



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Woodhill

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

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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 Woodhill is a complex prison serving multiple functions that is part of the long-term and high-security estate (LTHSE). The prison re-rolled to become a category B long-term prison in late 2019, but the outbreak of Covid-19 has prevented many of the changes needed to implement fully the provision of services for this type of prisoner. This remained true for the whole of the reporting year.

The prison accommodates primarily category B male prisoners serving sentences of four or more years. It also holds a small number of category A prisoners, mainly on remand and attending trial. In addition, Woodhill has a close supervision centre (CSC), a separation centre and a discrete unit (see below). The perimeter security is category A level, as is part of the interior of the site.

The main prisoner accommodation is made up of five house units, and there is a healthcare inpatient facility and a segregation unit. House units 1–4 are each divided into two wings, A and B. Each wing holds 60 prisoners. House unit 5 holds 90. Almost all prisoners occupy single cells.

For most of the reporting year, one of the house units in rotation was closed for work to upgrade the fire alarm system. Towards the end of the year, the healthcare and segregation units were relocated to temporary accommodation, so that the fire alarm upgrading could be carried out there.

House unit 6 has two CSC units, which are administered and managed under a national strategy through the security directorate. These units hold some of the most challenging prisoners in the prison system, requiring demanding efforts to achieve headway in rehabilitation. They can hold a maximum of 10 prisoners each. The prisoners spend almost all their time in the house unit.

There is also a separation centre, to hold extremist prisoners away from the general population, and a small discrete unit for other prisoners who need to be held away from those on normal location. The units on house unit 6 are self-contained, with their own gym, visits areas and other facilities. One small area of house unit 6 remained unused throughout the year.

At the start of the reporting year, the separation centre was closed, but it reopened towards the end of 2020.

The operational capacity of Woodhill when all accommodation is in use will be 614 but for this reporting year it varied between 450 and 480 because of the temporary closures of units.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

The reporting year was dominated by the restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. For the first part of the reporting year, prisoners were confined to their cells for 23 hours a day, being allowed out only for exercise and showers. Visits, religious services, education and the gym were all stopped. Prisoners were kept in small groups and not allowed to mix, to reduce the chance of transmission of the virus.

The prison took other measures to reduce the spread of the virus, and through good planning and good fortune there was no outbreak at Woodhill. There were only two cases among prisoners, and both of those were in individuals transferred from other prisons who were already infected. The isolation measures for all transferees to Woodhill helped protect the resident population. Woodhill was reported as being the only prison that did not have an outbreak among its prisoners during the year.

At times, over 15% of staff were either off sick or isolating because they had been in contact with cases or were vulnerable. In addition, there were other staff off work for more 'normal' reasons, such as annual leave, maternity or other sickness absences. This inevitably affected the provision of the regime, including dealing with applications and complaints, prisoner monies, answering queries, and basic locking and unlocking.

There was some relaxation of the restrictions during the summer of 2020; visits restarted and time out of cell was increased to two hours a day. However, the severe restrictions were re-imposed in December 2020. They continued until May 2021, when visits resumed again and there was limited use of the gym. The prison continued to provide limited in-cell education, a wider allocation of televisions, DVD and games loans, and activity packs.

Two other themes were notable during the year: the levels of violence and the new ways of sending banned items into the prison.

Throughout the year, there were very high levels of violence, of all types, reported: assaults by prisoners on staff, assaults by prisoners on prisoners, and prisoners' self-harm. Woodhill had the highest level among comparator establishments, although there were some indications that the prison was more assiduous in reporting incidents than other prisons. The prison took several strong initiatives to tackle the problems during the second half of the year.

In response to the visiting and movement restrictions caused by Covid-19, Woodhill experienced a huge increase in the number of 'throw-overs'. There were no visitors, and prisoners could not mix outside their Covid-19 'bubble' of 20. Packages started to be propelled into an exercise yard, and were retrieved by prisoners into their cells via someone in the yard or by using a retrieval line. Many of the packages were

retrieved before they got to prisoners and were found to contain mobile phones, SIM cards and drugs.

The prison responded by installing restrictors on windows, so that the packages could not be retrieved by prisoners. There was also close liaison with the local police for increased monitoring outside the perimeter, and assistance from local residents identifying suspicious people. The number of throw-overs had declined markedly, to almost nil, by spring 2021. The lack of available drugs seemed to provoke increases in self-harming and brewing 'hooch' to distract prisoners from the harsh realities of incarceration, particularly with the Covid-19 restrictions.

Finally, a note about the speed of the prison's information technology (IT) systems. While the software and programmes used in the prison are generally very good, the poor speed of the connections and processing makes them almost unusable for prison staff and the Board. Untold hours are wasted as staff sit and wait for a response to a key press, or a system process to respond. Staff productivity would be increased considerably if the speed of the IT systems matched those generally used in other organisations.

The preparation of this report has been more difficult than in pre-Covid years. The assessments made are based on observation throughout the reporting year and information obtained from the prison where it was available. However, during the Covid-19 emergency it has not always been possible to triangulate the evidence to substantiate our observations as well as we would have hoped. Thanks are due to prison staff for providing us with information despite the difficulties they faced.

