

HMP BLANTYRE HOUSE

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

1 JULY 2009 – 30 JUNE 2010

SECTION ONE

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 Home Secretary from members of the community in which the prison or centre is situated.

The Board is specifically charged to:

- 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
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom he has delegated authority, as it judges appropriate, any concerns it has; and
- 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 offender and every part of the prison and to the offenders' records.

SECTION TWO

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SECTION THREE

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

- 3.1 Blantyre House is a category C semi-open prison. It is one of only three establishments in England and Wales that is given over entirely to the provision of a comprehensive resettlement programme for adult male offenders. Since January 2008 the prison has been jointly managed with the resettlement open prison and young offenders' institution for females at East Sutton Park (ESP) under the title of The Weald of Kent Resettlement Estate.
- 3.2 The establishment's Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) is 122. The number of life sentence offenders within that total has recently been increased from 25 to 40. A waiting list is kept so that each vacant place can be filled as soon as possible. Close contacts are maintained with feeder prisons. Generally, the prison is able to keep its percentage occupancy rate in the high nineties. Determinate sentence offenders are drawn from prisons within the South East with life sentence offenders coming from a wider catchment area. However, these men will either have family in the area or have expressed a wish to resettle in Kent.
- 3.3 The Home Office bought the site in 1952, it having previously been a training farm set up in 1911 by James Fegan for boys rescued from the streets of London. It was a Young Offenders Unit until it was re-rolled in 1987, when it became the first Resettlement Prison to be established in the UK. Many of the original buildings remain and the impressive two-storey house block with its clock tower and inner courtyard provides accommodation in 116 single rooms and three doubles. Each offender has his own room key and once he has settled into a single room he is allowed to decorate it.
- 3.4 The house block also accommodates the Healthcare Suite and offices for Probation, Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare Service (CARATS), Mandatory and Voluntary Drug Testing (MDT), Integrated Drug Strategy System (IDTS), and a Cardio-Vascular Exercise Suite. The relatively new and popular suite was set up in the house block so that it could be used when the gym was not available. Offenders have to be in the house by 20.30 hrs and in their rooms by 22.00 hrs. There is a room where snooker and billiards can be played. The courtyard with its ornamental fishponds and planters is another area for relaxation and association. The Offenders Management Unit and Activities now work with Information Advice and Guidance in the Education complex.
- 3.5 The other prison buildings are single storey and the grounds surrounding them are extensive. The full size football pitch is used to host Sunday League matches. The Blantyre House team includes both offenders and staff. A compound with farm sheds and poly-tunnels, as well as apple orchards, is only used by offenders if supervised by officers. Elsewhere offenders are able to move freely from one area and one building to another.
- 3.6 Peer support in the form of Insiders is provided in the early days following arrival at Blantyre House. Peer tutors assist in the Job Club/Information Advice and Guidance room as well as the classroom. However, Listeners do not operate at Blantyre House; this is with the approval of the Samaritans. The offenders, however, have telephone access to the Samaritans if required.

- 3.7 West Kent PCT has full commissioning responsibility for health services available at Blantyre House. The GP team is contracted to the PCT with the two nurses employed by the Prison Service. The healthcare manager is based at East Sutton Park although she visits Blantyre House regularly to provide clinical and managerial support. An Alcohol Awareness course is run at the prison and Alcoholics Anonymous visit the prison every week to support offenders and Narcotics Anonymous have held meetings. A CARATs team has been introduced to assist and support offenders who may have experienced or have issues surrounding drugs. The Offender Welfare and Drug Strategy Manager assess new offenders with 24 hours of arrival and a complete drug and alcohol history is taken to assist in formulating the offender's sentence plan. Men are expected to comply with a drug free regime and mandatory drug test failures are rare.
- 3.8 Education is provided by the City of Manchester College. There has been close monitoring of the education contract by the Head of Learning and Interventions and the Governor with regular meetings being held with the regional contract manager. Resources within the department include two IT suites, a library, art room, workshop and independent classroom facilities.
- 3.9 On arrival, having signed a compact, which includes agreement to fully participate in the regime and take an active part in the preparation and delivery of their sentence plan, offenders undertake a two to three week Induction Pathway course. This course is linked to the NOMS seven pathways to reducing re-offending. The Induction Board, that takes place about six weeks after arrival, sets the targets for the remaining months of the six-month "lay down" period. Enrolment on external college courses is subject to a successful Risk Assessment Board at which times all issues concerning Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) are considered.
- 3.10 Reparation work in the local community is an important part of the resettlement programme. Once risk assessed, it is the intention that groups of four to six offenders, supervised by a prison officer, go out to work on projects. The projects have included the painting and decorating of local primary schools in the school holidays and Scouts' and Brownies' huts. Other beneficiaries have included parish councils and charities.

