



**INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD**  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025**  
**MAGHABERRY PRISON**

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## **Mission Statement**

To enhance the quality of prison life, by working to ensure fairness and accountability in prison.

### **The Board is required to:**

- visit HMP Maghaberry regularly and report to Justice Minister on the conditions of imprisonment and the treatment of offenders;
- consider requests and complaints made by prisoners to the Board;
- report matters of concern to the Governor or, in serious cases, the Justice Minister; and
- Exercise certain powers that are given to the Prison and Young Offenders 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. In exercising their rights under the Prison Rules, members shall take into consideration the matters referred to in Rule 124 (5) which state, in the exercise of any of its powers, the Board will not:

- undermine the security and good order of the prison;
- prejudice the efficient operation of the prison; or
- prevent the proper treatment of prisoners.

The Board shall also have reasonable access to any of the records of the prison, with the exception of medical records and matters of national security.

## **UK National Preventive Mechanism**

The IMB is part of the United Kingdom National Preventive Mechanism (UK NPM) as required by the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

## Chairpersons Introduction 2024/25

I am delighted, as Chair of Maghaberry Independent Monitoring Board (IMB), to introduce the Annual Report for 2024/25. The report sets out our observations and monitoring in relation to the fair and equitable treatment of those held in custody within HMP Maghaberry this monitoring also extends to accommodation and healthcare.

Since our last report there has been 8 deaths in custody (custody covers a period of 14 days after release none of the deaths fell into this category). 3 of the deaths were at outside hospital. All deaths in custody are subject to a Prisoners Ombudsman Report with the outcomes of those reports published by the Prisoners Ombudsman's Office. On behalf of the Board, I would take this opportunity to pass on our sympathies to the family and friends of those deceased.

The prison service has also experienced the loss of both serving and retired personnel over the past year, and the Board would like to extend deepest condolences to the families and friends of those deceased. In particular, I would like to acknowledge, an officer who passed away suddenly over the reporting year, whose contribution to looking after prisoners especially in the Care and Support Unit was immense. He made an immeasurable contribution within the prison, and his loss was felt deeply by his colleagues and by many of the prisoners he looked after.

Over the last year, HMP Maghaberry has remained a stable regime, with the IMB being largely satisfied with the treatment of prisoners. However, there have been a number of occasions where we have intervened, seeking clarity on aspects of the prison regime to assure ourselves and the public of the appropriate treatment of prisoners.

The increasing prison population has been a significant challenge for prison management, staff, healthcare also the IMB. With the low numbers of Board members and the increase in the prison population there continues to be a significant strain placed upon members. In the reporting year the Maghaberry Board has had over 5300 interactions with prisoners, which is a substantive workload for volunteers and the figures do not include the monthly or ad hoc meetings with other stakeholders which the IMB participate in. As a consequence of our low numbers, I

have undertaken a review of IMB activities to determine how the IMB can remain effective as a monitoring body within Maghaberry prison whilst dealing with an increasing workload. I am confident that, with the input of the Board, I will be able to maintain a high standard of monitoring even with the low number of Board members until we can increase our numbers.

Whilst I would acknowledge that the Department has put significant time and effort into the recruitment of new members with very limited success, I believe there are other avenues to be explored which may encourage an increase in Board membership. I remain hopeful that with the support of the Minister and with some innovative thinking this trend can be reversed.

Maghaberry is now into the second year of the use of X-ray Body scanners (XRBS). XRBS are used to detect illicit and illegal items coming into the prison. Its success has had a substantial impact on the workload of the IMB, as the number of prisoners being held in the Care and Supervision Unit (CSU) increased significantly. As a direct consequence the monitoring demands placed on the IMB has escalated. However, as we progressed through the reporting year there was a noted decrease in the number of prisoners being held in the CSU. This reduction may have come about as a result of staff members becoming increasingly proficient and experienced in the use of the equipment, or it may be that those entering the prison are now aware of the greater likelihood for illicit items being detected. The positive news is that the numbers being held in this restricted regime have now stabilised and dangerous and prohibited items have been prevented from entering the prison. Whilst the IMB recognise the very positive impact this new technology has had within the prison, we have highlighted some areas of concern, especially around the length of time some individuals were held within the CSU. Whilst I acknowledge this may not sit outside NIPS policy the IMB need to assure ourselves of the fairness of treatment of individuals. The IMB will continue to monitor the situation over the coming year.

Lastly, I would like to wholeheartedly thank all the members of the Board for their continued support, hard work and professionalism during what has been another extremely challenging year. The skill set to carry out this role is considerable, and members have continued to show a level of commitment and dedication which is

rarely seen within the voluntary sector. I would like to commend each one of them, but in particular I would like to give a special mention to the Vice-Chair whose dedication to the role over the past twelve years should be justly recognised.

