



INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD
ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025
HYDEBANK WOOD COLLEGE & WOMEN'S
PRISON

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Mission Statement

The Independent Monitoring Board is part of the UK National Preventative Mechanism (UK NPM)

It was set up under the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) to monitor the treatment received by those detained in custody to confirm that it is fair, just and humane.

Statement of Purpose

Members of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) for Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison (HBW) are appointed by the Justice Minister under Section 3 of the Treatment of Offenders Act (NI) 1968 and under the Prison Act (NI) 1953).

The Board is required to:

- visit HBW regularly and report to the Justice Minister on the conditions of imprisonment and treatment of offenders;
- exercise certain powers that are given under the Prison and Young Offender Centre Rules (NI) 2005;
- report matters of concern to the Governor or, in serious cases, to the Justice Minister; and
- exercise certain powers that are given under the Prison and Young Offender Centre Rules (NI) 2005.

The Prison Rules further require the Board to satisfy itself as to:

- the treatment of prisoners including provision for their healthcare and other welfare while in prison;
- the facilities available to prisoners to allow them to make purposeful use of their time; and

- the cleanliness and adequacy of prison premises.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have free access at any time to all prisoners and to all parts of the prison to which they are appointed. The Board shall also have reasonable access to any records of the prison necessary to facilitate their role as members of the IMB.

Chairperson's Introduction

The legislation requires the IMB of each prison establishment to produce an annual report for the Justice Minister for Northern Ireland. Therefore, I am pleased to present this report of comments and observations from the IMB of Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison

Members of IMB in HBW from April 2024 to January 2025 numbered four. The recruitment and selection process in May yielded two additional members who commenced in January 2025. A further two members were selected for HBW in November, though due to security checks, it will be 2025-26 before they will be active. While we have appreciated that the Sponsor Body makes great efforts to recruit, the numbers of IMB members in HBW continued to curtail our ability to fulfil the breadth of our responsibilities. With so few, there has been considerable onus on the small team. As has been well discussed and documented, the number of IMB members across all three establishments is such that it is jeopardising the continuation of this important role.

In carrying out our role of monitoring during the year, I am pleased to report that we have observed the regime in HBW to be stable. We have found the accommodation to be clean and well-kept with a continuous programme of painting and upkeep, being carried out. The external environment is kept to a good standard with shrubs and flowering plants providing a relaxing atmosphere.

During the year staff have organised a number of specific events such as Graduation Day, International Women's Day and carol services. IMB wishes to commend these initiatives which provided prisoners with special experiences.

The main issues brought to the attention of IMB by women prisoners and students were in relation to medication and healthcare, access to GPs, these issues fall under the remit of Healthcare in Prisons. Other main issues such as unfair decisions about segregation, loss of privileges and dissatisfaction about Xray Body Scanner readings (only males), these issues fall under the remit of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. It has been much appreciated that, throughout the year, Governors, officers and Healthcare staff, have accommodated IMB members when we have made requests for information about prisoners' issues.

This reporting year has seen particularly high numbers in the female population in HBW, reaching an unprecedented 120 in November 2024. For a short period doubling up was necessitated, which we observed to be appropriately managed.

We observed that a proportion of the females in particular presented with extremely challenging behaviours and (or both) complex mental health issues. As was said in last year's report, many of the women should not be in a custodial environment which is not conducive for their well-being. Their disruptive behaviour adversely impacted on other prisoners and on staff. To their credit, we observed that all staff responded to the testing behaviour with care and patience.

The Report of an 'Unannounced Inspection of Hydebank Wood Women's Prison 21st May - 6th June 2024 by the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland', scored the top rating of 'good' in each of the four healthy prison tests, Safety, Respect, Purposeful Activity and Preparation for Release.

The report described the establishment as 'an impressive institution' with a high-quality middle leadership team with many excellent Senior Officers across many functions of the prison. IMB would like to applaud this achievement by Governors, prison service staff, Healthcare in Prison staff, and the relationship between both organisations.

We have appreciated a Governor's attendance at IMB monthly meetings to update the Board on HBW matters and provide members with the opportunity to raise issues relating to the treatment of those in custody in HBW.

Finally, and importantly, I wish to thank the IMB members most sincerely for their ongoing commitment to the role and their consistent willingness to volunteer, well beyond what should reasonably be expected. I have valued their support greatly and it has been a privilege to Chair the IMB in HBW.

