



INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

at

HMP ALTCOURSE

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR PRESENTATION TO THE

SECRETARY OF STATE

for the period

JULY 2009 – JUNE 2010

STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

The Prisons Act 1952 and the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 require every prison and IRC to be monitored by an Independent Board appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice from members of the community in which the prison or centre is situated.

The Board is specifically charged to:

- (1) Satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release.
- (2) Inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom he has delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has.
- (3) Report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records except for the medical records.

1. Statutory Role of the IMB

2. Contents

3. Description of the Prison

4. Executive Summary

A Issues for the Minister
Issues for the Prison Service
Issues for the District Offender Manager/Area Manager
Issues for G4S
Issues for United Kingdom Borders Agency

B Issues of Concern not requiring a response.

C Overall judgement

5. Mandatory Areas

5.1 Diversity
5.2 Learning and Skills
5.3 Healthcare and mental health
5.4 Safer Custody
5.5 Segregation (CSU)

6. Other Areas on which the Board wishes to report

Admissions
Catering and Kitchens
Drug strategy
Offender management
Probation
Radio and Drama Group
Regimes
Resettlement
Staffing

7. The Work of the Board

Board Statistics
Applications to the Board
Board Development and Performance
National Council Matters
Chairman's Comments

8. Glossary

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

HMP Altcourse is operated under the contracted estate by G4S, now in its thirteenth year serving the courts of North Wales, Merseyside and Cheshire as a Category B core local and remand male prison taking both adults and YPs.

Operational capacity is 1324 in seven house-blocks. The prison has a Care and Separation Unit, Library, Healthcare, Chapel and Sports Hall. Education is provided by both G4S and City College Manchester with a wide range of purposeful activity.

Workshops consist of vocational training (painting, bricklaying, plastering and carpentry on the new wing) with the existing bookshop and engineering in the original buildings plus the Railtrack Project.

Catering and canteen services are provided by Aramark.

4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A PARTICULAR ISSUES REQUIRING A RESPONSE

Issues for the Minister

Lack of Ministerial responses

This Board has communicated three times during the reporting year requesting an appointment with the Secretary of State in order to discuss grave concerns over the flood of mobile phones within the establishment and throughout the prison service. We have been completely ignored by the out-going secretary and did not even have the courtesy of an acknowledgement. We again wrote to the new Secretary of State and after a protracted time, we received a response, not even personally addressed and signed 'pp' from the head of security at NOMS.

At no time was our request for an interview acknowledged or the problem addressed; it is meant to be the right of all IMB members to have access to the Secretary of State if their concern is that serious. This has been flagrantly ignored and our letter passed to another department without our permission.

Our concern is serious and we have been raising it for the last five years. One must come to the conclusion that this problem is not being addressed at the highest level because the Ministry is unwilling to rid the Service of this menace.

This Board would be pleased to hear from the Minister himself on this subject and it does not wish to be the mailbox of anonymous general handouts.

Probation service /Licence revokees

Last year this Board raised a concern over licence revokees being returned to custody, without having been returned to court, on the instructions of the Probation Service.

Although these concerns still remain with us a further problem has arisen in that revokees who have the charge(s) dismissed for which they were revoked, are not then released but must wait for the hearing of the further review Board. Whilst we agree that it is appropriate that the FRB should reconsider their initial parole in light of further facts that may now be pertinent to the case it is very hard on a prisoner waiting for his further release or not, who has to wait an extended time. The FRB are very aware of this problem and sympathetic to enquiries but often do not have the resources to speed this process, we consider that the prisoner loses out when the recalled charge may even have been scurrilous.

Foreign Nationals held on IS91

Whilst the Board is pleased with the general improvements in the processing of Foreign Nationals held on IS91s, there is still concern at the backlog of prisoners awaiting transfer to IRCs or immediate deportation.

Furthermore, one 'challenging' detainee being held in CSU is now 3 years over his sentence expiry date. This is causing particular concern with a marked deterioration in his general demeanour and mental health. The Board would therefore urge that priority is given to taking appropriate action. There is a further concern with this man in that IRCs, we are told, would not take him because he was MAPPA2. However if this man had not been a foreign national he would have been released into the community with the same risk.

Issues for NOMS

- The Board is concerned that IPPs are not able to move to an establishment which offers the accredited programmes required by the Parole Board. Parole Board reviews take place every 18 – 24 months so prisoners are having years added to their sentence through no fault of their own.
- Prisoners suitable to be held in open conditions are aware that there is no immediate prospect of a place in a Cat D establishment. HMP Kirkham is the local adult open prison and serves all the prisons in the North West. HMYOI Thorn Cross is the local Cat D prison for under 25s. At the time of writing there are 60 prisoners at Altcourse waiting for a place in open conditions. There has been no movement since March 2010.
- The Board has been concerned over the apparent anomaly in the rules regarding the eligibility for HDC of prisoners serving two consecutive sentences where only the length of the second sentence determines the eligibility and length of any HDC allowed. N.B. This is no longer a concern. It is pleasing to note that the Supreme Court has now addressed these issues.
- P-Nomis: It appears the contracted sector is to remain disadvantaged by the non-introduction of P-Nomis. May we remind the NOMS that there is no such thing as a 'private prisoner' and that the seamless transition of information is in the best interests of all.

Issues for the Director Offender Manager / Regional Manager Custodial services.

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- Prisoners suitable to be held in open conditions are aware that there is no immediate prospect of a place in a Cat D establishment. HMP Kirkham is the local adult open prison and serves all the prisons in the North West. HMP Thorn Cross is the local Cat D prison for young offenders. At the time of writing there are 60 prisoners at Altcourse waiting for a place in open conditions. There has been no movement since March 2010.

