 Food was served at cell doors during lockdown, but prisoners now collect their meals from the wing serveries. Hand sanitiser is available as the prisoners come to collect food, although this is not always taken up. Lunchtime meals are now cold options, provided in individual bags, and the hot evening meals are placed in individual foil cartons. Feedback from the prisoners has been positive, not just from a quality point of view but also fairness and portion control. This appears to have reduced the bullying of some prisoners. There are also signs that food waste is reducing. The catering manager told the Board that he hopes to continue with individual portioning, but there will be issues of cost and waste packaging to consider.

5.1.13 Across the reporting period, the Board has received just one application relating to food and the kitchens, down from seven in the previous year. The Board feels that this reflects the excellent service provided by the kitchen over the past year.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 Quarterly prison data show that the average number of prisoners held in the care and separation unit (CSU) each week has fallen, from 18.5 in 2019/20 to 9.0 in 2020/21. This reflects the effect of the restricted regime on prisoners' behaviour and feelings of safety. Five prisoners in total were segregated for their own interest, although four of these were in the last quarter (January – March 2021). This might indicate that prisoners are beginning to feel more threatened as they are allowed to spend time out of cell in larger groups.

5.2.2 The average length of stay in the CSU was 8.5 days, down from 17 days in 2019/20, which is a welcome improvement. The Board believes that the increased

presence of officers on the landings because of the regime has allowed prisoners to be more closely managed on the wings. Over the year, seven prisoners remained in the CSU for more than 42 days. The reasons for this were varied, including threats to themselves or others, often linked to mental health issues.

5.2.3 The number of prisoners coming into the CSU on an open ACCT remains of some concern, although the Board understands that these prisoners often have complex issues. In total, 38 prisoners arrived on an ACCT; 14 were able to come off it during their stay.

5.2.4 The CSU still houses a constant watch cell, which is often in use despite the prison setting aside two cells on the wings for this purpose. It is not ideal because of the noise from other prisoners on the unit, particularly at night, and the Board has raised this regularly with the Governor.

5.2.5 The prison keeps data on the percentage of black, Asian and minority ethnic, and disabled prisoners on the unit, and these are reviewed at the equalities board meetings. As the numbers are so small, it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions, but no concerns have been raised by the Board member in attendance.

5.2.6 Between June and early August 2020, the Board was not attending the prison, but received regular feedback from the CSU governor. Since returning to the prison in August 2020, Board members have visited all prisoners held in segregation weekly, and regularly attended good order and/or discipline reviews. They have been satisfied that the correct process has been followed and that the outcomes were fair.

5.2.7 The number of internal adjudications fell from 741 to 230 in the first quarter of 2020/21 as a result of the lockdown at the start of the pandemic. It has gradually increased to 351 in the final quarter. The number of young adults adjudicated rose significantly in the final quarter, possibly because of increased frustrations. The main reasons for being put on report were possession of an unauthorised article, damage to prison property and disobeying an order. Interestingly, there was a shift towards more outwardly aggressive behaviour during the final quarter, with fighting and disobeying orders featuring. It was notable that the percentage of appeals upheld was over 60%. The Governor carried out documented quality checks, and discussed his findings with individual governors.

5.2.8 The special accommodation cell was used just twice over the four quarters. Each time, the Board member on duty was notified, in accordance with protocols, and the prisoner remained in the cell for less than two hours. Mechanical restraints were not used at all.

5.2.9 There were five dirty protests, down from 15 last year. Board members do not visit prisoners while they are on dirty protest, but monitor all documentation relating to their management.

5.2.10 Opportunities for purposeful activities for prisoners in the CSU have been limited during the pandemic, partly because of quarantining of materials, but it is hoped that this will be addressed as restrictions are lifted.

5.3 Staff/prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 Regular key worker sessions ceased at the start of the pandemic, but the prisoners have been receiving regular wellbeing checks. The restricted regime has

allowed the officers on the wings more time to interact with prisoners on a daily basis, and prisoners have told Board members that this has been appreciated. Minor concerns have been able to be addressed before they escalated into formal complaints (see paragraph 5.2.2).

