



INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

HMP DORCHESTER

ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY 2013 – DECEMBER 2013

“Monitoring Fairness and Respect for People in Custody”

1. STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

The Prison 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 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.

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3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3.1 On 4 September 2013 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) announced the closure of HMP Dorchester. In these circumstances, this report gives a brief appraisal of the prison at the time of the closure announcement and comments on the closure procedure.

3.2 The report highlights concerns about aspects of healthcare and education at the prison. Although Dorchester is to close, these seem worthy of mention since they are relevant to other establishments. The Board also has concerns about two aspects of the closure process.

3.3 On education, HMP Dorchester provided courses in English, maths and business studies. Many prisoners did not complete courses they had started because of interruptions for court appearances, legal visits or simply because of the constraints of the prison's regime. One teacher revealed that of the 65 registered to take the maths exam, for which there was a fee, only 12 actually took the examination. Similar completion numbers were recorded for the English exam. That fees in such numbers are being paid for exam entries which are not followed through suggests that resources were not being best directed and indicates that courses provided for high turnover/short stay prisons should be reviewed (See 5.2 iii).

3.4 Financial constraints have meant that non-certificated courses have been curtailed. This is unfortunate, as many prisoners, a good number of whom have underlying mental health problems, enjoyed courses such as art, music and Storybook Dads (See 5.2 iv).

3.5 On healthcare, there was a long wait for prisoners with mental health problems to be assessed. Prisoners who were sectioned often had a longer wait for a secure bed than they should have, due to competition for beds with patients in the community. Unfortunately they were often held in the Care and Separation Unit (CSU), as they could not be on the wings, which often made their mental state deteriorate further (See 5.4 iii).

3.6 In addition, the Board received a significant number of applications on healthcare issues, mostly about medications. These mainly concerned: medications prescribed by prisoners' GPs before they came into prison, which took time to confirm; medications prescribed elsewhere which were not allowed to be prescribed in prison; and prisoners disagreeing with their treatment. It would be sensible for universal prescription guidelines to be followed throughout the country (See 5.4 iv).

3.7 In general, the closure of the prison was carried out with speed and efficiency. However, there was undoubtedly a great deal of waste. Many furnishings and equipment, deemed not to be capable of use at other prisons, were placed in skips for disposal. The IMB shares the view of staff that this displayed a huge waste of taxpayers' money and unimaginative exploration of potential recycling opportunities to other areas of the public or charity sectors (See 6.6).

3.8 MoJ Estates Management figures show that the new Medical Centre, which opened in the summer of 2013, cost £2.4 million. This contained offices and consulting and waiting rooms, all with a high standard of equipment. The IMB feels that there should have been greater coordination within the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to ensure that expenditure of this magnitude should not have taken place when, clearly, the closure of the prison was being proposed. Forward planning of this kind would have prevented such unacceptable financial wastage.

3.9 Despite assurances that the Medical Centre had been built using a modular system and could therefore be moved to another prison, it should be noted that - at the point of closure - no removal plans had been made and it was generally agreed by the experienced maintenance staff that removal would not be a simple exercise but would incur significant costs. The fact that the extension was brick-faced would make deconstruction and relocation difficult and therefore less likely (See 6.7).

3.10 The IMB raised their concerns on recent expenditure with the local MP, Oliver Letwin. He

accepted that, although the operational decisions to invest in Dorchester had been, in themselves, perfectly understandable, it was concerning that there did not appear to have been sufficient communication between the operational part of MOJ and the long-term planners, as a result of which - in retrospect - the MoJ had probably overspent on HMP Dorchester during recent years. He also accepted that it would probably not, in practice, prove economically feasible to move the new Healthcare building (as opposed to the equipment in it) to be used elsewhere.

4. INTRODUCTION

4.1 On 4 September 2013 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) announced the closure of HMP Dorchester. The Governor told the IMB that the closure would be swift and carried out within a twelve-week time span using previously established guidelines. This announcement was upsetting for the prison staff, unsettling for the prisoners and also a disappointment to the town of Dorchester.

4.2 The Independent Monitoring Board felt, in these circumstances, that the 2013 Annual Report should focus on providing a brief appraisal of the prison at the time of the closure announcement and making observations on the closure procedure.