Issues for G4S

- The continued number of serious assaults within the establishment continues to trouble the Board. The Board would advocate a profiling of these offenders with the aim of future strategies.
- Despite several attempts there is not the incentive necessary in the IEP scheme and certainly no deterrent factor. The Board would like to see G4S restart the scheme with wider divisions and far greater incentives.
- The Board would wish to see the cessation of the pre-entry regime. In the Board's opinion this is CSU without the checks and, as such, is unacceptable in HMP Altcourse. The Board views the placement of prisoners on this month long (at least), placement as subjective at best. A regime of 'basic, standard and enhanced' should be implemented as soon as

possible, we are however informed that this would require a contractual review. The Board carries out thematic reviews as a result of their disquiet at this system but does not consider that there is an adequate system of checks nor are there any algorithms in place. The Board does not consider that this is a regime that can lie comfortably alongside safer custody procedures. The somewhat 'ad hoc' regime whilst on pre-entry also gives us concerns.

B. OTHER ISSUES NOT REQUIRING A RESPONSE

N/A.

C. OVERALL JUDGEMENT

Overall a pleasing but challenging year, with many areas of success – coupled with challenges both met and ongoing.

The maxim that 80% of the time is spent on 20% of the people could not be more apt than in a prison situation, where an extraordinary amount of time and care is spent on particularly vulnerable groups of prisoners. It is therefore of particular note that there has been no incidence of self inflicted death during this reporting year. And, that diversity issues, including foreign nationals, have been dealt with both well and empathetically.

Healthcare now provided ‘in house’ continues to improve, with mental health and issues surrounding drug use and control via IDTS particularly challenging.

Ongoing issues i.e. the re-designation of Healthcare 2 and the review and re-balancing of the IEP scheme will, the Board consider, bring improvements.

However, there are other issues, outside the scope of the establishment which would be welcomed. For example – a technology based solution to the menace of mobile phones, places for the relocation of prisoners fitted for Cat D status and the availability of spaces for Lifers to move to establishments which offer accredited programmes.

All in all, successes, challenges met and always more still to be done.

MANDATORY AREAS

5.1 DIVERSITY

Diversity

- The Diversity and Equality Action Team (DEAT) meets bi-monthly, chaired initially by the Deputy Director, and more recently by the person who is responsible for Diversity matters throughout G4S prisons. A member of the IMB attends as observer. Prisoner representatives also attend and have active input.
- The Diversity Team is lead by a full-time Diversity Manager supported by a Race Equality Officer (REO) who maintains all the data and manages all RIRFs generated. Identified members of the team also take responsibility for Foreign Nationals, Disability and Age, and Gender and Sexual Orientation.
- The Diversity Action Plan for 2010 is based on the 15 (minor) recommendations made by HM Inspectorate following an unannounced full inspection in January under the headings Diversity, Faith & Religious activity, Race Equality, Foreign Nationals, Disability and Sexual Orientation.

Race Equality

- Incidents and Investigations and Ethnic Monitoring Data (SMART 2) are discussed thoroughly and efficiently at all meetings. The Diversity Manager produces an informative quarterly report on the Management of Race Equality.
- 222 (236) RIRFs were generated during the reporting year. RIRFs are available in 25 languages and readily accessible to all prisoners and staff and investigations are both proactive and reactive. Contrary to the minor criticism levelled in the HMCIP report, IMB monitoring of a sample of RIRFs showed a high level of accuracy and quality of investigation and an excellent and active awareness by staff of the need to address all perceived racial incidents.
- In service training in Diversity is ongoing and has been undertaken by 294 (198) members of staff during the reporting period. Efforts to recruit more BME staff are beginning to show fruit – 7 are currently employed out of a total of 613 staff, i.e. 1.14% (0.7%).
- The REO has produced 2 excellent information pamphlets for staff on 'Detecting Racism' and Search Procedures with cultural sensitivity (based on PSO 4550).
- All recognised religions are catered for at Altcourse, either by the permanent chaplaincy team or by visiting ministers (with the exception of Mormons). A Cantonese speaking pastor now attends regularly to see the increasing number of Chinese prisoners.
- At the end of the reporting year 88% (85%) of prisoners were listed as 'White British' – all BME prisoners amounted to 12% (15%). The largest single nationality recorded was Vietnamese (2% of all BME).
- Approximately 6% of the prison population is deemed to be 'racially high-risk'.

Disability, Age and Sexual Orientation

- 26(57) prisoners are currently registered as disabled, only 4 are wheelchair dependent. At present only 2 cells on normal location are suitable for wheelchair users although several cells have been adapted for prisoners with ambulant disabilities. The MoJ paper on 'Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Prisoners', published this year has proved a valuable tool for guidance on this topic and individual cases are discussed at DEAT meetings.
- An 'Older Prisoners' Policy document is in place to address the specific needs of those over the age of 55. At the present time there are 51 prisoners in this category, 26 are located in the VPU. 15 of the 51 are over 65, and 5 are over 75. The policy addresses their individual choices (eg relating to work, social needs, exercise and recreation etc.). A member of staff acts as Older Prisoners Co-ordinator and a member of the nursing staff leads on older

prisoner health issues. The Chaplaincy prioritises spiritual care and family contact for those who may end their life in prison.

- The Sexual Orientation Liaison Officer continues to raise awareness and confidence amongst prisoners and staff. The focus is on Diversity and Inclusion and the officer has personal contact with all those who have identified themselves and who welcome her support.

