



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Huntercombe

**For reporting year
1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

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

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

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

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

2. Description of the establishment

2.1 HMP Huntercombe is a category C prison for adult men foreign national prisoners. It stands in a rural location, with limited access to public transport, outside the village of Nuffield, between Reading and Oxford.

2.2 Its operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) is 520¹, split between seven residential units, with a mixture of single and double cells and a segregation unit comprising five cells and one special accommodation cell (where furniture, bedding and sanitation have been removed in the interests of safety). A total of 40 of those spaces are in rapid deployment cells, which are not built to category C security specifications and are, therefore, only available to specially risk-assessed prisoners. HMP Huntercombe was originally established as a World War II detention facility, since when the buildings have been added to and extended in order to provide a secure and improved environment for its present use.

2.3 The prison complex includes educational facilities, an indoor gym, outpatient healthcare facility, workshops, gardens, sports pitch, exercise yards, a visits hall, a cafeteria run by Clink Charity, with prisoners, and a multi-faith sanctuary.

2.4 Education is provided by Milton Keynes College (MKC) and healthcare by Practice Plus Group (PPG), which subcontracts other healthcare services such as dentistry, physiotherapy and podiatry. General maintenance is provided by Gov Facility Services Ltd (GFSL), which has an office and works hub on site.

¹ Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's position at the time of reporting, but may be subject to change following further validation and therefore may not always tally with Official Statistics later published by the Ministry of Justice.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- From its observations, the Board considers the prison to be a safe environment for prisoners.
- There have been increased levels of violence against staff and between prisoners, but the Board has noted that the incidents have been well handled by staff.
- The Board remains concerned about the level of illicit items and drugs that are entering the prison and the number of prisoners who appear to be under the influence of known and unknown substances.

Fair and humane treatment

- The Board believes that, in general, prisoners are treated fairly and humanely.
- The Board welcomes the opening of the new kitchen during 2023, providing an improved standard of food for the prisoners.
- The state of other buildings at HMP Huntercombe is causing issues for prisoners.
- The problems with the heating and hot water (paragraph 5.1.3) are unacceptable for prisoners and take up a great deal of senior staff time in dealing with the issues, as well as significant amount of public money. This needs to be urgently sorted with a permanent solution.
- The cell window mechanisms are no longer able to be replaced, which means that if a window's mechanism is broken (which is happening more often due to their age) it cannot be fixed. So the prisoners have to either have their window grilles open all the time or closed all the time, which is unacceptable in both cold and hot weather.
- Key working has, at times, had not been undertaken due to staff being redeployed. This is disappointing, as prisoners find it helpful to have the one-to-one time with their key worker.
- Property remains an ongoing issue. Despite the Ministerial response to the IMB's 2022 report² (see the annex), the Board can see no improvement in the volume of property that arrives with prisoners to HMP Huntercombe from other prisons.

Health and wellbeing

- The Board reported in the 2022 annual report that part of the healthcare building was not fit for purpose. Despite the Ministerial response stating that a scoping exercise was being carried out, the healthcare team has remained in the same building that suffers with water ingress.
- The Board is very concerned about the length of time that elapsed from when a medical professional deemed a prisoner needed to be transferred to an acute mental health facility, to the time that the actual transfer happened. Although the prison tried to give the prisoner the best care that they could, he

² [Ministerial response to the IMB 2022 annual report for HMP Huntercombe.](#)

did not receive the treatment he required as this was not able to be given in the prison. Staff in the segregation unit worked under particularly difficult conditions on several occasions when the prisoner assaulted them and damaged his cell.

- The healthcare team worked well during the year although there were several vacancies in the team covered by agency staff.
- The healthcare team should be commended for a good Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection during the year.

Progression and resettlement

- The Board welcomes the reduction in the number of prisoners who have passed their sentence end date but continue to be held under immigration powers (IS91s) and remain under convicted criminal conditions.
- The Board has noted that the roll call has had delays in being reconciled on many occasions, resulting in delays for prisoners attending work and education as well men missing healthcare and treatment appointments.
- The Board is aware that the offender management unit (OMU) has been working under extreme pressure and is concerned that, with the extended early release scheme (ERS), anticipated increase in roll in 2024 and faster throughput of prisoners, this will continue.
- The Board is concerned that, due to external issues, there has not been an increase in the number of prisoners being able to be released on temporary licence (ROTL) to work.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Despite raising the fact in the Board's 2022 report that many men arrived at HMP Huntercombe within three months of their ERS, this has once again remained of concern throughout the reporting year of 2023. The impact on the prisoners of not having enough time at HMP Huntercombe to be properly prepared for deportation is unsatisfactory. (paragraphs 7.3.5, 7.3.6)
What steps will the Minister take to address this issue?
- The delay in transferring a prisoner with a significant mental health condition to a specialist NHS site, even though it had been recommendation by a medical professional, was unacceptable. The Board is very disappointed that the NHS does not prioritise the transfer of prisoners who need NHS mental health treatment. (paragraph 6.2.6) How does the Minister plan to avoid this happening to other prisoners with mental health issues?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- When will the Prison Service facilitate the urgent upgrading of the antiquated heating and hot water systems? In the annex of the Ministerial letter (see above), HMPPS stated that the 'project delivery team are finalising design and costs which will then be submitted to the HMPPS governance board for approval'. Another year has passed and the prisoners at HMP Huntercombe still do not have a reliable heating and hot water system, while significant amounts of public money are being spent on temporary solutions. (paragraphs 5.1.3, 5.1.4)