Pip Jaffa OBE

Executive Council Forward

The Executive Council (EC) for the Independent Monitoring Boards in Northern Ireland provides strategic direction and guidance for the IMB Boards at HMP Maghaberry, HMP Magilligan and HMP Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison. The Executive Council is made up of 3 representatives from each of the IMB Boards, the Board elect a Chair and Vice Chair, and it has its own constitution.

The EC meets a minimum of 4 times per year and also meets quarterly with the Director General of Prisons, The Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland (CJINI) and other relevant stakeholders.

The EC report to the Justice Minister and this year were also called before the Justice Select Committee at Stormont. The EC were questioned by the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) about conditions and treatment of all prisoners within the 3 prison establishments, there was a particular emphasis on the introduction of new technology and its processes. I would like to thank Patsy McGonigle and Yvonne Adair for their attendance and participation at this meeting.

The EC, in committee, have discussed the introduction of new technology such as x-ray body scanners and the associated policies and procedures. Whilst we have challenged some aspects of the procedures, we believe they are a vital tool in helping to reduce the illicit trafficking of items within the 3 prisons. Northern Ireland Prison Service commissioned an independent report into the introduction of the x-ray body scanners, but to date the EC have not had sight of that report and we await it being shared with us.

The IMB is a member of the National Preventative Mechanism (NPM), which was established in 2009 after the United Kingdom ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of those held in custody (OPCAT) in December 2003. The NPM is made up from 21 statutory bodies that independently monitor places of detention across the UK. The EC send representatives to national events and the annual conference, which allows for important networking to take place. The NPM have nationally developed meaningful work on issues such as the needs of women held in custody, the needs

of an aging prison population, drug usage, rehabilitation etc., and later in the year they hope to launch a database to assist in identifying trends across the UK. The work at a national and international level of the NPM administration should be commended.

At a local level Northern Ireland now has a NPM sub-committee, which has met on several occasions, and it is providing extremely good support and guidance for all stakeholders.

Across prison establishments in Northern Ireland, the increase in numbers, age profile, mental health and addiction issues are placing significant strain on the prison service and health care providers. The EC welcomed the increased investment by the Minister in an attempt to improve this situation but we recognise that this funding needs to be replicated within healthcare.

The EC has also been involved in the national post covid enquiry and have provided information about their monitoring during that period of time.

As the EC Chair I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to each of the EC Board members for their dedication and time, which goes above and beyond what is expected of a group of volunteers.

John Denvir

Executive Council Chair

Overview of the Establishment

The campus of Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison, on the outskirts of Belfast, is a prison which houses male students from age 18-24 and female prisoners from 18 upwards. There is a combination of those who are sentenced and those who are on remand. In this reporting year, statistics show that under half of male students were on remand and that there were approximately the same number of female prisoners who were sentenced and those who were on remand.

It is reported that the average daily population of female prisoners increased by 12% throughout the year, rising from 89 to 120 in 2024, whereas the male student population decreased by 13%, down from 58 in 2023 to 50 in 2024. All prisoners are accommodated in single cells.

There is a strong focus on education, with a learning and skills programme delivered by Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) and others throughout the year and male students and female prisoners are encouraged to become engaged in learning and purposeful activity.

Summary of Observations

- The Board is disappointed to learn that when lecturers from the Belfast Met. are absent, classes are cancelled, leaving students and female prisoners on landings at a loose end, when they report they are bored. When the SLA between NIPS and Belfast Met. is reviewed, the Board would wish to see this issue resolved.
- The Board would like to commend the Governor responsible for collating the timely issuing of data, as this information is extremely detailed and continues to allow for a streamlined comprehensive review.
- The Board would like to see that strenuous efforts continue to be made to ensure the availability and attendance of both male and female representatives at every E&D meeting.

- The Board would like to see that continued efforts being made to extend the range of food items suited to the diets of foreign national students and female prisoners.
- The Board would like to commend prison staff for their continued and imaginative efforts to organise multicultural events to enhance the well-being of those in custody in HBW.
- The Board wishes to encourage;
 1. the re-introduction of specialist psychiatric addiction service, to provide the high level of intervention required.
 2. increased co-ordination and collaboration of the clinical and social care services for those presenting with addiction, and
 3. effective promotion of continuity of care upon release.
- The Board would like that a report on the Towards Zero Suicide initiative is provided.
- The Board, as stated in previous years, would encourage that staff working within the CSUs are The Board wishes to express its concern at the practice of the cessation/reduction of medications at what appears a critical time in individuals' lives.
- The Board would like to see that staff nominated to attend the Safety and Support Steering Group meetings do their utmost to attend at least send a report. This observation was stated in the 2023-24 report.
- The Board would like to see that a protocol is developed, and independent person/s identified to assist students and female prisoners with the writing of a complaint.
- The Board, as stated in previous years would encourage that staff working within the CSUs are carefully selected and are given appropriate training, support and supervision.
- The Board repeats from last year, that information sharing between healthcare and prison staff within the necessary parameters of patient confidentiality, needs to be prioritised.