Foreign Nationals

- Foreign National Prisoner numbers peaked at 147 in October 2009 but have decreased over the reporting year from an average of 105 last year to 101 in the current year. There are approximately 75 (120) at present representing 40 nationalities speaking 19 different languages.
- Touch screens were installed on all residential units during the year and allow prisoners to access basic information in five different languages. These have been well used but the benefits are limited and the problems of translation remain as around 40% of foreign national prisoners have little or no ability to speak or read English. However the prison has produced an FNP guide in several languages which addresses many of the questions a prisoner might have.
- The Board welcomes the increasing involvement of UKBA at Altcourse via the 'hub' at HMP Risley. Monthly immigration surgeries are held and the process is much improved although several 'difficult' cases languish here, including one FNP who is over 3 years sentence expired and refuses to engage with anyone or relocate from the CSU. However longer-sentenced FNPs are now being transferred to HMP Haverigg more regularly which has reduced some of the problems.
- Two prisoners are appointed as FN orderlies and trained to support FNPs in regime and immigration matters. The database set up by a previous FNP released in December has been maintained and developed by the current FNOs.
- The number of FNPs held at Altcourse on IS91s has, thankfully, decreased over the year but there is still a backlog awaiting transfer to an IRC or immediate deportation. Approximately 70% of all FNPs held in the prison will be subject to deportation at the end of their custodial sentence and approximately 25% of these will be subject to IS91s, i.e. held in a local prison beyond the end of their sentence. Numbers peaked at 28 in August 2009 and reduced to 4 in June 2010. The average this year has been 13 (18).

5.2 LEARNING AND SKILLS

- A recent Ofsted inspection rated prison education at Altcourse as 'very high', with a score of 97%.
- Education facilities have a high profile within the prison.
- There is a major emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy skills; all prisoners are electronically assessed on admission.
- A high level of work is undertaken with non-readers.
- ESOL has a high priority with two half day classes taking place each day. The ESOL courses are always fully subscribed.
- There is a new 'Skills for Life' Manager who has raised the standard to a very high level.
- Wing education works well across the prison; it is gratifying to see the greater emphasis on CSU.
- Externally accredited courses are highly prized, via, for example City & Guilds, British Computer Society, Open College Network. Prisoners are very keen to access the ECDL and advanced ECDL courses. In the last academic year 4554 externally accredited qualifications were gained by prisoners.
- Art classes are fully subscribed and work of a very high standard is achieved. A new art installation has recently been completed and will be entered for the Koestler art competition.. In a recent project on the Holocaust, prisoners wrote some extremely moving and sensitive poetry on the subject.

- The first trial of the Train to Change programme was recently completed, with 4 prisoners completing the 22 week course. This has led to these prisoners gaining the Community Sports Leaders award. The next course will begin in September 2010. Thorn Cross and Risley prisons are interested in running this programme.
- Gym staff under an enthusiastic Manager have set up programmes dealing with fitness and well-being, weight loss, etc. Staff have also set up courses to enable all prisoners to access suitable gym programmes, eg heart conditions, wheelchair users, older prisoners.
- All prisoners have access to 5 gym sessions each week, enhanced prisoners have 6 or 8 sessions. Football is very popular and matches are arranged with visiting teams.

5.3 HEALTHCARE & MENTAL HEALTH

- As mentioned in last year's report, following a comprehensive review, G4S made the decision to undertake and deliver Healthcare services in-house, rather than through a specialist sub-contractor. The change-over took effect from the 1st August 2009.
- Whilst there were initially some minor 'teething' problems, the change-over was well managed and went relatively smoothly. The board believe overall this change of control has improved the healthcare services being delivered to prisoners.
- It is significant to mention that the new Head of Healthcare is not medically trained. However, this has had a most positive impact on the day-to-day operational management of the service, with notable improvements in communications and working practices which are helping to improve services.
- The partnership arrangement with the local Primary Care Trust has continued to develop and strengthen during the reporting year through a positive and open culture of trust. There is also clear vision and strategy to deliver a quality service and drive improvements in all aspects of prisoner healthcare and, as required, facilitate a seamless service on release for prisoners requiring continued treatment.
- Up to the end of June 2010 the IMB had received 181 prisoner applications relating to Healthcare issues against 141 for 2009. Whilst this represents a 28% increase on the previous year, the majority of the applications received were found to be of a routine nature and have not highlighted any major concerns which the board need to mention in the report.
- The 'In-Reach Team' re-located to more appropriate offices and are now based on the Foinavon Unit. However, whilst the move took place last January, some of the IT systems are still not in place and the delays in installing the necessary equipment are therefore hindering the service delivery.

5.4 SAFER CUSTODY

Safer Custody is given the highest priority at Altcourse, with the emphasis absolutely on 'duty of care'. A senior manager and small highly focussed team implement the relevant PSO's and PSI's together with area and establishment initiatives in support of the 'duty of care' objective. All activity is carefully monitored and recorded using the Continuous Improvement Plan – which is based on the 'traffic light system' of reporting. The Board's overview is that this challenging area of operation is handled diligently, competently and with sensitivity by the establishment.

ACCT (Assessment Care in Custody and Teamwork)

- Internal Audit completed June 2010 - result 90%
- Documentation is sample checked on a regular basis and when shortcomings are identified they are highlighted by the SASH Co-ordinator/Assessor and further training is given.
- The requirement for good quality, relevant, Care Plans is constantly restated at Safer Custody meetings and with occasional exceptions the quality is assessed as good.
- Case Reviews are well conducted and thorough – with all appropriate staff in attendance

Safer Custody Team

- A fully minuted monthly Safer Custody Policy Meeting is held. This is attended by representatives from relevant internal departments, a representative from the Samaritans, an IMB observer and (for part of the meeting) two Prisoner Carers.
- Action points are dealt with from the minutes and where appropriate incorporated into the Continuous Improvement Plan.