- When will the Prison Service urgently replace the part of the healthcare facility that has water ingress and is not a reasonable work area? In the annex of the Ministerial letter, HMPPS stated that 'A scoping exercise is currently being carried out with a view to replacing it with a new modular building structure'. Another year has passed and the staff are still working in unsuitable conditions. (paragraph 6.1.5)
- As reported in the Board's annual reports in both 2021 and 2022, the issue of property for prisoners at HMP Huntercombe remains in 2023. The significant problem is the number of property items that go missing or are lost or delayed during a prisoner's transfer between prisons. In the annex of the Minister's reply, HMPPS referred to the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, which was implemented in September 2022. The Board has not been able to see any improvement in the particular issue for prisoners at HMP Huntercombe who are deported at the end of their sentence and should have their property made available to them. (paragraphs 5.8.1, 5.8.2, 5.8.3, 5.8.4)
What steps will the Prison Service take to rectify this problem?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- How will the Governor work with staff to ensure that the roll call is accurate, so that prisoners are not disadvantaged by not being able to attend work, education or healthcare? (paragraph 7.2.12)
- When will the Governor investigate whether prisoners in the segregation unit can access the larger exercise yard by work being done to contain the temporary heating hoses, until the substantive work on the heating system is completed? (paragraph 5.2.2)

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 After a period of operation under Covid restrictions during much of 2022, the prison has maintained a full regime in the reporting year. Transfers of prisoners, their induction and procedures at reception and on discharge are no longer impacted. At the reporting year end, the daily roll stood at the previous year-end level of just under 470.

4.1.2 Reception continues to hold a supply of Covid-mitigating items, such as masks, sanitising gel and gloves, in case circumstances dictate a requirement to use them. Immediate needs such as language support are identified, and a comprehensive assessment process is undertaken. Prisoners are routinely screened to determine the presence of objects that they may have secreted within their body. Following a positive scan result, the man is moved to the segregation unit, remaining there until the presence of any object can be verified.

4.1.3 A total of 1,060 body scans were carried out during the reporting year. The majority (935) were negative, 115 were positive and the results of 10 were recorded as 'inconclusive'.

4.1.4 Formal induction takes place on Patterson wing over a two-week period, during which time a decision will be taken about the appropriate wing allocation.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 The number of assessments, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plans, used to support men who are at risk of self-harm and suicide, opened (89) has continued to decrease year-on-year since 2021 (97). Of those prisoners on ACCTs during the reporting year, three were subject to IS91 regulations and the total included 18 prisoners having an ACCT opened on more than one occasion. The downward trend is encouraging, and the Board recognises the good work being done by staff across all grades with and for the prisoners while in their care.

4.2.2 There were no deaths in custody during the reporting year.

4.2.3 The quarterly safer prison meeting and the weekly safety intervention meeting (SPM/SIM) have continued throughout the year. Board members attended these meetings as observers, where possible, and prioritised attendance at the SIM. At the latter, individual prisoners on open ACCTs are routinely discussed, as well as those who have been giving cause for particular concern on the wings. Wing staff are encouraged to submit requests that prisoners of concern are discussed and the reason for doing so. The meeting minutes are distributed to Board members, providing an opportunity to follow up any concerns.

4.2.4 The Board has continued to prioritise observing ACCT reviews (which determine if segregation should continue) of prisoners in the segregation unit and on the wings, where possible in person or by familiarising themselves afterwards with the review outcome.

ACCT Plans opened January to December 2021-2023

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Avg.
2023	13	9	12	8	6	11	6	7	5	3	4	5	89	7
2022	13	6	12	3	8	14	9	8	7	5	4	7	96	8
2021	4	4	11	8	12	8	7	12	8	5	4	14	97	8

4.2.5 A total of 13 prisoners refused food during the year, a significant decrease from the previous year's figure (23), with no prisoner recorded as having refused food between February and April. The duration of the refusals varied between four and 168 hours. Only one prisoner was recorded as having refused both food and fluids – and he was closely monitored during the period of his refusal.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 The Board has been concerned about the increasing level of violence in the prison, both prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff assaults. The average monthly figure for violent incidents (5) in the reporting year is unchanged from the previous year and both are slightly higher than the figure in 2021 (3), when the regime was under Covid restrictions.

4.3.2 The issue of prisoners becoming indebted to other prisoners on the wing and the consequent potential for violence has long been recognised across the prison estate. A further survey regarding debt was conducted during the year, following up the one conducted in 2022; the results are being analysed and due to be published in 2024. Vapes that have been tampered with regularly feature in adjudications (a disciplinary hearing when a prisoner is alleged to have broken prison rules), as do the possession of drugs and mobile phones. The confiscation of the latter items almost inevitably leads to the incurrance of debt by the prisoners concerned. The Board recognises that debt will remain an issue but is encouraged that efforts continue to be made to raise awareness among staff. This is augmented using prisoner forums, which Board members try to monitor.