Learning and Skills

'Changing Lives, Changing Minds' Report suggests that educational opportunities, particularly at college level, can be a valuable tool in addressing the challenges of recidivism. The Report provides compelling evidence for the positive impact of college programmes in prison.

The primary purpose of education in HBW is to break the cycle of reoffending and improve employment outcomes for prisoners. By providing access to education and skills training, HBW aims to equip individuals with the tools needed to find stable employment and lead law abiding lives after release, ultimately reducing offending.

The Board continued to be pleased to note that the number of additional courses being offered by Belfast Metropolitan College (Belfast Met.) and the Prison Service to students and female prisoners. Male and female classes continued to be timetabled separately.

The Board is also pleased to note that male students and female prisoners, who are on remand, can now access education. The period of time on remand, as we have observed, can span many months, with release dates often quite unpredictable. It would be beneficial if education was continued in the community adding to the quality of life for those who have left custody.

This year's new courses included:

Drumming, Creative Writing, Line Dancing, Crafts, Knit and Natter, Chess for male students and staff, Cake Decorating, Flower Arranging, Speed Climb and Driving Theory (run by volunteers) Specific numbers for attendance at these classes was not available to us.

NIPS continued to offer the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme though it is disappointing to note that that no-one participated in this reporting year.

A very successful Graduation ceremony (which a Board member attended) took place in June when participants of the various courses were presented with certificates for their excellent work. Goody bags were presented to all attending and were much appreciated. The Learning and Skills tutors are to be commended for the hard work put in for this graduation.

During August a Wellness Workshop was offered and well attended. A Boys' event also took place during the month which raised money for the White Ribbon Charity.

In September a new initiative, 'Male coffee and buns' supporting cancer was introduced and continued once a month throughout the rest of the year.

Sports days and a Colour Run also took place in September, supporting the White Ribbon Charity. A Climbing Wall event was included.

Various events took place over the Christmas period including a well-supported Christmas Fair organised by NIPS. Two carol services in the Chapel organised by Clergy in HBW was attended by members of the Board.

The female Choir performed in Bangor Music Festival, achieving the Runner-Up award.

A very successful International Women's Day was held in March attended by a member of the Board and was well supported by the agencies within HBW. Several outside agencies also participated. The visiting speaker, Jemma McGrath, gave a very inspirational talk, speaking of her traumatic experience for which she got a standing ovation. She now runs her own successful makeup business and has gained the Prince's Trust Award. Each of the prisoners was presented with a Gift Bag.

The gardens continued to provide useful and productive opportunities to a cross section of male students and female prisoners. The resulting produce featured in the kitchen menus. Animal Husbandry also continued to be of considerable interest to male students.

Observation

The Board is disappointed to learn that when lecturers from the Belfast Met. are absent, classes are cancelled, leaving male students and female prisoners on landings at a loose end, where they report to us that they are bored. When the SLA, between NIPS and Belfast Met., is being reviewed, the Board would wish to see this situation resolved.

Equality and Diversity

The main forum for Equality and Diversity (E&D) is the E&D meeting, which is normally held monthly and chaired by the Deputy Governor. The agenda covers events and issues raised by male students and female prisoner representatives., Red Amber Green (RAG) reports, complaints, Protected Groups/Categories, Foreign Nationals, Horizontal Data and Emerging Trends.

Comprehensive statistical reports are circulated in advance of the meeting. After reviewing the statistics, the Board is content that the information provided does not highlight any areas of concern or disparities in the treatment of the groups across Section 75 categories.

Observation

The Board would like to commend the Governor responsible for collating and timely issuing of data as the information is extremely detailed and continues to allow for a streamlined, comprehensive review.

There were a limited number of formal complaints during the period under review, with only a very small number relating to E&D/Section 75 and the Board members have had no concerns about how these were addressed. The Board, will however, continue to monitor the data provided and highlight any areas of concern.