After the initial period of supervision, the offenders go out alone to continue working in the community until they become eligible for paid work.

SECTION FOUR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 4.1 The IMB is pleased to report that successful programmes of resettlement continue to be delivered at Blantyre House. The issue of Release on Temporary Licences (ROTLs) is well handled by management, bearing in mind that the risk managed by the prison is largely in the community. At least half the prison population goes out on paid work, community visits and project work during the week and in addition there are town and home visits to be managed. Given that approaching 20,000 ROTLs were issued in 2009, a failure rate of only 13 is creditable. Good relations and trust between

management, staff and offenders have been maintained and strengthened in part by the fact that the men are known as individuals and by the many Family Days which have been held, where offenders' families come into the prison to participate in various events including games and activities. During the World Cup competition Blantyre House held its own 5 a side soccer tournament with 26 teams being entered drawn from offenders and staff, in memory of a Senior Officer who was killed in a road accident in July 2009 and this reflected the ethos trust and respect which is typical of Blantyre House.

- 4.2 In our last annual report we mentioned that the senior management team, which was largely new to the prison and was new to resettlement, was somewhat inflexible in its approach to ROTLS, but we are pleased to report that the team now displays a constructive degree of flexibility in considering ROTLS and is more relaxed with the ethos of a resettlement prison. However, we feel we must mention that some offenders, who are returnees, have told IMB members that there is a certain lack of engagement by some of the senior management team and relations are more formal with offenders, in and around the prison, compared with their previous experiences.
- 4.3 At the beginning of the report year an MQPL (Measuring the Quality of Prisoner Life) survey of offenders revealed that Blantyre House had achieved the highest score in the country and marks for dignity, material needs and staff and offender relations were outstanding. The IMB considers that it must mention that just subsequent to the report year an announced inspection was carried out with some six different teams of inspectors and their provisional conclusion is that the prison had achieved the top mark of 4 for each of the four categories of Safety, Respect, Purposeful Activity and Resettlement. The senior management team and staff are to be congratulated on such an outstanding result.
- 4.4 The work of the Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) team (which arranges project work and assists men in obtaining external paid employment and external training and education courses) is to be commended, because despite the current difficult economic climate, the team has been very successful in assisting men to find paid employment. This has been achieved with a very low level of staffing. On average, during the report year, 56 offenders have been available for paid employment and out of that total, on average 42 have been in paid work. Of those unemployed, some have been over the retirement age and some others have been unable to work, through medical conditions. Their success has been achieved despite the frustration experienced by the team and offenders over the length of time some police checks have taken of potential employers. The team has also been successful in placing men on training and educational courses. Project parties have been curtailed, on occasions, due to staff sickness. However, projects have included repair work in schools during the holidays and work to Brownies' and Scouts' huts. This is unpaid work and part of the restorative justice programme. Offenders have visited schools to assist in the presentation of "Prison Me No Way" which has proved very successful judging by the reaction of students and has attracted good press coverage.
- 4.5 Education continues to thrive at Blantyre House under the leadership of an excellent Head of Learning and Interventions. The provisional Ofsted report has attributed scores of 2 across the board, which is very creditable. This is despite the problems encountered with Manchester College, who took over the education contract from A4E last year and the loss of a full time tutor who was replaced by a sessional worker. The IMB was concerned at the length of time it took for a tutor in painting and decorating and plastering to be appointed, bearing in mind that the previous tutor resigned in September 2009, to be replaced at the end of June 2010. It is therefore regretted that the course was not run for some nine months, leading to considerable frustration

amongst the men due to lack of purposeful activity. However, this delay was outside the control of the prison management. The Library is well run by a dedicated librarian and is a valuable resource. A well supported book club operates and reinforces literacy.