John Denvir

**Chairperson**

**Independent Monitoring Board**

**HMP Maghaberry**

## Executive Council Foreword

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 Maghaberry Prison

Maghaberry is a modern high security category A prison, with the capacity to hold 1935 prisoners in shared cells under crowded conditions but with an operational capacity of 1415. All adult males regardless of their crime or length of sentence are initially housed within Maghaberry. The prison holds individuals from category A to D:

- Category A prisoners are those that would pose the most threat to the public, police or national security should they escape. Security conditions in category A prisons are designed to make escape impossible for these prisoners.
- Category B prisoners do not need to be held in the highest security conditions but, for category B prisoners, the escape should be made very difficult.
- Category C prisoners cannot be trusted in open conditions but are considered unlikely to make a determined escape attempt.
- Category D prisoners can be trusted in open conditions.
- Un-sentenced prisoners or prisoners on remand awaiting trial are generally housed in normal prison population unless they have been provisionally classified as category A.

The prison also holds republican and loyalist prisoners under a separated regime as defined under the Steele Report 2003.

## Safer Custody

Over the past year the monitoring and observations of the IMB would indicate that safety within Maghaberry Prison remains a high priority for staff at all levels.

The numbers of prisoners coming through the reception process continues to increase. There were 3421 new admissions this year, 845 first-time offenders and 2576 who had previously offended.

A search process is carried out by officers at reception and any prohibited items which cannot be brought into the prison for a variety of reasons are placed in storage. Prisoners are then also screened with a scanner for any potential prohibited item secreted on their person.

Over the reporting year, 1932 prisoners had positive scans which indicated they were potentially holding illegal items. Prisoners who fail scanner screening are moved to and held in the Care and Supervision Unit (CSU) under a restricted regime. During the reporting year, a number of prisoners complained that they did not go through the normal committal process, as they were placed directly into the CSU and not Bann House, which is the usual reception house. This resulted in them not receiving their committal induction for a period of time. The Board raised concerns about inconsistencies in the induction process, and consequently measures were put in place to improve the situation.

There have been 8 deaths in custody during this reporting year, compared to 5 in the previous year. All are subjected to investigated by the Prisoners Ombudsman's Office as per protocol. The investigation Reports are published by the Prisoner Ombudsman's office, but the process can on occasions take a significant period of time to complete.

The Prison Service promptly informed the Board about sudden deaths, and relevant details have been recorded in the IMB serious incident log book. Where practicable the IMB have attended debriefs in relation to such incidents. In one incident the IMB felt that an important issue in relation to a particular death in custody were not recorded as part of that debrief. The IMB raised the matter with the prison service

who acknowledged the oversight and corrected the minutes to include the issue raised by the IMB member.

The number of prisoners who required support following incidents of attempted suicide or risk of self-harm has decreased in this reporting year. A decrease from 611 in year 23/24 to 478 in this reporting year. The work carried out by prison officers and the Healthcare Team (including Mental Health) has provided a vital service and significantly contributed to the health and wellbeing of prisoners. We commend their efforts to keep individuals safe.

### **Incidents of potential suicide / self-harm**

<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>
611	478

Figures provided by the prison in relation to drugs finds within the establishment have seen an increase from 476 in 2023/24 to 773 in 2024/25. This is despite the prison having a range of control measures in place to restrict the supply of drugs into Maghaberry, such as indicator dogs, body and cell searches and the relatively newly introduced x-ray body scanners. Prison security works hard to find and disrupt channels for smuggling illegal drugs into the prison but the level of sophistication and determination of individuals to get drugs into the prison continues to be a major issue. The trafficking of both illegal and prescription drugs within the prison has the potential to undermine the safety of prisoners and staff and the reduction of avenues where illicit items can enter the establishment is to be welcomed. The role of the IMB is to give assurance that the policy and procedure around such activities remain grounded in fairness and equality and therefore the Board will continue to monitor this over the coming year.

In relation to reports of alleged bullying incidents of staff on prisoners, the numbers are largely similar to the last reporting year, 349 compared to 357. There is little information on the outcomes of these allegations, the IMB will continue to monitor the situation, particularly to identify if there are any areas of the prison which are more susceptible to this type of activity.

### **Alleged bullying incidents – staff on prisoners**

<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>
357	349

The number of alleged assaults, prisoner on prisoner in this reporting year was 77, compared to 78 for 2023/24. This continues to be an area of concern and has the potential to increase as the prison population expands but it is encouraging to note that even with the increased prison population the numbers remain almost the same. There has been an increase in alleged assaults by prisoners on staff, from 31 in 2023/24 to 56 in the current reporting year. The impact of such incidences is not just related to the individuals involved, it can also lead to an increase in officers on sick leave, which then impacts on the ability of the prison service to ensure a normal regime within the prison. The prison service has, even with the increase in prison numbers delivered regime and out of cell time which has contributed to these numbers not increasing.

