



HMP STANDFORD HILL

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

YEAR ENDING 30 APRIL 2010

**HMP STANDFORD HILL
CHURCH ROAD
EASTCHURCH
SHEPPEY
KENT ME12 4AA**

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:-

- (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.

INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period from 1st May 2009 to 30th April 2010.

Standford is an open D category establishment for low risk male offenders on the Isle of Sheppey. Together with HMP Swaleside and HMP Elmley it forms the Sheppey cluster under a single management team.

The prison holds 464 prisoners and was opened in 1950. It is supposedly a resettlement prison but the pressures caused by the increase in prison population creating a very quick turnover of very short term prisoners render this an impossibility for at least a section of the population.

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ISSUES REQUIRING A RESPONSE

PROPERTY

The continuing of prisoners arriving at Standford Hill without their property is a scandal. It is not unknown for prisoners to move from prison to prison and not beyond the wit of man to devise a system whereby their property travels with them. A prisoner arriving at Standford Hill and having no personal property for a week is ridiculous (*Prisoners Property page 9*).

PAROLE BOARD

The lack of attendance of the Parole Board in the prison during the last year has been noticeable, leaving prisoners awaiting progress. The demands of the Parole Board for courses which do not exist in the prison to be completed by the prisoner also hold up progress. Keeping prisoners in prison for unnecessary lengths of time would seem an expensive matter in times when great savings have to be made (*page 9 refers*).

HIGH MANAGEMENT TURNOVER

We understand the wish for members of staff to progress their personal career but feel the Prison Service should have some grip on the high turnover of staff. No business can run successfully with senior management figures not lasting more than six months.

FIRE SAFETY

The Board have expressed their concerns over fire safety on the wings in every arena open to us. We are told the decision is to be made at the highest levels and hope it will be made expeditiously which to date is has not.

ISSUES NOT REQUIRING A RESPONSE

PEER SUPPORT WORKERS

The peer support workers in this prison are almost without exception peerless. It is an accepted fact that the prison could not run without their input. The Board feel that some tangible recognition should be given to those peer workers who contribute over a considerable period of time in an exemplary fashion.

OFFENDER MANAGEMENT UNIT (OMU)

The Board accept and recognise the extreme pressure that OMU work under. Nonetheless, the turnover of management and the considerable number of part time staff do not make the job easier or the results better (*OMU Page 6 refers*).

CLEANLINESS

The overall standard of cleanliness and tidiness in the grounds of the prison is poor – piles of leaves from last year – semi dead trees, half dead hedges and litter are unacceptable. There are many prisoners available to do the work without supervision and they should be utilised (*Grounds Page 10/11 refers*).

SAVINGS

There have already been serious savings made in the cost of running the establishment and it is known there are more biting cuts to come. Although it would be unrealistic for the Prison Service to be excluded from further cuts it should be formally recognised that this prison is dealing with one of the most dysfunctional sections of our society – nearing release into the community – cost cutting could prove extremely expensive in the long term.

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

HM Inspectorate of Prisons in their unannounced follow-up inspection in September 2009 said that Stanford Hill remains a generally safe, respectful and purposeful place and continues to perform reasonably well against all their tests of a healthy prison; this is a view with which the Board in general would agree.

AREAS THAT MUST BE REPORTED ON

DIVERSITY

In the Board's view, Diversity is well run and monitored in the prison. Bi-monthly well attended meetings are held. Challenge It, Change It training is regularly held. Complaints are investigated and dealt with appropriately. A successful Family Day was held.

There has been much discussion about changing the format of the diversity set up in the three prisons – this has taken a considerable period of time and we are told that it will be decided at the highest level. That decision has still not been made, creating a sense of unsettlement for the staff.

HEALTHCARE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Generally, Healthcare provides a very good and efficient service.

The Board has a concern in relation to access to the doctor. The current process is that the first ten patients to arrive at the surgery and who wish to see the doctor can be accommodated; others who attend subsequently are not provided with an appointment to see the doctor. This creates a surge of the fittest who literally run to the Centre and are able to see the doctor, whereas the less fit or physically less able have problems achieving an appointment. The Board has concerns that such a system can potentially and repeatedly fail to provide individuals with acceptable access to the doctor.