Safer Custody Strategies/Initiatives

- The establishment values the use of peer support and in this connection has a highly valued system of trained Prisoner Carers, presently totalling 17. There are 5 full time and 12 part-time (including 2 young offender carers and two vulnerable prisoner carers). Listeners attend the prison and there are free telephone lines to the Samaritans on all units for the use of prisoners. Carers receive additional training via the Samaritans.
- A new system of prisoner 'Buddies' – has been implemented. This involves a specifically identified and trained prisoner on each wing, who acts as a point of contact for prisoners with issues they wish to discuss. The Buddy acts as a link to the Carers and/or the Personal Officer.
- The Observation cell has been used 67 times during this reporting year.
- The Care suite(s) - 1 located in Healthcare and the other on Valentines unit, have been used a total of 45 times during this reporting year.
- A review of current accommodation (to remove as many ligature points as possible) has taken place. As a result new furniture is being developed and consideration is being given to its future use in the establishment.
- The First Night centre is located on one side of the Induction Unit a) to cope with the numbers and b) to enable the initial processing of those new to custody in a separate, supported, environment.
- A comprehensive system of identification of High Risk situations via trigger points is in place and widely publicised throughout the establishment.
- An information leaflet 'Help for you' has been produced by the Chaplaincy team. It is in a simple format and aims to support and inform the most vulnerable.
- Circulation of the Quick-time Learning Bulletins (part of a series of new publications from NOMS Safer Custody and Offender Policy Group).
- Violence Reduction/Bullying is an ongoing challenge with peaks and troughs. The reasons vary from - an individual prisoner with a high number of instances, a particularly challenging group of prisoners, gang related activity etc. There is a good ABS (Anti-bullying strategy) which is used in conjunction with IEP (Incentives and Earned Privilege) scheme and Adjudications. Further establishment Initiatives include – peer support via the Buddy system (see above), poster campaign relating to verbal abuse, poster campaign aimed at visitors who may have information and availability of a Safer Custody (free phone) contact telephone line for prisoner use.
- The Violence Reduction Strategy Document has been reviewed and is presently in draft form (06/2010).
- Mental Health Awareness Training is delivered to all relevant staff and to IMB members.

Deaths in custody

- There have been no self-inflicted deaths in custody during this reporting year. However, there are four inquests still to be held. Two involve prisoners who died at other establishments, but had spent time at Altcourse. The other two dates of death are 16.12.2008 and 25.03.2009.
- The Board is informed of all deaths in custody and is fully involved in monitoring the ongoing investigations and any inquests.

- The Board is fully aware of the excellent pastoral/operational work undertaken by the Family Liaison officer, Chaplaincy and Senior Management in case of death, serious injury or serious illness involving a prisoner.

IDTS (Integrated Drug Treatment Strategy)

- Initial implementation April 2009 - from that time methadone prescribing has been available for prisoners – subject to ‘clinical’ need.
- An average of 150 prisoners per month have benefitted from this facility – with numbers gradually increasing.
- The dispensing of individual doses of liquid methadone, in a large establishment, has proved challenging.
- Unit dispensing via a Methasoft machine is the preferred option and following a rolling programme is *almost* available on all units – with the planned exception of Foinavon. The *almost* refers to a technical problem in relation to the pumps on a number of Methasoft machines which are in position and otherwise ready for use.
- The part of IDTS which relates to psychosocial interventions has been delayed, due to difficulty in identifying and recruiting appropriate nursing staff. The situation is now much improved (although still not fully resolved). However, it has been possible to make a start with a series of courses for prisoners. Initial indications are that they have been very well received.

5.5 CARE AND SEPARATION UNIT

- CSU prisoners subject to a risk assessment are now eligible for exercise periods in company with one other prisoner.
- Suitable CSU prisoners now collect their own meals from the servery as distinct from staff bringing the meals to their cells.
- Education in CSU remains a concern of the Board, we appreciate that it actually does not form part of the contract with Manchester College and is therefore done on an ‘ad hoc’ basis but the end result is at best perfunctory and at worst totally non-stimulating and an insult to the average intelligence.
- An exit policy based on the Basic Regime document, (see Addendum), would be welcomed by the Board.
- The Board would wish the prison service to implement a PSI awarding all discipline CSU prisoners the regime of closed visits for the duration of their stay on the unit. This would be a far greater deterrent than the current threat of CSU alone. Although we advocate a better regime on CSU and an exit policy we are acutely aware that this could result in the deterrent effect of CSU being further diluted, hence the ‘closed visits’ suggestion.
- The CSU review board is held bi-weekly and is monitored on a constant basis by the Board. The Board still have concerns about non-auditable trails where security investigations are taking place, transfers and police outside investigations. The review boards are still very much in the dark as to the progress of these systems and without which they should not be making decisions, the Board will be taking a stronger line on these in the future.
- The proportion of prisoners held on GOOD forms 0.43% (0.38%) of the prison population, the average weekly residential figure is 11(12) representing 0.86% (0.9%) of the population.
- Planned interventions are videoed and the prisoner examined by the healthcare team immediately on arrival in CSU.
The Board are complimentary about the CSU staff, they are empathetic and caring, carry out the ACCT with due diligence and keep the Board informed at all times and within time of arrivals and movements.

Internal and External Adjudications

- The Board has monitored on a regular basis all members of the senior management in their adjudication role. We are pleased with the empathy towards prisoners and the attention to detail.
- The Board is less pleased with the shallowness of the investigations into the charges and the fact that some of the reporting officers take a cavalier attitude as to whether they will attend adjudications instigated by their reporting of prisoners. If a custody officer considers that charging a prisoner is appropriate then they must also attend the adjudication out of respect for both prisoner and adjudicator. This *laissez-faire* attitude percolates down to the prisoners who then consider that the adjudications lack *gravitas*. G4S are trying to remedy this and we look forward to a much greater rate of attendance, together with more *gravitas* at the actual hearings.
- Altcourse is most fortunate in that since the inception of external adjudications we have had the presence of one Senior District Judge only and this results in both continuity of sentencing and an innate knowledge, on his part, of the current problems within the prison. The Board is pleased to sit in on these sessions and we thank the Judge for his understanding of current problems.
- As a Board we are concerned at the apparent indifference of prisoners to their 'added days' awards. When you consider that they serve all of these days often with no remission, they add greatly to their sentences. However, the deterrent effect appears minimal and we would like the Ministry of Justice to look at the possibility of more severe sentencing regimes particularly for the possession of mobile phones and positive mandatory drugs tests, coupled with a three month closed visit regime for all prisoners found guilty on adjudication, both internal and external.
- There has been a marked and troubling increase in adjudication for mobile phone finds and for weapons found.