### **Assaults: Prisoner on prisoner**

<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>
78	77

### **Assaults: Prisoner on staff**

<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>
31	56

A number of prisoners reported to the IMB, occasions when they believed they had been treated unfairly by prison staff and felt they couldn't go through the normal complaints process. When raising such concerns with prison management the IMB have been largely satisfied that issues have been taken seriously, however, we will

continue to monitor for trends and patterns in this regard and if any are identified they will be brought to the attention of senior management.

From conversations with prisoners it would appear that some do not know how to report or are unwilling to report safeguarding matters to staff. In some cases, matters are raised through Chaplains, Traveller Mediation Service or other stakeholders, but this can lead to a delay in the issues being dealt with due to availability of resources etc. Whilst the IMB acknowledge there are arrangements in place our experience has been there are still issues. The IMB would encourage the prison service to ensure there is sufficient communication with those held in custody to make sure they understand the confidentiality surrounding the reporting of safeguarding issues.

The introduction of the ASK HIM mentors has been a very positive activity within the prison. This group of trained prisoners provide information and support to all those held within the prison, which is particularly important for those who have not been in prison before. It is clear to the IMB that this group have had a very positive influence on prisoners, and it is well supported by prison management. The prisoners who volunteer should be commended for their efforts.

There have been 781 Control and Restraint (C+R) incidents in the reporting year, compared with 609 in the previous year 2023/24. These incidents involve prison officers using controlled force in situations where there has been a perceived threat. The IMB have raised some questions around the notification of these incidents to the Board. Whilst we have no reason to believe these procedures are not being correctly applied, it would be assuring for us to carry out spot check verification in the future. The IMB have only recently become aware of use of force meetings which would provide oversight in these matters the IMB has not been invited to these meeting. We will hopefully be in a better position to report on this matter moving forward as we have asked to be informed when such meetings are taking place.

The IMB remains concerned that the use of body-worn cameras (BWC), which has improved, is still not fully embraced by all staff. There have been a number of incidents where prison staff have not activated cameras which would have been beneficial in the scrutiny of incidents. The IMB are aware that searches have been conducted with BWC turned off. The IMB highlighted this matter in the last Annual Report and are aware management have issued instruction, however that has not

always resulted in appropriate action on the ground. We will continue to monitor the situation.

An area of concern for the IMB, which was also highlighted in the 2023/24 Annual Report, is the low numbers of listeners who are available to provide support for other prisoners. The number of listeners in the last reporting year was 7, the number in this reporting year was 9, with 5 of these only recently being trained by the Samaritans, with another 2 in the process of completing their training. Considering the significant increase in the prison population we would encourage the prison to take steps to increase that number. We will continue to monitor the situation.

Issues around personal property (clothing, trainers, pictures etc) and the protocol around this issue has resulted in a substantial number of requests for the Board to deal with. A significant number of concerns raised relate to prisoners not being allowed to retain all the items brought in or sent in to them. Board members have on occasion, observed that items have been incorrectly recorded at reception i.e. colour, make or type of clothing and this can cause issues moving forward. Issues have also arisen when prisoners have been moved and as a consequence have lost property, especially if that movement involves transfer to the Care and Supervision Unit (CSU). Cell clearance is typically when a non-compliant prisoner is removed from their cell and relocated. Due to the circumstances of this removal, prisoners are not present for the cell clearance, and it is not uncommon for the allegations of missing property to be made by the prisoner.

In last reporting year 14.39% (761) of the complaints made were regarding property. This has increased in 2024/25 to 16.79% (856), the highest of any category. A prisoner's property policy was introduced in November 2023, and it is the Boards belief through monitoring of the situation that the policy has not being fully implemented by all prison staff. The IMB will continue to monitor the situation as it can have an impact on the attitude and behaviour of prisoners, which has the potential to impact on the safety of prisoners and staff.

## Care and Supervision Unit

The Care and Supervision Unit (CSU) within Maghaberry prison holds some of the most vulnerable, disruptive, mentally unwell and challenging prisoners in a secure location to ensure their safety and the safety of others within the prison.

At the beginning of the reporting year the use of x-ray body scanners placed significant pressure on the CSU, its staff and healthcare, as large numbers of new intake prisoners were failing the x-ray body scanner. This resulted in large numbers of prisoners being placed under a restricted regime in the CSU.

The IMB raised concerns about some aspects of the process which had the potential to impact upon the rights of individuals, who were potentially being held in separated accommodation for extended periods, with at times, inconclusive evidence. The IMB raised concerns in this regard, and the prison service were very open about the process and its implementation. The IMB took assurance from that engagement but still remain apprehensive about some areas of the process. Both the IMB and the prison service ensured that anyone wishing to challenge why they were being held in the CSU knew they could seek legal advice. In general, however few prisoners took that option.