- 4.6 The IMB is concerned that there is no longer a method of selection of offenders. Interviews of potential candidates used to be carried out in the feeder prisons, but some men now arrive with an unrealistic view of what Blantyre House can offer, and some are uninterested in what the prison can do for them. There have been cases of men expecting to stay in the prison to carry on only education without engagement in community and project work and external paid employment. Clearly, a return to a prison with closed conditions would be implemented if that stance was maintained. The IMB has noticed the deterioration of behaviour amongst some of the men with instances of vandalism and litter being thrown from windows and anti-social behaviour in the Main House. The IMB has also noticed an increasing number of men who are arriving at Blantyre House in denial of their index offence, which points to a failure, or absence, of restorative justice programmes in their previous prisons.
- 4.7 Men generally have gone through appropriate courses to ensure that they are free of drugs and/or alcohol dependency before transferring to Blantyre House and men are asked to sign a compact that they will continue to be drugs and alcohol free for the whole duration of their stay at the prison. It is the policy of the Prison Service to roll out the Integrated Drug Treatment System (IDTS), which will involve the prescription of methadone/Subutex to men to safeguard them against overdosing on release. With the introduction of IDTS, Blantyre House may see the introduction of men who arrive with a dependency and there may be cases of men being “re-toxed” before their release. This could create strains with other offenders who have struggled to be drug free. The IMB is aware that a needs analysis indicates that the number of men involved will be in single figures, however, we do not consider that IDTS is suitable for Blantyre House as it is against the ethos of the prison and undermines the prison’s strategy of placing men in paid employment. The “one size fits all” approach is inappropriate given the special nature of Blantyre House.
- 4.8 The proposed expansion of Blantyre House by 43 places, which would have involved internal alterations and the change of use of some buildings and which was outstanding for a considerable time, lead to staff being unsettled over the uncertainty of the effect of the project. The project was cancelled in June 2010 and the IMB very much regrets the loss of opportunity for men to benefit from the regime.
- 4.9 The introduction of a prison service wide computer programme called PNOMIS has meant many hours of training and assimilation by management and staff and this is another area which has caused frustration especially as it appears that it is not ideally suited to a resettlement prison. One anomaly, which it has thrown up, is that the programme, because of the constant movement due to ROTLs, cannot accurately gauge the prison roll.
- 4.10 The IMB is concerned at the present situation, which has arisen due to delays on the part of the Parole Board. As at June 2010 10 offenders’ hearings were overdue. In two cases the delay was 16 months. We are aware that these men are not alone in suffering this frustration, but it is unfair on men who are ready for release and an unnecessary cost to the nation and because men are held longer at Blantyre House awaiting the Parole Board’s decision, fewer men are given the opportunity of benefitting from the prison’s regime.

- 4.11 To conclude the IMB regards Blantyre House as a very successful prison, which has the support of the local community. Most of the challenges we have highlighted are due to factors outside the direct control of the management and staff. Given the guiding criterion of the “rehabilitation revolution”, currently expounded for the prisons in England and Wales, Blantyre House meets that criterion in full.

SECTION FIVE

ISSUES THAT MUST BE REPORTED ON

5.1 DIVERSITY

Overall, diversity is being ably dealt with by the Diversity Manager. No Racist Incident Forms have been submitted during the year and the KPT for Race Equality (prisoners) scored 90.9% at the end of March 2010. However, there have been several diversity related issues to be dealt with during the year, as the make-up of offenders has changed. In particular, the prison has had to accommodate the needs of disabled, Moslem and elderly offenders.

During the year the prison received one offender with multiple sclerosis and two with serious sight impairments. Various adaptations have had to be made in order to accommodate their needs. Following consultations with the Diversity Manager, new computer equipment has been purchased; grab rails installed in various places and toilet and shower facilities adapted for their use. There have inevitably been difficulties adapting an existing building, funding issues and problems dealing with a progressive, and therefore constantly changing, condition. There have been some delays and confusions in getting these arrangements in place, for example in organising appropriate access to the toilet facilities, but in general the work has been good and a disability access survey carried out during the year found the changes to be in order.

The needs of these offenders have been met, but it has caused some resentment among other offenders, particularly over access to toilet facilities. These are now only accessible via a radar key, a system which had to be instigated because of damage caused by other offenders.

The BME proportion of the population has remained reasonably constant at around 35% and SMART reporting, while inevitably highlighting minor monthly fluctuations, has not identified any major areas of concern.

At the same time, there have been issues with meeting the needs of Moslem offenders, particularly concerning food. Complaints have been made about the availability of Halal options at the prison canteen and over the preparation and serving of Halal food and the extent to which it is being properly separated from other meat. This may well have been caused by a lack of awareness among those working in the kitchen of these issues. However, an impact assessment has now been carried out, new serving trays and utensils purchased and kitchen staff made aware of the issues. It is hoped that this will improve matters. The Catering Manager is now attending Diversity and Race Equality Action Team (D&REAT) meetings, so he is more aware of any potential problems.