5.3.2 Key work recommenced, in part, towards the end of the reporting year. Prisoners who were deemed to be vulnerable have been having weekly key work sessions (see also paragraph 4.4.2), and others have seen their key worker monthly. The Board notes that recording of the sessions on P-NOMIS has shown some good-quality interactions.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 The Board is pleased to report that the prison has recently appointed an equalities manager, demonstrating a commitment to fair and equitable treatment of prisoners. During the year, the Wymott equality board (WEB) has been renamed 'DEI' (see section 4), to reflect current legislation and policies. Meetings were suspended from March 2020 and recommenced bimonthly from August 2020. Since then, they have been attended by wing representatives on an alternate meeting basis (shielding wings and non-shielding wings invited separately). A Board member has regularly attended the meetings. It continues to be difficult to recruit wing representatives from the mainstream side of the prison.

5.4.2 Prisoners have access to a discrimination incident report form (DIRF) for reporting instances of unfairness in relation to the protected characteristics. Twenty-five DIRFs were submitted during the year, a significant reduction from 59 in the last reporting year. The reasons for this are unclear. Fourteen were related to race, six to religion and five to sexual orientation. A Board member has sampled a cross-section of DIRFs, and most responses were sent within seven days of the complaint being made. The responses were found to be clear and respectful.

5.4.3 The prison holds a significant number of older prisoners suffering with complex physical and mental health issues, and the prison struggles at times to meet their needs (see paragraph 6.4.1). 'Buddies' (prisoners trained by Recoop) help the less able prisoners to keep their cells clean, collect their food and provide social contact. They arrange activities for the prisoners, to encourage social interaction. In March 2021, there were 13 buddies supporting 24 men, and the staff are very complimentary of the work they do. One prisoner with severe dementia has been particularly challenging, but has responded well to having regular support from a buddy.

5.4.4 Wymott currently houses 302 prisoners who are over 50, and 246 of them are situated on the vulnerable prisoner side of the prison. Complaints from the 60+ age group are relatively few, and the rationale given in their focus group is that their needs are being met in relation to the facilities, activities and opportunities in this prison.

5.4.5 Prisoners who have mobility issues are accommodated mostly on the ground floor, but only a small number of cells have been adapted for wheelchair access, and

this can be problematic at times. At the time of writing there are 56 prisoners with disabilities who have personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs).

5.4.6 At the end of the reporting period, there were 29 foreign national prisoners at Wymott, and this figure has remained fairly stable throughout the year. They receive additional support through the prison's foreign nationals strategy and surgeries with a Home Office Immigration Enforcement representative, although these were suspended for a time.

5.4.7 Prisoners under 25 who identify themselves as 'care experienced' are seen by a safety officer, to ascertain if they feel they need support through links with local authorities or social workers. There are currently 42 young prisoners who fit this profile.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 The chaplaincy team has continued to provide individual support to prisoners at their cell doors. Although there has been some relaxation of the restrictions, communal worship is still not available.

5.5.2 The team is to be commended for producing around 300 faith packs every week throughout the year to aid in-cell worship, and also working with Wayout TV to share information and finding ways of providing more one-to-one support and intervention. The Board has been greatly impressed by the commitment of the chaplaincy staff in maintaining this valuable service.

5.5.3 Bereaved prisoners have been offered opportunities to visit the chapel and light a candle for their loved ones, and the family liaison team has also continued to support bereaved families. The chaplaincy has also been active in facilitating the use of iPads to allow prisoners contact with their families at emotionally challenging times (see paragraph 7.4.4).

5.6 Incentives schemes (IP)

5.6.1 The prison has continued to follow HMPPS guidelines in avoiding reducing any prisoner to the support level (basic) regime. This has meant that all prisoners, except those in the CSU, have had access to free television throughout the year. The prison has conducted a review of prisoners who are on an enhanced regime, but the Board is not aware of any prisoner losing this privilege as a result of this process.

