

The Annual Report of

THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

HMP FEATHERSTONE

1st November 2009 – 31st October 2010

HMP FEATHERSTONE
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STATUTORY ROLE OF THE BOARD

The Prisons Act 1952 and the Immigration Act 1999 require each prison and IRC to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor from members of the community within which the establishment is located.

The Board is specifically charged with:

- Satisfying itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody in the prison and the range and adequacy of programmes preparing them for release.
- Informing promptly the Secretary of State for Justice or any official to whom he has delegated authority and judged to be appropriate of any concerns it has.
- Reporting annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed upon it and what impact this has on those in its custody.

To enable the board to carry out these duties effectively its members have right of access to every prisoner, every part of the prison and to prison records.

HMP FEATHERSTONE

HMP Featherstone is an adult male Category C prison located approximately 8 miles north of Wolverhampton. The main section of houses 1,2,3,4 was built in 1976 as was house 6 and occupies part of the same land complex as HMYO Brinsford. Houses 5 and 7 are later additions. A new prison is being built on land immediately adjacent with a target completion date of 2012.

HMP Featherstone has a nominal operational capacity of 687 although this has been reduced during the year as a result of work to upgrade services in some of the accommodation blocks. It holds only convicted prisoners and is served by local prisons including HMP Birmingham and HMP Hewell as well as other Category C prisons. Prisoners are either released directly or transferred to Category D prisons while very occasionally a prisoner may go to a Category B prison. The majority of prisoners are aged between 21 and 29 years usually serving sentences of between 4 to 10 years for a variety of offences. The prison also houses a small number of lifer and IPP prisoners in the latter stages of their sentences.

HMP Featherstone is regarded primarily as a working prison with well equipped workshops but there is also a busy education department, a library, gymnasium and an all weather sports pitch. The healthcare department provides daytime cover but there are no in patient facilities and those requiring them are either transferred to prisons where they are available or to hospital as appropriate. The chaplaincy provides spiritual and moral care for all prisoners.

Some improvements to services have been carried out during the reporting period and the appearance of and atmosphere in the prison often receive favourable comment from visitors.

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Section 4

Executive Summary

4.1 This report covers the period 1st November 2009 – 31st October 2010.

4.2 HMP Featherstone continues to achieve a good performance in the Prison rating System (PRS) which assesses the whole prison estate in England on 34 performance indicators.

4.3 Despite the departure of Governor Simon Cartwright and the arrival of Governor Deborah McGivern the prison continues to exhibit a clear sense of direction and purpose. Changes to the senior management team have helped to carry this forward. Deputy governor Paul Newton is particularly to be commended for the way in which he oversaw the management of the prison during the change of governor.

4.4 The governor and her Senior Management team continue to work hard on the Decency agenda and on Safer Custody. The Board considers that the reduction in prisoner applications noted in the report has much to do with the continued improvement in the effectiveness of the personal officer scheme.

4.5 The Board is pleased to recognise the improvements in the performance of the Healthcare Department with the medication rooms on the wings working particularly well. The staffing situation which previously gave rise to concern is being managed but the board is still concerned about the availability of dental appointments.

4.6 The concerns expressed in our last report that Healthcare staff were not able always to attend activities where their presence is regarded as desirable or necessary have been addressed and the situation is much improved.

4.7 The Board has on going concerns about the time spent by some prisoners on the CSU but recognises that the prison makes considerable efforts to address the situation. The new CSU regime may assist in this regard but the Board understands that some prisoners cannot be returned to normal location either for their own or others safety. It is difficult to transfer such prisoners.

4.8 The Board is still concerned that the property of some prisoners transferred to Featherstone is still going astray. Prisoners do not find compensation payments very satisfactory.

4.9 The Board continues to be concerned about the high cost of some canteen items made more worrying by the disappearance of incentive pay. This effectively means prisoners are experiencing a pay cut but the cost of canteen goods continues to increase. This does not seem reasonable.