6. OTHER AREAS ON WHICH THE BOARD HAS ISSUES TO REPORT

CATERING AND KITCHENS

- There has been an improvement in the food re: quantities and variety during the reporting year. Although there are inevitably complaints received by Board members on rota mostly that menus have been changed without notice.
- Complaints are logged into wing food comments books and dealt with via servery meetings.
- In addition two chefs attend each wing daily on a rota basis, during lunch and evening meals and report back with their findings.
- There are facilities for prisoners to undertake NVQ qualifications, presently eight, two on level two, six on level one.
- There are 43 prisoners being catered for on Ramadan and two extra Muslim cooks have been brought in to help. Specially-made meal boxes are sent out each evening, these keep the meals hot for a very long time.
- The health and safety officer has undertaken a course in kitchen hygiene enabling him to monitor more professionally.
- Kitchens have received an award from JMU for 'Healthy Food Choices'.

DRUG STRATEGY

- After a meeting between the Rehabilitation Services Group (RSG) and Correctional Services Accreditation Panel, (CSAP), G4S were informed that the Substance Treatment Offender Programme (STOP) was being withdrawn as a suitable programme; G4S continued to deliver the programme until its official close on 31st March 2010.
- Although the team knew the programme was finishing they continued to deliver it in a pro-social, professional manner, maintaining the integrity and high standards of the programme at all times.
- The STOP programme also achieved its KPT of 96 starters and exceeded its completions by 5, as 67 offenders successfully completed the programme. STOP also had a number of graduates of the programme who had successfully operated as 'peer supporters' to new attendees whilst they were attending sessions. A number of STOP graduates have now left custody and to our knowledge have led law abiding lives in the community.
- STOP also received continued support from all areas of the establishment from the Senior Management Team, Independent Monitoring Board, and staff throughout the prison. This was monitored through regular monthly staff awareness sessions, where the ethos of the programme was explained to staff, so through their personal officer work, they encouraged offenders to apply for programmes.
- The other accredited intervention delivered at HMP Altcourse is the Short Duration Programme (SDP). This programme has been delivered at this establishment since October 2004, and continues to perform well. Again, this programme was audited by RSG, and achieved a 'High Achievement' score at audit. This authenticated that SDP had achieved 100% at audit for the fifth consecutive year, which is a credit to the staff involved on this particular programme.

OFFENDER MANAGEMENT

- The establishment of an Offender Management Unit housed in a dedicated building is a welcomed development. It has resulted in a more co-ordinated and efficient operation.

- Categorisation reviews are on target with no backlog but complaints have been received from prisoners re-categorised as Cat D regarding the significant delay in being transferred to a Cat D establishment due to the lack of space in the Cat D Estate. Currently there are 60 prisoners awaiting transfer and some prisoners may have been waiting up to 93 days.
- Transfers into the prison from other establishments frequently include prisoners who are very close to their HDC release date and this creates considerable difficulties for staff in completing the process to meet a very tight deadline. In some instances prisoners have not been released when they could have been, although every effort had been made by Altcourse staff to complete the work on time.
- An earlier backlog in OASys assessments has been cleared and present procedures are ensuring that no further backlog develops.
- There was a short period when both accredited and non-accredited programmes were not being delivered and this resulted in a number of complaints from prisoners who claimed they were being denied the opportunity to follow their sentence plan and qualify for re-categorisation. All programmes re-commenced in February 2010.
- The STOP programme has now ceased and been replaced by the FOCUS programme. The implementation of this programme is being monitored.
- The SORI programme has been introduced and initial reaction is favourable.

Re-categorisation

- Prisoners suitable to be held in open conditions are aware that there is no immediate prospect of a place in a Cat D establishment. HMP Kirkham is the local adult open prison and serves all the prisons in the North West. HMYOI Thorn Cross is the local Cat D prison for young offenders. At the time of writing there are 60 prisoners at Altcourse waiting for a place in open conditions. There has been no movement since March 2010.
- Prisoners awaiting transfer are aware that they would have been entitled to home visits had they been moved to cat D. This has resulted in many requests for ROTL generating an increased workload for staff..
- A number of prisoners prefer to remain at Altcourse although they are suitable for open conditions as visitors would find it prohibitive to travel longer distances and incur greater expense to get to Kirkham/Thorn Cross. Altcourse houses many Welsh prisoners. There are no prisons in North Wales.
- There is little incentive to follow programmes if the prisoner is not anticipating or aiming for a transfer to Cat D.
- The long term prison estate is full. The Board is concerned that Lifers are not able to move to an establishment which offers the accredited programmes required by the Parole Board. Parole Board reviews take place every 18 – 24 months so prisoners are having years added to their sentence through no fault of their own.

PROBATION

- The team of four full-time probation officers is seconded from Merseyside Probation and 'supervised' one day per week by a Senior. There is no 'team leader' and work is allocated by the Offender Management Unit on a reactionary basis. This adaptable team shares the workload amongst themselves but feel, as they are independent of the prison itself, that they are somewhat isolated and there is a lack of direction and remit.
- Work includes Parole Board applications, sentence planning, risk assessments, sentence progression and ROTL requests, and also statutory contribution to establishment meetings eg MAPPA, ROTL, Recat, Child Protection, Drug Strategy etc.
- There are links with other agencies inside and outside the prison and contributions are requested for MAPPA meetings on a regular basis. The case load is heavy and difficult to control. By next year it will be a requirement to manage all offenders, including for example, OASys assessments for all remands – this will have a major impact on the team. There is no control over the numbers coming into this busy local prison and much probation work involves dealing with unnecessarily complex procedures that may

ultimately result in disappointment for the prisoner and consequent frustration for probation staff involved.