5.6.2 The DEI board reviews data on the distribution of IP levels against the protected characteristics, and no issues of concern have been raised.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 The Board is still concerned about failings in the complaints procedure. A number of applications have been received from prisoners stating that their complaints are not being responded to within the designated timeframe, or, in some

instances, not being logged at all. The Board has brought this to the attention of the senior management team in the prison, which is actively trying to resolve the situation. The Board acknowledges the impact of staff shortages as a consequence of the pandemic, but would have hoped to see some improvement by now.

5.7.2 Confidential complaints, which go directly to the Governor, were not being logged and followed up appropriately. The Board raised this as a concern, and all Comp 2 forms are now recorded.

5.7.3 The DEI board found that there were few complaints in the over-60s age band (see paragraph 5.4.4). They were slightly elevated in the 'white other' ethnic group, although this was mainly due to one prisoner submitting a lot of complaints. This individual also submitted a large number of applications to the Board, and we found that, in several instances, his complaints had not been dealt with satisfactorily.

5.8 Property

5.8.1 The Board has serious concerns about the amount of property that goes missing when prisoners are transferred from one prison to another. Prisoners have submitted Comp 1 and 1a forms to the relevant prisons but the Board is alarmed at the regular failure to respond, despite follow-up reminders from the business hub. Loss of property has had a particularly detrimental effect on prisoners who have very little property logged on their cards, when what they have then goes missing. This includes the loss of personal letters, photographs and legal papers. The Board has observed no improvement over the reporting period.

5.8.2 There have been several instances of parcels reportedly sent in to enhanced prisoners going missing, although the Board has not been able to ascertain whether the problem lies with the prison or the carrier.

5.8.3 The Board received 13 applications for property lost 'during transfer or in a different establishment or location', down from 31 in 2019/20. A further 11 applications related to property lost within Wymott, down from 29 in the previous year.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the provision of primary healthcare services, and the healthcare staff are to be commended for their hard work in rolling out the vaccination programme in line with that in the outside community. However, the longstanding problems raised in previous reports still persist.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 Although many of the clinics have been taken out onto the wings during the pandemic, the healthcare centre remains too small, with insufficient treatment rooms and small, badly ventilated waiting areas. This has been highlighted by the Care Quality Commission.

6.2.2 There is still too great a reliance on agency staff, especially pharmacy staff, leading to cancellations and problems with the distribution of medication.

6.2.3 During the reporting period, prisoners have complained repeatedly about the distribution of medication. There have been problems regarding both the length of time taken to distribute medication on the wings and, more importantly, the lack of continuity of supply. This becomes a particularly serious problem where antipsychotic and diabetic medications are involved. On certain wings, there has also been a problem of inadequate supervision of the dispensing hatch queues, to prevent bullying.

6.2.4 Dental treatments and denture fittings have been heavily affected, with waiting times of one year 27 weeks and one year seven weeks, respectively, towards the end of the reporting period. Many treatments could not be carried out for much of the year and, when they recommenced, progress was slow because of having to allow time between treatments, for the room to be cleaned.

6.2.5 Equipment for aspirated treatments in dentistry has now been installed, but the staffing requirements for such treatments mean that they are often cancelled due to a lack of prison staff.

6.2.6 Since the healthcare centre has been reopened to prisoners, there have been further problems regarding their escorts back to the wings and, in addition, the Board notes with concern that the receptionist has not been replaced by GMMH, leaving prison officers to manage this.

6.2.7 The healthcare forum was unable to meet for much of the year. When it recommenced, prisoners on shielding wings were unable to attend. Concern previously expressed by the Board about the cancellation of meetings of the forum, with little or no notice, persists. Since the restart, several have been cancelled and attendance at others has been very poor.