Note that the statistics quoted below may refer to the prison's reporting year, which runs from April to March, rather than the Board's reporting year.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

The Board judges that the prison is reasonably safe, despite:

- a) the high levels of all types of violence
- b) the high proportion of inexperienced staff, which results in delicate situations being mishandled, inadequate knowledge of rules and processes, and safety being compromised. There is also a small proportion of staff who appear not to care sufficiently about prisoners' welfare.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

The Board judges that prisoners are mainly treated humanely, despite:

- a) too many prisoners being held in segregation for long periods. Despite the best efforts of prison staff, prisoners are held for months waiting for referral to the CSC system, transfer to a special unit or for a progression plan to be

formulated, or simply held because they cannot or will not go back to normal location and there seem to be no other options

- b) continuing problems with moving prisoners' property, principally by prisons transferring property to Woodhill. Property is frequently lost or delayed in transit
- c) prisoners arriving at Woodhill who are concealing contraband, indicating that they were not properly search before leaving their former prison
- d) servery facilities being poorly maintained, hygiene procedures being followed sporadically and inadequate record-keeping
- e) the impact of the Covid regime restrictions on prisoners' wellbeing, essential though they may have been to protect their physical health.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

The Board judges that the healthcare services operated well, despite:

- a) the severe difficulties caused by the Covid-19 restrictions
- b) staffing and other resource constraints
- c) the disruption caused by relocating prisoners temporarily to other premises during building works.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

The Board judges that progression has been inadequate because:

- a) Covid-19 restrictions meant that there were delays in progressing parole board hearings
- b) Covid-19 restrictions meant that education and library provision was curtailed
- c) for most of the year, there were no social visits, although video-conferencing facilities ameliorated the situation somewhat
- d) there are too few offending behaviour programmes to progress prisoners towards parole release
- e) there are too few workshops, education and library facilities to advance prisoners' work and qualifications.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- a) Again, we ask the minister to work with ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health to ensure that delays in transferring prisoners to secure mental health facilities are reduced.
- b) To review the per-day funding allocation for food and to ensure that prisoners are able to access, for example, five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, in line with current Department of Health and Social Care guidance

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- a) To increase the number of specialist units to cater for prisoners now kept in long-term segregation
- b) To review and reform the property system, to reduce delays in transportation, inconsistencies in entitlements and reduce losses
- c) To ensure that prisoners are properly searched and transferred from one prison to another without contraband
- d) To ensure sufficient funding for works and maintenance
- e) To increase efforts to recruit and retain uniformed staff
- f) To improve the speed of prison IT systems.

TO THE GOVERNOR

- a) To continue to work with the Service to reduce the number and length of stay of prisoners placed in segregation
- b) To ensure that appropriate offending behaviour programmes are reinstated as early as possible to support the progression of prisoners
- c) To expand work and education opportunities to a level where all those seeking work can be supported and ensure that education opportunities at a range of entry levels are available to all
- d) To increase efforts to improve servery hygiene and maintain the food logs on each wing.

3.4 Progress since the last report

The Board's report for 2019/20 included requests for improvements to the following areas, and the resulting action has been:

TO THE MINISTER

- a) To ask the minister to work with ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health to ensure that delays in transferring prisoners to secure mental health facilities are reduced – there has been some evidence of faster referral and transfers, but, overall, the process is still much too slow.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- a) To ask the Service to review and reform the property system, to reduce delays in transportation, inconsistencies in entitlements and reduce losses – no progress
- b) To ensure that prisoners are properly searched and transferred from one prison to another without contraband – no apparent progress
- c) To improve the management of long-term segregated prisoners – some signs of limited progress towards the end of the year
- d) To ensure sufficient funding for works and maintenance – no progress.

TO THE GOVERNOR

- a) To reduce the supply of illicit items, specifically drugs, phones and weapons – supply reduced due to Covid-19 restrictions and installation of window opening restrictors
- b) To manage more effectively the works maintenance programme – limited progress but difficulties due to Covid-19 restrictions
- c) To manage more effectively the distribution of kit – some progress made
- d) To continue efforts already being made through the Woodhill Growth Project to create a culture where the wellbeing and progression of prisoners is the prime consideration for staff – Covid-19 restrictions have made progress difficult
- e) To increase prisoners' time out of cell – Covid-19 restrictions have precluded this
- f) To improve the quality of use of force records – progress evident in improved quality.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Covid-19 restrictions meant that the number of transfers in and out of Woodhill was reduced significantly to inhibit transmission of the virus. Towards the end of the reporting year, transfer numbers increased, but not to pre-pandemic levels.

The long-term problem noted in last year's report of prisoners arriving late in the day has not improved. It appears that the cause is that Serco carries out court movements first, before moving prisoners between prisons.

The Rapiscan body scanner is used daily and more staff had been trained in its use. It has proved very important in detecting contraband items secreted by prisoners, not only on the new arrivals, but also on long-term Woodhill prisoners.

The induction unit was located on house unit 5, and the Covid-19 pandemic caused challenges. Prisoners moving in from a 'green' establishment did not need to isolate but those arriving from a 'red' or 'amber' establishment were isolated for 10 days. They could form a 'bubble' with other prisoners on the same transport van.

During the reporting year, the number of prisoners arriving at Woodhill each month ranged from 13 in August 2020 to 52 in October 2020.