4.3.3 The total number of violent incidents over the year were:

Number of violent incidents January to December, 2021-2023

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Avg.
2023	2	5	4	8	7	3	8	5	3	5	7	4	61	5
2022	4	4	4	4	5	4	2	9	7	8	4	2	57	5
2021	2	4	4	5	0	6	4	4	3	3	1	4	40	3

4.4 Use of force

4.4.1 The Board continues to prioritise attendance at the meetings, so it can observe the proceedings, held by the prison to review body worn video camera (BWVC) footage; when we are unable to attend the quarterly use of force (UoF) meetings, we will receive the written notes.

4.4.2 In the reporting year, there were 99 incidents where either planned or unplanned force was used an increase over the previous reporting year (53). Of these interventions, eight were planned, the rest (91) were unplanned. The monthly average (8) disguises the fact that the final three months of the calendar year

accounted for 45 of the incidents, whereas the numbers in the previous months were in single figures. One of the incidents in November is recorded as fighting with improvised weapons between several prisoners of predominantly two different nationalities. The use of boiling water and sugar ('kettling') during this incident caused severe facial injuries to one prisoner, which necessitated hospital treatment. As noted in last year's annual report, the monthly discrepancy in the figures highlights the importance of the regular use of force meetings rather than a reliance on overall statistics.

4.4.3 There were three occasions during the reporting year when batons were drawn but were only used once. PAVA incapacitant spray was drawn on two occasions and used once.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

4.5.1 Random and targeted mandatory drug testing (MDT) is carried out on a regular basis, together with intelligence-led searches of cells by wing officers. When appropriate, the specialist dedicated search team (DST) is also deployed. During the reporting year, 286 random drug tests were carried out and 87 targeted drug tests, with cannabis remaining the substance most frequently found. There is evidence from searches and the consequent adjudications that the brewing of 'hooch' (alcohol illicitly brewed in the prison) occupies the time of several prisoners. Mobile phones and attachments are also frequently found during searches. Aerial drone activity has become more evident in the reporting year and packages (of illicit items, such as mobile phones and drugs) have been found by officers either when on routine patrol around the estate or via intelligence received.

4.5.2 The Board is concerned, as it was last year, about the issues arising from the presence of illegal substances and illicit items on wings, including how they arrive there and the debt issues that inevitably arise (paragraph 4.3.2). In respect of how such items enter the prison, searches are conducted at social visits, where more stringent procedures were introduced during the reporting year and prisoners are routinely screened on reception (paragraph 4.1.2). Periodic searches of staff are undertaken, but the Board has not been made aware that illegal drugs have been found during such searches.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 Several new initiatives are underway at Huntercombe to improve space and facilities across the estate. The new kitchen opened in July 2023 and provides for a more efficient and varied food service for the prisoners. The old kitchen is being refurbished as a multi-faith centre, which will have a positive effect for prisoners where there is space pressure for Friday prayers. Additionally, there is a new kitchen being built on Rich wing, the unit for men on the enhanced level of the incentives scheme.

5.1.2 A significant development is also the building of a new unit (Cadbury wing) which, when complete, will house 40 prisoners in pods. Each pod has its own toilet and shower and is single-cell occupancy. Cadbury wing will be self-contained and will have its own servery and communal area. It is expected to be open for occupancy in January 2024. This facility will be available to prisoners with super-enhanced status only and who have additionally been risk assessed for the less secure environment.

5.1.3 Central heating and hot water provision across the estate continue to provide challenges for Huntercombe, as outlined in the IMB's 2022 annual report. The Board has been informed by the Governor that the major issue of the new ring main (plus replacement boilers) is being addressed and that a costed proposal is with the Ministry of Justice Estates Board. At the reporting year end, the prison was yet to hear whether or not the project had the go-ahead. Whilst this is a significant investment, the current unreliability of the existing system means the prison is spending significant amounts of time and money on replacement or temporary boilers, which are not long-term solutions. Each year, the problem only becomes more pressing to resolve.

5.1.4 Whilst accommodation across the prison is generally clean and tidy, it is obvious that the ageing infrastructure will need significant investment in the coming years. As an example, the cell window mechanisms (allowing the prisoners to have a limited amount of fresh air in their cells) are increasingly failing and because they are particularly old and no longer manufactured, they are not able to be easily repaired. In cells where they have broken, prisoners can either have the window grille permanently fixed open or closed. This causes obvious frustration in the summer if it is closed, when the cells become practically airtight, and in the winter, if it is open, coupled with the central heating issues, the cells are very cold. A fully functioning and reliable heating system will make a significant improvement to the wellbeing of the prisoners in the future.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 The segregation unit at Huntercombe provides five separate cells (one of which can be used for constant observation) that are used to house prisoners who are either disruptive, awaiting an adjudication for a misdemeanor or housed there for their own safety. During the reporting year, there have been occasions when all five cells were occupied and, at such times, prisoners who are deemed to fall into one of the above categories have been housed in segregation conditions on the wings. An increasing number of occasions when the segregation unit has been full in 2023

could be linked to increasing violence on the wings, which was witnessed towards the end of the reporting year.