RADIO AND DRAMA GROUP

The Board continues to take an active interest in this worthy and effective strand of Altcourse life which embraces many elements of the arts including drama, music, film making, audio broadcasting and editing and, recently, puppeteering! A PCO continues to lead the Group and receives support and guidance from the Butler Trust who granted him a major award in 2009.

- The group has 6 (4) full-time prisoner employees who run Radio Altcourse on a 24 hour loop and produce several live shows including a daily live music, information and competition show, a weekly Desert Island Discs, and a family request show which is recorded onto discs that prisoners can send to their families. OCN qualifications at level 1 and 2 are available in audio editing.
- In addition to the full-time employees the group has 18-25 part-time prisoner employees at any one time who are involved in all aspects of the groups work. Over the year up to 90 prisoners have been involved with the Group in various capacities.
- The Drama Group's production of 'Crossroads' (previously known as 'Choose Life') was presented 35 times to various vulnerable and 'at risk' groups over the year. A radio version and DVD of this powerful message is now in preparation.
- At Christmas the Group put on five performances of 'Under the Arches', a story of the homeless, written by the PCO and very well received by all.
- The Band – renamed 'the Insiders' continue to meet every Thursday evening and are currently rehearsing for the next Christmas show.
- The film group, known as 'Studio Films' gives prisoners a chance to gain up to a level 3 OCN qualification in movie making. They have made health & safety videos for staff training, and information films for the local Chamber of Commerce to promote the work of Altcourse workshops.
- The latest innovation is the building and setting up of a puppet theatre to entertain prisoners' children on family visit days. Some puppets were purchased, others have been made by members of the group. It is planned to prepare a film of a puppet performance to help children of prisoners cope with having their father in jail.

We applaud the work of this Project. There is so much talent amongst the Altcourse population which is recognised, encouraged and developed by the work that is done here. It builds self-esteem in those who take part, but also provides entertainment and information to a much wider audience, and benefits the community by supporting prisoners' families and helping to divert 'at risk' young people from a life of crime. In the present culture of 'cuts' we sincerely hope that these qualities continue to outweigh the necessity to economise.

REGIMES

- The First Night Centre has been integrated into the Induction Unit on Furlong. This has been a positive move with a clear strategy in place to deal with new prisoners as soon as they arrive on the unit.
- Concerns have been raised over the present use of the previous First Night Centre and length of time taken to decide a clear policy for the use of that unit. A positive decision has however now been made to re-house all the prisoners presently resident in the unit in other units within the prison. It is hoped that a satisfactory decision as to its use will be made in the near future.
- The Board would wish to see on a weekly basis a central log listing the details and location of all prisoners on a below standard regime. This would aid in the thematic review of all such prisoners albeit that the Board does not lie comfortably with pre-entry at all.

RESETTLEMENT

- Over the last twelve months, the Resettlement Department has been proactive in helping offenders gain accommodation and employment through a number of schemes involving liaison with external agencies.
- The prisoner Identification Card Scheme continues to be used for all prisoners who are about to leave the establishment and be relocated into North Wales for benefit and accommodation purposes.
- Resettlement has also continued to promote links with Shelter Cymru, and has weekly surgeries in the North Wales Resettlement Unit, when offenders from North Wales are invited to speak to a member of Shelter Cymru to organise accommodation for their release from custody.
- There is also an opportunity for offenders to speak to Debt Advice Advisors from Wales to sort out their financial worries whilst in custody. These meetings occur once every six weeks and are well attended.
- Offenders are offered the opportunity to talk to agencies such as Connexions and Training Network Group (T.N.G.), about employment upon release. Representatives of these agencies call into the establishment once every two weeks to talk to offenders.
- G4S have reintroduced the North Wales Service User Group, (S.U.G.), in which offenders have the opportunity to ask guest speakers from North Wales about what is available for them when they are released from custody.
- The Merseyside Prisons Housing Open Day that was held in Altcourse in July 2009, has generated the anticipated interest from housing providers, that in turn has assisted the department in obtaining accommodation for offenders upon release from custody.
- The Future Skills Wales Project was introduced as a pilot scheme in Altcourse in October 2009. This project was designed for offenders from the North Wales area.
- G4S are in contact with the Saint Giles Trust, London, who look to finding accommodation for offenders going back to the capital. This assists the Resettlement Officers to actively help offenders who are transferred in from southern establishments.

STAFFING

Care Team

- Currently 17 members in the team
- Listening Skills training has been provided to the team by the Training Department
- CSU: Due to working in a high risk area it is now a requirement for officers to receive additional support, therefore all officers working in the CSU have been sent a letter informing them of the Care Team member who will be available for them should they need additional support, whilst informing them they can contact any member of the team should they wish.
- Safer Custody: After an incident of self harm on the unit, the paperwork that needs to be completed now includes an information notice regarding the Care Team. This ensures that if the officer has been affected in any way they are aware of the support available to them

TRANSPORT

- The Board has inspected prison transport vehicles, finding them to be clean and fit for purpose.
- The Board has a concern for the safety of drivers as the glass in the windscreen and doors is not toughened glass. This can, therefore, be smashed quite easily. The Board feel this is a matter that should be addressed.

VISITS

- As a measure of his frustration the Director has issued an ultimatum to PSS in order to facilitate the immediate and complete implementation of the plans for the creche.

7. THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

BOARD STATISTICS	2009	2010
Recommended Complement of Board Members	20	20
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	13	13
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	14	16
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	4	4
Number of members leaving within reporting period	1	1
Total number of Board Meetings during reporting period	12	12
Average number of attendances at Board Meetings	11 a	10 a
Total number of visits to the prison (including all meetings)	782	764
Total number of applications received	1171	1373
Total number of segregation reviews held	99	111
Total number of segregation reviews attended	98	96
Number of attendances other than Board meetings	662	648

Three members have been appointed to the Board during the last twelve months.

