



Dame Anne Owers
National Chair
Independent Monitoring Boards

Email: anne.owers@justice.gov.uk

2 July 2020

The Rt. Hon. Sir Bob Neill MP
Chair, Justice Select Committee

(via email to: [Holly Tremain TREMAINH@parliament.uk](mailto:Holly.Tremain@parliament.uk)>)

Dear Sir Bob,

Update on Independent Monitoring Board findings

I said that I would provide a regular update on the findings of independent monitoring boards (IMBs) during the Covid pandemic. HMPPS has published details of its recovery plan and is due to publish the exceptional delivery models (EDMs) that support it.

We have also now received over 1,000 calls to our 0800 line. The attached chart (page 3) shows the issues that were raised by each caller. As before, health and sentence management predominate, with concerns about staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying the next most common.

Boards report that many prisons are considering when and how they would move to level 3 in the recovery process. In the meantime, many of the issues previously reported to you remain the same.

- In general, prisons remain calm, though in some (particularly women's local prisons) there are increasing concerns about self-harm, and there have also been spikes in violence and finds of 'hooch' in many male prisons. Boards are aware that prisoners are expecting to see changes to the very restricted regime and the recovery phase will be fraught with some risk, particularly the pace of change against expectations and built-up frustrations.
- Inconsistencies in time out of cell remain, though in some prisons it has increased. We remain particularly concerned about children and young people, and look forward to the HMPPS level 3 recovery plan for the youth estate
- Boards report a return to key working, following the most recent guidance, though it is largely focused on welfare and vulnerability
- Education provision remains extremely patchy, and in most prisons generic and basic, though some providers are now in direct contact. There are some examples of good and innovative practice, particularly in the women's estate and some private sector prisons, which could usefully be adopted by other providers and establishments

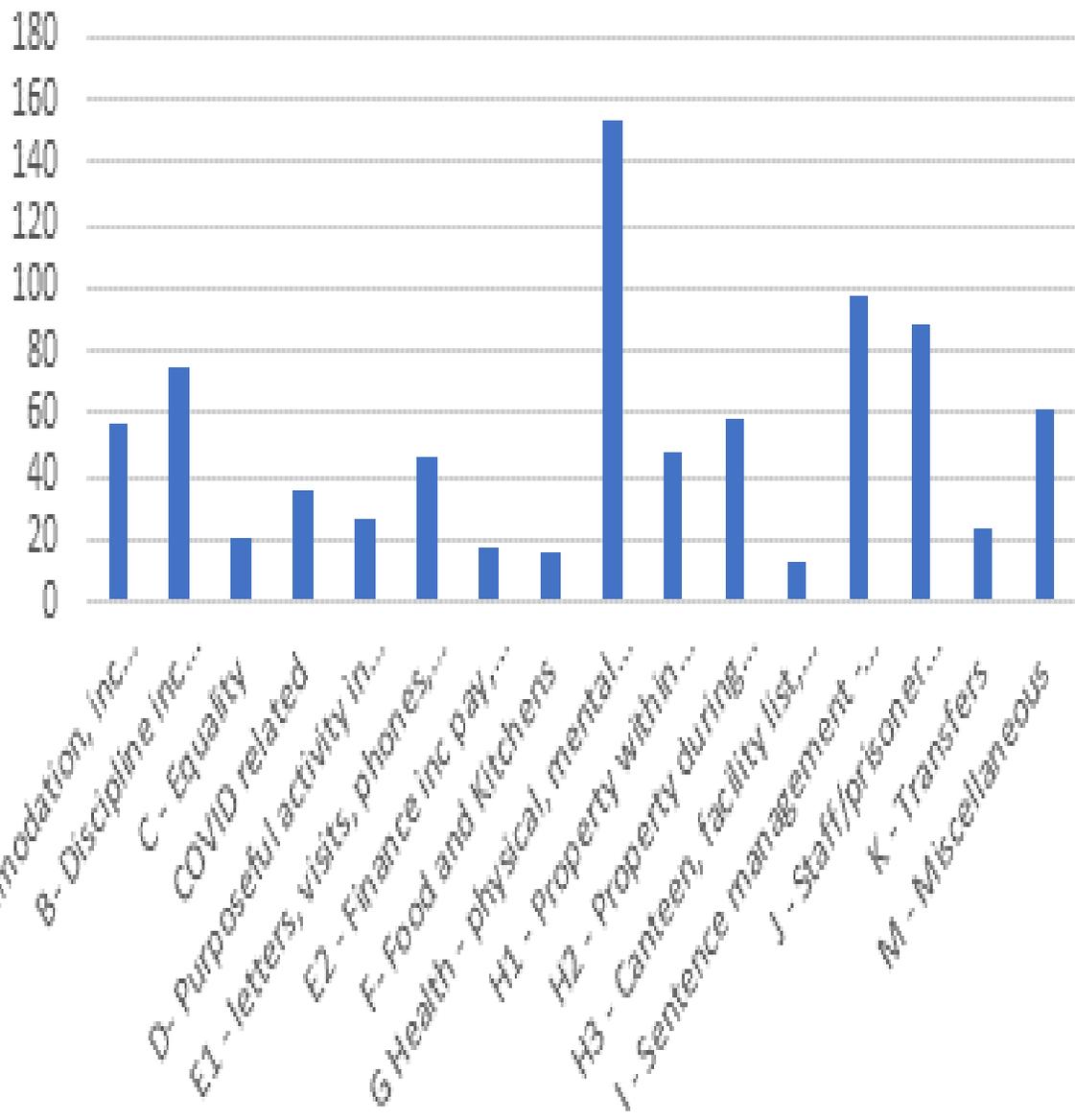
- The IMB at Ford open prison has recently raised serious concerns about inaccurate advice given to prisoners in employment about their eligibility for the furlough scheme. I am seeking further information from boards on this point and will provide more details shortly.
- There remain significant concerns about homelessness on release: the IMB at Bronzefield women's prison is reporting that 40% of women are released to no fixed abode.
- In most prisons, mental health is still largely a crisis service, and in some there is no face to face contact.
- Prisoners' progression also remains a problem. Some Boards note that, now these decisions are made by HMPPS Gold Command, rather than the Prisoner Management Unit, they appear to focus on numbers, rather than the sentence planning or categorisation needs of prisoners.
- There are growing concerns about foreign national prisoners held under immigration powers, with limited or non-existent Home Office contact. I have raised this issue, and some individual cases of concern, with Home Office Immigration Enforcement.
- We note the recent communication from HMPPS about PAVA use. I have asked for a breakdown of recent use by protected characteristics, including ethnicity.
- The roll-out of video visits is welcome, but appears quite slow.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne Owers".

Anne Owers – National Chair, Independent Monitoring Boards

Count of Category



*graphic excludes repeat/follow up calls about one application