



Debriefing paper for the inspection of

## **HMP Bristol**

by HM Inspectorate of Prisons

10<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023

DRAFT

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.

# Contents

Healthy prison assessments.....	3
1. Leadership.....	4
2. Safety .....	5
3. Respect.....	8
4. Purposeful activity.....	11
5. Rehabilitation and release planning.....	13

DRAFT

## 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.**

- Bristol remained one of the most unsafe prisons in the country. There had been 8 self-inflicted deaths and one suspected murder since our last inspection\*. The various strategies employed to reduce high levels of violence, self-harm and drug misuse were not having the intended impact.
- The prison was severely overcrowded, with almost half of prisoners living in cramped double cells designed for one person. A significant minority were in single cells with no internal sanitation.
- There had been an investment in reception and living conditions, including refurbished showers, but the prison remained run down in too many areas.
- Despite good efforts to recruit and retain staff, the prison suffered with chronically short staffing levels. On most days around 80% of the profiled staff were available to be deployed to operational duties, which meant important tasks such as escorting prisoners to work and education, and keywork, were dropped. Leaders relied on detached duty and overtime to maintain a basic regime. Vacancies in partner agencies also contributed to their inability to deliver some core work.
- Many of the senior team were new to post. They were passionate, motivated and keen to learn in their new roles, but it was clear that they did not understand some of the key priorities of the prison.
- Outcomes had improved in a limited number of areas, but remained poor in too many others. Leaders worked hard to implement systems to reduce violence, but it was not leading to wholesale improvements in this critical area.
- Partnership working was not leading to the joint delivery of good outcomes in too many areas.
- Leaders had improved their collection of data, but the interpretation was sometimes too positive.
- The prison's self-assessment was detailed, but some of the targets set were unrealistic, and some positive assertions were not borne out in the evidence we found during the inspection. Too many of the promising plans were yet to be implemented or embedded, which was a concern given that four years had passed since our last inspection and the issue of an urgent notification.
- The stated ethos of kindness being adopted by the senior team was laudable, but in reality, the outcomes often did not reflect this. The prison did not do enough to motivate prisoners to behave, engage and progress. Equally, standards on residential wings were not set high and too little was done to challenge low level poor behaviour.
- Poor outcomes in safety, purposeful activities, families work, and release planning represented a missed opportunity to meet the prison's core purpose.

\*In the days following the inspection, there was a further self-inflicted death.

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.

## 2. Safety

**Outcomes for prisoners against this healthy prison test were poor.**

### Early Days in Custody

- Leaders had made clear efforts to address previous recommendations about prisoners' experiences in their early days.
- Reception was very busy, with around 55 new arrivals each week.
- Recent refurbishments meant the reception area was now fit for purpose, with private interview rooms where staff could assess prisoners' risks and vulnerabilities, and a comfortable waiting room.
- In our survey, prisoners reported more positively than last time about their experiences in reception and their first few days in the prison.
- Peer mentors welcomed new arrivals, serving hot meals and answering questions.
- Prisoners spent too long in reception while staff scrambled to free up bed space on the induction wing.
- First night cells were bleak, but generally clean.
- Staff conducted hourly wellbeing observations on new arrivals' first night.
- Induction was good, multi-disciplinary, and helped prisoners understand what daily life was like and how to do basic tasks.

### Managing Behaviour

- Bristol remained an unsafe prison with rates of violence increasing over the previous 12 months. The levels of recorded violence including serious assaults on both staff and prisoners were higher than most other adult prisons.
- The number of serious assaults remained too high and included a recent suspected homicide. Immediate learning from HMPPS had been conducted to improve processes such as the management of cell share risk assessments.
- All incidents were now investigated, but the response to some incidents using CSIP (challenge support and intervention plans), and local behaviour monitoring processes took too long to implement.
- Data analysis had improved, and leaders understood the reasons for violence which included the availability of drugs and associated debt.
- The revised safety strategy incorporated a range of measures designed to address the risks leading to violence, including weapons amnesties and individualised interventions to manage and support those involved. The safety meeting structure had improved and was better attended.
- However, this work was yet to reduce the high levels of violence. Poor access to education and meaningful work, the absence of keywork, and overcrowded living conditions did little to motivate prisoners. The prevalence of drugs and associated violence undermined efforts to create a safe and rehabilitative environment.