Again, efforts made to accommodate the needs of a particular group have lead to resentment amongst the rest. There have been incidents where the Halal meat appeared “better” than the non-Halal and complaints were made. In order to resolve

this, at one point all the meat provided was Halal, but this was deemed to be inappropriate for others and is no longer done.

Blantyre House also has a sizeable elderly population (50+). A questionnaire is being prepared for them to ensure that their needs are being adequately met.

Last year's report commented on the lack of cultural events. Whilst these have been somewhat sporadic, good events have been organised. An event was organised to celebrate Black History Month and the prison hosted a very successful World Cup tournament, accompanied with cultural meals. These proved popular and may well continue.

An ACA Standard 48 audit was conducted in November, which was generally positive with a few issues highlighted for improvement. One was the need to develop additional community engagement with the D&REAT to provide an external perspective. Despite efforts on the part of the Diversity Manager, this has proved difficult to achieve. Poor meeting attendance by staff was also highlighted, however this improved somewhat towards the end of the year.

CHAPLAINCY

Blantyre House offers worship and ministry of various faiths to meet the religious needs of offenders. The Chapel has been refurbished, and is open at all times for contemplation. Services are held weekly, on Sunday evenings, when offenders are encouraged to participate, choosing the order and style of service. On Family Days, and at Easter and Christmas, the gatherings are planned to encourage families to join in and worship together.

The Temple attached to the Chapel provides an area of worship for Muslims, and additional ante-rooms provide privacy for one-to-one counselling.

The Anglican priest, who was Prison chaplain, emigrated in July 2009, but the support team has performed admirably in the interregnum, The Roman Catholic and Methodist teams hold regular services. A Rabbi is available upon request.

A new part-time imam, Muhamed Gani, joined during the year. He has been very helpful in advising on and helping to resolve some of the issues mentioned above. Offenders now attend Friday prayers within the prison; ROTLs for external attendance have ceased. Muhamed Gani is now the co-ordinating chaplain.

5.2 HEALTHCARE

Healthcare continues to provide an excellent service. The nursing staff is up to date with training and will now have access to the Practice Nurse Advisory Service.

Healthcare was well prepared for Swine flu and those on the Chronic Disease Register were offered immunisation.

Trends: a rise in more needy patients with a combination of mental health/physical conditions. It has been agreed that a Psychiatrist and CPN (Community Psychiatric Nurse) will attend regularly however, a counsellor is still awaited.

IDTS: it has been established that a mapping process needs to be undertaken to obtain a clear understanding about the service that should be delivered and who it should be delivered by.

The Prison Partnership Board have announced that in future the PCT Assistant Director of Clinical Quality will take the lead of Clinical Governance of all three prisons - Blantyre House, East Sutton Park and Maidstone. The purpose will be to ensure consistency in reporting mechanisms, standardise approaches to clinical governance and enhance NHS West Kent's engagement with the Prison Service. If the PCT ceases to exist there will be a question mark over the continued provision of these services.

5.3 LEARNING & SKILLS

The aim for offenders nearing the end of their sentences is to prepare and equip them for life outside again. At their induction at Blantyre House they are required to commit to completing their education, where required, to undertake training courses in their chosen fields, either within the prison confines where available, or at outside colleges.

Education, training and pathway interventions are managed by the Head of Learning and Interventions. The contract with education provider A4E finished in July 2009 when the new contractor Manchester College commenced. The present contract is for 2,976 hours a year.

There are approximately 100 places for part time education and training places within the prison.

In addition to the education and IT courses offered, courses in painting & decorating, and plastering are provided. Various grades and qualifications can be worked towards

During the initial period after arrival, before men are risk assessed for work in the community, they are given the opportunity to work in the gardens, the gym and the kitchen. The gardens offer the City and Guilds Level 1 in Horticulture skills, the gym offers up to and including Level 3 Instructors' Courses, and the kitchen up to Level 2 Catering diplomas, plus Food Safety training. So as well as using their lay-down time usefully, they are able to gain experience, and qualifications if they so desire, in these fields.

Armed with the education and qualifications already acquired, Blantyre House endeavours to ensure that the work placements achieved lead, in many cases, to continued work after release.