Diversity

5.1 The Diversity and Race Equality Committee meets monthly. It is chaired by the Deputy Governor and there are departmental heads, uniformed staff and prisoner representatives with board members attending as often as possible. Any staff member or prisoner may attend if they have an issue to raise or simply want to learn about the work of D/REAT.

5.2 During the year 43 Racial Incident Report Forms (RIFs) were submitted. None gave the committee special concern although all were discussed and dealt with in a timely manner in compliance with PSO 2800. Supporting the committee is an external scrutiny panel (shared with HMYOI Brinsford) of people with experience in the area who check to ensure that complaints are dealt with fairly.

5.3 The committee receives monthly data generated through SMART II- Ethnic monitoring also available to prisoners. Results are generally within range but an over representation of white prisoners in the CSU led to concern that staff might be less likely to challenge BME prisoners. No evidence was found to support this and it was thought to be due to a number of white prisoners spending a considerable time in the CSU.

5.4 Much work has been done this year to improve the quality of life for older and disabled prisoners and the board wish to commend staff and prisoners on House 7 for the help given to three severely disabled prisoners.

5.5 The board wishes also to commend the work done in establishing a team of Prisoner Diversity Representatives. These now form a highly motivated and well supported team that is an asset to the prison.

Learning and Skills

5.8 A full list of education and training courses available to prisoners is produced by the Prisoner Development Department. Included is a list of qualifications linked to each course or programme and information on how these relate to employment opportunities available on release. The list is regularly updated and publicized throughout the prison. The range of courses and qualifications is impressive being both diverse and appropriate, distinguishing as it does between the needs of those serving shorter sentences and those facing longer ones. An example of the former is Industrial Cleaning taking up to 15 days and of the latter City and Guilds NVQ in Food Preparation and Cooking taking several months. There are also distance learning course such as City and Guilds plumbing theory.

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5.9 More vocational courses such as painting and decorating, woodwork, bricklaying and plastering are naturally popular with prisoners who are tutored by instructors with excellent knowledge and skills. Places on the new motor vehicle maintenance programme are much sought after as are those in the recently re-opened hairdressing/barber training salon.

5.10 the prison's main educational providers are The Manchester college, Stoke College and JHP Group Ltd supported by the Skills Funding Agency. The Prisoner Development Department has regular meetings with these to monitor and review programme performance and the implication of training and educational developments elsewhere. This is well done but time consuming and HMP Featherstone has begun to share staff and services with HMYOI Brinsford which adds to the complexity. The "Passport to Employment" which documents soft skills such as time keeping, team working, communication skills etc is currently being piloted and could be valuable provided the disparate needs of the various partners can be met.

5.11 Complementing the vocational courses, the Education Department offers classes in basic literacy and numeracy as well as information and communications technology while art and design is popular and high standards are achieved.

5.12 External to the Education department there is the Toe by Toe reading plan and the "Storybook Dads" scheme where prisoners put onto CD a story to be played to their children.

5.13 Board members regularly visit classes and visit the Prisoner development department and rota reports confirm that the prison achieves an excellent standard of educational provision.

HEALTHCARE

5.14 The Healthcare department operates under the aegis of the South Staffs Primary Care Trust (PCT). Relations between the prison management and the PCT have not always been easy but monthly meetings, the introduction of which was noted in last year's report, have been helpful.

5.15 The Healthcare Department continues to give cause for concern although there are definite signs of improvement. The manager in post at the start of the reporting year left in January having promised much but delivered little and was replaced temporarily by a manager who was a qualified CPN and had prison healthcare management experience. The current management arrangements provide for three senior staff in the department thus providing a much improved level of cover.

5.16 Staffing is still a concern with some on-going long term sickness absence but this is being managed. Attendance at CSU reviews and assessing prisoners for work and fitness to attend court hearings are now properly covered.

5.17 Concerns with the level of mental health cover were raised with the Strategic Health Authority by prison management at the end of the board's last reporting period. An action plan was put together by the Governor and Deputy Governor and improvements have followed. Additional support in assessing prisoners has been obtained from the externally based Inreach team.

5.18 In its previous report the Board expressed its concern over the provision of dental treatment. Although the situation has improved with the PCT sourcing a second provider so that additional surgeries have been held, some at weekends, there are still complaints from prisoners about waiting times. The board continues to monitor the situation.