6.3 Mental health

6.3.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the provision of mental healthcare services. Staffing shortages persisted, and one senior member of staff was absent for several months due to shielding. Prisoners with mental health issues were seen on the wings, but little follow-up treatment was provided.

6.3.2 Clinical provision has continued throughout the reporting period, but therapy now has a 12- to 14-month waiting list. Prisoners due for release are currently being told that they will not be seen, and offered links to community services on release.

6.3.3 During the reporting period, there was no group therapy provision and, although there is now some contact, this provision is not possible with current cohorting arrangements.

6.3.4 It is of great concern to the Board that some prisoners have still had very long waits for places in secure mental health facilities.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1 There have, again, been a large number of instances when only one care assistant has been present on I wing. This has severely impacted on the tasks which could be done. Given the complex needs of the prisoners on I wing and the fact that it has been a shielding wing, staff are, again, to be praised for the way they have met these challenges.

6.4.2 Some prisoners have had to rely on the goodwill of prison staff in performing tasks beyond their remit and skill. The introduction of the 'buddy' system has been very beneficial, particularly for one prisoner with advanced dementia (see paragraph 5.4.3).

6.4.3 Obtaining and repairing daily living aids, such as grab rails and wheelchairs, has taken longer than usual, limiting the quality of life for a small number of prisoners.

6.5 Exercise, regime

6.5.1 At the start of the reporting year, all gym sessions had been cancelled. The prison exercise instructors produced some simple fitness programmes that prisoners could follow in their cells until they were able to provide sessional gym sessions outdoors. Since December 2020, small groups of prisoners have been able to use the indoor gym facilities on a rota basis, with strict Covid-19 protocols in place.

6.5.2 Within the restricted regime, prisoners have been given 45 minutes out of cell in the morning and afternoon to exercise, shower and make telephone calls. The Board has concerns about the impact of the limited time out of cell on prisoners' physical and mental health, but many prisoners have told Board members that they feel safer.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

6.6.1 Drug programmes and support are provided by Delphi through a drug and alcohol recovery service. However, therapeutic programmes have been severely curtailed during the reporting period because of Covid-19 restrictions. Prisoners have been provided with in-cell work and distraction packs to help maintain their motivation.

6.6.2 The therapeutic community (TC) on K wing was closed as part of the Covid-19 restrictions, and prisoners already on the programme were kept in contact via newsletters. The Board is pleased to note that the TC was partially reinstated toward the end of the reporting period, with a limited programme for 10 prisoners on one spur of its previous location.

6.7 Soft skills

6.7.1 Other distraction/activity packs have also been issued. Painting by numbers has been a notable success in supporting the mental health of prisoners, particularly those shielding on K wing.

6.7.2 It has not been possible for the prisoners to have group sessions to develop their creative skills, but the Board has been told by senior staff that there are plans to expand this area once restrictions are lifted.

6.7.3 Sunday afternoon bingo was reintroduced on I wing, to provide mental stimulation for the older prisoners. Bingo afternoon has also started on the older prisoners unit on B wing. Prisoners have commented that little things matter in these dismal times, and that this additional activity is a real bonus. Recoop has also provided a 'Wing-it' activity box with activity equipment, for use by the buddies on G/H wings.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 There has been no face-to-face education over the past year because of the restricted regime during the pandemic. During the early stages, basic work packs were sent to the wings, but take-up of these was disappointing and they were not always followed up. Education staff were permitted to return to work in July 2020 and tutors started to produce more targeted distance learning packs which they collected and processed, while from May 2021 tutors were able to visit prisoners and carry out limited face-to-face work with them. Some distance learning through the Open University has been taking place, and specific programmes in subjects such as infection control, industrial cleaning, bricklaying, mathematics and English have also been supported through study packs.

7.1.2 Classroom-based education will not be reinstated at least until the prison moves to stage 2 of its four-phase recovery plan. At this stage, groups will be small and opportunities clearly limited. The Board will closely monitor the impact of this on the prisoners.