5.2.2 Whenever possible, IMB members visit the segregation unit to speak to prisoners who wish to converse. All prisoners in the unit are allowed an hour each day out of their cell to both exercise and shower, if they wish; and, during 2023, all cells had phones made available to prisoners should they wish to use them. There is a concern, however, that the main segregation unit exercise yard continues to be out of bounds for use by prisoners. This is because it is being used as a pipe duct for the temporary boilers that are providing heating and hot water to the unit. Until this area is cleared, which at the moment is not confirmed, prisoners in the unit only have a very small area in which to exercise each day.

5.2.3 Communication between staff in the segregation unit and the Board has been good in 2023, with the statutory requirement being followed that Board members shall be informed when prisoners are admitted to the unit. The Board is grateful to the segregation unit staff for informing them of impending segregation reviews (to determine if segregation should continue), which Board members, if available, are always interested in observing.

5.2.4 During 2023, 153 prisoners passed through the segregation unit, of whom 48 were prisoners who were held more than once. In 2023, the average length of stay was 6.7 days (compared with 5.1 days in 2022) and the longest stay in segregation was 62 days, albeit spread over a number of different individual occasions.

5.2.5 The adjudication and review processes conducted in the segregation unit were regularly observed by members of the Board and were considered to be consistent and professionally managed. There was also regular attendance by staff from supporting departments such as healthcare.

5.2.6 The Board considers that the segregation unit is being well run by the staff, who are often found to be working in difficult circumstances.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 When it has been able to observe, the Board considers that there is a positive relationship between staff and prisoners on all wings. In 2023, there were only nine complaints made to the Board about staff. This compares to a total of 56 in the previous reporting period.

5.3.2 All prison officers (both full-time and part-time) are allocated a key worker shift and are assigned up with five prisoners each. The aim is to meet with each prisoner every two weeks but, unfortunately, due to shift patterns, holidays and illness, the fortnightly frequency is only achieved approximately 50% of the time. It is important to note, however, that prisoners considered as high risk or vulnerable are seen more often than this average and are moved to the front of the queue if, for example, shift patterns necessitate a change of meeting schedules.

5.3.3 Key worker meetings are held privately in wing offices or cells - wherever the prisoner feels comfortable - and comprehensive notes are subsequently written up and put onto NOMIS (an internal computer terminal that records a prisoner's personal information). Each officer is allocated 90 minutes per prisoner, per meeting, to include pre-meeting reading, the meeting itself and note writing.

5.3.4 Quality-control checks, undertaken by wing custodial managers, are in place to ensure the productivity and usefulness of the key worker meetings; prison management is able to call on data to see how many key work conversations have taken place in any one period.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 Huntercombe, as a prison for foreign national individuals, contains numerous diverse national and minority ethnic groups. The Board continues to monitor issues around diversity and equality within the prison and considers that the staff handle these issues sensitively and consistently. Staff take any such issues seriously and the Board's opinion is that that the prison handles these well.

5.4.2 With the opening, in the last 12 months, of the new multi-faith centre and the new kitchen facilities, the prison is now able to improve its provision for religious observation and menu options, so better respecting religious commitments and dietary preferences.

5.4.3 Discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs) are the mechanism by which prisoners can formally complain to the prison if they think they have been mistreated in a discriminatory way. The prison has an equalities officer and maintains a categorisation of the nature of the DIRF applications and the number received, as well as whether or not these applications were upheld. There is no evidence to show that the DIRF review process is anything but fair.

5.4.4 The total number of DIRFs in the reporting period was 56, of which 36 were deemed not to fit the criteria for a DIRF, so were converted to a complaint. A total of 20 were, therefore, processed as DIRFs. This represents an increase compared with 2023, when there were 41 DIRFs submitted in total, of which 21 were deemed not to fit the criteria.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 A new managing chaplain was appointed in 2023. The full team of 12 multi-faith chaplains looks after the pastoral needs of 80 different nationalities at Huntercombe, which has 18 different categories of religious affiliations. Huntercombe ensures all faith groups have a chaplain and worship provision, including prayer/study, which amounted to over 1,500 hours per month in 2023.

5.5.2 The chaplaincy offers compassionate support, encouragement, respect and a safe space for all prisoners regardless of faith. Every day, apart from Saturday, there are worship opportunities, study groups or prayers. In an average week, well over 100 prisoners of the Muslim faith attend Friday prayers, while 135 men attend the main acts of Christian worship. 5.5.3 The old kitchen, which closed in July 2023, is being refurbished as a new multi-faith centre, and was scheduled to open in January 2024. This will positively impact other areas of the prison as, currently, Friday prayers are being held in the gym because there is not enough space in the temporary multi-faith room.

5.6 Incentives schemes

5.6.1 At Huntercombe, the incentives scheme is in place to reward positive behavior whilst, at the same time, acting as a deterrent against poor or negative behavior across the estate. The scheme has three levels, from basic and standard to

enhanced, and prisoners can move between these levels depending on their behavior. Any movements between the levels are recorded on NOMIS. The scheme is often a sensitive subject amongst prisoners, as it has a considerable impact on their daily lives. It is no surprise that the majority of incentives scheme complaints to the prison are about prisoners contesting their incentives. But, on the flip side, it is positive to note that, year-on-year, these complaints are falling (162 in 2022 compared with 42 in 2023).