Due to staff shortages in reception, prisoners were sometimes moved off the induction unit to a residential unit without their property.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There was one death in custody during the reporting period, on 25 April 2021. It is likely to have been self-inflicted but at the time of writing the inquest had yet to take place.

The Board is pleased to note from the visits it has been able to conduct this year that the quality of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents has improved since the last reporting year. Both the procedural elements of the ACCT document and the quality of the written observations have improved. ACCT documents are checked for quality of entries and actions.

The number of ACCTs remained stubbornly high (see table below). This is unsurprising in the current restricted regime because of prisoner frustrations and boredom. The Board was pleased to note that the prison undertook a 'safer prisons survey' in December 2020, to try to better understand, among other issues, the reasons for self-harm from the prisoners' perspective. Over 68% of survey forms were returned and over half of these said that not being listened to by staff was the most common reason for self-harm. This was followed up with a prisoner discussion forum. Notwithstanding the pressures of the current regime, it would appear that yet

more can be done by prison officers to assist prisoners at risk of self-harm, by ensuring that they listen to and act on information from all prisoners.

Number of ACCTs as a proportion of prison population

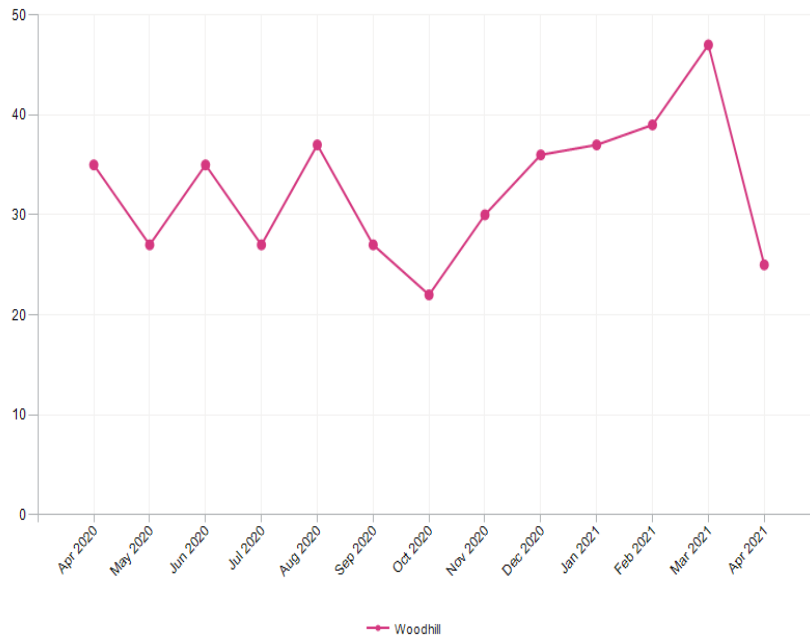
Month (1st of)	Roll	Number of ACCTs	% of population
June 2020	498	20	4.02%
July 2020	491	24	4.89%
August 2020	476	17	3.57%
September 2020	469	19	4.05%
October 2020	463	15	3.24%
November 2020	479	18	3.76%
December 2020	474	21	4.43%
January 2021	476	21	4.41%
February 2021	485	25	5.15%
March 2021	471	27	5.73%
April 2021	475	22	4.63%
May 2021	455	20	4.40%

Self-harm increased during the Covid restricted regime, and also after measures were taken to physically prevent/reduce the success of 'throw-overs', with the introduction of window bars. Illicit items were harder to obtain, and it was believed by the safety team, and supported by healthcare staff, that this could have increased frustration and self-harm. Prisoners reported discontent at the number of inexperienced officers, who were reported as being inconsistent in their dealings with prisoners.

In April 2021, there was a significant improvement in the number of incidents of self-harm following an upward trend since October 2020. It is hoped that this progress

will be maintained, as the incidence of self-harm per thousand prisoners has been worryingly high over the whole year (see figure below).

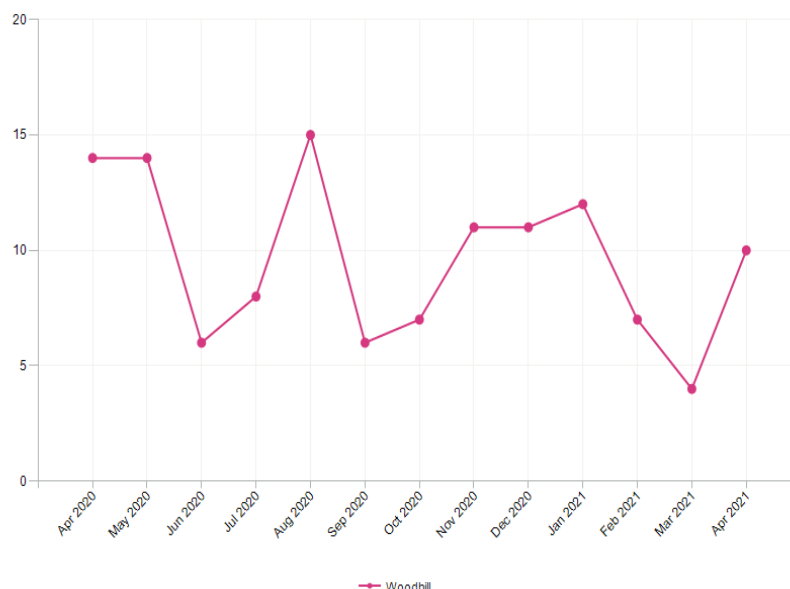
Self-harm rates (rate per 1000 prisoners)



4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The levels of violence (both against staff and prisoner-on-prisoner) continue to be of great concern to the Board and to the prison. The level of violence against staff has shown a slight downward trend when taken over the whole year, but is still the highest when compared with other prisons in the high-security estate, despite Woodhill's relatively small population (see figure below).