EDUCATION

On Induction all prisoners are encouraged to complete a Basic Skills Assessment and a member of the Education team attends the Labour Board in an effort to persuade offenders to attend Education, though continued low wages and previous poor experience of schooling dissuades many. Currently there are 120 students, 50% of whom are full time, though attendance declines by some 20% during the summer months.

Education at Standford Hill is carried out under the aegis of Manchester College which has responsibility for the majority of establishments in South and East England. Standford Hill has its own Education Manager who leads a team of eight with a further six sessional staff, providing courses such as Art, Craft and Design and Basic Spanish. Full time courses include ESOL, ICT Business Studies, Life Skills, Key Skills with vocational courses in Carpentry, Industrial Cleaning and Food Hygiene. Where less well recognised accreditation is

currently employed, Manchester College is encouraging the adoption of BTEC and CGLI courses, though restricted access to the internet for offenders will present some difficulty with CLAIT.

The Education Team are pleased that the construction of a new Education facility will overcome problems currently encountered in cramped and poorly laid-out rooms and see that this may well encourage greater recruitment and retention of students. However, there is disappointment that little can be done for the large number of prisoners whose stay at Standford Hill is of very short duration.

Recent restructuring decisions have caused considerable disquiet for UCU members. Whereas a large proportion of offenders entering Standford Hill display limited reading and writing skills, practical courses of study have proved popular and beneficial. Evening classes in Art (OCN), Food Hygiene (CGLI), ICT (CLAIT), Music (Brass Band) and beginning Spanish (OCN) are to be discontinued and the use of sessional teaching staff considerably reduced.

SAFER CUSTODY

It may be said that Standford Hill continues to provide a safe environment for prisoners but the prison is finding it more challenging to do so as the number of transfers encountered each week remains disproportionately high. Officers endeavour to maintain a good working relationship with offenders and act with alacrity if they perceive problems of unease and disquiet in a prisoner or receive intelligence that all is not well within a residential wing.

On rare occasions there has been intimation of a “gang culture” developing and, where this was evidenced, offenders were quickly transferred into a closed estate. Standford Hill has no Segregation Unit, so dealing with bullying and intimidation is difficult where such a situation is encountered and owing to the rapid turn over of offenders, occurrences of this nature appear to be a little more common than was the case heretofore.

It has been said by some officers that too many offenders are being transferred into this open prison when all previous indications suggest that it does not provide an appropriate environment for such prisoners, but it does provide an opportunity for pressure to be placed upon the weak, vulnerable and easily led, especially during free association at night time when the staff to prisoner ratio is particularly low. It speaks well of the staff that they are sensitive to the development of a strained atmosphere and have been able to take action to pre-empt difficulties before they manifest themselves; whether this will continue to be the case as economies and inevitable staffing cuts come into force remains to be seen.

SECURITY

Security have had a period of stability in its leadership which is to be commended.

Staffing of the department would appear to be insufficient to carry out routine security checks. It is to be hoped this does not lead to what would have been avoidable problems. There is one dog for use at Standford Hill – it was removed but has now returned.

PRISONERS PROPERTY

Much staff time and significant costs are wasted due to the apparent inability of sending prisons to make sure that the prisoner takes with him his property on transfer.

This results in prisoners arriving at Standford Hill often without even a change of clothing. A recent example underlines this problem; a life sentence prisoner arrived without any property whatever; staff at Standford Hill immediately contacted the sending prison and followed up frequently with emails and phone calls to the prison involved. Eventually the prisoner's family bought new clothes and brought them to the prison on Visits! The waste of staff time and Prison Service resources is obvious and very frustrating for all concerned, including the IMB who frequently find themselves involved.

LIFE SENTENCE PRISONERS

Life sentence prisoners now number thirty-five and Standford Hill has again had the benefit of an excellent team of uniformed staff, together with the support of an experienced Probation Officer and dedicated clerk. Would that senior management were equally stable.

