



Debriefing paper for the inspection of

## **HMP Bedford**

by HM Inspectorate of Prisons

30 October – 9 November 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.**

- The governor had been appointed 11 months before the inspection. Both she and the prison group director had an understanding of the significant issues at the site.
- There had been nine new senior managers appointed since the governor arrived, six of them on a temporary basis. It was positive to see proactive action being taken to address issues and poor staff performance, but the scale of leadership changes created unavoidable delays in improving outcomes for prisoners.
- Leaders still faced the challenge of shortfalls of operational staff.
- Some of these new managers were starting to improve systems and processes in areas including preparation for release, violence reduction, oversight of use of force and security.
- There were several issues that impacted negatively on outcomes that were outside of the governor's control. These included an education contract that did not provide cover for teachers' annual leave, and significant delays to the construction of the new segregation unit.
- There were however several deficiencies that were within the control of local leaders including the very weak systems for redress, insufficient attention to meeting diverse needs, lack of challenge of low-level poor behaviour and poor standards of cleanliness on residential units.
- Support and oversight for the most vulnerable prisoners including those with poor mental health and at risk of self-harm was weak. Leaders had failed to take opportunities for learning from incidents.
- Leaders had not done enough to improve the regime or address low levels of attendance at education.
- Despite some very recent progress, leaders had not addressed the multiple legitimate frustrations of prisoners which lay behind much of the violence and use of force at the establishment.

## 2. Safety

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

### **Early days in custody**

- The prison experienced a high level of population change. All new arrivals were provided with a hot meal and spoke with a nurse in private. Most prisoners were located on the induction landing but some went to other wings when it was full.
- Too many induction cells for new prisoners were dirty, graffitied and did not have adequate furniture or privacy curtains.
- The induction was limited and there was poor oversight of the process.
- Time out of cell for new prisoners was poor, particularly for prisoners who needed protecting from their counterparts.

### **Promoting positive behaviour**

- Levels of violence remained very high especially against staff where the rate was the highest of all adult male prisons in England and Wales.
- A new head of violence reduction had begun to develop an informed strategy and sensible actions to try to reduce violence, but this work was in its early stages and yet to show any significant impact.
- There had been several areas of recent improvement: every violent incident was now investigated and the CSIP process was becoming embedded.
- Failure by staff to challenge low level poor behaviour and enable prisoners to engage in purposeful activity was not helping leaders' efforts to reduce violence.
- There were too many adjudications were for minor offences that could be better dealt with on the wing. Hearings were held in a timely manner but the level of enquiry was inconsistent.

### **Segregation**

- Use of segregation was similar to the previous inspection.
- Living conditions on the segregation unit were squalid, with regular flooding and dilapidated cells that were unsuitable for their purpose.
- The relationships between staff and prisoners on the unit were very good but time out of cell was poor.
- It was good that prisoners who were there for longer periods were given a TV, in cell phone and access to education outreach.

### **Use of force**

- The amount of force used by staff remained very high.
- The use of PAVA and batons had both reduced since the last inspection.
- In the sample we viewed we saw examples of inappropriate and excessive force used by staff alongside unprofessional behaviour such as swearing at prisoners. Not all of these had been identified and addressed by leaders.

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- There had been recent improvements in oversight with 100% of incidents viewed by managers.
- Use of body worn video cameras was improving with footage available for most spontaneous incidents.

## **Security**

- Security processes were improving, following an escape from the establishment in 2022.
- The significant backlog of intelligence reports had been eradicated and a new local security strategy was being developed.
- Intelligence was well managed, and leaders identified key threats to the prison well and set suitable actions that were appropriately monitored.
- Security procedures were mostly proportionate to the risk posed by the prisoner population.

## **Safeguarding**

- There had been one self-inflicted death in March. An overview had been completed by the regional safety lead but this did not inform the death in custody action plan which had not been reviewed in the last 12 months.
- Self-harm had risen by 84% since the last inspection and was high. There had been 533 incidents of self-harm in the last 12 months.
- Oversight of prisoners on ACCT was inconsistent. Wing staff were caring however reviews frequently lacked input from health care professionals and meaningful actions to help prisoners.

### 3. Respect

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

#### **Staff-prisoner relationships**

- In our survey, 63% of prisoners said that staff treated them with respect. The interactions we observed were polite but mostly transactional to support the delivery of the regime.
- Prisoners we spoke to were frustrated by the inability of staff to respond to legitimate requests.
- The delivery of keywork was poor.

#### **Daily life**

- Just under three-quarters of the population lived in overcrowded conditions.
- While the condition of the cells varied, too many of them were in poor condition; some prisoners were held in mouldy cells, with broken windows, and graffiti.
- In our survey, fewer prisoners than at the last inspection and similar prisons said that communal areas were quite clean (42%); our observations supported this.
- Leaders were struggling to manage problems with cockroaches and rats.
- The number of cell calls was high, with over 5,000 presses each week. Leaders used data well to monitor and identify trends, but around a quarter were not responded to in a timely manner.

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

- The inability of prisoners to resolve issues informally had led to very high numbers of applications and complaints, including complaints about discrimination (DIRFs).
- These systems were completely overwhelmed and as a result prisoners were justifiably frustrated.
- While consultation did take place, it did not lead to issues being addressed.
- Access to legal rights was adequate.

