



Debriefing paper for the inspection of

HMP Woodhill

by HM Inspectorate of Prisons

14–25 August 2023

This paper represents the material presented at the full inspection debrief by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. The material and assessments are indicative only and may be changed at the discretion of the Chief Inspector after due reflection during the report production process or on the discovery of additional evidence. Inspected bodies will be offered the opportunity to correct factual inaccuracies as part of the publication process.

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Healthy prison assessments

Outcomes for prisoners are good against this healthy prison test.

There is no evidence that outcomes for prisoners are being adversely affected in any significant areas.

Outcomes for prisoners are reasonably good against this healthy prison test.

There is evidence of adverse outcomes for prisoners in only a small number of areas. For the majority there are no significant concerns. Procedures to safeguard outcomes are in place.

Outcomes for prisoners are not sufficiently good against this healthy prison test.

There is evidence that outcomes for prisoners are being adversely affected in many areas or particularly in those areas of greatest importance to the well-being of prisoners. Problems/concerns, if left unattended, are likely to become areas of serious concern.

Outcomes for prisoners are poor against this healthy prison test.

There is evidence that the outcomes for prisoners are seriously affected by current practice. There is a failure to ensure even adequate treatment of and/or conditions for prisoners. Immediate remedial action is required.

1. Leadership

Our judgements about leadership take a narrative form and do not result in a score.

- Leadership of this complex and high-risk prison, operating both specialist units and holding category A prisoners in addition to its role as a category B trainer, was made especially challenging by the severe and enduring shortage of staff. The poor outcomes identified at our last inspection had not been addressed and had worsened in some important areas, particularly in relation to safety.
- The prison was unsafe, with the highest rate of serious assaults against staff in England and Wales. Reported incidents of self-harm and use of force were the highest in the male estate, and illicit drug use was a significant problem. Leaders had yet to take effective action to make the prison safer.
- Leaders were not tackling sources of much prisoner frustration that included delays in getting basic things done. The many relatively inexperienced staff were not sufficiently supported to challenge poor behaviour, and we found bullying and intimidation by prisoners to be rife. Many prison officers told us they feared for their safety, and morale was low.
- Despite considerable efforts to recruit and retain staff, a chronic shortage of officers remained at the crux of the prison's difficulties; only half of the prison's quota of Band 3 officers were available for operational duties, and there was still a 36% shortfall when supplemented by officers on detached duty from other prisons. More officers were leaving than joining (97 v 56 in the last 12 months), and a continuing deterioration in staffing was forecast.
- The prison was not fulfilling its function as a category B trainer, for example, there was insufficient activity. Prisoners were underemployed and very frustrated by the lack of opportunities for progression. In our survey, only a third of prisoners said their experience in this prison would make them less likely to reoffend in the future, which was much worse than the comparator.
- Strategic work to reduce reoffending was weak, and the offender management unit (OMU) remained understaffed, with only around half of probation trained prison offender managers (POMs) in post. Delivery of key work to support offender management was non-existent, and there were no designated resettlement resources, despite the prison releasing prisoners.
- The rundown physical infrastructure needed investment and planned improvements for the refurbishment of showers had stalled. The facilities management provider struggled to keep on top of the repair of frequently damaged cells.
- The governor and her senior team had shown considerable commitment to the prison over time, although both staff and prisoners told us they were not sufficiently visible on the units. Effective and capable leadership

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across all functions was needed to address the prison's critical challenges.

- Many custodial managers (CMs) and supervisory officers (SOs) were relatively inexperienced, but we found some strong and dedicated middle leadership and a group of staff that wanted to do a good job.
- The prison's self-assessment detailed its strengths and weaknesses but lacked realistic plans for improvement in important areas. It was also uncertain whether some initiatives would have the desired outcome. Concerningly, none of the recommendations following our last inspection had been achieved.
- Local leaders urgently needed more support to reset the prison. Although a capacity reduction of 74 spaces remained in place, requests to HMPPS for a further reduction had so far not been agreed.

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2. Safety

Outcomes for prisoners against this healthy prison test were poor.

Early days in custody

- Early days arrangements were not good enough. They had lost focus and were adversely impacted by staff shortages. In our survey, prisoners reported negatively about many aspects of their early days experiences.
- Reception was not a welcoming facility, although this was mitigated in part by friendly and patient staff.
- The absence of readily available peer support throughout a new arrival's first days was a missed opportunity to help them settle in.
- First night cells were not always clean, well prepared or properly equipped.
- Induction was very poor, and prisoners received little or no information about life at Woodhill.