Over the reporting year the numbers of those being held in the CSU in relation to failing the x-ray body scan has dramatically reduced. This will potentially will have been as a consequence of the increased experience of staff interpreting the scanner images and will hopefully continue to lead to minimal numbers being held on a potential false positive indication. There is also a strong possibility that those who believe they can secrete items into the prison no longer see this as a pathway due to the use of this new technology. The general opinion of the prison service is that there has been a reduction in illicit items being brought into the prison, however the picture is not completely clear, and the IMB await with interest the findings of the independent report into the operation of x-ray body scanners within Maghaberry carried out by an independent author.

The IMB have also raised concern about the numbers of prisoners who leave the prison for emergency or planned appointments but who on return fail the x-ray scan. This has raised a number of issues for the Board, and we have expressed those

opinions to the senior management of the prison. We will continue to monitor and question that ongoing situation.

IMB members continue to complete a weekly check of all the individuals held within the CSU. We note that over the last year few complaints have been received about their treatment within the unit. Indeed, staff members are regularly acknowledged by prisoners for their fair and equitable treatment. The IMB would commend the leadership shown by senior officers within the unit and the actions of their team, which promotes a culture of compassion and respect, whilst assuring a high level of control and security within a highly challenging environment.

The IMB also recognises that there are a number of individuals held within the CSU who are suffering from mental health issues. The prison management and the regular oversight meetings held by senior management and relevant stakeholders, including health care, are a significant protective measure to keep individuals safe.

Over the past year there has been some facility improvements within the CSU which have been welcomed by both staff and prisoners. All improvements have not as yet been fully implemented, but it is hoped to be completed during the 2025/26 reporting year.

The IMB would urge NIPS Headquarters to consider the aging profile and health demands of the prison population and give some regard to the provision of disability facilities for individuals potentially held within the CSU.

The CSU is providing a high level of care for prisoners who had complex needs. Facilities are improving but do need to reflect the continued demands being placed upon it. The Senior Officers and staff have played a significant part in maintaining a stable regime within the CSU and their understanding of the needs of those been held in a restricted regime should be recognised.

## HEALTH CARE

### Background:

Primary health and mental health care on the HMP Maghaberry site is the responsibility of the South-Eastern Health Trust (SET).

Its provision includes a wide range of medical supports and interventions that are appropriate to, and can be managed within, the Maghaberry site. As required additional and supporting medical provision for prisoners (patients) can be sourced beyond the site. This includes other specialised units such as Shannon (Knockbracken) and within other health trusts such as the Belfast Trust.

Health care staff interact with an increasingly high percentage of the prison population on a daily basis, with many such interactions being of a complex and sustained nature.

The Health Care operates its own referral and complaints system independent of the management and data systems of NIPS.

The daily working relationships between Health Care and NIPS continue to develop and expand to the benefit of the prisoner/patient population. Management within Health Care continue to develop joint workshops with NIPS about the impact of a range of medical conditions including mental health on prisoners.

While levels of staffing within Health Care remain a challenge, there were increasingly proactive approaches to ensuring more sustained coverage across the site. This is evident in the continued static medical provisions within houses with greater and safer supervision of medication during holiday periods.

The vast majority of medical issues raised by prisoners with the IMB were in relation to their ability to access professional medical care, mostly at GP and specialist level. The issues may be partially as a result of high demand and availability of staff, and it continues to be an area of challenge.

While there has been a clear effort to improve feedback from health care evaluations, through the allocation of a nurse specifically assigned to this area, response times are still a challenge.

The continued increase in the establishment population has placed a level of challenge on Health Care provision. However, despite this, a range of new initiatives began throughout the year, which have required specialist provision; the administration of vaccines, smoking cessation clinics, respiratory clinics, the attempt to reduce podiatry and dental waiting lists, weight loss programmes, as well as a more static nursing staff within houses. The IMB welcome the new initiatives and will monitor progress in this regard.

In the last reporting year, a number of increasingly complex medical and mental health related issues have been evident. Health Care are aware that medical feedback to such patients can be confusing and overwhelming. This can on occasion, from the prisoner's perspective, be contradictory. The IMB have observed that this can result in unnecessary anxiety and would encourage improved communication to ensure prisoners have a clear understanding of their medical position, reducing frustrations and anxieties. We will continue to monitor the situation.

## **Separated Prisoners**

Since the last report the separated prisoner's regime has remained stable.

Those held in custody, who identify with certain groups, can if they fulfil certain criteria request to be housed as part of the Loyalist or Republican regimes.

The numbers of prisoners in these houses fluctuates during the year but the numbers are relatively low. The IMB interaction with these groupings has been courteous and positive. We have engaged on relevant matters in relation to various issues highlighted to us over the year. We have had no matters of a serious nature reported to us in areas of equality or fairness.