Assault rate on all staff



The safer prisons survey undertaken by the prison in December 2020 asked prisoners how violence could be reduced. The most frequent response was to have more proactive staff, followed by more activities. Other evidence to support this view came from the members of the LTHSE team, which was invited by the prison to carry out a 'health check' of safety within HMP Woodhill. This team found a high proportion of inexperienced staff who lacked 'jail craft' and needed to develop their interpersonal skills. This was recognised by the senior management team, which is committed to improving the situation. In addition, high levels of absence and restricted duties among staff, as found by the safety team, and high levels of temporary appointments to supervisory roles, has added to the lack of experience in role. It is suggested by the management team that this will affect the speed at which Woodhill can open up the regime for prisoners, and will thus impact on their wellbeing and preparedness for release. Additional support has been offered to Woodhill, and the Board will continue to monitor the safety of prisoners, given the high levels of violence currently experienced.

The number of prisoners self-isolating for non-medical reasons reduced in the last two months of the reporting year. The prison is actively managing this situation at weekly safety meetings, to better understand the needs of those who are doing so. The relatively high proportion doing so for more than 10 days is often connected with the time it takes to arrange a transfer to another location. The Board is encouraged by this proactive approach and will monitor with interest the impact on this small but vulnerable population (see table below).

Number of prisoners self-isolating – non medical

Month	No. of prisoners self-isolating	No. > 10 days
June 2020	7	6
July 2020	13	9
Aug 2020	9	7
Sep 2020	9	7
Oct 2020	4	3
Nov 2020	5	5
Dec 2020	13	8
Jan 2021	10	9
Feb 2021	13	9

Mar 2021	15	10
Apr 2021	9	8
May 2021	4	1

4.4 Prisoners with specific vulnerabilities

The weekly safety meeting continued to discuss prisoners on an open challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP). The numbers from June 2020 and May 2021 ranged from seven to 21, with the average being less than 14, or about 3% of the population. This approach ensures that these prisoners are actively managed and not overlooked. The governor responsible for this area at present is proactive in holding supervisors to account on their management of these prisoners. The CSIP team was praised by the team that carried out the 'health check' of safety at Woodhill, but were let down by some case managers who did not complete their actions and delayed the process. It is not clear whether this was due to a lack of knowledge or skill, inertia, absence or some other reason.

4.5 Use of force

The governor responsible for this area actively monitors the use of force (UoF) and ensures that the relevant paperwork is completed by officers, so that lessons can be learned. It is unfortunate that the senior management team sometimes needs to actively remind some officers to complete the required paperwork.

The introduction of electronic UoF paperwork has had a positive impact. The low completion rate of UoF forms that was a concern last year has much improved. Completion within 72 hours was as high as 91% in March 2021 and, although some completions have been late, they have been at 100% every month since the introduction of the electronic forms. Most UoF arises out of spontaneous incidents rather than planned events. A prisoner refusing a direct order was the most common reason for UoF. As the regime for prisoners improves in the new reporting year, this might be expected to diminish (see table below).

All UoF incidents are followed up, and prisoners invited to participate in feedback. Where officers are involved in more than one incident, these are examined to see if there are lessons to be learned.

The statistics for the UoF during the year were:

Month	No. of incidents	No. of prisoners	No. of staff to hospital	No. of prisoners to hospital	Use of special accommodation
Jun-20	23	21	8	0	1
Jul-20	36	29	2	1	2

Aug-20	43	35	2	0	4
Sep-20	29	26	1	0	1
Oct-20	23	18	1	0	1
Nov-20	31	25	3	1	0
Dec-20	31	25	3	0	0
Jan-21	61	47	2	0	0
Feb-21	38	26	5	1	1
Mar-21	33	26	1	0	0
Apr-21	27	19	5	0	0
May-21	44	31	4	0	0

4.6 Substance misuse

Substance misuse was reduced due to the implementation of more security measures and the effects of Covid-19 restrictions.

An additional bar was put across cell windows on the two wings which are closest to the perimeter wall. This prevented the window opening far enough to allow substances thrown over the wall to be taken in by prisoners 'fishing'. Throw-overs were gradually reduced until almost eliminated.

Restrictions on prisoner movements and association meant that moving illicit substances around the prison was made more difficult. However, as it has become more difficult to obtain drugs, there has been an increased demand for hooch. The prison drugs dogs have been effective, especially when social visits resumed, which resulted in visitors being intercepted trying to bring in prohibited items. There was still an issue with letters allegedly from solicitors being impregnated with drugs, but there are now more verification checks and the incidence has reduced.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Since re-rolling to becoming primarily a category B long-term facility, almost all cells have become single occupancy. The fire alarm system upgrading work was completed in the main house units 1 to 5 and, as the reporting year ended, the prison could start to increase the number of prisoners held. However, staff shortages precluded this. The fire upgrade works were still to be completed on the segregation unit.