The format of the E&D meetings allows for a male student and a female prisoner representative to attend part of the meeting to bring forward issues of concern. As in previous monitoring periods, issues raised by male and female representatives were not generally related to E&D, rather they were requests and complaints. This involvement of representatives is very beneficial and attendance has been more consistent than in previous years despite two changes in female representatives over this monitoring period.

Observation

The Board would like to see that strenuous efforts continue to be made to ensure the availability and attendance of both male and female representatives at every E&D meeting.

There was an overall increase of 7% in the number of foreign nationals, covering 25 different nationalities, during the monitoring period, with an average of 64 in custody. There was a decrease of 4% within the female population and a 50% increase in the number of males.

On committal, Literacy and Numeracy Assessments are undertaken with male students and female prisoners. Both mainstream and English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) assessments are offered to foreign nationals. Due to capacity issues, those ESOL students who are at different levels continue to be taught by the tutor at the same time, which is not ideal.

Translation services have been provided to foreign national students and female prisoners through the use of tablets which are widely available, regularly updated and generally have been very successful in preventing isolation. Due to the successful use of tablets, the trend for a decrease in the use of Language Line has continued.

There have been complaints over a prolonged period, from foreign nationals, regarding availability of food suited to their diets. While some male students and female prisoners can avail of items from Asda World aisle, the option is not available to all. There have also been on-going issues of non-availability of items from Asda.

Observation

The Board would like to see the continued efforts being made to extend the range of food items suited to the diets of foreign national students and female prisoners.

The Board members acknowledge the consistent availability of specialised Afro hair care services, which was an area of concern in previous monitoring periods.

Changes in timetabling in the Learning and Skills Centre, during the previous monitoring period, to ensure the separation of students and female prisoners, have remained in place. The Literacy tutors are to be commended on how they have continued to ensure that the increase in the number of female prisoners throughout the year were not at a detriment compared to male students. This was in addition to coping with those male students and female prisoners for whom individual arrangements were required.

As in previous monitoring periods, there were a number of events during the year that were relevant to E&D. These included, Chinese New Year, International Women's Day, Colour Run, The Summer Wellness Workshop and the Mexico to Hydebank 'Men Can Cook Too' event. Funds raised supported the charity of the year, 'White Ribbon' which seeks to eliminate male violence against women.

Observation

The Board would like to commend prison staff for their continued and imaginative efforts to organise multicultural events to enhance the well-being of all those in custody in HBW.

Healthcare, Incorporating Primary Care, Mental Health and Addiction Services.

The Report on an unannounced inspection of Hydebank Wood Secure College and Women's Prison (November 2024) stated, under the section Health, Wellbeing and Social Care, the expected outcomes as follows:

'Patients are cared for by services that assess and meet their health, social care and substance use needs and promote continuity of care on release. The standard of provision is similar to that which patients could expect to receive elsewhere in the community.'

Healthcare within Hydebank Wood continued in this year to be a necessary service to respond to and address the many needs and demands of those for whom it cares. Whilst those who come into Hydebank are from our local communities, in general they present with increased and often more acute and chronic physical and mental health. Additionally, a significant number have emotional and behavioural difficulties, often undiagnosed and untreated in the community, and many have experienced extreme trauma. Furthermore, the number of female prisoners, many with very complex needs, has remained high, putting increasing demands on healthcare staff.

It has been reported to us that the healthcare team is often under continuous pressure. As with previous years and as is experienced within Health & Social Care services in the community, staff sickness, retention of staff and filling posts has

proved difficult, often resulting in periods of quite chronic understaffing and inevitable pressure on existing staff.

Nonetheless, it is encouraging to report that the multidisciplinary nature of the healthcare team has continue to expand, to include a wide range of allied health professionals. Last year, the inclusion of a social worker was welcomed and this year, the Board is pleased to report that the staff team has been joined by a dedicated full-time Learning Disability nurse. This person works closely with the Speech and Language Therapist and the Mental Health team, delivering a valuable service, given the increasing numbers with both diagnosed and non-diagnosed learning disability and those experiencing neurodiversity. It is somewhat concerning that the Occupational Therapist post specifically for Hydebank is currently vacant, with this service being covered by the OT within the Healthcare in Prison team.