#### **Fair treatment and inclusion**

- The absence of an equalities manager at the prison for almost a year meant that focus on ensuring fair treatment of prisoners had been lost.
- Only three equality meetings had taken place in the last year, data reviewed was out of date and did not produce meaningful actions.
- Consultation with prisoners with protected characteristics had waned, aside from foreign national prisoners and care leavers consultation was too limited.
- Provision for young adults was better but undermined by staffing shortfalls.
- Prisoners, staff and managers reported witnessing racism which was concerning.
- The committed chaplaincy team provided good levels of support for prisoners.

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## **Health, well-being and social care**

- The new contract had caused significant disruption, particularly around the management of medicines. We found gaps in patients receiving their medication and continuity of care. This had only recently started to settle.
- The head of healthcare had implemented some positive changes during a challenging time with a focus on recruitment and improving some aspects of governance. However, staffing remained stretched and managers were having to cover clinical duties to maintain the service.
- While there had been improvement in the reporting of clinical incidents and complaints, we found a serious issue which had not been reported which was a significant concern.
- With the exception of the optician, prisoners had reasonable access to primary care services and the dentist.
- There were very significant staffing difficulties in the substance misuse team, but patients were kept safe and had access to an adequate range of support.
- The service offered by the mental health team was poor and did not meet the needs of the population.



## 4. Purposeful activity

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

### **Time out of cell**

- Around half the population was unemployed at the time of the inspection.
- Time out of cell was poor, unemployed prisoners received as little as an hour a day out of their cells. While those living on some wings and employed prisoners could receive slightly more, in recent months, education, skills, work, and other aspects of the regime had been curtailed almost daily.
- In our survey, 67% of prisoners reported spending less than two hours out of their cell each day, and prisoners were frustrated with the limited time they had out of their cell to complete domestic tasks.
- While indoor gym facilities were good, outdoor facilities were not used, the gym was often closed, and overall provision was limited.
- While prisoners struggled to access the library weekly, the facilities were reasonably good.

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

- Attendance to education and vocational training was poor at an average of 52% over the previous six months. Too many education sessions were cancelled due to staff holidays and shortages of prison officers.
- Teachers in education provided effective teaching sessions that helped prisoners make improvements. However, there were not enough places in English and mathematics to meet the needs of the prison population.
- Prisoners' behaviour in education work and skills was appropriate.
- Leaders provided sufficient part-time places within education, skills and work to meet the needs of the prison population. However, the allocation process was not effective, nor did they utilise spaces in education work or skills efficiently.
- Leaders put in place effective support for prisoners in education who could not read.
- Trained peer mentors worked effectively in education sessions to support prisoners.
- While there had been some recent steps to improve the vocational offer the curriculum was not ambitious enough to support prisoners in developing the skills needed for employment on release. There were no opportunities to gain accredited qualifications, nor to progress or follow an appropriate pathway.
- Prisoners did not routinely access or know of the enrichment opportunities that were available.
- Career, education, advice and guidance sessions were not effective. Prisoners did not receive appropriate advice for their next steps.
- Prisoners in industries and work did not develop, reading, English mathematics or ICT skills.
- Prisoners with additional needs did not routinely receive the support they needed to progress swiftly in work or industries.

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- Leaders did not make sure the tutors in industries and work used progress in workshop booklets effectively.
- The workshop areas did not meet industry standards.

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## 5. Preparation for release

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

### **Children and families and contact with the outside world**

- Prisoners were more negative about their contact with families and friends than at similar prisons. Staffing issues had had a recent detrimental impact on visits, secure video sessions and prisoners' mail.
- The visits hall was bright and welcoming with a nice play area for children.
- Family days were being delivered in partnership with the family support provider, Invisible Walls, and the chaplaincy team had very recently started a parenting course.
- Secure video calls were underused.

### **Reducing reoffending**

- Support for the majority of prisoners who were remanded or unsentenced was reasonable. They could expect help for immediate needs on arrival and had access to a bail liaison officer.
- Although there was a new remand strategy in place, it was too soon to assess the effectiveness of this.
- A minority of the population needed sentence planning and offender management. Of the twenty sentenced cases we examined in detail, all had an OASys assessment less than a year old, which was very good, but some plans were missing.
- Recorded levels of contact between prisoners and their prison offender manager (POM) were insufficient.
- Wing surgeries and a daily duty POM aided prisoners' access to a POM to request help with queries and concerns. This was helpful as key working was poor and did not support offender management.
- Home detention curfew (HDC) was managed efficiently. Some releases were delayed for reasons outside the prison's control.
- Initial categorisation and transfer were timely for most prisoners.

### **Public protection**

- POMs attended all multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) meetings for the level 2 and 3 cases and their written reports were generally good. However, we found cases close to release with no recorded MAPPA level.
- Telephone monitoring had improved but there were frailties in mail monitoring and leaders had plans to address this.
- The interdepartmental risk management meeting (IRMM) gave reasonable oversight to higher risk prisoners, but attendance was inconsistent.

### **Interventions and support**

- Work to reduce reoffending and support release was aided by the co-location of services involved in this work with the offender management unit.

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- The focus on release employment had been strengthened with the introduction of a prison employment lead and an employment hub. Links were being made with employers which had led to some prisoners securing interviews and employment.
- Too many sentenced prisoners were recorded as having been released homeless or to unsustainable accommodation. The appointment of a strategic housing specialist and the recent formation of a housing advisory board aimed to improve these outcomes.

### **Returning to the community**

- Prisoners nearing release had support from the pre-release team who made relevant referrals. In cases looked at bank accounts were opened, birth certificates obtained, Job Centre appointments arranged for day of release and housing referrals and assessments were undertaken.
- Release day arrangements were adequate. The loss of the departure lounge which was identified as notable positive practice at the last inspection was a deficit that leaders were addressing.