One member has resigned during the last twelve months.

One member is on long-term sick leave.

a. Attendance figures at Board meetings are swayed by the number of members on sick leave or who have been appointed for less than twelve months or who were on sabbatical.

SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS TO BOARD:

CODE	SUBJECT	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
A	Accommodation	24	18	48	47
B	Adjudications	13	16	20	13
C	Diversity related	2	3	14	10
D	Education/employment/training	46	20	39	91
E	Family/visits	69	55	69	92
F	Food/kitchen related	16	25	44	28
G	Health related	84	127	141	181
H	Property	66	126	150	204
I	Sentence related	139	249	349	358
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee related	57	65	54	54
K	Transfers	34	58	44	51
L	Miscellaneous	15	200	199	209
Total number of applications		565	962	1171	1338
Average per month		47	80	98	112
Percentage increase on previous year (%)		55	70	22	14
Confidential access to Chair		-	-	45	138
Request & Complaints to G4S (COMP1)		697	977	1055	1373

- Applications continue to take up a considerable amount of the Boards time, which of course impacts on the effective time available for carrying out its other important prime monitoring duties.
- It will be noted that once again '*Code I / Sentence related*' issues produced the highest number of applications from prisoners, accounting for 358 or 27% of the grand total. The board are particularly concerned that of these applications, 251 or 19% relate to HDC matters. Furthermore, in a number of instances, serious delays have been identified in taking appropriate action. We therefore feel there is a need to review the overall process including providing prisoners with a much clearer understanding of the process.

BOARD DEVELOPMENT & PERFORMANCE

- As usual, the board carried out a formal and rigorous annual team performance review exercise to fully evaluate its effectiveness in carrying out its duties. This resulted in the production of an Annual Improvement Plan setting out a number of challenging objectives. The Board is satisfied that these objectives, including its mandatory obligations, have now been fully met for the reporting year.
- To support the Annual Improvement Plan, a programme of learning and development activity was delivered. This comprised a range of specific and tailored development sessions coupled with some members accessing the range of IMB National Training Courses, which all contributed to reinforcing the board's skills, knowledge and behaviour.
- We continually strive to strengthen the size and diversity of the board. In particular, we have developed good links with the local Universities which has recently resulted in the appointment of 3 graduate students who are now in the process of undertaking their induction programme. However, after a short period of sabbatical, one experienced board member has unfortunately resigned due to work pressure. The total board size is now 15 members.
- One experienced Board Member has continued as member of the National Training Team delivering the range of courses offered to members at all establishments and the Board Development Officer serves on the National Training Strategy Group, in addition a further Member serves as an independent interviewer assisting with board recruitment at establishments in the North West area.

NATIONAL COUNCIL MATTERS

- The Board was pleased that the National Council was able to issue their second Annual Report. This important document not only informs the wider community but also provides boards across the custodial estate with a good general overview of the IMB's activity and concerns.
- The Board also applauds the National Council on the introduction of the NC Bulletin, which provides a brief resume of NC meetings. We feel this has undoubtedly had a positive impact and helped to improve general communications.
- We would urge the National Council to provide leadership and a clear vision in moving forward, particularly during this challenging period with government cut backs in budgets, as the IMB strives to remain a respected and effective organisation.

General Duties of the Board

Applications

Presentation of an induction programme to new prisoners four times weekly

Presentation to the initial training courses for new staff

Weekly rota visits

Attendance with the external arbiter on a fortnightly basis

Observation of adjudications

Attendance as observers at establishment committees (see list below)

Attendance at the Coroner's Court

CSU review boards

Meetings attended by the Board on a regular basis:

Resettlement

Security

Safer Prisons

Drug Strategy

Health and Safety

Separation Management and Review Group

Quality Improvement Group

Violence Reduction

Public Protection Meeting`

Diversity Group

PCT Partnership Meeting

Reducing Re-offending Pathways

AMIMB

Northern Area Local Conference

IMB Annual Conference

The Chairman or the Deputy also attend:

Weekly meeting with the Director

North West Chairmans Meeting with the North West Area National Council Representative

North West Chairmans Meeting with the North West Area Manager

Contracted Prisons' Chairmans Meeting with Assistant Director Contracted Prisons

Contracted Prisons' Chairmans Meeting with National Council Representative for Contracted Prisons.

Re-categorisation boards.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Firstly my thanks to my Board for all their hard work and patience, diligence and tenacity, without them none of this would be happening and I would be an impossibly busy man. Thank you and may you carry the Board at Altcourse forward with all the professionalism that you have exhibited throughout my chairmanship.

This has been an awkward year for HMP Altcourse exacerbated by the secondment of the Director on trouble-shooting duties. In his absence the Acting Director did a professional job for which we thank her. This dilution of the SMT however is not supported by the Board and G4S should consider the long-term effects of such moves. Previous excellent performances do not signify an ability to maintain such whilst struggling with a reduction in key personnel.

There are several areas which give the Board concern or continue to do so:

Pre-entry, this is an area with which the Board has no empathy at all and would wish to see removed as soon as possible. The Board is concerned that this is a restricted regime with no appropriate paperwork other than a booklet, no laid down daily visits by Duty Director Etc and no multi-agency review panel with a monitor on board. In effect this is CSU with few 'checks or balances' and is unacceptable to the Board. It is in effect too subjective on the prisoner. There have been too many applications during the year regarding the regime in this area and the Board do not consider that it fits within the Altcourse ethos; a reversion to the State Sector system of three IEP levels would be well received. This is not the way forward for a re-integration unit.