Managing behaviour

Encouraging positive behaviour

- In our survey, 71% of prisoners said they had felt unsafe at some point during their time at Woodhill, and 48% said they felt unsafe at the time of the inspection.
- Levels of violence between prisoners and against staff were very high and higher than at our last inspection. The rate of serious assaults against staff in the past 12 months was the highest in the country. Overall, reported incidents of violence had significantly increased (182 prior to the last inspection v 298 in the previous 12 months).
- Leaders were well sighted on the drivers for violence - many of which were as a result of prisoner frustration. Initial actions and challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs) to manage perpetrators were detailed, but they were poorly communicated to wing staff, which made them largely ineffective.
- Reward and sanction schemes were ineffective and underutilised. In some cases, staff were reluctant to use them for fear of reprisals from prisoners.
- We saw many examples of staff ignoring low level poor behaviour by prisoners.
- The high number (26) of self-isolating prisoners spent too long separated without hope of reintegration and were subject to an impoverished regime.

Adjudications

- There had been 2,900 adjudications over the past 12 months which was very high, and too many were for offences that should have been dealt with at a lower level.
- There were 186 outstanding adjudications, which undermined confidence in the system.
- Good relationships with the local police had helped reduce the number of outstanding charges referred externally by more than half, but they remained high.
- Levels of enquiry by adjudicators were poor, and recent improvements in quality assurance were yet to show results.

Use of force

- The amount of force used by staff on prisoners was amongst the highest of all adult male prisons. There had been 692 incidents compared with 485 prior to the last inspection. Almost a quarter of the prison's population had been restrained at some point, according to our survey.
- Although the scrutiny of incidents that were viewed was good, only 30% were considered. Quality assurance and prisoner debriefs had significant backlogs because use of force coordinators were regularly cross-deployed.
- In the sample of incidents we viewed, most force was justified and there was evidence of good de-escalation. We saw excessive force used once and this had been appropriately challenged by leaders.
- Special accommodation had been used 13 times over the last 12 months. The uses that we reviewed were justified.
- The use of body worn cameras was improving following some recent action by managers, but was still not good enough.

Segregation

- The segregation unit housed complex prisoners and frequently exceeded capacity. Many stays were lengthy, and reintegration, which was challenging, had only been achieved for a small number.
- Some prisoners also experienced segregation conditions on normal location, and we were not assured that the oversight of this was rigorous enough.
- While staff generally did their best to engage with prisoners, they lacked specialist training or supervision to work with such challenging behaviour.
- The communal environment was run down, and cells were often in a poor state.

- The regime was frequently compromised, and prisoners were rarely able to shower daily. However, efforts were made to engage them with in-cell education packs and daily periods of exercise, albeit in caged yards.
- Prisoners had access to a range of multi-agency professionals but could rarely speak to them in private.

Security

- Information reports were well managed. Although there were some backlogs, effective triage meant all urgent information was acted on appropriately by the well-resourced security department.
- Analysis of data was good and effectively disseminated around the prison.
- The supply of illicit substances was a significant problem. The random mandatory drug test (MDT) rate (38%) was the sixth highest of all adult male prisons, despite considerable resource.

Safeguarding

Suicide and self-harm prevention

- The rate of reported self-harm was currently the highest in the male estate, and there had been two self-inflicted deaths and a further unexplained death since the last inspection.
- In the 12 months prior to this inspection, there had been 829 incidents of self-harm involving 124 individuals.
- The prison managed some complex and vulnerable prisoners. Drivers for self-harm included frustration about lack of access to basic amenities such as a phone, kettle and water. While the reasons prisoners hurt themselves was understood by the prison, too little was done to address this proactively.
- Learning from Prisons and Probation Ombudsman recommendations was not fully embedded. We were particularly concerned by the number of prisoners covering their observation panels, which often prevented proper welfare checks from being conducted.
- Cell bells often went unanswered for long periods of time and some prisoners, including those under assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) case management, had no access to a working cell bell.
- There were frailties in the management of the ACCT process. While many prisoners told us they felt uncared for, most cited helpful support from some officers and/or specialists such as psychologists and mental health practitioners.
- Access to Listeners was not good enough.

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- Too many prisoners on ACCT were located in the segregation unit without robust and defensible decisions. The constant watch cells that we observed were in a poor condition.

Adult safeguarding

- Notwithstanding the governor's attendance at the local safeguarding adults board, leadership and ownership of the prison's arrangements had slipped.
- Staff were aware of some vulnerabilities but were not always properly sighted on how to raise a concern.
- Prisoners with a range of vulnerabilities were appropriately discussed at the weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM) but actions were not always evident.
- The Compass unit continued to work well with some of the more complex and vulnerable prisoners.