5.6.2 The prison continues to have to inform prisoners of the workings of the scheme, as it is viewed by some men as punitive and somewhat random in its application rather than offering them incentives.

5.6.3 All men from other prisons who were previously on the basic level are immediately put onto the standard level when they arrive at HMP Huntercombe. The prison believes this is the right thing to do to give all new prisoners the opportunity in a new prison to draw a line under previous behavioural issues and to start with a clean slate. The Board supports this.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 Across the Board, prisoner complaints have dropped significantly, year-on-year. The prison received 1,005 complaints during the reporting year (a decrease from 1,314 in 2022). Of these, 214 related to issues over property, equating to 21% of the total. Year-on-year, this is an increase from previously being 19% of the total. Breaking this down further, 111 of these complaints were about property coming into Huntercombe. The continuing issues about property are covered later in this report in section 5.8.

5.7.2 Of the 1,005 complaints received by the prison in the reporting year, 11% were responded to later than the target response time. This is a similar percentage when compared with 2022. It is not possible to find one simple reason for the delayed responses to prisoners' complaints, but requiring information from other prisons in regard to property, for example, can slow down the process of resolution considerably.

5.7.3 The Huntercombe management team continues to randomly select four complaints each week for quality assurance purposes to ensure the standard of responses remains high.

Type	Number	%
Total number of Complaints	1005	
Stage 1 complaints	896	89
Stage 2 complaints	62	6
Confidential complaints	47	5
Most common complaints	Number	%
Property	214	21
Residential	112	11

Incentives scheme	142	14
Response time	Number	%
On time	887	87
Late	118	11
Outstanding	23	2

5.8 Property

5.8.1 Each year, there continue to be problems associated with property coming into Huntercombe. Walking through the reception area on days after transfers in can vividly illustrate the problem, with multiple bags of property piling up, ready to be sorted. Until all prisons satisfactorily manage volumetric control (and strictly adhere to the agreed protocols) of property being able to be transferred between prisons in the UK, this problem will persist. The current situation leads to both staff and prisoner frustration, much of it being understandable.

5.8.2 In 2023, the prison received 214 complaints about property, which is an increase on the previous year. In the same period, the Board received 24 complaints about property from prisoners, with 14 relating to items that did not seem to have followed prisoners from previous prisons. The figure of 24 is slightly down from 2022, when the IMB received 27 complaints.

5.8.3 Staff in reception at Huntercombe are helpful and keen to resolve property issues brought to them. However, if property is lost, misplaced or simply not able to be accounted for and it is agreed that the prisoners have a right to compensation, then whether this be compensation from Huntercombe or from the prison from where they have been transferred the Board urges a quick resolution. Chasing such compensation payments for prisoners takes up an increasing amount of the Board's time. Additionally, as the volume of property coming into the prison only seems to be increasing, there is pressure on staff to complete increasing amounts of paperwork on property cards (a list of everything the prisoner has with them when they arrive at the prison). This needs to be done accurately, as it is the only point of reference when complaints are raised.

5.8.4 In the annex of the Minister's reply, it is stated that the policy framework was implemented in September 2022, but the Board can see no evidence of this being followed. This is particularly important at Huntercombe, as prisoners are deported at the end of their sentence and request all of their property before they leave the country.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

6.1.1 Healthcare at HMP Huntercombe is provided as an outpatient service under contract by Practice Plus Group (PPG). There is no inpatient provision. All other services, such as GPs and dentists, for example, are provided as subcontractors to PPG.

6.1.2 The provision of primary and secondary mental health is provided by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (OHFT).

6.1.3 From its observations, the Board considers that PPG and OHFT have an effective and harmonious working relationship at HMP Huntercombe

6.1.4 A partnership board exists, comprising the commissioner of healthcare, PPG, OHFT and the Governor representing the prison. A representative of the Board is usually in attendance, to observe these meetings.

6.1.5 Healthcare has had continuing acute accommodation problems throughout the year and part of that accommodation had to be vacated, as it is not weatherproof. There has been significant water ingress, resulting in collections of such water in vessels and the necessity to turn off lights for safety reasons. Steps to relocate these healthcare offices are progressing but at a very slow pace, and significant relocation may not commence until April 2024 or later. The healthcare team is concerned that these accommodation problems affect staff morale and place unacceptable pressure on the team as it endeavours to provide an effective service to its patients in the prison. This issue was raised in the IMB's 2022 annual report and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) commented, in the annex to the Minister's response, that scoping work for a replacement was being carried out. The same problems exist a year on and the Board regards the current position as totally unsatisfactory.

6.1.6 On receipt of a request for an appointment, every effort is made to provide a nurse clinic appointment within two weeks and, where necessary, a GP appointment within a month. Every effort is made to reduce these periods where there is urgency and also to arrange blood or testing prior to a GP appointment where this will provide a more meaningful GP appointment for the patient.

6.1.7 Staffing is kept under constant review. There is a significant dependence on regular agency staff and some hours (such as holidays and sickness, for example) are covered by the support of staff from other prisons in the region. Further staffing will be required when the Cadbury unit opens, and this is under active review. Vacancies are at the rate of 30%, although they are generally covered effectively by agency staff.