The condition and cleanness of house units varied, some being kept well and others lacking care.

House unit 1 benefited from some improvement work. The showers/bathroom areas had new modern fittings installed that meet the cleanliness and decency standards required. The lino and carpet flooring were also replaced and most of the unit was repainted. Work on the bathrooms and showers on house unit 2 started at the end of the reporting year. The other house units need the same works but regrettably there is no funding for this, despite the prison's efforts to obtain it.

Many of the pool tables on the wings need repair and/or replacement. They have not been used during the Covid-19 restrictions, but will be needed when the restrictions are relaxed.

Standards of cleanliness and record-keeping in the house unit serveries improved during the year, but further improvement is needed and consistency of high standards needs to be maintained. Those working in the servery on the wings now have more chefs' whites and footwear available and the cleaning standard is improving.

Each wing has a servery diary. This contains the check sheets for equipment, uniform and so on, and an area to record the food temperature for each item being served. Once the checks have been completed and temperatures measured, they should be recorded in the diary and be dated daily. Often, these records were not completed, missing the whole day, or only partly recorded. There are no food comment sheets for prisoners.

Furniture on the wings is often in short supply and is not readily available when required. After reopening a wing once the fire upgrade works had been completed, prisoners were decanted from another wing, to allow the works to take place there. Furniture had to be moved with them, to ensure that the required items were present in each cell on the completed wing.

The problems reported in previous years concerning the issue of sufficient clothing seem to be largely resolved and there were few complaints on this. The laundry machines on each wing have been more reliable than previously, but the cleanliness still needs improving.

Most other category B prisons are able to offer cooking facilities and kitchen areas for the prisoners to prepare their own food. Woodhill is currently not able to provide these areas for the prisoners, but funding for this was approved at the end of the reporting year.

5.2 Segregation

The management of the unit is generally good. The staff have a good understanding of the needs of the prisoners they look after, especially those who are long term. They suffer from staff shortages, as do the other units.

Throughout the year, the unit held several prisoners for very long periods, way above the maximum 42 days that requires special approval. It was reported in last year's report that Woodhill had two long-term prisoners in segregation. This year, there were five prisoners at one point, and at least three for most of the year. In several cases, prisoners had been in segregation for over a year. Long-term segregation is detrimental to mental and physical health, and is highly undesirable. The staff in the unit did an outstanding job of caring for these prisoners, but what they could achieve was limited without specialist interventions and adequate professional staffing.

The prisoners being held are complex cases; however, solutions need to be found to progress these individuals so that they do not deteriorate further and can advance in their sentence. There needs to be more special units in the system to cater for these prisoners and their particular needs.

At the end of the year, the segregation unit had to move temporarily so that the fire upgrade work could be completed.

During the last year, it has been very difficult to relocate prisoners in segregation to other units around the country because of the government Covid-19 restrictions on their movement.

As the regime was restricted because of the pandemic, almost all the prisoners in segregation were able to have a television in-cell.

Reviews for continued segregation under Prison Rule 45 are held weekly, with the attendance of mental health and psychology staff. These are chaired by a governor, who reviews each case and makes decisions on the best path of progression to return the prisoners to the general population or refer them to a smaller specialist unit as soon as possible. The process of referral to a specialist unit is slow and there are very limited places.

5.3 Staff-prisoner relationships, key workers

The key worker system has a positive impact on relationships between prisoners and staff. However, the Covid-19 restrictions meant that this scheme could not operate normally. A series of welfare checks by telephone was introduced but, while useful,

this was not as effective. Personal visits by key workers were resumed in March 2021.

The high proportion of inexperienced staff results in inconsistent information being given out to prisoners. Some new staff have mentioned they have learnt a lot in one day when teamed up with very experienced staff. Provided that staff are retained, the passage of time should improve this problem.

The lack of experience among uniformed staff, together with the restricted regime, meant that staff did not have the opportunity to develop the necessary interpersonal skills with prisoners. At June 2021, almost two-thirds of prison officers and nearly one-third of the Supervisory Officers had had less than two years' experience. Long-term prisoners are very aware of this and on occasion took advantage to create disorder and trouble.

House Unit 6 generally has been well run but has suffered from staff shortages on occasions. It is particularly important that the CSC units have consistent staffing by trained and experienced staff to maintain relationships with volatile prisoners. To maintain a good routine, the CSC units try to preserve an established staff base, which allows a weekly risk assessment meeting to take place with each prisoner.

Staff shortages, particularly at weekends, sometimes with only one regular officer on a wing and the rest cross-deployed, has been a continuous problem.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Owing to the Covid-19 restrictions, the equalities committee did not meet from March until November 2020. However, informal meetings and one-to-one support for the prisoners continued, reviewing social care plans and the need for reasonable adjustments. Wing prisoner equality representatives met individually with members of the equalities section each month. Equality representatives spoken to by the Board reported that they liked the role and appreciated being able to help other prisoners. However, they also reported that lockdown had made contacting them more difficult.