5.19 Arrangements for the distribution of medication have been regarded as unsatisfactory for some but a new initiative that has seen the provision of a small dispensaries on the house units has brought about considerable improvements. Staff get to familiarise themselves with prisoners and their needs and are better able to deal with queries and give advice.

SAFER CUSTODY

5.20 After two distressing incidents in the recent past happily no death in custody occurred during the reporting period. A suicide prevention day was again held in September with a good attendance of staff and prisoners. Stars in memory of those departed were hung on the Tree of Life.

5.21 The Safer Custody Team monitors and supports vulnerable prisoners with an average of 11 on re-integration regimes at any one time and there is a waiting list of those wishing to enter the programme.

5.22 Mental health awareness training is on-going in the face of an increasing number of prisoners with mental health problems possibly associated with more young prisoners being transferred to Featherstone. Distraction boxes have been very useful both on the CSU and in normal accommodation.

5.23 Listeners and Insiders play a valuable role in the area of mental health despite turnover caused by transfers and releases. Fortunately there appears to be an adequate number volunteering to be trained. One insider has been appointed to mentor older prisoners, an area neglected in the past.

5.24 The Safer Custody Team has also been much involved in efforts to get those in the CSU to return to normal location. Some success has been achieved in some cases with apparently intransigent prisoners.

There have been occasions when the Stafford based INSIGHT team have been helpful in diagnosing a prisoner's condition and indicating ways to proceed.

CARE AND SEPARATION UNIT

5.26 In the year to November 2010 prisoners were moved to the CSU on a total of 258 occasions, a reduction of nearly 20% on the previous year, though a significant minority of prisoners appeared more than once. All were seen regularly by members of the Board who were able question them as to their treatment by staff and the likely outcome in respect of their stay in the unit.

5.27 Board members routinely attend CSU reviews as observers but are required to signify their acceptance or otherwise of the process. Reviews were always conducted in a fair and professional manner as were adjudications and cases put before the Independent Adjudicator, both of which members attended with reasonable frequency.

5.28 The concern expressed in the previous year's report about the length of time spent in the CSU by some prisoners continued into the report year. Some prisoners still regarded the unit as a safe haven and refused normal location for a variety of reasons, hoping for a transfer despite advice from governors and CSU staff that transfers from the CSU are more difficult to achieve than those from normal location. The prison addressed this with a modicum of success by involving the Safer Custody Team to review with the prisoners the issues that were keeping them on the unit. In the last quarter of the report year a new and somewhat harsher regime was introduced in line with regional requirements with the object of making the CSU a less "comfortable" place to spend time. There was initially some unevenness in the application of the new rules but this has largely been resolved. It is, however, too early to say how effective the change will prove to be. Careful Board monitoring will continue.

5.29 While managing the CSU is not an easy task the Board wishes once more to record its appreciation of the professionalism of the staff in helping prisoners and assisting members of the Board.

Section 6

ACCOMMODATION

6.1 At HMP Featherstone a total of 655 prisoners are currently accommodated in 7 house units. Houses 1 and 2 can each house 116 prisoners on a Voluntary Testing Unit (VTU). Houses 3 and 4 also have 116 prisoners while house 5, the Induction Unit, houses 100. House 6 (40 prisoners) is for enhanced regime prisoners and house 7 (72 prisoners) is a healthy lifestyle unit. Following the redecoration work last year rewiring has been ongoing for houses 2 and 3 which has reduced cell availability from time to time and reduced numbers below the nominal figures given above.

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6.2 Single cell occupancy is the norm, with the exception of house 5 where there are 2 to each cell. There is also a small number of double cells on houses 1 to 4. Every cell has integral sanitation, power points and a light switch.

6.3 Houses 3 and 4 had experienced problems with behaviour because of gang culture and also concentrated numbers of younger prisoners. The efforts of residential staff have brought about improvements especially on house 4.