In addition to the daily treatment, prescribing and dispensing of medicines, a range of health promotion services and programmes are delivered, to include - Sleep Hygiene, 'Ask Him/Her' mentoring and Male and Female Sexual Health Awareness. In this year, a total of 7 Sleep Hygiene classes were delivered by the pharmacist, 4 to females and 3 to males. These link well with the rest of the 'Wellbeing Within' programme run by the psychologist and other members of the healthcare and prison MDT. They aim to increase understanding of what negatively impacts sleep and what measures can be applied to aid healthy sleep patterns, giving practical tools such as lavender inhalers, sleep teabags and ear plugs. The Ask Him/Her healthcare mentors meet every new committal to assist them to navigate the healthcare service and to support them living well in prison. They provide a supportive and informative engagement which aims to reassure individuals and assist them to get the support they need.

As is being experienced within the community, it is our understanding that this past year has seen also, a continued rise in substance misuse and dependency of those being committed to Hydebank. Of the 485 female committals during this year, 32% presented with substance withdrawal, 48% stated they had used substance immediately prior to custody, 64% reported being a drug user and 46% to receiving mental health services support. Of the 173 male committals, 14% presented in withdrawal, 49% stated they had used substances prior to committal, 82% reported

being a drug user and 40% of being in receipt of mental health services in the community. Whilst these percentages are a little lower than last year, it is reported that the degree of alcohol addiction and the strength of the drugs being used (often intravenously) is greater and more intense.

This year saw the departure of the Psychiatrist who specialised in addictions which would appear to us to have left a gap in professional experience and service provision for this significant group of individuals. This has been remedied in part by the services of the Clinical Director of Healthcare in Prisons, a GP with special interest in addictions, who delivers an addictions clinic each Friday. The Mental Health team is overseen by two psychiatrists (one of whom joined this year) who work across all three establishments. This year has also seen the introduction of a new Mental Health lead, which is a new post.

Additionally, and importantly, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust commissions Start 360 (a non- profit support service) to deliver the AD.EPT (Alcohol and Drugs. Empowering People through Therapy) service. This service provides assessment, casework and counselling. A vital part of this is the SMART (Self-Management and Recovery Training) programme, with a specially adapted version called Start Smart, designed specifically for young men. The AD.EPT programme and its workers endeavour to align closely with healthcare staff, to maximise collaboration and positive intervention and outcomes.

Observations

The Board wishes to encourage:

1. the reintroduction of specialist psychiatric/addiction service, to provide the high level of intervention required,
2. increased coordination and collaboration of the clinical and social care services for those presenting with addiction; and,
3. effective promotion of continuity of care upon release.

Board members have been concerned this year at receiving an increasing number of complaints, mostly from female prisoners, regarding cessation or reduction of their medications upon committal to Hydebank. This practice does appear to have caused

both physical and mental distress. Healthcare managers have been forthcoming in explaining the rationale behind this and from a clinical point of view it generally makes sense. However, whilst previous and existing use (and often abuse) of medications both prescribed and illicit needs to be addressed, this Board has difficulty in understanding the timeliness of this, at a time when individuals are experiencing the stress and difficulty that imprisonment brings. Additionally, we are concerned that, whether due to emotional distress or lack of mental ability (or both), individuals do not have the capacity to properly understand the rationale.

Observation

The Board wishes to express its concern at the impact the practice of the cessation/reduction of medications, at what appears a critical time in individuals' lives.

To conclude, the Board wishes to express its appreciation to all those, both clinical and otherwise, who work hard, often under great pressure and with individuals who are vulnerable, often demanding and in great need. Also, it wishes to thank Healthcare staff for their increased attendance and input to our monthly meetings and to Start 360 staff for their willingness to respond to our queries.

Safer Custody

The purpose of Safety and Support is to promote and provide a healthy and safe environment for all people who live and work in HBW. This includes collaboration across all departments and officers.

The Unannounced Inspection of Hydebank Wood Women's Prison 21 May-6 June 2024 by Criminal Justice Inspectorate N.I. assessed that the outcomes for women as 'good' for Safety.

IMB observations have been drawn from member's attending the monthly Safety and Support Steering Group meetings and through communication with women prisoners and students during rota visits

The Safety and Support team consists of a Governor, two senior officers and two custody prison officers.

From the observed interactions between staff, male students and female prisoners, we can report that generally we have felt there has been a good rapport with officers, who have appeared to be keen to ensure that those in custody are treated with care and respect. Those students and female prisoners who were deemed to be vulnerable have been placed on particular landings. It has been clear from meeting with them throughout this reporting period, that for their safety, they have needed to be protected from the general population because of their vulnerabilities and for the safety of others.

During 2024-25, IMB noted there has been a continued focus by staff to address the risks of male students and female prisoners with support systems in place designed to enable them to feel more secure. Of particular note, we have observed diligent staff who have constantly responded to the demands of a number of prisoners with complex needs, mostly women. Considering the risk that these prisoners posed, this has been impressive, requiring much sensitivity, patience and resourcefulness on the part of the staff.