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.

- The formal incentives scheme offered rewards for those on the highest level, such as better access to the prison shop provision and extra time out for three days a week, when staffing could facilitate this.
- Leaders had abolished the use of a basic regime to manage prisoners' poor behaviour. Despite this, in the previous month, over 80% of all incentive behaviour management case note entries described negative conduct. There were also examples of prisoners remaining on enhanced levels despite their poor behaviour.
- Staff did not set sufficiently high standards for prisoners, and low-level poor behaviour often went unchallenged.

## Segregation

- The segregation unit was consistently full, often with prisoners who were acutely mentally unwell. This led to prisoners being segregated in other areas of the prison which inevitably impacted on staff's ability to meet the needs of other prisoners on those units.
- Living conditions on the segregation unit were grim and the regime was too limited. Despite this, prisoners spoke positively about their interactions with staff.
- There were weaknesses in the governance of segregation, including poorly documented authority to keep prisoners segregated.
- The prison had introduced one-page plans to support reintegration, but not all were of sufficient quality to address the needs of complex prisoners.
- There were some noticeable improvements in the governance of disciplinary procedures since the last inspection, such as the introduction of electronic recording systems and regular quality assurance.
- Fewer charges were outstanding, although some referrals to the police for serious allegations took too long to reach conclusion.

## Use of Force

- Recorded use of force was much higher than at the last inspection and was amongst the highest for the type of prison. This reflected the high levels of violence in the prison.
- Most incidents were unplanned, and 53% resulted in the application of restraint techniques.
- Managerial oversight of force remained good. A weekly scrutiny panel reviewed all incidents to identify good practice and concerns, but the frequent cancellation of training hindered the prison's ability to reinforce this learning.
- The cases we reviewed evidenced a clear focus on de-escalation of incidents.
- It was notable that there had been no use of special accommodation, Pava incapacitant spray or batons during the 12 months before inspection.

## Security

- Security procedures were proportionate. The prison was responding to some key threats such as the ingress of illicit items, serious organised crime and the challenges of county lines.
- In our survey, 46% of prisoners said drugs were readily available. This was reflective in the current MDT positive rate of 25.9% over the previous 12 months. Suspicion testing was in place but did not reflect the number of prisoners identified as being under the influence.
- The prison benefitted from a seconded police officer to lead on the drug strategy. This had led to the implementation of a realistic action plan and improved joint working within the prison to address supply reduction.
- The drug strategy was appropriately focused on reducing the ingress of illicit items and was supported by appropriate treatment interventions. However, a poor regime, the lack of key work to develop effective relationships, and uncertainty about transfer or resettlement increased frustrations and boredom. Until the prison addressed these issues the demand for drugs would prevail.

## Safeguarding

- There had been eight self-inflicted deaths since the last inspection, most of which occurred in the last year.
- Most PPO recommendations had been implemented, and early learning reviews had been held for three of the four most recent deaths.
- The rate of recorded self-harm was 16% higher than at the last inspection, the third highest of all reception prisons. The rate had been on an upward trajectory over the past 12 months.
- Leaders made good use of consultation and data to identify patterns of self-harm. From this, they derived targeted actions to address some of the issues identified, for example to reduce self-harm linked to debt and vapes.
- However, the strategy to reduce self-harm was too limited, and did not focus enough on the bigger issues that increased the risks. High levels of violence, threat and debt, poor and inconsistent access to purposeful activity, and a lack of keywork and family casework, inevitably led to a sense of hopelessness.
- The number of prisoners on ACCTs was high, and the demands that this placed on staff – especially at night – risked compromising the quality of care for those most at risk.
- There was evidence of some good multi-disciplinary working with individuals with very complex needs to reduce their risk of self-harm.
- Access to Listeners and the Samaritans had improved since the last inspection, and was good. The safer custody hotline was now monitored routinely.
- Use of constant supervision was frequent. Staff did not engage constructively with these prisoners, and one-third of uses were in cells not designed for constant watch.