6.4 House 6 has a mix of young prisoners and IPP and Lifers. All seem to get on and behaviour is to the expected standard. In the view of the Board house 7 sets the standard for efficiency and we have been impressed by the way staff and prisoners together cope with and support a number of disabled prisoners.

RISK REDUCTION

6.5 Risk reduction figures in many aspects of prison life such as work placement and category D review boards but Pathway 7 (attitudes, thinking and behaviour) is key with interventions the major element.

6.6 The Accredited Programmes e.g. PASRO (Prisoners Addressing Substance Related Offending), TSP (Thinking Skills Programme) and CALM (Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage it) have not run so frequently in the report year but regional targets have been met and in the case of CALM (the non-availability of which has been the source of a number applications to the Board) most prisoners will be accommodated before their tariff or release date.

6.7 Area Approved programmes (Being a parent, Time 4 families, Coping skills and Confronting crime) are all being effectively delivered as well as Alcohol Use and Reconnect for those trying to address issues outside prison.

6.8 The Board still has some concerns about staff turn over caused by young professionals looking for career progression. TSP (Thinking Skills Programme) is a requirement identified in many sentence plans but with IPP prisoners of whom there are 50/60 in the prison at any one time taking priority, not all who wish to take part can do so. Interventions are a key part of prisoner rehabilitation so the Board will continue careful monitoring noting that changes to delivery arrangements are in the offing.

6.9 The chaplaincy team led by a Church of England minister supported by ministers of other faiths continue to offer care and support to all who are in need of help. Weekly services are held for Church of England, Catholic, Muslim, Sikh and Jehovahs Witnesses.

6.10 The new multi faith room is a much appreciated asset and used regularly

6.11 Board members visit the chaplaincy regularly and attend services on occasion being always warmly welcomed.

6.12 Members wish to praise the work of the chaplains who visit most parts of the prison daily and particularly the CSU so that anyone needing to talk to them has that opportunity.

CATERING AND KITCHEN

6.13 The kitchen produces lunch and dinner for every prisoner daily as well as a breakfast pack, a total just short of 713,000 meals every year.

6.14 The department works on a budget of only £2.10 for each prisoner per day but is still able to offer a wide choice with an emphasis on healthy eating, including 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Healthy eating information is displayed on each house, in the library and gymnasium in a number of different languages.

6.15 The Kitchen celebrates diversity contributing to Christmas, Chinese New Year, Ramadan, Eid, Sikh festivals and British Pride Week.

6.16 Board members taste the food in the course of rota visits and check comments books which are regularly checked by staff. Prisoner views about the food offered are also dealt with by the Food Catering Committee which meets regularly.

APPLICATIONS TO THE BOARD (cf tables page12)

6.17 Every week a member of the Board visits the prison to deal with applications made by prisoners. Every effort is made to resolve these as quickly as possible and to provide as complete an answer as possible. The nature of the applications, common themes or trends and any unusual issues, are discussed by the Board at its monthly meeting.

6.18 During the reporting period members dealt with 145 applications (significantly down from 176 the previous year).Some applications raised more than one topic so that150 issues were dealt with (183 the previous year).

It is difficult to know what led to the reduction but the Board considers that the Personal Officer scheme is working more effectively and prisoners are using the Request and Complaints procedure to better effect. Even so, as in the past, there are issues referred to the Board that might have been better dealt with through other channels. Some prisoners applied to the Board when they failed to get the answer they wanted from other appeals or hoped that applying to the board might somehow bring pressure to bear to achieve the result they hoped for.

6.19 There were 24 applications on medical matters (13 last year) possibly reflecting some of the issues with the Health Care Department, 18 on property matters (31 last year) of which 13 had to do with transfers between establishments, 17 related to transfers (14 last year), 14 related to visits (27 last year) and 8 were about Category D status down from 14 last year.

6.20 The failure of some prisons to correctly transfer property continues to concern the Board as prisoners understandably find this very frustrating. It is rarely possible to locate the missing items and prisoners have to claim compensation which they do not find satisfactory.