Progress on the action plan from the Lammy report is discussed at each equalities committee meeting.

The Governor reinforced her opposition to all forms of discrimination in several messages to staff and prisoners.

Protected characteristics

Race

Forty-two per cent of the prison population is from black and minority ethnic communities, including 3.5% from the Travelling community. During the year, a

training package was developed to help staff understand about the different types of racism that occurs. Unfortunately, it had to be suspended because of Covid-19. A black history exhibition was held to celebrate Black History Month, with each of the wings attending in bubbles, and was well received with many prisoners speaking positively about it.

Disability

Thirty per cent of the prison population is registered disabled. Of those, 38% have a learning disability and 23% have reduced mobility. The equalities team held a Let's Talk About Disability session in December 2020. However, during the year the Board recorded several instances where the assessed needs of a disabled prisoner were not met within a reasonable timescale. For example, one prisoner was left with no option but to reuse urine bottles, despite clean bottles being on the wing on a table outside his cell. Two uncooperative prisoners had to wait significant lengths of time for their needs to be met after they damaged their own equipment, and healthcare staff reported that, occasionally, a disabled prisoner was sent to an unadapted cell from reception. However, other disabled prisoners spoke highly of the support they had received.

Personal emergency evacuation plans are not always readily available on the wings, and, as staffing shortages result in staff cross-covering, this is a risk for prisoners.

Age

The majority of the prison population at Woodhill are below the age of 50. There were no discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs) alleging age discrimination during the year.

Faith

See section 5.5.

LGBT+

In LGBT+ History Month, February 2021, the equalities team visited each wing, to encourage discussion between staff and prisoners on the subject.

DIRFs

From April 2020 to March 2021, there were 144 DIRFs received, of which 61 (42%) were responded to within the recommended timescale. This is a significant increase in timeliness over 2019/20.

The Board reviewed all the DIRFs submitted from January to May 2021. The quality of responses has improved significantly. Every response now includes a clear narrative describing the investigation, any mediation attempted, the rationale for any decision, resolution or not, and actions to be taken to stop recurrence.

The majority of complaints in the DIRFs reviewed were not supported. All three of the DIRFs submitted by officers were supported. However, in two of the three, conversations resulted in the prisoner admitting they were in the wrong and apologising.

A source of frustration for prisoners was that if a DIRF was found not to involve discrimination but in fact to be a complaint, the prisoner had to fill out new paperwork to get consideration. There is no process where the DIRF can be transferred to the complaints process, despite being logged on the same spreadsheet.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

There was a new head of service appointed, and during the year the chaplaincy redesigned its services to try to support prisoners better in their cells during lockdown – for example, the rabbi telephoned each of the Jewish prisoners regularly and an imam interpreted for a prisoner during a meeting with senior staff. There has been increased contact by chaplaincy staff despite Covid-19 restrictions.

Concern was expressed about the ability of the current chaplaincy service to support house unit 6, although a half-time imam post is funded by the Prison Service.

Thirty-five per cent of the prison population (169 prisoners) is Muslim and 16% Roman Catholic. The chaplaincy reported concern that mass worship appears low on the national prison agenda. They reported frustration increasing among prisoners, as they could see mass gatherings resuming in society from spring 2021 and yet were not allowed to pray together.

Prisoners in the separation centre raised an allegation that institutional racism caused the Prison Service to establish such units only for Muslim prisoners.

All collective worship was cancelled during the pandemic but interim arrangements for individual prayer in cells worked reasonably well for many prisoners.

5.6 Incentives schemes (IP)

As a result of the Covid-19 regime restrictions, the normal operation of the incentives scheme was stopped. The withdrawal of privileges and money for bad behaviour was substantially curtailed. During the early part of the second lockdown, the Board was concerned at the relatively large number of prisoners who were listed as being subject to basic status, despite a national instruction that this level of the scheme should not be used except in extreme circumstances. A review of the accuracy of the data reduced the numbers being recorded.

Prisoners were not allowed to have their television removed, except for a very short time and by exception, unless in segregation. As lockdown has progressed, most prisoners either have standard or enhanced status. The Board is concerned that when lockdown measures reduce and/or cease, there will be an upturn in those on the basic regime.

5.7 Complaints

During the reporting year, the prison received a total of 3,670 complaints. The most common reason for a complaint was property within the establishment and at reception.

The prison has key performance targets for the initial response times for complaints and appeals (COMP1 and COMP1a forms). These varied throughout the reporting year, from a low of 67.3% in September 2020 to 97.5% in August 2020, with the average being around 81%. The percentages of all complaints (including COMP1 and COMP1a forms) responded to on time varied between 42% in August 2020 and 83% in April 2021.

5.8 Property

Prisoners continue to arrive at Woodhill with large amounts of property from other establishments, sometimes well in excess of the three 15kg bags they are allowed. All new arrivals are body scanned. The high frequency (about 25–30% of prisoners) where items are detected on arrival indicates that sending prisons are not searching the prisoners properly before they leave.

Staff shortages in reception were a feature throughout the reporting year and there was no improvement on the slow service given in the previous year. Staff are frequently cross-deployed to other areas of the prison because of shortages, meaning that property allocation is delayed.