## 3. Respect

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

### Staff prisoner relationships

- Most staff were friendly and approachable and there were examples of positive and caring interactions between staff and prisoners.
- Prisoners were broadly positive about staff although they expressed frustrations in getting things done.
- The quality and depth of relationships was limited by staff shortfalls, a poor regime, and the absence of key work.
- Staff did not set sufficiently high standards for prisoners, and low-level poor behaviour often went unchallenged.
- Respondents to our staff survey indicated that 48% of frontline operational staff had witnessed staff behaving inappropriately towards prisoners, which was unusually high in surveys of this type.

### Living conditions

- Almost half of all prisoners still lived in overcrowded conditions.
- Cells on B wing had no internal sanitation and the shared facilities on some landings were unsanitary and unpleasant. Prisoners on these landings also complained of long waits to use the toilet during the night.
- There had been noticeable improvements to some cells and showers on most wings since the last inspection, but overall living conditions were run down.
- 'Decency boxes' on the wing allowed prisoners to collect toiletry items whenever they were out of their cell.
- An enthusiastic prisoner work party and a responsive facilities management team completed repairs promptly in most cases. However, there were still broken windows, damaged furniture, and few lockable cabinets despite the drug problem in the prison.
- Cleaners were not adequately supervised by staff, and some areas were grubby.
- In our survey, far fewer prisoners than at similar prisons said their cell call bell was answered within five minutes, despite the concerns around prisoner safety. The prison had very recently introduced a system to monitor and improve response times.

### Residential services

- The prison had responded positively to prisoner feedback about food and many prisoners told us that the quality had improved. Freshly baked rolls at lunchtime and hot meals for brunch at the weekend were particularly well received. Further work was needed to improve the evening meal.

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.



- The lack of adequate supervision at mealtimes resulted in poor portion control, leaving some prisoners with less food. Staff did not ensure that food was served at the correct temperature or that appropriate PPE was worn by serving workers.
- Very few areas had microwaves or toasters to enable prisoners to prepare their own food.
- There was improved access to the prison shop in the early days. However, the prices charged by DHL were unaffordable for many prisoners, particularly as wages were very low.
- It was positive that prisoners on the highest level of the incentives scheme could buy items from a proper on site shop.

## **Prisoner consultation, applications and redress**

- Consultation with prisoners was good. The prison held monthly prisoner council meetings alongside regular wing and protected characteristic forums which resulted in some positive changes for prisoners.
- Despite efforts to improve it, the paper-based application system was still a source of frustration for prisoners.
- Complaint responses were mostly on time and polite and the prison completed some good analysis of trends at a monthly assurance meeting. However, too many complaints were sent back to prisoners because they used the wrong form.
- Poor access to the library hampered prisoners' ability to access legal support.

## **Equality, Diversity and Faith**

- The prison captured excellent data on protected characteristics above and beyond what we would normally see. This was regularly fed into strategic meetings across departments to monitor and address any disproportionate outcomes.
- Some support for prisoners with disabilities had improved since our last inspection with the introduction of a well-run buddy scheme and good links with social care in the community. However, prisoners in wheelchairs could not always access facilities off the wing including education, training and healthcare.
- A fifth of the population was under 25 and the prisoners we spoke to were happy with the support they were receiving. The prison completed some additional activities for younger prisoners including Duke of Edinburgh and maturity interventions.
- Black and minority ethnic prisoners reported some racism and discrimination and were more negative about staff in our survey, which required further exploration by senior leaders.
- Many of the complaints we heard revolved around food following poor management of Ramadan.