6.21 There was a welcome reduction in the number of applications relating to visits at almost half of last year's figure. Where closed visits featured the board found in all cases that these had been authorised correctly usually because of suspicion, or proof, of drug or contraband smuggling. Although some distress is caused to prisoners and visitors, closed visits are necessary and the regular reviews that are held are helpful.

6.22 Applications to do with Category D status, the regime and Requests and Complaints were again lower than the previous year. Regrettably there were 24 applications about medical and dental matters, double the previous year. There have been problems in Health Care which are reported in the appropriate section of this report. It does also appear that some prisoners have been particularly demanding in respect of medication and appointments etc. and have applied to the Board when they fail to receive what they want. In almost every case the Board were unable to provide the response hoped for, although on occasion it was possible to demonstrate that the matter raised was in hand.

6.23 Within the miscellaneous category was a number alleging mistreatment of prisoners by staff, a disturbing matter. Careful examination of these showed some prisoners were mentally unstable, in other cases there was a genuine misunderstanding (usually resolved by a meeting of the parties) while others were without foundation and possibly malicious. Two were linked to confidential access to the Governor and one was in hand with a solicitor. In each case where immediate resolution was not in the power of the Board prisoners were invited to re-apply to the board but none did so. The board is satisfied that there is no evidence of mistreatment or bullying of prisoners by staff at Featherstone.

6.24 Applications from Houses 1,2 3and 4 fell significantly from last years figure but those from House 5 rose from 22 to37. House 5 is for new arrivals at Featherstone who spend some time on induction before moving to more permanent

accommodation. With a reduction in capacity in the South-West area a number of prisoners were transferred to the Midlands much against their wishes and became very disgruntled. Applications to the Board followed with respect to transfers in the reverse direction but also to do with missing property, medical and other matters. While this accounts for a number of the applications the Board were surprised by the significant increase from House 5 which is run extremely professionally by a competent and helpful group of officers.

Table 1: ANALYSIS OF APPLICATIONS BY SUBJECT

	2009-10	2008-9	2007-8
Adjudications	2	5	5
Category D status	8	14	26
Food	1	2	0
Medical	24	13	21
Parole	4	5	0
Property	18	31	18
Regime	5	13	10
Requests/complaints	1	7	4
Transfers	17	14	20
Visits	14	27	27
Miscellaneous*	55	48	57
Withdrawn	1	6	7
TOTAL	150	183	195

* includes: Allegation of mistreatment by staff 8, transfer of money 8, damp or cold cell 4, HDC&ROTL 4, job changes 3, incorrect wages 3.

Table 2: ANALYSIS OF APPLICATIONS BY HOUSE

	2009-10	2008-9	2007-8
House 1	15	14	28
House 2	26	37	33
House 3	27	33	28
House 4	27	46	27
House 5	37	22	22
House 6	2	3	9
House 7	8	6	4
CSU	2	4	3
Not recorded	1	4	3
TOTAL	145	143	168

GYMNASIUM AND SPORTS FACILITIES

6.25 The gymnasium continues to be heavily used by prisoners who appreciate the opportunity to keep fit and to work off stress and tension. The staff provide a wide range of physical education classes including weight training, kinetic lifting and first aid (usually as part of prisoners' induction).

6.26 Competitions are held over bank holiday weekends with "Mr Featherstone" bodybuilding and the annual half marathon featuring.

6.27 Prisoners are able to work towards qualifications in weightlifting development, first aid, football, rugby and badminton. There are matches against local teams in rugby, basketball and volleyball.

Board members visiting the gym have been impressed by the enthusiasm of PE staff and the response this generates from prisoners.

WORKSHOPS

6.28 Featherstone is working prison where prisoners are able to gain practical skills to help them in their return to life in the community and earn money to purchase canteen items.

6.29 The workshops undertake a wide range of activities from the traditional (engineering and textile manufacture) to the more up to date (vehicle maintenance, carpentry, brick laying and plastering and fork lift truck driving) the latter being very popular, as is a course in Industrial Cleaning. Qualified civilian instructors supervise the work.

6.30 Regrettably from time to time work is held up by delays in material supplies or by lack of orders. While the prison does its best to address these problems periods of idleness, however occasional, do not encourage prisoners to apply themselves.