When IMB identified male students and female prisoners during rota visits who appeared to be in need of more immediate emotional support, it has been helpful and reassuring that the safety and support team have responded swiftly to our referrals.

As referred to in the IMB report 2023-2024 there continued to be some underrepresentation of staff who are expected to attend monthly Safety and Support Steering Group meetings. While the meetings are extremely informative, when reports on issues such as Healthcare and Child Protection have been absent, it has left gaps in the updates.

Observation

The Board would like to see that staff nominated to attend the Safety and Support Steering Group meetings should do their utmost to attend or at least send a report. This observation was stated in the 2023-2024 report.

Weekly Oversight meetings, which IMB have attended during the year, continued to discuss the safety of male students and female prisoners in the CSUs and to agree plans for their management while they remain there. It has been clear during the year that in order to keep them and others safe, decisions have been made to keep them in CSU where they can be best protected. Oversight meetings also discuss the possibility for early reviews.

When male students and female prisoners have made complaints to IMB about feeling unsafe due to intimidation or bullying either by staff, male students or female prisoners, we have urged them to raise the matter through the NIPS complaints procedure. In some instances, male students and female prisoners have said they found it difficult for their issue to be heard. When appropriate, IMB members have raised those issues with the Governor at the IMB monthly meetings or if urgent, immediately with relevant staff, in order to get a response back to the prisoner.

On two occasions, in year, IMB viewed CCTV following serious allegations by a prisoner of their ill treatment by staff. Having viewed the CCTV, IMB was satisfied that the treatment of the prisoner was fair and humane.

There have been occasions when a prisoner has said they were not confident about completing a complaint form. This is an issue which IMB would like addressed, so that male students and female prisoners can call on an independent person to record their complaint. This is important in respect of all complaints but especially in relation to a complaint about safety.

Observation

The Board would like to see that a protocol is developed and an independent person/s identified to assist prisoners with the writing of a complaint.

The profile of male students and female prisoners entering custody in HBW is routinely reported as First Night Vulnerabilities at the Safety and Support Steering Group meetings. These statistics have indicated self-reported high levels of drug and alcohol misuse, mental health and self-harm.

On rota visits to committal landings IMB observed that the atmosphere on both female and male landings has, in the main, been positive. This is especially striking considering the level of first night vulnerabilities.

The most frequent concern brought to the attention of IMB by prisoners on committal landings is the changes to their medication, which they had been receiving in the community and which they said helped them to manage their pain and or emotional issues. This matter is addressed in the Healthcare report. However, in respect of safety, some prisoners repeatedly reported to IMB how they find it difficult to cope emotionally, when their medication is suddenly stopped on committal, with some who said they feared they would self-harm.

The statistics for self-harm are reported at the Safety and Support Steering group meetings and the vulnerabilities of individuals discussed in detail at weekly meetings. Care plans are opened after every self-harm incident to prevent any further harm to the student or female prisoners.

SPAR Evo is well embedded in HBW as an approach to raise concerns about the potential risk of serious self-harm or suicide with safer custody cells used to accommodate those students and female prisoners. During each rota visit members have made a point of asking about those who are on a SPAR and when appropriate speak with them. In year, IMB has not received any complaints from students and female prisoners about being on a SPAR or their treatment during that time.

IMB continued to note that staff have been vigilant about any deterioration in the mood of students and female prisoners. This has been apparent on rota visits when we heard of prisoners on a SPAR, in Observation rooms and at attendance at R32s, when Governors have asked the prisoner about their emotional state, including any cutting incidents.

In the IMB report for 2023-24 the observation was made about the Towards Zero Suicide programme. In spite of requesting progress reports many times during this year, it is disappointing that IMB has not yet received any information. Considering the importance of suicide prevention, IMB find this to be disheartening. It may be that Healthcare and or NIPS are familiar with the details of the programme and its impact, but no information has yet been made available to IMB.

Observation

The Board would like a report on Towards Zero Suicide should be provided.

It is pleasing to record that, within this reporting time, a refreshed Child Protection Policy was drawn up and that a Child Protection committee has been meeting. As this was one of IMB's observations last year it is reassuring to note this progress. While no IMB member has been available to attend Child Protection meetings, minutes indicate that there are systematic processes in place to risk assess students and female prisoners for contact with children. When there is deemed to be a risk, restrictions have been implemented. During the year prisoners have not raised any issues with IMB about child protection.