Healthcare 2 continues after eighteen months with no firm decision as to its future being taken. There have been various suggestions over this time as to its designation however it still contains a high proportion of VP prisoners with a non sex-offender status and vacillates between half and a quarter full. If this redesignation does not happen G4S must try to, as a matter of priority, decide where this unit is going and then correctly place VP prisoners within the establishment with appropriate notifications and regimes.

The IEP scheme continues to disappoint. There is not sufficient difference between the levels and therefore the incentives are realistically very small. The Board would advocate a complete reappraisal of the scheme.

The staff at Altcourse continues to work well even within the current strictures and once again the Board would wish to thank them for their cooperation and assistance as we undertake our duties.

Dr John D Schofield
Chairman
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Altcourse

ADDENDUM

The Board is pleased to report that as we went to press the returning Director initiated a complete re-appraisal of pre-entry now to be titled 'Basic Regime'. There will be one area for basic regime and prisoners will be required to attend work, gym will be provided and the basic regimes will last for one month in the vast majority of cases, no 'reds' will be worn. The two Heads of Residence will be exclusively responsible for locating prisoners on this regime. This has addressed all our concerns and will involve a weekly review board at which the Board will be represented.

APPENDIX 1

Section 8

GLOSSARY OF PRISON-RELATED ABBREVIATIONS USED

AA Administrative Assistant	HCC Health Care Centre
ABS Anti-Bullying System	HDC Home Detention Curfew – the Tag
ACCT Assessment, Care in Custody & Teamwork – replacement for F2052SH	HCED HDC eligibility date
ACR Automatic Conditional Release	HMCIP Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Prisons
ARD Automatic Release Date	ICA1/2 Initial Categorisation & Classification Forms for Adults/YOs
BCU Briefing and Casework Unit – PS unit handling adjudication appeals	IDTS Integrated Drug Treatment Strategy
BME Black & Minority Ethnic	IEP Incentives and Earned Privileges – Prisoners can be on Basic, Standard or Enhanced
BOSS Body Orifice Security Scanner	IG Instruction to Governors
C & R Control & Restraint	IMB Independent Monitoring Board
C2W, CTW Custody to Work – pre-release focus on housing, employment and lifestyle issues	IND Immigration & Nationality Department
CARATS Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice & Throughcare Scheme – drug & alcohol team	IRC Immigration Removal/Reception Centre
CC Cellular Confinement – a punishment	JSA Job-Seekers Allowance
CCD Criminal Casework Department (Croydon)	JSAC Job Simulation & Assessment Centre (for officers seeking promotion to SO)
CCT Criminal Casework Team (part of Home Office Immigration & Nationalities Dept)	KPI/KPT Key Performance Indicator/Target
CMU Case Management Unit – work on sentence planning & progress	LDR Latest Date of Release
CNA Certified Normal Accommodation	LED Licence Expiry Date
CRD Conditional Release Date	LGBT Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender
CSU Care and Separation Unit	LIDS Local Inmate Database System – IMB can use this to check location, dates, etc.
DASU Drug And Alcohol Support Unit	LSC Learning & Skills Council
DH Dog Handler	MAPPA Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
ECL End of Custody Licence	MDT Mandatory Drugs Testing
EDR Earliest Date of Release	MSL Minimum Staffing Level
EO Executive Officer	MQPL Measuring the Quality of Prison Life
EGP Ex Gratia Payment	NACRO National Association for Care & Resettlement of Offenders
ETE Employment/Training/Education	NC The National Council for IMB
ETS Enhanced Thinking Skills Course	NOMS National Offender Management Service – amalgamation of the Prison & Probation Services
F2050 Prisoner’s basic record	OASYS Offender Assessment System – computerised risk & needs assessment
F2052A Prisoner’s wing record	OBP Offending Behaviour Programme
F2052SH Record for prisoner currently at risk of self-harm	OCA Observation, Classification & Allocations – a Reception task
FLED Facility Licence Eligibility Date (when prisoner may be considered for ROTL)	OLASS Offender Learning and Skills Service (part of LSC)
GOOD Good Order or Discipline – Segregation under Rule 45/49 (historically GOAD)	OI/OR/OP Own Interests/Request/Protection – Segregation under Rule 45/49
	PASRO Prisons Addressing Substance-Related Offending – an OBP
	PCO Prison Custody Officer
	PCT Primary Care Trust – National Health component responsible for healthcare
PER Prisoner Escort Record	
PIN Prisoner Information Notice	
PMU Population Management Unit (central)	
POPO Prolific and Persistent Offender	
PPO Prisons and Probation Ombudsman	

PPP Public Protection Panel
PS Prison Service
PSI Prison Service Instruction
PSO Prison Service Order – see
www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/resourcecentre/psispsos/listpsos
RFW Removal from Wing – a punishment
ROAD Remission of Added Days (up to 50%)
ROM Regional Offender Manager
ROR Restoration of Remission – now ROAD; Risk of Reconviction;
ROTL Release on Temporary Licence – e.g. to work in mess; town visits; home leave
RRA Assistant to the RRLO
RRLO Race Relations Liaison Officer
SAU Standards Audit Unit
SCG Safer Custody Group
SED Sentence Expiry Date
SEO Senior Executive Officer
SIN Staff Information Notice
SIR Security Information Report
SLA Service Level Agreement
SMARG Segregation Monitoring and Review Group
SMT Senior Management Team
SPDR Staff Performance & Development Record – reviewed annually
SOTP Sex Offender Treatment Programme
STOP Substance Treatment Offender Programme
TOIL Time Off in Lieu (of payment)
VDT Voluntary Drugs Testing
VO Visiting Order – sent out by prisoners, allows named people to visit
VTC Vocational Training Centre
Gold Commander Headquarters controller for serious incidents
Silver Commander Person in establishment in charge of serious incidents
Bronze Commander Local Sub Commander for serious incidents
Operation Tornado System to provide extra staff and resources for serious incidents