6.31 Incentive payments have normally been available to encourage prisoners to apply themselves and earn additional funds. Regrettably the introduction of the Nomis system has ended these payments. Not surprisingly prisoners complain that their wages have been reduced while canteen prices rise. Board members have no answer to these complaints.

VISITOR CENTRE AND VISITS.

6.32 The John Sandy Visitors Centre, which is outside the prison itself, continues to be managed and operated by Halow (Birmingham). Two paid staff and a small group of volunteers continue to provide a courteous, friendly and helpful reception for those

visiting prisoners. Although the average age of volunteers remains high, a number of new recruits have joined in the past year.

6.33 Approximately 24700 visitors passed through the Visitor Centre including 6700 children compared with 26000 (7000 of whom were children) in the previous year. The slight reduction after last years increase reverts to the trend of declining numbers. Community transport continue to provide a bus service to Featherstone and Brinsford on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays with pick ups at New Street, Birmingham and Wolverhampton stations. Family days have proved attractive and there is a waiting list to participate.

6.34 The visits room in the main building retains a relatively cheerful atmosphere. The Board accepts that careful, properly conducted searching is necessary to prevent drugs entering the prison with the use of drug detection dogs and CCTV surveillance as back up.

MANDATORY DRUG TESTING

6.35 At Featherstone mandatory drug testing (MDT) may take place at reception or as part of random, suspicion based or risk assessment testing.

6.36 The key performance target is 9% positive rate. Actual figures vary from month to month but lie in the range 3% to 18%. The 18% figure occurred in the months of May and June when a Full Action Plan was introduced. The year to date figure is now 7.64%. The board applauds the efforts of the Governor and staff to prevent the entry of drugs and other contraband.

6.37 The Integrated Drug Treatment System (IDTS) has been in place for 3 years and provides prisoners with substitutes such as methadone and buprnormphine.

6.38 During the reception process all prisoners are assessed by Healthcare staff. If a prisoner admits to or shows signs of substance misuse immediate symptomatic relief can be given as appropriate and a referral made to the CARATS team (Care, Assessment Referral, Advice and Through Care Service). Carats staff provide daily support for prisoners receiving treatment as does a Featherstone peer drug support group.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

6.39 The board have noted with pleasure that the appointment of a new Health and Safety officer has galvanised activity in this previously somewhat neglected area. Fire exercises have been successfully undertaken, Risk Assessments reviewed and COSHH data updated. Accident statistics are reviewed monthly and appropriate actions undertaken.

6.40 Staff have been heavily involved in monitoring the work to remove asbestos and heavy metals prior to the rewiring of the establishment.

THE WORK OF THE BOARD

The Board started the year with 12 members but 1 member resigned during the year leaving the board with 5 vacancies. An effort to set up a “clustering” recruitment process with other West Midland prisons did not work so the current members covered the shortfall.

The Board meets on the second Friday of each month. Each week one member makes a rota visit or visits while another deals with applications and CSU reviews. All members devote significant amounts of time to their Board duties which also include additional training when the need arises.

An annual “Board Development Meeting” is held when the Board reviews its own performance, discusses working patterns and future strategies. This has been very useful in keeping the board focussed and maximising its performance.

The Board is very mindful of the diverse population in its local area which is reflected in the prison population but still has difficulty in recruiting from minority ethnic groups.

Financial constraints have limited the board to a single visit to HMP Long Larten. This was useful in pointing up the way a secure prison works and members discussed the reasons for and effects of the differences.

The board appreciates the good relationship it had with Governor Cartwright until his move and the way that relationship was carried forward by Deputy Governor Newton during the “inter-regnum” and by Governor McGiven since her appointment.

The year was made more difficult by Chairman David Chalenor’s battle with cancer which he finally lost in December 2010 (just outside the reporting period). His pleasant demeanour and common sense approach will be sadly missed. I would like to thank all members of the Board for the assistance and advice given to me when filling in for the chairman. Last but by no means least special thanks to our clerk Mrs Betts who gave us invaluable support despite herself taking on additional responsibilities within the prison.