3. Respect

Outcomes for prisoners against this healthy prison test were not sufficiently good.

Staff-prisoner relationships

- In our survey, 61% of prisoners reported that staff treated them with respect, which was similar to other category B establishments. However, only a fifth of those responding said they had been spoken to in the last week, and only 27% said they felt treated as an individual – both significantly below comparators.
- Rapid staff turnover and the high proportion of inexperienced staff led to inconsistency of treatment for prisoners. Some officers lacked confidence in enforcing basic rules and challenging poor behaviour.
- Key work was not being delivered.
- Some prisoners made allegations of poor treatment by staff, but others told us that officers were doing their best in difficult conditions.
- We saw mostly positive interactions between prisoners and staff, and it was clear that many officers cared about the welfare of prisoners and supported them as well as they could.
- Peer support was underdeveloped.

Daily life

Living conditions

- Many communal areas of the prison were unacceptably dirty, and some were filthy. Staff shortages meant that cleaners were often locked-up when they should have been working. There was a lack of cleaning protocols and inadequate supervision of cleaners on some house units. In our survey, only 26% of prisoners said that communal areas were clean – less than half the rate of comparator prisons.
- All prisoners were housed in single cells which provided adequate space. The condition of cells varied. Many were badly in need of repainting, and some had long-standing defects, such as broken toilet seats and windows, and many cells lacked cupboards.
- Too many in cell phones were out of order or missing and repairs took a long time.
- Prisoners could access showers every day, but on most wings shower rooms lacked privacy and were often very dirty.
- Most prisoners wore their own clothes but supplies of prison clothing remained erratic, and some wing laundry machines were out of order.
- In our survey, only 8% of prisoners said their cell bells were answered within five minutes. Prison records showed that many were not answered within the target time, and there was insufficient monitoring.

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Residential services

- In our survey, only 20% of prisoners said food was good and 21% said they had enough to eat, which was lower than in similar prisons.
- One hot meal was served daily. Some of the meals we saw were acceptable, but others were very unappetising. Portions of carbohydrates were adequate, but main dishes were small. Portions in the cold meals and breakfast packs were insufficient.
- Meals were served too early, and staff did not adequately supervise the serving of food.
- There was little consultation with prisoners about the food. Menus had not been analysed to ensure they were nutritionally adequate.
- The kitchen was clean, and most equipment was working, but only five of the eight catering posts were filled.
- Very limited self-catering facilities had been introduced on the house units.
- Prisoners complained that prices in the prison shop were unaffordable, and that fresh produce generally arrived in very poor condition.

Prisoner consultation, applications and redress

- Prisoner consultation meetings had recently restarted, and wing forums were infrequent. In our survey, significantly fewer prisoners than at other prisons said that they were consulted about everyday issues.
- Prisoners also reported that applications were not dealt with either promptly or fairly. The system was not well organised.
- The complaints system had been undermined by lack of timeliness and variable quality of responses, but efforts were being made to improve this.

Equality, diversity and faith

- Work to improve fair treatment had stalled until the recent appointment of a new adviser. An ambitious action plan had been devised and foundations were being laid, but so far there was limited progress, for example, in use of data or arranging of special events.
- Some good work had been done with Black and Muslim prisoners on their specific needs, priorities and issues, but foreign nationals were less well supported.
- Reasonable support was given to those with physical disabilities, especially in the clinical assessment unit (CAU), although peer assistants were only just beginning work. Other areas, such as support for neurodiverse individuals, were not well developed.

- There was little practical attention to the specific needs of older or younger prisoners. In our survey, only 13% of those aged 25 and under said their time at Woodhill had made them less likely to reoffend.
- Some support was provided for care leavers and for veterans, but there was a lack of support for gay or bisexual prisoners.

Faith and religion

- The chaplaincy team stood out as a united and energetic influence across the prison. Provision of worship and pastoral support for almost all faiths was very good.
- The active engagement of chaplains and chaplaincy volunteers around the wings went beyond the usual ministry and extended to mediation and practical support.