Education and use of facilities within the system still remain the principal areas of concern, as identified to the IMB during visits to those Houses. Both Republicans and Loyalists have continued to express an interest in completing educational courses and hands on training which could potentially help them gain meaningful employment following release however it should be noted that the numbers

expressing an interest and those availing of the facilities continues to be disappointing.

The IMB engage systematically with each of the groupings but rarely receive any formal requests through the system to attend these areas.

The IMB will continue to engage with all groups to ensure that all of those held within separated regimes, have a better understanding of our independence and our commitment to ensure that all prisoners are treated equally and fairly.

## **Adjudications**

Adjudication is a process used within prisons where a prisoner who has been suspected of a breach of prison rules is charged with an offence. An adjudication process is then instigated whereby a Governor will listen or view evidence in an attempt to ascertain the facts around an incident. Prisoners will then be given a decision which considers the evidence and any mitigation circumstances.

The monitoring of adjudications has continued to be difficult for the Board. The shortage of Board members, the volume, and the scheduling of adjudications have resulted in a position which means that meaningful monitoring in relation to the process and policy has had limited observation from the Board.

Whilst the answer in the long term is a requirement for increased Board numbers we are putting in place interim measures which we hope will provide some limited assurance in relation to adjudications.

The Board has continued to raise this matter with the Sponsor Body and have highlighted the associated risks, but an early resolution is unlikely at the time of this report.

There have been occasions where Board members have been made aware of issues around adjudications, with prisoners highlighting the length of time the process has taken before charges are brought before a Governor. On some occasions this has been caused by the prisoner requesting legal advice (usually sought through a solicitor), and in these instances the IMB would be of the opinion that prisoners are not always made fully aware of the consequences of that choice,

particularly in relation to timelines. The IMB has also expressed some reservations in relation to adjudications being “timed out” which means a charge has not been dealt with within the appropriate time period but can result in the prisoner having a reduction in regime or job loss, even though there has been no outcome in terms of guilt or innocence. The IMB would be of the opinion that this element of the adjudication process should be reviewed.

## **Equality and Diversity**

The primary aim of the Equality and Diversity (E&D) forum is to ensure all aspects of the prisoner population are being treated equally. The forum is chaired at Deputy Governor Level and consists of Department Heads and prisoner representatives with a member of the IMB attending to observe.

To help achieve this oversight, the forum meets monthly to examine the statistical data covering areas such as:

- Adjudications.
- Complaints.
- Control and restraint (use of force).
- Drug tests.
- Progressive Regimes and Enhanced Privileges (PREPS).
- Prisoner Development Unit (PDU) reports covering Transitional Leave and Work Allocation.
- Unsupervised Temporary Release (UTRs).
- Compassionate Temporary release (CTRs).
- Searches and segregation.

Any anomalies in the statistical data are examined by taking a 10% dip sample. Key performance measures relating to protected groups are analysed under the headings of Religion, Race and Age. In addition to scrutinising the above data the forum discusses any disparities and, if required, question managers at all levels.

Prisoner E&D representatives from different groups are invited to attend all meetings. Prior to the E&D forum meeting each of these representative groups meet monthly.

The Prisoners are invited to raise any concerns/issues with the committee. While this input is valuable, and the issues brought forward are wide ranging and important, they are often unrelated to Section 75. However, it is worth noting that all issues are discussed at the forum with many of them being resolved to the satisfaction of the prisoner E&D reps

From the meetings that have been observed, considerable information is gathered and analysed each month. During this reporting period the following observations have been made:

**Section 75 complaints**

	2024/25 Reporting Year
	<u>NUMBERS</u>
How many Section 75 complaints	78
How many dismissed as not Section 75 related	48
How many disproven/rescinded	28
How many upheld	2

Section 75 complaints are discussed at each monthly meeting with background and reasons given as to why they were upheld, disproven or rescinded. At the meetings attended by the IMB no issues or concerns re the process here identified.

Prisoner E&D representatives continue to attend all meetings. However, due to prisoner releases and transfers, a number of the reps have left the forum. It is worth noting however that considerable efforts continue to be made to encourage new prisoner reps unto the forum with notices being place on all landings and further engagement taking place with different groups.

The Foreign National forum continues to meet monthly with Governors, Healthcare, Chaplin's etc all being available to help prisoners. The IMB only managed to attend one of these events but remained impressed by the up-take and work that is conducted.

The following events took place during this reporting period:

- World day for Cultural Diversity.
- Chinese New Year.
- International Day for people with Disabilities.
- International Day of Older people.

It should be recognised that considerable work has been undertaken by staff for these events to take place and have been well received by the prisoners.

We will continue to ensure that the forum endeavour to attract prisoner representatives from a wide range of groups.

## **Education & Other Purposeful Activity**

Prison rule 124 requires the IMB to satisfy itself as to....

‘The facilities available to prisoners to allow them to make purposeful use of their time.’