7.1.3 The IT facilities in the education area have now been upgraded, with new computers and interactive whiteboards in classrooms. The virtual training centre, which was condemned as a result of its poor ventilation, is due to be improved in July 2021.

7.1.4 The library was out of use for the first part of the year because of Covid-19 restrictions, and during that period small wing-based libraries were set up. Library staff withdrew from the prison for a time, but on their return were able to invest in new stock and furniture, as well as a set of talking books for prisoners on I wing (the care and enablement wing). Although the library is only operating remotely, it offers an outreach service: sets of books are delivered to the wings and a request system is in place that is well used by the prisoners. The highly successful reading groups have continued to operate, with books sent to members and comments invited. Storybook Dads, another very successful programme, has been introduced as a remote activity, with books purchased to enable a father and his child to read together during an online visit.

7.1.5 At the end of the last reporting year, the Board expressed concern about high levels of cancelled library sessions, largely due to staff shortages. The Board is pleased to note that permanent library staff have now been appointed. One challenge that faces the staff is how to enable prisoners to return to browsing the stock while maintaining safe practices.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 Most of the industries have been closed for the entire year because of Covid-19 restrictions, with only essential work operating. This includes cleaning, waste management, essential laundry, kitchen work, DHL and distribution packing.

7.2.2 The physical environment was identified as an area of concern for the Board in 2019/20. Since then, roof repairs have commenced on the vulnerable prisoner industries workshops, and this major essential work is being completed in stages. The laundry remained open until late July 2020, when work began on repairing the roof. The reopening, scheduled for May 2021, was delayed until August 2021.

7.2.3 Some work has been carried out in the gardens, and wings have been painted as a means of improving the physical environment and also providing meaningful activity for some prisoners. In total, only 200–250 prisoners have had access to work during the pandemic.

7.2.4 Other industries will not be reinstated until the prison moves to stage 2 of its four-phase recovery plan. At this stage, groups will be small and opportunities for work will be part-time, although plans to introduce a range of new and relevant employment, such as lawnmower repair, bicycle repair and community engagement workshops, are well under way. The Board will monitor the impact of this development on the prisoners.

7.2.5 All unemployed prisoners have received an enhanced level of pay during the lockdown; however, the Board has some concerns about the adequacy and equity of pay as the Covid-19 recovery plan is implemented, particularly as the proposed new personal integrated compact model significantly reduces the amount of time that prisoners spend in employment. At the time of reporting, a pay review is under way and the Board will closely monitor the outcome of this.

7.2.6 Sadly, the employer engagement calendar has been suspended, although it is planned that this will be reinstated as soon as regulations permit.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on offender management and progression. Probation officers and prison offender managers (POMs) withdrew from the prison during lockdown, and face-to-face-work ceased. Since returning, most of them have continued to work partly from home, reducing opportunities for prisoners to see their POM.

7.3.2 Offending behaviour programmes also ceased, which meant that the prisoners could not progress with their sentence plans. Courses are gradually recommencing, but with much reduced group sizes. Priority is being given to prisoners who are nearing the end of their sentence, but groups can only be made up of prisoners from the same cohort, leading to much frustration at the slow progress. Some prisoners have been released without completing courses.

7.3.3 The Board remains deeply concerned at the number of prisoners at Wymott serving indeterminate sentences. At the end of the reporting period, there were 51 prisoners serving indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPP), and 186 serving life sentences. There is little incentive or opportunity for any of these prisoners to progress.

7.3.4 Transfers between prisons have understandably been kept to a minimum, which has led to some frustration, particularly among prisoners who have been waiting to move to open conditions or to resettlement prisons in other regions.