6.1.8 Active steps are being taken to address recommendations made by EPIC in their patient perspective report of September 2022 examples of such steps are advertising waiting time and improvement in communication to patients of the repeat medication processes.

6.2 Mental health

6.2.1 The mental healthcare team (MHT) is accommodated separately from healthcare and its accommodation is regarded as satisfactory.

6.2.2 The MHT is currently staffed to a level of 36% but additional staffing is supplied to a broadly acceptable level using agency and bank personnel. There are currently gaps in delivering psychology interventions, due to staff vacancies, and business cases are being made to employ two psychological therapists and two psychological wellbeing practitioners.

6.2.3 After referral, patients are seen within 48 hours for urgent cases and five working days for routine cases. Urgency is determined by the mental health nurse reviewing the referral and is based on clinical need and risk.

6.2.4 There is daily interaction between the MHT and healthcare in relation to handovers, where any patients of concern, medication and other issues are discussed.

6.2.5 In the reporting year, Huntercombe had a number of prisoners who were clearly mentally unwell. These men were largely managed on their own wing, although due to their individual needs, behaviour and vulnerability, they had, from time to time, to be located in the segregation unit. The Board has been impressed by the care shown and efforts made by staff across all grades and departments in often very trying situations.

6.2.6 Of significant concern to the Board has been the delay in the transfer of prisoners who have been assessed as needing a bed in a mental health hospital. In two cases during the reporting year, the time exceeded the contracted timeframes. This meant the prisoners were not getting the treatment they required and the prison staff, although doing their best to look after them, did not have the skills to do so, and some staff were also assaulted by the unwell prisoners. The Board is aware of the report by the chief inspector of prisons, dated February 2024, on the subject of delays in transfer of mentally unwell prisoners and agrees with the concerns raised in it.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1 There is a memorandum of understanding with the local authority, and PPG has been commissioned to deliver social care when needed.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

6.5.1 The physical education team is fully staffed and activity has increased significantly post-Covid restrictions.

6.5.2 Prisoners have access to the gym for varying periods, depending on their incentives scheme status, which is based on their behaviour in the prison.

6.5.3 Various courses are available to prisoners, such as level two or three gym instructor, for example, leading to level three personal trainer and spinning instructor

6.5.4 Sporting and recreational activities available to prisoners include football, badminton and volleyball.

6.5.5 The prison provided 315 men with a 16-session stoic course, which is highly structured and provides a framework for training in emotional resilience consistent with and complementary to evidence-based psychotherapy

6.5.6 On occasion, members of the team take young people who are already out of mainstream schooling into pupil referral units around the prison to show them

something of the consequences of offending. This is part of inviting them to reassess their behaviour and enabling them to make better lifestyle decisions.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

6.6.1 The prison's drug and alcohol recovery team (DART), employed by Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, sees all new arrivals during their induction week.

6.6.2 DART currently has 69 prisoners on its caseload, and therapy and work strands are provided to prisoners. The written material provided to prisoners is substantial and of good quality. However, a practical problem is that some material is written in English only and a number of prisoners neither speak nor read English.

6.6.3 DART and MHT are based in the same location, which facilitates the provision of co-ordinated care to prisoners with both substance misuse and mental health needs.

6.6.4 There has been an increased detection of drugs within the prison. The active and passive search dogs have been in the prison on 216 occasions.

6.6.5 DART produces a regular newsletter, which is sent to all prisoners. The contents point out the significant health and other risks involved in consuming hooch. It also outlines the support available from both DART and especially trained prison peer supporters to prisoners who might be inclined to use illicit alcohol or drugs.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 Milton Keynes College (MKC) is the education provider. The contract was renewed from 1 April 2023 for ten years plus two years. The prison appointed two new HMPPS posts towards the end of 2023: a head of education, skills and work; and a neurodiversity support manager. The Board looks forward to seeing the development of the two posts and their interaction with MKC.

7.1.2 Education started the year with several vacancies. This was addressed by MKC working to provide flexibility in roles so it could offer general cover when staff were absent and it was also prepared to consider teachers requiring further training. A new pay mechanism for providers adversely affected spaces in the first half of the year, but MKC worked hard to recruit so that by end of the reporting year, most of the classes were running consistently. Courses offered by MKC are now in line with the contract and provide up to 84 places on a weekly basis for between 42 and 48 weeks each year.

7.1.3 MKC took over the running of the library at the start of the reporting year. The library is open on weekdays, which is in line with the contract. A total of 48 men participated in raising readers. The Board is concerned at the loss of various activities, including Storybook dads (where men record stories on CD or DVD for their children), which wasn't run in 2023.

7.1.4 During the early part of the reporting year, the library suffered with a lack of staffing. The computer system used to record resources was problematic and was replaced with a new system; this change with the subsequent stock audit was about 70% complete at the end of 2023. Due to this and the lack of officer staffing during the year, some men were unable to attend the library. This was offset somewhat by using the peripatetic and education support staff to support men on the wings. By the year end, a new timetable was created and every wing and area were included to ensure equal opportunity of access. As a consequence of the new contract, the amount of money for resources was cut. However, the prison and MKC implemented a donations box and greater checks on the men leaving to ensure the need for replacement stock is kept to a minimum. MKC will look to improve the range of materials in 2024.