In the absence of a NIPS definition of Purposeful Activity it is taken to mean activity that is likely to benefit prisoners.

### **Prisoner Profile**

The majority of committals to Maghaberry have very low levels of academic skills and even fewer with any level of qualifications: a considerable number have learning difficulties and learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, nonverbal learning, processing disorder etc. With many years of compulsory education failing to meet their needs, they are long-term disengaged. Most have extremely negative associations with education and learning. Typically, in addition, many have drug and alcohol addictions and mental health problems. Overall, the profile is that of men with significant barriers to learning and development.

The challenges for HMP Maghaberry in delivering Purpose Activity to these men are:

- Making provision for a population that comprises roughly 50% remand prisoners, including men incarcerated for very short periods of time.
- Developing a sufficiently extensive provision for a prison population, a large proportion of whom are disenfranchised.
- Accurately assessing prisoners with very complex needs in a short timescale after committal.
- Expanding provision for an increasing prison population.
- Addressing issues resulting from NIPS staff absences.

### **2024-25 Developments**

Work continued from the previous year on developing a more holistic, cross function approach to planning and activity allocation for prisoners. In the revised approach interviews with prisoners are conducted along with PDU with the conversation aiming to elicit what they could or might want to do when they are released. The discussion

focuses on realistic options, taking account of their skills and interests. It factors in activity waiting lists and advises them about current available opportunities to keep them engaged and on track. The aspiration for the future is to digitise the application and allocation process.

We monitored a concerted effort being made to try to engage more prisoners, specifically that large but disillusioned group who have faced significant barriers to learning. Developments included: expanding the peer mentor program across the estate, enabling more mentors to encourage and support their fellow prisoners from the point of committal; expanding opportunities for creative and performing arts, for those who have struggled with traditional learning approaches; introducing more targeted engagement for minority groups such as foreign nationals and the travelling community as well as larger groups such as those with special educational needs and those with mental health issues; and expanding and enhancing NIPS staff awareness about purposeful activity opportunities.

Interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of NIPS staff absences are being explored and consideration was given to the possibility of moving some provision out to the houses at the point of need. Some resources have been allocated to staff PE facilities as part of a strategy effort to help reduce staff absences with a positive knock-on effect for prisoners.

## **2024-25 Delivery**

During the year Maghaberry staff and stakeholders delivered a wide range of opportunities to enable prisoners to make purposeful use of their time.

### **1. Work across the prison estate.**

This includes in the kitchens, laundry, gardens, recycling, tuck shop, Braille workshop, trade work parties, and in the houses as orderlies. Work not only enables prisoners to develop vocational, employability and social skills, it helps them achieve vocational qualifications, increasing their potential to gain employment on release as well as providing them with a structured day/week.

Some of these opportunities have increased with the rise in the prison population.

However, there are not sufficient workplaces to meet applications and waiting lists persist in a number of areas. Some prisoners have expressed frustration about the waiting time for access to work.

Attendance figures for work were generally above 20%, up to 24%-25% some months, during a year when the average monthly roll was well over 1200.

## 2. Regulated qualifications from Entry Level to Level 3.

Qualifications are provided under a service level agreement with Belfast Met; they are delivered in the Learning and Skills Centre and out in the houses when appropriate and where resources permit.

General qualifications focus on literacy and numeracy, communication and language, ICT as well as ESOL for foreign nationals. The vocational qualifications offer includes a good range of subjects aligned to current employment opportunities in Northern Ireland. New qualifications are added to the curriculum when resources permit. The majority of the vocational qualifications offered are at Level 1 and 2; a smaller, appropriate, range of Level 3 vocational qualifications is also offered.

Education classes are small, and attendance is interrupted by requirements to attend higher priority events, legal, medical etc. This, along with staff absences (NIPS and Learning and Skills), is a challenging delivery context for staff and it impacts on qualification outcomes.

Between April and November attendance at Education was generally over 40%, 44%-45% some months. However, there was a significant drop in December, down to 28%, as a result of higher than usual NIPS staff absences during the month.

There was some improvement between January and March with attendance at about 33%-35%. NIPS staff absences appear to have had a greater negative impact on education, with a longer recovery time.

## 3. Higher level education

For the very small percentage of prisoners who have the skills levels and motivation to pursue higher level education (roughly 1.5% of the prison population), undergraduate and postgraduate provision is offered through the Open University.

## 4. Physical Education

Prisoners have access to excellent physical education facilities across the estate and good outdoor spaces. There is a large gym and well-equipped fitness rooms in the houses and in the CSU. Outside partners such as the GAA and IFA offer a number of sporting opportunities and programmes aimed at rehabilitation and reducing recidivism. Staff also arrange for men to participate in the Belfast City Marathon within the estate on marathon day.