Headquarters, management and the Parole Board continue very unreliable and not one single Oral Hearing has taken place on time during the reporting year.

Demands made by the Secretary of State are frequently not achievable as the courses required often do not exist either at Standford Hill or elsewhere. It is hardly surprising that prisoners and staff feel very frustrated.

The Lifer Liaison staff have continued internal review boards which are much appreciated by the prisoners who are told that these boards are no longer "a requirement" (on whose authority?). The Board considers that they are certainly an example of very good practice.

OFFENDER MANAGEMENT UNIT (OMU)

OMU is a key department in the management of prisoners. OMU input is required in the movement of all offenders in and out of the prison whether through initial reception, release, the provision of all types of temporary release licences or early release on tag. In a Category D resettlement establishment this represents a very high workload. It is paramount that such activity is scheduled efficiently to ensure there is minimal aggravation and cause given for resentment and in the case of release on HDC, to provide as early release as possible to free up spaces for incoming prisoners. OMU suffers from frequent changes in management and the overly high proportion of part time staff which inevitably leads to work process issues and inefficiencies.

In addition, the introduction of PNOMIS in February created high backlogs in work which necessitated weekend working to resolve.

PNOMIS

The new CNomis system was introduced to the establishment in February 2010. All staff received training by working through self tuition programmes. Inevitably the self tuition programmes covered the most commonly used processes whilst more specialised requirements have had to be acquired through on-job activity. Staff worked hard and positively to acquire and work with the new system. However, and as experience widely when introducing new systems, productivity initially appeared to drop as staff became conversant with the new system. Most concerning are:

- i) The apparent lack of workstations specifically within the Wing Offices where one machine is now inadequate to manage the multiplicity of tasks which have been transferred from annual paperwork systems onto the computer.
- ii) Issues surrounding the correct payment of wages to prisoners which if not speedily resolved will inevitably affect morale.

FOREIGN NATIONALS

The number of Foreign National (FN) offenders at Standford Hill varies throughout the year but usually they comprise some 8% of 9% of the total number of prisoners housed; there has been a marked reduction in the number of long term FN prisoners. Approximately one quarter to a third of Foreign Nationals are from Eire and present few problems of language or culture, whereas those who originate from farther afield (eg Africa, Turkey, Jamaica) encounter problems of language, visits and maintaining contact with home. Where email is employed,

costs and inaccessibility in parts of Africa have caused some disquiet. Fortunately, the responsible officers at Standford Hill act efficiently and with some sympathy for the difficulties experienced by these offenders; a weekly meeting for Foreign Nationals ensures that peer support workers are able to keep officers informed of any concerns and mitigate problems which may result from lack of communication. The provision for Foreign Nationals is assisted by the excellence shown by Diversity; an event organised to inform staff of West Indian cuisine and culture was well received.

PERSONAL OFFICER SCHEME

It is unrealistic to expect a personal officer scheme to work when the ratio of prisoners to staff is as at this prison and with the very quick turn around of prisoners. It could possibly work if only directed at longer term prisoners.

GROUNDS

The prison buildings and grounds have been in a state of chaos for over three years now due to building works. While appreciating the difficulties, the Board feel piles of dead leaves from last year and a dead Christmas tree at the Gate for three months shows a lack of attention to detail. The spring flowers in other areas are beautiful.

The rabbit population continues to grow by leaps and bounds.

VISITS

The Visits Centre is an open attractive place with reasonable disabled access.

FOOD

The food is brought from HMP Elmley – there are problems from time-to-time with quantity, both over and under but generally the Board considers the food to be of a good standard. It is tasted regularly by a Board member.

INCIDENTS

The Board were disappointed that on the few occasions when an incident or a major search occur that the Board were not informed in time to attend. Promises have been made to rectify the matter and we shall see.

RECEPTION

Reception deals with, in the region of 70 people a day – Working Out, hospitals, newcomers etc. The area is an unpleasant work place - leaking ceiling stuffed with towels; ceilings generally in poor repair. Talk of a new building would appear to be unrealistic in the present climate. Therefore a refurbishment would appear necessary. The staff treat prisoners appropriately and are ably assisted by peer support workers.