4.3 The disappointment in the town is understandable: there has been a prison in the centre of Dorchester for over 800 years, since 1305. The present HMP Dorchester was completed in 1795 and is a local Category B Prison. The Victorian buildings have seen many alterations and additions over the years in continued attempts to keep pace with ever-changing needs. Despite this expenditure, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons in 2009, and then again in 2012, reported upon the buildings' inadequacies, describing Dorchester as "overcrowded, holding significantly more prisoners than the certified normal accommodation (CNA). While some refurbishment had been done to improve physical conditions on wings, cells were not adequately furnished".

4.4 Despite this, the recent emphasis placed by the Ministry on prison cost-effectiveness led, over the last couple of years, to a Governor-initiated scheme to grow the prison's population from some 250 to 270 prisoners, compared with a certified normal accommodation of 145. While increased prisoner numbers undoubtedly improved the economic viability of the prison, overcrowding remained a problem, even though some extra cells were brought into use.

4.5 Money has continued to be spent on improvements, even in recent years: a new reception area was created; roof improvements made and, most importantly, a new healthcare wing, costing £2.4m, was opened in the summer of 2013. Although these improvements were welcomed, particularly in providing improved medical care for prisoners, for investment of this order to be followed so swiftly by the announcement of the prison's closure suggests an unfortunate lack of forward-planning on the part of the MoJ.

4.6 It is a real disappointment, albeit understandable given the Victorian buildings' 130 years of service, that HMP Dorchester still fell short of the standards considered appropriate for a prison in the 21st century, despite this recent expenditure.

4.7 Despite the inadequacies of the buildings, the IMB concurs with the findings of the Inspectors that Dorchester has been a "prison with excellent staff-prisoner relationships and a sound focus on resettlement." IMB members observed care given to the prison population in Dorchester to be generally good. Staff were seen to interact well with prisoners, and comments made to IMB members by prisoners were generally positive. In addition, surveys showed that prisoners felt safe - an observation made in the Inspection report.

4.8 The Security Audit held this year showed a notable improvement. Despite problems caused by a high staff turnover, the prison received an improved rating of Amber/Green. At the same time, officers were warned not to allow themselves to become complacent.

5 APPRAISAL OF THE PRISON

5.1 CHAPLAINCY

- i) The Board is pleased to note that the Chaplaincy Team supported prisoners and staff of all faiths and those of none. The Team held regular services and observed major religious festivals.
- ii) The Board compliments the Team on the care and provision made to the families of two prisoners who died whilst in custody. The Board attended a memorial service held in the prison chapel for the family of one of these prisoners and noted the dignity and care extended to the family and the high standard of the service.
- iii) The Board made regular visits to the Chapel and observed courses being run by the Chaplaincy Team; for example, Basic Islam and Foundation for Living.
- iv) The Chapel remained an oasis of calm in HMP Dorchester's busy day. Chaplaincy staff were supportive to staff and prisoners alike during the closure process.

5.2 EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS

- i) The education block provided a safe, light and fit-for-purpose environment for the English, maths and business studies courses on offer. Prisoners commented on their satisfaction with course content and delivery.
- ii) The nature of the population at HMP Dorchester as a local prison meant that there was a high turnover of prisoners. This in turn meant that certificated courses provided by Weston College needed to be of short duration. In the past, courses were run on a 'roll-on roll-off' basis, enabling a prisoner to begin at any time. More recently, prisoners needed to complete a course through to its conclusion, usually a period of six weeks. Since 2012 all courses have been examination-based, designed to give prisoners a certificate of their achievements to help them gain employment on release
- iii) Many prisoners did not complete courses they had started because of interruptions for court appearances, legal visits or simply because of the constraints of the prison's regime. One teacher revealed that of the 65 registered to take the maths exam, for which there was a fee, only 12 actually took the examination. Similar completion numbers were recorded for the English exam. That fees in such numbers are being paid for exam entries which are not followed through suggests that resources were not being best directed and indicates that courses provided for high turnover/short stay prisons should be reviewed.**
- iv) Financial constraints have meant that non-certificated courses have been curtailed. This is unfortunate, as many prisoners, a good number of whom have underlying mental health problems, benefited from courses such as art, music and Storybook Dads. The teaching staff raised their concerns about this with the IMB.**
- v) The lack of purposeful activities has been a major problem for HMP Dorchester. Barbershop training ceased and there were no workshops to teach skills which would be of value on release. There were plans for a fork lift truck course, but - due to logistical problems - these were never realised. Despite management efforts to encourage over-time, staff shortages have meant a reduction of the amount of time prisoners have been able to spend on activities outside their cells.