Attendance at the gym has increased slightly during the year, generally around 33% attendance, rising to 36%-37% in some months. A large proportion of the men greatly value access to the gym and comment on the impact on their mental health when issues, usually staffing, prevent attendance.

#### 5. Personal Development Opportunities

NIPS, along with a number of voluntary and community organisations, deliver an extensive range of personal development opportunities, from introductory awareness sessions to short, accredited courses on a wide variety of topics. This provision, designed and targeted at specific prisoner needs, not only helps the men with issues such as alcohol and drug abuse, relationships and parenting, communication and social skills, it provides an entry route to more formal learning, and qualifications. For the large numbers of prisoners with extremely complex issues this provision is an indispensable part of their rehabilitation; without it they will struggle to progress.

#### 6. Creative and Performing Arts

Prisoners had the opportunity to avail of a range of creative and performing arts activities offered by the Prison Arts Foundation, Spanner in the Works Theatre Company and Off the Cuff drama society. The men were able to develop their skills in fine art including ceramics, music and theatre performance. The aim of this provision is to engage the men in developmental activities; to enable them to explore creative approaches to learning and expand their communication and interpersonal skills.

#### 7. Libraries

Prisoners have regular access to the Library on the main site. There is also a small library in the Mourne complex. The libraries are well stocked. Some prisoners make

excellent use of the facilities, however many of the men, particularly those with a poor educational history, are not inclined to use the library. It is a challenge engaging these men and encouraging them to use the library materials for personal interest and development.

The extensive Purposeful Activity offer is designed, developed and adapted to meet the varying and often complex needs of prisoners with a clear focus on engaging prisoners in their personal development and their rehabilitation. However, the extent of the provision is not sufficient to meet the needs of the prison population at its current size and therefore does not meet the NIPS standard M12. Prisoners have regularly complained to board members about waiting lists for activities and waiting times to access support. Prisoners have also complained about not being able to access provisions because of NIPS staff absences.

The IMB is of the opinion that staffing complement is not sufficient to enable Maghaberry to meet standard M12 and the NIPS staff absence rate is exacerbating the issue.

The board will continue to monitor the extent to which provision of Purposeful Activity meets the needs of prisoners and the NIPS standards. In particular the board will monitor:

- the outcomes of this year's development initiatives, and
- initiatives to mitigate the impact of staff absences on the delivery of Purposeful Activity.

## Resettlement and Rehabilitation

In relation to rehabilitation the IMB have again because of limited resources been unable to monitor to the level it would like. We have anecdotally monitored the difficulties of some prisoners to access drug and alcohol treatment programmes as well as educational programmes. On occasions this has been down to the behaviour of the individual and their unwillingness to fully engage and commit to the program however we are increasingly finding that the lack of staff is having a major part to play in difficulties around rehabilitation. In relation to resettlement, whilst we have monitored that prisoners are being signposted towards support services such as housing, benefits, employment and healthcare, we are not assured that all prisoners are fully aware of what support agencies are available to them. The lack of clear communication and understanding for prisoners is something the prison service along with relevant stakeholders should seek to improve, as was also noted in last year's report.

During their stay in prison, sentenced prisoners should have access to a Personal Development Plan (PDP) along with a PDP co-ordinator. Whilst we have monitored some of that taking place, we have again increasingly found that prisoners are expressing the view that their contact with the co-ordinators is limited.

We have also noted that in terms of conditions of licencing being communicated to prisoners, it appears that this information is being provided on their exit from the prison or shortly before. The IMB note this would not be the same position with other prisoners held in other establishments across the UK. This may be an area which should be reviewed by NIPS.

Similar to last year's report, the IMB are increasingly concerned about the number of prisoners advising they cannot access support services and will continue to monitor and highlight the situation to prison management.

We continue to monitor issues around communication whether actual or perceived by prisoners in which they are receiving little or no information about exit plans

Provision of exit plans and associated timelines, in either written or verbal form should be considered for potential review by NIPS.

## Accommodation

During the reporting year 2024–2025, the prison continued to face significant challenges in managing population levels, particularly in relation to accommodation capacity. The ongoing reliance on three of the older square houses (Bann, Erne, and Foyle) remained essential to meeting demand, despite these units having been earmarked for future demolition due to their outdated condition compared to the more modern Davis and Quoile houses. Due to sustained population pressures, cell sharing was maximised wherever feasible. The prison was required to activate its final available accommodation unit, Lagan House, to manage capacity.

Given the continued use of older accommodation blocks, a business case for the installation of CCTV was approved by the Governor in September 2024. Despite this, installation has been delayed due to competing maintenance priorities, and the system has not yet been fully implemented. The IMB considers the installation of CCTV a priority, particularly in light of prisoner concerns and instances where footage has not been available to support matters raised.