The goods inwards section rings reception every weekday to ask whether they can bring property that has been screened by them over to reception. Frequently, they were told that, due to staff shortages, this was not possible, resulting in a backlog of property in RIDs before it ever gets to reception.

It frequently takes at least two to three weeks to reunite a prisoner with his property after arrival at Woodhill. This undoubtedly causes anxieties and stress for some prisoners and has been the subject of many Board applications throughout the year.

Property transfers from the sending prison have also been problematic; there have been significant delays in receiving property, and some cases where couriers have lost property in transit. Obtaining compensation is difficult, time consuming and a long process.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Healthcare services at HMP Woodhill are provided by Central and West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL), commissioned to provide primary care and mental health services, as set out in the national contract. The Trust is currently rated 'good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), although HMP Woodhill has not been inspected since 2016.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) carried out a short scrutiny visit in May 2020. There are currently no outstanding actions from HMIP or the CQC.

The Board carries out regular monitoring visits to the clinical assessment unit, which houses both mentally and physically ill prisoners. Most of the information contained in this report is drawn from contract monitoring reports, triangulated where possible with comments from prisoners during house unit rota visits and analysis of applications.

Both the primary care and mental health teams are relatively well staffed but both services found it difficult to recruit band 5 nurses. To mitigate the impact on services and reduce the amount of overtime that staff were working, both services tried to recruit other disciplines, in order to enhance the multidisciplinary team.

Covid-19 response

During 2020/21, the healthcare service was responsible for delivering not only healthcare services as usual, but also the healthcare response to Covid-19. The integrated response implemented by both the prison and healthcare department helped to ensure the remarkable achievement that there was no outbreak within the prison.

A testing centre was set up within the prison in February 2021, to make it easier for staff to access tests. Staff were encouraged to be tested twice weekly, in line with national guidelines.

Vaccinations began to be delivered to prisoners and staff in March 2021, according to the national criteria.

Prisoners transferred to Woodhill were separated and isolated for 14 days in a designated unit, before being tested and allocated to one of the other house units.

A shielding unit was opened to protect clinically vulnerable prisoners. This was closed in January 2021, and prisoners were then shielding on the units in their own cells.

6.2 Physical healthcare

During the first few months of lockdown, access to routine healthcare services was difficult. However, by May 2021, waiting times for the GP were being reduced by relocating the clinics onto the units, and physiotherapy and optometry services were in full operation. Dental clinics were required to stop, apart from emergencies, and waiting times remained long, averaging 33 weeks for January to March 2021, although all referrals are triaged to minimise the impact on prisoners.

From January to April 2021, the healthcare services were moved to temporary accommodation due to essential building work. This resulted in further delays for dental services and increased GP waiting times, from two days to two weeks. All national screening programmes are in place and meet the required targets, with the exception of bowel screening, as prisoners often choose not to return samples.

At the end of the reporting year, there were 72 prisoners aged over 50 and therefore classed as older people for health purposes, and entitled to access annual healthcare checks and screening in line with the outside population.

6.3 Mental health

The maximum waiting times for mental health services, according to the contract, are 48 hours for urgent referrals and five working days for those that are non-urgent. In practice, the mental health team reviews all referrals every morning and most prisoners are assessed on the same day.

There is good evidence of strong multidisciplinary working among the mental health team.

The Compass unit opened in May 2021. It aims to support those prisoners who struggle to cope on the wings – for example, those who have been in self-isolation or segregation for some time – to regain their confidence to join the general population.

A new day unit is planned to open in the summer of 2021. The unit will be staffed with occupational therapy, art therapy and psychology, and aims to work with prisoners with a history of trauma. It is hoped that this will provide a pathway to progression for those who do not need to be in an inpatient setting, but require more support than can be delivered on a wing.

6.4 Social care

Social care assessments for specialist equipment for prisoners with disabilities are carried out by Milton Keynes unitary authority occupational therapists. This has slowed down the process, so CNWL recruited an occupational therapist to work in the prison. The provision of equipment remains the responsibility of the prison, and the Board is concerned that there were cases of unacceptable delays.

6.5 Exercise, time out of cell

The Covid-19 restricted regime was embedded throughout the year. Cohorts or 'bubbles' were established in each house unit, with each group of prisoners being out of their cell for 45 minutes of domestic time and one hour of exercise each day.

Apart from the wing workers, prisoners were in their cells for over 22 hours a day and the impact was far-reaching. Almost all prisoners had televisions. Many were given distraction packs and in-cell education work, and they were given an extra allocation of telephone credit. Nevertheless, there was a major impact on their wellbeing. The distraction packs and in-cell education work provided were not sufficient to occupy the prisoners, and they were reported to be repetitive and boring.

Inevitably, prisoners spent most of the time lying on their beds and many were seemingly drawn to destructive and self-destructive behaviour, resulting in the levels of violence and self-harm seen. There was increased tension between prisoners, and between prisoners and officers, and boredom and frustration at not being able to work.

On a positive note, it seems that boredom, especially among the younger prisoners, has in many instances led to a willingness to improve their environment, including prisoners volunteering to paint, decorate and create better spaces.

During exercise time, the prisoners had access to some outdoor equipment and had access to circuit training supervised by the PE instructors. The gym reopened in May 2021, with access to sessions for one hour per week, with distancing restrictions in place and limited access to equipment.