7.1.5 Four times a year, personnel from the Shannon Trust visit the prison and do a single training session for new mentors, who are required to have at least Level 1 or Level 2 literary and linguistic skills. On average, there will be at least six trained mentors operating within the prison at any one time. Each mentor will see up to five mentees in the morning and three in the afternoon for around 20 minutes each. At the end of 2023, there were 11 mentors, seeing approximately 67 mentees, which comprised 654 sessions. Unlike other prisons, Huntercombe allocates mentees from their needs recorded at induction; these men are allowed to 'opt out' after an initial session, but would be listed as a 'refusal' if they refused to start.

7.1.6 During the latter half of 2023, the prison also looked at implementing a new numeracy training plan from the Shannon Trust.

7.1.7 Throughout 2023, the information, advice and guidance (IAG) mentoring course was delivered by MKC and an increasing number of part-time peer

advisors/orderlies (trusted prisoners who take on work to provide services that contribute to the running of the prison) were employed across the establishment. The criteria for applying for this role has been reduced and the flow through the course now ensures there is a steady supply of mentors. A total of 40 learners completed the course over the year.

7.1.8 The prison has introduced education skills and work orderlies to cover where there are gaps in provision and orderly cover. Teaching assistants (TA), chosen by class tutors, were not used as much in 2023. Initially, this was due to the setting up of new classes with new staff and also to minimise the numbers in each room where the potential for Covid was still present.

7.1.9 It was noted by MKC that the verification offered by City & Guilds and Gateway is checked annually by the awarding bodies, with no recommendations for 2023. There are monthly review meetings between the prison and MKC.

7.1.10 Due to the work required to complete the transference of the virtual campus from the Mountbatten corridor to the Mainwaring Centre, there was a period of time during the reporting year when it was more difficult for those on distance learning to get support directly. However, staff ensured that learners were not unduly affected, and by the last quarter of the year more learners were engaged in more qualifications. Numbers of applications for support have almost doubled in the year but difficulties with the application process, in that the total funding pot is under pressure, resulted in fewer men receiving funding. Despite HMP Huntercombe working with the Open University and other providers to ensure that applications meet the specification for approval, the expectation is that it will become more difficult during 2024 to get student funding. MKC will be looking at other means through the virtual campus system to ensure men continue to be educated outside of the core qualifications.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 The number of prisoners working in waste management increased from eight men at the start of the reporting year to 18 by year end. The prison now has a composting machine included in recycling activities.

7.2.2 WAMITAB industrial cleaning ran with six prisoners per session, increasing to 10 on training and eight on the work party by year end. Staffing was erratic through the year and non-accredited training was all that could be provided until staff had been formally trained.

7.2.3 In the social enterprise workshop, craft services, including t-shirt and mug printing, bag making and small craft work, ran reasonably consistently, with 12-15 prisoners working each morning and afternoon. This resulted in sales of Christmas good to local outlets.

7.2.4 For most of the reporting year, gardening was largely curtailed due to the insecurity of the location and the proximity to building work of the new kitchen block and modular units for future accommodation.

7.2.5 The newly equipped woodworking workshop ran in the morning and afternoon, taking 11 prisoners per session, with beautifully crafted items such as signage and bird boxes being offered for sale locally.

7.2.6 In textiles, 15 slots are available for prisoners to produce cagoules, face cloths, pillow cases and duvet covers.

7.2.7 Overall, the kitchens employ 18 workers per session. However, due to the transition from the old kitchen to the new kitchen block, all of which took longer than anticipated, numbers fluctuated during the year and no formal qualifications were delivered.

7.2.8 Wing workers operated as normal during the year and were linked into industrial cleaning to ensure training and assessment of quality of cleaning. The group also included wing painters. There was an average of 10 wing workers on each wing.

7.2.9 The old Rolls Inn was closed due to contract obligations for MKC and funding issues. The new provider, the Clink, started training operations very late in the year, but will be delivering higher level NVQ qualifications for prisoners on a hospitality pathway. This area will employ around eight or nine men.

7.2.10 Therapeutic art sessions for up to eight learners were introduced three times a week to enable non- or low-engagers to access some activity. This proved beneficial for most attendees.

7.2.11 Two-week long Gamelan music courses for therapeutic work were run during the year. Each course took 12-15 learners on sessions, with a performance at the end of the week.

7.2.12 The Board has observed that, too often, problems with the roll call and other security restrictions on movements resulted in some men not being able to attend activities for full sessions, particularly for the CIAG (paragraph 7.5.5.), education and the library, (paragraph 7.1.3). The changes in officer staffing and training also impacted on men not attending activities.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 The anticipated outcome of foreign national prisoners transferred to HMP Huntercombe is that, in the majority of cases, they will ultimately be deported to their country of origin. The average monthly roll through 2023 was 465. The annual number of foreign national prisoners deported fell from 230 in 2022 to 218 in 2023. This left deportations from HMP Huntercombe on track for the lowest annual total for at least the 10 years since local records were started in 2014.

7.3.2 The Board is pleased to report that in June 2023, following many representations to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Home Office (HO) concerning the fair and humane treatment of foreign national prisoners who have passed their conditional release date (CRD) but continue to be held in convicted criminal conditions under immigration powers (IS91), the HO detention services commenced moving a number of risk-assessed foreign national prisoners with IS91s into the immigration detention estate (IDE). This initiative has resulted in a decrease at HMP Huntercombe in the number of those with IS91s held at the establishment from a monthly average of 12 between January and June to four between July and December.