5.3 EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

- i) All staff and prisoner representatives were given diversity training and monthly meetings were held in the prison where prisoner representatives were given the opportunity to raise any matters

that had been brought to their attention by other prisoners or through their own observations. These meetings were well attended at the start of the reporting year but had fallen off more recently. The Governor put great value on these sessions and had asked those involved to ensure they attended future meetings.

ii) During the reporting period 1 October 2012 to 30 September 2013, five applications out of the 210 made to the IMB were based partly or solely on the basis of racial discrimination. The IMB found that prison staff took these complaints seriously and the Governors were readily available to the IMB to investigate these complaints.

iii) Prison staff arranged activities to mark significant events in the calendar. Information from appropriate sources was gathered and displayed on notice boards in areas that were frequented by prisoners. The librarian endeavoured to provide a range of literature designed to promote a deeper understanding of issues raised within the prison. In addition, the needs of foreign nationals were met as far as financial constraints would allow.

iv) The IMB noted the care and attention that was given to the preparation of evening meals for those observing Ramadan.

5.4 HEALTHCARE AND MENTAL HEALTHCARE

i) There were many changes, improvements and difficulties in healthcare this year, making it a challenging time for NHS and prison staff.

ii) A brand new healthcare unit was completed in May, only four months before the closure was announced. The new wing was purpose-built and easily accessible. It was well designed to facilitate all the demands that a GP surgery would offer with the added constraints of prison requirements. The old computer system was replaced with a more up-to-date version and new equipment was provided.

iii) There were however some problems:

- no designated cleaner was supplied by the prison so nursing staff were obliged to carry out this task;
- there were some staff on long-term sick;
- the dental department was closed for a while to be deep-cleaned and a long waiting- list built up. Although the dentist could provide an extra clinic, the prison did not have the staff to escort prisoners to appointments.
- **there was a long wait for prisoners with mental health problems to be assessed. Prisoners who were sectioned often had a longer wait for a secure bed than they should have, due to competition for beds with patients in the community. Unfortunately they were often held in the Care and Separation Unit (CSU), as they could not be on the wings, which often made their mental state deteriorate further.**

iv) The Board received a significant number of applications on healthcare issues, mostly about medications. These mainly concerned: medications prescribed by prisoners' GPs before they came into prison, which took time to confirm; medications prescribed elsewhere which were not allowed to be prescribed in prison; and prisoners disagreeing with their treatment. The new lead nurse was working very hard to address these problems. It would be sensible, and has been raised previously at the Dorset Prison Partnership Board, for universal prescription guidelines to be followed throughout the country.

v) The clinics ran smoothly each day and new prisoners were seen by the GP the day following arrival. There was a good system in place for prisoners to make an appointment to see the GP. Prisoners were escorted, when necessary, to local hospital outpatient departments but, as often happens with local prisons, were sometimes moved on before their appointments.

vi) There was a registered nurse on duty at all times and in the occasional emergency they reacted quickly and efficiently.

vii) It is disappointing that after many years of struggling with a healthcare department which was not fit for purpose the new purpose-built and expensive unit was so short-lived.

5.5 OFFENDER MANAGEMENT UNIT (OMU)

i) The Board would comment that it was a further year of change for the OMU Department, with the implementation of the Fair and Sustainable and New Ways of Working Programmes.

ii) The Governor with responsibility for the OMU was shared with HMP Portland and HMP The Verne. The uniformed staff were often deployed in other sections of the prison and the administrative staff within the unit maintained a heavy workload. The Board is pleased to note that the Governor of HMP Dorchester and the OMU Governor tried to address the issues within the unit and sought to employ and re-deploy further administrative staff to the unit.

iii) The Board is further pleased to note that the level of Home Detention Curfews had increased and that each Prisoner was seen individually by the OMU Governor.

iv) The OMU Governor attended the Wing Representatives meetings and so was able to answer immediately any concerns raised there.

v) The Board notes that preparations for the prison's closure resulted in increased work for the OMU as prisoners were moved. However, they completed this work ably and efficiently.

5.6 REDUCING REOFFENDING (RRO)

i) HMP Dorchester has been short of constructive work for prisoners but a positive structure was in the process of being formed and implemented. Outside workshops, painting booths and a road construction course leading to certification were due to start.

ii) The Board reports that a family visiting day was to be recommended as this was thought to have been an excellent initiative. Also, parent counselling courses had been planned, with help from the local Citizens' Advice Bureau and other outside groups.

iii) The RRO Team worked closely with the Education Team and, as HMP Dorchester was in the process of becoming a Resettlement Prison, ROTL was expected to become available.