- Translation services for foreign nationals were not always used when necessary which reduced the opportunity for prisoners to understand the prison regime and tell staff about the difficulties they were experiencing.
- DIRFs were well managed. The prison completed appropriate investigations which were regularly quality assured.
- Transgender prisoners were well cared for and the prison had a good knowledge of their needs.
- Most prisoners could access core religious services, and the chaplaincy provided a good range of pastoral support through its wing surgeries and bereavement counselling.

## **Health, wellbeing and social care**

- Staffing across healthcare suffered from shortfalls in substantive staff, often leaving a fragile mix of staff skill and experience. With a current deficit of over 20 whole-time equivalents, staff members shifts were often left thinly spread resulting in additional pressures on an already stretched staff team.
- Prison staffing issues had also led to high numbers of patients failing to arrive at appointments.
- Patients with long term conditions were well managed. Proactive clinicians worked together across disciplines to support their patients. Thorough care plans were person centred with regular input from care staff and the patient.
- Demand for mental health support was high and referrals to the team had doubled in the last six months. The mental health team were short staffed and had to prioritise only those with the greatest need.
- 16 patients had been transferred to secure mental health inpatient care under the Mental Health Act in the last 6 months with the majority taking far longer than the NHS guideline of 28 days which is unacceptable. At the time of the inspection, a further 12 patients were awaiting a transfer with some of these acutely unwell patients being managed in segregated conditions.
- Psychosocial substance misuse worked closely with clinicians to deliver a person-centred service. Despite fast-moving caseloads with complex and challenging clients the service was able to support individual recovery journeys. Feedback from clients indicated that they kept prisoners supported with interventions and harm minimisation.
- Social care arrangements had been transformed since the last inspection, with an easily accessible and caring service.
- Extensive delays in finding solutions to enable wheelchair users to access first floor services was unacceptable, as patients with significant mobility issues were unable to attend dentistry and other clinics in the health centre, which was inequitable.
- Medicines management arrangements were not robust. Patients could not access medication reviews; medicines administration was often late, and we observed unsafe dispensing practice in the segregation unit which required immediate resolution.
- Patients, who did not have mobility issues, had prompt access to NHS standard dentistry, with short waiting times.

## 4. Purposeful activity

**Outcomes for prisoners against this healthy prison test were poor.**

### **Time out of cell**

- Prisoners attending a full-time activity could be out of cell for 7 hours a day during the week.
- However, only around a third of prisoners attended purposeful activity. Forty per cent of prisoners were locked up during our roll checks and most prisoners were locked up for almost 22 hours.
- Evening association was available for three nights for those on the higher levels of the incentive scheme, but prisoners and staff told us this was often cancelled due to staff shortfalls, and cancellations were not adequately tracked to improve the situation.
- Very few prisoners were allowed to use wing recreation equipment and managers could not explain why.
- In our survey, prisoners were relatively positive about access to the gym.
- Gym staff did not offer any qualifications, but facilitated activities such as yoga and the DoE scheme.
- The library facility was bright and welcoming, but very few prisoners could access it.
- Library staff no longer supported the Storybook Dads scheme and did little to drive an improvement in literacy.

### **Education, skills and work activity**

- Leaders and managers offered a limited range of curriculum pathways which comprised a series of courses. However, prisoners were not always aware of these pathways and how the courses offered helped them to progress towards their career aspirations.
- Leaders and managers had not prioritised the development of prisoners' English and mathematics skills well enough. Functional skills in English and mathematics courses did not run frequently, while the range of individual units in English and mathematics were too narrow. Consequently, the English and mathematics curriculum did not meet the needs of prisoners.
- The curriculum was not sufficiently aspirational. Courses at level 2 or above were limited. As a result, prisoners' ambitions were not met.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that there are sufficient activity places for the vast majority of the prison population. However, the proportion of prisoners allocated to education, skills and work was too low and attendance was very low. As a result, the majority of prisoners did not benefit.
- For the small number of prisoners who participated in education, skills and work, the majority developed skills that will help them while in prison or once released.
- In education, tutors taught topics that helped prisoners develop their knowledge and skills. Tutors checked prisoners' understanding effectively,

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.

and identified and corrected misunderstandings through verbal feedback. As a result, prisoners developed their knowledge in a logical way that built on what they had already learnt.