7.3.5 Parole boards were suspended for a time, but have recommenced remotely. There is a significant backlog. Recategorisation reviews have been maintained. In January/February 2021, the prison carried out a review of the outcomes of the recategorisation process according to ethnicity. The results are shown in the table below:

Ethnic group	No. of reviews	No. successful	% successful
White	97	18	19%
Asian	3	0	0%
Black	1	0	0%
Mixed/other	6	2	33%

The table shows that the highest proportion of successful applicants came from the mixed/other group, although the figures are too small to draw any meaningful conclusions.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 As a result of the Covid-19 restrictions, it has been a difficult year for the prisoners to maintain direct family contact. Many strategies were put in place, so that prisoners had other routes to keep in touch with families. Prisoners have complained of delays in the receipt of mail, although this has often been due to incoming mail having to be quarantined.

7.4.2 Wymott does not have in-cell telephones, so prisoners have had to use the communal telephones located on the wings. They were given daily time out of cells in small cohorts, so that the demand for the telephones was spread out. They have appreciated the extra £5 telephone credit received each week during the pandemic. The prison also obtained a small number of mobile devices for prisoners to contact families at times of stress.

7.4.3 Video calling ('Purple Visits') was introduced as another way that prisoners could 'see' family (see paragraph 4.1.2). Each visit lasts for half an hour, once a month. There were initial technical problems but these were rectified. The programme has been a success, with very positive feedback from the most isolated. The 'email a prisoner' scheme was also introduced, whereby prisoners could receive and reply to emails from their family.

7.4.4 iPads have been made available, to enable contact during a funeral or when a loved one was dying and visits were not possible (see paragraph 5.5.3).

7.4.5 The family development officer has been very innovative in developing ways for prisoners to send messages to their loved ones. She arranged for photographs of over 250 prisoners to be printed, along with a short message telling loved ones that they were fine and would see them soon. At Christmas, staff and volunteers made hundreds of Christmas tree decorations, so that prisoners could send one to their families, and this was widely appreciated.

7.4.6 In July 2020, on-site visits recommenced, but were again cancelled in January 2021. They restarted in May, but hugging and handshakes have not been allowed. Visitor numbers per day have been very low, as visitors from lockdown areas were not allowed to book visits. Prisoners told the prison council meeting that families were reluctant to come in. They also cited the lack of a canteen and the necessity to socially distance as other reasons.

7.4.7 Phoenix Futures maintained contact with families throughout the reporting period, using video technology to hold forums and to provide up-to-date information.

7.4.8 During the reporting period, the Board had 32 applications relating to contact, down from 45 the previous year. The highest monthly total was for December 2020 (seven).

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 Achieve North-West and the community rehabilitation company withdrew from the prison at the start of the pandemic, and pre-release work was done remotely, which has caused a lot of anxiety among prisoners. Although they are now back in the prison, the Board is concerned that release arrangements are often not communicated to the prisoner until just before their release date. A number of older prisoners have approached Board members not knowing where, or even if, they will have accommodation.

7.5.2 Wymott has continued to release prisoners to a range of settings (see table below). It has been particularly challenging, as most approved premises closed during lockdown or have had to restrict their numbers. The total number of releases has increased slightly this year, from 296 in 2019/20.

June 2020 – May 21	PCOSO	Main category C	Total
Approved premises	78	61	139
Permanent accommodation	36	69	105
Supported housing	3	9	12
Short-term accommodation	17	15	32
Home detention addresses	0	19	19
Psychiatric hospital	2	0	2
Unknown (out of region)	1	0	1
Other hostel	1	0	1
Deportation	1	0	1
No fixed abode	0	0	0
Total releases	139	173	312

7.5.3 No prisoners met the criteria for early release under the end of custody temporary release scheme brought in by the government during the pandemic.

7.5.4 Achieve North-West has reported that Covid-19 made it more difficult to find employment for prisoners on release. Prisoners also found that they could not spend their discharge grant money.

7.5.5 Progression to resettlement prisons ceased for a time at the start of the pandemic, and has been restricted for much of the year. This has been a cause of frustration and anxiety for the prisoners, and has contributed to the numbers released directly from Wymott (see paragraph 7.5.2).