5.7 RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

i) Overcrowding was a long-standing problem at Dorchester, and was exacerbated by recent attempts to make the prison more economically viable by increasing prisoner numbers. It was, for example, regrettable that there was no separate dining area so that prisoners took all meals in their shared cells. However, it should be noted that the IMB did not receive any complaints from prisoners on overcrowding.

ii) The food at Dorchester was of a high standard, despite budgetary constraints. IMB members regularly visited the kitchen, which was always clean, and tasted the food, which was tasty, nutritious and plentiful. Prisoners clearly enjoyed working in the kitchen and the kitchen manager interacted well with them.

5.8 SAFER CUSTODY

i) The Safer Custody Team included members from each department of the prison, all showing a keen interest and dedication to the task. They are to be congratulated on the valuable and effective work carried out at HMP Dorchester.

ii) Of particular note was the work done by the Listeners (trained by the Samaritans); although there was a frequent problem of trained Listeners moving on, often leaving a gap in the service.

iii) HMP Dorchester maintained security and good order through positive staff-prisoner relationships, based on mutual respect. The rules of the prison were well publicized, proportionate and fair which, in the long term, encouraged responsible behaviour.

iv) The Security Department was responsible for safeguarding the whole establishment and was managed by an Operational Governor. The Security Committee was properly constructed and meetings were well-attended by representatives from appropriate departments and external agencies, including the IMB. Their success in meeting targets to maintain the smooth running of the prison was helped by regular publication of intelligence assessments.

v) There was a drug problem in HMP Dorchester, as is reported in other prisons. However, good liaison with the police, including the presence of a police officer three days a week, helped to stem the flow of unlawful substances into the prison.

vi) During the year construction work has been ongoing and this placed additional burdens on the Security Department but no obvious weaknesses or anomalies were found.

vii) The Security Department was aware of problems caused by a gang culture which developed from time to time. This was always dealt with effectively by removing ring leaders wherever possible.

viii) The Security Department received a good rating in an inspection by HMIPS. This was particularly impressive given the high staff turnover during the year and says much for the hard work and enthusiasm of the team.

6. THE CLOSURE PROCESS.

6.1 The closure of the prison was carried out with speed and efficiency: the targeted twelve-week programme from closure announcement to decommissioning was met. From the time of the announcement to closure, the staff worked together, supporting the prisoners and colleagues over this unsettling period. The Governor was transferred shortly after the closure was announced and the new Deputy Governor coordinated the closure process. Weekly working-party meetings, to which the IMB was invited, were held to report on progress and determine next steps.

6.2 Some prisoners felt unhappy about the closure and voiced their concerns to the IMB. These concerns often related to which prison they would be sent and how this might affect visiting relatives. The IMB and Prison staff worked to allay these concerns, but - as a local prison - it should be recognised that prisoners would have been expected to spend only a short time at HMP Dorchester in any event. However, those prisoners who had been housed at Dorchester for longer periods, as suitable places at other establishments had not been available, were treated with sensitivity.

6.3 The local newspaper reported that prison officers were unhappy with the closure announcement. Interviews were held by the Human Resources Department to find suitable positions in other prisons, but the IMB received several complaints from officers concerning the quality of these interviews. They felt that it had been a 'tick box' exercise and that their needs were not given due consideration, with redeployment reliant solely on where they lived.

6.4 At the October IMB meeting, the Deputy Governor stated that all staff, apart from agency workers, had been found positions elsewhere or had taken a voluntary early departure package. However, some staff, who were unhappy with their placements, were following the appeals procedure.

6.5 Within days of the closure announcement, areas of the prison were stripped of furniture and equipment facilitating the closure of wings as prisoners were transported out. The IMB noted that one of its application boxes was removed prematurely from a wing still housing prisoners.