NIPS in HBW carry out exit surveys of those leaving CSUs and leaving custody altogether to gather information about their experiences, including how safe they felt. While a small percentage refused to complete the surveys, the statistics from those who did are positive.

From September 2024-to February 2025, of the 88 males and females surveyed leaving CSUs, 22 felt safe and 66 felt very safe. The statistics from the exit surveys of those leaving custody over the same period showed that while a small percentage didn't feel safe in the first six months this improved subsequently. Further scrutiny of the data could identify the interventions that lead to this welcome improvement, which may also be able to be applied to the minority who did not feel safe.

Although statistics indicated that the use of X-Ray Body Scanners has reduced the prevalence of drugs coming into the prison, drug testing continued to be routinely carried out. This is another system to protect prisoners from risk of harm. Testing occurs either because of reasonable suspicion, or randomly and applies to both males and females. The Safety and Support Steering Group Meeting reports on the findings although the results slightly varied from month to month, the fact that the testing produces regular finds acts as a deterrent and preventative method to keep prisoners safe.

In respect of anti-social behaviour, statistics have also been presented at the Safety and Support Steering Group meetings. While they have indicated some fluctuation month to month, statistics show that the rolling six-month trend for anti-social

behaviour for female prisoners averaged approximately 11 per month and for students averaged approximately 9 per month.

After some technical problems we understand that access to the Samaritans phone was re-instated in year. IMB welcomes this resource as another outlet for students and female prisoners to avail of a confidential source of support.

Segregation/Care & Supervision Units

The Care and Supervision Unit Operational Framework (2022) states that the vision is:

‘To create a person-centred CSU environment where people in our care are supported and encouraged taking into account why they are there, the risk they pose, what they can access while there, what they needed to do to move back to their usual residential area and what supports are available to facilitate that return in as short a time as possible.’

Students and female prisoners can be segregated in Care and Supervision Units (CSUs) away from the general population for their own safety or the safety of others, for breaking prison rules or because they are suspected of having drugs or other illicit items in their possession. When this happens, they are placed on a Rule 32 (R32), which must be reviewed within 72 hours, and thereafter as agreed.

In this year, the average length of time for females to be held in segregation was 10.2 days, with 49% there for up to 3 days and 5% more than 42 days. Within the male population, the average length was 7.87 days, with 50% up to 3 and 1% more than 42 days. Whilst it is not desirable, the Board is generally satisfied that those held for long periods is done out of necessity, generally due to extreme mental health issues and the consequent behaviours rendering it impossible to place them within the general population.

IMB has a mandatory requirement to attend R32 reviews and during the year members made it a priority to do so. However, due to our low numbers and the consequent time pressure, a decision reluctantly was reached NOT to cover weekend reviews (Saturday and Sunday). Additionally, IMB members attend the

weekly Oversight meeting, where those who have been more than 72 hours in segregation are reviewed, to ensure that they are not being segregated longer than is necessary and that they are receiving the care and support required.

This year has seen a significant increase in the number of reviews and subsequently, the size of the oversight list, most particularly a result of the increasing volume of females being segregated. In April, there were 3 women in the CSU, November saw 6 segregated and at one stage in January, 10 women were in the CSU. This would appear to reflect the increasing numbers of females in Hydebank, the associated rise in mental health/addiction/trauma and the distress and volatility this brings. Members have witnessed the extreme behaviours and the impact this has, not only on the individual but on the other prisoners and on the staff. Whilst management is very aware of this and would appear to do what they can to alleviate the stress and vicarious trauma, it is a concerning issue that needs continued monitoring. The CSUs are kept in good order and painted as the need arises. The latter end of this year saw the floor in the male CSU being repaired. Due to the volatility and distress of those within the CSUs, there is frequent physical damage caused within the units. Whilst this is quickly and efficiently dealt with by staff, it can be disturbing and harrowing, as well as costly.

In September 2023 the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland issued 'A Review into the Care and Supervision Units in Northern Ireland Prison Service, a follow up Review of Recommendation Implementation.' In that report 'Inspectors observed good staff and prisoner relationships, and a person centred approach underpinned engagement.' Whilst the issues and personality disorders experienced by many of those held within the CSUs can cause friction and tension, the positivity found in the above review appears to have been maintained. As stated above, staff are dealing with extreme and challenging behaviours and as such, require both specific in-house training and support.