5.4 SAFER CUSTODY

The IMB continues to monitor Safer Custody, bearing in mind the steadily changing profile of offenders. No ACCT (Assessment Care in Custody Teamwork) documents were opened during the reporting year. There are no current concerns with Safer Custody.

SECTION SIX

OTHER AREAS MONITORED

6.1 SECURITY

The IMB is pleased to note the speeding up of the vetting of prospective employers, where these are either established employers of offenders or large nationwide companies.

6.2 CATERING AND THE KITCHEN

The provision of meals for the offenders continues to be of a high standard taking into account not only an offender's requirements, whether on religious or health grounds, but also the needs of those who work out of the prison and may miss a meal because of an early start to the day or a late return.

Since October 2009 the Catering Manager at East Sutton Park has had overall responsibility for both sites and is now based at Blantyre House working with a team of two full-time staff members and one part-timer.

In order to have more staff available on weekdays there has been a reduction in the number of hours worked at weekends. The consequence of this has been a simplification of the menus on Saturdays and Sundays. The evening meals now consist of a pre-packed snack bag. The main meal at lunchtime is a brunch on Saturday and a roast meal on Sunday. The introduction of this new arrangement did not go smoothly. However, lessons have been learned and questionnaires were distributed to offenders seeking their views. The results of the surveys were largely positive. Over 60% of respondents thought the caterers were friendly and professional. 72% of offenders have no special dietary requirements. Food complaints ranged over a number of headings including quality and portion size.

Long-awaited new equipment has been installed and there are plans to rationalise the cold storage facilities.

The Board is pleased to note that as well as the Level 2 Food & Hygiene course that every offender in the kitchen party must undertake, there are now men enrolled on an NVQ Level 2 catering course.

The Board is aware of the constraints that a central supply system imposes, but feels it is a great pity that more use cannot be made of the existing poly-tunnels to grow produce on site as was the case in the past.

6.3

During the year of report the IMB has also monitored the following areas but has no concerns: Health and Safety and Works Department and Prison Estate and Gym and Fitness.

SECTION SEVEN

THE WORK OF THE IMB

7.1

Membership of the IMB stood at eleven at the beginning of the past year, reducing to ten, at the end of the year. One member resigned during the year of report. The three members who joined in March 2009 successfully completed their probationary year at the end of March 2010, but were not able to receive their letters of appointment until June, as there were no spaces on a Foundation Course until then. As attendance on this course is a requirement during the probationary year, it was agreed that in future new members should sign up for this course soon after they join the IMB.

7.2

Three applications were received from offenders covering issues arising from, ROTL conditions and property. These were dealt with by members of the IMB discussing the issues with the offenders concerned, liaising with the appropriate staff and reporting to the offenders. At this stage in offenders' sentences, they are encouraged to solve problems for themselves and the low number of applications reflects this.

7.3

Members sit as observers on all the various committees including the senior management team meeting. IMB members also sit in on induction/sentence boards, risk and review boards and pre-release boards.

IMB STATISTICS

Recommended Complement of Members	10
Number of members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of members at the end of the reporting period	10
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	0
Number of members leaving within reporting period	1
Number of attendances at meetings other than IMB meetings	173
Total number of visits to the prison/IRC (including all meetings)	310
Total number of applications received	3
Total number of segregation reviews held	0
Total number of segregation reviews attended	0

7.4

Six members of the IMB visited Elmley prison in September 2009; this was particularly useful for new members who had not visited a prison with closed conditions. A number of men at Blantyre House have come from Elmley so it was helpful for the IMB to get some idea of their background and to make the IMB aware of the huge adjustments that men need to make when they move from closed conditions to the resettlement regime at Blantyre House.

IMB members also visited Tumim House in Maidstone in March. This is a house with self-contained flats and a warden where men can go on release if they do not have anywhere to live. It is extremely well run and offers a degree of support to men who might find it difficult living alone in the community.

7.5

IMB members have attended a number of courses and training sessions during the year including: Challenge It Change It which addressed diversity and bullying issues amongst staff and offenders; a counter terrorism lecture which covered issues surrounding the growth of extremist groups within the prison population; a PNOMIS course; an adjudication awareness training session and internal Fire Safety and Health and Safety and Manual Handling courses.

7.6

The IMB held its Annual Team Performance Review day in March, which proved to be a useful and worthwhile exercise.

7.7

The IMB had talks from individuals from within the prison as a prelude to the monthly IMB meetings.

7.8

Finally, two members attended the National Conference in September 2009, three members attended the Foundation course and two members the Continued Development course.

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