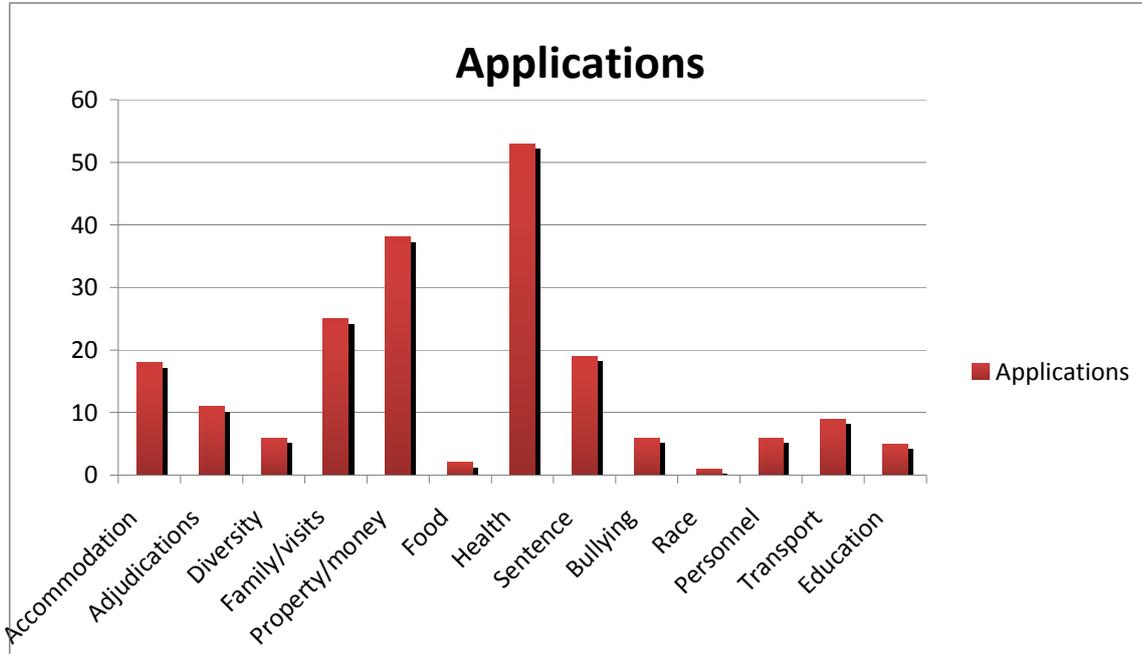
6.6 There was undoubtedly a great deal of waste involved in the closure process. Many furnishings and equipment, deemed not to be capable of use at other prisons, were placed in skips for disposal. The IMB shares the view of staff that this displayed a huge waste of taxpayers' money, and unimaginative exploration of potential recycling opportunities to other areas of the public or charity sectors.

6.7 MoJ Estates Management figures show that the new Medical Centre, which opened in the summer of 2013, cost £2.4 million. This contained offices and consulting and waiting rooms, all with a high standard of equipment. The IMB feels that there should have been greater coordination within the MoJ to ensure that expenditure of this magnitude should not have taken place when, clearly, the closure of the prison was being proposed. Forward planning of this kind would have prevented such unacceptable financial wastage. Despite assurances that the Medical Centre had been built using a modular system and could therefore be moved to another prison, it should be noted that - at the point of closure - no removal plans had been made and it was generally agreed by the experienced maintenance staff that removal would not be a simple exercise but would incur significant costs. The fact that the extension was brick-faced would make deconstruction and relocation difficult and therefore less likely.

6.8 This is surely important at any time, and is certainly the case when prisons are struggling with limited funds, which has meant reduced staffing levels, increased demands made of retained staff, reduced educational and recreational opportunities for prisoners and severe limitations placed on the Reducing Re-offending programme.

6.9 Finally, the IMB at Dorchester concurs with the comment made by Prisons Minister Jeremy Wright that the closure "is in no way a reflection of the hard work and commitment of the staff, nor of the prison's performance."

ANNEX 1



ANNEX 2

GLOSSARY OF PRISON-RELATED TERMS USED

CNA	Certified Normal Accommodation
CSU	Care and Separation Unit
HMP	Her Majesty's Prison
HMCIP	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
IMB	Independent Monitory Board
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
OMU	Offender Management Unit
ROTL	Release on Temporary License
RRU	Reducing Re-offending

ANNEX 3

THE BOARD

Recommended Complement of Board Members	12
Number of Board Members at the start of the reporting period	11 (including 2 co-opted)
Number of Board Members at the end of the reporting period	9
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	2
Number of members leaving within the reporting period	4 (including 2 co-opted)
Total number of Board meetings during the reporting period	12
Total number of visits to the establishment during the reporting period	Approx 200
Date of annual Team Performance Review	Sept 2013