7.3.3 The above initiative has also had the effect that foreign national prisoners being released on immigration bail through the course of 2023 decreased from 191

in 2022 to 107 in 2023; and, of that number, only 25 received bail following the introduction of this initiative.

7.3.4 Deportation orders (DO), which are the building blocks of the deportation process, also fell in the last half of 2023, but still only appear to have been served on 25% of the HMP Huntercombe population.

7.3.5 The numbers arriving at Huntercombe past their early release scheme date (ERS) - 176 in 2023 - remain relatively consistent, with similar figures for the previous two years (2021:168; 2022:172). The Board considers these numbers to be excessive and believes they put the staff at Huntercombe under unnecessary pressure and could be avoided through speedier triaging by case workers at the HO.

7.3.6 In December 2023, 17 foreign national prisoners were deported in their ERS window: 13 were under one month; three between one and three months; and two between four and six months.

7.3.7 The staff budget for the offender management unit (OMU) through 2023 was for one band 5, one band 4 and five case administrators. In addition, the budget for the probation offender managers was for three full-time staff, and four point five prison offender managers (POMs).

Through the course of 2023, there were only four full-time POMs, who were responsible for up to 80 cases.

7.3.8 The Board is concerned that the current staffing levels in OMU will not be sufficient to cover the anticipated increase in operational capacity as the new Cadbury wing is filled.

The number of prisoners deported each month

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2023	22	11	20	24	8	20	24	17	24	15	16	17
2022	17	21	25	20	10	18	30	22	27	21	10	9
2021	11	6	19	27	34	23	13	14	26	22	24	17

The number of foreign national prisoners with IS91s

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2023	9	10	14	19	11	10	1	3	1	8	3	6
2022	30	24	27	12	8	22	19	15	23	18	19	9
2021	30	30	27	29	9	18	18	18	22	12	17	17

The number of prisoners past their conditional release dates (CRDs)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2023	2	1	1	0	1	2	0	0	2	1	1	1
2022	0	1	1	12	3	2	1	4	3	3	2	2
2021	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	2	0	1	1

The number of prisoners released on immigration bail

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2023	17	12	22	12	19	6	9	2	3	1	2	2
2022	26	14	18	14	28	11	15	6	9	16	17	17
2021	7	11	16	22	4	10	14	14	17	13	11	19

7.3.9 There was a monthly backlog of men lacking an offender assessment system (OASys) through the reporting year of around 39.

7.3.10 Some incoming transfers have poor quality (if any) OASys records which have been completed in a rushed manner prior to transfer. Possibly due to the perception in other prisons that an OASys is of no use to a FN as OASys does not have any value in other countries and thus see no need to prioritise. The Board continues to believe that it is good practice for all prisoners to have an OASys.

7.3.11 A total of 13 prisoners were moved to category D prisons (open prisons) in 2023.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) charity holds family days (which bring together men and their families outside of their statutory entitlement, usually in more informal settings) on the last Wednesday of each month, which are consistently well attended.

7.4.2 Social visits and social video calls remained popular routes to family contact.

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 The Home Office has signed compacts with 11 countries, and reintegration advice sheets, produced by international returns and reintegration assistance (IRARA), are available to prisoners in preparation for deportation.

7.5.2 The prison was not able to fully utilise the possible external job opportunities for suitable candidates for release on temporary licence (ROTL). This was due to delays in both clearance by outside probation and to the tardiness of the HO in triaging men drawing close to the proximity of either ERS or CRD.

7.5.3 ROTL is still under development and the resettlement department is working hard to ensure that as many men as possible are afforded this opportunity. The requirements are quite strict and the change in reception numbers and their length of remaining sentence made it difficult to progress in this area. With the opening of the Cadbury unit, this will hopefully improve in 2024.

7.5.4 Resettlement has a supply of clothing and footwear for those returning to the community with inadequate personal possessions.

7.5.5 Acorn Training has the contract for the careers information advisory guidance (CIAG, para 7.2.12). The budget is for 1.6 posts. However, through 2023, there was only one person in post. CIAG was digitalised in August 2023, with two sessions per week. Due to the frequent hiatus in the roll call (para 7.2.12), these sessions were too often compromised. The Board hopes that further support is given to this important function.

7.5.6 The prison held an employment fair in November, which was attended by 17 prospective employers.

7.5.7 In summer 2023, The Boats not Bars programme commenced, which aims to reduce the likelihood of reoffending through participation in rowing. It is planned to expand the project.

The Board sends its congratulations to the head of resettlement, who has received a nomination for the Butler Trust Award and who has been invited to St James' Palace in March 2024.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8 (one of whom is on sabbatical)
Total number of visits to the establishment	188

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	4	10
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	0	12
C	Equality	0	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	9	16
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	4	7
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	5	3
F	Food and kitchens	3	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	23	21
H1	Property within the establishment	12	11
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	15	22
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	0	9
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	32	41
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	45	8
K	Transfers	4	6
L	Miscellaneous	5	6
	Total number of applications	161	176



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