- Leaders and managers did not offer sufficient opportunities to gain accreditation in prison industries.
- Of the small number of prisoners who had access to education, skills and work, the vast majority achieved their qualifications.
- In education, skills and work, prisoners were respectful towards staff and each other. Most worked well in lessons and industries and understood the importance of teamwork.
- Leaders and managers did not routinely identify specific personal development targets with prisoners. Prisoners developed their confidence and team-working skills. However, these had not been identified or recorded. As a result, prisoners were not aware of the skills they had developed or had any record of these that they could have used upon transfer or release.
- Prisoners received detailed information at induction about the education, skills and work offered at the prison and how this would help them fulfil their career aspirations. The information they received on jobs and further study leading up to release was adequate. The newly opened employment hub helped some prisoners with disclosure letter, CVs and job searches.
- Leaders' and managers' oversight of the quality of education, skills and work was not systematic enough and did not support teachers and instructors to improve.

## 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**

- Work to help prisoners rebuild ties with their families and significant others was too limited and poorly resourced. A recent innovative project using restorative practice had lost its funding and there was very little other casework.
- It was much too hard to book a social visit and on average half of the available spaces went unused. Visits often started late.
- Prisoners had reasonably good access to video visits, and some took place in the evenings and weekends.

### **Reducing risk, rehabilitation and progression**

- The prison held a very transient population. Most prisoners stayed for just three months or less and prison data told us that 80% had been in custody before. The majority were now unsentenced.
- Strategic work to help prisoners reduce their likelihood of reoffending had lapsed until very recently. Provision was uncoordinated and there were not enough staff to deliver good outcomes. Funding for some promising initiatives had ended and some providers were not on site often enough to improve outcomes for prisoners.
- Over half of prisoners were on remand or unsentenced. There was not enough systematic and embedded help for these prisoners.
- A minority of the population needed sentence planning and offender management. The quality of some OASys assessments and sentence plans was extremely variable, ranging from very good to particularly poor.
- A new leadership team in the OMU was beginning to build stability. Contact between POMs and sentenced prisoners was fairly consistent and frequent.
- Too few prisoners were released on home detention curfew.

### **Public protection**

- Nearly 50% of the sentenced population was assessed as a high risk of serious harm to others. Public protection arrangements had some key weaknesses.
- Two thirds of high risk-prisoners approaching release had only arrived in the jail very recently. This made oversight very challenging and too many high risk cases were never brought to the IRMT.
- Liaison between POMs and COMs to ensure safe release planning was not always good enough to provide assurance.
- Phone monitoring was not always used effectively and did not promptly identify risk.

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.

## **Categorisation and transfers**

- Too many long-term prisoners who needed to progress were stuck at Bristol while others with a short time to serve were moved out, disrupting their resettlement planning.
- Most recategorisation reviews lacked enough evidence to support decisions.

## **Interventions**

- Some young adults could access very useful interventions. There were not enough brief interventions to help other prisoners think about their offending behaviour.
- Access to benefits was better than we usually see, but support to help prisoners open bank accounts and manage debts was weak.
- Overall support for prisoners to secure housing on release was not good enough. Although there was some good support from local agencies, the contracted provider received very few referrals, only attended once a week and did not work with remanded prisoners.
- A quarter of prisoners were homeless on the day of release. There was still no data to confirm how many prisoners found sustainable accommodation and no data at all about what happened to about 500 prisoners released from court.

## **Release planning**

- Over 100 prisoners were released each month so demand for help was high.
- Resettlement services were disjointed and poorly resourced. Resettlement needs were not reliably identified, reviewed and addressed. Prisoners we interviewed did not know about plans for their imminent release.
- The weekly release board was a good initiative that had started to mitigate some of these deficiencies.
- A minority of prisoners approaching release accessed some good help in the employment hub.
- Prisoners being released could access some good through the gate support provided by external agencies.