Following recommendations made in the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) report of early 2023, efforts were made to enhance the environment and facilities within the Care and Supervision Unit (CSU) to ensure it is fit for purpose for both staff and prisoners. Notably, improvements to the learning and skills facilities and the adjudication room were completed in December 2024. However, progress on other key upgrades, specifically the landings, exercise yards, and CCTV systems have been delayed. At the time of reporting, no confirmed timeline has been provided for the completion of these works.

Throughout the year, the IMB received multiple reports regarding general maintenance issues. These included concerns about the lack of privacy in shower facilities and the unavailability of toilet facilities during outdoor association periods. While six of the residential houses are equipped with external toilet facilities, these are frequently out of service due to maintenance problems. An incident brought to the IMB's attention involved a prisoner being denied re-entry to the prison when external toilet facilities were non-operational. This was regarded as a potential

breach of the individual's human rights. Following IMB intervention, the prisoner received an apology from the Governor.

The Board acknowledges that damage to facilities can on occasion be caused by prisoners; however, in the absence of CCTV in certain areas it is often not possible to determine responsibility. The IMB is considering implementing a system of rotational inspections of toilet, hygiene, and laundry facilities to ensure standards are maintained. However, this initiative is dependent on the availability of sufficient Board members.

The IMB remains concerned that, while efforts are being made to address maintenance and accommodation issues, the increasing population continues to place strain on the prison's infrastructure. The Board will continue to monitor these matters closely and raise concerns where necessary to ensure that the rights and dignity of all prisoners are upheld.

## **Reception and Induction**

Due to the insufficient numbers of Board members, we are unable to give a substantive monitoring overview of Reception and Induction.

Matters around the lack of cleanliness and overcrowding in Bann House have been highlighted and noted by Board members we will continue to monitor the situation.

We would hope to be in a position in the next reporting year, to give a more substantive and comprehensive input into these areas.

## **Chaplaincy**

At time of writing this report, the number of prisoners in HMP Maghaberry is circa 1,200. These unprecedented numbers have a challenging effect on the chaplaincy and its resources, there are more committals to visit, requests to attend and pastoral care to deliver.

Despite this the chaplaincy continues to work as effectively as possible in delivering religious services, visiting prisoners and running religious courses. Chaplaincy services have encountered difficulties with enrolment, which was “capped” at 60 prisoners attending each service, and as a consequence decisions had to be made regarding who could be enrolled. This has resulted in complaints from prisoners who have not been able to attend a service. Conversations are on-going about how to resolve this issue.

Despite the challenges of an increasing population, services are going from strength to strength with the Christmas and Easter joint services being particular highlights, with the prison choir taking a leading part. Chaplains continue to deliver a service that is beyond that which is expected, particularly when it comes to external prison work which has included picking up clothing or delivering a message to family members that have been impossible to reach by phone. It is important that we acknowledge and show appreciation for those who volunteer, giving of their time in support of prisoners through chaplaincy. The work of Peter McVeigh and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul deserve special mention.

## **Catering**

The increase in prison numbers have placed a significant burden on the kitchens at Maghaberry not only in terms of operation but also the financial implication of dealing with larger numbers of prisoners.

The IMB have noted few complaints about the quality, quantity or temperature of food being provided. The kitchens remain at a very high level in relation to cleanliness and it is encouraging to note the huge buy-in, from the prisoners working in this area.

Prison staff in particular should be commended for their work and treatment of prisoners within the unit. On many occasions they have gone above what is required of them to provide specific dietary needs for some prisoners, for either religious or health reasons.

The IMB had highlighted in last years report the possibility of using renewable food containers to reduce the impact on the environment, and we are pleased to report that improvements in that area have taken place.

The IMB continue to be impressed by the standard and quality of products produced by the kitchens and will monitor whether any additional financial pressures have an adverse impact upon prisoners. The IMB will also continue to monitor the use of food containers.

## **Burren House**

Burren House is a Pre-release Prison which is in the grounds of the old Crumlin Road in Belfast and forms part of a person-centred pathway or controlled exit plan for prisoners. It has facilities for more than 20 inmates most of who are life sentence prisoners nearing the end of their jail terms. Burren House is a safe, low security pre-release facility where prisoners can be adequately tested before they are released into the community. Prisoners are allowed to attend daily work placements, which helps with their rehabilitation and transition back into life outside the prison.

It is seen as a privilege to be housed in Burren house and there are strict rules, such as regular drug and alcohol testing. The IMB have observed that any breach of prison rules will not be tolerated and may result in prisoners being returned back to Maghaberry main prison. We have noted that this has happened during the reporting year, and we are satisfied that all policies and processes were adhered to.

Over the year we have visited Burren House and observed adequate accommodation for prisoners, with laundry facilities, washers, dryers all kept in good condition and working order. Toilets and shower facilities were clean and adequate for use. The IMB have not received any reports of issues with either staff or the building in the reporting year. We have been very impressed with the staff who run Burren House and the way they interact with the prisoners.