8. The work of the IMB

The Board membership remains well below the permitted complement of 16, but the Board is satisfied that it has been able to carry out its monitoring duties effectively. There are currently eight members – five experienced and three at various stages of their probation. A recruitment campaign is about to be launched to strengthen and extend the Board's performance. During the pandemic, individual Board members have undertaken development through online training, webinars and other virtual meetings, and the Chair has taken part in virtual meetings with other Chairs in the region.

From March to August 2020, Board members did not attend the prison, but carried out their monitoring duties remotely through report reading, emails and telephone calls to the prison. Members were conscious that this was mainly providing a one-sided view, so on a small number of occasions, telephone calls with prisoners were facilitated to hear their experiences of the restricted regime. Most Board members have returned to direct monitoring in a Covid-safe way since August 2020. Board meetings continued to be held via Zoom until April 2021, and were regularly attended by the Governor, which was appreciated. The Chair also had regular telephone calls with the Governor.

Board members have continued to receive applications from individual prisoners on a variety of issues (see data below). These have been investigated, and responses provided as promptly as possible. While the Board was not attending the prison, written applications were scanned and emailed out via secure email, and a national 0800 telephone line was set up to enable prisoners to call the IMB. Call handlers record the prisoner's issue and pass it to the Board at the relevant prison. Two of the Wymott members volunteered to act as call handlers. It is hoped that this will be retained as an alternative way for prisoners to contact their local IMB, being particularly useful for prisoners with limited writing skills.

Experienced Board members take particular interest in at least one specialist monitoring area. This improves the Board's breadth and depth of monitoring. Board development is normally supported by regular pre-Board meetings, at which aspects of the Board's monitoring work are discussed or updates are provided by members of prison staff on their area of work. During the reporting year, this has been limited, but a planned programme is now in place, moving forward.

The Board usually makes every effort to attend reviews of prisoners held in segregation under Prison Rule 45 as part of the weekly rota (see table below). While the Board was not attending the prison, a governor emailed the outcomes of reviews, and Board members were able to discuss any concerns with him. The Board maintains its own record of individual reviews and is thus able to have a continuous overview of each prisoner held under Prison Rule 45. The Board also attends a sample of internal and independent adjudications. It has not been possible to attend adjudications in person since March 2020 because of social distancing requirements, but reports and data have been scrutinised.

During the early part of the reporting year, few prison meetings were held, but members are now attending a range of prison meetings as observers. This helps to

extend their depth of monitoring and to inform them of events and changes within their specialist areas.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	270*
Total number of segregation reviews attended	88**

*No visits were carried out between 19 March and 10 August 2020, and visits were restricted to minimise footfall at other key times.