Health, well-being and social care

- Health care managers provided good leadership and staff described them as supportive. We observed a cohesive team that worked together to deliver responsive patient care.
- We saw kind, caring interactions between health care staff and patients.
- Despite significant vacancies in all areas of health care, patients continued to have good access to most services.
- A serious incident had not been formally reported or investigated to identify key learning points.
- The environment of some clinical rooms was poor, did not meet infection control standards and required remedial work.
- Almost half of external hospital appointments were cancelled because of the lack of escorting prison staff and suitable transport for those who required a wheelchair.
- Mental health provision was good and nearly all patients were seen within 72 hours of arrival.
- The SPaR (stabilisation, progression and rehabilitation) programme continued to support highly complex prisoners and was valued by patients who credited it with contributing to their positive progress.
- Substance misuse services provided a good range of treatment and one-to-one support for prisoners with drug and alcohol problems, but there was no group work taking place.
- The follow-up of patients following the use of psychoactive substances was inconsistent and did not always meet the required standard.
- Patients with social care needs were appropriately identified but there were unacceptable delays in local authority assessments being carried out. The prison and health care were working collaboratively to support patient needs in the interim.

- Dental services were good, but for a small number of patients the waiting time was too long.
- Approximately one third of the population did not have an up-to-date in-possession medication risk assessment.
- Medication administration practice was inconsistent and did not always meet the necessary standard of safe practice. Officer supervision of medication queues and administration was also very variable and increased the risk of diversion.

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4. Purposeful activity

Outcomes for prisoners against this healthy prison test were poor.

Time out of cell, library and gym

- Although time out of cell had improved since our last inspection, prisoners still spent far too long locked-up. Those with a part-time job were unlocked for up to 5.75 hours, while unemployed prisoners had less than three hours out of their cell each day. Prisoners were unlocked for only 2.25 hours on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Around three-quarters of prisoners had a part-time job or education place, but staff shortages meant these were often cancelled. Our roll checks this week indicated that less than 25% of the population were actually attending activities.
- All prisoners had one session of association and domestic activity and could exercise outside for an hour each day. There were few recreational activities to occupy prisoners during association time on the units.

Library

- The library was closed because there were insufficient officers to patrol. However, the library staff had made considerable efforts to maintain a service for prisoners, visiting wings regularly to discuss reading needs and deliver books.
- Library data showed there were 300 active borrowers, which was a high proportion of the population.
- The book stock was large and up to date. It included an appropriate range to meet the needs of different groups within the population. There were few reader development activities.

Gym

- The gym was very popular with prisoners, and access was good. Enhanced prisoners could attend four times per week. In our survey, 61% said they could attend the gym twice a week or more, which was much better than comparators. However, there were no evening or weekend sessions.
- The gym was well-equipped with facilities for weights and fitness training, and indoor and outdoor sports areas.
- Activities included an outdoor football league, and sessions to cater for prisoners on the Compass unit and CAU.
- Only three of the eight posts for PE instructors were filled, and they were currently assisted by sports and games officers.

Education, skills and work activities

- Most teachers did not use the outcomes from prisoners' assessment of what they already knew and could do to plan learning that met their specific development needs.
- Teachers often failed to set prisoners challenging development targets that identified and addressed learning gaps.
- Most teachers did not plan learning logically to help prisoners build their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time.
- Prisoners did not consistently receive suitable assessment and feedback that aided their understanding of what actions they needed to progress.
- Prisoner mentors in education and workshops were not effectively deployed or managed to support learning
- In vocational training, workshops and work, teachers and instructors do not set and monitor targets to help prisoners gain vital employment and personal skills.
- Not all prisoners had received an assessment of their reading standards or were given the opportunity to practise and extend their skills.
- Prisoners' progress was slow, with many having been on courses for a considerable period and had not achieved their qualification.
- When prisoners did attend education, most developed new skills and knowledge and produced work of at least the expected standard. (High in art, music technology and English).
- Achievement for the relatively small number of prisoners who completed accredited and non-accredited qualifications was high.
- Teachers and instructors were qualified in their academic and vocational areas.
- Activity attendance was very low, and particularly so in education classes.
- Prisoners often did not attend sessions punctually.
- Too often prisoners were demotivated to attend ESW and displayed a poor attitude towards their learning and development.
- Wing-based workers failed to develop a suitable work ethic and were under-employed.
- Prisoners were usually proud of the work they produced. They exhibited an appropriate level of self-control and regulation that contributed to a calm learning environment.
- Prisoners did not receive effective and sufficient careers information, advice and guidance.
- The small number of prisoners released were not prepared well enough for successful resettlement.
- Relevant induction arrangements had only recently been introduced and required further improvement.
- The curriculum does not promote and support effectively prisoners' character development including building resilience, confidence and mental health.
- The curriculum was not designed to prepare prisoners for life in modern Britain, for example prisoners are not taught how to protect themselves against radicalisation or extremism.