Competitive initiatives within the gym (for example, the Strong Man Challenge) were not able to take place throughout the reporting year.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The rehabilitation service is managed by the Addictions team in the healthcare department, with two defined objectives: to implement structured groupwork programmes suitable for category B prisoners, and to develop a partnership with the GP in healthcare to guide the team in the long-term management of pain where there is a dependency upon prescribed analgesics. Complex cases are reviewed in a fortnightly complex case meeting. Referrals to the service are made from house units or can be by self-referral.

Referrals are generally seen for an initial consultation within 24 hours. The average caseload throughout the year was 100 prisoners, although the service estimated that

this was not all the drug users in the prison, many of whom had no interest or motivation to change their behaviour.

Complete detoxification is only rarely achieved; the success rate is only approximately 3%.

A new programme of drug interventions for the category B prisoner population has been designed nationally. The Addictions team anticipates starting the new interventions once the prison restrictions are lifted. The programme is validated to link with national programmes and is transferable, for the prisoners, across establishments. The Covid-19 regime restrictions stopped group work on addictions and led to one-to-one sessions on the house units instead, but, inevitably, the number of prisoners that could be handled was reduced.

Healthcare staff reported that an average of 82 prisoners were vaping (smoking is prohibited). There was no demand for smoking cessation courses.

All illicit drug use incidents are reported to the Addictions team for harm minimisation follow-up. Mandatory drug testing was suspended throughout the year, and there was restricted searching by the drug dogs due to Covid-19 restrictions.

'Spice' use continued to be a major issue; one major route into the prison was on mail impregnated with spice liquid.

A quarterly Addictions newsletter, containing a combination of staff and patient contributions, was circulated to all house units.

6.7 Soft skills

There were a small number of initiatives throughout the year involving the prisoners. The safety team organised a series of violence summit meetings, entitled: 'Violence and Unacceptable Behaviours'; the entire prison was involved and bubbles of 30 prisoners attended sessions over a two-week period. They were judged successful and concluded with trained mediators presenting a summary: 'Make Woodhill Safer'.

The prison has regular prisoner council meetings, attended by prisoner representatives, and in the house units senior officers facilitated initiatives such as wing forums.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

Due to Covid-19, there were no group educational classes run during the year, but one-to-one education provision in cells restarted in April 2021. It is planned to restart classroom education when allowed by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. In-cell education packs were organised; they were generally well received but there was some criticism that the content was repetitive and very low level.

Library staffing was reduced to one staff member per day coming in, and only dealing with requests from wing staff or order forms from prisoners. Staff were unable to visit prisoners to assess needs properly.

There is a new head of the library services at HMP Woodhill, and plans are in place for when prisoners can come back into the library to select books and to work on educational courses.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Vocational courses have not been offered during this reporting year due to the Covid-19 restrictions. They have been sorely missed.

Work opportunities for prisoners were limited to house unit-based roles (mainly servery and cleaning) and kitchen duties. The workshops were closed.

7.3 Offender management, progression

The offender management unit (OMU) took over the duties of the resettlement team after Woodhill became a long-term category B prison. Few prisoners are released into the community from Woodhill, so there is no need for a specialist resettlement team.

An OMU case worker is allocated to each person in custody. They manage the sentence plan and collate all the required information for progression, parole boards, participation in offending behaviour programmes, and so on.

7.4 Family contact

It was a particularly difficult year for all those in custody, as all face-to-face visits were halted due to Covid-19, apart from during the summer of 2020. Even then, numbers were severely restricted and the take-up of visits was low.

Woodhill had been fitted with in-cell telephones in the previous year and this was a huge benefit in keeping the prisoners connected with their friends and family outside. Due to the amount of time that prisoners spent in their cells, each received £5 telephone credit weekly.

A new service of video calling, known as 'Purple Visits', was introduced. The prisoners are allocated a 30-minute slot, in a meeting room on the wing. A laptop enables a video call to someone on a pre-approved list. Calls are monitored by the software, blocking unauthorised persons appearing on screen. The service was well received, despite a few technical issues at the start.

Between August and December 2020, face-to-face visits recommenced, with significant distancing restrictions in place. However, there was not a good uptake for these visits. They recommenced again on 10th May 2021.

8. The work of the IMB

Members of the Board continued to visit the prison throughout the year, despite the Covid-19 restrictions in place in the prison and outside. Owing to lockdown measures, visits were restricted from June to August 2020, and again from January to April 2021, to two a week. Visits were made primarily to administrative areas, avoiding visiting the units in order to reduce the chances of spreading infection.

Applications were received through a national telephone answering service, as well as by written applications. Replies were made after investigating, where necessary, using email or memos instead of personal visits to prisoners.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	15
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11
Total number of visits to the establishment	326
Total number of segregation reviews attended	142*

Note: * Includes attendance by dialling in.

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	4	5
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives and earned privileges, sanctions	3	17
C	Equality	3	7
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	12	5
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	18	3
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	1	6
F	Food and kitchens	4	0
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	36	53*
H1	Property within this establishment	29	26
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	98	24
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	5	1
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	16	11
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	47	21
K	Transfers	31	18
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	23	10
M	Not classified	34	9
	Total number of applications	364	216

Note * includes many applications from 2 prisoners



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