THE GATE

The staff at the Gate treat people courteously and helpfully. The room from which they work is dingy and in serious need of a coat of paint.

CHAPLAINCY

The Chaplaincy – multi faith support – is co-ordinated by a full time Church of England Chaplain. In addition to the co-ordinating chaplain, the Multi Faith team is made up of:

- 2 Church of England – who each provide one day per week
- 1 Catholic – who provides 1.5 days support
- 1 Free Church and 1 Imam who split the full time between Standford Hill and Elmley

In addition, regular weekly sessions are provided by Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Jehovah Witness. Quaker and Jewish sessions are available as and when required.

The Multi Faith team provide services and discussion groups as well as acting as a central point for the receipt and action of prisoner welfare issues and this element takes up considerable resource.

The team ensures that each wing is visited every day, are very clearly visible in the prison and easily available and approachable. All issues, regardless of faith, can and are dealt with by any member of the Faith team.

INDUCTION TALK

As part of the Induction process, the IMB give a weekly address to all recently arrived prisoners. This is explanatory and outlines the purpose of the Board and the ways in which it may be accessed.

ADJUDICATIONS

Adjudications are attended on a regular basis.

There has been an increase in cases involving possession and use of cell phones. In the past three months some such cases have been deferred and an Independent Adjudicator brought in. The possible award of 'extra days' is seen as a deterrent.

Some of these adjudications have also been attended.

CARATs

Regular testing takes place, both mandatory and voluntary, for drugs. Regrettable, alcohol is not treated with the same level of importance.

WORKING OUT

Statistics on employment are hard to obtain. A snapshot:-

22 offenders on Stage II - Full Employment
70 on Stage I – College, Community Service

It is believed that 7 of the 22 would carry on in paid work.

THE WORK OF THE IMB

The Board visits the prison at least three times a week, sometimes more for important committees. An evening surgery is held on occasion; this is not greatly used but is greatly appreciated by those who are out of the prison during the day. Church services are also occasionally attended. A Christmas Day visit is made.

The Board consists of nine members with one member long term sick. When attending the prison they empty the IMB boxes on the wings and generally are available for prisoners to talk to on the wings and elsewhere. Adjudications are attended and have always been found to be fair.

A member attends Inductions every week to inform newcomers of the IMB.

We would consider we have a good working relationship with management and staff, the Governor attending our monthly meetings and the Chairman holding quarterly meetings with the Chief Executive.

We are very ably supported by the IMB Clerk who has done the IMB Clerk training and who, with luck will be with us for a long time.

BOARD STATISTICS

BOARD STATISTICS	
Recommended complement of Board Members	10
Number of Members at start of reporting period	10
Number of Members at end of reporting period	9
Number of new Members joining within the reporting period	1
Number of Members leaving within the reporting period.	1
Number of attendances at meetings other than Board meetings	Not available
Total number of visits to the prison	336
Total number of applications received	343
Total number of segregation reviews held	N/a
Total number of segregation reviews attended	N/a

The following table contains the statistics of applications to the Board. There has been a significant increase since the prison was clustered.

Code	Subject	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
A	Accommodation	3	7	12	5
B	Adjudications	16	12	22	11
C	Diversity related	5	7	2	2
D	Education/employment/training	3	28	23	16
E	Family/visits ROTL/home leave/town visits	14	6 34	5	5 14
F	Food	5	13	6	8
G	Health related	16	17	29	8
H1	Property/money Stanford Hill		23	19	17
H2	Property/money other prisons Total	90	134 157	138 157	49 66
I	Sentence related excluding HDC and parole HDC parole Total	274	47 114 9 170	151 256 407	49 116 165
J	Staff/prisoner related	12	8	5	4
K	Transfers	12	4	11	20
L	Miscellaneous total of which Risk Assessment or Board Drugs	52	85 16 8	75	19
	Total number of applications	502	541	783	343