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- Prisoners had few opportunities to engage in enrichment activities for enjoyment and to extend their experience of learning.
- Prisoners had no routine access to the virtual campus to develop their digital skills and prepare for release.
- Leaders had not implemented a curriculum that met the needs of all the prison population.
- Wing-based workers and those in the workshops could not gain accredited qualifications.
- Too few prisoners received help to improve their weak English and mathematics skills.
- Most of the significant proportion of the prison population with identified learning difficulties/disabilities received no support to remove barriers to their development.
- Activity places were largely part-time and not utilised effectively.
- The prison did not have a consistent and predictable regime that occupied prisoners for the planned hours.
- Leaders had not prioritised the implementation of an effective prison wide reading strategy.
- Most prisoners had no opportunity to improve their digital IT skills.
- Leaders failed to have adequate oversight of the quality of learning in workshops and work.
- Pay did not disincentivise prisoners' education session attendance.

5. Rehabilitation and release planning

Outcomes for prisoners against this healthy prison test were not sufficiently good.

Children and families and contact with the outside world

- There was insufficient vision and drive behind work with children and families, with out-of-date strategies and limited provision.
- The visits team provided a reasonable service, and weekend visits had resumed. Family visits had also re-started. PACT provided a good service in the visitors' centre and visits hall and were also doing some work with individual families to strengthen family ties.
- Video calling had not been available for many months, other than in emergency situations. Combined with a number of in-cell phones being out of action, this was a real detriment to the many whose families lived far away.

Reducing risk, rehabilitation and progression

- The prison held an extremely complex population in relation to offender management. Nearly all prisoners were serving long sentences, including about a third who were serving life or indeterminate sentences for public protection.
- Strategic work to reduce reoffending had lapsed until very recently and had been far too slow to improve.
- The resilience and dedication of staff in the OMU, which had been affected by longstanding staffing shortfalls, was commendable.
- The unit was still short of probation trained staff, and offender manager and case administrator caseloads were high – especially given the complexity and risk of the prisoners they were managing.
- Contact between offender managers and prisoners was still not good enough and was mostly sporadic, driven by timebound tasks. However, we saw some good examples of skilled case management work taking place, and the ongoing delivery of OMU monthly wing-based clinics was positive.
- Most prisoners had an initial assessment of their risk and needs, and good efforts were made to keep on top of the small but persistent backlog.
- OASys reviews were not always timely, but the quality of those we examined was reasonably good. Sentence plan objectives were usually

relevant, realistic and tailored to individual needs which was better than at our last full inspection.

- Many prisoners were rightly frustrated about the lack of opportunities to demonstrate progression in their sentence, either through structured risk reduction work or engagement in a fulfilling and purposeful regime.
- Recategorisation reviews were generally well considered and decisions defensible, but they were not always timely.
- There were delays in transferring prisoners for progressive moves, mainly due to national population pressures.
- Very few prisoners were eligible for home detention curfew owing to the length of the sentences. For those that were, arrangements were managed efficiently.

Public protection

- Nearly three quarters of the population were assessed as high or very high risk of serious harm to others, and most were subject to MAPPA because of the nature of their offences.
- The monthly 9IRMM was better attended, and the prison had good oversight of the risk planning arrangements for prisoners due for release.
- The timely handover of responsibility and sharing of information between the prison and community probation teams was reasonable, but there were sometimes delays.
- The quality of risk management plans was mostly good. The prison's written contributions to community MAPPA meetings were useful and well informed.
- Monitoring arrangements for those subject to public protection restrictions remained weak.

Interventions

- The accredited and validated programmes delivered were appropriate for the majority of the known needs of the population, but there were some gaps.
- The introduction of the Kaizen programme since our last full inspection was positive given the level of high-risk violent offenders the prison held.
- Managers were dynamically prioritising waiting lists and the appropriate allocation of prisoners onto these programmes based on national instruction. However, this limited the opportunity for some to demonstrate their progression, such as prisoners with longer time left to serve. Recently implemented local arrangements would go some way to enable more of these prisoners to access the interventions sooner.
- The on-site psychology team and OMU worked collaboratively to oversee and support some complex prisoners, and those serving indeterminate sentences for public protection.

Release planning

- Despite not being resourced as a resettlement prison, there had been 79 releases in the previous 12 months. All these prisoners were released to some form of accommodation, including a third to probation approved premises.
- We saw evidence of appropriate resettlement planning between the prison and community staff. However, there was limited support for prisoners needing help with their finance, benefits, and debts.

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