Observation

The Board, as stated in previous years, would encourage that staff working within CSUs are carefully selected and are given appropriate training, support and supervision.

Tablets held by staff record all prisoner movements out of cells. This includes when the student or female prisoner takes a shower, when they use the phone, see the chaplaincy or go to visits. Where an individual has been involved in education, there is an effort to enable them to continue to some extent and there is a weekly set timetable for those in the CSU which includes contact with Start 360, the Speech and Language therapist, Restorative Justice, use of the gym and access to library facilities.

In this year, there has been an Exit Survey in place to capture the experiences of those who have been in CSU. It gave the prisoners the opportunity to record their view such as how they were treated, if they felt safe or not, if they felt supported and if the CSU activities were helpful. The information from both the tablets and the surveys was analysed giving staff the opportunity to reflect on practice. Results with regard safety, respect and support have been very positive, with that regarding purposeful activity quite good.

Generally, IMB has found the Governors who chair the R32 reviews to have been thorough in their approach, have taken time to ensure that the person was aware why they had been segregated and talked through what change was expected and what support could be given, to leave the CSU and to avoid returning.

When a student or female prisoner has been sent to the CSU due to their behaviour which seems to stem from an issue relating to their emotional/mental health it can be very problematic for staff to respond appropriately. IMB would believe that when healthcare states that an individual has a personality disorder or that they have behavioural issues, guidance from healthcare as to how to manage that person would be very beneficial both for staff and the prisoner. This was a recurrent issue throughout the year and IMB would completely concur with the following statement in the CJINI report:

'It was important that appropriate information, with the patient's consent, was shared with prison staff to support them to manage the needs of people in their care'.

Observation:

The Board repeats from last year, that information sharing between healthcare and prison staff, within the necessary parameters of patient confidentiality, needs to be prioritised.

In conclusion, the Board is generally satisfied with the structures and practices with the CSUs (male and female). Over and above the observations noted above, we wish to note our concern at the growing numbers of females needing to be segregated. This does appear to be directly associated with the increase in female prisoners with very severe emotional/mental ill health and places immense pressure on prison staff.

Chaplaincy

IMB asked the lead Chaplain, Fr. Stephen McBrearty, to provide input on Chaplaincy services for this report. Below is a summary.

The Chaplain's Department in Hydebank Wood College and the Women's Prison (HBW) currently consists of Fr. Stephen McBrearty (lead chaplain), Sr Oonah (Catholic Chaplains Rev. Rodney Cameron (Presbyterian), Rev. Mark Lennox (Church of Ireland), Rev. Tanita Lee (Methodist and Dr Anwar (Muslim Imam). The department has no fulltime chaplain but shares their part time duties through the week to ensure a presence each working day.

The Chaplaincy department provides daily pastoral coverage within HBW. It works together across different denominations and faiths for the overall good of all students, prisoners and staff. As a department within the Personal Development Unit (PDU) it works closely with all agencies sharing as much information as is possible to assist each other in the overall care and rehabilitation of those in custodial care.

Fr Stephen is on call for any emergencies that may occur and will liaise with other chaplains. This ensures that the department offers a 24-hour service, 7 days a week. Chaplains also meet all new committals, offering support for anyone, whether or not they hold any beliefs. Chaplains aim to a calm presence, bringing peace to the most anxious on arrival.

The Catholic Chaplains hold 2 religious services each Monday afternoon and a combined service is held each Thursday afternoon, rotating between the three denominational ministers.

Working closely with other agencies, the department supports those going for trial, assisting with the return to society and when possible, arranging for follow through support from the many charitable agencies available.

In this past year, the three Lead Chaplains across the prison estate met with the Director General quarterly. An annual reflection day was held to look at progress, or indeed lack of it, within the prison service.

Within HBW the Lead Chaplain makes sure that the Chaplains support all faiths and their individual celebrations as expressed by that faith. Dr Anwar, our Muslim Chaplain, works to ensure that. Religious Holy Observance of Ramadan is observed. Christmas and Easter, for the Christian male students and female prisoners, are shared with all those who wish to participate and the Chaplaincy support the Governors in the organisation of days of special interest.

Chaplains are independent, working within the system, but are not part of it. This is an important role, which supports all involved who live and work in HBW. Chaplains can face dilemmas in caring for both those placed within the walls by the judicial system, and those who work within the college and prison.

List of HBW IMB Members 01 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

Pip Jaffa Chair

Yvonne Adair – Vice-Chair

Anne Adams

Christine Allister

Elma Greer – appointed 01/12/24