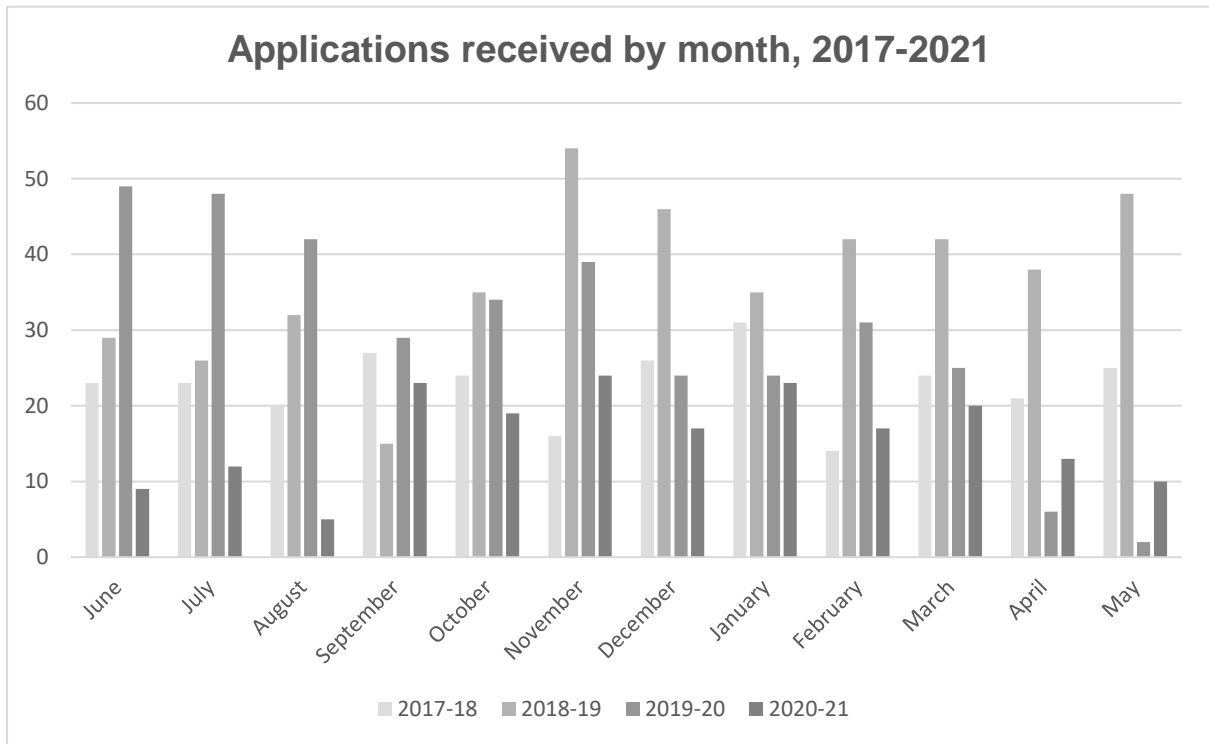
**No reviews were attended during April, May, June and July 2020, or in March 2021 because of Covid-19 outbreaks.

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	12	4
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	23	8
C	Equality	3	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	37	17
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	45	32
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	13	7
F	Food and kitchens	7	1
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	42	29
H1	Property within this establishment	29	11
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	31	13
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	3	4
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	48	21
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	27	15
K	Transfers	18	5
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	15	23
	Total number of applications	353	192

Applications for the 2020/21 reporting year are once again notably fewer than for the previous year, at just over 54% of the 2019/20 total. This reflects a full 12 months of Covid-19 restrictions, whereas for the previous reporting year just three months were spent in lockdown. In March 2020, members of the Board ceased their attendance and dealt with applications remotely. During this period, from April to August 2020, the number of applications received fell to just 34 compared with 225 in the previous year.

After five months of working remotely, most members of the Board resumed their attendance at the prison in August 2020. The free 0800 applications line was launched in July, although, to date, only 19 applications have been received in this way, seven of which were from one prisoner. Despite the relatively low numbers, the Board considers this to be a positive additional means for prisoners to submit applications, particularly as it enables more detailed information to be logged at the point of initial contact.



Several factors may have affected the further reduction in application numbers, many of which began at the end of the previous year. These include greater officer presence on the wings, restrictions on work and labour movement, more time devoted to resolving issues on the wings before they are escalated, changes to the way that healthcare services are delivered and fewer transfers between prisons for an extended period.

The greatest number of applications received concerned contact, primarily missing and late receipt of mail (see paragraph 7.4.1). The Board has investigated this at length and has raised concerns with the Governor. The Board reported an increase in applications in 2019/20 that related to sentence management, and noted that this correlated with acute staff shortages in the offender management unit. The Board is pleased to note that the number of applications in this category has fallen by over 56%, and most of these were submitted during a period when offender managers were not attending the prison in person.

Despite falls in nearly all areas, there has been an increase this year in the number of applications that relate to complaints, primarily where these have not been responded to, either within the designated time period or, in many cases, not at all (see paragraph 5.7.1). The Board has raised concerns about the adequacy, effectiveness and timeliness of the prison's responses to prisoner complaints.



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